

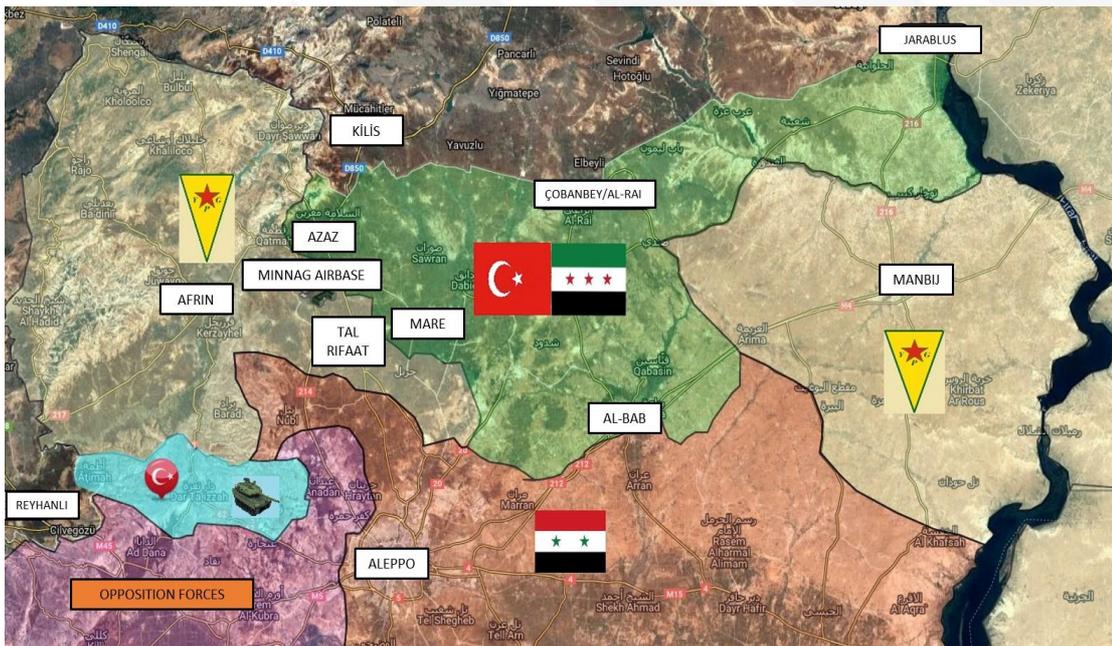
Possible Business – Wise Repercussions of Turkish Army intervention into Afrin Region in Northern Syria.

Key Takeaway:

Among the three fundamentals of strategy, namely; “time”, “space” and “power”, the factor of “time” seems to be the primary determinant for the success of the operation. A precisely planned sequence of the operations, properly aligned with the diplomatic engagements, is a necessity for overcoming the long-term security concerns of Turkey including the internal clashes with PKK. Corporations which are potential to conduct business operations in Turkey should definitely keep in mind that this duration until mid-2019 will constitute the culminating period regarding the overall security environment in Turkey. As such, due attention should be paid for the continuity of planned and ongoing business operations in a secure manner as to be minimally effected by the collateral damages and possible direct, indirect adversities.

1. Introduction:

Afrin is a neighboring border town to Turkey which is 28.3 km away from the Öncüpınar border gate and 84.5 km away from Idlib. The dominant ethnicity of Afrin is Kurdish (%74). There are also Arabs (25%) and others (1%). The population of Afrin is 48,693 as of 2016 data. Sunni Muslims constitutes a vast majority (89%) in town. There are also Christians (6%) and Alawites (4%).



