



# UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

*Master in Humanitarian Action and Conflict*

*Department of Theology*

## **The Humanitarian Crisis in Light of the Autonomy Conflict in Northeastern Syria/ Al-Hasakah Governorate 2011-2022**

The Role OF External Intervention

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## **Abstract**

**“That there are no humanitarian solutions to human problems” David Rieff (2002) states.** Proceeding from this argument, perhaps the solutions are compatible with the nature of the factors causing the problem. Thus, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of the factors that caused and exacerbated the crisis. Wars and their political factors are one of the most important causes of humanitarian crises in the current era. So, the thesis presents a dual political and humanitarian vision that aims to understand the humanitarian crisis in a particular region from the background of the intertwining of the international and local relations of the conflict, to discover the impact of these issues on the humanitarian crises.

This thesis uses Al-Hasakah Governorate in northeastern Syria as a case study, focusing on the humanitarian crisis in this region resulting from the autonomy conflict which is represented by the conflict of some Kurdish factions against the Syrian government to obtain autonomy through imposing military control. In that context, the research sheds light on external intervention and the role played by international actors in this conflict.

The conclusions indicate how the conflict and its political nature which moved from the local level to the international through external intervention, plus the conflicting geopolitical interests led to the spread of most types of violence, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, and created challenges for the humanitarian response.

**Keywords:** The Humanitarian Crisis, Autonomy Conflict, violence, Al-Hasakah Governorate, External intervention.

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## **Abbreviations:**

(NES) North East Syria

(AANES) The Autonomy Administration of North and East Syria. Kurdish autonomous administration.

(PYD) The Democratic Union Party: is the dominant Syrian Kurdish political party.

(YPG) People's Protection Units: The military wing affiliated with the PYD.

(SDF) Syrian Democratic Forces: The Kurdish Army of PYD emanating from YPG.

(ISIS) The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

(SNA) Syrian Free National Army: The Opposition factions emanating from the Free Army.

(PKK) Kurdish Workers' Party, in Turkey.

## **Preface**

Given the prolonged conflict in my motherland, which is still active until the date of this thesis, and seeing the humanitarian situation deteriorating from bad to worse, far from signs of sustainable and real peace, my motivation grew to learn more about the factors affecting this humanitarian crisis and its consequences. This is not just from a political perspective, but also from the suffering at the grassroots level, civilians whose daily lives are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict; who await an uncertain future in the aftermath of this conflict.

This thesis is dedicated to Syria's Al-Hasakah Governorate and to the international community, more specifically, those interested in alleviating suffering and achieving stability; the humanitarian workers and peacebuilders. Thanks to everyone who shared his/her testimony for humanity, through this platform.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The war in northeastern Syria<sup>1</sup> is a typical conflict; on the one hand, an integral part of the Syrian war and, on the other hand, a local and international armed conflict of varying intensity imposed by rebel groups in this area against the Syrian government, it is based on the pretext and slogans of equality to create a democratic Syria. These groups share an unified goal of gaining power through military resistance.

#### 1.1.1 A brief

With the Syrian regime's withdrawal from vast swathes of northeastern Syria in the spring of 2012, the majority of Kurdish leaders have found that the Syrian uprising is a historic opportunity to obtain the rights they have demanded for decades and an opportunity to realize the Kurdish dream of establishing an independent entity or autonomy in northern Syria<sup>2</sup>. So, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, known as the People's Protection Units (YPG), began to build their own governance project in northeastern Syria that includes the entire Al-Hasakah Governorate in addition to parts of other Governorates<sup>3</sup>. Kurdish forces succeeded in controlling the region and established a de facto autonomy in 2014 from one side, led by the PYD and called the Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria (AANES). Its army, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is spread on the ground, supported by the United States and many of its allies who are part of the international coalition to defeat ISIS. The Northeastern Syria's<sup>4</sup> different regions have been affected in different ways. So, for this reason, the investigation will only be done in detail in the Al-Hasakah governorate (Mapp A).

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<sup>1</sup> Syria is now a geographical entity divided into three main areas. Western, central, and eastern Syria, controlled by the Syrian government; north and northwest Syria along the Syrian-Turkish border, which is controlled by the Syrian opposition and supported by Turkey; northeastern Syria controlled by Kurdish.

<sup>2</sup> See: Azzma Aljurf. THE SYRIAN KURDS' RIGHT OF SELF DETERMINATION IN THE LIGHT OF "ARAB SPRING" 2019. [https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/41954/1/ulfd140976\\_tese.pdf](https://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/41954/1/ulfd140976_tese.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Al-Rakah. Der azoor. Aleppo

<sup>4</sup> (AANES) control three regions Al-Jazira include al-Hasakah, the Euphrates, and Afrin.

### **1.1.2 Definitions**

The target area<sup>5</sup> has geopolitical importance<sup>6</sup>; is the center of the autonomy struggle and an important battlefield affecting the regional conflict and emerging as a significant focus of the ongoing conflict in Syria<sup>7</sup>. In addition, it is an agricultural area described as the food basket of Syria, it rich in underground resources as oil, and includes various ethnic groups<sup>8</sup> with more than one million population.

The target area includes several cities and many villages. However, the reader may notice that the focus will be on the main cities of the events, namely: Al-Hasakah, Qamishli, and Ras al-Ain. Al-Hasakah is the center of the Syrian National Governorate, Al- Qamishli is the capital of AANES, and the Kurdish forces control the majority of the two cities de facto. Ras al-Ain is located in the area of the Turkish military operation “Peace fountain/Spring” and is controlled by the Turkish forces.

The designations within the thesis are according to the official nomenclature approved in the Syrian Arab Republic.

### **1.2 The problem**

The humanitarian situation in the targeted area has deteriorated since the conflict in Syria in March 2011. However, the autonomy conflict that originated in this area worsened the situation and transferred the Al-Hasakah from marginalization to the circle of international conflict. Today, in 2022, the majority of the province's areas are under the control of the SDF, with Turkish control in some parts. The division of power led to the humanitarian crisis exacerbation, followed by the humanitarian response difficulties. This, in turn, led to the complexity of attempts at peacebuilding in the region and the overall Syrian level.

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<sup>5</sup> The target area is a term used by the writer within this thesis, and means Syria`s Al-Hasakah Governorate.

<sup>6</sup> It is close to the international road network and border crossings that connect Syria, Iraq, and Turkey and it has an international airport.

<sup>7</sup> It is the main area in the Autonomous Administration, which links West Kurdistan in Syria to the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq.

<sup>8</sup> Most of whom belong to the Islamic and Christian religions. Most of the population is Arab, with a significant Kurdish minority and Syriac, Assyrian, and Armenian and the rest of the sects.

### **1.3 Objective and Purpose:**

This thesis aims to understand how local factors, politically and humanely, interact with the international context in the case of regional competition and their impact on the humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, the specific objective is to explore the factors and effects of the humanitarian crisis in Al-Hasakah Governorate 2011-2022 in the context of the research question: **What are the consequences of the autonomy conflict -politically and humanely – on humanitarian crisis in Al-Hasakah governorate in northeastern Syria?**

#### **Sub-goals:**

- 1-Determine the dynamics of conflict and violence
- 2-Determine the extent of the impact of external military intervention on the humanitarian crisis.
- 3-Determine the impact of conflict on the humanitarian response.

#### **1.3.1 Justification**

The topic is related to the humanitarian field. Considering that each region has its unique characteristics and conditions, the local contextual approach to events is a step forward in the correct diagnosis of the problem and the pursuit to treat it. Given the lack of research on northeastern Syria, this thesis will perhaps take a step forward to gain a brief comprehensive understanding of the situation and the autonomy conflict consequences on the humanitarian crises. That may be useful for humanitarian workers and those interested in peacebuilding locally and internationally, to help identify the problem accurately, to alleviate suffering and make access to complete stability more efficient in the target area.

### **1.4 Methodology**

**1.4.1 Study Design.** This is qualitative research based on the case study as a research design. It attempts to determine and redefine a problem to gain new knowledge or, at the very least, extract a perspective from a different angle (Merriam,1998, p.178- 60-61). In

this context, the research aims to draw conclusions about the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian crisis in light of external interventions.

