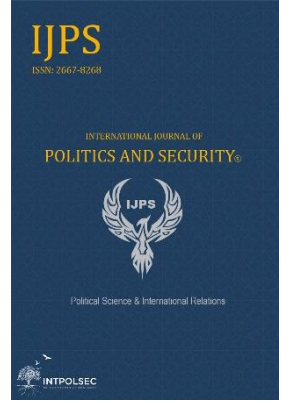


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### Turkey's Preventive Operations against Terrorists across Southern Border

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## Turkey's Preventive Operations against Terrorists across Southern Border

Arif FERAH\*

Hakan Ömer TUNCA\*\*

### Abstract

*Besides having advantages due to its geostrategic location, Turkey has a position open to risks and threats. In addition to the humanitarian, social, economic, health and education difficulties of a large number of immigrants from the Arab Spring, border security has also become another concern. For this reason, this paper examines the physical measures taken at the border and cross-border operations within the scope of preventing terrorists. The purpose of this study is to examine the benefits and difficulties of having a cross-border presence against terrorist organizations. In addition, an answer will be sought to the question of whether the preventive military operations carried out in the authority vacuum country benefit the border security or not. In this context, the study is limited to the cross-border operations conducted between 2016 and 2021.*

**Keywords:** Border Security, terrorism, immigration, cross-border presence, preventive military operations

## Türkiye'nin Güney Sınırları Boyunca Teröristlere Karşı Önleyici

### Operasyonları

#### Özet

*Türkiye jeostratejik konumu nedeniyle avantajlarının yanı sıra risk ve tehditlere açıktır. Arap Baharından sonra güney komşularından gelen çok sayıda göçmenin insani, sosyal, ekonomik, sağlık ve eğitim zorluklarının yanı sıra, neden oldukları sınır güvenliği de Türkiye için bir başka endişe kaynağı haline geldi. Suriye ve Irak'ta yaşanan otorite boşluğu ve çatışmalar nedeniyle Türkiye güney sınırlarında ek önlemler almaya kendini zorunlu hissetmiştir. Bu nedenle bu makale, terör eylemlerinin önlenmesi kapsamında Türkiye'nin güney sınırlarında ve sınır ötesinde gerçekleştirdiği operasyonlarla, bu kapsamda alınan fiziki önlemleri incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı terör örgütlerine karşı sınır ötesi mevcudiyet sağlamanın yararlarını ve zorluklarını incelemektir. Ayrıca otorite boşluğu olan sınır komşusu bir ülkede gerçekleştirilen önleyici askeri operasyonların sınır güvenliğine fayda sağlayıp sağlamadığı sorusuna da yanıt aranmaktadır. Bu kapsamda çalışma, 2016 ve 2021 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilen sınır ötesi operasyonlarla sınırlandırılmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sınır Güvenliği, terörizm, göç, sınır ötesi varlık, önleyici askeri operasyonlar

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## 1. Introduction

António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who is recently serving as Secretary-General of the UN, said that “*The Syrian situation is the most dramatic humanitarian crisis the world has faced in a very long time*”<sup>1</sup> at the conference of *Syrian Refugee Situation-Supporting Stability in the Region*, 28 October 2014 in Berlin. Although more than six years have passed since that conference, there have been no significant positive developments in the situation in Syria. According to official figures, about six million<sup>2</sup> people had to migrate out of Syria, and millions of people had to displace internally within the country. Syrians emigrating to Turkey constitute about 4,3%<sup>3</sup> of the population and this rate ranges from 10,6% to 73,9% throughout borderline cities according to their populations.<sup>4</sup>

Terrorism and irregular immigration are by far the most major security problems for nation-states and international stability in this century. Iraq and Syria have a very chaotic situation, which constitutes very risky conditions to take the required actions for controlling unrest, throughout the southern borders of Turkey. This region provides a great opportunity for terrorist groups with religious motives to emerge, terrorist organizations to operate easily, and to provide human resources. During the Arab Spring, the mass movements spreading to Syria turned into a civil war in 2011. Many people and neighboring states of Syria were negatively affected as a result of this civil war.

With the critical understanding of security, the definition<sup>5</sup> of security has expanded to include non-state actors beyond the use and threat of force. The events that took place in the world in the 1980s and lastly the events of September 11 made the concept of enlargement broad, including states, individuals, and global and international organizations. In addition, non-

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<sup>1</sup> António Guterres, UNHCR “Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation”, The UN Refugee Agency, at <https://www.unhcr.org/544fb4189.html>, (11 January 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Syria Regional Refugee Concept, The UN Refugee Agency, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> , (15 January 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Temporary Protection, Directorate General of Migration Management, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638> (15 January 2021)

<sup>4</sup> Syria Regional Refugee Concept, The UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> , (15 January 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Hakan Ömer Tunca, “Suriyeli Sığınmacılara Yönelik Güvenlik Algısı” Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, (2020), p.72-76, summarized the definition from the works of İbrahim Erdoğan, 2013; Barry Buzan, 1998; Jef Huysman, 1995, 2000, 2006; Ole Weaver, 2015.



military threats that are not included in the concept of security have begun to be securitized. Since immigration and immigrants are seen as elements that complicate the natural flow of life, it has become a threat in itself. In the first group, international terrorism, organized crimes, cyber terrorism, states with the aim of attack, the proliferation of conventional and weapons of mass destruction as national physical threats; In the second group, attacks on the national or global economy or financial markets, encroachments on (individual, social or national) welfare or the environment and health, migrations and refugee movements are threats to national interests; In the third group, it is possible to list attacks on universal democratic values, human rights, and freedoms as threats to common values.

Turkey is a geopolitically important country, which is a strategic bridge between the continents, a NATO member, and a nodal point due to its proximity to energy sources. Inevitably, the turmoil and vacuum of authority on the southern border of a country that is so important in its region will have security implications for Turkey. It is clear that many terrorist groups, which would want to take advantage of this turmoil and chaotic conditions, will adversely affect Turkey via asylum-seekers and smugglers. Facing low-density threats on the southern border, Turkey has developed various measures to prevent the transition of asylum-seekers, terrorists, and smugglers to its hinterland. First of all, in 2014, Turkey initiated the construction of over 900 km long barrier on the border with Syria.<sup>6</sup> Besides the wall with Syria, Turkey has announced building similar constructions at its border with Iraq in 2017. The physical layer includes modular concrete walls, patrol routes, manned and unmanned towers, and passenger tracks.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Asena Soyluk, Aslı Yıldız, Pelin Sarıcioğlu, "Border Walls from Past to Today", *Asia Minor Studies-International Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2018): 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.



**Figure 1.** The Construction of a Concrete Barrier on Turkey's border with Syria.<sup>8</sup>



After the regionalization of the Syrian civil war and its absorption into different armed groups, Turkey's external border security began to be threatened by non-state armed actors. In addition, many foreign and Turkish citizens lost their lives in bomb attacks in various cities and attacks with missiles from Syria on border provinces. Turkey's proposals such as "safe area"<sup>9</sup> and "no-fly zone"<sup>10</sup> were not supported by the international community. Therefore, Turkey decided to struggle with this problem on its own. Turkey has started operations to ensure the security of its borders, prevent the creation of a terror corridor across its southern border, neutralize terrorists and terrorist organizations threatening its national security, and create the necessary conditions for the return of displaced Syrians to their homes and lands. Operations were in line with the country's right to self-defense borne out of international law, and under the right to self-defense under Article 51<sup>11</sup> of the UN Charter, while being respectful of Syria's territorial integrity.

In this paper, the effects of Turkish preventive operations on border security and the transition will be discovered. The question of how forward presence bases and using advanced

<sup>8</sup> Turkey-Syria Border Wall, Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-syria-border-wall-to-be-completed-by-end-sept/916748>, (20 July 2021)

<sup>9</sup> Pursuit of a safe zone does not meet our expectations", an interview with Reuters, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/109620/-guvenli-bolge-anlayisi-beklentilerimizi-karsilamiyor->, (12 May 2021)

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Minister, Anadolu Agency [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-mevlut-cavusoglu\\_nun-anadolu-ajansi-editor-masasina-verdigi-mulak\\_-25-subat-2016\\_-ankara.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-mevlut-cavusoglu_nun-anadolu-ajansi-editor-masasina-verdigi-mulak_-25-subat-2016_-ankara.tr.mfa), (21 July 2021)

<sup>11</sup> UN Charter, Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.



technology over border security will be examined. First of all, the chaotic environment on Turkey's southern border and its existence in the future will be analyzed, then the cross-border operations carried out by Turkey between 2016-and 2021 and their results in the fight against terrorism will be revealed. Secondly, the legal basis of the operations, their aims, and the results obtained from the benefits of high technology will be explained. The importance of using high technology to fight against terrorism and the results of the operations will be evaluated. Finally, the paper is going to investigate the success of Turkey's military operations across her southern borders with Iraq and primarily Syria whether they prove to neutralize terrorism or not.