The town is held by YPG (People’s Defensive Units) which is the armed branch of Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party). PYD is the central part of the coalition of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which was established by the USA as an umbrella organization of opposition fractions including the Arabs as well. In short, PYD is a political Kurdish party and YPG is its armed extension. Turkey, regarding YPG/PYD as an affiliate of PKK terrorist organization, envisages the possibility of the establishment of a Kurdish State along its southern border in Northern Syria and therefore perceives YPG/PYD influence as a direct threat to its national security. In the light of solid evidences, for Turkish policy makers, it is clear that YPG/PYD is an organization

founded and governed by the PKK. Thus, the possibility of a Turkish intervention against the YPG/PYD dominance has been in Turkish Government's security agenda since 2015. However, the urban resistance movements internally organized and conducted by PKK in many districts of South Eastern Turkey in 2015-2016 have seemingly been a factor distracting the focus of Turkish security apparatus from the YPG's spread of influence throughout Northern Syria. Similarly, the failed Military Coup attempt of 15 July 2016, might have been another factor to deny Turkish policy-makers from engagement with YPG establishments with armed instruments. Exceptionally, Turkey conducted Operation Euphrates Shield between 24 August 2016 and 30 March 2017 seemingly against the ISIS threat along its borders. This operation partially impaired the stretch of YPG dominance between Jarablus and Azez.

In the meantime, the USA has visibly increased its support to YPG, equipping and training it with sophisticated heavy arms. Turkish Presidency and the Government had frequently been warning the USA as to cease its support towards YPG and rather to prefer Turkey as the main ally against the fight against ISIS in the region. In return, the USA recently declared that it was to initiate a new process to establish a "Border Security Formation" within YPG. This was directly meant by Turkey, as the warning bells of the potential threat pragmatically emerging in its imminent proximity. Finally, Turkish President openly voiced in a public meeting on 12 January 2015 that Turkey would conduct an intervention against YPG "Terrorist Organization" to disable it eternally.

In conclusion; the possibility of a "direct armed conflict" between Syrian Kurdish Forces and Turkish Armed Forces has long been being monitored by the security professionals as a possible "defining moment" regarding its potential effects for the overall security environment in Turkey.

2. Primary Considerations:

Turkey should calculate the political repercussions of this military campaign (which it might easily manage and accomplish in military perspective actually). Because Afrin, although having a limited geographical space, is representing more extensive complexities in which balances among diversified power groups are concentrated. Therefore Turkey should calculate the least risky scenario option at the very end of this picture.

Although the prominent threat factor seems to be PKK (PYD/YPG), the Syrian regime, potentially to be supported by Russian and Iran, will most likely be appearing in the borderline as a power determinant for Turkey as well in the mid and long-term. Afrin Operation is undoubtedly within the capability and expertise of Turkish military. Thus Turkey has already been maintaining control over the similar size of geography in Syria for at least one year. Moreover, this naturally provided Turkey with a capability to arrange logistics and military deployments and to cope with the complexities of the battlefield environment. However, the existence of the civilians and delicacy paid by the Turkish army in order to minimize the civilian losses will be affected to decrease the operational tempo. Finally, Turkey should consider the possible forthcoming appearances of the Syrian regime as a military force component beyond YPG itself in the battlefield.



3. Possible Course of Actions of Turkey:

Turkey's decision making process regarding the "time and space factors" of such an operation, has surely not been a simple one considering the parameters of;

- Internal political conditions through the serious transitional process to the Presidential System in Turkey,
- Potential internal objections from Turkey's Kurdish population,
- Possible undesired interactions of the operation with internal conflict conditions with PKK,
- Potential strength recently attained by YPG (heavily armed and asymmetrically supported by the US – potentially in the area of air defense and anti-tank weapons),
- Extreme length of the clash front,
- Complexity of the battlefield environment,
- Possible international dimensions regarding Turkey's NATO membership, EU perspectives (as well as the "theoretical" strategic alliance with the USA)
- Possible future involvement of the Syrian regime forces into the matter,
- Russia's approach/support/tolerance,
- The problematic of air superiority and control of the Syrian airspace,
- Reorganization/rehabilitation of the Turkish security sector.