**1.4.2 Data collection Method:** The thesis focused on two types of data as methods of obtaining information:

- Literature review (secondary data collection), theoretical verification by desktop search of publicly available international literature and reports in order to shed light on the concepts of conflict, external intervention and humanitarian action.
- Interviews (the primary data collection); empirical verification.

Conducting the interviews with residents and diaspora migrants who emigrated from the target area during the war was the primary source of data collection about how the conflict affected - or not - the humanitarian situation and humanitarian response, which creates a local seed for new ideas. To select the participants within the case, the researcher found that the most appropriate sampling strategy for this case is the Snowball technique, a commonly used non-probability sampling technique. That is, each participant recommends to the researcher the name of another person familiar with the topic. Non-probability samples (Shawkat,2017, p.7) often have the limit of not guaranteeing a large and representative sample (Grey, Williamson et al 2007. p 117). However, the researcher tried to ensure a broad sample participant covering the research requirements and the presence of snowballs in several geographical locations and from different backgrounds of both genders in approximately a similar proportion, includes 34 persons (Annex A). The field research was not possible in person; the chosen method for conducting interviews was social media and mobile phone networks, a mixture of video call, and chats, which took place between January and May. As the research progressed, some participants were interviewed additional times to support and triangulate the findings in August 2022. All participants were given written and/or oral information prior to the interview (Annex B,C) and they answered some of questions in (Annex D). For participant security, research ethics and the humanitarian principle of doing no harm, the names of the people interviewed will not be disclosed and the quotes are displayed under a pseudonym (Höglund, Öberg, 2011 p.4). The interviews were conducted in Arabic, which is the mother

tongue of the researcher and interviewees, which leads to avoiding possible translation errors.

**1.4.3 Data Analysis:** is the process of understanding the materials. The case study usually does not adopt a specific type of analysis; all available methods can be used. This study will apply thematic analysis of the different materials and data. First, an inductive approach is applied, followed by an interpretive analysis of the academic and empirical materials combined based on (Broun, Clarke, 2006, p.24) framework for interpreting topics. This complex process involves moving back and forth between concrete pieces of data and abstract concepts and between inductive and deductive reasoning. This combination of understanding and insights shapes the findings of the study (Merriam,1998, p.178). The reliability of the study is determined by the researcher's accuracy in measuring and evaluating the results (Esaiasson, Gilljam et al, 2012, p. 63). However, an inductive approach can increase the risk of self-interpretation, so the researcher used precise citations from participants to allow readers and other researchers to track and evaluate the findings to support reliability.

## **1.5 Paper division:**

The different chapters of this thesis are organized to provide a contextual and conceptual basis for the research that reflects a comprehensive overview of the human condition in the political context experienced by the target area. Starting with the interdiction, which includes basic information and methodology of collecting information. The second chapter is the first foundation stone, the theoretical literature includes concepts of the conflict, violence dynamics, external intervention and their impact on the humanitarian situation in light of realism theory. The context of the selected case study, Al-Hasakah Governorate in northeastern Syria is a heavier stone in the third chapter. Here, the humanitarian crisis is highlighted in light of the conflict from multiple aspects and then delves into its impact on the humanitarian response in the fourth chapter.

This is followed by a discussion in the fifth chapter, linking the theoretical and experimental data. It is then lit from a new angle, building on whether the interview participants' views align with or differ from what is presented in the literature and during that the research questions will be answered. At last, the conclusion is drawn based on the study results.

## Chapter Two: Theoretical and conceptual framework

This section presents a review of previous research studies about the conflict's concepts and Strategies of violence against civilians related to practices reflected on the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis. Then it presents the issue of foreign interference in light of the realism theory of international relations (Meiser, 2018). Together these aspects will build the narrative of the research questions of the thesis as indicated below.

### 2.1 The concept of conflict

The conflict results from a dispute between actors due to incompatible goals (Sian, 2017, p.5). It may turn from a latent to an open conflict, then into violent conflict in environments of injustice when dissenting voices cannot be heard and deep-rooted grievances cannot be addressed (Fisher, Ibrahim et al. 2000, p.6). It may include accidental events such as coups, riots, and bombings. The research indicates the basis of violent conflict is power, politics, and competition between actors "to the reshaping of institutions for the benefit of some at the expense of others" (Sian, 2017, p.3).

The researchers refer to multiple factors of the conflicts including among others, political and institutional, identity politics, and socio-economic factors such as inequality, marginalization, and poverty (Kriesberg et al, 2017, p.37). In addition, resource factors include greed and overexploitation of resources (Haidar, 2014a.p. 6). Moreover, the conflict is not random even if all their factors and causes are well-established in society. Instead, it needs to be mobilized, forming the basis for starting conflicts (GSDRC, 2017, p11). Mobilization is a crucial step in the transformation of the conflict into violence (Sian, 2017, p.2). For example, the direct cause of sectarian violence is not sectarian tensions per se but rather the exploitation of sectarian differences by some parties (Ramsotham and Woodhouse et al., 2016 p. 117). Furthermore, To Conflict Resolution, the conflict must be analyzed as a comprehensive system of interacting factors and dynamics that shape the conflict's reality and an understanding of the causal links between them (MRW: 2016 chapter 1.p.1).

## **2.2 Violence as a dynamic of conflict and humanitarian crises:**

Violence against civilians -civilian targeting- generally refers to any actions that harm civilians or civilian objects through force. It is a part of the dynamics of the ongoing conflict and a factor in exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, and has many classifications (Balcells, Stanton, 2021, p.49. 50 )<sup>9</sup> .Among other things, political violence is the use of force by a politically motivated group (ACLED, 2015) because of a social system that privileges some classes, nationalities and races on others, and institutionalizes unequal education opportunities and resources, among others. Moreover, it becomes an armed conflict involving armed force between two parties, at least one of whom is a government. (GSDRC. 2017. p. 5).

Valentino concludes after much research that violence is not irrational, random, or the result of old hatreds between different groups (Valentino 2014, p. 91), and accordingly explains why political elites sometimes promote violence and how war creates incentives to organize the violence and target civilians.

Pioneering research on regional competition, indicates that the level of violence against civilians is affected by the degree of military competition of various armed actors in the territory (Balcells, Stanton. 2021. p. 54), as well as the general breakdown of law, order and the rise of warlords and those with a vested interest in prolonging the conflict (Strachan and Schippers, 2011. p. 303).

Regarding the types of violence, researchers argue that selective violence is more likely in areas of asymmetric conflict, with an emphasis on the dynamic interaction between governments and rebel groups when one group exercises dominant control but not complete control over the territory and thus follows the logic of control (Kalyvas, 2006), that leads to the practice of selective violence. Conversely, the likelihood of indiscriminate and unintended violence<sup>10</sup> increases when one side exercises complete control over the territory.

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<sup>9</sup> Violence versus restraint Deliberate vs. unintended violence involving non-primary collateral damage to civilians.

<sup>10</sup> Selective violence is narrow targeting after a selection process at the individual or collective versus indiscriminate violence which is large-scale targeting of civilians

Moreover, external material support for dominant groups with non-local cadres also increases violence against civilians. On the other side, the government's attempts to establish control over territory escalate the challenge and increase insurgent violence against civilians (Balcells, Stanton, 2021, p. 54).

### **2.2.1 Strategies of violence**

Researchers of strategic violence have identified strategies that explain the rationale for violence against civilians (Balcells, Stanton, 2021. p. 50). One example is the logic of control, seeks to secure and consolidate military control through violence against civilians, which stimulates more civil cooperation in providing material and human resources to tighten control. Secondly, the logic of clearing areas seeks to separate the opponent from his civilian supporters by clearing a territory inhabited by a particular group of civilians, either temporarily or permanently. Finally, a third logic is the use of coercion, which is called punishment or terrorism, which aims to coerce the opponent, not civilians themselves, to achieve the goal and force the opponent to surrender (Kydd, Walter, 2006).