**Figure 2.** Image Taken by Turkish UAV of Terrorists Attempting to Attack Turkey from across the border during Operation Olive Branch.<sup>12</sup>



## 2. Chaotic Condition across the South of Turkey

During the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, a challenging security threat settled on Turkey's borders. The increasing armament and the developing atmosphere of insecurity in the region during the war created long-term problems for the region.<sup>13</sup> During and after the Iran-Iraq War, organizations like PKK, which is a terrorist organization<sup>14</sup>, found a safe base of operations for

<sup>12</sup> UAVs captured the terrorist attacks in Afrin” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i5SCgqBGT0> , TRT Haber Official YouTube Account. (21 March 2021)

<sup>13</sup> Seçil Özdemir, Iran-Iraq War: Effect on Terrorism on Turkey's Borders, *Akademik Bakış* 13, no. 26 (2020): 70-71.

<sup>14</sup> The PKK is listed as a terrorist organization internationally by numerous countries, including the members of the European Union and others such as United States, Canada and Australia. European Union also designated PKK as a terrorist entity in 2004. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also refers to PKK as a terrorist entity. (at





them in the north of Iraq. After the Gulf Crisis, Kurdish ethnic originated problems in the north of Iraq have been globalized by the international community with the UN resolutions, and the PKK terrorist organization has been the one who exploited this situation the most.<sup>15</sup> Due to the vacuum of authority in this region, Turkey faced irregular migration and terrorist incidents. Therefore, by establishing logistics bases, camps, and training facilities in Iraq, the PKK has caused the death of more than 13,000 soldiers and civilians and 35,000 wounded, with the strategy of hit and run in Turkey since 1984.<sup>16</sup> Turkey continues to take all kinds of military and political measures from the arising of this problem.

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the Syrian administration had never considered such an uprising to take place in Syria.<sup>17</sup> The global prominence of the Syrian crisis can be explained by two main reasons. The first of these is the diversity of internal and external actors involved in the crisis. While the peaceful demonstrations in March 2011 were mainly economic, secular segments demanding improvement in their social and political conditions, opposition groups also took their place in the struggle in the country in a short time.<sup>18</sup> While the army, various groups other than the regime forces, consisting of some civilian militias and some civilian militias, constitute the internal actors of the war in Syria, territorial or non-regional states formed the external actors.<sup>19</sup> The struggle of various countries over Syria, which reminds us of the cold war period, has caused the anarchy in the region not to be ended for years. Another reason why the Syrian crisis is closely followed and discussed by the world community is the human casualties caused in a short time and the size of the migration spread over a wide geography. It is important to bear in mind that the burden of protecting and assisting migrants has largely fallen on the shoulders of major host countries, primarily Jordan, Lebanon, and

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Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa> (28 November 2021)

<sup>15</sup> Cihat Yaycı, "Wars in Iraq and their Effects on Turkey", *The Journal of Security Strategies* 15, no. 30 (2019): 342-343.

<sup>16</sup> Nedim Şener, "The bloody balance sheet of the PKK", *Hürriyet* (4 September 2020)

<sup>17</sup> David W. Lesch, "The Arab Spring –and Winter in Syria", *Global Change, Peace and Security* 23, no.3 (2011): 422.

<sup>18</sup> Angela Joya, "Syria and the Arab Spring: The Evolution of the Conflict and the Role of the Domestic and External Factors", *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 4. no.1 (2012): 31.

<sup>19</sup> Moshe Ma'oz, "The Arab Spring in Syria: Domestic and Regional Developments", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 7. no.1 (2014): 49-57.



Turkey.<sup>20</sup> The conclusion of the crisis will directly affect Syria's neighbors because they will have to coexist with the resulting structure.<sup>21</sup>

At least 600.000 people have died and more than two million have been injured or permanently disabled in the Syrian civil war, and more than 12 million Syrians are stated to have been displaced by internal or external migration. Estimates are that the war in Syria has produced around 13 million displaced people, which encompasses over 60 percent of Syria's pre-war population.<sup>22</sup> Before the Syrian civil war started, its population was about 21 million. This population ratio clearly shows us the loss of Syria and the chaotic condition in this country. The displacement of almost 13 million Syrians -half the country's population- is the most daunting humanitarian crisis of our time.<sup>23</sup> In addition to many innocent Syrian people fleeing from the persecution of Assad, terrorists linked to several terrorist organizations went through Turkey's border.<sup>24</sup> Especially, DAESH/ISIS terrorists have been trying to reach Europe by using Turkey. The migration of Syrians causes the negative effects of the Syrian civil war to be felt over a wide geography and thus this situation led to more discussion around the world. The intensity of the ongoing conflicts in Syria and the acceleration in the pace of change have affected the civilian population as well as the combatants more than ever before, and those who want to live in their land are deprived of meeting their most basic needs. To prevent the influx of refugees from Syria to the European Union, the EU has committed to helping Turkey. However, in the past, EU aid has been limited and Turkey has spent more than 40 billion Euros on Syrian asylum-seekers.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Elizabet Ferris and Kemal Kirişçi, *The Consequences of Chaos, Syria's Humanitarian Crises and the Failure to Protect*, (Brooking Institution Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Kaya, "The Syrian Crisis from a Neighbor's Perspective: View from Turkey", *Military Review* 94, no.2 (2014): 49.

<sup>22</sup> Marko Valenta, Jo Jakobsen, Drago Župarić-Iljić and Hariz Halilovich. "Syrian Refugee Migration, Transitions in Migrant Statuses and Future Scenarios of Syrian Mobility", *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 39, (2020): 157.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabet Ferris and Kemal Kirişçi, *The Consequences of Chaos, Syria's Humanitarian Crises and the Failure to Protect*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Doğan Şafak Polat, "Objectives and Results of Turkish Military Operations in the North of Syria", *The Journal of Security Strategies* 16, no. 33 (2020): 90.

<sup>25</sup> Speech of President of Turkey, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/116954/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-turkiye-nin-kahraman-kadinlari-programina-katildi> (15 March 2021)





The first group of refugees escaping from the civil war in Syria arrived in Turkey on 29 April 2011. It has not been easy to control the movement of people on the 911 km long Turkish-Syrian border. The fact that so many migrants are in every city of Turkey has social, economical, political, and security effects and continues to affect Turkish citizens in many other ways. The open-door policy and the acceptance of Syrians, which are implemented with humanitarian feelings, have led to the entry of not only those who escaped the persecution of Assad but also those who moved due to different organizations and threats, especially in 2013 and 2014. It has created a perception that the bomb attacks, mortar attacks, and suicide bombings took place in places such as Istanbul, Sultanahmet, Suruç, Ankara Train Station, Ankara State District, Ankara Kızılay Square, Istanbul Istiklal Street, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Akçakale, Clive Gözü Border Gate, Reyhanlı, Kilis, Diyarbakır, Ağrı Doğubayazıt, Istanbul International Terminal, Diyarbakır Regional Traffic, Van Police Station and Gaziantep Şahinbey were carried out by people who came to Turkey from Syria. The perception in the society increased not only by the terrorist attacks but also in common crimes such as theft, pickpocketing, and begging, which are known to be crimes, is the Syrians have started to emerge in the society.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of terrorist organizations such as DAESH/ISIS and increasing attacks within the border as created major problems for Turkey's national security. In addition to ongoing problems within the Iraqi border for many years, the vacuum of authority on the Syrian border has brought additional cost and effort to Turkey. The existence of a civil war in Turkey's border neighbor poses a great threat and also poses very comprehensive risks. As a result, this condition has become a situation where everyone is fighting each other. Numerous local, regional and global actors have become a part of this civil war, and it is very difficult to detect which group is fighting against another.<sup>27</sup> Despite growing attention to the role of regional organizations, Syrian displacement is also a clear indictment of the failure of regional bodies to prevent and resolve crises. While both the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic

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<sup>26</sup> Hakan Ömer Tunca, *Suriyeli Sığınmacılara Yönelik Güvenlik Algısı*, (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2020), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Emre Ozan, "Suriye İç Savaşı ve Türkiye'nin Değişen Güvenlik Gündemi", (Ankara Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2017), 25.