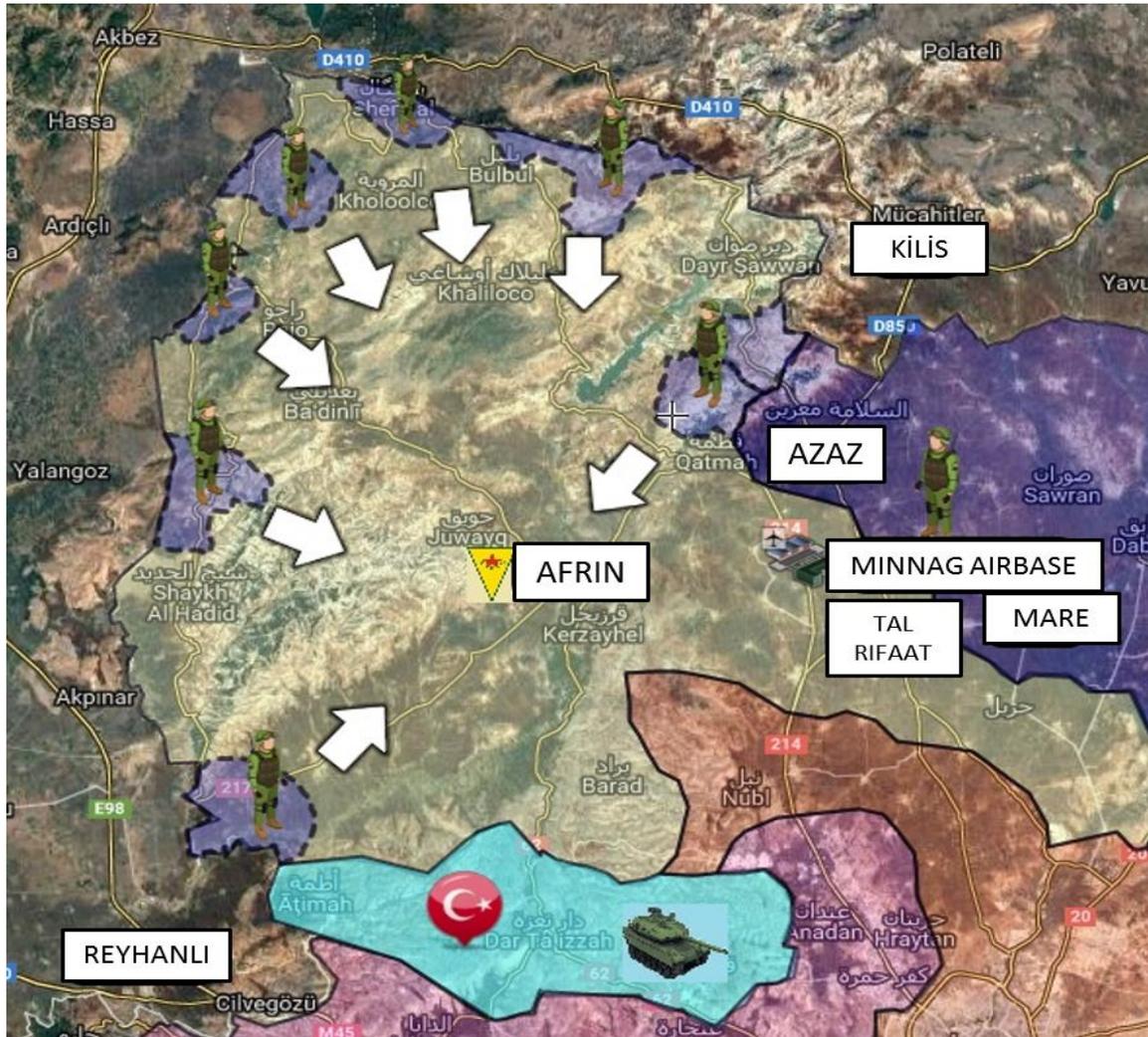
These parameters will probably continue to be the primary determinants of the duration and intensity of a possible Afrin operation of Turkish Armed Forces. The fashion of the conflict will inevitably affect the overall business continuity considerations of the corporations investing and operating in Turkey.

4. Possible Operational Phases:

This operation may be expected to include four distinct phases:

- Intensive air force and artillery bombardment against the YPG strongholds in Afrin (already completed),
- Expansion of the land operations inside the depth of Afrin terrain by Turkish Armed forces supported by FSA (ongoing as of reporting time),
- Establishment of the secure evacuation routes for the civilians,
- Possible intensive urban warfare in and around Afrin city center.





