
**RESOLUTION OF LOCAL CONFLICTS INVOLVING ARMED ISLAMISTS:
THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR, 2011–2021**

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Abstract In the 2010s, violent Islamist actors have become increasingly involved in intrastate armed conflicts, but little is known about how these conflicts can be resolved. Previous studies have found that negotiations are less likely to be successful in resolving armed conflicts that involve violent Islamists. Ceasefires are another tool of conflict resolution related to negotiation that may be reached before, during, or after the negotiation process. This article investigates the conditions for reaching ceasefire agreements with Islamist armed groups in Syria by expanding the author's earlier dataset, codifying the data, and using logistic regression analysis to test three main hypotheses. From 2011 to 2021, 141 local ceasefire agreements were reached in 190 distinct locations during the Syrian civil war, comprising about half of the agreements reached with Islamist armed actors. The finding is that such actors were more receptive to a ceasefire if the drafting of agreements prioritized (a) humanitarian considerations above tactical ones and (b) gradual implementation as opposed to immediate. Long-lasting sieges, fighting exhaustion, and the associated public pressure on combatants may further explain why humanitarian incentives are motivating for agreements. The gradual pace of implementation might be attributed to efforts made to create confidence. In contrast, as anticipated by earlier studies, the involvement of third parties does not significantly explain a relationship to achieve a ceasefire with these armed actors.

Keywords civil war, local ceasefires, violent Islamism, transnational jihadism, conflict management, mediation, humanitarian aspects, Syria

Название статьи Регулирование локальных конфликтов с участием вооруженных исламистов (на примере гражданской войны в Сирии, 2011–2021 гг.)

Аннотация В 2010-е годы усилилось и расширилось участие вооруженных акторов исламистского толка во внутренних конфликтах, однако до сих пор нет

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ясности в методах урегулирования таких конфликтов. Исследования показывают, что конфликты с участием вооруженных исламистов хуже поддаются урегулированию путем мирных переговоров, чем другие конфликты. Однако еще одним форматом решения, связанного с переговорами, являются перемирия, которые могут заключаться до, в ходе или после завершения переговорного процесса. В статье исследуются условия для достижения соглашений о перемирии с вооруженными исламистскими группировками в Сирии. Исследование проведено на основе расширенной авторской базы данных по локальным перемириям в Сирии путем кодификации данных и использования логистического регрессионного анализа для проверки трех основных гипотез. За период с 2011 по 2021 год в ходе гражданской войны в Сирии было заключено 141 локальное соглашение о перемирии в 190 локациях, что составило около половины всех соглашений с вооруженными исламистами в мире за этот период. Сделан вывод о том, что вооруженные исламисты более склонны к заключению соглашений о перемирии, которые отдают приоритет, во-первых, гуманитарным вопросам над военно-тактическими, а во-вторых, постепенному, а не срочному выполнению условий перемирий. Среди факторов, объясняющих, почему за большинством локальных соглашений о перемирии стоят гуманитарные стимулы, затяжные осады, усталость от военных действий и связанное с этим растущее давление на комбатантов со стороны населения. Постепенный, поэтапный характер реализации большинства таких перемирий может быть продиктован необходимостью подстраховаться за счет мер доверия. В то же время подтвержден намеченный в предыдущих исследованиях вывод о том, что роль третьих сторон не является значимым фактором в локальных перемириях с участием вооруженных исламистов.

Ключевые слова гражданская война, локальные перемирия, вооруженный исламизм, транснациональный джихадизм, регулирование конфликтов, посредничество, гуманитарные аспекты, Сирия

I. Introduction

Statistically, intrastate armed conflicts have been common in recent decades.¹ However, their character is shifting away from conventional conflicts between state and non-state actors. A range of non-state local armed actors throughout the globe increasingly engage in conflict with the state and with one other for a variety of motives in a number of locations inside the same country.² Practitioners often refer to a confrontation between non-state actors in the context of peace operations as a local conflict because of the great localization of such conflicts.³ Disputes over property, trespassing by neighbouring communities, ethnic tensions, and religious differences, as well as illicit mining, trafficking, banditry, and other forms of extortion are common causes of conflict at the local level.⁴ The causes might also stem from national incompatibilities that have begun or persist in single or multiple isolated localities between rival groups. To address these issues, political scientists working the field of international mediation have adopted a variety of ways to effectively resolve armed conflicts at the country level.⁵ This is one of the reasons why research on conflict resolution has moved its focus to sub-state level.⁶ In particular, the Syrian civil war and the process of its resolution have attracted a lot of attention.⁷ When it comes to non-state actors driven by religion, such as jihadist groups or Islamist armed groups,⁸ however, very little research has been conducted on the issue of settling intrastate conflicts.

