

# TURKISH OLIVE BRANCH OPERATION'S EFFECT ON SYRIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY STABILITY IN 2018

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## Abstract

On January 20, 2018, Turkey officially announced the launch of a military operation called Olive Branch Operation in the town of Afrin, northwestern Syria, within two months to sweep Afrin from Partiya Yekitiya Democrat (PYD) and Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG) forces. However, the operation has affected Syria's national security stability based on the direct territorial line between the two sovereignties. This paper explains how the Olive Branch Operation influenced Syria's national security stability throughout 2018 using the concept of national security by Barry Buzan. The qualitative research method, analytical descriptive writing techniques, was used in this paper. This research concluded that the Turkish Olive Branch Operation hurt the stability of Syria's national security in 2018. It is based on several military, political, economic, social, and environmental indicators that occurred from this military operation toward the stability of Syria's national security.

**Keywords:** National Security, Olive Branch Operation, Partiya Yekitiya Democrat (PYD), Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG), Turkey, Syria

## Introduction

Turkey is known as a transcontinental country because it borders the Black Sea to the north, Bulgaria to the northwest, Greece and the Aegean Sea to the west, Georgia to the northeast, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran to the east, Iraq and Syria to the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south (Editorial Turki, 2017). The Kurds are one of the tribes that inhabit several countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and parts of Syria (Sahide, 2014). Although the Kurds live in more than one country, the Kurdish population in Turkey is the largest population, with 30 million populations. Most Kurds occupy eastern and south-eastern Turkey, bordered by Syria, Iraq and Iran.

1923 Mustafa Kemal Pasha formed the Republic of Turkey and carried out many reforms in the social, legal and political fields. Since that year, the Lausanne agreement divided the Ottoman Kurds into Turkey, Iraq and Syria, and because of that, because Kurdistan was an Emergency State in Southeast Turkey, Kurdish ethnic people formed indeed inhabit formed. The Kurds have carried out large-scale rebellions three times, which were held in 1925, 1930 and 1937. The regime's power has always suppressed the November 27, 1978 rebellion. Abdullah Ocalan founded a Kurdish separatist group called PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) to fight for constitutional recognition for the Kurdish community and the legalization of local autonomy (Lenczowski, 1962).

Kurds ethnicity in Northern Syria emerged as one of the leading actors in the period of the Syrian conflict (Partiya Yekitiya Democrat (PYD) and Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG)). The PYD-YPG took advantage of the chaos in Syria to declare its territorial autonomy. Turkey overtly designates the PYD as a PKK splinter in Syria and considers Kurdish involvement in political-military activities in Northern Syria as a threat to Turkish national security and the Syrian revolution (Acun & Keskin, 2016). The presence of

Kurdish militias on the Turkish-Syrian border has become a separate conflict for the two countries (Rahmi, 2018). Maintaining territorial integrity and legitimacy of its sovereignty, the Turkish government has established several policies; they are: (1) cooperating with state and non-state actors, (2) conducting internal and external military operations, and (3) repression of pro-Kurdish journalists and politicians (Nabiyyin, 2020). Olive Branch Operation (*Zeytin Dalı Harekatı*) is one of the external military operations which Turkey carried out in Syria and the only military operation that happened in Syria in 2018. How did the Turkish Olive Branch Operation affect Syria's National security in 2018? This paper aims to answer this question's research.

## **Research Method**

Qualitative research is applied in this paper by using analytical descriptive writing techniques. The main object to be raised in this study is the impact of the Olive Branch Operation on the stability of Syria's national security in 2018. In this study, the authors used the library research data collection method.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Correlation Between National Interest Concept and National Security Concept**

The primary basis of realism is national security and state survival. The state is seen as very important to the life of its citizens and as a protector of its territory, population and unique and valuable way of life (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). Security is a condition free from military threats or a country's ability to protect itself from military attacks from the external

environment (the absence of military threats or the protection of the nation from external overthrow or attack) (Haftendorn, 1991).

Barry Buzan broadens the meaning of the concept of security by arguing that security includes not only aspects of the military and state actors but also includes the activities of non-state actors (Buzan, 1991). Buzan's concept of national security is applied in this paper to analyze the impact of the Olive Branch Operation on Syria's national security stability in 2018. Buzan argues that there are five security dimensions: military, political, economic, societal and environmental (Buzan, 2008).