Cooperation suspended Syria's membership in 2011 and 2012, respectively, neither has played a significant role in addressing the conflict.<sup>28</sup>

The beginning of the problems originating from Syria that Turkey faces is Turkey's security. The clashes, which took place in neighboring cities, towns, and villages on the Turkish side of the border, created very high risks.<sup>29</sup> There have been attacks against Turkey by terrorist organizations positioned in Syria beyond the border resulting in the deaths of civilians. The turmoil in Syria had a negative impact on Turkey both commercially and socially, as well as negatively affecting the tourism of the country and the region.<sup>30</sup> Turkey's main objective in Syria has been to prevent the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)<sup>31</sup> from "establishing an autonomous area along Syria's northern border with Turkey".<sup>32</sup> Like the threat posed by DAESH/ISIS, the threat posed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD)<sup>33</sup> to Turkish national security has always been among the top priorities of Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>34</sup> Turkey does not want this region to turn into another short or long-term conflict zone with the interference of global powers. It is for this reason that Turkey has declared the advancement of the PYD/YPG to the west of the Euphrates River as its red line.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to the different physical conditions and sharing fairly a long border, the dynamics of the civil war due to the frequent change of controlling region makes threats to border security unpredictable. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Turkey has been subjected to various terrorist attacks. The most important of these attacks were carried out by DAESH/ISIS. Terrorist acts originating from DAESH/ISIS, both in border provinces and inland

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabet Ferris and Kemal Kirişçi, *The Consequences of Chaos, Syria's Humanitarian Crises and the Failure to Protect*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Tuncay Kardaş and Ömer Behram Özdemir, "The Making of European Foreign Fighters: Identity, Social Media and Virtual Radicalization", (SETA Analysis, No: 11, October 2014), 9-15.

<sup>30</sup> Soner Söyler and Mehmet Ertaş, "The Effect of the Syrian War On Tourism: A Research on Border Provinces", (16. Tourism Congress, 2015), 881.

<sup>31</sup> MoI Turkey, "PKK/KCK Terrorist Organization's Extension in Syria: PYD-YPG" (2017), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> European Asylum Support Office, "Syria Socio-economic situation: Country of Origin Information Report," (May 2020) p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> MoI Turkey, "PKK/KCK Terrorist Organization's Extension in Syria: PYD-YPG" (2017), p. 3

<sup>34</sup> Muhittin Ataman and Çağatay Özdemir, "Turkey's Syria Policy: Constant Objectives, Shifting Priorities", *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. (2018): 27.

<sup>35</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Syria's Dark Shadow over US-Turkey Relations", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2016): 30-32.



regions have become an additional security problem in Turkey. Not only did the crisis prevent Turkey from realizing its regional foreign policy priorities, but it also created a national security threat to the integrity of the country.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the emergence of structures that recruit militants for DAESH/ISIS in Turkey created significant problems for internal security.<sup>37</sup> While Turkey has conducted an intense fight against the PKK in Iraq and PYD/YPG in Syria, her allies have not accepted terrorist organizations such as the PYD/YPG due to providing military and political aid on the grounds of fighting against DAESH/ISIS, which remained Turkey alone.<sup>38</sup> This environment can lead to conflicts that cause shooting down each other's planes.<sup>39</sup>

Turkey's security concerns in Syria and its security strategy can be listed under five main headings:<sup>40</sup>

- Counterterrorism,
- Ensuring border security,
- Preventing instability and its consequences in northern Syria,
- Protection of Turkey's long-term strategic interests due to the presence of other states,
- Managing the social consequences of conflicts.

As stated above there are many concerns related to the unstable situation of the south of Turkey, like strategy, Turkey has three basic approaches either Iraq or Syria namely humanitarian aid, determined social and political solutions together with numerous military operations against terrorists for safe and secure areas not only in but also outside of Turkey under the International Law.

### 3. Forward Presence Over Border Against Terrorists

For many years, Turkey has tried to carry out its fight against terrorism to get security within its borders. Apart from that, Turkey carried out short-term cross-border operations and

<sup>36</sup> Muhittin Ataman and Çağatay Özdemir, "Turkey's Syria Policy: Constant Objectives, Shifting Priorities", 30.

<sup>37</sup> Emre Ozan, "Suriye İç Savaşı ve Türkiye'nin Değişen Güvenlik Gündemi", 27.

<sup>38</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "Iraq, Syria, ISIS and the Kurds: Geostrategic Concerns for the U.S. and Turkey", *Middle East Policy* 22, no.(1) (2015), pp. 102-111.

<sup>39</sup> Oktay F. Tanrısever, "Türkiye-Rusya Krizinin Dinamikleri ve İkili İlişkilere Etkileri", *Bilge Strateji* 8, no.14 (2016): 7-17.

<sup>40</sup> Murat Aslan, "Yeniden Yapılandırma Türkiye'nin Suriye'deki Modeli", (Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2019), 30.



returned to its lands.<sup>41</sup> The purpose of these operations was to neutralize the terrorists where they were located and to prevent them from entering Turkey by taking advantage of the harsh geographical conditions. However, as a result of the increasing terrorist incidents in both Iraq and Syria, Turkey has started to implement "proactive" methods.<sup>42</sup> Since 2016, Turkey has adopted the strategy of eliminating the threat at its source with the operations it carries out across the border, instead of fighting the terrorist threat only within its borders.<sup>43</sup> The need for an operation "to destroy the terrorist threat at its source" has emerged. The operations carried out by Turkey are different from the "Bush doctrine"<sup>44</sup> carried out by the USA. Turkey carries out a military operation against only the shelters and bases of terrorists in Syria and Iraq but does not attack these states.

Turkey's operations result from the need to overcome the troubled security environment along Turkey's borders with Syria, as well as the geopolitical necessity of establishing cross-border operational depth until a political solution to the civil war is found.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1. Legal Status

A condition of "state toleration", exists when a state does not sponsor or support terrorist groups within its borders, but knows of their existence and fails to suppress them.<sup>46</sup> Such terrorist groups may be self-supporting or may have foreign sponsors or supporters. They may carry out their terrorist activities primarily abroad having reached an unspoken understanding with the host government.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, this condition does not remove the responsibility of the state, in which a terrorist group has settled. According to International Law, this state is under an obligation not to allow its own country to be used for activities that are

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<sup>41</sup> Ahmet Şahin, "Major Operations in Northern Iraq", available <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/irakin-kuzeyine-gerceklestirilen-buyuk-harekatlar-417275.html> .

<sup>42</sup> Murat Aslan, "Türkiye'nin Terörizmle Mücadelesi Pençe Harekatı", (SETA, 2019), 8.

<sup>43</sup> Sercan Çalışkan and Hamza Haşıl, (<https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/turkiyenin-sinir-otesindeki-proaktif-stratejisi-baglaminda-sofi-nurettin-operasyonu>).

<sup>44</sup> Mackubin Thomas Owens, "The Bush Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of Republican Empire", (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2009), 26.

<sup>45</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, "Operation Euphrates Shield and the al-Bab Campaign: A Strategic Assessment", EDAM Foreign Policy and Security Paper Series, (2017), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Antony Clark Arend and Robert J.Beck, *Int. Law and the Use of Force*, (Routledge Publication, 2013), 142.

<sup>47</sup> Richard J. Erickson, *Legitimate Use of Force Against State-Sponsored Terrorism*, (Air Uni. Press, 1989), 26.



contrary to the rights of other states.<sup>48</sup> This state is obliged to prevent the activities of a terrorist organization by taking appropriate measures.<sup>49</sup>

In this particular circumstance, the state does not wish to ignore international terrorists within its borders but lacks the ability (*either through inadequate domestic police and military forces or lack of technology*) to respond effectively. The state's responsibility to deal with these terrorists continues. It may meet this responsibility by inviting another state or regional organization to assist it.<sup>50</sup> However, this did not work in the course of Syria, and danger continued on Turkey's southern border. If a state is incapable of responding to international terrorism and does not request outside help, then a situation may arise in which assistance may be given without an invitation.<sup>51</sup> However, it is accepted that such operations that are not based on the consent of the country state do not violate the "*jus cogens*"<sup>52</sup> prohibition on the use of force.<sup>53</sup>

UN Charter Article VII, titled "*Action concerning Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression*", the collective security system provides an effective mechanism in the fight against terrorism. First of all, to take action for this mechanism, the Security Council must act within the framework of Article 39. After that, Security Council may decide on the complete or partial interruption of economic relations according to Article 41<sup>54</sup> or may take such action by air, sea, or land forces according to Article 42.<sup>55</sup> Until today, the UN Security Council has repeatedly defined terrorism as a "*threat to international peace and security*" under Article 39.<sup>56</sup> However, it has never implemented a collective security mechanism to eliminate

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<sup>48</sup> Alfred P. Rubin, "Current Legal Approaches to International Terrorism: Alternative Legal Approaches", in *Terrorism & Political Violence: Limits & Possibilities of Legal Control*, ed. Henry H. Han, (Oceana Publications Inc., 1993), 380-381.

<sup>49</sup> Sertaç Hami Başeren, *Uluslararası Hukukta Devletlerin Münferiden Kuvvet Kullanmalarının Sınırları*, (Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2003), 200-201.

<sup>50</sup> Richard J. Erickson, *Legitimate Use of Force Against State-Sponsored Terrorism*, 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Jus cogens is a principle of international law that is based on values taken to be fundamental to the international community and that cannot be set aside (as by treaty).

<sup>53</sup> Sertaç Hami Başeren, *Uluslararası Hukukta Devletlerin Münferiden Kuvvet Kullanmalarının Sınırları*, 172-174.

