

REPORT



Operation
**OLIVE
BRANCH**

TRTWORLD
**re|search
centre**



Operation

OLIVE BRANCH

© TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PUBLISHER

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

APRIL 2018

Contributors

Alpaslan Oğuz

Muhammed Lütfi Türkcan

Ozan Ahmet Çetin

Edebalı Murat Akca

Aruuke Uran Kyzy

Pınar Tankır

Hakan Şirin

Özgür Dikmen

Gökem Dirik

Design

Erhan Ağırgöl

Photo Credit

Anadolu Agency

TRT WORLD ISTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

TRT WORLD LONDON

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1620 I STREET NW, 10TH FLOOR,

SUITE 1000, 20006

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

www.trtworld.com

researchcentre.trtworld.com

C O N T E N T S

6	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
7	INTRODUCTION
12	MULTIPLE NAMES, ONE ORGANISATION: THE PKK, PYD and YPG
22	US' SUPPORT TO THE PYD/YPG
25	TURKEY'S MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN AFRIN
34	WHAT IS NEXT?
36	BIBLIOGRAPHY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch to clear terrorist groups from its borders. This report demonstrates the link that exists between the PKK and PYD/YPG, the implications of the US support to PYD/YPG and Turkey's military involvement in Afrin.

.....

For the existing link between PKK and PYD/YPG, the report demonstrates that;

- The PYD was established in 2003 upon a direct order from the PKK's imprisoned founder, Abdullah Öcalan.

- The PYD/YPG are taking orders directly from the PKK's ruling elite in the Qandil Mountains in Iraq.

- Thousands of YPG militants fought for the PKK previously, with some of its members even fighting for both organisations at the same time.

- These groups follow the same ideology, which is evident from the textbooks discovered in the teaching centres of the PYD/YPG in Syria.

.....

For the US support to the PYD/YPG, the report demonstrates that;

- Despite the obvious acceptance of the existing link between the PKK and PYD/YPG by high-level US officials, such as former Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter, the US still does not officially recognise the PYD/YPG as a terrorist organisation.

- The machine guns, MANPADS and even anti-tank weapons provided by the US to the PYD/YPG are used against Turkish forces, and many more weapons have been discovered in the ammunition shelters of the PYD/YPG in and around the city of Afrin.

- The main reason behind the US support towards the PYD/YPG arises from the US policy of having a proxy group instead of its own military on the ground to realise its own interests.

.....

For the reasons of Turkey's involvement in Afrin, the report demonstrates;

- The foremost objective of Turkey's ongoing military operation is to annihilate the terrorism threat that Turkey is facing at its southern border with Syria.

- Turkey views any attempt that strengthens the PKK's existence in the region as a security threat to its homeland and people.

- Turkey considers the city of Afrin as a hub for the PKK and its Syrian offshoot PYD/YPG to transfer militants and ammunition through the Amanos Mountains at the border.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey officially announced the start of its long-expected military operation to clear terrorist units from the town of Afrin in northwest Syria on January 20, 2018. Within two months, the town centre of Afrin was cleared of YPG/PKK terrorists as Turkish Armed Forces and Free Syrian Army Forces declared victory on March 18.

An official statement released by the Turkish Armed Forces laid out the objective and scope of the operation. According to this statement, Operation Olive Branch aims to neutralise terrorist organisations such as the PKK/KCK/PYD/YPG and Daesh in the Afrin region to provide security and stability across Turkey's border as well as in the region. Additionally, it aims to save the people of the region from oppression and persecution as well as creating a passage of safe return, so that displaced Syrians can return home. It is also stated in the announcement that the operation is being carried out under the framework of rights appointed to Turkey by the United Nations. These rights are based on international law, the UN Security Council resolutions, and Turkey's right to use all necessary force to defend its territorial integrity under Article 51 of the UN charter with respect to Syria's territorial sovereignty.¹

Despite the misinformation about the operation in different media outlets, careful precautions have been taken to avoid harming civilians. The Turkish Armed Forces have attempted to diminish the risk of inflicting damage upon civilians during the operation. They have done so by relying on its well-trained and experienced military personnel who have successfully fought against the PKK for almost 40 years, as well as their participation in the UN peace-building processes in Kosovo and Afghanistan;

alongside their recent cross-border operations such as the Euphrates Shield and Idlib operations. Timely information sharing with its allies, transparency and the aforementioned factors have enhanced Turkey's operational capability and precision in targeting terrorists.

This report elaborates the importance of Turkey's military operation in the northern Syrian town of Afrin, named Operation Olive Branch. Firstly, the report provides a detailed outline of Turkey's strategic aims in Afrin as well as the necessity of the operation from a state perspective in eradicating terrorist threats from the country's southern border. This is done by giving a detailed overview of the operation, as well as highlighting its main objectives. Secondly, it provides a timeline of events leading up to the launch of the operation, in that it gives a historical account of how the conflict between the PKK and Turkey has posed severe security challenges for the Turkish state.

Thirdly, the report offers a comprehensive analysis on how organisations such as the PKK and PYD/YPG pose grave security threats to the Turkish Republic and its citizens, and thus bringing to light Turkey's security and humanitarian concerns. Fourthly, it exposes the link that exists between the PKK and PYD/YPG and as such, uncover how these organisations have relentlessly targeted innocent civilians and security personnel over the course of many years. Fifthly, it aims to bare the US's strategy to support PYD/YPG at the expense of alienating its long-term NATO ally, Turkey. Finally, it will provide an in-depth explanation regarding the conclusion of the Operation Olive Branch and its prospects for the future in trying to rebuild and restore civil life in Afrin.

Timeline of the Events Leading up to Operation Olive Branch

July 2011

What started as peaceful pro-democracy protests turned into a violent confrontation between the Syrian regime and the opposition groups. It caused a civil war rendering the region unstable and vulnerable to the emergence of terrorist groups.

July 19, 2011

The armed wing of the PYD was established and began operating under the name of YPG.

July 25, 2012

The Syrian regime decided to withdraw its armed forces from the five cities in northern Syria, which caused the region to fall under the control of PKK cadres.²

January 2014

PYD declared three northern districts of Syria, Afrin, Jazira, and Kobani, as self-autonomous cantons across the Turkish border with Syria.³

January 21, 2014

PYD declared a provincial government in northern Syria, which covers almost half of the Turkish-Syrian border.⁴

September 18/19, 2014

The US Congress approved the Obama administration's request to arm groups in Syria to fight against Daesh.⁵

September 10, 2015

An attack from Afrin killed a Turkish soldier in the Cilvegözü border gate.

October 11, 2015

The SDF, largely made up of YPG members, was established.

March 13, 2016

A blast in the Turkey's capital of Ankara killed 34 people. TAK, a sub branch of PKK, claimed responsibility for the attack. It was revealed that the bomber was trained by YPG in Syria.⁶

March 17, 2016

The PYD declared the so-called "Syria's Kurdish Federation."

March 22, 2016

The so-called PYD federation government claimed the Shahba region in Syria as a new canton.

May 1, 2016

A car bomb attack against a police centre in Gaziantep killed 2 people and injured 18 others. It was later revealed that the attacker originated from Afrin.

August 26, 2016

Turkey launched the Operation Euphrates Shield.

December 10, 2016

A terrorist attack in the Beşiktaş district of Istanbul, targeting security officials and citizens at the end of a football match, killed 46 people, and injured 243 others. The bomber was trained by the PYD/YPG.⁷

March 22, 2017

A sniper, residing from Afrin, shoots a Turkish soldier in Reyhanlı, a district of Hatay.⁸

May 30, 2017

The US began providing heavy weaponry directly to the PYD/YPG at the outset of the assault in Raqqqa, Syria.

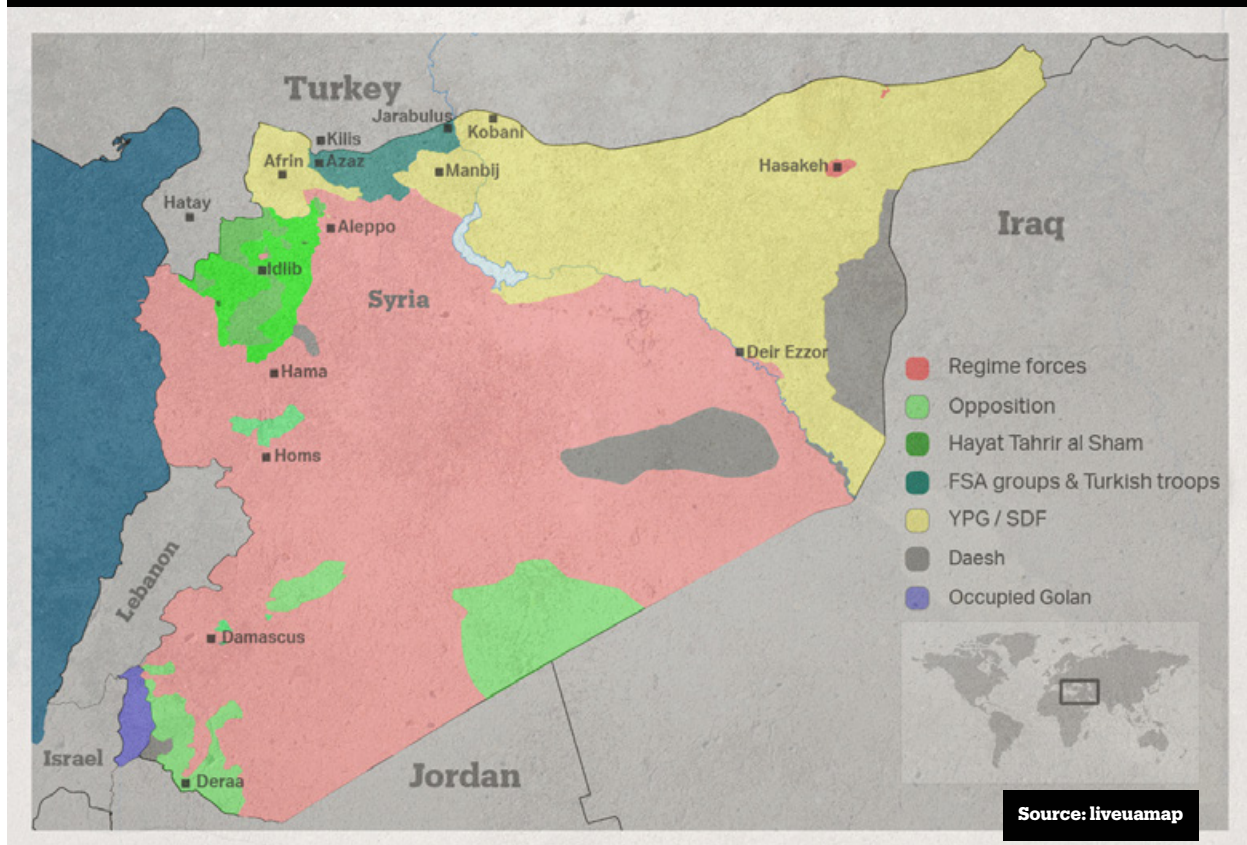
January 13, 2018

The US announced its plans to form a 30 thousand-strong "Border Security Force" in northern Syria under the command of the PYD/YPG.