### **Kurdish Militia Movement on the Border between Turkey and Syria**

Turkey is one of the countries in the Middle East region neighbouring Syria. After the end of the Cold War, Turkey occupied a problematic position between regional conflicts in the Balkans and the Middle East. Among those were the Turkish-Armenian strife in 1992, Turkey-Greece in 1996, and Turkey-Syria in 1998. Since the rise of the domestic conflict and the Syrian domestic political crisis, Turkey has begun taking steps to protect its country. The ethnic Kurdish alliance on the borders of Turkey, Syria and Iraq is vital, as evidenced by the protection of PKK political leaders by Iraqi Kurds when ethnic Kurds in Southeast Turkey came under attack from the Turkish government. The Turkish government has also confirmed that Syrian PYD forces have close ties to Turkey's PKK (Hapsari, 2020). Discriminatory measures by the Kurds have prompted the Kurds to take on the separatist movement. The Kurdish movement in Syria began in 1957 with the formation of the KDPS (Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria), which struggled for Kurdish existence. It stalled when the KDPS leadership was caught. Eventually, the struggle continued when the PYD was formed. The PYD is headquartered in Qamishli and has actively organized its group since 2011 in Afrin, Ayn al-Arab, and al-Hasakah (Acun & Keskin, 2016).

After the end of the Gulf War in 1991, Turkey and Syria signed the Adana Protocol (Duran, 2012). In reaction to the Adana Protocol and the normalization of relations between Syria and Turkey, in 2003, the PKK increased its influence over the Syrian Kurds by opening a branch called the PYD/Democratic Unity Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat). The goal is to reach more Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria (Acun & Keskin, 2016). Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2010, Syria has placed the Kurdish groups PYD and YPG as instrumental actors in the fight against ISIS, thus strengthening PYD-YPG control areas, creating the view that the Syrian government stands on the side of terrorists. Recognizing the threat posed by the PKK/PYD-YPG in the border area, Turkey seeks to keep those areas stable and safe from the presence and terror of their activities (Luerdi & Hakim, 2020).

Article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter prohibits using force in international relations. However, in addition to banning attacks, the UN also recognizes the "inherent right", which is the inherent right of either individuals or collectives to conduct self-defence on the condition that there has been an armed attack (Makalew, 2019). In the teachings of Islam can also be found the doctrine that legalizes attacks when attacked that has been regulated in the Quran surah al-Hajj verses 39 to 40: *“To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and verily Allah is Most Powerful for their aid. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, (for no cause) except that they say, “Our Lord is Allah.” Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause); verily Allah is full of strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His will).”* (Q.S. Al-Hajj: 39-40) (Tim Al Huda, 2014).

Allah SWT allows people to balance political, economic, and social life (Hakiki, Kesuma, Muttaqien, & Badruzaman, 2019). The Turkish

government's stance in response to moves that jeopardize its country's sovereignty is a form of *self-defence* of a nation. Suppose. If the Turkish government does not take decisive steps, Turkey's position as a sovereign state will be continually threatened, so the political, economic, and social balance will not materialize.

### **Turkey's Olive Branch Operation in 2018**

Turkey's objectives for the Olive Branch Operation in the town of Afrin, northwestern Syria carrying out such operations are: (a) Eliminating the threat of terrorism carried out by the PKK/KCK-PYD/YPG on its territorial border with Syria, (b) Providing a safe way back for displaced Syrians, (c) Turkey considers the increasing strength of the PKK in other areas as a threat to the security of the homeland, and (d) Turkey considers Afrin to be territory that the PKK and PYD-YPG use to transfer ammunition and militants (IRT World Research Center, 2018).

Two months after the operation was launched, the Turkey government felt has the right to secure its border with Syria as more than 700 attacks on Turkish territory were launched from the border (Urundul, 2018). On October 17, 2007, the Turkish parliament passed a draft law. It granted permission for the Turkish armed forces to carry out cross-border attacks to cripple PKK bases around its border area (Handayani, 2012). This was done to realize the principle of Peace at Home and Peace Abroad, which Mustafa Kemal had initiated at the beginning of the founding of the Republic of Turkey (Beach, n.d.). Operation Olive Branch, conducted by Turkey, is an operation that has the potential to have a significant impact on the stability of Syria's national security in 2018. The short time of the military operation and the massive attacks carried out by the Turkish military against Kurdish militias caused a great deal of damage and several casualties.

