Rationales of Foreign Fighters in the Syrian Civil War
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In this study, I investigated why Muslims participate in jihad as foreign jihadist fighters, whose numbers have been increasing rapidly during the Syrian civil war. The main concern of this research is to examine the underlying motivations and reasons of these mujahedeen during their decision process to participate and maintain the jihad. In accordance with the existing studies that tend to explain radicalization through discrimination of the Muslim societies and ideology, Islamic religious doctrines such as the brotherhood of all Muslims, the obligation to help other Muslims who are suffering and the perception that Muslims around the world are being persecuted by “infidel” Western countries are major causes of the radicalization process. In addition to these, the narratives and personal experiences on the jihad field such as ‘miracles’, brotherhood and friendship among the mujahedeen are other determining factors. Another conclusion of this research is that, in contrast to the conventional thinking and existing studies, the mujahedeen do not join the jihad only because of their purpose of becoming a martyr or defeating the enemy. According to the findings of this study, acquired during the group meetings and interviews, these fighters are not focused on the results but rather on the path which they follow in order for them to obtain the approval of God. Despite the fact that becoming a martyr and defeating the enemy are the ultimate goals, the mujahedeen do not consider themselves unsuccessful if both the scenarios do not become a reality. Instead, having a genuine faith on God and performing meritorious action during the
jihad are enough to be called successful regardless of the result. To complete this research, I conducted participatory observation with a jihadist group and conducted interviews with active fighters and their first degree relatives.

Keywords: Mujahedeen, Martyrdom, Syria, Religion, Participant Observation, Interviews.