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Between the Bombs

EXPLORING LOCAL CEASEFIRES IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR, 2011-2017

ABSTRACT

Previous research on ceasefires in armed conflicts has primarily focused on the aggregated country-level of analysis. By contrast, this article contributes by examining the local level dynamics of local ceasefire arrangements. In particular, this study examines a novel set of 106 local-level ceasefire arrangements in the Syrian Civil War, reached between the years 2011 to 2017. Most (72 percent), but not all, of the ceasefire arrangements were respected during the stipulated time-period. We argue that informal and domestic peacemaking should outperform formal and external approaches in managing conflicts with multiple rebel-groups, on-going violence and different fronts such as in Syria. We find that the presence of insider mediators ("insider-partial") as well as confidence building measures between the belligerents are positively associated with successful ceasefire arrangements, whereas explanations emphasized by previous research – external third-party mediation as well as various indicators of quality of agreement – fail to explain outcomes of ceasefires. Yet, we also find some evidence indicative of a selection effect in that external mediators are associated with more difficult conflict situations. The study of local ceasefires in the Syria can stimulate further examinations of the micro-dynamics of peacemaking in civil wars, including the causes and consequences of local ceasefires.

INTRODUCTION

Ceasefires have been the focal point of scholarly interest in the study of political violence and armed conflicts over the last decades.[1] Research on ceasefires is one part of a larger research field on conflict resolution through agreements.[2] The common wisdom is that they provide a critical juncture in wars and, given that they are well-designed, can be an essential mechanism towards more peaceful relationships between antagonists. Previous research has, in particular, highlighted the role of quality in ceasefires, in terms of the importance of crafting arrangements that can maximize the chances for violations to be identified and avoided, and minimize the risk for unintended escalations to occur due to misunderstandings.[3] Moreover, previous research emphasizes the importance of the presence of external credible third parties, who can help to craft agreements and monitor their implementation.[4]

However, previous research has limited itself to focus only on ceasefire arrangements on the national level, and has therefore been overly dominated by an aggregated level of analysis. Yet, several of the contemporary armed conflicts are fought within more complex and fragmented conflict environments, with many stakeholders and armed actors,[5] in which an aggregated analysis is not appropriate. In particular, an aggregated level of analysis would miss out on many limited – spatially and temporally – ceasefire arrangements, which occur in the midst of a context characterized by on-going political violence and armed conflict.

This study aims to fill the lacuna outlined above and provides the first disaggregated analysis of ceasefire arrangements in the civil war in Syria. In this study, drawing on secondary sources, various NGO- and official reports, we identify 106 local ceasefire arrangements from the start of the armed conflict in 2011 until the first months of 2017. We examine the extent to which these were successful in terms of being respected, or not, during the stipulated time-period, measured in terms of either behavior (violations) or formal annulation by any of the sides. We find that

most of the local-level ceasefires were actually associated with respected by the parties entering into the agreement. In fact, 72 percent of these ceasefire arrangements were respected by the belligerents agreeing to them, whereas only 28 percent were violated. This study aims to account and understand this variation, by addressing the following research question: *why are some ceasefire agreements respected, whereas others are violated?*

Previous research on ceasefire agreement emphasize, as mentioned above, quality of agreements and external third parties as the main explanation for why ceasefire agreements are successful. However, local ceasefires occurring in a context of on-going civil war with multiple actors, such as in the Syrian civil wars, provide a different setting for the implementation of ceasefires. The multiplicity of actors and complexity of the Syrian civil war implies that it is inherently challenging for external third parties to know let alone influence what is happening on the ground, and it is indeed challenging for the parties themselves to design high-quality agreements in these turbulent environments. By contrast, informal and domestic peacemaking approaches should stand better chance to deliver successful implementation of ceasefire agreements in these types of contexts. We argue that there are three main reasons for us to expect informal and domestic peace-making approaches to outperform formal and external peacemaking approaches. First, the domestic and informal approaches yield more possibilities for entry, that are attuned to the local contexts and specific situations. Second, processes derived from the parties themselves, or through informal actors in the specific context, should have a higher degree of ownership and would not create artificial incentives depending on the interests of third parties. Third, the fact that belligerent actors, as well as the informal actors, will continue to interact with each other in the future, provides a reputational incentive to stay true to commitments. This leads us to expect that informal approaches to peacemaking should play a prominent role in determining the outcomes of local ceasefires.

We find that internal mediators – local actors such as Kurdish and Arab tribals and elders, and prominent figures such as the preacher Abdullah al-Muhaysin – are associated with respected ceasefire agreements, whereas external actors – such as neighboring countries or international organization – are associated with violated agreements. Moreover, confidence-building measures between the parties stipulated in the agreements increase the chance that the ceasefires will be respected. The indicators of quality of agreements – for example, temporal specificity, gradual implementation, and monitoring mechanisms – are not associated with respected ceasefires. Yet, it is important to point out that the difference between internal and external mediators should be caveated, since this might be driven by different selection dynamics. In fact, some empirical pattern can be seen as in evidence of a selection effect, yet, the lack of comprehensive data on mediation attempts in Syria inhibits us from making a comprehensive analysis on the selection patterns of third parties.