January 20, 2018

Operation Olive Branch begins.

Situation in Syria before the Operation Olive Branch





The Overview of the Operation

Operation Olive Branch is the continuation of Turkey's previous military operation in Syria, Operation Euphrates Shield, notable for clearing the Daesh terrorist organisation from the cities of Jarabulus, Azaz and al-Bab in northern Syria. Turkey says the objective of Operation Olive Branch is to liberate its southern borders of any terrorist organisation, mainly the PYD/YPG. Turkey had argued for a long time that the PYD/YPG existence along its southern border posed a grave security threat to its national security as it saw the PYD/YPG as the Syrian offshoot of the PKK terror group. The US plan of establishing a 30 thousand-strong "border security force" in northern Syria, mainly comprised of PYD/YPG militants - amid expectations from the US to stop aiding the PYD/YPG after Raqqqa and Deir ez-Zor

offensives - was the tipping point for Turkey to start a military operation.

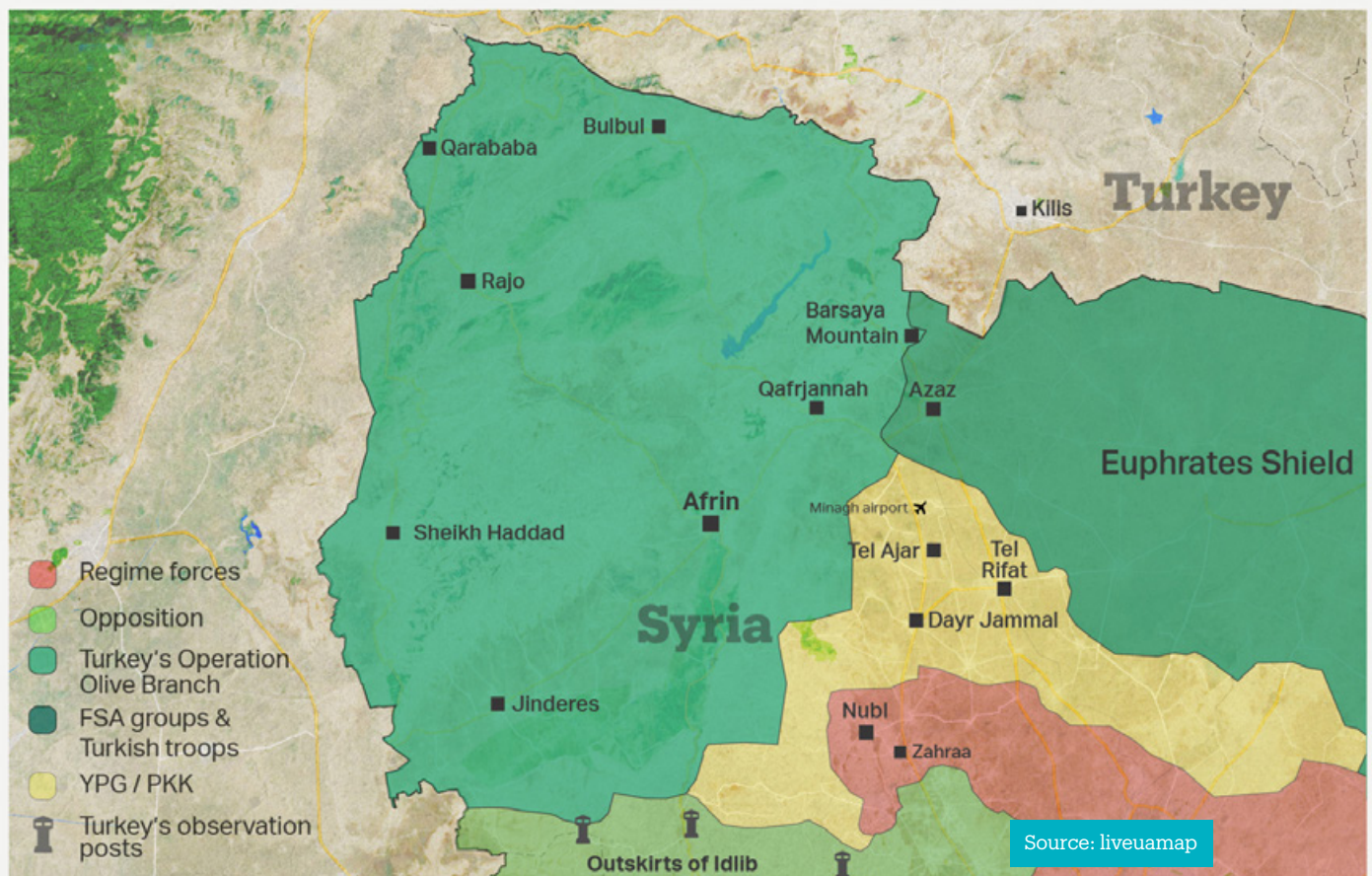
Operation Olive Branch has inflicted heavy damage to the PYD/YPG and PKK terrorists. As of March 31, 2018, a total of 3,820 terrorists have been neutralised since the start of the operation. In the same period, 52 Turkish soldiers were martyred, and 229 soldiers were wounded while at least 302 members of the Free Syrian Army have also been martyred, according to official statements.⁹ In addition, YPG/PKK terrorists have fired rockets towards the Turkish border cities of Hatay and Kilis 98 times, killing 7 civilians and injuring 113. The YPG/PKK also used civilians as human shields to slow down the Turkish army during the operations.

After successfully liberating the Afrin town centre from terrorists, Operation Olive Branch has entered a new phase. Turkish soldiers and FSA forces are now taking security measures to improve and restore peace and security in Afrin in order to provide a safe return of the civilians and bring normality back into daily life. Similar to what had been done in Cerabulus, Azez and al-Bab, Turkish security forces are constantly patrolling the city as well as searching and destroying hand-made explosives and mines planted by the terrorists in the town. According to military sources, the Turkish military have defused nearly 650 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and 80 landmines since the start of Operation Olive Branch.¹⁰ Moreover, a police force

was formed with the help of Syria's interim government and checkpoints have been set up to sustain the safety of the people.¹¹ Additionally, Turkish state and civil society organisations, particularly Turkish Red Crescent and AFAD, have been mobilised to provide humanitarian aid to the civilians by distributing hot meals and personal care items and giving uninterrupted health care services to the locals. The efforts to rebuild infrastructure will take place after the city is completely cleared from mines and explosives, according to officials.

Turkish officials have also stated that since terrorists have fled to the city of Tal Rifaat, in northern Aleppo countryside, Tal Rifaat has become a natural extension of the operation.

Situation in Afrin as of 1st of April



MULTIPLE NAMES, ONE ORGANISATION: THE PKK, PYD and YPG

What is the PKK?

The PKK was established by Abdullah Öcalan on November 28, 1978 and is recognised as a terrorist organisation by many countries and international organisations including Turkey, the US, the EU and the NATO. Öcalan and his supporters performed terrorist attacks in eastern Anatolia and the southeast of Turkey with the aim of secession. After the 1980 military

coup, the PKK gained more strength and power, and initiated its first terror attack against the state in 1984 in the Eruh district of Siirt province of Turkey. Moreover, the PKK declared war against the Turkish state for an independence from Turkey.

The armed conflict that peaked during the mid-1990s came to an end after the capture of Öcalan in 1999. Until 2004, except minor incidents of clashes, there was no significant presence of armed struggle.

The armed conflict that peaked during the mid-1990s came to an end after the capture of Öcalan in 1999. Until 2004, except minor incidents of clashes, there was no significant presence of armed struggle.¹² In 2004 the attacks intensified again as the PKK cadres consolidated their power within the group and reorganised the PKK militants during these periods.¹³ The PKK campaigns came to a temporary halt due to the Peace Process initiative of the state in 2013. During this two-and-a-half-year period, terrorism related attacks and deaths were lowered dramatically.

The peace process, a relatively stable period, ended with the PKK's killing of a Turkish soldier in the eastern province of Adiyaman on July 20, 2015. This was then followed by further killings of two police officers in front of their families in their homes near the Turkey-Syria border.¹⁴ After the Turkish security forces responded by launching operations against the PKK and its branches, the YDG-H, PKK's youth branch,



Source: Emin Sansar / Anadolu Agency

started digging ditches in the streets mainly in the provinces of Cizre, Silopi, Nusaybin, Dargeçit and Sur, with the aim of preventing Turkish security forces from entering these provinces. These violent clashes that lasted

478 days martyred 793 police officers.

During the clashes, areas controlled by the PYD/YPG within Syria's border across Turkey was actively utilised by the terrorists.

Abdullah Öcalan

Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the PKK, was born in 1948 in Ömerli, a village in Halfeti, Şanlıurfa, a province situated in southeastern Turkey. He started to work as an officer for the directorate of land registry in 1969. Öcalan then moved to Istanbul with his duty appointment, he began to study at Istanbul University. He subsequently transferred to the political science department at Ankara University. The leftist ideology was attained by him during his university years. These ideas had wafted with Kurdish



nationalism and eventually led to the establishment of the PKK.