Religion is, to some extent, intertwined with conflict and resolution. In recent years, there has been an uptick in studies into the effect of religion on intrastate armed conflicts. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area, inter- and intra-religious incompatibilities, as well as violent struggles for regime change, have become more frequent.⁹ J.Fox points out that religion is globally playing an increasingly important part in intrastate conflicts. He has indicated that religious intrastate tensions are becoming more frequent in Muslim communities.¹⁰ The role of religion deserves more attention as it can have a double-edged nature: on the one hand, it can be exploited to instigate a conflict and achieve political power, and on the other hand, it can be helpful to facilitate conflict resolution.

M.Basedau and his colleagues examined the relationship between religion and the onset of armed conflict in 130 developing nations (1990–2010). They point out that discrimination toward a particular religious community, overlapping religious and ethnic identities, and calls by religious elite for aggression all raise the impetus for militant political action and therefore the risk of armed conflict.¹¹ Their findings contribute significantly to our knowledge of the role of religious factor in conflict initiation, allowing religion to be studied in combination with other factors. J.Fox argues that religious conflicts are difficult to resolve because people's divergent religious views might stymie discourse and desire to compromise.¹² More facets of religion are explored to see how effective interfaith dialogues, religious actors, and networks are at settling violent conflicts. C.Alger advocates that religious peace activists are more capable of providing "field diplomacy" to support conflict resolution than state actors.¹³ In that respect, C.Sampson argues that religious communities significantly contributed to peacebuilding and conflict transformation in the past and suggests using religion as a powerful peacebuilding tool for religious practitioners.¹⁴

In recent decades, Islam has become globally identifiable in religious armed conflicts.¹⁵ D.Nilsson and I.Svensson have found out that 56 percent of armed conflicts which occurred in 2015 involved an Islamist dimension.¹⁶ In 2019, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) counted 54 state-based conflicts. Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda, or their allies were engaged in 28 state-based conflicts.¹⁷ Despite the Islamic State's declared defeat, the number of conflicts with the involvement of IS branches or elements climbed from 12 in 2018 to 16 in 2019.¹⁸ Many recent developments of organized violence have been motivated by tensions surrounding these transnational jihadist movements.¹⁹

M.Toft addresses three reasons, demonstrating that Islam is increasingly involved in religious civil wars: (a) in most Muslim nations, secularism is not a part of the constitution; (b) geographic location determined by oil resources; (c) jihadism is on the rise.²⁰ This growing number requires further investigation not just of the causes of conflict but also of conflict resolution with Islamist insurgent movements. As a result, research has begun to focus on Islamist movements, including jihadists, but it has received little attention in peace and conflict studies.

The use of third-party mediation as a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of armed conflicts has been shown to be very beneficial in prior study on the Syrian civil war,²¹ but has not been tested specifically with violent Islamist groups. They have the ability to develop dialogue and trust among parties involved in a disagreement. In addition to acting as facilitators of talks, mediators may also offer vital monitoring and verification services to guarantee that ceasefire agreements are being followed. In addition, mediators have the ability to provide essential humanitarian assistance to people who are being impacted by the conflict. This helps to lessen the toll that the war is taking on affected populations and fosters goodwill among all of the parties involved.

I find that violent Islamist armed groups are more likely to accept a ceasefire if humanitarian incentives take precedence over tactical ones and/or the agreement is implemented in steps. Contrary to conventional beliefs, the involvement of a third party in mediation has no statistically significant effect. In this context, humanitarian incentives can be more effective in providing a way out of the fighting, as they are seen as tangible benefits that can improve the lives of those affected by the conflict. The release of prisoners, the withdrawal of rebels with their families, the availability of humanitarian supplies, and public exchange might be major incentives. One explanation for this is that Islamist/jihadist actors may face extended sieges and combat fatigue.²² These conditions can lead to immense pressure on combatants, both from within their groups and from the wider public, to end the conflict. In contrast, tactical incentives such as the control of critical highways, power centers, oil commerce, and army reunification are less significant in the context of a larger conflict. Moreover, tactical incentives may not be seen as having a direct effect on the lives of individuals impacted by the war. The success of ceasefire agreements with these groups is also aided by implementing them in stages rather than all at once. Efforts to build trust may have had a role.