There are several reasons for why this line of inquiry is important. First, it provides a more nuanced, empirically grounded understanding of the micro-dynamics of peacemaking processes. Whereas disaggregated conflict analyses on the *onset* of armed conflicts is an expanding field of research,[6] much less attention has been paid to the disaggregated analysis of the *termination* patterns of armed conflicts. This will, hopefully, stimulate further examinations of the causes and consequences of local ceasefires. Second, since many of the ceasefire agreements analyzed in this study concern agreements between non-state actors, this study also helps to advance our understanding of rebel-to-rebel relationships and how these affect the dynamics of war and peace. Research is now starting to examine more systematically the patterns of violence between armed non-state actors,[7] but this research has typically not paid attention to conflict managing strategies and outcomes in these types of conflicts. Third, by providing the first systematic and comprehensive mapping of ceasefire arrangements in the Syrian civil war, it can also deepen our understanding of this conflict. The Syrian civil war is one of our times' most devastating

humanitarian catastrophes, and the sheer size of the human misery should compel us to examine whether there are any mechanisms at all that in some ways can serve to manage, let alone terminate the fighting. Previous scholarly work on peacemaking in Syria has mostly been conducted on the aggregated level of analysis, examining the macro-level of peacemaking, yet, so far, largely avoided making a disaggregated empirical analysis.[8] Research that still exists on local peacemaking initiatives has neither had a comparative ambition, nor systematically focused on ceasefires.[9] This study provides a service to the research community by presenting the first comprehensive list of all local ceasefires in the Syrian civil war. Future research may continue to examine other important questions, including how arrangements can be cumulative, what roles third parties can play in mitigating ceasefire durability, and what accounts for why they are reached in the first place.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous theories on ceasefire outcomes

There is no agreed definition of the term 'ceasefire'.[10] Whereas there are a set of related concepts including 'truce', 'cessation of hostilities', and 'armistice', there are differences in terms of formality and comprehensiveness. However, as noted by Smith, and Åkebo,[11] the terms are utilized interchangeably in previous research and largely also in policy. Basically, ceasefire arrangements are decisions to end fighting and the procedure for doing so, and hence, a "core premise of a ceasefire agreement is that the conflicting parties agree to stop fighting, but an agreement also defines the rules and modalities for such an endeavor".[12] It is important to point out from the start that ceasefire agreements do not necessarily end conflicts; they sometimes only serve as a temporary halt in the armed conflict. In other words, ceasefires can be a way of ending conflicts, but they do not necessarily do so. Kreutz operationalizes ceasefires as one of several ways to terminate armed conflicts.[13] Yet, for our purposes, that definition is too restrictive, as it

would exclude unsuccessful or failed ceasefire arrangements (which are necessary to include in a comparative analysis).

Ceasefire arrangements can be part of an overall process from war towards more peaceful interactions. As such, they can be initiated early in the process in order to create an atmosphere in which the parties can engage in constructive dialogue over their incompatible claims and sort out their differences in a productive manner. They can also serve as a signal of good intent, testing the ground for whether mutual interest and capabilities actually exist for further collaboration. Ceasefire arrangements can also be implemented at later stages in a peace process, as part of an overall settlement of the conflict, in which the issues at stake are settled or transformed. Some have argued that there could be a problem when ceasefires precede peace talks, as they may then decrease the sense of urgency,[14] whereas others suggest that early ceasefires can help to secure a safe space for political negotiations and build trust between the parties.[15] Ceasefires can contribute to create a safe space for negotiations and by themselves serve as a trust-building mechanism.[16] Thus, ceasefire arrangements may be part of political processes, but not necessarily so, and their function in an overall process can vary. The types of ceasefire arrangements that we study in this paper are predominately of more restrictive nature, in terms of their scope. As we will see below, many of them are, at least explicitly, unrelated to attempts to settle the conflicts politically.

Ceasefires can be reached for various reasons. The parties entering into such arrangements can be driven by interests to settle the conflict peacefully, and change their interactions from violent towards more peaceful dynamics, but that is not always the case. By contrast, there can very well be incentives for reaching a ceasefire, which has more to do with tactical considerations, such as buying time when the parties perceive they are under military or other types of pressures. It can also be related to a desire to please and increase legitimacy towards various audiences, including

that of the third party (if one is engaged). A ceasefire arrangement can help to solidify gains reached at the battlefield or enable tactical arrangements that are of mutual benefit (for example, population swaps). Ceasefires may have negative consequences, and could be "understood as a part of the dynamics of conflict, rather than a basic step to facilitate 'real' peace negotiations".[17]

Previous research has identified a set of conditions that help to explain the effect of ceasefires. Based on previous research, we can separate between two main explanation: 1) the quality of the agreements, and 2) third party engagement.

Quality. The most prominent scholar in this line of inquiry is Page Fortna, who has identified the three basic tasks that a ceasefire needs to address in order to help to alleviate the risk of a return to the battlefield: 1) increasing the cost of offensive actions, 2) reducing uncertainty, and 3) preventing accidents (that may spiral into escalation). Ceasefires can make transgressions and offensive actions costly,[18] by implementing a set of measurements that increase the level of formality (including public commitments, formal agreements) and create physical separation (for example, by withdrawal of troops and de-militarized buffer-zones). By increasing the potential costs – either in practical terms, or in terms of domestic or international audience costs – the risk of breakdown of ceasefires is decreased. Yet, ceasefires may also break down because the parties have private information about their resources, fighting capabilities, and commitment to the cause for which they are fighting, and at the same time disincentives to honestly reveal information of that sort. In other words, in a bargaining environment that incentivizes strategic misinformation, ceasefires would be more effective if they can help to clarify misunderstandings. Ceasefires can reduce the level of uncertainty by, for example, increasing the level of specificity and including monitoring mechanisms and third-party referees, that (if credible) can help to overcome the information gap between the parties. Ceasefires can help to prevent accidents through mechanisms such as negotiations and dispute resolution procedures, and by providing

arrangements for communication lines, arms regulations, and other forms of confidence building measures. Another example of a measure that can help to mitigate against mistrust is arrangements to control irregular forces from one's own territory. Chounet-Cambas highlights the role of time-frames in ceasefire arrangements, as well as the need to explicitly regulate hostile behavior and violence against civilians.[19] Åkebo points out that it is important to take into account the *who*-question, that is, the identity of the signatories of ceasefire agreements, in order to understand the chances for successful outcomes of ceasefires.[20]

Overall, previous research suggests that we need to scrutinize the content of the agreement and its strength, in order to be able to explain the durability of agreements.[21] Thus, the more mechanisms an agreement has to address the underlying challenges of incentives for pre-emptive action, rational misunderstandings, and accidents, the more likely that it will hold. This would lead us to expect that the higher the quality of the ceasefire agreement, the more likely that it will be respected by the parties.