<sup>54</sup> UN Charter, Article 41.

<sup>55</sup> UN Charter, Article 42.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Greenwood, "International law and the war against terrorism", *Int. Affairs* 78, no.2 (2002), 303.



the terrorist threat to international peace and security. Resolutions 1373 (2001), 2170, and 2178 (2014) of the UN Security Council invite states to act as global cooperation fighting against terrorism however it does not operate a collective security system.

Syria has not attacked any other state directly, nor is there any evidence that it intends to do so shortly. On the contrary, such an action would be irrational given its internal turmoil. The situation in Syria is indeed destabilizing the region, particularly concerning refugee flows into Turkey and other neighboring countries.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, DAESH/ISIS emerging as a non-state actor was involved in many terrorist attacks against Turkey. The armed attacks of DAESH/ISIS were not limited to suicide bombings, but it launched missile/rocket attacks at various times from the areas, where it controls in the Syrian region.<sup>58</sup> Turkey has also been exposed to attacks by the terrorist organization PKK and its extensions, the PYD/YPG. The armed attacks of the PYD/YPG against Turkey make the right of self-defense possible.<sup>59</sup>

When cross-border operations are evaluated in terms of international law, the following conclusions are reached;<sup>60</sup>

- Armed attacks originating from Syria are carried out against the State of the Republic of Turkey, both inside and outside its country,
- These attacks are carried out by terrorist organizations existing in Syria,
- These attacks have reached the level of an armed attack,
- The Republic of Turkey had to take the necessary measures to prevent these attacks,
- The target of the operations is not the military power and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic State, but the terrorist groups that directly attack,
- Turkey is in the region only for military purposes<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Michael N. Schmitt, "The Syrian Intervention: Assessing the Possible International Law Justifications", *(International Law Studies, 2013)*, 747.

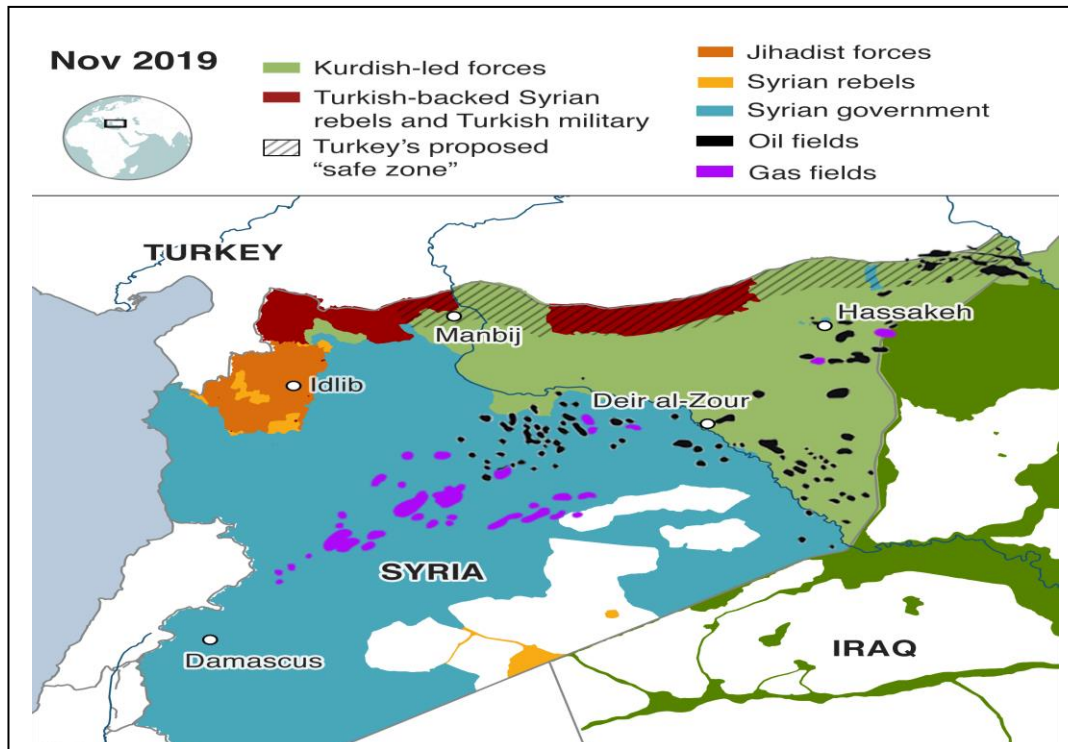
<sup>58</sup> Fatma Taşdemir and Adem Özer, "The Operation Euphrates Shield from The Perspective of Use of Force Law", *The Academic Elegance* 4, no.7 (2017): 60.

<sup>59</sup> Fatma Taşdemir, *Suriye, Çatışma ve Uluslararası Hukuk*, (Nobel Akademik Yayınları, 2020), 82.

<sup>60</sup> Süleyman Sırrı Terzioğlu, "The Issue of Legitimacy of the Operation Euphrates Shield in terms of International Law", *Union of Turkish Bar Associations Journal* 134, (2018), 33-34.

<sup>61</sup> Map is a supplementary showing that Turkey is in Syria not because of the energy resources in the region, but because of security concerns.



**Figure 3. Syrian Oil and Gas Field.**<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2. Operations Carried out by Turkey over South Border

As a result of the decrease in the authority of the Assad regime during the civil war in Syria, uncontrollable areas have emerged and these areas have provided a suitable environment for terrorist groups.<sup>63</sup> DAESH/ISIS and PYD/YPG declared their de facto administration over the areas that cannot be administered by Syria. DAESH/ISIS took advantage of this chaotic environment<sup>64</sup> and declared its so-called caliphate<sup>65</sup>, while the PYD/YPG declared its autonomy in Haseke, Ayn'el-Arab (Kobani), and Afrin.<sup>66</sup> Although Turkey took its first decision for a military operation in Syria in 2012<sup>67</sup>, it has for a long time endeavored to resolve the problem and the dangerous situation on its border through peaceful means.

<sup>62</sup> Syria war: Who benefits from its oil production?, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/50464561>, (24 April 2021)

<sup>63</sup> Raymond Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Resilience and the Arab Uprising: Syria in Comparative Perspective" *Centre of Middle East Studies* 7, no.1 (2015): 33-34.

<sup>64</sup> Burhanettin Duran and Ufuk Ulutaş, "Türkiye'nin DEAŞ'la Mücadelesinin Kritik Dönemeci: Fırat Kalkanı Harekâtı", in *Türk Dış Politikası Yıllığı*, (SETA, 2017), 13.

<sup>65</sup> DAESH Declared Its Caliphate, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/isid-hilafet-ilan-etti>, (20 March 2021)

<sup>66</sup> Syrian Kurds declared Its Autonomy", *Aljazeera Türk*, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/suriyelikurtler-ozerklik-ilan-etti>, (20 March 2021)

<sup>67</sup> Republic of Turkey Legal Gazette, 6 October 2012, Serial: 28433.



Fighting against DAESH/ISIS is a national security priority for Turkey. As an active member of the Global Coalition since its inception, Turkey has contributed to its “*Operation Inherent Resolve*”. Turkey also carried out more than 9 major counter-terrorism operations on the Syrian and Iraq territories neighboring its border based on international law, under its right to self-defense as outlined in Article 51 of the UN Charter and the relevant Security Council Resolutions on counter-terrorism.<sup>68</sup> After the attacks carried out by DAESH/ISIS in Kilis and Suruç in 2015, Turkey stated that it had the right to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter by sending a letter<sup>69</sup> to the Security Council.<sup>70</sup>

To eradicate DAESH/ISIS’s presence from the Syrian territories along its borders, Turkey launched “*Operation Euphrates Shield (OES)*” from 24 August 2016 to 29 March 2017. The Free Syrian Army, supported by the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), has established control over an area of 2,015 km<sup>2</sup> and neutralized 2,647 DAESH/ISIS fighters.<sup>71</sup> First of all, after the DAESH/ISIS and PKK/YPG terrorist organizations in the region were neutralized, then continuous territorial dominance was ensured to prevent these groups from carrying out attacks again. As a result of the success of the OES, DAESH/ISIS started to lose ground and lost its territorial control in Syria by the end of March 2019 due to subsequent operations conducted by the Global Coalition. Independent Patrol Activities are carried out with Russia to make the atmosphere of peace and security permanent.<sup>72</sup> The main aims of this operation;

- Ensuring Turkey’s border security and ensuring the security of life and property of the living in the region,
- Completely neutralizing the DAESH/ISIS and PYD/YPG terrorist features here and support the Free Syrian Army for the integrity of their countries.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Relations between Turkey–Syria, MoFA, (<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%e2%80%93syria.en.mfa>), (23 April 2021)

<sup>69</sup> It is apparent that the regime in Syria is neither capable of nor willing to prevent these threats emanating from its territory, which clearly imperil the security of Turkey and the safety of its nationals. Individual and collective self-defence is our inherent right under international law, as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter of the UN.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from the Chargé d’affaires.i. of the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the UN addressed to the President of the Security Council” UN, 24 July 2015, UN Doc. S/2015/563.