### **2.3 External interventions and the interests of world powers**

The paragraph reviews external interference in light of the realism theory to understand the intertwine between international interests and the humanitarian crisis in the targeted area.

**2.3.1 Realism Theory:** is a normative view; the main position in international relations focuses on power, anarchy, and statecraft. (Waltz, 1979; Ikenberry, 2009, p. 206). The elements of the realism are state sovereignty, survival, security, and self-help.

Realism summarizes that the principal actors have egoistic behavior and make choices that will benefit their own interest, rather than the interest of others. Namely, the interference in other state's affairs is based on interest, and the refrain is due to the absence of that interest. Kenneth Waltz who is one of the most important researchers in realism stresses that security is the ultimate goal, in international anarchic system that does not have a central authority to protect states from each other. Every state must rely on itself to ensure its survival and security, then comes the importance of other goals such as welfare, profit, and power (Waltz, 1979, p. 169). Thus, working in this arrangement is a form of self-help which later helps it create stability and reassurance from threats (Waltz, 1979, p. 63).

On the other hand, for a country to remain a significant power or for an emerging country to take place among the prominent ones, the nation must use its resources effectively in the long term, and accumulate all possible resources and wealth to achieve its military objectives (Waltz, 1993, p.52,55). The interest of oil as an example, is based on the nation's interest in increasing its resources and earnings and thus the security of the country (Reid, 2004, 20-21).

From this concept, international relations are not based on moral foundations and standards. Thus, conflicts and wars are inevitable in light of this chaotic system, and peace depends on the balance of power and not on the concepts of international law. Thus, intervention may become necessary according to realists who justify these interventions to maintain order and prevent an escalation and wars (Waltz, 1993).

Accordingly, the previous ideas are the basis that can help us think critically about the crisis and explain external interventions in this thesis.

### **2.3.2 External military intervention**

External intervention is when a country uses its power to deal with an issue within a foreign community using soft power of persuasion or hard power (Nye, 2004.p.2). These interventions aim to address and create a desirable situation in the country where the problem exists. Thus, this itself can be a problem when the actors' view differs about the preferable situation in a country. Frederic Pearson argues that external intervention from a military perspective is a military force led by one country or group of countries that cross the borders of another country or the actions taken by the foreign colony located in the state (Frederic,1974, p. 261). Waltz notes that policymakers in self-help countries are now focusing on more than just the security of their own countries and they use all available tools to influence other countries (Waltz, 2000, p25:1,18). Thus, great powers may see political interests and goals behind the intervention, and the realism theory believes that states do not intervene for humanitarian considerations but national interests.

### **2.2.3 Humanitarian intervention and Humanitarian Action**

Humanitarian intervention is “Action by international actors across national boundaries including the use of military force, taken to relieve severe human suffering” (Moore, 2007.p.169).

Humanitarian action: Its core is the will, or desire, to alleviate suffering (Davy, Borton et al. 2016, p.1). It starts through relief operations and then development projects to engage beneficiaries and include local capacities in assistance to enhance resilience by reducing vulnerabilities (The Code of Conduct, 1994, p.4). This is done by following the basic principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and Independence (Mazurana , Maxwell, 2016, p. 4,5,6).

The main challenge is the lack of commitment to humanitarian principles and may branch out into several complex challenges in politicizing humanitarian action and reducing humanitarian space, including the militarization or politicization of humanitarian assistance and the lack of political will on the part of actors (Barnett, 2005, p. 723). So, political interference in humanitarian action impedes the principle of independence (Van den Homberg et al, 2020). Moreover, complex working situations often force humanitarian workers to appeal to those in authority on the ground and the rebels for permission to assist the vulnerable. (Barnett, Walker 2015, p. 130,131).

Lack of institutional and societal organization, information and communication among actors, and lack of economic health (Manyena, 2006, p. 436) are factors generating greater risk. In addition, violence has become a development problem, as political violence and insecurity create access issues by the slowing or non-delivery of promised international aid (Heintze, Thielbörjes, 2018, p.8)

### **2.4 The impact of interventions on violence**

The researchers found different effects according to goals. For example, that the overall impact of the US military intervention on terrorism is harmful, as it fuels more terrorist incidents and casualties. Moreover, that anti-terrorist interventions as a central goal led to successfully deterring terrorism. But the other intervention’s tasks in the state’s affairs, such

as those interfering in internal disputes and facilitating the change of the political system in the country or even the provision of humanitarian assistance; creates counterproductive and retaliatory reactions from stakeholders and local populations (Choi, 2011, p.2, p.4).

On the other hand, research highlights the impact of international diplomatic support policy and international condemnation of violence against civilians, which sometimes induce restraint toward civilians. In this sense, the separatist rebel groups that seek international recognition and support are likely to comply largely with international humanitarian law and exercise restraint towards civilians (Stanton, 2016, p.52).

Thus, the impact of the external intervention on the continuation and exacerbation of humanitarian crises becomes clear through the interactive political processes locally and internationally that push violence across different levels.

## Chapter Three. The case study: Al-Hasakah Governorate

This experimental chapter aims to understand the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the target area from a regional lens; first reviews the factors of the conflict then the impact of external interventions in the targeted area. Among the responses provided by the participants, there were clear themes supported sometimes by previous research and reports that are clearly referenced in the study below.

### 3.1 Background of the autonomy conflict

The outbreak of the conflict in Al-Hasakah Governorate is rooted in the underlying political, social, and economic factors before the outbreak of the war in 2011, which in part intersects with the causes in the rest of the Syrian geography. However, the ideology from which the internal opposition emerged and its goals are different here, which go beyond the complete overthrow of the Syrian government and regime to achieving autonomy, which was an old dream of some Kurdish factions.

**3.1.1 Al-Hasakah before the war 2011:** Al-Hasakah recorded among the largest cities of poverty at the national level, and large numbers of the population, according to United Nations estimates, needed humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2019). Moreover, the citizens of northern Syria were suffering from difficult living conditions and economic instability in light of drought (Femia, Werrell, 2012) in a region whose economy depends on agriculture, high unemployment rates, and the absence of political freedoms under the one-party policy (Al-Baath). The participants were unanimous that for geopolitical and national reasons, the government discriminated against this region. It did not give it enough development and social attention. One of the reasons was the concentration of a large proportion of Kurds in the region, where Kurdish unionism was considered a potential danger by the Syrian authorities. This has fueled frustration among some segments of the population who feel alienation and inequality of power and status.

**3.1.2 Al-Hasakah After 2011:** In the context of the start of the Syrian conflict in other governorates, the Kurdish separatist movement was woken up in the target area and was supported by some of the beneficiaries of the chaos. With the emergence of this new dimension imposed by the Syrian Kurds, attempts to organize the majority of the violent

networks succeeded in the conflict along sectarian and national lines. The armed Kurdish confrontation against Syria's government and their competition for power led to the launch of violence in the governorate from other actors and terrorist groups after their mobilization.

### **3.2 The power relations in Al-Hasakah governorate**

In order to understand the cause of the humanitarian crisis, it is necessary to understand the regional division and the structural division of forces on the ground (Map 2).

Shortly after the 2012 withdrawal of Syrian government forces from northern districts including Al-Hasakah, the US-allied Kurdish military and political actors controlled large areas of northern Syria. They unilaterally declared regional autonomy there in 2014. The Kurds say their goal in fighting is autonomy and the elimination of the Islamic State (ARK Group. 2016, p. 23).

Al-Hasakah Governorate witnessed significant events, especially those that occurred with the beginning of the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria "ISIS" over the eastern regions of Syria, and in 2015 the ISIS attack on Al-Hasakah failed, and city centers remained under government control. At the same time, the Kurdish forces took control of most of the areas, and events developed until Turkey invaded and penetrated part of the targeted area during the military operation Peace Fountain / Spring in October 2019.

#### **3.2.1 The role of international actors**

The development of the conflict, in general, attracted global and regional powers seeking to achieve their interests (Hazan, 2012). The roles of international actors differed in the targeted area still under the control of non-government actors, supported either by Turkey or by the United States. Therefore, the research focuses on the impact of the Turkish and American presence that has no legitimate cover, and to a lesser extent Russia, whose presence in Syria is considered legitimate according to the public international law, participants claimed.