During the 1980s and 1990's he ruled the PKK when living in Lebanon and Syria. He was captured in 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya and sentenced to death after trial.

His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in 2002. He has been serving his term in the jail in İmralı, a small island near Istanbul. He is still considered the founding and symbolic head of the terrorist organisation.

PKK's Financial Sources

A large scale of PKK's finance (about 70%) comes from its activities in Europe. In addition, another significant part of its income is generated by the so-called "taxation" of contrabandists in neighbouring countries.¹⁵ The PKK is heavily involved in the heroin traffic from Southwest Asia to Europe, with some estimating that 80% of the narcotics in Europe have some connection to the

terrorist organisation.¹⁶ On May 30, 2008 and on April 20, 2011, the US Secretary of Treasury decided to freeze the assets and bank accounts of the terrorist organisation's top brass due to concrete indications of involvement in drug trafficking.¹⁷ Moreover, the PKK's need for guns and yields is being financed through an arms trade and human trafficking encompassing Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Europe.



Tunnel used by the PKK and YDG-H to transfer military equipment and terrorists from Northern Syria to Turkey and vice-versa. Source: Anadolu Agency

Turkish security forces discovered tunnels in 2017, which were used by the PKK to transfer terrorists and ammunition from Syria to Turkey's south-eastern region, during the "Trench Warfare." This shows that there is a two-way flow of military equipment between the PKK and its Syrian offshoot, the YPG.

The PKK adopted a new strategy, which has been used and replicated by the YPG during the clashes. The new strategy transformed guerrilla warfare - which was the decade's long strategy PKK hinged upon - into an urban warfare by taking armed struggle from rural areas into city centres.

The armed clashes between the PKK terrorists and Turkish security forces have passed through various phases. The terrorist attacks indiscriminately targeted civilians, children, tourists, and security forces as well as state institutions and infrastructures, which has claimed more than 40 thousand lives.

PKK's Assaults on Kurdish and Turkish Politicians

Over the years the PKK has put increasing pressure on civil society and political life in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Turkey. Individuals and groups have been targeted by the PKK when they refused to pay tributes or give in to the directives of the terror group. Before 1984, during a period called "Hilvan-Siverek period", the group focused solely on local political authorities.¹⁸ The PKK silenced and eliminated those who opposed it, either through intimidation or through direct attacks.

June 29, 2010

In the Yüksekova district of the city of Hakkari, AK Party's district president Ahmet Uçar's house at Eski Kışla neighbourhood was bombed with grenades. The attack caused no casualties but damaged the house severely.

July 2, 2012

AK Party's district president of Gürpınar in the city of Van, Hayrullah Tanış, was kidnapped by 3 armed PKK members and released on August 24, 2012.

September 3, 2012

Lawyer of AK Party's city president of Hakkari, Mecit Tarhan was kidnapped. Tarhan was released on October 5, 2012.

March 16, 2014

5 people including AK Party's municipal council member Zeki Karakuş was attacked with stones and sticks during the election campaign in Van.

April 17, 2014

PKK members in Dicle's Kurşunlu village of the city of Diyarbakır, kidnapped 4 people, including former mayor of Elazığ's Bükardı district, Abit Doğruer. They were released on April 20, 2014.

June 5, 2015

AK Party's Karayazı district president Servet Tutkun was kidnapped and beaten by PKK terrorists, and was released the same day.

March 29, 2016

PKK members kidnapped AK Party's İspir district president Salih Zeki Çetinkaya. He managed to escape two days later when the terrorists were asleep.

August 13, 2016

AK Party's youth branch president of Beytüşşebap district of the city of Şırnak, Naci Adıyaman was kidnapped. His dead body was found in the following days.

August 25, 2016

Leader of the main opposition party, CHP, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and his convoy attacked by PKK terrorists when the convoy was heading towards Artvin. One soldier martyred during the clashes.

September 1, 2016

Former Village Guards Foundation's president's son and AK Party member Menderes Özer was kidnapped from his car and killed.

September 10, 2016

400 kilograms of handmade explosives were found around the graves of AK Party's vice president Mehdi Eker's mother and brother.

September 14, 2016

Ahmet Budak, who was the number one candidate in the list of AK Party in the city of Hakkari during the first of November elections, was shot and killed.

October 9, 2016

AK Party's Van, Özalp district vice president Aydın Muştı, was shot dead in his home.

October 10, 2016

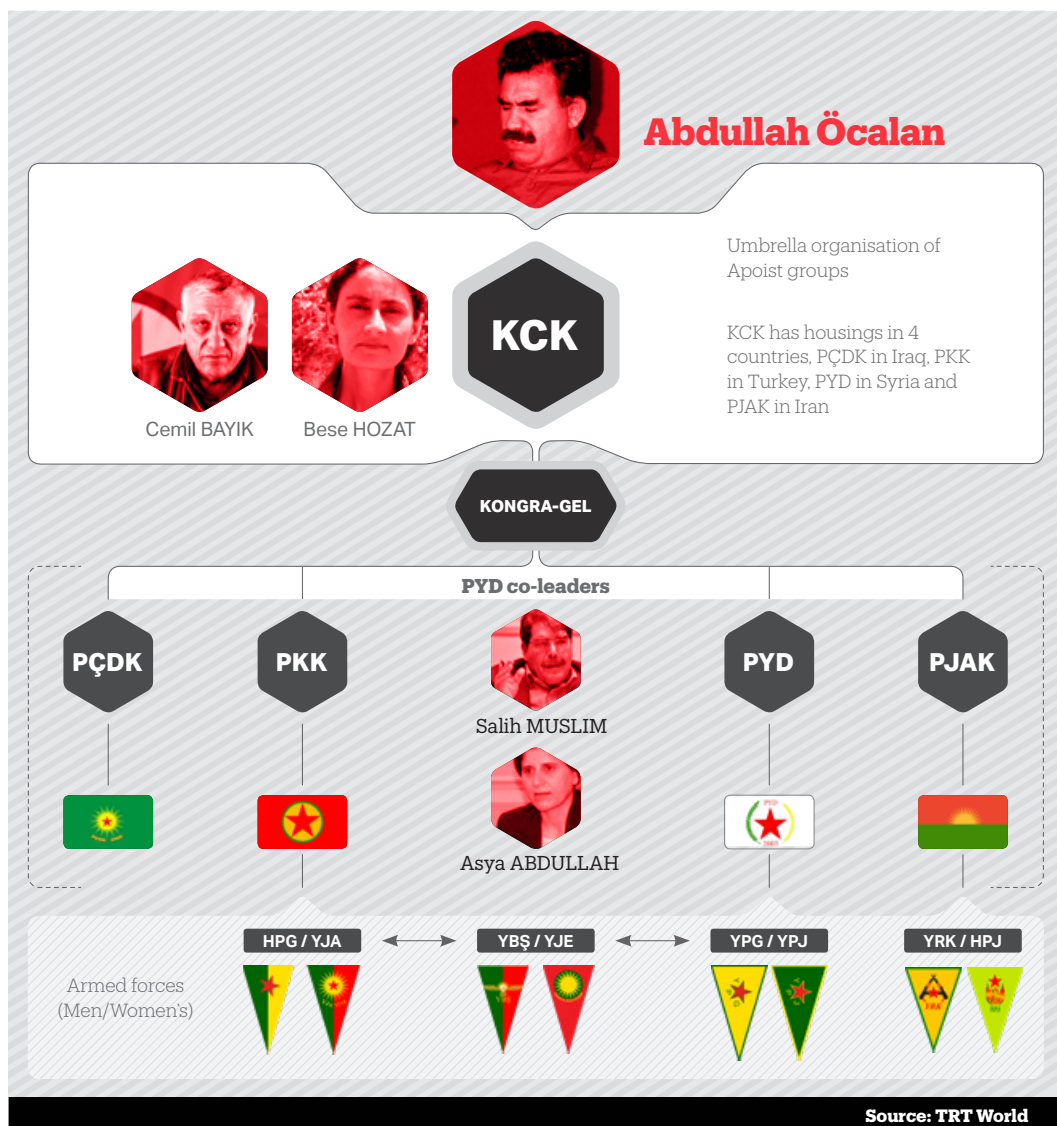
AK Party's Diyarbakır, Dicle district president Deryan Aktert was attacked and killed with long-range weapons at his office.

Source: Anadolu Agency

PKK's Syrian Offshoot: PYD/YPG

Syria's heavy-handed ruler and Bashar al Assad's father, Hafez al Assad, planned to exploit Öcalan and the PKK as leverage against Turkey in the 80s and 90s. Hence, Assad allowed the PKK to establish ideologically based education and training camps in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. He also

provided them with protection and logistic support. The PKK used the camps to train its militants, most specifically the new recruits. Apart from Abdullah Öcalan himself, many prominent PKK members have contributed to the ideological educations in these camps.





Salih Muslim, head of the PYD, in a PKK rally. - Open Source

Öcalan was given a free hand in Syria by Assad in return for not speaking about the plight of the Syrian Kurds. In the following years, the PKK conducted many operations in Turkey by using Syria as both a refuge and new recruitment base. This lasted until the commander of the Turkish Land Forces Atilla Ateş's speech in 1998, in which he reiterated that Turkey's patience was wearing thin, meaning that Turkey could launch a military offensive on the PKK bases in Syria. This alarmed many in Syria, as a result the country decided to expel Öcalan from the country.

Syria continued to be an important base for the terror group. In 2003, the PYD was established as the Syrian branch of the PKK. However, its influence in the country was limited. Internal unrest within the country resulting from the civil war, created a vacuum for the PKK to operate more

effectively by providing the terrorist group with new opportunities to expand their support bases.

Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's imprisoned founder at the time, ordered the establishment of the PYD during a meeting with his lawyer in 2002. Subsequently, in the eighth congress of the PKK, the terrorist organisation decided to form offshoots in Syria, Iraq and Iran. Thus, the PYD was founded in 2003. In fact, a statement of KCK (the umbrella organisation of Öcalanist groups) in its official newspaper Serxwebun, demonstrates the link between the PKK, PYD/YPG and KCK: "PYD as the Western Kurdistan organisation of KCK."¹⁹ Moreover, the code of the PYD recognises Abdullah Öcalan as its supreme leader and KONGRA-GEL (the legislative body of the KCK) as the highest legislative power.



Photographs of the terrorist organisation founder of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan are seen in a room of a tunnel, which was used by PKK-PYD terror groups, after Turkish Armed Forces and FSA freed a village then discovered the tunnel within the "Operation Olive Branch" - Source: Emin Sansar / Anadolu Agency

There are also several reports on the organisation that clearly demonstrate the link between the two, including one that records some 2,500 cases of YPG members who were killed in action and were previously known to fight for the PKK.²⁰

The YPG is the armed wing of the PYD, founded in 2011, shortly after the start of the Syrian civil war. A year after the war began; Bashar al Assad withdrew his

forces from the northern border of Turkey. The withdrawal of Assad's forces left a vacuum on the Syrian side of the border, which the PYD/YPG moved in to fill. They have declared the establishment of three autonomous cantons in areas under their control - Afrin, Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) and Jazira.

Another organisation, the SDF, was established with the support and guidance of the US to cover PYD/YPG's activities in northern Syria. The SDF claims to be a coalition of regional forces: Kurds, Arabs and Syriac Christians. Yet, it is led by the PYD/YPG, as it is apparent from both the organisation's cadre and its ideology. Within its regions, the SDF imposes the PKK's radical Marxist ideology and indoctrinates the local population with it. The support of the US has handed a ticket over to the PYD/YPG to hide its terrorist activities from the eyes of the international community, and to facilitate PKK attacks in Turkey.



A screengrab captured from a video shows a so-called memorial of the head of PKK-PYD terrorist organisation Abdullah Öcalan before it was destroyed by Turkish unmanned air vehicle (SIHA) within the Operation Olive Branch.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has confirmed that the perpetrators of suicide bombings outside the Beşiktaş soccer stadium in Istanbul, which killed 44 people, have received training from the PYD/YPG.²¹ Furthermore, authorities believe that weapons transferred to the PYD/YPG are being handed over to the PKK as Turkish security forces in operations against the PKK have captured

sophisticated shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (MANPADS).²²

The PYD/YPG declared self-governing units comprising of 898 communes and 47 councils in northern Syria. Although the self-governing units are depicted as independent, in fact, they take direct orders from PKK leaders who are known to reside in the Qandil Mountains.²³

BBC's Raqqa Investigation: Uncovering the secret release of Daesh Terrorists²⁴

Turkey has long argued that the YPG in Syria have organic links with the outlawed PKK terrorist organisation, with some of its members even having ties with Daesh. Two weeks after the capture of Raqqa, the BBC revealed a secret deal that the YPG, PKK's Syria affiliate, struck with Daesh terrorists. The deal included letting Daesh terrorists, including some of the most notorious figures, and their families escape from the city under the watchful eye of the US-led anti-Daesh coalition. The report indicates that the freed Daesh terrorists have spread across Syria and some of them have ended up in YPG-controlled areas close to the Turkish border. The BBC's revelation is based on extensive interviews with dozens of people, including those who transported the fighters (convoy drivers), those who were transported, those who negotiated the deal and those who observed it.

The deal unleashed threats to Syria as well as the outside world by letting hundreds of terrorists, some of them foreigners, to spread to different parts of the country. In May last year, US Defence Secretary James Mattis dubbed the war against Daesh as a fight of "annihilation." "Our intention is that the foreign fighters do not survive the fight to return home to North Africa, to Europe, to America, to Asia, to Africa. We are not going to allow



them to do so," he said on US television.²⁵ However, foreign fighters, too, were allowed to leave Raqqa, following the deal. According to the BBC investigation, the coalition now admits that it has let the foreigners join the convoy. "We did not want anyone to leave," said Col Ryan Dillon, spokesperson for the anti-Daesh coalition. "But this goes to the heart of our strategy, 'by, with and through' local leaders on the ground. It comes down to Syrians – they are the ones fighting and dying, they get to make the decisions regarding operations."

At the beginning of February 2018, news spread that the YPG had released more than 400 Daesh terrorists from some of its detention centres in Afrin, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor on the condition they joined the fight against the Turkish and FSA offensive in the Afrin region.²⁶

Human Rights Violations under the PYD/YPG Rule

Civilians living in northern Syria are predominantly under PYD/YPG control and have become victims of the ongoing mass human rights violations and abuses. Thousands of people have fled PYD/YPG rule in order to escape large-scale conscription, including forced military enlistment of children.²⁷ Additionally tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds have also left their homes to pursue safety in Turkey as well as northern Iraq. Some fled due to the poor economic

conditions in Syria and others due to political pressure from the PYD.²⁸

Having taken power in 2012, the 'Asayish', YPG's so-called police force, along with the YPG have used boys and girls under the age of 18 at checkpoints and on bases in Afrin, Ain al-'Arab and Jazira. These children have been forced to fight alongside the YPG. Moreover, according to the Human Rights Watch, the YPG have also used young boys

and girls under the age of 18 in conflict zones.²⁹ Take for example the Human Rights Watch visit to Jazira in February of 2014, which found solid evidence to support that the YPG continues its recruitment of child soldiers. Another report provided by the Human Rights Watch in 2015 also raised concerns of the PYD/YPG's conscription of children under the age of 18.³⁰ In accordance with 'the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child,' states and non-state actors are restricted from recruiting children under the age of 18 for the purposes of armed conflict by all means.³¹

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS REVEAL PYD/PKK VIOLATIONS IN SYRIA

International groups report PYD/PKK disappearances/killings, abuse, use of child soldiers, war crimes in Syria

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW)

- In a 2014 report, Human Rights Watch also detailed arbitrary arrests, rights violations, drug smuggling, and other illegal activities by the PYD/PKK.
- The 107-page report also documented disappearances and killings, jurisdictional violations, random arrests of political opponents, abuse of prisoners, and the use of child soldiers in northern and northwestern Syria controlled by the PYD/PKK terrorist group, especially in Afrin as well as Ain al-Arab (Kobani) and Jazira.
- The report documented arbitrary arrests of the PYD/PKK's political opponents, abuse in detention, and unsolved abductions and murders. It also documented the use of children in the PYD/PKK's police force and armed wing, the YPG. It also said PYD/PKK terrorists had committed crimes violating people's rights in areas mostly populated by Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, and other groups.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

- Amnesty International documented similar cases in its October 2015 report "Syria: We Had Nowhere to Go." Civilians living in areas of northern Syria were subjected to serious abuses by PYD/PKK terrorists including forced displacement and home demolitions, said the group.

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

- A report released Friday by the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) said that in 2017, PKK/PYD terrorists killed 316 civilians in Syria, including 58 children and 54 women.

Source: Anadolu Agency

Over the past two years, the PYD/YPG-dominated 'Asayish' have arrested their political opponents without evidence. Human Rights Watch investigated the cases of six Kurdish men linked to an opposition political party – the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria, the Azadi Party and the Yekiti Party – all of whom had been arrested arbitrarily in Afrin. Three of them were released and the other three were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in April 2014.³² Human Rights Watch interviewed the three released men where they stated that they had no access to a lawyer, and that only one of them was granted a family visit. Two of the men thought they had been detained due to their peaceful political activism, and the third did not know the reason at all.

According to Human Rights Watch, the physical and mental abuse of the arrested individuals was prevalent in YPG dominated areas. Another victim stated that 'Asayish' officials physically beat him in Qamishli in late 2013 to force him to confess. As far as he knew, Asayish members had not been punished or executed for this unlawful act. Below is the statement from the victim:

“When they put me in the car they started to punch me. They kept beating me from Amuda to Qamishli. They punched me in the head, face and stomach. They took me to Qanat al-Sweis police station. I didn’t confess right away, and they beat me. The second day they asked me again and I denied. The fifth day they took me, blindfolded me, and put my hands in cuffs. They put me on the ground. They put my legs in their Kalashnikov. They started to beat me on part of my legs...bottom of my feet...with a thick stick...my eyes were blindfolded. Two people held my legs. They caused a big shock. They used electricity also. Because my flesh couldn’t handle the stick, I confessed.”³³

London-based Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)³⁴ and Amnesty International³⁵ published several reports demonstrating that the PYD/YPG committed ethnic cleansing which then led to the displacement of thousands of people. In particular, Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) emphasises that at least 120 thousand people have been displaced in PYD/YPG dominated areas. In addition, civilian properties were demolished and confiscated by the PYD/YPG.³⁶ These human right violations are war crimes under international law.

SNHR also reports that in one case 42 women, nine of whom were adolescents, had died at the hands of the PYD, mostly because of "random shelling or through direct firing during raiding campaigns or sniping."³⁷ Furthermore, Amnesty International interviewed three individuals who said the PYD/YPG destroyed their homes or confiscated their property, forcibly displacing them because of their suspected familial affiliation with other non-state armed groups.

US' SUPPORT TO THE PYD/YPG

In September 2014, the US Congress approved the Obama administration's request to arm and train rebel groups in Syria fighting against Daesh.³⁸ According to this programme called "train and equip", consisting mostly of moderate opposition fighters, trained forces were to fight only against Daesh, not against the Assad regime.³⁹ This created a motivation problem among opposition groups and the programme failed to achieve its goals.