External third parties. The engagement of third parties can be seen as an indicator of quality of an agreement, but is also a factor that can be considered by itself. Third parties can play different roles in the contexts of ceasefire arrangements, including that of facilitators and mediators of an agreement, as well as monitors who supervise or oversee the implementation of agreements once they are reached. Third parties can thus help to bring about agreements, and can also serve critical functions in the implementation period following an agreement. The knowledge that they will help to implement agreements (for example, by serving to screen information about actions that may violate the spirit or stipulations of the agreements), can also help to materialize agreements, as conflict parties can be assumed to be forward-looking. Third parties can help to draft the basic components of ceasefires, which are commonly provisions for (1) a stop in fighting, (2) the separation of forces, and (3) monitoring of the agreement.[22] As suggested by

Antonia Potter: "Many of the most serious problems experienced by ceasefire monitors relate not to shortcomings in their performance but to omissions or a lack of clarity in the original agreement.".[23] In other words, the role third parties may have in drafting clearer, better agreements can be instrumental in order to increase the chance that the agreements will be implemented. This would lead us expect that if external third parties engage themselves in getting the belligerents to a ceasefire agreement, the more likely that the agreement will be respected by belligerents and durable.

Our argument: informal peacemaking

The Syrian civil war is an outstanding complex civil war, with multiple actors and dynamics. In this complex conflict environment, there are reasons to assume that the explanations that previous research emphasize – in particular external third parties and quality of the agreement – would play a lesser role in explaining why some ceasefires are respected and not others. The context of the Syrian civil war, with local ceasefires occurring in the midst of fighting, with multiple groups and several fronts, the role of well-crafted peace deals could therefore play lesser role than in interstate conflicts or civil wars between two well-defined actors, because it will be more difficult for mediators and monitors to access the situation on the ground and judge the outcome of conflict actors' behavior.

By contrast, we argue that informal peacemaking mechanisms should be more important to minimize the risk for violations. Informal peacemaking has three main advantages. First, they provide unique entry points to the parties in conflict. The mediation literature identifies what is labeled as 'insider-partial' mediators, who through their localized networks can make connections, establish contact and facilitate dialogue between the belligerents.[24] The literature on peacebuilding and sustainable peace outlines that civil society, informal actors and internally managed peace processes, can be pivotal in transforming violent situations.[25] One example of an

internal actors is faith-based actors.[26] Religious actors commonly have widespread and popular base, particularly in a religiously conservative country such as Syria. This provide religious actors with a potential to bridge cleavages between fighting actors and help to facilitate temporally and spatially restricted ceasefires, in order to, for example, make humanitarian delivery possible. Second, internally derived ceasefires should have a greater degree of ownership and would rely on artificially created incentives to stick to the peace.[27] Informal approaches, including confidence building measures between the parties and insider mediators, rely primarily on creating trust between the parties, rather than utilize leverage over the parties to get them to cease fire. This would imply self-maintained and self-enforced ceasefires, rather than relying on outsiders, as we have argued above, will be inherently problematic anyway in the Syrian context. Lastly, internal mediators are actors within the conflict context that will continue to interact side by side with the belligerents in the foreseeable future. Thus, they need to maintain their local reputation. This implies that they can have reputational costs which will enhance their credibility, and thereby help them to in a more trustworthy way communicate information between the parties and help them to overcome information asymmetries.[28]

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, we have identified 106 local ceasefire agreements reached between different warring actors since the Syrian civil war broke out in March 2011 up to the end of the year 2016.[29] The information about the local ceasefire agreements is based on local electronic newspapers from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey (Including from Kurdish-dominated regions in North-Iraq, Rojawa, and Turkey), Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UK, Germany, as well as from reports from NGOs in Syria, US and UK. The cases are listed in terms of the names of conflicting parties, the location of agreements, the date and time period of agreements, the information sources, and the type of local agreements. We have also consulted existing databases and relevant NGO reports on domestic peacemaking.[30] Overall, with regard to constructing the list of ceasefire agreements,

it should be noted that credible information about local peacemaking in Syria is scarce and challenging to find. This is partly because of the security situation which has negated comprehensive media coverage of several areas in the country. Media representatives do not go to many places due to the risks of kidnappings and violence against them. Some journalists have been killed or wounded by attacks in different locations in Syria and its neighboring countries.

In this study, we have included only cases of mutual ceasefires, and unilateral ceasefires are therefore excluded. The reason for that is both that it puts us in line with most of the previous research on ceasefire agreements, which tends to focus on bilateral rather than unilateral ceasefires, but also because of the practical problems of identifying these types of unilateral offers in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Unilateral ceasefires are interesting to study as part of signaling within the overall dynamics of peace processes. If designed in a way that makes them costly for the one that makes such a commitment, they can (at least theoretically) reveal the intentions of the initiator.

Ceasefire agreements can be verbal or written, and this study includes both types of agreements. In case of the latter, it is important to study who the signatories to the agreement are, in terms of their individual rank and status, as well as what group and faction they are representing.

The outcome variable in this study is respected ceasefire arrangements, which is defined as the ceasefire being respected during the stipulated time period by the parties to the agreement. This is measured either in terms of reported violations or reported annulment of the ceasefires. Thus, either the behavior (actual fighting) or the parties' statements (declarations that they no longer are restricted by the ceasefires) form the basis of measurement of whether the ceasefires are respected, or not. In order to gauge violations, we have utilized data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP). Whereas UCDP does not publically make available the data on Syria in a