Turkish forces needed much effort by running two phases of fighting in the border area or suburb of Afrin and fighting in urban areas. Turkey's policy of conducting Olive Branch Operations eventually became an external military threat to Syria. A decision, action, or event must influence the object coming into contact with all three. Concerning this, the influence exerted by Turkey's Olive Branch Operation on the Syrian border was divided over the impact on the political, economic, social, and environmental spheres that, if accumulated, could interfere with Syria's national security stability.

## **Turkey's Olive Branch Operation Effect on Syria's National Security Stability**

### **1. Effect on Military Aspect**

The modern state has been defined as a sovereignty and the right to rule in a territory and population. Since power is an effective way to acquire controlled territory, the nature of a country is to use force in any case. Buzan argues that the military sector is inseparable from a country's ability to defend itself from domestic and foreign military threats and use military force to protect the country or government from non-military threats (Buzan, 2008). The Olive Branch Operation that Turkey launched into the Afrin region is one of the military threats to Syria.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Syria did have two strongholds within its country. The first stronghold is a stronghold of Assad's government, and the second is an opposition group that wants the Assad regime down. Initially, the Syrian Kurds were a tribe not taken into account by the Assad regime. However, after the PKK opened a branch in Syria under the name PYD-YPG, the Assad regime began to have good contact with the PKK branch. The PYD-YPG is considered

a group capable of resisting the insurgency that is often carried out by the opposition. Seeing Turkey launch attacks on the PYD-YPG in the Afrin area, the Syrian government is also taking action to help the PYD-YPG. The Syrian military is split to confront ISIS, opposition forces and Turkey after the PYD-YPG, which is believed to be able to support Syria's official government, was banished from areas they had taken control of.

The actions taken by the Syrian government in support of the PYD-YPG are Syria's first step in entering a new fighting zone in the Afrin region. The Turkish army's indirect assault on the PYD-YPG in the Afrin region caused new problems, namely the strengthening of the opposition and the weakening of the Syrian government as the Syrian government broke up its country's military into several battle zones. In other zones, the Syrian government only faces opposition parties, in contrast to the Afrin zone, where the Syrian government has to deal with two groups at once: the Turkish-backed opposition group and the Turkish military group.

## **2. Effect on Political Aspect**

Disruption of the military sector in a country will affect the course of politics. Buzan stated that existential threats in the political industry are defined as threats to the principles of sovereignty and state ideology. Buzan also stated that sovereignty can be threatened by anything that questions recognition, legitimacy, or governing authority (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). The Turkish army raid on Afrin also caused the leading actor of Syrian Kurdish politics (PYD) to boycott the Sochi Conference that will be held in Russia. The Sochi Conference is a Syrian National Dialogue Congress that discusses peace negotiations in Syria. It will be attended by parties concerned with Syria's future, with no



exception representatives of sects, social movements, and opposition groups (Sabbagh, 2018c).

The PYD's boycott of the Sochi Conference led to the delayed planned Syrian peace negon the PYD's vital role as an influential actor in Syria. Syria's civil war and domestic conflict that may be supposed to end in 2018 failed to find a solution due to PYD sentiments towards Russia, which it considers supporting Turkey to conduct Olive Branch Operation. Just after Turkish forces deployed Afrin, the Syrian Interim Government held the "Afrin Salvation Congress" in Gaziantep, Turkey. The congress was held to establish a civilian police force and a civilian council for Afrin. After being formed in Afrin, the committee was also formed in other sub-districts. However, the presence of the council did not have a good influence on residents because the intervention of the armed forces still coloured the Afrin area. This indicates that the legitimate government of Syria has absolutely no access to Afrin.

Throughout 2018, Syria's legitimate government has lost its authority in the Afrin region. The Olive Branch Operation has completely destabilized Syria's domestic political situation. The operation has also caused a split in Syria's sovereign territory. According to Buzan, an existential threat in the political sector can threaten sovereignty and matters concerning a country's legitimacy, authority, and recognition (Buzan et al., 1998). The military offensive launched by Turkey not only threatens the unity of Syrian territory but also prolongs the war in the country. The entry of the Syrian Interim Government into the Afrin region, formerly based in Gaziantep, Turkey, is a threat to Syrian sovereignty. Referring to Buzan's opinion on the stability of the political sector, the transfer of Syrian government authority in Afrin from the legitimate government to the Turkish-backed SIG government indicates political instability in Syria.