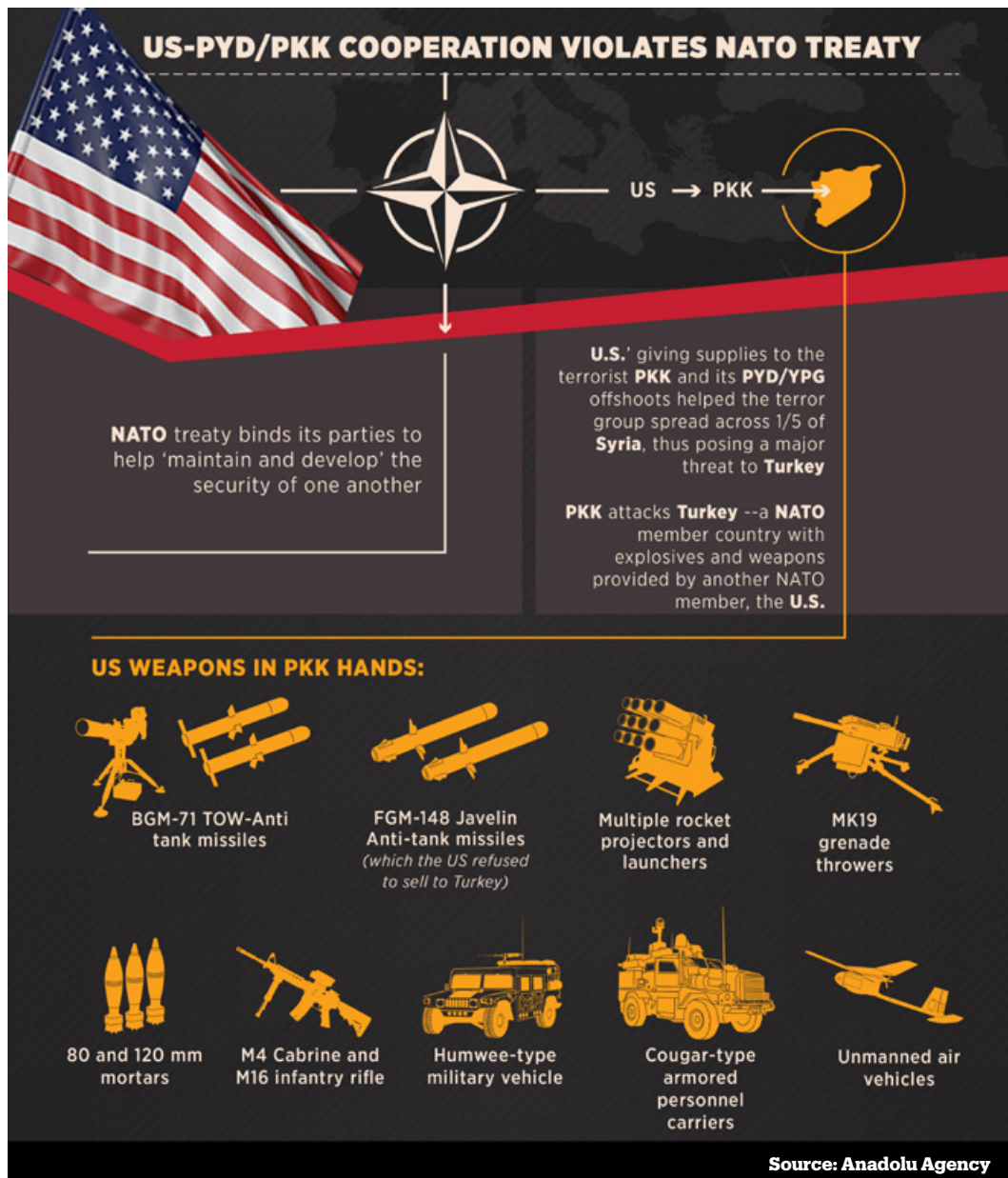
Following this, the US adopted a new policy in Syria, to support the PYD/YPG on the ground. The decision was officially announced during the battle for Ayn al-Arab in 2014 in which the US assisted the PYD/YPG forces fighting against Daesh with air strikes. Turkish authorities criticised this support saying that PYD/YPG is the equivalent of PKK.⁴⁰

Hereafter, the US turned a blind eye to the Assad regime's brutality and shifted its sole focus in Syria to defeat Daesh. The PYD/YPG's specific focus on their own ethnicity rather than the Syrian identity and their inaction against the Assad regime⁴¹ from the beginning of the war, caused intense criticism from the Syrian opposition. Therefore, the situation curtailed any support to PYD/YPG from the Syrian opposition.⁴²

Although the success in the battle for Ayn al-Arab against Daesh was achieved with the help of Turkey and KRG governments, the US has



Source: Anadolu Agency



chosen to attribute the success exclusively to PYD/YPG forces. In the first month of the battle for Ayn al-Arab,⁴³ the Obama administration defined the PYD/YPG forces as a "reliable partner" in the fight against Daesh. US's primary objective in supporting the PYD/YPG terror group appears to be its pursuit of having a proxy force on the ground in Syria to realise its own interests.

The PYD/YPG's fight against Daesh has led to the rapprochement between the terror

organisation and the US. Although the US considers the PKK and KONGRA-GEL as terrorist organisations,⁴⁴ it, however, refuses to formally acknowledge the PYD/YPG as their Syrian wing in order to use the terror group as its proxy in the region. The US denial of the link between the PYD/YPG and the PKK comes even at the expense of multiple testimonies offered by top officials at Washington, such as the former Secretary of Defence Ash Carter.⁴⁵

A media campaign was launched to legitimise PYD/YPG as a reliable partner in the fight against Daesh. Following the media coverage of the PYD/YPG as "secular", both the group and the US policy gained international support and legitimisation. Nevertheless, the US support was heavily criticised by experts in the region and policy makers who acknowledged the link between the PKK and the PYD/YPG.

In mid-2016, the SDF was established as a coalition of Kurdish, Sunni Arab and Syriac Christians. However, the SDF's ruling elite and main fighting forces composed of PYD/YPG elements. Former high-rank commander of the SDF, Talal Silo, said that the creation of SDF was a move to cover the US military support to the YPG.⁴⁶ Additionally in 2017, a statement from the US Army General Raymond Thomas revealed that the US was the mastermind behind rebranding the YPG to the SDF. General Raymond stated, "we literally played back to them: You have to change your brand. What do you want to call yourselves besides the YPG?" With about a day's notice they declared themselves as the SDF.⁴⁷

In May 2017, the US announced that it would directly⁴⁸ provide heavy weaponry to the PYD/YPG, including heavy machine guns and anti-tank weapons⁴⁹ in the assault on Raqqa - the self-claimed capital of Daesh in Syria. The US authorities claimed that the weapons provided to the PYD/YPG were only to be used against the Daesh militants in the Raqqa assault and would be called back in when Daesh was wiped off from the city. However, even after the capture of Raqqa from Daesh, the US continued arming and training the PYD/YPG militants.

Turkey accused the US of providing over 4 thousand truckloads of weapons to the PYD/YPG.⁵⁰ Turkish President Erdoğan

condemned this move during a speech at the TRT World Forum 2017 by warning the US that these weapons might be used against Turkey, which was the case when George W. Bush decided to send military aid to Kurdish forces in northern Iraq during the Iraq invasion of the US in 2003

The US has on many occasions, tacitly acknowledged the ties that exist between the PKK and PYD/YPG. An example of this appears on the CIA's website of enlisted terrorist organisations. Under terrorist organisations, the CIA enlists Salih Muslim as both the leader of the PYD and the leader of the PKK's Syrian branch.⁵¹ What is alarming, however, is that according to NATO sources, NATO declared the PYD as a terrorist organisation in a meeting in 2013 and the US ratified this decision,⁵² further supporting the notion that the US acknowledges the ties present between PYD/YPG and the PKK. The aim of the PYD and PKK in Syria is to seek some form of autonomy⁵³ that will indisputably create grave security challenges for Turkey. The aforementioned examples further support the notion that US foreign policy contradicts itself.

Finally, the US announced on January 15, 2018 that it would form a "border security force" under the command of PYD/YPG forces, consisting of up to 30 thousand people. This caused tremendous fury in Turkey. "The US is trying to form a terror army in our southern border," Erdoğan said. The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in a speech at Stanford University that the US "owes an explanation to Turkey for saying that it supports the creation of a border security force in northern Syria."⁵⁴

TURKEY'S MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN AFRIN

On January 20, 2018, Turkey declared the start of a military operation called Operation Olive Branch in Syria's Afrin region, which is bordering Turkey's southeast cities of Hatay and Kilis. According to the announcement, the operation would be conducted with the internationally recognised opposition group in Syria, the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

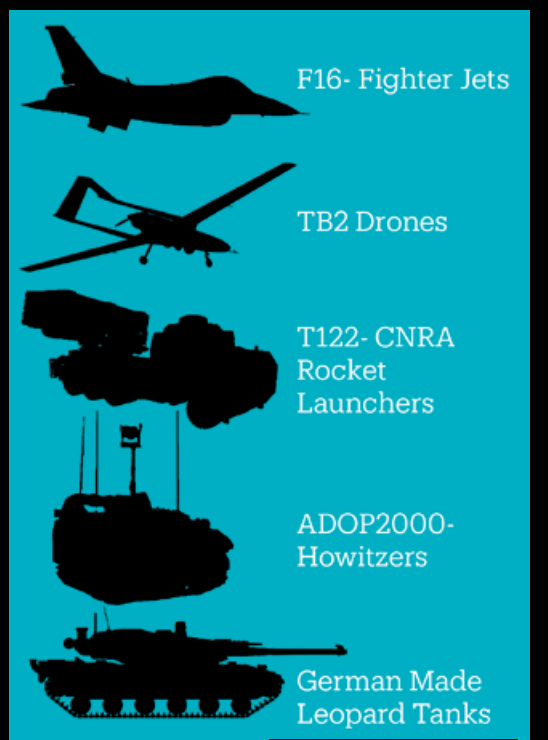
According to the Turkish officials, the aim of the Operation Olive Branch is to neutralise PKK/PYD-YPG and Daesh terrorists and to save the people of the region from oppression and persecution of terrorist groups. Moreover, the operation would target only terrorists and their shelters,

buildings, weapons and equipment. All kinds of attention and sensitivity would be shown to prevent damage to the environment and civilians. The statement further maintained that the operation was based on Turkey's inherent right to self-defence under international law, stemming from Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Turkey also announced that the operation would be carried out with respect to the territorial integrity of Syria. In this regard, Turkey's military involvement in Afrin was grounded upon its security and humanitarian concerns.