disaggregated manner, we have been allowed to utilize the information that lie behind the accumulated measurements. The advantage of the UCDP data is that it is generally recognized as a reliable source on organized violence, and that it is geographically referenced. Utilizing these data as the starting point, we could identify 25 ceasefire agreements that were followed by absence of battle-related deaths between the parties to the ceasefire agreement, and that we therefore counted as successful. The disadvantage with the geo-referenced UCDP data for Syria is that it is currently not disaggregated in terms of conflict-dyads or -actors, and could therefore not enable us to distinguish battle-relate deaths between the other fighting parties and parties who has been agreed for a ceasefire in those locations at the same time period. Also, the general time-periods that we could specify did not always exactly match the stipulated time-periods of the ceasefires. In the 25 cases above this was not a problem, as the UCDP timing did match the ceasefire and it was also evident which parties that respected the ceasefires. But for other cases, the timing and identification issues were more problematic. Therefore, the UCDP data was completed by examining the cases where they were followed by battle-related deaths after the ceasefires with information from the Facebook page of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The Syrian Observatory is a reliable and well-used source, which although it originates from circles close to the Syrian opposition, has become the most trusted and detailed source on political violence in Syria. Through this secondary screening, we were able to identify another 76 cases of the ceasefires that we code as successful, on the basis of reporting from the Observatory. (The Syrian Observatory sources also confirm the 25 coded as successful through the UCDP-source.) The observatory reported both actual fighting on the ground and accusations of fighting from the parties, and does not always separate between these two aspects. We assume that battle-deaths in the context of ceasefires would generally be news-worthy and that if there are no reports on violations in the Syrian observatory source, then we conclude that the ceasefires should be seen as successful. We also code cases as failed if any of the parties to the agreement have explicitly annulled the agreement (often because they perceive that the other side has not

fulfilled its obligations) or actions which are reported about violations and break-down of the ceasefire. In total, this gives us 76 successful cases, and 32 cases that we code as unsuccessful, and thus, overall, the success rate is 72 percent. In and by itself, this is an important descriptive empirical finding: most of the ceasefire arrangements are actually respected by the parties.

Quality of agreement. We utilize the following indicators in order to measure the quality of the agreements. First, we examine *Formality*, which outlines whether the agreement was officially in written declaration, with public commitments, rather than informal and verbal. Second, whether there was a *Temporal specificity* to the agreement, or in other words, whether the agreement included a temporal implementation stipulation, for example through a detailed time management in hours, days, weeks, and months, etc. The stipulation of a *stepwise implementation* is a way that enables the parties to examine whether the other side actually lives up to its commitment, and is therefore also an indicator of quality of agreement. It is measured in terms of whether the ceasefire agreement was implemented step-by-step in time, rather than immediately. Likewise, the inclusion of *confidence building measures* indicates whether some confidence building measures are included in the agreement such as prisoners' exchange, information-sharing, or joint-control through, for example, sharing checkpoints, etc. *Physical separation of troops* measures whether the agreement contains a provision which prescribes a withdrawal of the troops from the battle field. *Violence regulation against civilians* represents whether the agreement contains some regulation to protect civilians. Lastly, the monitoring mechanisms are essential indicator of ceasefire quality. The study therefore examines *monitoring mechanism in the agreement* on the ground which outlines whether the third-party monitoring was mentioned in the agreement, or whether there were any practical monitoring mechanisms on the ground during the implementation process of agreements.

Third-party mediation. We examine *external* mediation measures, that is, whether external actors outside of Syria was present during the cease-fire negotiations. The UN special envoys – Kofi Annan, Lakhdar Brahimi, and Staffan De Mistura – have all been trying to mediate cessation of violence during their attempts to bring negotiated settlement to the civil war in Syria. External actors with ties to at least one of the antagonists, and with a history of active involvement through support to the fighting actors, including Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the US, have been negotiating and brokering ceasefire deals between the Syrian Government and various fractions of Syrian oppositions in large regions from 2011 to 2017. By contrast, *internal mediators* such as leaders of tribals, elders, notables or prominent figures, aid organization, leaders from conflicting parties have been made a high relevant effort to mediate between various conflicting parties. Table 2 exemplifies some of the internal mediators.

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Table 1 about here

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Control variables. The last set of explanatory factors has to do with the political and social environment in which the agreements occur. The level of hostility and the dimensions of cleavages that the parties need to bridge should be taken into account in order to understand when agreements are durable. Åkebo suggests that certain contextual dynamics are important to take into account when studying the outcomes of ceasefire arrangements. Notably, a high degree of intraparty rivalry can serve as an obstacle to transforming ceasefires into vehicles for peace.[31] It is also important that the parties entering a ceasefire arrangement develop non-military and political means for expressing their aspirations as well as space for political dialogue, or otherwise, the potential momentum of a ceasefire agreement may be lost.[32] Another factor can be the local pressure for a ceasefire,[33] which may create a context beneficial for ceasefires. This

could be, for example, high-level intensity of fighting, long duration of conflicts, and ideological and identity-based differences between the antagonists. An overall expectation can be formulated on the basis of this line of research, namely that the more difficult a situation is, the less likely that a ceasefire agreement will be durable. Thus, high-level intensity of fighting, intractability of conflicts, and ideological and identity-based differences between the antagonists – as indicators of a difficult conflict situation – may be expected to lower the probability of durable ceasefire agreements. The level of 'difficulty' is obviously hard to assess empirically – also because of the paradoxical relationship that occurs when difficult situations increase the pressure to settle the situation – and will here be explored in terms of ideological and identity-based distance between the parties agreeing to a ceasefire. This study applies the following indicators to specify the *context* of agreements. First, we investigate the war fatigue factor: whether agreements occurring later in the Syrian civil war were more likely to be successful than those earlier in the conflict (simply measured as number of years from the beginning of the civil war). We might expect the war fatigue factor to increase the pressure to actually hold on to agreements. Second, the effects of *identity cleavages* are also examined. Agreements between parties from the same ethnic or religious tradition might be more likely to be respected, than those agreed between parties whose identities diverge according to ethnic or religious identity-markers. Due to the intersectionality of ethno-religious identities, conflicting parties are often characterized by more than one identity-marker (i.e. Arab, Kurdish, Turkmen, Yazidis, Syriac). Third, we analyze *agreement dyads in terms of religion* which measures whether the conflicting parties (i.e. the agreement dyads) share the same religious tradition. Third, the study examines whether there was *local pressure for ceasefire*. This indicator reports whether any type of local pressure for ceasefires occurred, including whether the affected communities during the war pressured the leaders to make an agreement with the opponents.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The frequency of local agreements in Syria has increased over time during the civil war, from no agreements in the second half of 2011 up to 106 agreements reached until to June 2017. Thus, 31.1% of all the ceasefires were reached in 2016, whereas only 3% of the ceasefires were reached in the beginning of the conflict (year 2011-12). Table 2 shows the frequency of ceasefire arrangements over time. The growth in number of ceasefire agreements over time may signal a growing sense of conflict-fatigue in the sense that the belligerent actors perceive a greater need for a pause in the fighting, the longer the civil war rages on. Military dynamics, with increasing costs of conflicts, human suffering, regional and international expectation may also pressure the parties to enter into agreement that may give at least temporal respite to the fighting.[34]