The article is organized into five distinct sections, including an introduction, a theoretical framework, a research design, an empirical analysis, and a conclusion. The introduction establishes the context for the study, while the literature review provides an overview of relevant prior research and presents the author's argument. The research design section outlines the data collection process and methods used to gather information. The empirical analysis section presents the actual research results. Finally, the conclusion section brings together the key findings and discusses their implications for further research and policy.

II. Theoretical framework

Previous theories on Islamist conflict and conflict resolution

In recent years, a number of scholars have focused on the settlement of conflicts with violent Islamist organizations. The Berghof Foundation has progressively changed its focus to disaggregating policy studies on Salafi-jihadi militant groups and conflict resolution, including talks with such groups and de-escalation options in Mali, Somalia, and Syria. According to K.Göldner-Ebenthal, V.Dudouet, and M.Migeon, civil society, as well as external factors such as inter-party power politics and foreign intervention, are critical in developing a mechanism for conflict de-escalation.²³ D.Nilsson and I.Svensson perform the first quantitative large-N study including 368 conflict dyads on conflict resolution with Islamist/jihadist groups at an intrastate level. They argue that Islamist armed conflicts are less likely to be resolved by negotiation. This is particularly true when a localized religious dispute becomes internationalized.²⁴ Transnational Islamist armed groups aiming at establishing a worldwide *caliphate* are backed up by jihadists to remain adamant in their refusal to negotiate peace. Islamist parties with revolutionary or separatist claims are more likely to compromise than transnational jihadists.²⁵ Scholars encourage further research as there is a significant gap in empirical knowledge in that field. Afghanistan is one of the most recent examples of resolving conflicts with violent Islamists. The United States and the Taliban²⁶ signed the Doha Peace Agreement on 29 February 2020. The peace agreement was made of four parts and sought not just peace between the United States, its NATO allies, and the Taliban, but also negotiated intra-Afghan solution.

Qualitative case studies on peace negotiations involving Islamist armed actors were conducted. M.Sheikh reflects on failed peace talks with the Pakistani Taliban as to whether religion/Islam has had a negative impact on the negotiations. Her findings suggest that the “Tehrik-e-Taliban”’s insistence on Sharia law makes (sovereignty of God) compromises impossible and stifles the spirit of agreement because its enforcement is very complex and open to interpretations. Furthermore, it goes against Western civil rights principles. She emphasized that the failure is the result of a multitude of contextual factors, including internal leadership struggle, a lack of consensus over who to bargain with, and ties to other conflicts, governments, and actors such as the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda.²⁷ In another case analysis conducted by A.Engvall and I.Svensson, peace negotiations between the Thai state and the Patani Muslim separatists reveal why previous attempts at peace negotiations have failed, until hostilities were finally brought to an end in 2013. Having a credible spokesperson, according to the analysis, is critical to comprehending why peace efforts can advance.²⁸ The level of leadership has a significant effect on commitment challenges and is critical to avoiding agreement compliance failures. In general, every failure can reduce trust in future peace talks and expectations of conflict resolution between rival armed parties. Finally, the above-mentioned scholars have expressly urged the collection of further analytic evidence on intrastate Islamist conflicts.

Existing datasets on religious conflicts and resolution

Six datasets are being used to further our understanding of intrastate conflicts and resolution. The first five are dedicated to religious conflicts in general, each with its own perspective on Islamist insurgents/militants, while the last one is directed at a number of written ceasefire agreements negotiated around the world. The last and most comprehensive data collection focuses only on ceasefire agreements between state and non-state actors. They all have a significant contribution to make, as well as shortcomings that allow new research to be launched. Chronologically structured, M.D.Toft analyzed data from all religions between 1940 and 2000, and found that religious conflicts were particularly prevalent in Islam. Toft included high-intensity internal armed conflicts in her analysis, where the average annual number of battle-related casualties exceeded 1000.²⁹