#### **A. The Turkish presence in northeastern Syria**

The growing Turkish interest in national security focused on dismantling the Kurdish autonomy project. AANES was a source of great concern for Ankara which saw it as a threat to its national security (al-Hilu, 2021, p. 106) along the entire southern border of

Turkey. That is because the Syrian Kurdish autonomy might encourage the Kurds in Turkey, and The Kurdish Workers' Party PKK to represent them to take steps toward secession. The tension in relations escalated with the escalation of the United States' support and dependence on the People's Protection Units as a significant partner in its war against the Islamic State. To weaken Kurdish expansion and influence and to keep the SDF away from Turkey's southern borders (COAR, 2021), the Turkish army launched four military operations in northern Syria from 2016 to 2022<sup>11</sup>. Afterward it succeeded in bringing together many anti-Kurdish factions in northern Syria, including Syrian Free National Army SNA and the Islamic Brigades. In addition to the operations, Turkey deployed permanent forces on Syrian territory and took control of some areas from the hands of ISIS and SDF<sup>12</sup>. The Turkish military campaign "Peace Fountain/Spring" on 8 October 2019 (Map 3), against the PYD and ISIS organizations included Ras al-Ain city and its countryside in Al-Hasakah Governorate<sup>13</sup>. They invaded the areas controlled by the YPG to establish a safe area at least 30 km deep along the border devoid of any presence of YPG fighters<sup>14</sup> and resettlement millions of Syrian refugees hosted by Ankara on its soil.

Turkish forces acted with great severity in Ras al-Ain, unleashing the SNA against the Kurds, and intervened at the military and administrative levels (al-Hilu. 2021, p. 4). It deployed its barracks in the heart and around the areas under its influence. In the meantime, population scattered and access to services for the rest was restricted. Turkish provinces supervised the administration of the Syrian regions adjacent to them and a model of local administrative councils similar to Turkey was imposed to ensure the formation of loyal local councils and the exclusion of all opponents or even neutral parties, according to the participants.

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<sup>11</sup> Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018), Peace Fountain /Spring (2019), and Spring Shield (2020)

<sup>12</sup> Turkey now controls three areas: the Ras al-Ain area in the Hasaka governorate, Tal Abyad in the Raqqa governorate, and Afrin in the Aleppo governorate.

<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the border area separating the city of Ras al-Ain and the border city of Tal Abyad was controlled.

<sup>14</sup> To ensure the formation of loyal local councils and the exclusion of all opponents or even neutral parties.

## **B. United States of America USA**

The USA, represented by Obama has declared since 2014, that USA has a moral obligation and a national security interest in ending the carnage in Syria after declaring the fight against ISIS and declaring support for opposition groups to create security and allies in the target region for a more democratic and freer Syria (BP, 2017). It carried out a large number of raids, under the pretext of supporting a counterattack by the Autonomous Administration forces to limit the spread of ISIS and to protect religious and ethnic minorities who are facing the threat of slaughter at the hands of jihadist fighters (Zughni, 2012, p29-30). It justified that this would be in the interest of the population and the interest of the United States, which affected by its ability to change the balance of power in the world as well as the internal interests of countries (Walt, 1985, p. 3). The interest of the subsequent US administration in Syria differed. Instead (Goldberg, 2016), they made efforts to improve relations with Russia and Turkey (Zachariasson, 2019).

In the fall of 2019, a large part of the American forces was withdrawn from Syria, however, the American administration left the forces that control the oil in northeastern Syria, including the target area, in order to prevent other powers, particularly Russia, to fill the void that the USs' departure will leave. Moreover, the participants pointed out that the illegal military bases of the US occupation are distributed in the countryside of the cities of Al-Hasakah Governorate, in the southern neighborhoods of the city of Al-Hasakah and near the oil sources. Hamid, a resident of a border area, says: "We see Syrian oil convoys stolen by the American forces and the Autonomous Administration heading to northern Iraq through illegal crossings".

America also does not allow approaching the oil fields and is responding to all attacks by the Syrian and Russian forces targeted to restore the Syrian oil fields (AA. Syria, 2020). At the beginning of 2022, the US established an oil refinery in the target area to serve its interests (Kurdpress, 2022).

## **C. Russia**

Russia has already taken the explicit step of intervening in the conflict since 2015, which can be interpreted as wishing to become a potent mediator in the region (Satloff, 2019) and

emerge as a regional power, changing the global order from unipolar to bipolar (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 6). Russia has adopted a form of "fixer role" and has made it clear that it could be a new alternative to the United States. Most of those interviewed claimed that Russia plays the role of mediator between the Kurdish leaders and the Syrian government when the situation and the conflict between the two forces in the region escalates, and it held a military agreement with SDF October 2020. Russia does not openly oppose the Kurdish idea of establishing an autonomous administration in northeastern Syria, but rather puts the ball in the divided Kurdish party's area; They are attributed with the task of adopting a realistic project of self-administration agreed upon by most Kurdish leaders which are not ideologically united with the currently dominant Kurdish party. The Russian military presence also supports the SDF and protects AANES from Turkish military campaigns, especially if AANES is betrayed by the American side, as happened in Operation Peace Fountain, which U.S. not opposed it.

Thus, one can observe how the interests of the external foreign presence in the target area differ.

### **3.3 Violent behaviors and risk factors**

The researches indicate that the conflicts in Syria represented the diverse trends in organized violence. Therése Peterson pointed that a critical factor of severity of the Syrian conflict in general, was the collapse of state authority and the control of non-state actors that govern some Regions through the establishment of governing institutions through which the subordination of civilians to them is ensured (Pettersson, Therése et. al.,2021, p. 816,817). This structure constitutes a basis for understanding how the parties use violence, which has taken various forms according to the goal sought by the parties.

The external military intervention had apparent effects on the situation, as Al-Hasakah governorate was divided into areas of influence, including Ras al-Ain and its countryside, under full Turkish control, while the rest of the areas were under the control of Kurdish forces backed by the Americans. There is just a small area inside each city named "security squares" under Syrian control, containing Syrian government facilities conducting transactions linked to Damascus.

According to the interviewers that the level of insecurity, turmoil, and more, which is reflected in the humanitarian situation, varies from place to place, according to the dominant factions and the demographics of the area. Violence against civilians, caused by ISIS attacks, the actions of SDF supported by the USA, all led to provocations and Turkish military operations against the region, the response of the Syrian army and Russia, and intermittent terrorist bombings inside cities, in addition to denial of services. Finally, there was multifaceted individual social violence generated by societal instability such as violence against women and vulnerable groups.

**3.3.1 ISIS :** According Imad: "ISIS has done systematic massacres against civilians in Tal Tamer city in Hasakah in 2015; the coalition and American planes hovered over our heads during the massacre without targeting ISIS". In addition to terrorist bombings inside the cities, including Qamishli, targeting specific neighborhoods inhabited by Christian and another by Kurdish sects. The conflict's parties threw accusations on each other about who the offender was. Nour says: "The target killers were sharing the ideology of sticking to staying in the homeland and rejecting the idea of immigration".

ISIS has also been active this year, and the organization launched the attack on Ghwiran prison (UNICEF 2022) in Al-Hasakah city to free detainees belonging to terrorist groups (UN SE, 2022). Ahmed says, "We were displaced during the last operation; January 25, 2022 to recycle ISIS elements; they are working to displace the Arab population from the region". Moreover, some research supports the claim of the participants that the US-led coalition forces in eastern Syria are conducting raids on residential areas under the pretext of fighting ISIS (Pettersson et al. 2021, p. 58:4).

### **3.3.2 In Turkey's areas influence**

According to the participants, Security within the Turkish areas of influence in Syria is fragile due to lack of security, violations committed by SNA factions, clashes, bombings, and assassinations. In Ras al-Ain, after Operation Peace Spring, the fighting and shelling intensified, and the displacement renewed, further destroying the fragile infrastructure. Interviewers confirm that Turkey undermined the region's stability and changed the mixed demographic composition due to the participation of many residents and former prominent

figures of this city in the PYD project. So, it replaced the Kurdish population with Turkmen and Arabs.