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Table 2 about here

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There is a variation in longevity of agreements. 32 of the agreements lasted more than 6 months, whereas the remaining 74 lasted shorter than that. The shortest agreements lasted 24 hours, such as the agreement between *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (YPG) and the Syrian Government, reached on 20 January, 2015, which concerned the territory of *Hasakah*. By contrast, the longest ceasefire agreement - mediated by Mesud Barzani, President of Iraqi Kurdistan - is still in place, having lasted since mid-2012. Overall, the longest cease-fire agreements are agreements on the reunification of the Kurdish military groups, or between the Government of Syria and Kurdish *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (PYD). There have also been long-lasting agreements between the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and PYD.

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Table 3 about here

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The ceasefire agreements in the Syrian civil war have varied in their type. Table 3 outlines whether the nature of agreement was humanitarian in focus, or whether it was more tactical in nature. As shown, 18 of the ceasefire arrangements were neither specifically tactical nor humanitarian in nature, but of a more general character. Obviously, it is difficult to discern what the nature and intentions of an agreement was, but based on the content of agreements – for instance, exchange and release of prisoners, withdrawal of rebels with their families, ceasefire for humanitarian aid in places where the people suffer from the siege, and cessation of hostilities etc. – it is possible to measure whether the intention of agreement was tactical or not. For example, tactical agreements focus on controlling some strategic roads, power centers, and oil trade, or carrying out joint operations against the same enemy etc. They indicate that agreement was reached for strategic/tactical purposes. Some agreements were clearly particularly tactical in nature. Examples include the agreement between Jaysh al-Islam and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham[35] (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra or Al-Nusra Front) general in Syria in 2015.[36] The tactical aim of this agreement was based on the unification of armed jihadists against the forces of the Assad regime. Another example is the agreement which was signed between the ISIS and the moderate and Islamic rebels in the area of Al-Hajar al-Aswad in 2014. This agreement was also more focused on uniting against Assad's forces and not each other. Yet another interesting tactical agreement, according to the Turkish daily news "Sabah", was reached between the ISIS and the Syrian government in Northern Aleppo (Azaz) against FSA. While the government opened some strategical roads for ISIS forces which facilitate attacks on the areas controlled by the FSA, ISIS crucially agreed to sell oil to the Assad regime. The parties also agreed that ISIS would attack the FSA on the ground while the Assad regime would lead the operation and support ISIS with its air force.

Humanitarian agreements, on the other hand, have existed in areas where civilians suffer from the lack of basic necessities such as water, food, health care and medicaments, clothes etc. The explicit reason for such humanitarian ceasefires between the conflicting parties is to allow civilians to meet their basic human needs. Examples of humanitarian agreements include the agreement between Hezbollah and Ahrar al-Sham in the areas of Zabadani, Madaya, Beqin, Sarghaya, in Dimashq and Idlib provinces in 2015. The aim of the agreement was facilitation of civilian rescuing, particularly women and those under the age of 18 as well as the men over the age of 50 who suffered under the military siege. A further example was the ceasefire agreement which was signed between YPG and Jabhat Al-Nusra to maintain the Kurdish-Arab brotherhood during the war. Some of the agreements reached in Damascus between FSA, the Syrian government, and Hezbollah were humanitarian.

The local agreements have been reached at different sites and geographical areas in Syria. Figure 1 below demonstrates the geolocation of all ceasefire arrangements between 2011 and 2017. 25 of all the ceasefires were city-based. Examples include the ceasefire agreements between the YPG/PYD and Damascenes Front (Cebhetu'ş- Şamiye), YPG and FSA, ISIS, the Syrian government and opposition forces, YPG/PYD, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham in the area of Aleppo, which is the most populous Syrian city. The city contains almost all conflicting parties.

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Figure 1 about here

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Let us now turn to examine why some agreements are respected whereas others are violated, that is, to examine the variation in terms of whether the agreements can be classified as successful or not. This is examined in Table 4.

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Table 4 about here

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First, internal mediators are systematically associated with respected ceasefire arrangements. Regardless whether the bivariate relationship is examined (Model 1), or a set of possible confounding factors are taken into account (Model 2), the coefficient is statistically significant and the sign is positive. By contrast, the involvement of external actors is associated with decreased chance of the ceasefire arrangements being respected, as seen in the bivariate (Model 3) and multivariate models (Model 4). Hence, in terms of external third party-based explanations for respected ceasefires, the indicators overall have no effect on the risk of violations. Thus, ceasefires mediating by external third parties seem to be associated with lower chance of being respected. In Model 5, we can see the only indicator of quality that has decreased the risk of ceasefire violation is the inclusion of confidence building measures. Thus, this variable is significant and positively associated with respected ceasefires. This is an indicator of a trust-based approach to peacemaking.

Overall, previous explanations for ceasefire outcomes largely failed to explain the variation in respect of ceasefires in Syria. Thus, the indicators of quality of the agreements and external third-party interventions are not able to account for the variation of interest. The different indicators of quality have no significant relationship with the success-variable as it is studied here. Whether the agreement have been formalized (Formality), whether there are stipulations about how the ceasefires will be observed (Monitoring), and regulation of violence against civilians (Civ.Violence Reg) seem to decrease, rather than increase, the chances for the agreements being respected. Monitoring has no significant relationship with the risk for violations of ceasefires.