<sup>71</sup> Relations between Turkey–Syria, MoFA, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%e2%80%93syria.en.mfa> , (23 April 2021)

<sup>72</sup> Operation Euphrates Shield, Land Forces Command, (<https://www.kkk.tsk.tr/firat-kalkani.aspx>) (23 July 2021)

<sup>73</sup> Press Release, Secretariat-General of the National Security Council, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/28-eylul->



- To prevent civilians in the region from being harmed by terrorist incidents,<sup>74</sup>
- A longer-term objective was to ensure the return of refugees from Turkey to Syria once security had been established.<sup>75</sup>

While Israel<sup>76</sup>, France, and Germany<sup>77</sup> saw Turkey's fight against terrorists as legitimate, the USA also supported the operation. Thanks to this operation, the region between Azez and Jarablus was taken under control. Therefore, the connection between Manbij and Afrin, which is under the control of the PYD, was cut off and the PYD's access to the Mediterranean was prevented.<sup>78</sup>

The Astana peace talks were launched on 23-24 January 2017, to put an end to violence and improve the humanitarian situation in war-torn Syria.<sup>79</sup> The third round of meetings in Astana held on 14-15 March 2017 resulted in the agreement by all parties to the existing ceasefire agreement. Russia, Iran, and Turkey have agreed at peace talks in Kazakhstan to place observers on the border of a de-escalation<sup>80</sup> zone in Syria.<sup>81</sup> Idlib was chosen as one of four de-escalation zones in which Turkey was assigned to monitor the truce between the Syrian regime and the opposition.<sup>82</sup> Turkey had begun setting up observation posts in Idlib in October 2017. The Turkish Operation in Idlib Governorate or code-named “*Idlib De-escalation Control Force*” is an operation by TAF which started on 08 October 2017, following the earlier Operation Euphrates Shield. The largest one of those included the Idlib Governorate and

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2016-tarihli-toplantı , (25 April 2021)

<sup>74</sup> Op Euphrates Shield, Land Forces Command, (<https://www.kkk.tsk.tr/firat-kalkani.aspx>) (23 July 2021)

<sup>75</sup> Valeria Talbot, “Turkey in Syria: Role, Interests and Challenges”, in *Rebuilding Syria: The Middle East's Next Power Game?* eds. Eugenio Dacrema and Valeria Talbot, (Ledizioni Ledi Publishing 2019), 76.

<sup>76</sup> Support from Israil over Cerablus, Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/israildenturkiyeye-cerablus-destegi/635036>, (15 April 2021)

<sup>77</sup> Dünya Ülkeleri Cerablus'a Ne dedi?, Hürriyet, at <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/dunya-ulkelericerablus-operasyonuna-ne-dedi-40207222>, (15 April 2021)

<sup>78</sup> Doğan Şafak Polat, “Objectives and Results of Turkish Military Operations in the North of Syria”, *The Journal of Security Strategies* 16, no. 33 (2020): 70.

<sup>79</sup> Turkey, Russia, Iran FMs to assess Astana Syria process, Anadolu Agency, (<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkey-russia-iran-fms-to-assess-astana-syria-process>), (24 July 2021)

<sup>80</sup> Russia, Turkey, and Iran signed a memorandum in May 2017 and are sponsors of the Astana talks on Syria.

<sup>81</sup> Russia, Turkey, Iran Agree On Borders of Syrian De-Escalation Zones, Radio Free Europe, <https://www.rferl.org/a/astana-russia-turkey-iran-agree-on-borders-deescalation-zones.html> (25 July 2021)

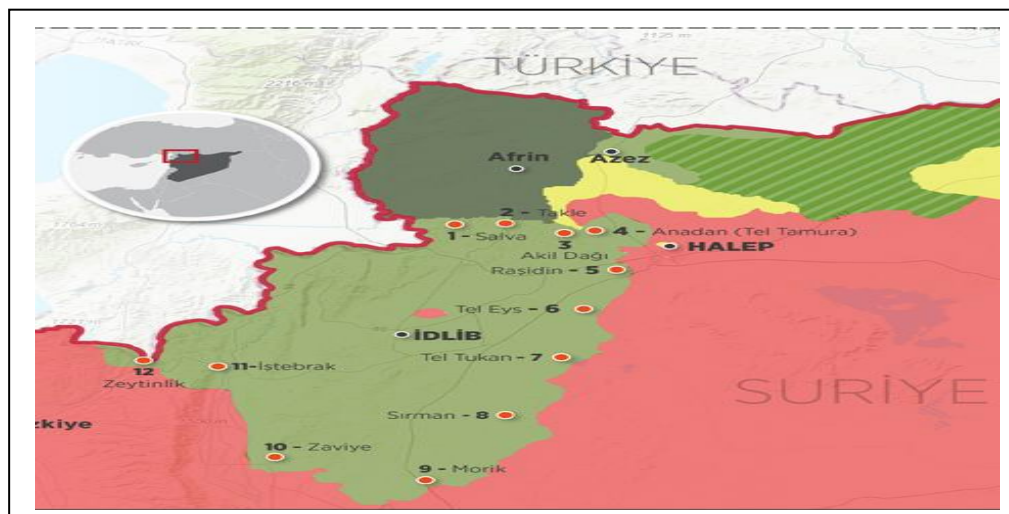
<sup>82</sup> Turkey finishes setting up observation posts in Idlib, Hurriyet Daily News, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/tsk-idlibde-son-ateskes-gozlem-noktasini-kurdu/1147979>, (24 July 2021)



adjoining districts of Hama, Aleppo, and Latakia Governorates. TAF would take an active role and 12 observation points were established in the interior of the region to observe the ceasefire. The first observation point took office on 13 October 2017 and the 12<sup>th</sup> on 16 May 2018. Likewise, Russia has established 10 and Iran 7 observation points outside of the Idlib de-escalation zone. The aims of these de-escalation zones,<sup>83</sup>

- Increasing the effectiveness of the ceasefire regime,
- Ending conflicts around the region,
- Delivering humanitarian aid to those in need,
- Providing suitable conditions for the return of local people to their homes,
- Supporting the creation of favorable conditions for the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

**Figure 4.** Turkey's 12 Observation Points in Idlib.<sup>84</sup>



The threat posed by the PYD/YPG terrorist elements located in Afrin in the northwest of Syria to the lives and properties of the local population as well as to Turkish citizens living in the bordering Turkish provinces escalated due to indirect long-range fires and attacks. The presence of DAESH/ISIS elements in Afrin and the risk of their possible attacks on Turkey as well as their infiltration into Europe constituted another reason for Turkey to act. Against this

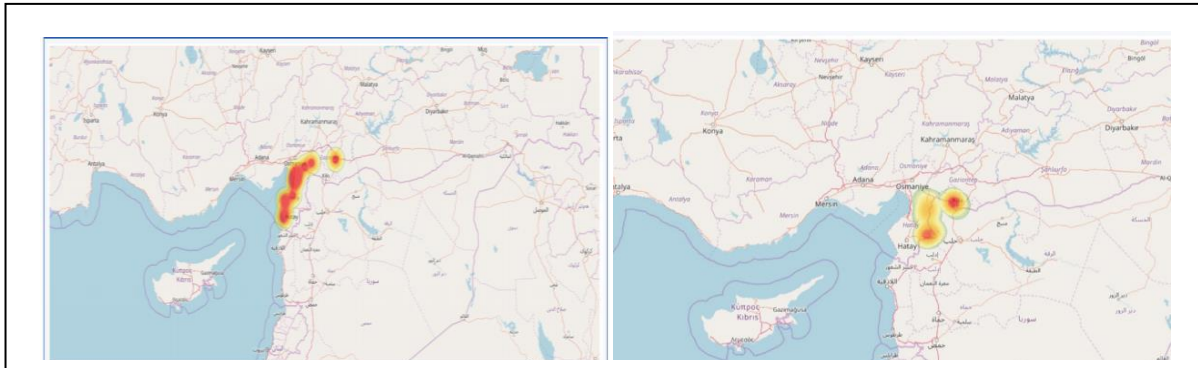
<sup>83</sup> TAF is in Idlib, CNN, <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/son-dakika-tdan-idlib-aciklamasi>, (25 July 2021)

<sup>84</sup> TAF Established 12<sup>th</sup> Observation Point”, Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/tsk-idlibde-son-ateskes-gozlem-noktasini-kurdu/1147979> , (24 July 2021)



backdrop, the TAF and the Free Syrian Army supported by the TAF launched “*Operation Olive Branch (OOB)*” on 20 January 2018 till 18 March 2018<sup>85</sup> which is a meaningful day that is the anniversary of the WW1 victory of Çanakkale.<sup>86</sup>