On the other hand, from 1989 to 2003, I.Svensson focuses on cross-country statistics in 73 countries, of which 217 conflicts led to 56 agreements. In his research on the role of religion in civil wars, he examines whether religious characteristics in violent conflicts render them less likely to be resolved, as well as what conditions for peace deals are appropriate. He includes both high-intensity and low-intensity domestic conflicts (with at least 25 battle-related deaths a year). The impact of religious demands raised by both parties is highlighted. He concludes that religious claims hinder negotiated settlements in general. However, once successful agreements are reached, the use of mediation and third-party guarantees are critical components. Three outliers are highlighted: the Philippines, Sudan, and Tajikistan.³⁰

N.P.Gleditsch and I.Rudolfson conducted a descriptive study based on 70 Islamist groups and Muslim countries that were vulnerable to violence between 1946 and 2014. They argue that the increasing number of conflicts in Muslim countries is due to “colonial history, interventions by major powers, and economic and political development”.³¹ Since 2001, the upward trend in the number of such conflicts has become more visible. Their research attempts to clarify the occurrence of religious conflicts in the Islamic world. As a result, more systematic study of religious issues is highly advised.

I.Svensson and D.Nilsson have assembled the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Dataset, which provides specific data on the roots and patterns of religious conflicts between governments and rebel groups (420 dyads between 1975 and 2015) and can be used to examine religious conflict resolution. It reveals the relationship between various religious claims (Islamist, Christian, secularist, as well as other religions), incompatibilities (territory, government, or both) as well as various forms of Islamist claims (revolutionary, separatist, and transnational). It focuses on armed groups' claims and the frequency of violence. Over time the percentage of active dyads engaging in an armed confrontation over a religious problem rose significantly from just 3 percent in 1975 to 55 percent in 2015 and "a majority, 75 percent, is fought between governments and groups with Islamist claims".³² The analysis only focuses on a limited segment of the Syrian civil war. The documented timeframe for this study is from 2011 to 2015, during which 11 state-level interactions occurred between the Syrian government and non-state actors, including Syrian insurgents, PYD,³³ and ISIS, since the beginning of the civil war.

One of the largest lists of local agreements referring to peace (the PA-X database 1990–2023) was assembled by C.Bell, S.Badanjak, and colleagues.³⁴ While they were searching their dataset for the term "intrastate/local conflict (UCDP defined conflict)", they discovered 344 local agreements across the globe. Of these, 85 are related to the Syrian civil war (2011–2020). However, the codification rules take only written agreements into account and exclude informal agreements, which are very common in internal conflicts and particularly in the Syrian case. By eliminating informal agreements from the sample, the overall number of agreements is significantly decreased, weakening statistical inference, and precluding examination of informal-local peacemaking in a large number of locations.

Lastly, the joint Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH) / Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) project maintains the most extensive database on ceasefires in civil conflict, focusing on agreements between state and non-state parties as well as unilaterally declared ceasefires.³⁵ However, since this article concentrates on local ceasefire dynamics, particularly in fragmented conflicts such as Syria, it is critical to include agreements between non-state actors. Agreements among non-state actors have been frequent and significant throughout the Syrian civil war to control specific territories. Since the onset of the war, various non-state actors have been engaged in it, and control of various cities has been exchanged between them. While some non-state groups were dissolved or merged, others continue to operate. If only state/non-state dyads are included in the dataset, it is difficult to identify conflict resolution patterns across a large variety of locations administered exclusively by non-state actors in Syria.

Author's argument

Previous research indicates that armed conflicts with participation of violent Islamists tend to be intractable and less amenable to negotiation due to a range of factors. These include the influence of Sharia law, internal power struggles among leadership, a lack of consensus over whom to negotiate with, connections to other conflicts, interference from foreign governments, and the absence of a credible spokesperson. Moreover, when a previously localized religious dispute becomes internationalized, it can further complicate efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiation. In contrast, multiple ceasefire agreements, another form of conflict resolution, have been reached with Islamist, including jihadist, groups in the Syrian war.

I argue that Islamist/jihadist armed actors would be more receptive to a ceasefire if the formulation of agreements centered on humanitarian features such as the release of prisoners, the withdrawal of rebels with their families, the access to humanitarian aid, and public exchange, rather than tactical ones such as controlling strategic highways or checkpoints, power centers, the oil trade, organizing joint operations against the same enemy, etc. This leads me to propose three hypotheses.

