

# Playing to the Hearts and Minds: Psychological Warfare of the YPG

Operation Olive Branch initiated on January 20, 2018 at 17:00 by the Turkish Armed Forces, the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other factions fighting against YPG terrorists, an off-shoot of the PKK terrorist organization, has been continuing for almost five days now, with latest statistics showing that 10-15 villages have been liberated from YPG tyranny, allowing internally displaced Kurds and other Syrians having different ethnic or religious identity to turn back their homes and daily lives.

As liberation takes place and YPG terrorists are being driven out and neutralized, the PKK has begun to play to the hearts and minds of international audiences with fabricated narratives of civilian casualties taking place as a result of Turkish Armed Forces shelling and bombing with means of fighter jets and helicopters. Though, how can civilian casualties take place when ammunition depots and YPG terrorists have been targeted?

The YPG through the ANF news website; the official media source of the PKK and the YPG media office has been putting into play psychological warfare techniques, with mostly appealing to emotions and emotive language, primarily composed of civilian casualties are taking place, and the Turkish state is committing 'genocide' in Afrin and YPG controlled areas, especially towards women and children, but is this really the case?

The YPG, by appealing to the hearts and minds of its international audiences is currently trying to create and build fabricated narratives in order to tie down the Kurds to Afrin and make them stay there, and also influence international Western media in an effort to make propaganda against the Turkish state. Specific images displaying children drenched in blood or injured women have been chosen on purpose. Turkish media outlets have proven that the images are false, and in fact, belong to the bombing done by the Assad regime in 2014 and 2015.

An operation of the caliber of Operation Olive Branch requires prior in-depth analysis and intelligence preparation of the operational environment (IPOE). Vigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis has been conducted with means of Turkish Special Forces previously labeling YPG safe-houses, ammunition facilities, armoured vehicles and operation planning centers, and human intelligence also being provided by assets on ground.

All-source fusion analysis techniques would be used to merge together visual, auditory, geo-spatial, cyber and human intelligence to identify factors for center of gravity (COG) in time critical strikes and high value targeting of YPG locations and terrorists. COG would also be used by Turkish Armed Forces to identify critical target sets as well, proven by the initiation of the operation with 72 Turkish fighter jets and 108 out of 113 targets and target locations being neutralized with no civilian casualties.

Another aspect of the YPG playing towards fabricated narratives is the YPG utilizing techniques previously used by terrorist organizations such as DAESH. Reports have come in of YPG terrorists hiding among the civilian population in Afrin, pretending to be ordinary civilians, and also hiding in civilian houses with means of threats made against their families, sons and daughters. In addition to the fact that the YPG hides among the civilian population, it is also reported that it delivered ammunition and firearms to its members on-ground through emergency vehicles such as ambulances.

The YPG is currently trying to wage psychological warfare, as explained above, by playing to the hearts and minds of the international community, especially through Western media outlets as stated earlier. Western media outlets should think twice when using YPG and PKK news sources for reporting the 'casualties'. The current phase of Operation Olive Branch, as there is no civilian casualties by now in villages of Afrin, is continuing successfully as planned as a result of intensive planning and preparation executed by Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish state.