Currently, the dominant factions in Ras al-Ain are from the SNA and do not include local fighters (al-Hilu, 2021, p. 10). Amnesty International had accused Turkish military forces and groups of showing shameful disdain for civilian life (Amnesty International, 2019). Inter-factional clashes were frequent, often resulting in civilian casualties. Turkey also took over essential and social services, including health, electricity, and education. Turkey canceled the curricula imposed by AANES and adopted the curriculum of the Syrian interim opposition government instead (al-Hilu, 2021, p. 13). Needs increased in the absence of international organizations where the much-needed humanitarian aid was withdrawn (MSF, 2020) as a form of international rejection of Turkish practices.

Furthermore, since November 17th 2019 water was Turkey's war against the peoples of the region, as it fought through thirsty civilians by cutting off the water flowing from Turkey to Syria (Wilks, 2021) as a pressure card to tighten the screws on AANES. This affected the Euphrates River tributaries that feed the Al-Hasakah Governorate, led to its drying up, and negatively affected the agricultural sector. "The Turkish forces are using a thirsty as a strategy, which has caused conflicts and violence related to the lack of waters", Abeer said. Noteworthy, Ras al-Ain depends on electricity from power station plants under the control of SDF and Electricity is exchanged for water coming from Turkey between the armed parties.

### **3.3.3 In AANES areas influence**

The participants confirmed, Al-Hasakah Governorate may have been safer at one time than the rest of the Syrian governorates because of the SDF's confrontation against ISIS and preventing it from penetrating the area at the beginning of the crisis. However, AANES practices have serious consequences on various vital sectors as will be seen later in subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter Four. The Humanitarian crisis in Al-Hasakah Governorate**

The chapter reviews the consequences of the conflict on the humanitarian situation.

The participants confirm that North-East Syria (NES) remains one of the most complex environments in Syria due to ongoing hostilities, environmental problems, and the effects of the conflict. Moreover, there has been a complete collapse of public services in some areas, an economic crisis and the interruption of education, and epidemics, especially among the most vulnerable groups of the population. Famine and thirst were used as weapons of war.

The conflict has left many people dead and displaced, and most of the population has taken refuge in neighboring countries and the European Union by a perilous journey.

### **4.1 Crisis's outcomes on humanitarian sectors**

#### **4.1.1-Migration and Forced Displacement**

There are stunning levels of displacement and need. The random internal and external displacements have been going on since the beginning of the conflict due the ethnic cleansing campaigns from ISIS in other governorates (IDMC-2019) which led to the transfer of hundreds of thousands of fleeing civilians to temporary settlements in Al-Hasakah which was safer (Map 4). Furthermore, the military operations Peace Fountain on the vicinity of the Turkish border also led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands from their homes on the border strip around Ras al-Ain (OCHA, 6 May 2021). Half of these displaced people have sought refuge in Al-Hasakah and its countryside (IDMC, 2019). Recently, “as a result of the events of Ghweran prison in January 2022 in the city of Hasakah (UN, 2022), about 5,000 people were stranded in the fighting area in the Ghuwairan and Zuhur neighborhoods, south of the city of Hasaka” the participants confirmed. While immigration increased, Sara says: “Fear, instability and division of power, pushed large numbers of the original residents of Al Hasakah Governorate to migrate out of Syria from the beginning of the war”.

#### **4.1.2 Economy and Services**

The participants reported that the area's people suffer from a dire economic situation and high prices amid insufficient access to essential life services such as potable water, health, electricity, fuel, and food. In addition, agriculture suffered many blows due to climate change that led to drought (Femia, Werrell, 2012), coinciding with the cutting off of the water supply by Turkey (al-Hilu, 2021, p. 14). Most of the people whose livelihood depends on this resource are unemployed. Furthermore, the enmity among the parties, the exchange of fire and incendiary bullets between the SDF and the Turkish border guards, led to the outbreak of fires in the countryside of Al-Qamishli during the harvest season and crop combustion (SOHR, 2021). Nidal added another reason: "The gangs' method continues to persist; farmers who sold their crops to the Syrian state have had their agricultural lands set on fire for more than a year in a row, in order to be forced to deal with the other parties".

This was in addition to the monopoly of commodities by some merchants and warlords in the region to raise their prices. This led to the majority of the population living below the poverty line and dependent on humanitarian aid and charitable funds sent by relatives or friends from outside Syria, which constitute most of the region's resources. According to Rakan: "AANES's policy of randomly imposing taxes on shop owners, added to the fuel crisis, and raising its prices will benefit AANES while impoverishing the people". He continues "In light of the settling of accounts, we are the victims". All this was accompanied by the tightening of international economic sanctions on Syria, which led to further economic collapse and the devaluation of the currency (Singh, Stroul et al., 2019, p. 10). This had a significant impact on civilians.

On the other hand, the participants point out that there is a huge cash movement among certain groups of the population and the currency exchange offices spreader widely without any controls. It can be said that all service is available to those who can pay.

In the administrative context, the dual power led AANES to the establish ministries, administrative and security institutions, and courts. In addition, it imposed compliance with licenses, approvals, and decisions issued by it, which increased the administrative burden on citizens and various organizations that need dual approvals from the two authorities, Syrian

and the Kurdish de facto authorities. Moreover, from time to time, the SDF seizes or tries to seize the property of absentees and immigrants.

**4.1.3 The health:** During the conflict, the health situation in Syria was generally deteriorating (Akik, Semaan et al., 2020, p. 2-6). Many health workers fled, and health care facilities were disrupted (Alhaffar, Janos, 2021, p.7). The interviews indicated that there is a health disaster in Al-Hasakah governorate, where the conflict has created a significant gap in the public health system supported by the government because most of the governorate 's free hospitals are out of service. The rest operate at a minimum level and lack medicines and medical devices. As described by the health workers, the indicators of the disaster are manifested by the high rates of incurable diseases due to the pollution of the environment resulting from the extraction and primitive refining of oil in handmade oil refineries spread in most villages. In addition to toxic gasses emitted by the electricity generators that spread in the neighborhoods due to the insufficient electricity subsidized by the Syrian government. On the other hand, patients cannot travel outside the governorate to receive treatment <sup>15</sup>. "Patients cannot afford the high costs of travel and treatment, or travelers are arrested at the checkpoints planted on all the roads and taken for recruitment or capture by the conflicting parties" Miriam said. As for the Corona pandemic, the participants - except health and humanitarian workers - ignored the epidemic and said that it was the lesser of evils and its effect was manifested just by increasing the economic burdens imposed by the quarantine.

**4.1.4 Education:** SDF occupied public schools in the governorate, closed and turned part of them into military barracks and detention centers and in the other part imposed their own Kurdish curriculum of AANES, and only few schools remained within the security squares teaching the Syrian government curriculum. The education rate has declined due to the inaccessibility of schools. Schools are either unavailable or expensive or because militias on the ground cut off the roads and impeded access, plus there is education deprivation caused by child labor. The educational process has also been suspended for several months in Al-Hasakah colleges, destroyed by the Gwiran Prison attacks in Al-Hasakah 2022. "AANES

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<sup>15</sup> For economic and security reasons, and because of the land blockade from the rest of Syria, the only transportation means was flying till 2021.

behaviors prompted students to abandon going to the schools and young were forced to join SDF”, according Ali.

**4.1.5 Gender-based violence:** An interview with a camp’s humanitarian workers revealed that during the years of conflict, gender-based violence increased due to the social and economic conditions and the pressures experienced by the family in general, such as unemployment, scarcity of resources and economic uncertainty, in addition to long-term displacement. And so, women were victims of patriarchal society and the men bullying because of her weakness and inability to defend herself, this information actually intersects with previous research (UNFPA, 2022, p. 93-95). Omar, the humanitarian worker, pointed to the increasing systematic use of exploitation and deprivation of resources as a form of this violence, such as depriving women of their children or depriving them of compensations and aid and education. Plus, the high rate of early and forced marriage due to poverty.