My first hypothesis (**H1**) is the following: *if humanitarian provisions are prioritized above strategic provisions in a ceasefire arrangement, Islamist armed groups would be more responsive.*

According to previous study by D.Karakuş and I.Svensson, there is a strong correlation between the participation of insider mediators and the effectiveness of ceasefire agreements between the warring parties.³⁶ J.Bercovitch and A.S.Kadayifci-Orellana argue that communities rely on faith-based mediators rather than state/secular mediators in order to promote interfaith dialogue and consensus more effectively.³⁷ According to N.Johnstone and I.Svensson, several faith-based mediations have been effective in reaching agreements.³⁸ Religious mediators are individuals that have a religious background or are members of a religious group or non-governmental organization (NGO), such as an *imam*, a leader, or a *sheikh*. There is a wealth of knowledge from many mediators involved in Syria's local peace-building activities that helps to expand the scope of this sort of conflict-resolution investigation.

My second hypothesis is built on an aggregate assumption rather than disaggregated specifics on the identity, worldview, internal or external, quality, or quantity of mediators since I am interested in determining whether their inclusion makes a difference. **H2:** *Involvement of third-party mediators increases the likelihood of achieving ceasefire agreements with Islamist armed groups.*

Lastly, regarding implementation processes, Lundgren and his colleagues find that gradual implementation of ceasefire agreements enhances the probability of a long-term de-escalation of conflict intensity in the Syrian civil war.³⁹ It may have important implications for the study of conflicts involving Islamist armed organizations, including jihadist groups. I am testing another effect, which involves examining whether the gradual implementation of ceasefire provisions raises the probability of reaching agreements with these actors. Given the complexity of the motivations and goals of these groups, achieving ceasefire can be particularly challenging. By implementing ceasefire provisions gradually, however, the parties may be able to build trust, reduce misunderstandings. In light of this, I construct my third hypothesis. **H3:** *Islamist armed groups would be more responsive if implementation is prioritized on a step-by-step basis rather than all at once.*

III. Research design and dataset: local ceasefires agreements

First, I will describe the dataset and its evolution, which will be utilized in the empirical analysis to test my hypotheses. The analysis is then performed, the conclusion is presented, and the implications are addressed.

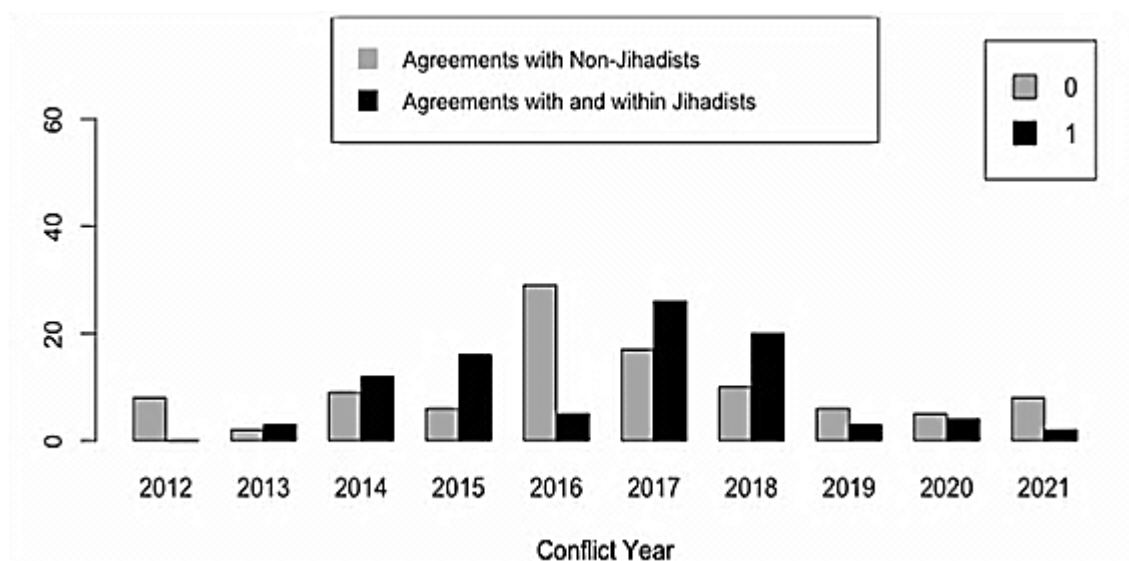
Dataset

To test my theoretical expectations, I expanded the local ceasefire dataset first presented in 2020.⁴⁰ It focuses on the microdynamics of peacemaking success via the examination of local ceasefire agreements that occurred between 2011 and 2017. The dataset has been updated with Islamist party-specific information, and time spans from