The Military Hardware Used by Turkish Army

According to official statements, the Turkish Armed Forces uses domestically produced weapons, missiles and military vehicles, which account for 70% of the military equipment being used in Operation Olive Branch. Due to Turkey's reliance on the foreign defence industry, it has long suffered consequences and is now looking to develop its own weapon stockpile and thus enhance its own defence system.



Source: TRT WORLD



Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ
January 20, 2018

"We do not hide our intention. We say the same thing to US officials and officials of other countries: as long as the PKK, YPG, and Daesh remain present here [in Manbij and east of Euphrates], the threat to Turkey continues."



Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu
January 18, 2018

"Turkey is subject to attacks every day from Afrin. It is our right to defend ourselves in line with international law and to take measure against a terror group surrounding us on three sides, violating our rights, hence we should intercede."

Turkey's Defence Minister Nurettin Canikli

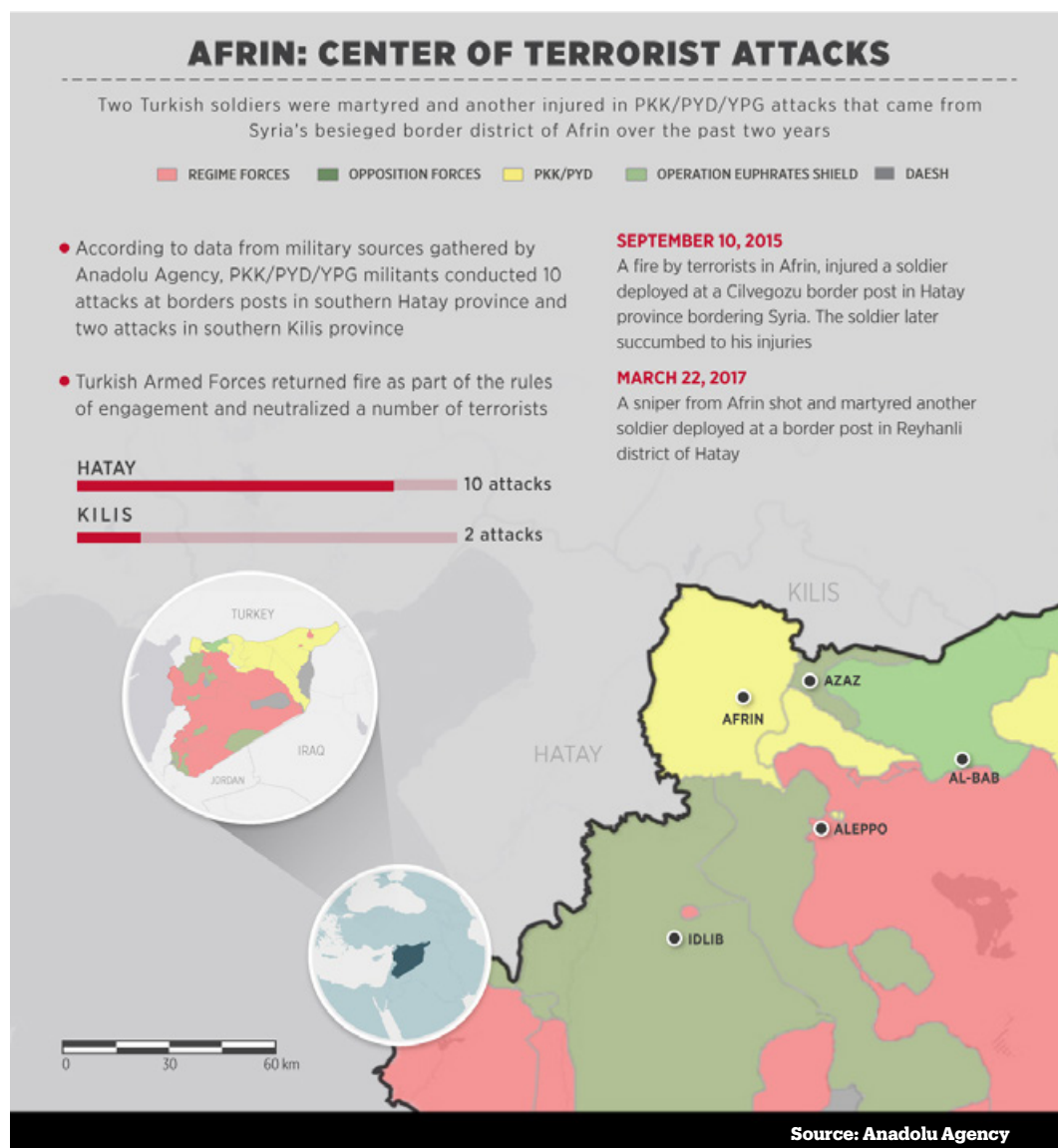
January 19, 2018

"It will happen. All terrorist lines in northern Syria will be eradicated. There is no other way."

The Importance of Afrin

The city of Afrin is located in the north-western part of Syria, bordering Turkey's southern cities of Hatay and Kilis. The city is about 1850 km square in total and is located in a high mountainous region. It holds a significant geopolitical importance due to its close proximity to the Mediterranean Sea. As such, the PYD/YPG depends on Afrin to connect to the Mediterranean Sea from north-western Syria. It is the westernmost region of the stripe of land held by the PKK, which Turkey calls the 'terror corridor.'

The 2004 population census estimated that the city's population was about 172 thousand. It was traditionally composed of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens with a tiny minority of Yazidis. Kurds comprise the majority of the population, while Arabs are the second largest ethnic group in the city. After the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, the city's population grew steadily since the Assad Regime did not target it. Current estimations indicate that the city's population is around 300 thousand with internally displaced people.



Afrin became one of the most nested regions of the PYD/YPG during the Syrian civil war after the Assad regime left the city in July 2012 without putting up a fight. The PKK's presence in Afrin has constituted a problem to Turkey mainly because the cities of Kilis and Hatay are within firing range from Afrin. Once the city was captured by the PKK, the group utilised it as a source of new recruits and as a way to infiltrate weapons and militants into Turkey. It was revealed that the assailant of a car bomb that exploded in a police centre in Turkey's city of Gaziantep on May 1, 2016, originated from Afrin. Moreover, the terrorists passed through the Amanos Mountains organised four terrorist attacks in Antalya, one of the most famous touristic cities of Turkey.

Turkey has been battling the separatist movements on its borders for decades. Moreover, Afrin's strategic location is of vital importance for this struggle.⁵⁵ Afrin has been used as a transit route for PKK terrorist to infiltrate into Turkey since the 1990s. The region has also been used for the recruitment and training of the militants in addition to providing logistical support for terror attacks in Turkey. There are more than a dozen PKK camps serving these purposes in the region.

Turkey's sensitivity towards the existential threat that is prevalent along its borders requires the Turkish government to act accordingly. On this notion, this may oblige Turkey to choose between the use of hard and soft power as to secure the 120-kilometre border that extends from Reyhanlı to Kilis.

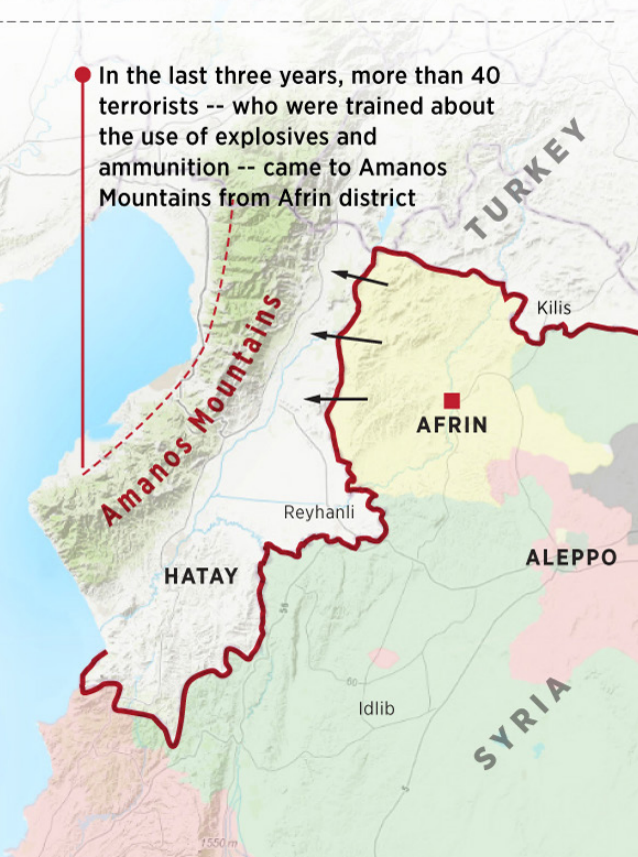
PKK/PYD MEETS NEEDS OF TERRORISTS THROUGH AFRIN

PKK/PYD terrorist organization, which is located at Amanos mountain range in Hatay province of south-central Turkey, meets the needs of their operatives through Afrin

Amanos Mountains -- which is also known as Nur Mountains -- has emerged as a hideout for PKK/PYD, where the terrorist organization plots attacks

- A terrorist named Resit Kodaks, -- who was sentenced to 29 years in jail after being caught by citizens with one M-16 gun and two hand grenades -- confessed that he joined PKK/PYD in Afrin district
- 24-year-old woman Y.B., who was 4-month pregnant at the time of arrest in 2012, said she had been affiliated with the organization for the past 9 years.
"I was recruited without my will. They told me that I was in wanted list of terrorists, so I hid for a while in Iran and Iraq," she said.