#### **4.1.5.1 Forced recruitment and violence against children**

A kind of gender-based violence is the forcing of children to participate in bearing arms in the terrorist organization ISIS. On the other hand, it is a strategy followed by the SDF to increase the number of its members by launching campaigns for forced recruitment under the name of “self-defense duty” in all its areas of control, and for this purpose it launches campaigns of raids and arrests that include young men, girls, and minors, both Kurds and different sects.

Plus, SDF receives children who volunteer in its classes to earn money because the parents are unable to support them <sup>16</sup>. Haitham confirms: “In December 2021, the SDF kidnapped about 50 minors in the city of Qamishli. As a result, the families organized vigils during February in front of the UNICEF building in Qamishli”. This intersects with what previous reports said about that (UNFPA, 2022. P.93. 94).

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<sup>16</sup> SDF does not abide by the agreement it signed with the United Nations, on June 29, 2018, to protect children under the age of 18 and end their recruitment.

## **4.2 Humanitarian response and the role of international actors**

This section provides an overview of how organizations and states have intervened to address the situation in the targeted area from a local perspective.

The participants reported that the area received the attention of international and local organizations of all kinds (Annex Z) and, in turn, contributed to the establishment of various official and unofficial camps <sup>17</sup> and had a positive impact on mitigating the crisis. On the other hand, some participants accused the humanitarian organizations of treason. Thayer says "Humanitarian organizations, especially transnational organizations, are more interested in gathering intelligence on the political situation in the region than in providing aid.". Additional initiative resulted a few Al-Hawl camp detainees being over to their countries. In addition to international initiatives from several countries to discuss the crisis, but without tangible results during summer 2022.

### **4.2.1 Challenges facing organizations**

- The inability of organizations to abide by the principles and foundations of humanitarian work. Because of the state of emergency and lack of support, employees are not sufficiently trained on these principles, which leads to cases of violations of the code of conduct in organizations.
- Access and registration challenges due to the chaos and the slow arrival of international aid as a result of the divided authority in the region, bureaucratic restrictions and the need to obtain licenses from the two authorities, Syrian and de facto authorities. Either ways, all organizations, directly or indirectly, need approvals from AANES to carry out its activities.

Additionally, the movement restrictions, barriers inside and outside cities, difficulty of targeting the widely spread countryside in Al-Hasakah Governorate and the concentration of services in the cities. In conjunction with the imposition of a total quarantine several times due to the spread of the Corona pandemic, NGOs focused on providing non-life-

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<sup>17</sup> Formal camps: Hol, Al Areesha, Newroz, Roj. Informal camps licensed by AANES: Sekanie, Talaie, Twinah/ washokani.

saving services remotely, such as consultations and awareness sessions, but most of the targeted people did not have the means nor the Internet to activate online services. There was also a lack of an automation system for linking information and data. Organizations have internal systems for linking data that do not intersect with the rest, due to the presence of different types of international organizations.

Furthermore, the volatile security situation, the Turkish military operations along the border and the closure of the crossings led to impeded access and to the withdrawal of several international organizations from the camps as a rejection of the Turkish behavior.

- Politicization of aid: the controlling authorities discriminate in dealing with the camps according to the affiliations of the displaced. AANES sometimes prevents organizations from providing services in camps and areas under the control of armed factions under the auspices of Turkey which include ISIS. Some unlicensed organizations may be subject to accountability and prosecution when they enter Syrian territory illegally in Syrian government areas and accusing them of working with terrorist organizations. On the other hand, the Autonomous Administration took control of the decision in the camps, and chaos spread. reprisals increased among the camp residents, such as burning tents and clashing with weapons, as well as threats against humanitarian workers. Moreover, AANES does not have sufficient experience to deal with displaced to contribute to solving their complex issues.
- Lack of funding, as it is not commensurate with the needs, and has decreased since 2020 under the pretext of the end of armed conflicts, although the governorate witnessed an economic crisis coinciding with the imposed economic sanctions and the spread of the Coronavirus.

All of the above has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.

## Chapter Five. Analysis and Results

A new humanitarian and political angle will be built by answering research questions regarding the effects of conflict, military interventions, and humanitarian response. This is based on the statements of participants in the interviews supported sometimes by the previous research.

### 5.1 Escalation of the conflict

It seems that it is not possible to treat Hasaka as a post-conflict region because hostilities have not yet experienced an end, whose end alone is insufficient to resolve conflicts whose social and political causes have exacerbated. Moreover, the conflict is driven by a mixture of international and local animosities based on conflicting interests and goals as Kreisberg indicated to it (2017, p. 9. 37). The demand of Kurdish autonomy has grown which has been supported and mobilized in light of the continued division of the international community and its immersion in a geopolitical competition, as a basis for violent conflict in the context of the general Syrian conflict (Sian Research, 2017; GSDRC, 2017, p11). Thus, national differences were exploited as a basis for sectarian violence (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse et al., 2016, p.117) by establishing a Kurdish region in Syria. Moreover, the parties had exploited the country's oil and agricultural resources to establish their presence, which is consistent with the theoretical ideas of Haider (2016).

#### 5.1.1 Power Relationships Through the Lens of Realism Theory

The conflict in al-Hasakah confirmed the supremacy of realism theory as a basis for a broader internationalization of the conflict. That led to the polarization of foreign military interventions commensurate with the parties' interests. Thus, Sectarian divisions and the humanitarian crisis were aggravated due to the US and Turkish occupations in the region, their support for armed terrorist gangs and separatist forces, and the usurpation of wealth without the international community taking an active position in condemning them. This supports the realistic argument that the international community's response to some conflicts and crises occurs to serve an important interest of the intervening countries.

On the other hand, the de-facto administration and its armed forces (SDF) made themselves a dominant force in the region to control it militarily and administratively and give priority to the interest in establishing self-rule in northeastern Syria, regardless of the extent of its impact on the aggravation of the humanitarian crisis. In the course of it the US-led coalition supported the Kurds, while Turkey stood against the Kurdish policy.

The strategic goal of the Turkish policy is to destroy any Kurdish national entity, which is consistent with the self-help criterion for achieving security (Waltz1979). For its part, Turkey considered the methods used by the de-facto administration to build its war arsenal and alliances with America as a threat to Turkish security. Thus, it worked to increase its areas of influence and control in northern Syria to protect its security and stability without formulating an integrated policy to meet the humanitarian needs of the areas it controls.

On the other hand, the interviewees agree that the war was in the interest of the United States which is seeking to preserve its presence as a superpower, supports the Kurdish separatist ideology, and was concentrated around the oil sources to exploit the Syrian oil wealth. At the same time, Russia sought to compete with America and establish its presence as an influential power in the region. All of this is consistent with the conclusions of the realism theory of international relations regarding the great powers that seek to increase their resources and establish their presence at the expense of other peoples (Waltz, 1993, p.52).

## **5.2 The nature of the conflict exacerbated the crisis**

The previous chapters showed the various effects of the conflict in Al- Hasaka, which resulted in various forms of violence manifested by many local and international armed conflicts and indiscriminate air raids or maybe the deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure. Moreover, the research showed how the conflict's parties exploited humanitarian needs to serve their interests.

### **5.2.1 Violence as a reason and a result of the crisis**

From a review of empirical and theoretical results, it appears that the conflict in Al-Hasakah Governorate is not similar to a conventional war affected by direct fighting. Thus, most conflict and multi-directional violence occur behind the front lines, where the region's communities suffer.

This is consistent with the conclusions of (Peterson, Therese, et al. 2021) on how the parties use violence and its forms. Ideology, financial and human resources determine how armed groups deal with civilians. Additionally, regarding to the relationship of organizational structures to violence; the militias which depend on external material, human resources and seek to achieve immediate and short-term goals under changing leadership such as SNA led to an increase in direct violence against civilians, as happened in Ras al-Ain and ISIS locations. While the long-term plans led by a progressive and stable organizational ideology led to self-restraint, such as AANES. It exploited resources, and has incomplete control in the area and attracted two types of local allies; local elements aimed at financial gain, plus people from partisan backgrounds with well-established ideologies and specific goals. As a result, it has reached a level of organization that prevents its members from engaging in random but more selective violence.