Whether they include the stipulations of physical separation (Troop withdrawal), has no significant relationship with the outcome of the ceasefires. Moreover, agreements that are designed in a step-by-step (Stepwise) manner are not less likely to be violated, as could have been expected. Another explanatory indicator of quality of agreement, but that fail to have a

statistically significant effect on the outcomes of ceasefires is temporal specification (Temporal Specificity). Thus, if there are stipulations in the agreements about the time scope of the agreements, for instance, during exactly how long a time-span the ceasefire will be implemented, seem not to matter in terms of whether they will be more likely to break down in violations.

There are certain third parties who played an important role for humanitarian and strategic mediation between different conflicting dyads. According to our data collection, there are 72 agreements achieved through third party mediation efforts and 34 without third party intervention. Interestingly, the identities of third parties include not only international actors, such as neighboring countries, the United Nations, Russia or USA, but also a great variation of local actors who mediated between the parties. Thus, there is a local, regional and international variation in terms of third party involvement in ceasefire arrangements. The neighbors and regional powers such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Qatar have also played key roles for some of the local ceasefire agreements. Due to the fact that some of these countries have mutual cultural identities but also overlapping political interests with some of the local parties, they could potentially be important to put pressure for ceasefire agreements. The fluidity of the Syrian civil war, and the unstable military and political situation in Syria, have led to situations in which there has been space for some local and regional leaders of religious sects, NGOs, leader of tribals, elders, notables or prominent figures, aid organizations, or neighboring countries to take the initiatives for local ceasefire agreements, for instance, Iran for Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey for Al-Nusra Front, FSA and Turkmen Brigades and further fractions. Actors who share a common ideology, ethnic background, or religious denomination, can provide unique points of entry. For example, the Saudi religious preacher Abdallah Al Muhysini mediated between ISIS and rebel militias which share the same ideology and political aim purpose in Syria as Abdallah Al Muhysini himself. The leader of Iraqi Kurdistan, Mesud Barzani, mediated between all Kurdish factions from Northern Syria (Rojawa) where the parties share the same

ethnicities and governmental purpose in Syria as Mesud Barzani. Sheikh Abu Amir, the representative of the Islamic movement Ahrar as-Sham, mediated between the independent Chechen-led faction Jaish al-Muhajireen wal Ansar and FSA faction Shuhada Badr because both parties have to concentrate on the fight against the Syrian government, just like Ahrar as-Sham.

It would be too hasty to draw any firm conclusions about effects of different types of mediators on the success of ceasefire without considering that the difference may be due to selection effects. We have seen above that external mediators are negative associated with successful ceasefires, whereas internal mediators seem to have a positive association with successful ceasefires. We here employ a similar methodological approach as Fortna, in controlling for selection dynamics.[37] Ideally, we would have liked to utilize a two-stage selection model (with an instrument approach), yet the small number of cases will make the model extremely vulnerable to model specification, and therefore unreliable. As we can see in Table 5, there are some indications of selection effect, as external mediators are associated with structural conditions that could be indicative of increased difficultness, whereas external mediators are associated with more difficult settings. Thus, we examine the contextual factors' effect on internal versus external mediators. Local pressures for ceasefire have increase the likelihood of external mediation, indicating that civilians can have some influence over the decisions external mediators to intervene and negotiate ceasefires. Another aspect worth exploring is the identity-based similarities. External mediated ceasefires tend to occur in conflicts in which there is a religious cleavage, whereas internal mediators are predominately occurring in conflicts in which the two sides share religious tradition. This is indicative of a selection effect: if religious dissimilarity is an indication of more severe conflicts (albeit something that can be problematized, although this is beyond the scope of this study), then internal mediators select themselves into the relatively 'easy' conflict setting, and external mediators are self-selected into the most difficult ones. War fatigue (a factor increasing the chance for success as it increases the perceived cost, or sunk costs, of

conflicts) decreased the chances for internal mediators, which can be seen as indicating a selection effect.

Yet, we lack data on mediation efforts that did not yield ceasefires, and thus this must be treated as indicative, rather than a comprehensive test. To understand the selection patterns of internal versus external mediators. Anyway, this (tentative) conclusion that internal mediators intervene is relatively less difficult situations resonates with earlier findings on 'insider partial' mediator.[38]

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Table 5 about here

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CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This is a first attempt to systematically map out, and compare, different partial ceasefire arrangements in Syria. The information is scarce and limited, and as time unfolds, research may be able to detect more instances of ceasefire arrangements, as well as gain better information about the implementation dynamics of these arrangements. The analysis suggest that informal practices of peacemaking play a pivotal role in bringing about ceasefires that are respected. It also suggests that the two main explanations for success of ceasefires – quality of agreements and external third-party intervention – largely fail to explain the variation in the Syrian civil war. We have suggested that this is due to the particular conflict settings that Syria represents, and therefore our study should be seen as helping to define the scope conditions for existing theories on ceasefires, rather than an overall rebuttal of these earlier theoretical claims. The analysis here does suggest, however, a need to take seriously the informal, domestic peacemaking capacities within Syria, and show how they systematically are associated with respected ceasefires.

It is notable that most of the ceasefires were actually not violated. With a track-record of 72 percent of the ceasefire arrangements that were respected by the belligerents entering into the agreement, this study confirms that ceasefire arrangements are overall relatively effective and feasible conflict management approaches. This is of practical as well as theoretical importance. Theoretically, it is important to understand how cooperative arrangements, such as agreements to hold fire, can be constructed in the midst of environments characterized by high levels of violence, mistrust and various conflict complexities. Practically, it is important to understand how local level ceasefire arrangements can be designed in a manner than make them effective in controlling the violence and helping to create possibilities to alleviate human suffering. Our study points to the role of domestic peacemaking capacities, which may have been overlooked in previous policy-making approaches (as well as, as we have seen, in the theoretical discussion about ceasefires).