**Figure 5.** PKK Attacks on Turkey between 2015-2017 (Left) and 2017-2018 (Right)<sup>87</sup>



The objectives of the OOB were to ensure Turkey’s border security, neutralize terrorists in Afrin, and liberate the local population from the oppression and tyranny of terrorists. Control was established in Afrin as of 18 March 2018. In less than two months, an area of approximately 2,000 km<sup>2</sup> was cleared from PYD/YPG and DAESH/ISIS elements. Approximately 4,600 terrorists have been neutralized since the start of the operation. As in the OES area, Turkey focused on ensuring security and stability with the participation of the local population in areas freed from terror with the OOB. More than 371,000 Syrians have been able to return to the said operation areas thanks to stabilization efforts in areas such as de-mining, public order, local governance, and return of Internally Displaced People.<sup>88</sup> The main aims of this operation;

- Establishing security and stability along the Turkey-Syria border region,
- Protecting Syrian civilians from the terrorist groups’ depredations,
- Ensuring the safe return of displaced Syrians to their homelands,
- To prevent PYD/YPG's infiltrations into Turkey via the Amanos Mountains.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Relations between Turkey–Syria, MoFA, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%e2%80%93syria.en.mfa>, (23 April 2021)

<sup>86</sup> Erdoğan announced Afrin center has been taken under full control, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/news/peace-and-security-are-waving-in-afrin-not-the-rags-of-the-terrorist-organization>, (23 April 2021).

<sup>87</sup> Necdet Özçelik and Can Acun, “Terörle Mücadelede Yeni Safha Zeytin Dalı Harekatı”, (SETA, 2018), 13.

<sup>88</sup> Relations between Turkey–Syria, MoFA, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%e2%80%93syria.en.mfa>, (23 April 2021)

<sup>89</sup> Turkey's Operation Olive Branch: 10 questions answered, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkeys->





As a result of the operation, PYD/YPG terror elements were cleared and cantonal structuring was prevented in Afrin and 282 urbanized terrains were taken under control.<sup>90</sup> Following this operation, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that Turkey has a right to act in self-defense.<sup>91</sup>

Considering the ongoing PYD/YPG threat and the inability of the U.S. to effectively address Turkey's legitimate security concerns, the Syrian National Army supported by the TAF launched "*Operation Peace Spring*" (OPS) on 9 October 2019 when the Turkish Air Force launched airstrikes. The objectives of the OPS were;

-To eliminate the terror threat to Turkey's national security, contribute to the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and unity,

-Liberate the local population from the oppression and tyranny of the terrorists and lay the ground for the dignified,

-Safe and voluntary returns of displaced Syrians.<sup>92</sup>

Contrary to the existing agreements, as a result of the attacks launched on 06 May 2019, many innocent civilians lost their lives and were injured.<sup>93</sup> After weeks of unheeded warnings to the Syrian regime to stop its expansionist policies in Idlib by the end of February 2020, Turkey declared the launch of an operation called *Operation Spring Shield* (OSS) in the region. The operation was launched after regime forces carried out airstrikes, killing 34 Turkish soldiers and injuring tens of others in the area.<sup>94</sup> OSS was a cross-border military operation conducted by the TAF in the Idlib Governorate of northwestern Syria, which began on 27 February 2020 in response to the airstrikes. Turkish National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar announced that the purpose of the operation had been within the framework of the Astana talks, to ensure a

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operation-olive-branch-10-questions-answered/ (22 July 2021)

<sup>90</sup> Operation Olive Branch, Land Forces Command, at <https://www.kkk.tsk.tr/zeytin-dali.aspx> (23 July 2021)

<sup>91</sup> Turkey has right to act in self-defense, NATO chief Stoltenberg says, Eurasia Diary, <https://ednews.net/news/-turkey-has-right-to-act-in-afrin-natochief-stoltenberg-says> (13 May 2021)

<sup>92</sup> Relations between Turkey-Syria, MoFA, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey%e2%80%93syria.en.mfa>, (23 April 2021)

<sup>93</sup> Operation Spring Shield", Land Forces Command, at <https://www.kkk.tsk.tr/zeytin-dali.aspx> (23 July 2021)

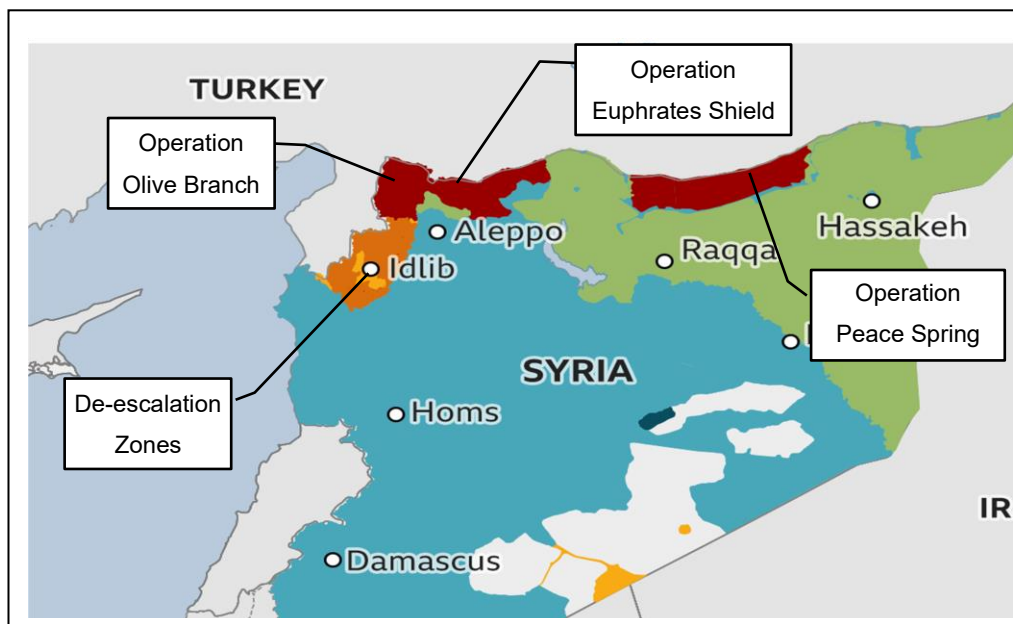
<sup>94</sup> Turkey launches Operation Spring Shield against regime aggression in Syria, Daily Sabah, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkey-launches-operation-spring-shield-in-syrias-idlib/news> (19 July 2021)





ceasefire agreement in the Second Northern Syria Buffer Zone and to prevent migration from Idlib towards the Turkish border.<sup>95</sup> On 5 March 2020, Turkey and Russia signed a ceasefire agreement in Moscow and also agreed to establish a security corridor and joint patrols.<sup>96</sup> The cross-border controlled areas as a result of the operations are shown below.

**Figure 6.** Areas took under control as a result of operations.<sup>97</sup>



As a result of the operations, the region was cleared of terrorist organizations, especially DAESH/ISIS and PYD/YPG, and the formation of a possible terror corridor was prevented. The terrorists in the region were pushed to the south, enabling them to leave Turkey's southern border region. In coordination with these operations; Northern Iraq operations were launched by Turkey with the Decisive Operation in 2018 and keep going without any interruption to cease the terror attacks of PKK and its affiliates. Decisive Operations are aimed to prevent the border crossings of the terrorist organization PKK by controlling the Hakurk territory. Another goal of the operations is to deal a financial blow to the terrorist organization PKK by preventing the

<sup>95</sup> Statement by Minister Akar about Operation Spring Shield, NTV, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/bakan-akardan-bahar-kalkani-harekati-aciklamasi>, (23 July 2021)

<sup>96</sup> Syria war: Russia and Turkey agree Idlib ceasefire, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51747592> (23 July 2021)

<sup>97</sup> "Why has the Syrian war lasted 10 years?," BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229> , (23 July 2021)



revenue it generates from fuel smuggling.<sup>98</sup>

Operation Claw (Turkish: Pençe Harekatı) was a cross-border military operation by the TAF into Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region (Hakurk).<sup>99</sup> Turkish troops fired artillery shells and launched air attacks on 28 May 2019, followed by a border crossing by the TAF.

Operation Claw-Eagle<sup>100</sup> (Turkish: Pençe-Kartal Harekatı) was another cross-border OP on 15 June 2020 and followed by Operation Claw-Tiger (Turkish: Pençe-Kaplan Harekatı) on 17 June 2020 and Operation Claw-Eagle 2 (Turkish: Pençe-Kartal-2 Harekatı) was conducted on 18 January 2021 following the earlier Operations.<sup>101</sup>

The joint Claw-Lightning and Claw-Thunderbolt operations (Turkish: Pençe-Şimşek Operasyonu and Pençe-Yıldırım Operasyonu) are ongoing TAF cross border operations in northern Iraq began on 24 April 2021. The operations are taking place in the Metina, Zap, and Avashin-Basyan regions.<sup>102</sup> Now, a similar example of having a forward presence will be examined.