● In the last three years, more than 40 terrorists -- who were trained about the use of explosives and ammunition -- came to Amanos Mountains from Afrin district



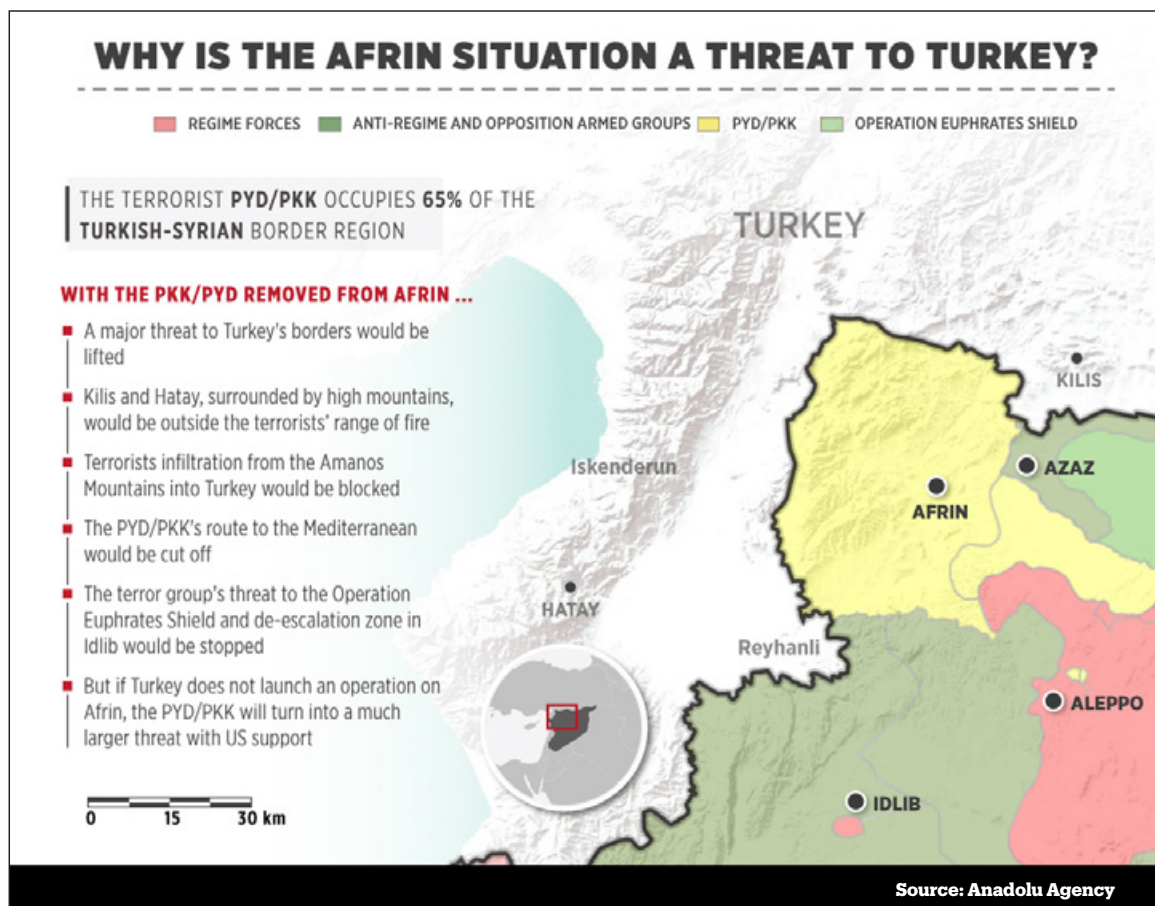
Source: Anadolu Agency

Turkey's Security Concerns

Turkey's strategic purpose in northern Syria is based on eliminating all terrorist elements and preventing the formation of a terror corridor along its borders with Syria. In line with this strategy, Turkey launched the Operation Euphrates Shield on August 2016 and began establishing observation posts around Idlib region in October 2017 as part of the agreement reached by Turkey, Russia and Iran to establish "de-escalation zones" to cease the conflict in Syria. Finally, Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch to eliminate the direct PKK threat at its southern border.

Turkey views any attempt that strengthens the PKK's existence in the region as a security threat to its homeland and

people. Thus, the US support to the YPG compromises the security of Turkey, in that the weapons and US-trained militants are used to attack Turkey. This claim was further backed as Turkey discovered US weapons in the hands of neutralised PKK terrorists. The US announcement to establish border security forces out of YPG militants on Turkey's border with Syria have increased Turkey's security concerns. First, this move, from Turkey's perspective, would grant international legitimacy to this terrorist group. Second, the establishment of a "regular army" would advance the operational capacity of the PYD/YPG terrorists, leaving Turkey susceptible to terrorist attacks organised and logistically supported from a region across its borders.





Source: Emin Sansar / Anadolu Agency

Operation Euphrates Shield

Operation Euphrates Shield was carried out after several PKK and Daesh attacks targeted civilians in Turkish cities. Whilst Daesh threatened to attack Turkey, the PYD were claiming regions in northern Syria. Due to the threats directed and carried out by the PKK and Daesh, Turkey took steps to clear its southern border with Syria from terrorist organisations to prevent further attacks, which may target Turkish security forces and civilians.

As per the case of Operation Olive Branch, Operation Euphrates Shield was not an incursion on Syrian territory rather an effort to resettle the local Arab and Turkmen populations who had been forcibly removed from their hometowns, by the PYD. The operation also aimed to create a de-facto safe zone to halt the mass relocation of refugees. The Operation removed Daesh from the border town of Jarabulus on the Euphrates River, and roughly secured a 100-kilometer stretch of the border. It was followed by the liberation of the Daesh stronghold of al-Bab, located 30 kilometres south of the Turkish border on February 23, 2017. Operation Euphrates Shield came to an end on March 29, 2017.



Source: Fatih Aktaş / Anadolu Agency

The cleansing of al-Bab from Daesh led the path to the defeat of Daesh in al-Raqqa. Additionally, al-Bab had a greater significance for the PKK and its Syrian offshoot the YPG than it did for Daesh. If the PKK and YPG had taken al-Bab, it would have meant the establishment of a YPG/PKK-controlled corridor running across northern Syria. Control of al-Bab, paved the way for subsequent operations

against Daesh in Raqqa and Manbij, as well as eliminating the chance of an YPG corridor being established in Turkey's southern border.

Turkey instigated the rebuilding of al-Bab upon the successful completion of the operation. One of the first steps in rebuilding al-Bab was the construction of a hospital.⁵⁶ The rebuilding of schools followed and by autumn 2017, primary education had recommenced.⁵⁷ In April of 2017, Turkey pledged to build a satellite city in al-Bab capable of hosting 80 thousand people.⁵⁸ Efforts on Turkey's part to rebuild civilian life is becoming successful. According to the statistics of the Ministry of the Interior, around 100 thousand Syrians have returned to their homes after Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army secured the city.

Operation Olive Branch does not target any specific ethnic, religious or ideological group. Turkey is against any group that threatens the stability of the region and Turkey's own security. In this sense, Turkey is an important and active member of the international coalition against Daesh and is determined to wipe out Daesh and PYD/YPG terrorists from the northern Syrian cities of al-Bab and Jarabulus as part of its campaign in Euphrates Shield Operation. Considering these facts, Turkey has proved on many occasions that its northern Syria policy is not directed against any ethnic

or religious group. In September 2014, Turkey welcomed more than 70 thousand people in three days who escaped from the assaults of Daesh in Ayn al-Arab. This was one of the largest refugee influxes within a short period. The overall number of people who fled from Daesh to Turkey during Daesh's assault on Ayn al-Arab has reached a staggering 130 thousand. During the Ayn al-Arab war in 2015, Turkey allowed the Iraqi Peshmerga forces to pass through its territory into Syria to help fight against Daesh in Ayn al-Arab.

Turkey's Humanitarian Concerns

Turkey's humanitarian concerns overlap with its security concerns. The PYD/YPG militants have forced people in the area to leave their homes and established an oppressive administration in the region. Many people have become either refugees or internally displaced people due to the policies designed to change the demographics of the area in favour of PYD/YPG's benefit. In this regard, Turkey aims to provide an environment where people of the region can return to their homes. Moreover, Turkey has gained significant experience as a result of the operations that liberated Jarabulus, Azaz and al-Bab from terrorists.

Throughout Turkey's military operation in Afrin, alarming reports surfaced regarding human rights violations committed by PYD/YPG militants. In response to these violations, spokeswoman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rafina Shamdani expressed her concern regarding civilian casualties in the Afrin region. She stated that hundreds of thousands of civilians were at risk as

they had received reports of the militants in Afrin preventing civilians from leaving.⁵⁹ The UN spokeswoman also went on to state that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was deeply concerned as there was a high risk of civilian deaths, injuries and blockades in Afrin. This was because according to latest UN reports, the YPG was using the civilians as human shields.

Furthermore, the YPG's use of 'human shields' was no doubt to quell Turkish advancements in Afrin and perhaps tarnish Turkey's reputation in the international arena. Presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalın further backed this claim as he stated in a guest column written for CNN international that "the use of human shields to stop Turkey's lawful steps in the region should ring alarm bells in the White House."⁶⁰ The use of civilians as human shields is atrocious and a violation of international human rights. Accordingly, the use of human shields in Afrin further elucidates Turkey's humanitarian concerns.



Source: Sarp Özer / Anadolu Agency

WHAT IS NEXT?

Following the clearance of Afrin city centre from YPG control, there are expectations to extend the offensive further east, however this could require negotiations with relevant international actors.⁶¹ On the other hand, Manbij appears to be a more probable future direction due to PYD/YPG's consolidation of its presence in the eastern side of the Euphrates. Diplomatic negotiations with the United States might change the course of that option as the presence of American soldiers, as well as arms supply by the US, contribute to the YPG consolidation in Manbij. As such, Turkey is expected to direct its geopolitical attention and military efforts toward YPG presence in Manbij.

Following the defeat of the YPG in Afrin, it is assumed that the terror organisation will come up with new plans in the case of a Turkish military operation in Manbij. According to experts,⁶² the YPG might employ a hit-and-run tactic towards Turkish Armed Forces and Free Syrian Army personnel, as well as the civilians in the liberated areas. Another possibility is to open a direct front against Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army on the border between the liberated areas and Manbij whilst carrying out simultaneous

attacks from the outside.⁶³ A cooperation between the Syrian regime and YPG against Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army is also an expected possibility, as such moves took place earlier on in the operation.⁶⁴ The YPG may resort to that option and establish a more solid line against the operation forces in the adjacent areas. Another assumed possibility, in line with the US strategy, is deploying the remaining YPG elements in the eastside of the Euphrates. As such, attacks against the Turkish Armed Forces in the border areas of Turkey by PKK and PYD/YPG may well be a strong possibility in the near future. A final possibility might be the shift of the remaining PKK and PYD/YPG elements to northern Iraq, following the statements for joint operations against PKK by both Turkey and northern Iraq.