At the same time, ceasefire arrangement between two actors in conflicts that involve many, can be seen as essentially local level alliance pacts. They may be reached because of tactical and strategical reasons, for example, in order to direct energy from one area of fighting to another. Ceasefires may buy time for re-armament and can help to concentrate resources on fighting an enemy with higher priority. In this study, we have shown that there are some ceasefires that are characteristically tactical in nature, and some more clearly humanitarian. Yet, it should be underlined, that the parties' interests for entering into ceasefire arrangements may vary and there can be mixed motives (both humanitarian and tactical) behind agreeing to cease fire.

As a first attempt to study the microdynamics of peacemaking in Syria, we believe that this study may generate some important stimulus for further scholarly scrutiny. Three such areas are particularly noteworthy.

First, there is need to study why ceasefire arrangements occur in the first place. This research is part of larger trend in empirical research on conflict management to start to examine ceasefire agreements as something important to explore in its own right, not only as a pre-stage to comprehensive peace agreements.[39] We have here provided for some empirical leverage on this question, but have not tried to fully explain or empirically account for their occurrence. One interesting possibility would be to start by analyzing geographical districts in order to examine which of these have experienced ceasefire arrangements, and which ones have not. Another avenue would be to examine the fighting dyads (including non-state dyads) in Syria, and explore which actors who tend to agree to ceasefires between each other, and which ones refrain from such agreements. Knowing more about the conditions under which ceasefire arrangements occur is, of course, important in and by itself, but it is also important in order to detect selection bias dynamics – do ceasefire arrangements occur in the most or least difficult of conflict situations? – which is a question that needs to be taken into account in order to increase our confidence in the results presented here.

Second, this study has measured outcomes in terms of violations, but the overall effects on conflict societies remain to be studied. As previous research has shown, there could be either positive or negative consequences of ceasefire arrangements. Positive consequences include space for political negotiations, a better humanitarian situation for the affected civilians, as well as a cumulative trust-building process through implemented de-escalatory steps towards peace. Negative consequences include consolidation of military powers, abilities to re-group and re-arm, as well as room for exploitations of civilians under the 'protection' of one side. Future research needs to examine under what conditions partial ceasefire arrangements have longer-term societal effects, and distinguish between more positive or negative of such effects.

Third, ceasefire arrangements may, under some conditions, contribute to a larger process away from hostilities and war, towards more constructive relationships. The dynamic perspective of ceasefire arrangements has not been examined in this study, and there is clear need to examine that in greater depth and detail. For example, ceasefire arrangements can be sequentially organized provided a stepwise approach towards more conciliatory group-relationships. Moreover, local ceasefires may cumulatively contribute to larger areas without armed hostilities, and in the longer run, provide a bottom-up approach to peace. This has been much of the guiding principle of the Aleppo-initiative of UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura, in his first peacemaking initiative as UN mediator in Syria.

Overall, this study provides an entry-point to the study of micro-dynamics of cease-fire agreements, and peacemaking initiatives more broadly. Whereas we are definitely not the first to map out local peacemaking initiatives that have occurred in Syria, there is an abundant need for more comparative analysis, in order to understand the variations between different types of peacemaking efforts, as well as the differences in terms of their outcomes.

Table 1: *Example of internal mediators involved in ceasefire arrangements*

Ceasefire agreement, dyads and location	Third party mediator	Time
Jaish al-Muhajireen wal Ansar vs Free Syrian Army, faction Shuhada Badr in Hreitan (Aleppo)	Sheikh Abu Amir: The representative of the Islamic movement Ahrar as-Sham	17.02.2014
YPG/PYD vs FSA in Ras al-Ain	Representatives of Jabhat AL-Nusra	17.02.2013
YPG/PYD vs Al-Nusra Front in Tel-Abyad	Kurdish and Arab tribal figures	28.07.2013
ISIS vs Asifat al-Shamal in Azaz	Representatives of Liwa al-Tawhid	19.09.2013
ISIS, Syrien government and opposition forces in Aleppo	The Ahali Aleppo Initiative team	15.9.2014
Syrian Government vs FSA in Barzeh	The Barzeh Local Coordination Committee	05.01.2014
YPG/PYD vs Fath Aleppo operations room in Afrin	The initiative of the Magistrate and Shura Council in Aleppo	19.12.2015

Table 2. *Local ceasefire agreements during the Syrian civil war (2011-17)*

YEAR	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
2012	3	2.83
2013	5	4.72
2014	19	17.92
2015	22	20.75
2016	33	31.13
2017	24	22.64
TOTAL	106	100.00

Table 3. *Types of ceasefire agreements in the Syrian civil war*

	Total
Humanitarian agreements	71
Tactical agreements	33
Humanitarian and Tactical agreements	16

* 18 agreements cannot be classified as either humanitarian or tactical in type

Table 4. *Explanations for respect of local ceasefire arrangements in Syria, 2011-2017*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
EXPLANATORY VARIABLES										
INTERNAL MEDIATOR	1.45***	2.2***								
	(0.561)	(0.565)								
EXTERNAL MEDIATOR			-1.86***	-1.34**						
			(0.477)	(0.538)						
STEPWISE		-1.22*		-.866						
		(0.665)		(0.651)						
FORMAL AGREEMENT		-1.24***		-1.01**		-1.3***				
		(0.479)		(0.473)		(0.461)				
MONITORING		-1.48**		-.53				-1.6***		
		(0.631)		(0.564)				(0.485)		
CONFIDENCE BUILDING		1.61***		1.49**	1.19**					
		(0.579)		(0.631)	(0.581)					
TROOP WITHDRAWAL		1.25*		.937			.532			
		(0.665)		(0.582)			(0.596)			
FATIGUE		.139		.07407						
		(0.105)		(0.108)						
TEMPORAL SPECIFICITY									-.04806	
									(0.608)	
CIV. VIOLENCE REG.										-.813*
										(0.472)
CONSTANT	.34	1.24**	1.64***	1.79***	.431	1.32***	.298	1.7***	.589	1.22***
	(0.319)	(0.496)	(0.283)	(0.615)	(0.315)	(0.253)	(0.377)	(0.338)	(0.367)	(0.331)
OBSERVATIONS	106	104	106	104	106	105	106	106	106	106

ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS IN PARENTHESES
*** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.1