### 3.3. Forward Presence of NATO

In 2017, NATO deployed four multinational battle groups to the Baltic States as part of a wider program to deter Russian aggression called eFP (Enhanced Forward Presence). Although there is no cross-border activity here, a concept based on the principle of anticipation has been developed. After Russia annexed Crimea, there is clear evidence that Eastern Europe, as a whole, was becoming an increasingly important target for Russia.<sup>103</sup> Why would NATO have taken such an approach? Because NATO believes that she cannot prevent the threat with her normal deployed forces and should be present at the borderline. NATO expanded its

<sup>98</sup> “Decisive Operations, Habertürk, <https://www.haberturk.com/kararlilik-harekatini-ndan-carpici-goruntuler-1888599>, (16 July 2021)

<sup>99</sup> Operation Launched in Hakurk Region, Northern Iraq, MoD, <https://www.msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/2852019-47414>, (23 June 2021)

<sup>100</sup> Pençe-Kartal Operasyonu, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-53044428>, (23 June 2021)

<sup>101</sup> Pençe-Kaplan Operasyonu, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-53072803>, (23 June 2021)

<sup>102</sup> Pençe-Şimşek ve Pençe Yıldırım Operasyonları, MoD, <https://www.msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/2442021-24360>, (23 June 2021)

<sup>103</sup> The Positive Impact of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence the Positive Impact of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence” at <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/9/3/hanced-forward> (30 April 2021)



presence in the eastern part of the Alliance by establishing multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland following the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Allies implemented the 2016 Warsaw Summit decisions to establish NATO's forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland and to develop a tailored forward presence in the Black Sea region. These decisions demonstrate the Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to defend Alliance territory.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the idea of providing border security at the borderline requires being forward presence. At the same time, having a force that can intervene immediately on the borderline appears as an indicator of determination. Due to the circumstances, NATO cannot maintain forces across the border and ensure the security of its allies with its ready-made troops behind the border. Although the course of action of NATO and Turkey is not the same, their end state is the same: secure their borders. Countries are trying to deploy near to the threat and neutralize the threat at its source now. That's why NATO's determination to stay ahead is like Turkey's determination to stay beyond its borders.

NATO's forward presence is part of the biggest reinforcement of Alliance collective defense in a generation. Forward presence can be rapidly reinforced by additional forces and capabilities.<sup>105</sup> Amidst an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment, the eFP is NATO's first new deployment model since the Alliance's inception over seventy years ago: member states assisting other member states with the unanimous endorsement of the Atlantic Council.<sup>106</sup> This concept was developed directly to protect the eastern border. This forward defense concept and Turkey's need to protect its borders from forward are very similar. Because in both, preliminary preparation against attacks and control of border crossings are kept in the foreground. Despite being rival countries in NATO's concept, terrorist groups and illegal crossings are at the forefront of Turkey's practice.

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<sup>104</sup> Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm), (30 April 2021)

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander Lanoszka, Christian Leuprecht, and Alexander Moens, "*Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence 2017-2020*", (NATO Defense Collage, November 2020), 4.

**Figure 7. NATO Enhanced Forward Presence as of April 2021.<sup>107</sup>**

Forward presence contributes to the NATO Alliance's strengthened deterrence and defense posture, and the Allies' situational awareness, interoperability, and responsiveness. Deterrence consists of taking measures that serve to prevent an adversary from undertaking actions that would revise the status quo.<sup>108</sup> NATO's rapid reinforcement strategy also ensures that forward presence forces will be reinforced by NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), the broader NATO Response Force, Allies' additional high readiness forces, and NATO's heavier follow-on forces, if necessary.<sup>109</sup> Within the same framework, Turkey's defense from the front and having a force in the front both contribute to its deterrence and can prevent people who want to enter the country before they approach the border by detecting them early. The course of action of NATO and Turkey is to ensure their security from ahead, without the intention of attack. Although NATO cannot defend from across borders due to their nature, cross-border defense is necessary due to the chaotic environment in Syria.

The security environment in the Euro-Atlantic area continues to evolve and new threats and challenges are constantly emerging. The Alliance adapts and plans accordingly, and its forward presence will remain as long as the security situation requires it. All NATO measures

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Alexander Lanoszka et al. "Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence 2017-2020", 5.

<sup>109</sup> "Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast" NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm), (30 April 2021)



are and will remain defensive, proportionate, and consistent with international commitments.<sup>110</sup> NATO is also trying to provide border security with the same idea in Turkey. As the threat continues, Turkish soldiers will fight beyond their borders, protecting their people and preventing border crossings. In this way, the flow of terrorists, smugglers, and asylum seekers, first to the European Union countries and then to the whole world, will be at a minimum level.

### 3.4. Effects of Turkey's Operations

As a result of the operations which has been carried out, Turkey has become an effective actor in the Syrian territory against terrorist groups thanks to its direct military force. In this way, with the political and military superiority gained in northern Syria, the balance began to change in favor of Turkey.<sup>111</sup> As a result of these military operations, Turkey has demonstrated its military and political deterrence.<sup>112</sup> Turkey's boots on the ground have undoubtedly changed the balance in northern Syria.<sup>113</sup> Turkey gained a geostrategic advantage in the region and created a 220-kilometer-long security zone in the south by controlling territorial military bases.<sup>114</sup>

Turkey has shown that it is possible to fight without causing civilian casualties without the destruction of cities both to the world and to the people of the region and proved that only the terrorist elements are cleared. The Turkish army made a great effort in preventing civilian casualties during operations. This sensitivity is not shooting at areas where civilians are near a target, by also taking measures to prevent such situations while planning and conducting operations.

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<sup>110</sup> İbid.

<sup>111</sup> Necdet Özçelik and Can Acun, "Terörle Mücadelede Yeni Safha Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı", 33.

<sup>112</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı: Kazananlar ve Kaybedenler", (SETA, 2018), <https://www.setav.org/zeytin-dali-harekati-kazananlar-ve-kaybedenler/>.

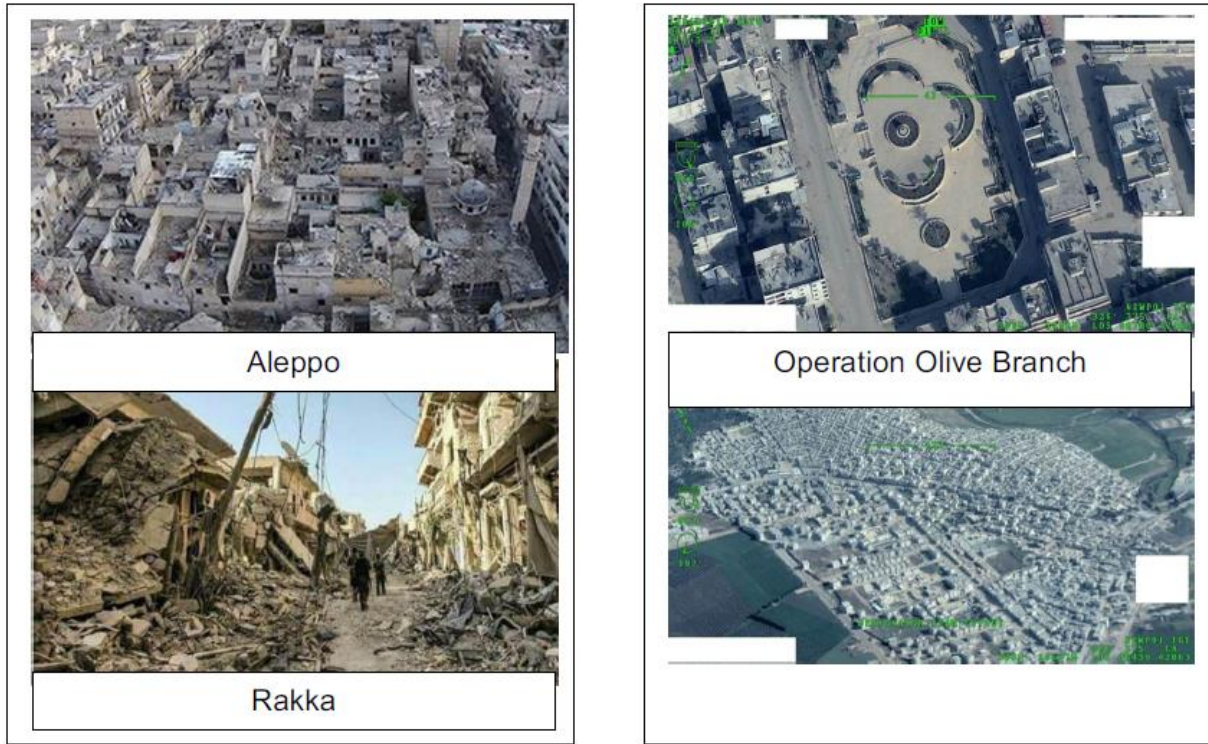
<sup>113</sup> Valeria Talbot, "Turkey in Syria: Role, Interests and Challenges", in *Rebuilding Syria: The Middle East's Next Power Game?*, 84.