5. Syrian Regime, Russia, and Iran:

As to the knowledge of followers of the Syrian crisis, it is a phenomenon that YPG had adopted Syrian regime flag and concurred with it to decelerate FSA's advance into Tal Rifaat in 2016. In connection with that past experience a possible similar collaboration between YPG and Regime can still be regarded in the scope of further political and military developments because YPG is apparently out of military capacity to stop Turkish military forces. YPG, considering the prominent agreement item of Astana negotiations which refers to the prevention of military hostilities between Turkish and Syrian regime forces in the field, may choose to exploit this political argument as a security umbrella for itself and, thus, may invite Syrian regime to Afrin in the scope of power-sharing against Turkey. A similar scenario may also be considered in the scope of the possible movement of regime forces from south to north direction and demonstrate a show of force in the backyard of the Turkish forces situated in Idlib. Furthermore, Syria may also choose to establish control over Bab-el Havva and Bab-el Selam border gates across Reyhanlı district and thus may proliferate the military front against Turkey in Reyhanlı front in addition to the one existing in Yayladağı. Taking all these developments into account within one scenario spectrum, a possibility of hybrid management and power balance between YPG and Syrian regime may be considered against Turkey. Finally, we can deduce that Turkey will be able to discourage PKK with this operation. However, the steps to be taken by Syrian regime should be calculated at all times.

Considering the long term benefits of Iran and Russia in connection with those of Syrian regime, it may be asserted that these two, which have been providing silent support to Turkey so far, may demonstrate a different approach towards Turkish military activities. The possible future dominance of Sunni Muslim factions within the FSA will always be a matter of concern for Iran as it is for the Syrian Regime also. As such, they may carry the issue to the international fora easily and put pressure on Turkey to limit its operations and choose to establish a new strategic condition across Turkey and Syria border. In conclusion, Turkish policy-makers should rather consider the possibility that in case of a political junction for Iran and Russia, they both may prefer cooperation with YPG as to establish a political dialogue between the Syrian regime and YPG. In parallel, it should also be considered as an evidence of the situation above that Syrian regime had left Afrin territory to YPG against the benefits of Turkey before Operation Olive Branch started.

6. Free Syrian Army - FSA

Despite the fractional divergences and loose hierarchical structure within itself, FSA can still be expected to provide vast support to Turkey. There are some pragmatic and emotional reasons for such a policy choice for FSA:

- FSA clans, mostly Arabic, may wish to regain Tal Rifaat and Minnag areas, which are demographically Arabic, from YPG,
- Dependence of FSA to Turkey's support in military and political terms,
- Possible aspirations of some FSA groups which are acting in line with Arab nationalist motivation rather than that of religious one to oppose Kurdish expansionism (This aspiration is thought to have spread as a result of well-known inhumane practices of YPG forces invading some Arabic biased areas in the regime-controlled regions.).



7. International Society and “Human Rights” Problematics:

Taking into account the considerable number of civilian inhabitants (almost one million) in Afrin geography, it may be asserted that the “problematic of displaced persons and refugees” might constitute the fundamental argument that international society and media will promote against Turkey. As such it is anticipated according to the worst case scenario that almost half of this population will potentially displace to other locations from Afrin, which had so far been one of the rare cities having been inflicted upon the adversities of internal war. The refugee influx is expected to develop towards southern cities like Aleppo, which is under regime control, rather than to north towards Turkey. Moreover, this influx may potentially constitute the best piece of propaganda for YPG and Syrian regime against Turkish operations in the international fora.

8. USA:

It has been observed since the beginning of the Operation Olive Branch that the US had reacted against it with an indirect and concerned manner. This is mostly related to the lesser degree of affiliation of US policies towards Afrin region. However, considering the future expansion of



10. Recommendations:

DRK considers that there is no immediate requirement for additional security precautions for the companies operating in Turkey. However, the developments should be carefully monitored by the managerial levels, as to define the required steps to acquire and enhance business continuity. DRK also regards that the respected companies may rather;

- Revise, revisit and update the incident response structures, procedures, and mechanisms including; hibernation, evacuation and relocation plans.
- Revise, revisit and update the Business Continuity measures, procedures and training levels.
- Increase and intensify the situational awareness efforts.
- Conduct concise and conclusive situational updates in the managerial levels.
- Apply for expert support and advice regarding the detailed logistics and transportation/travel arrangements.