### **5.2.1.1 Parties Strategies for violence**

The SDF adopted the ideology of violence and indirect coercion against civilians to gain international support with the legitimacy of its presence on the ground. This was in addition to the dynamics of the siege imposed by the SDF; there were arrests of certain people and specific neighborhoods which are under the Syrian government's control, were deprived of services, education, and primary essentials such as bread and fuel. It confirms what Kalyvas said about selective violence and the imposition of the logic of control. In turn, the explosions, whose actors are unknown, were directed at specific groups that refused to emigrate; displacement seem was the goal.

In the same time, Turkey has followed several strategies of violence to reach its goals, such as the logic of control, purification of the region, punishment, and terrorism through directing military strikes and incursion into the Syrian borders. They additionally created crises, such as the need for water and electricity to tighten the screws on the population to weaken the capabilities of the Kurdish units and change the demographics of the region with the aim of geographical separation between the Kurds of Turkey and the Kurds of Syria. Turkey believes that the settlement of non-Kurds in the Kurdish areas will eliminate the possibility of Kurdish autonomy that threatens Turkish national security. Moreover, Turkey depends on

the SNF and thus was less dependent on the local civilian population, which increased the frequency of opportunistic violence and punitive attacks in the city of Ras al-Ain.

On the other hand, it is evident in this context that the Syrian state in al-Hasakah governorate did not attempt to maintain its control over the land by force in the context of regional competition, perhaps in contrast to its behaviour in other Syrian regions. This approach led to a reduction in confrontations, government violence, and civilian casualties in this region. The above is consistent with theoretical research (Balcells, Stanton, 2021).

It appears that the American support for SDF led to the continuation of the internal conflict between the local parties and exacerbated the crisis and that the direct attacks against ISIS did not bring the desired results but instead had negative consequences on the infrastructure of the area and the displacement of the local population. This is consistent with what was stated by (choi, 2011, p. 2.4), that the impact of the American intervention on terrorism is generally harmful.

All of the above is consistent with the theoretical research that the level of violence is affected by the levels of military competition on the ground, according to (Balcells et al. 2021. p. 54).

This type of war appears to change the risks to civilians in a conflict environment, with fewer civilians directly and deliberately targeted but more suffering from indirect/unintended violence, i.e., collateral damage, such as forced displacement, migration, and gender-related violence. In this context, young people were forced to join extremist groups and SDF because they often feel excluded from civil society (Mikhail, Norman, 2018, p.57-58).

Furthermore, the results indicate that immigration and displacement was a strategy adopted by some parties of the conflict, and in a small part, it was an unintended result of violence to obtain security and stability. This indicates the use of collective, selective violence aimed at demographic change, as the local population has been claiming.

### **5.3 The humanitarian response has been affected**

According to empirical research, the behavior of conflict parties reflects how human needs are exploited, as services are bartered between conflicting parties to enable control and

strengthen power relations through crisis trafficking. Furthermore, these services are also provided in a discriminatory manner according to affiliations of the beneficiaries. Thus, one notices that the region's residents have turned into cards and pawns used by the parties of the conflict to apply pressure and achieve their political goals.

On the other hand, with the continuation of the humanitarian crisis, the issue of supporting civilians remains urgent in an environment of a complex conflict that has protracted in Al Hasakah governorate and turned into new phases. People's needs exceed emergency aid to development needs, such as those resulting from high levels of violence, loss of education, displacement, and social diseases, among other issues.

The empirical research clarified the harmful effects of the conflict on humanitarian work through the challenges that limit the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, in light of the military intervention and the weakness of humanitarian intervention. The lack of experience and breadth necessary for the aid which has also been hindered by the division of authorities on the ground, due to the forces' control over the decision of geographical distribution. Plus, the quality and level of services provided in the camps varied according to the settlers' affiliations. Furthermore, organisations need to appeal to those in power on the ground to allow them to help the vulnerable. This in line with the findings of Barnett Walker (2015), in turn, is a kind of political interference that hinders the principle of independence in humanitarian work, as indicated by Van den Homburg and others (2020).

The results show often a lack of readiness of international and humanitarian organizations to meet humanitarian needs, as demonstrated by the events of Ghwayran prison through the weak response to sudden displacement. In addition, the needs during the years of conflict were more than the available resources, especially in light of the increase in reverse displacement with the region's lack of services. This coincided with the collapse of the economic and agricultural sector as a result of smuggling the region's goods and wealth abroad and depriving farmers and citizens of their dues, at a time when the region has been suffering from drought for years, plus the international economic sanctions.

On the other hand, the research results revealed that the multiplicity of the organizations types present on the ground and their different objectives led to the mistrust of the local citizens and the parties of the conflict in them and sometimes they accuse the organizations

of betrayal. Also, poor coordination and communication between actors and NGOs have led to chaos and inefficiency, and priority is given to relief assistance rather than development.

Furthermore, the AANES'S behavior led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and negatively impacted the humanitarian response due to its poor camp management, the spread of chaos, and differences in how it dealt with the displaced people according to their affiliations.

Thus, the results indicate that the nature of the conflict has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and led to the spread of most types of violence in Al-Hasakah, and that direct or indirect violence in a large percent was not random, as it was an organizational policy followed by the conflicting parties to serve their interests. Moreover, the external military intervention and the diversity of authorities on the ground exacerbated the crisis and impeded the improvement of the humanitarian situation. While humanitarian intervention had an effective effect in alleviating suffering, but it was insufficient and subjected to politicization.

#### **5.4 Study recommendations**

The study considers that the international community has a political and moral duty to address this crisis through condemning the international illegal presence on the ground, Turkish military operations against Syrian territory, and strengthening international efforts to accelerate solutions to ISIS's file detainees inside the prisons of Al-Hasakah Governorate, who pose a real threat to the situation. Moreover, pressure should be put on parties to deal with the displaced humanely, allowing the entry of international organizations to follow up on the general situation in the camps and facilitate their work and ensuring unimpeded access. Moreover, increase financing to continue access to those in need. In addition to facilitating the return of the displaced to their original safe areas.

## **The Conclusion**

This study reflects a local view of the autonomy conflict in an area that has an active role in the general Syrian conflict and evaluates its factors and effects on the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the results indicate the specificity of the conflict in Al-Hasakah Governorate, which could be described as politicization from the beginning but its dynamic changed during the years of the war. The conflict's impacts can be evaluated from two broad perspectives: first, attracting external intervention; secondly, its role of exacerbating the violence and humanitarian crisis in all their forms. Arguably this conflict has become the nucleus of the continuation of the current Syrian conflict.

Moreover, the negotiating approach to the solution is still invisible, because of the absolute refusal by the Syrian government to establish an autonomous administration in northeastern Syria. On the other hand, this issue is connected with the policy of international powers which have conflicting geopolitics interests in the region. Among others, Turkey is wholly opposed to the Kurds' obtaining autonomy because of the historical enmity with them and considers that they pose a threat to southern Turkey. At the same time, the United States of America aims to continue strengthening its presence and its colonies in the region by supporting the Kurds in northern Syria. Between this and that, the first victim remains the human.

The above confirms the necessity of a political solution to the crisis. That could be through unifying and activating international goodwill in parallel with reconciliations at the local level, to reach a strategy for formulating solutions that can be translated as a benefit in stabilizing the humanitarian situation and local peacebuilding that maybe become the nucleus for sustainable national peace in Syria. More research needed to achieve this objective.

Last but not least, there are no humane solutions to humanitarian problems whose main factors are political. Therefore, it is necessary to search for the conflict exact factors and their repercussions in order to be able to devise practical solutions later. Additionally, it is worth to give more attention to human, because in the end, roads can be paved, but people's lives cannot be restored.