2017 to 2021 have been expanded to include new local ceasefire agreements. As a result, this article operates with more than twice the quantity of data on ceasefire agreements that was included in the previous version of the dataset. Accordingly, the expanded version contains 141 verbal/informal and written/formal ceasefire arrangements between the Syrian government and non-state actors and between/among non-state actors distributed over 191 Syrian locations from March 2011 to October 2021. 90 out of the total of 191 ceasefire agreements (47.37 percent) include at least one Islamist/jihadist armed faction. The frequency of agreements and trends is shown in Figure 1 below.

From March 2011 until the end of October 2021, a total of 3644 days were examined. The shortest ceasefire agreement was registered for 12 hours as far as its duration was concerned.⁴¹ The high number of agreements is attributed to the numerous troops in the battlefield. In 2017, the highest number of agreements was reached. After the Syrian government's progress backed by Russian forces at Hama, Ghouta, and especially after the recapture of Aleppo and a ceasefire deal in April 2017, the frequency of ceasefire agreements began to decline from 2018 to 2021. Syrian government forces have intensified military operations in many areas rather than reaching deals as a consequence of territorial gains in key cities and Free Syrian Army's (FSA's) withdrawal movements.

Figure 1. Local ceasefire agreements, Syrian civil war, 2012–2021



Source: author's expanded version of the 2020 dataset by D.C.Karakuş and I.Svensson.⁴²

Data are gathered by use of the following protocol: analyses of regional and international news, scientific papers, and research conducted by non-governmental groups are examined.⁴³ The amount of information available varied between ceasefires. Information appeared freely accessible with certain ceasefires; for others, only a limited amount of information was accessible since the combatants either intentionally blocked media access or the conflict's conditions rendered reporting impossible. In territories impacted by the Islamic State, for instance, frequent research and media outlets have been stifled at times, since the Syrian government blocked access to foreign reporters. This ceasefire package may be incomplete as a result of field reporters avoiding

potentially hazardous areas. Simultaneously, warring parties in Syria have shown that they favor the announcement of a local ceasefire, bringing the agreements to the attention of the rest of the region. Each ceasefire report is double-checked for accuracy, disinformation is weeded out, particularly in light of opposing parties' remarks and social media postings. Monitoring news and social media posts about a specific implementation in the days and weeks following the initial announcement is the best way to assess. To complement cross-checking, the media portal Live Universal Awareness Map ("Liveuamap") that delivers everyday reporting from the conflict zones is used.⁴⁴ This significantly simplifies the procedure of verifying consensus after an agreement's declaration and is thereby incorporated into the data collection, following a successful simultaneous inspection.

Variables

In this article, a *local ceasefire* is defined as an arrangement when two or more armed parties come to an agreement, whether written or verbal, for a variety of motivations, to halt fighting permanently or temporarily in one or more localities, but not on a national scale. Rival armed parties (dyads) are not exclusively comprised of state versus non-state entities, since many agreements have been made between non-state groups. The data gathering process identifies agreements that are compatible with these credentials. The following variables have been finalized for the codification protocol. *Side A* and *Side B* are the parties that commit to local ceasefire arrangements under the side name. In certain cases, more than two parties are involved, and their names are also included in the same row. Rebel organizations' identity may evolve over time, or they may be supplanted by new movements or amalgamated with others under a new name. For example, Al-Qaeda affiliated group used to be known as "Jabhat al-Nusra" (Al-Nusra Front) is now referred to as "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham".⁴⁵ One of the reasons why such parties change their identities is because they are on the international list of terrorist organizations, which prevents them from being admitted to international level peace talks.⁴⁶ Several of them form an alliance with other armed parties such as the National Front for the Liberation of Syria ("Ahrar al-Sham", the Nour al-Din al-Zenki Movement and "Suqur al-Sham"). Since a large component of the Free Syrian Army was renamed the Syrian National Army, they were categorized as such.