### **3. Effect on Economy Aspect**

In addition to impacting the military and political fields, Operation Olive Branch also impacted the economic sector in Afrin. Buzan argues that there is a clear link between financial issues and other security sectors. What constitutes an existential economic threat depends on the object of reference. Economic security is the most understandable for individuals regarding basic human needs. The financial sector can seriously impact the wheels of the turnaround of local, national, and even international economics. The national and global economies depart from the most minor industry of a country, namely individuals. Therefore, the basic needs of individuals in a country must be met and cared for (Buzan, 1991).

Olive Branch Operations destroyed infrastructure and public services such as bread production plants, power plants, water pumping stations, and archaeological buildings (Sabbagh, 2018b). After the Olive Branch Operation, residents who still live in the Afrin area struggle to meet their needs due to the damage to these public facilities; an economic recession has occurred in Afrin since Turkey took control of the region. Afrin's local shops were forcibly closed, so the needs of the locals were not guaranteed. In addition, Turkey also inhibits agricultural and industrial production processes in Afrin. Afrin is a district in Syria known for its olive oil. After the Turkish army's occupation of the Afrin region, olive looting by Turkish-backed opposition forces began. More than 70 million euros of olive oil were sold in Europe by Turkish companies (Badcock, 2019).

Operation Olive Branch makes local sources of income disappear. Access to exchange money for basic materials took a lot of work. This is compounded by the relocation of refugees from outside the Afrin region, which leads to an imbalance between supply and demand. When

supply needs are not directly proportional to demand or needs, then the economic downturn occurs. If the supply is greater than the market demand, then what will happen is abundant goods in the absence of buyers. Even if the market demand is higher than the existing goods, then what will happen is the soaring price of goods that make goods challenging to obtain.

The many refugees coming to Afrin have led to soaring demand for electricity and housing. No one can meet the market demand in Afrin except Turkey. Finally, as a solution to the problem, Turkey opened the Afrin market to Turkish companies mainly engaged in construction, and Turkey collected taxes from those companies (Al-Hilu, 2019). Previously in the Syrian government, Afrin's economy shifted direction and was inducted into Turkey. Turkey only makes Afrin a trading market and limits the area's productivity, especially in olive production. Afrin's majority-eyed population as olive growers also fell into poverty. Afrin has more than 18 million olive trees that can produce up to 270,000 tons of olives (Akin, 2019)d, So, the release of olives was the same as that of the deprived source of Afrin.

The seizure of the property and livelihoods of Afrin residents is also an indication of national security instability as Afrin enters the territory of Aleppo governorate, which is the largest populated area in Syria (Kedutaan Besar Republik Indonesia Di Damascus, 2018). This is supported by Buzan's opinion that economic threats occur when a group cannot meet its life needs, and the decline of the financial sector enters into indications that affect the stability of a country's national security. Buzan also stated that the financial industry provides access to resources and finance that support welfare levels.

#### 4. Effect on Social Aspect

Olive Branch Operation has affected the social aspects of Syria, especially the Afrin region. Viewed from a humanitarian point of view, the Olive Branch Operation has raised the prospect of military sieges and other warfare. The operation also adds to the risks civilians face. Among the dangers facing civilians is being human shielded by YPG militants or being forced to fight against the military (Kellner, 2017). The threats posed to Afrin locals have become fear and trauma in itself. Just two days after Turkey's military operation against Kurdish militants in the Afrin region, the number of refugees has risen dramatically to about 5000 people. Meanwhile, another 10 million people live in difficult situations despite not leaving their homes (Van, 2018). The Syrian Arab Red Crescent noted that aid sent by the SARC and ICRC in the form of clothing and groceries had reached more than 25,000 families displaced in Afrin as a result of Turkish military operations (Sabbagh, 2018a).

Demographic changes occur after the Olive Branch Operation is complete. Afrin's locals fled their area to refugee camps in Northern Aleppo. The five camps were Sardam camp, Barkhodan camp, Afrin camp, al-Shahba camp, and al-Awdah camp (The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019). Turkey, meanwhile, is putting new residents in the area to replace the natives of Afrin who have left. Turkey has placed Syrian refugees coming from areas other than Afrin to occupy the Olive Branch operating area. In addition, the issue of 'Turkification' also arose after the Turkish military took control of Afrin. The many damages have given Turkey a reason to rebuild schools that teach Turkish and fund various educational and health facilities.

