

# The Afrin Smear Campaign and Lessons for Turkish International Initiatives

In the midst of Operation Olive Branch against terrorists in Afrin, the propaganda instigated by the terrorists and their supporters around the world have prompted a realization of the importance of investing in human capital and in humanitarian initiatives around the world. The terrorists' quest to win the hearts and minds of the people and to turn them against Turkey necessitated a response from Turkish authorities. The Turkish response which has so far managed to quell the dark propaganda machine especially on social media involved espousing a disinformation strategy involving sending the corrected information to tens of thousands of contacts around the world who studied in Turkey and thus experienced first hand the principals that guide the Turkish state and its citizens. It is often these people who are first in line in seeking the right information, in examining the narratives that are relayed by the more influential Western media and they would be much more ready to defend and propagate the correct information. This is one reason why the dark propaganda campaign by terrorists is being effectively put at bay.

This phenomenon highlights the need to further invest in human capital initiatives around the world. The terrorist's desire to win hearts and minds of people against Turkey cannot succeed because of the well-earned respect that Turkey is gaining on account of her humanitarian activities over the years. The natural rule that power creates resistance notwithstanding, Turkey's image around the world, especially the hitherto marginalized world is one that can not easily be erased by mere smear campaigns.

The influence of Turkish humanitarian initiatives is increasingly becoming well documents and bearing fruits. The pro-Israel *The Washington Institute* reported on February 16, 2018, the impact of Turkey's leader's intervention in Palestine as an encouragement to the Palestinian economy. "When Turkish Muslims visit Palestine", it wrote sourced from al-Monitor, "they are encouraged to stay in Palestinian hotels and purchase goods in Palestinian shops..Furthermore, Turkey has specifically created development projects and organizations that work with Palestinian groups and promote Palestinian development within the city".

This Palestinian example depicts the broader philosophy of Turkish humanitarian interventions. Central to this philosophy is to accord the recipient communities with means that would help sustain them in the long run not just mere offering of food and blankets, although these two are required in times of disaster. In calmer times, however, the ability to develop effective human capital is the best way to reduce poverty.

The World Bank report released on January, 30th 2018 proved this. According to the report titled the Changing Wealth of Nations, the World Bank observed that the global economy grew 66% from 690 trillion dollars in 1995 to 1,143 trillion dollars in 2014. It reported that human capital is the largest component of global wealth and was responsible for the increasing global wealth pointing to the need, and benefit of investing in people. Turkey's humanitarian efforts have focused on the human capital aspect more effectively than other actors.

**The world is changing in all ways from social relations to economic standing to political power relations. It is in these liquid times of change that benignity is most needed around the world.**

Whereas in the recent past the more nationalistic one was, the more praiseworthy one would be, contemporary ethics seeks to praise moderate nationalism and increasing internationalism. The world is now closer than it has ever been that an event thousands of miles away can affect a person in more immediate ways than ever before. With globalization, we now have the means to feel ashamed if we simply look on while injustice is meted out to any people around the world. This I believe is making us more human, for it is our compassion to fellows, our ability to be our brother's keeper, our shared commitment to protecting the eco-system, human rights and all of the good that is making our generation the best moment to be alive.

This period of change, the future of the world cannot be trusted with heartless institutions to guide it. This is why Turkish intervention is necessary. The world is rooting for the success of these interventions and as

Afrin disinformation campaign is showing, the fruits of these interventions would be mutually enjoyed by both Turkey and the recipients of Turkish assistance and co-operation programs.

Turkey's foundations and development agencies now have a presence in more countries than ever before, effectively sending aid and reaching out directly to the people in need around the world. The resultant Turkish assistance model can be espoused by other wealthy nations with good intentions to augment development and reduce wars, terrorism, and poverty. We are still living in a troubled world. But at least we now know that we can make it better. Turkish assistance has been central to that realization.