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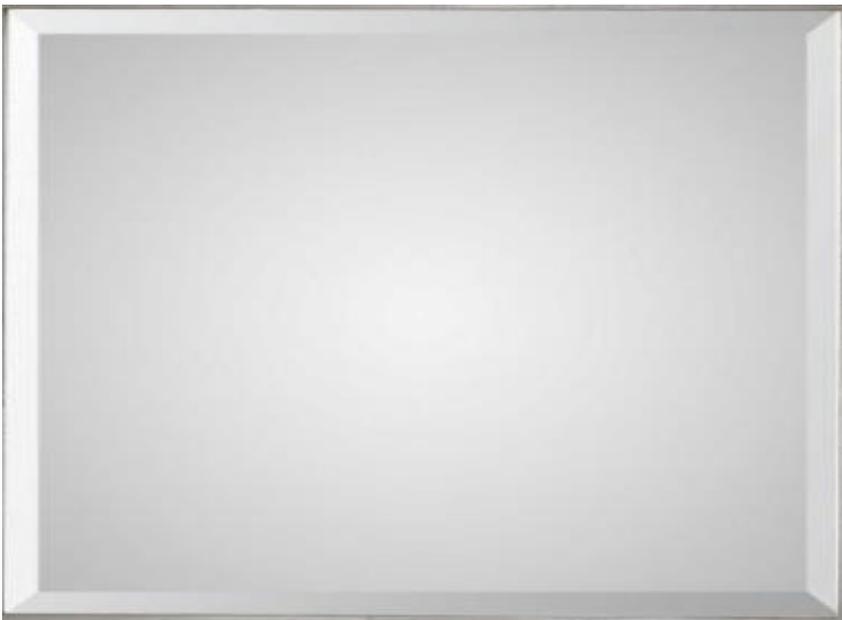
**Mirna Hanna**

**2022-09-05**

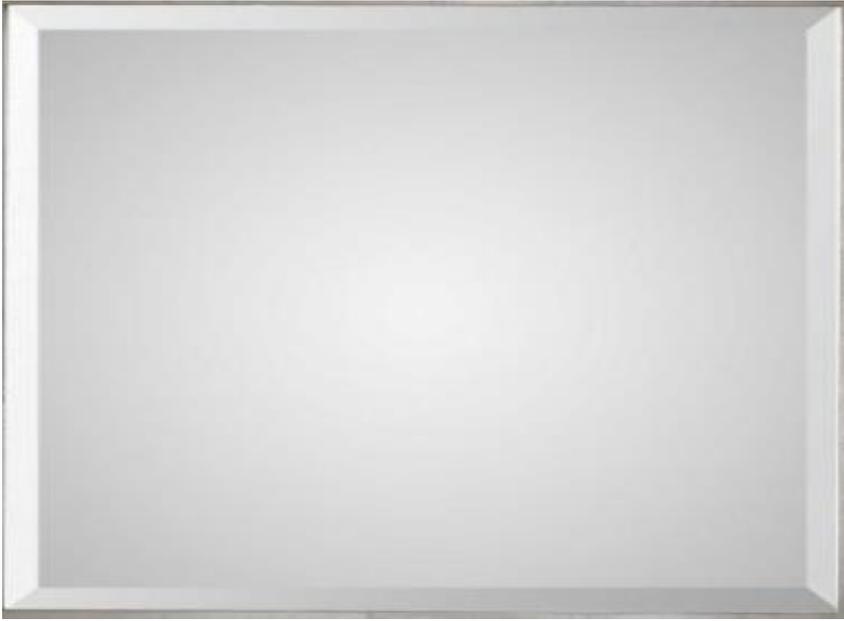
## Annexes: Maps. Figure. interview information



Map 1. Al Hasakah governorate



Map 2. Distribution of forces on the ground



Map 3. Turkish Military Operation Zones



Map 4. Locations of Assessed IDP Camps and Sites

**Annex A: List of interviewees**

-Simple list to differentiate interviewees, including people with different political, social, and scientific backgrounds, who belong to the various parties to the conflict, to various social classes:

| Number | Gender       | Age and other attributes      |
|--------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| 2-3    | Male- Female | 23-60 years old. Humanitarian |
| 2-3    | Male- Female | Legal and political field     |
| 2      | Male         | Journalist field              |
| 2      | Male         | Religious field               |
| 2      | Male         | Military field                |
| 1-2    | Male- Female | Medical field                 |
| 1-2    | Male- Female | Educational field             |
| 3-3    | Male- Female | Diverse professions           |
| 3-3    | Male- Female | 18-29 years old. Youth        |

**Annex Z : Types of organization in Al Hasakah according the participants.**

| Organisation  | Licenses from:   |
|---|--|
| United nations. international organizations. national associations. Non-governmental (non-profit) associations. | Syrian government<br><br>But it needs a satisfaction from AANES to carry out its activities somehow. |
| cross-border international organizations. Most civil society organizations. Not-for-profit associations         | Not licensed by the Syrian government, but licensed by AANES   |

## **Annex B: Information sheet for interviewees      Information sheet**

Exploring the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation and the role of external interference in Al-Hasakah Governorate.

My name is Mirna Hanna, I am studying for a master's in “Humanitarian Action and Conflict” at Uppsala University, Sweden. For my master thesis “**The Humanitarian Crisis in Light of the Autonomy conflict in Northeastern Syria 2011-2022 / Al-Hasakah Governorate. The Role OF External Intervention**”

I am trying to discover the humanitarian crisis' factors in Al-Hasakah Governorate and the impact of the conflict and external interference from a local perspective. So, this research is a seed for understanding the dynamics that exacerbated the crisis and its various aspects to be a bridge for subsequent research that seeks to discover the region's solutions.

I would like to do individual interviews with a diverse sample of the population with various political and professional backgrounds to find out your personal view on the mentioned academic research. There are no right or wrong answers.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Each participant will be asked several questions, and additional questions can be added depending on the answers. The participant is free not to answer specific questions or to leave the study at any point. However, there might be a need to reconnect with some interviewees who continued to ask further clarification questions.

Your answers work as a control of the academic results in this master thesis.

The final thesis will be published online on (DiVA) the Swedish Digital Academic Archive. Due to privacy reasons, no individual names and answers will be shared so it is impossible to identify the person who answered. In the case of using quotes, they will be displayed with fictitious names in the thesis. Transcriptions will be kept in private by the author for three years. The final result could be shared with the interviewees if they requested.

Thanks for reading through this information.

If you choose to participate, please sign the consent form attached; if this is not possible, oral consent is sufficient, and the writer will indicate that.

For any further information contact Mirna Hanna: #####

## **Annex c: Consent form for interview participants**

### **Consent form for interview participants**

Each form was produced in two copies, one for the participant/one for the researcher.

I have read the attached information, which was explained to me before the interview. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date (day/month/year)\_\_\_\_\_

Statement by the researcher

I have accurately explained the information sheet to the potential participant, and I am sure that the participant understands all the information about this project and that all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly. I confirm that the consent has been given freely and voluntarily and the person has not been forced into giving consent.

Researcher's name:

Mirna Hanna

Researcher's Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Date (day/month/year)\_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: Phone number: #####

E-mail address: #####

## **Annex D: Interview guide**

### **Questions for the interviewees:**

The questions contain general and specialized questions that were answered by the participants, each according to their specialization and information.

1-The name, age, and profession.

2- What would describe the humanitarian situation after 2011 as good, bad, or dangerous? Fixed or variable? What are the factors that affected the humanitarian situation in the governorate?

3- What is the impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation in the governorate from ten years ago until today, from your point of view? (Example: security, violence, health, migration, displacement, services, and education). How is this effect reflected on the ground?

4-Is there a clear external interference on the ground? What are its forms?

5-What is the impact of external military intervention on the humanitarian situation, positive or negative? What is your attitude towards this intervention?

6-What is the impact of external humanitarian intervention on the humanitarian situation?

Are there humanitarian organizations, and what are their types? How do organizations respond to the humanitarian situation? good or bad?

What are the challenges - specific to the region - facing humanitarian organizations and impeding their work?

7- At this moment, how do you see and assess the distance and duration to start a real peace process in the region?

8-Who bears the responsibility for reducing the crisis and stabilizing or peacebuilding in the region from your point of view. Is it a local, national or external decision

**Mirna Hanna**

**2022-09-05**