Turkey's decision to relocate the refugees also led Afrin locals to complain of rights violations of ownership. The seizure of farmland,

houses, and furniture by the Turkish armed forces led to a gap in relations between the Afrin natives and migrants (refugees relocated from areas outside Afrin) (McGee, 2019). The Turkish military and Syrian opposition groups seized the homes of residents. They acquired homes left by their owners to then house Syrian refugees coming from Turkey and other Syrian territories. The harsh treatment received by Afrin locals caused them to lose the right to live and live properly and safely in their own country. The Turkish government's goal of relocating and housing Syrian refugees in Afrin is good. Still, the authors consider the realization stage of that goal to be done less appropriately.

## **5. Effect on Environmental Aspect**

Olive Branch Operation targeted the clearing of the Afrin area from PYD-YPG forces. Another characteristic of the Olive Branch Operation was the combat shift from mountainous regions to urban areas due to varying battlefield conditions. Before the fighting shifted into metropolitan areas, the Turkish military pounded the hilly northwestern terrain of Syria at an altitude of 800-1,100 meters along the Turkish border to the northern part of Afrin. The battle area was also mostly planted with olive trees and other dense green leafy plants. Afrin's southern and eastern regions consist of less high hills, farmland, dry rivers, and hillsides (Megrisi, 2020).

In the first phase of the Olive Branch Operation, Turkish military forces were focused on clearing the outskirts of Afrin, resulting in extensive natural damage from heavy artillery and other Weapons of Turkish troops. The authors assess that the environmental damage caused by the Olive Branch Operation also significantly affects residents. Human and natural relationships are inseparable. Humans need nature to meet their life needs, and vice versa; nature needs humans to care for them. In the second phase, the urban area of Afrin

became the main target that had to be controlled by the Turkish army. This operation caused many physical buildings to be destroyed due to their location, which tended to block and limit the movement of heavy equipment and other advanced military equipment. YPG militants also use underground defence systems, anti-tank systems and sniper positions, create defensive nests in the lowlands, and develop explosive devices (Boz-Acquin, 2021). This caused the air condition in the Afrin area to be shrouded in smog and limited human visibility (Buzan, 1991).

The operation also used various types of bullets and weapons, including chlorine gas, which is internationally prohibited. The use of firearms and explosive devices during olive branch operations caused many hills to be damaged. Buzan argues that environmental safety concerns the survival of a species, the human relationship with nature, and the prevention of damage caused by human activity. According to Buzan, the existence of the environmental sector can be threatened by two things. They are scientific agenda and political agenda. Scientific agendas are scientific activities involving nature. In contrast, political agendas are often government or policymakers concerning the environment, such as infrastructure development, business land clearing, war, and military aggression. Buzan also argues that the climate is like an inanimate object.

The environment that human hands have touched will determine human life, especially in socioeconomic life. If the climate is good, human life will be good, and vice versa; if the environment is terrible, human life will also deteriorate (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Based on Buzan's opinion, the authors categorize the damage done in the Olive Branch operating area as an existential threat to the environment caused by the political agenda. The danger to the environment in the Afrin region also affects the stability of Syria's national security due to the size of the natural assets in Afrin.

## Conclusions

It can be concluded from the explanation above that the Olive Branch Operation led to Syria's national security stability in 2018. This is characterized by the affected five important sectors in Syria, are: 1) In the military sector, the Olive Branch Operation made a new battle zone for the Syrian military, 2) In the political sector: (a) The entry of the Syrian Interim Government in securing and governing the Afrin region both the city and the countryside, (b) The Syrian government loses control of Afrin, (c) Turkey will not return territory it has controlled to the Syrian, 3) In the economic sector: (a) Loss of livelihoods of local people so that access to basic needs is difficult to reach, (b) The imbalance of supply and demand, (c) Turkish investment in Afrin is spreading, (d) Afrin uses Turkish Lira currency, (e) Monopoly on olive fields by Turkish military-backed opposition, 4) In the social sector: (a) Increased prospects of military siege in Afrin, (b) Demographic changes due to an increase in the number of refugees coming to Afrin and those going to other regions, (c) Turkification of Afrin residents both local and refugees relocated by Turkey. 5) In the environmental sector: (a) Damaging natural assets in the hills of Afrin due to the use of explosive weapons during the battle, (b) Damaging urban areas due to the use of weapons and heavy equipment from the Turkish side as well as the PYD-YPG during military operations.

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