According to reports, when parties achieve an agreement, its version on paper is not necessarily made accessible or the parties only resolve their disagreements informally. As researchers may review *formal* or *informal* agreements independently or both, the formality of an arrangement is coded. If an agreement is intended to achieve *humanitarian* objectives (evacuation, relief, or food supply), or *tactical/strategic* goals (withdrawal, reunification), or both, they are coded accordingly between humanitarian and tactical/strategic agreements. Tactical/strategic agreements are more focused on preparing for the next phase of combat against an opponent, while humanitarian agreements are more likely to aim at stopping the fighting in this location. As a result, the two can have varying effects on conflict severity. On the basis of *ideologies*, *denominations*, *objectives*, and *claims*, the Syrian government and non-state entities may favor agreements with some groups over others.

Armed organizations are divided into six subcategories to simplify interaction analysis: (i) *transnational Salafi-Jihadi actors* (ISIS, Al-Qaeda); (ii) *nationalist Islamist armed groups*; (iii) *localized jihadist groups*; (iv) *Islamist/jihadist coalitions*; (v) *armed Shia Islamists*; (vi) *moderate Islamists* (that ascribe to basic democratic values). In contrast, there are *secularist groups* that advocate a political stance that explains the

diminished position of religious legislation, parties, and the constitution. Regarding secularist claims, two major Syrian parties, the Syrian Government for the entire country and the Kurdish forces for Rojava (Kurdish Autonomy in Northeast Syria), have secularist priorities. The collection includes *external* (foreign) and *internal* mediators that sometimes collaborate to achieve agreements. Internal mediators include teachers, *imams*, *sheiks*, aid organizations, heads of tribes, and representatives of other armed groups, as well as external mediators, including UN special envoys, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States, and various NGOs. Each type has a distinct facilitation, leverage, and communication effect on reaching understanding.

Table 1 provides examples of three different types of ceasefire agreements: (a) reached between Islamist armed parties; (b) reached between Islamist and non-Islamist parties; and (c) reached between non-Islamist armed parties.

Table 1. Sample ceasefire agreements in Syria, by type/composition of actors

	Side_A	Side_B	Locations	Start	End
(a) Between Islamist armed parties	ISIS	Jabhat al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front)	Deir ez-Zor city	05.05.2014	08.05.2014
(b) Between Islamist and non-Islamist	ISIS	Syrian government	South of the capital Damascus	20.04.2018	23.04.2018
(c) Between non-Islamist parties	YPG*	Syrian government	Al-Hasakah city	23.06.2016	23.07.2016

* YPG stands for “Yekîneyên Parastina Gel” (Kurd.), or People’s Protection Units.

The manner in which a ceasefire is maintained is a key factor in determining the quality of the agreement. V.Fortna employs three types of quality: (1) Raise the cost of avoiding retribution by taking the following steps: *military withdrawal* from the front lines, establishment of a buffer zone, control of arms, formal public announcement of a ceasefire, and third-party security guarantee. (2) The agreements are to eliminate uncertainty by defining the ceasefire conditions, including a precise location and explicit provision, verification, and an impartial *monitoring* process. (3) Prevention of accidental violations by introducing confidence-building mechanisms such as openly sharing military information, exchanging hostages, and establishing joint checkpoints.⁴⁷ As a result, variables related to the three approaches to maintaining a ceasefire agreement are coded separately to assess the extent to which such characteristics have an effect. Even if all of the qualities of an agreement are established, as well as the presence of a credible third-party mediator, peace spoilers might break the agreement.⁴⁸

Success in reaching agreements with Islamist armed groups may be improved by taking a gradual, step-by-step approach to implementing ceasefires, rather than a single, comprehensive package. Agreements that are broken down into several stages might help the parties learn from one another.⁴⁹ Increased openness is one of the benefits of this method, which can help to facilitate the successful negotiation of ceasefires. Accordingly, all agreements are codified, regardless of whether they are implemented *stepwise* or not.

IV. Empirical analysis and results

The study conducted a logistic regression analysis in R to test the three hypotheses, which had a binary dependent variable, "One side is jihadist," and seven independent variables. The results of the logistic regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Logistic regression results

Dependent variable:	
One_side_is_jihadist	
Human_based_agree	−1.082*** (0.387)
Stepwise_agre	−0.727** (0.353)
Formal_agree	0.276 (0.356)
Monitoring	−0.162 (0.408)
Troop_withdraw	0.386 (0.314)
Tactical_based_Agree	−0.535 (0.348)
Mediation	−0.285 (0.413)
Constant	1.144** (0.472)

Observations	190
Log Likelihood	−121.310
Akaike Inf. Crit.	258.620

Notes: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

In scrutinizing the findings of the logistic regression analysis, a revelation unfolds, unfurling the preeminent significance of the independent variables that underpin humanitarian-based agreements and stepwise agreement. Eclipsing their counterparts, including formal agreements, monitoring activities, troop withdrawal, mediation, and tactical agreements, these variables emerge as stalwarts, wielding a profound influence on the outcome.