Table 5. *Are internal and external mediation driven by different causes?*

	(1)	**(2)**
	Internal Mediator	External Mediator
LOCAL PRESSURE	.419	.865*
	(0.422)	(0.448)
SAME RELIGION	1.44***	-.873*
	(0.491)	(0.492)
FATIGUE	-.177*	.122
	(0.0921)	(0.101)
JIHADISM	-.211	.237
	(0.484)	(0.548)
CONSTANT	-1.39***	-.525
	(0.465)	(0.651)
OBSERVATIONS	106	106
ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS IN PARENTHESES		
*** P<0.01, ** P<0.05, * P<0.1		

Figure 1. *Georeferenced Map of the Local Ceasefires Agreements in Syria (2011-2017)*
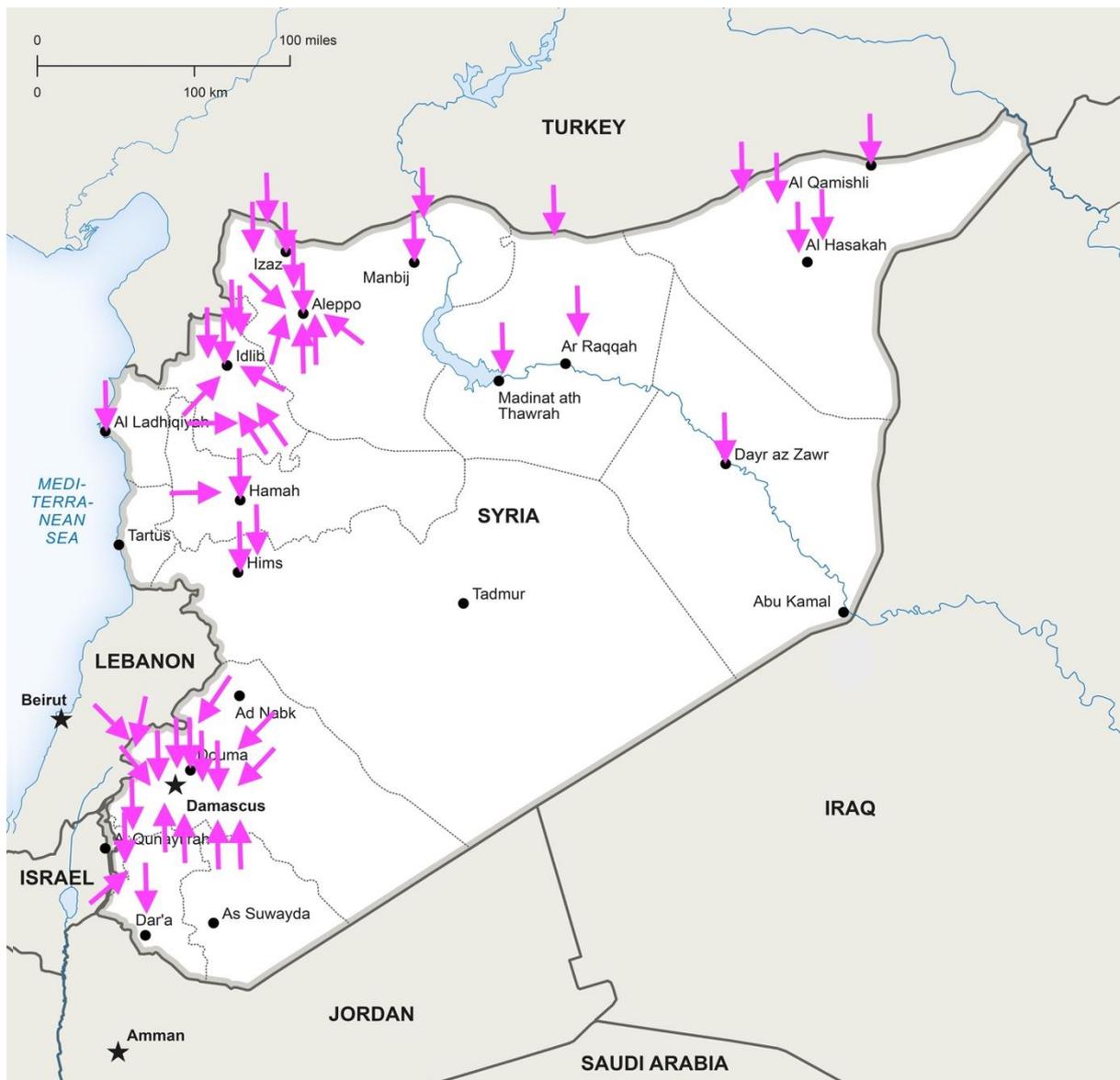
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29. There are potential cases that we have omitted from this analysis due to lack of information and / or clarity as to whether they are, indeed, ceasefire arrangements. Lack of clarity is often the result of preconditions. For instance, the leader of the opposition party Zakir Sakit from Aleppo mentioned 4 preconditions that must be met by the government for a

ceasefire agreement on March 2015. [In: http://www.islahhaber.net/suriye-de-ateskes-icin-dort-sart-43915.html.] Another example is from 2014 when the Syrian government set preconditions for a ceasefire agreement that had to be met by the opposition party in Damascus, and since it was unclear whether the opposition party accepted this offer, it is not possible to determine whether this was a ceasefire, or just an attempt at a ceasefire (which we do not include) [see: http://goo.gl/LLFnZa]. We include a table of all non-included cases in the appendix.

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31. Åkebo, (See note 1 above).

32. Ibid.

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34. Another possible reason why there were more agreements in the latter stages of the time period is because parties have had time to negotiate and settle their differences.

35. Formerly known as a branch of Syrian Al Qaeda or Jabhat al-Nusra

36. The group was named *Jabhat al-Nusra* when it entered into these ceasefire agreements, but has since severed its previous ties with the al-Qaeda network and subsequently changed its name to. *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham*. We use the names interchangeably below.

37. Fortna, (See note 1 above).

38. Svensson and Lindgren, (See note 24 above).

39. Clayton and Sticher, (See note 1 above).