

Black, White and Grey: A War of Propaganda and Operation Olive Branch

Propaganda has been the building block of many wars, battles and military operations. It serves to fuel motivation, fire, and zeal to sympathizers and militants on-ground, aiding in their motivation, and keeping their morale high. The latest battle of propaganda can be seen with Operation Olive Branch executed by Turkey on January 20, 2018, at 17:00. Turkey initiated the operation with 72 fighter jets and bombing 108 out of 113 pre-planned locations. From the initiation of the operation till now, the YPG terrorist organization has been utilizing three main forms of propaganda, these being white, grey and black.

Propaganda by dictionary definition is 'information, especially of biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view'. Not one form of propaganda exists, and many ways of conducting propaganda are also present. In terms of platforms and mediums, social media is currently utilized the most, with means of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to aid in the maneuvering of ideas and ideology towards the organization.

The YPG is an offshoot of the PKK terrorist organization currently present within Syria. It is seen as the armed faction of the PYD, the 'political' body of the PKK in Syria. With the decision taken by the PKK in its third congress in 2005, a coordination body, the KCK, was decided upon whereby all of its arms and the terrorist organization itself were going to be connected and coordinated.

With the initiation of the KCK and its arms in northern Syria and parts of Iraq, the YPG, PYD and the PKK are trying to set up a terror corridor, to create an independent autonomous state made up of communes and cantons. An idea that was adapted from Ray Bookchin's Social Ecology theory. To aid in constructing its own governmental system, the YPG has been terrorizing Kurds in the region, dividing them among one another, and labeling them as either 'old' Kurds or 'new/reformed' Kurds. The organization has also been the US's greatest ally in fighting both extremist groups such as DAESH and other moderate groups as well. It is also worth noting that most natural gas resources and 80% of the region's water supplies go through the regions the PKK and its faction claim is theirs.

As with all terrorist groups, especially its founding organization the PKK, the YPG has been severely propagating false and misleading information in regards to both its activities, and the latest Operation Olive Branch initiated by the Turkish Armed Forces and the Free Syria Army against it. The operation consisting of bombing pre-planned ammunition depot's, training grounds, underground tunnels and weapons storage facilities is being twisted, turned and fed back to its sympathizers, to aid in recruitment purposes, and hatred towards the Turkish State, and to also derogate Turkey's activities in the eyes of international media organizations.

Specific techniques of *ad hominem* (attacking the opponent instead of attacking his arguments), *ad nauseam* (tireless repetition of slogans to mislead from the truth), *appeal to fear* (instilling anxiety in the general population), *appeal to prejudice* (using emotive terms and language to attach value to the idea proposed) and the Bandwagon techniques (spreading the idea of inevitable victory and calling everyone to join the cause) are being used by the PKK, the YPG, PYD and PJAK very aggressively.

The YPG has been attacking both Kurdish and non-Kurdish civilians in Afrin and Manbij, aiding in their migration to other countries and literally ethnically cleansing the region of Kurds who do not agree with their ideology. Operation Olive Branch in this sense is an operation for both Turkey's national security, but also possesses a humanitarian aspect whereby the Kurdish population not agreeing with the YPG is saved from its tyranny of terrorism.

YPG has been utilizing three forms of propaganda, these being white, grey and black. White propaganda is a propaganda initiated by the organization itself towards its opposition, in this case, the YPG against the Turkish state. The YPG has been distorting facts, figures and historical narratives on its communication platforms and social media, stating the Turkish state is going into Afrin for 'occupation' and 'trying to take away Kurdish land', when as stated before, this is not the case as at least 20,000 Kurds have been negatively affected, sometimes beaten and tortured by the YPG's activities.

Grey propaganda, on the other hand, is the mixing of true and false facts to cover the truth. Latest statistics show at least 110 YPG terrorists being killed by shelling of Turkish Armed Forces, and dozens turning themselves into the Turkish Army and the FSA. The YPG have accepted they have casualties, but are keeping the numbers to a bare minimum stating its only '3-5' people, mixing fact with fiction. Body counts show this is not the case.

Finally, black propaganda is a form of propaganda whereby the side conducting the propaganda executes it a way that looks like it has come from the opposition. The propaganda involves derogating the opposition, by making it look like they have losses, deaths, and defeat. The YPG has utilized black propaganda from the initial day of the operation and is still doing so today. False narratives of 'Turkish fighter jets being brought down' 'Turkish soldiers being killed' were spread on social media platforms, especially Twitter by the YPG. Fake Turkish nationalist looking Twitter accounts were made by the YPG and its sympathizers where black propaganda was executed with messages stating 'I'm sorry to say we have losses', 'Our tanks have been bombed by the terrorist YPG' and so forth. This propaganda not based on any facts or even photos was denied by the Turkish Armed forces stating no tanks have been hit, and all 72 fighter jets have returned home safely.

In conclusion, Operation Olive Branch is being fought both on-ground, and more importantly on cyber-space. This two-dimensional war is currently being fought with great effort and results by the Turkish state and should continue. Observers and followers of the operation should also look out for this misleading information and propaganda constructed by the YPG-PKK-PYD, aiming to distort the true nature and intention of the operation and to cover their own illegal activities.