Delving deeper into the results, the coefficient for “humanitarian_based_agree” was an impressive −1.082, exhibiting a statistically significant influence at the 0.01 level and possessing the largest coefficient magnitude amongst the independent variables in the model. This value implies that as the level of human-based agreement between the

conflicting parties decreases, the odds of one side being a jihadist group exponentially increase. Similarly, the coefficient for “Stepwise_agre” was -0.727 , also exhibiting a statistically significant effect at the 0.05 level and signifying that as the level of stepwise agreement between the parties decreases, the probability of one party being an Islamist group increases. In contrast, the coefficient for mediation was a rather lacklustre -0.285 and failed to achieve statistical significance at conventional levels ($p > 0.1$). This lack of significance implies that there is no compelling evidence to support the hypothesis 2 that mediation has a significant impact on the likelihood of one side being a jihadist group.

Overall, the logistic regression analysis demonstrates that the level of human-based agreement and stepwise agreement between the parties embroiled in the Syrian civil war between 2011 and 2021 are paramount in determining the likelihood of one party being identified as a violent Islamist/jihadist group.

V. Conclusion

The article presents three findings. The primary discovery of this investigation is that violent Islamist actors are more inclined to accept a ceasefire (a) if the agreement prioritizes humanitarian considerations over tactical ones and (b) if the implementation process is gradual rather than immediate. The prioritization of humanitarian considerations is linked to the effects of extended sieges, combatant fatigue, and public pressure on the parties involved. These elements increase the persuasiveness of such inducements to encourage acceptance of a ceasefire. The slow pace of implementation is seen as a confidence-building measure. Additionally, it was found that (c) the involvement of third parties does not have a significant impact on achieving a ceasefire with these parties, contrary to earlier studies. Further investigation is needed to determine why mediation is ineffective with Islamist/jihadist actors and whether or not this is due to a lack of information. It is plausible to consider that this trend may hold particular significance within the context of Syria exclusively. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and negotiators seeking to establish peace in Syria.

The Syrian civil war has been fuelled by a diverse array of armed non-state actors and objectives, resulting in a protracted conflict. The Free Syrian Army, for example, aimed at toppling the government of Bashar al-Assad; “Ahrar Al-Sham”’s objective has been the establishment of a new Islamic republic; Kurdish forces want a secular autonomy in Northern Syria; “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” desires a local *caliphate*, while ISIS first strove for a transnational *caliphate* across Syria and Iraq and then declared itself a core of the global *caliphate*. These actors have also been backed and abetted by a variety of external actors. External actors, on the other hand, convened international negotiations in Geneva and Astana. They all have had a continuous impact on the dynamics of conflict and on conflict resolution. While no national peace deal has been reached so far, ceasefire agreements have resulted in the establishment of de facto local administrations inside Syria.⁵⁰

The Syrian government has regained control over much of the country, while the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Turkish-backed FSA dominate the north, the U.S.-backed FSA occupies some southern regions, and “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” controls Idlib. The boundaries between these actors remain fluid and may shift abruptly over time.⁵¹ A national peace accord or a new constitution will be very difficult to attain as long as the four foreign parties – the United States, Russia, Turkey, and Iran – are unable to establish a consensus. Russia’s stance is particularly crucial to the peacemaking process.⁵² The Euphrates River seems to be the clearest boundary line between the Syrian Government and the SDF. A full departure of the U.S. forces from

Syria, similar to the one in Afghanistan, or an end to military assistance for the SDF would drastically alter the situation on the east bank of the river, where the SDF governs.

Finally, the UN participation in civil conflicts may be strengthened via cooperation with local mediators. They possess capability, expertise, and a solid reputation as an impartial organization on the ground. Their mediation efforts, however, may be hampered if local actors are designated as terrorist groups or if the UN Security Council refuses to give them full authorization. Future studies may concentrate on enhancing the UN role in facilitating rapid mediation of local ceasefire agreements in order to prevent and help settle long-lasting civil wars.

ENDNOTES

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