Considering the threat posed by the PKK and PYD/YPG against Turkey, it appears clear that Turkish operations against terrorism will not remain limited to Afrin. This has been reinforced by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who announced that similar operations are likely to take place in the near future in Iraq and in Manbij.⁶⁵

Restoring Order, Reviving Civil Life

Since Turkey's establishment of control in Afrin's city centre and adjacent areas, Turkish efforts have focused on the restoration of vital infrastructure and revival of the civil life. Both in the city centre and in the country side, Turkish Red Crescent and other humanitarian aid organisations have sent and distributed a considerable amount of health care and nutritive materials to those most in need.⁶⁶ According to the report published by Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), "309,605 civilians have benefited from humanitarian aid that has been distributed by Turkish humanitarian agencies, including 30,881 food packages, each enough to sustain a family for a month, 155,200 hot meals, 4682 kg of vegetables and 27,233 bottles of water in Afrin" between January 29 and April 5.⁶⁷ Similar to the cases of Al-Bab and Jarabulus, 200 thousand people who fled Afrin are expected to return to the city following its liberation and after Turkish humanitarian organisations and civil authorities restore the civic, health and the security infrastructure.⁶⁸

In addition to humanitarian efforts, Turkey is leading the way to the provision of a civil administration in Afrin. One of the beginning steps of this was the Afrin Liberation Congress, which convened in Gaziantep on March 18, 2018 with the attendance of Arab, Kurdish, Alawite and Yezidi notables from Afrin who had previously fled their city due to YPG's oppression and returned following its liberation. In the meeting, a local council was selected comprised of 30 members, as well as a final declaration regarding the administration of the city being issued which contained 17 articles regarding the provision of security in Afrin and its villages. This step set precedent for rebuilding

the city of Afrin, by nurturing a tolerant atmosphere for the coexistence of different groups. This includes the disarmament of the local population, the transfer of local authority to a democratically elected and representative council, as well as ensuring the provision of humanitarian needs and easing of the border crossings between Turkey and Afrin for those moving in and out.⁶⁹

The position that Afrin is in today, combined with Turkey's post operation efforts, indicates that Turkey has finally achieved its long-awaited aim. That being the clearing of terrorist groups from Afrin and the provision of humanitarian aid provided to the people of Afrin. Furthermore, Turkey aims to restore order, revive the civil life and promote the establishment of a democratically elected local council.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624 (2005); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2170 (2014).
2. Al Jazeera Turk, "Kronoloji: Suriye'de isyandan iç savaşa", Dec 27, 2013.
3. BBC, "Syria conflict: Kurds declare federal system", Mar 17, 2016.
4. Eric Solomon, "Special Report: Amid Syria's violence, Kurds carve out autonomy", Reuters, Jan 22, 2014.
5. Stephanie Condon, "Obama signs bill to arm and train Syrian rebels", CBS News, Sep 19, 2014.
6. Press Release of Ministry of Interior Affairs of Republic of Turkey on March 15, 2016.
7. Reuters, "Bomber in Istanbul attack came from Syria: Turkish foreign minister", 14 December 2016
8. Hurriyet, "Sınırdan sniper saldırısı", Mar 23, 2017.
9. Anadolu Agency, "3,820 Terrorists 'Neutralized' in Afrin Operation", Mar 31, 2018.
10. Anadolu Agency, "Turkish army defuses 650 IEDs, 80 landmines in Afrin", Mar 31, 2018.
11. Anadolu Agency, "Syrian interim govt aids Turkish army in securing Afrin", Apr 03, 2018.
12. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns", Princeton University Press, 2011.
13. Aliza Marcus, "Turkey's PKK: Rise, Fall, Rise Again?", World Policy Journal 24, no. 1, 2007: 75-84.
14. Al Jazeera Turk, "Kurdish Groups Claims 'Revenge Murder' on Turkish Police", Jul 22, 2015.
15. Republic of Turkey Police Headquarters, "PKK Financial Resources".
16. Michael Freeman, "The Sources of Terrorist Financing: Theory and Typology", Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 34, no. 6, 2011: 461-75.
17. Republic of Turkey Police Headquarters, "PKK Financial Resources".
18. Al Jazeera Turk, "PKK nasıl kuruldu ve güçlendi?", Dec 26, 2013.
19. Serxwebun, "Kürt Halkı Demokratik Konfederalizm Bayrağı Altında Özgür ve Demokratik Yaşamını Kuracaktır", Mar 2006.
20. Andrew Self and Jared Ferris, "Dead Men Tell No Lies: Using Killed-in- Action (KIA) Data to Expose the PKK's Regional Shell Game", Defence Against Terrorism Review, Vol. 8, 2016.
21. CNN "Ankara bombing: Female suicide bomber spent time in Syria", Mar 15, 2016.
22. Daily Sabah, "US provides YPG terrorists air defense systems in secret deal: report", 16 Jan, 2018..
23. Murat Sofuoğlu, "How YPG manipulated the US to crush Kurdish opposition leaders", TRT World, Mar 26, 2018.
24. Quentin Sommerville and Riam Dalati, "Raqqa's Dirty Secret Deal", BBC, Nov 13, 2017.
25. Haaretz, "U.S. Now Engaged in Tactics of 'Annihilation' Against ISIS, Mattis Says", May 28, 2017.
26. Ahval, "400 ISIS fighters join Kurdish ranks in Afrin – Turkish state agency", Feb 1, 2018.
27. Diana Darke, "How historical Afrin became a prize worth a war", BBC, Jan 2018.
28. Human Rights Watch, "Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria", Jun 2014.
29. Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Events of 2016", Nov 2016.
30. Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Kurdish Forces Violating Child Soldier Ban", Jul 15, 2015.
31. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
32. Human Rights Watch, "Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria", Jun 2014.
33. Ibid.
34. Syrian Network for Human Rights, "4,000 Residents from al Salhabiya al Sharqiya Village in Western Suburbs of Raqqa have been Forcibly Displaced. Syrian Democratic Forces Bar Residents from Going Back Home", Jul 7, 2017.
35. Amnesty International, "Syria: 'We had nowhere to Go' – Forced Displacement and Demolitions in Northern Syria", Oct 13, 2015.
36. Ibid.
37. Anadolu Agency, "PYD violating human rights in Syria: Watchdog", Jan 18, 2016.
38. NBC News, "Obama Praises Congress for ISIS Vote", Sep 18, 2014.
39. Paul McLeary, "The Pentagon Wasted \$500 Million Training Syrian Rebels. It's About to Try Again", Foreign Policy, Mar 18, 2016.
40. BBC Türkçe, "Kobani'ye havadan silah yardımı", Oct 20, 2014.

41. Soner Cagaptay and Andrew J. Tabler, "The U.S.-PYD-Turkey Puzzle", The Washington Institute, Oct 23, 2015.
42. Michael Stephens and Aaron Stein, "The YPG: America's new best friend?", Al Jazeera, Jan 28, 2015.
43. Brett LoGiurato and Michael B Kelley, "The ISIS Siege Of Kobani Exposes A Critical Flaw In Obama's Syria Plan", Business Insider, Oct 8, 2014.
44. U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations List".
45. Hurriyet Daily News, "US defense chief admits links among PYD, YPG, PKK", May 22, 2017.
46. Anadolu Agency, "INTERVIEW - Ex-SDF man tells of US support for PKK/PYD", Dec 3, 2017.
47. Reuters, "U.S general told Syria's YPG: 'You have got to change your brand'", Jul 22, 2017.
48. The Guardian, "US to arm Kurdish fighters against Isis in Raqqa, despite Turkish opposition", May 9, 2017.
49. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Begins Arming Syrian Kurds for Final Assault on Raqqa", The New York Times, May 31, 2017.
50. Hurriyet Daily News, "US contacts Turkey on Syria peace, YPG", Nov 24, 2017.
51. Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook", Jan 2018.
52. Anadolu Agency, "Western countries admit links between PYD/YPG/PKK/KCK", Feb 2018.
53. Coats, D, R, Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2018.
54. Matthew Pennington, "Amid Spat With Turkey, Tillerson Denies Syria Border Force", USNEWS, 17 Jan, 2018.
55. Bora Bayraktar, "The missing piece of the puzzle: Afrin", Daily Sabah, Jul 2017.
56. A News, "New Turkish hospital in Al-Bab", Jan 12, 2018.
57. Daily Sabah and Anadolu Agency, "Syrian children's dream of education comes true with Turkish initiatives", Apr 10, 2017.
58. Gazete Vatan, "Türkiye'den El Bab'a 80 bin kişilik uydu kent", Apr 23, 2017.
59. Hurriyet Daily News, "Civilians used as 'human shields' by YPG in Afrin, says UN", Mar 16, 2018.
60. Anadolu Agency, "So called US ally PYD/PKK using human shields", Feb 2, 2018.
61. Necdet Özçelik and Can Acun, "Terörle Mücadelede Yeni Safha: Zeytin Dalı Harekati", SETA, Apr 2, 2018.
62. Ibid.
63. Al Jazeera, "Kurdish fighters vow to fight Turkey army after Afrin withdrawal", 19 Mar, 2018.
64. Reuters, "Friend or foe? Assad quietly aids Syrian Kurds against Turkey", Feb 11, 2018.
65. Sabah, "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Münbiç'e Geliyoruz", Feb 6, 2018.
66. Anadolu Agency, "Turkish Red Crescent to send humanitarian aid to Afrin", Mar 21, 2018.
67. AFAD, "Turkey's Humanitarian Aid in Afrin - Report No: 2", 5 Apr, 2018.
68. Al Jazeera, "Refugee returns expected after Afrin operation: Turkey", Feb 22, 2018.
69. Anadolu Agency, "Afrin Kurtuluş Kongresi' Gaziantep'te toplandı", Mar 18, 2018.