<sup>114</sup> Doğan Şafak Polat, "Objectives and Results of Turkish Military Operations in the North of Syria", 87.

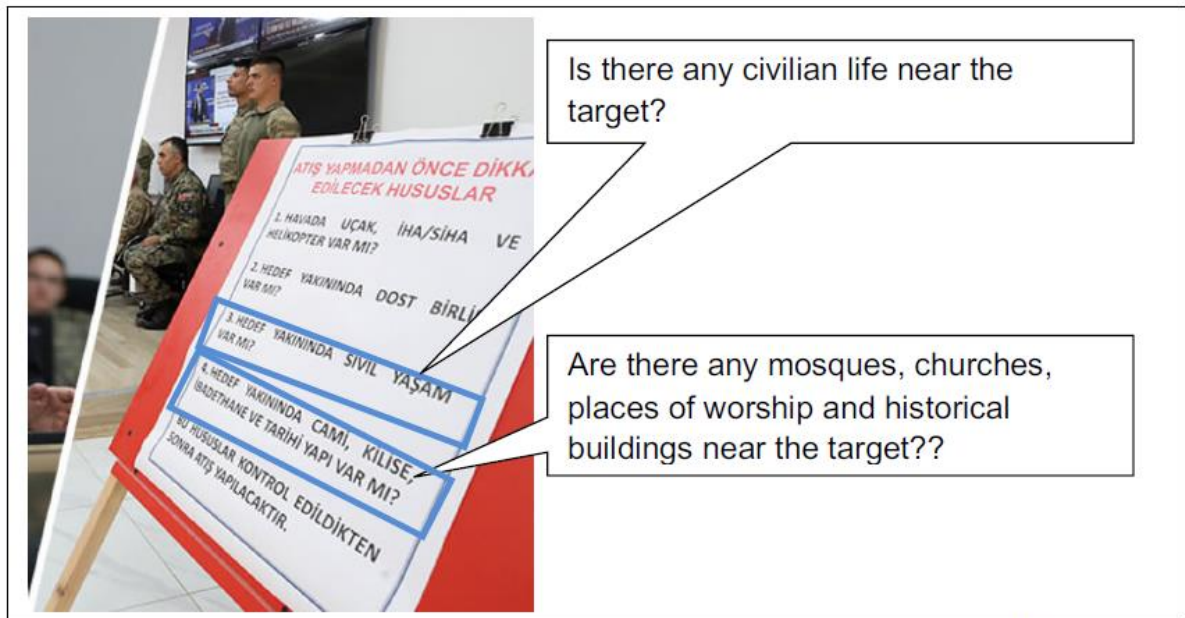




**Figure 8.** Comparison of the Effects of Military Operations.<sup>115</sup>



**Figure 9.** Warning Notes and Restrictions in the Operation Center.<sup>116</sup>



<sup>115</sup> Turkish Armed Forces Official Twitter Account, at <https://twitter.com/tskgnkur/status/975778965834039296> (25 July 2021)

<sup>116</sup> Sensitivity of Turkish Armed Forces on Civilians” Star, <https://www.star.com.tr/guncel/harekat-merkezindeki-pano-dikkat-cekti-iste-tsknin-sivil-hassas>, (4 May 2021)





Turkey's gains as a result of the operations were as follows:

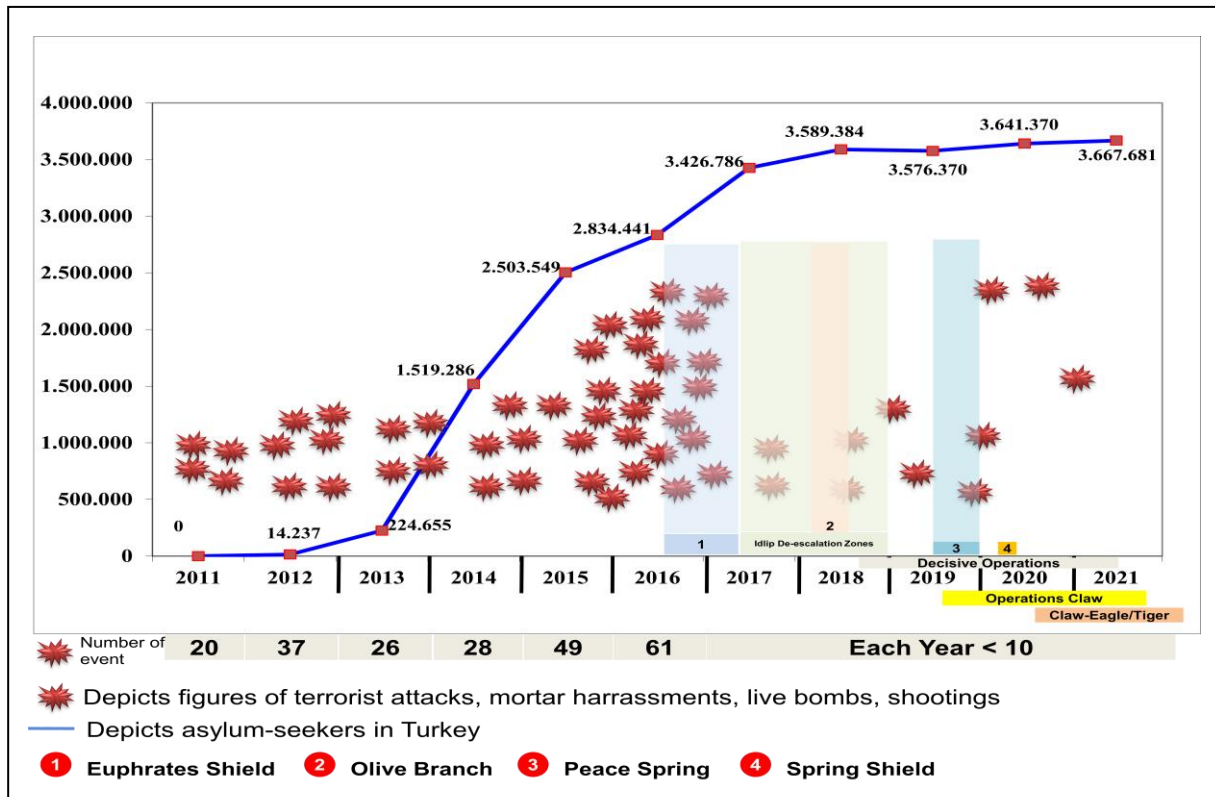
- By providing border security, it prevented YPG/PYD terrorist attacks in the Hatay-Osmaniye-Kilis-Islahiye region,<sup>117</sup>
- Removed the danger of terrorist organizations at least 35 km from the borderline,
- Turkey's southern border region and the people living there remained outside the range of terrorist weapons,
- Demonstrated to the elements in the region by carrying out successful joint operations across the border,
- Demonstrated ability to carry out operations with local elements without harming local civilians and residential areas,
- Contributing to the neutralizing of terrorists in the region, Turkey took the issue diplomatically at the Astana and Sochi summits,
- With the "Operation Claw" operations carried out in coordination with these operations in the north of Iraq, attacks of terrorists have prevented the border from this region,
- With the clearing of mines and traps in the regions that were attacked by terrorists, immigrated people have started to return to their homes gradually,
- A soft power effect has been achieved on the people in terms of both hosting the refugees and neutralizing the terrorists in Syria,
- By providing territory dominance, the movement of asylum seekers, smugglers, and terrorists has been limited.

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<sup>117</sup> Necdet Özçelik and Can Acun, "Terörle Mücadelede Yeni Safha Zeytin Dalı Hrk.", (SETA, 2018), pp. 48-50.



**Figure 10.** All Operations and their Effects on Decreasing Number of Terror Incidents.<sup>118</sup>



### 3.5. Using Advanced Technology against Terrorism

With the developing technology, the operation against non-conventional forces has become even more effective. Thanks to high technology, the distinction between terrorists, smugglers, asylum seekers, and civilians has become more easily detectable now. The developments in surveillance and reconnaissance systems and the increase in the capabilities of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) make target detection and destruction, where necessary, even more effective. In particular, the development of UAV technology allows countries to meet arising threats and provide a preventive effect. The elimination of targets, the ability to operate in difficult areas and danger for people, the low cost in comparison to other aircraft, and the minimal risk of losses are the main reasons for preferring UAVs.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Created by the authors by analyzing data of Director of General of Migration Managements, Nedim Şener's article, attacks on Turkey and the operations carried out.

<sup>119</sup> Osman Şen and Hüseyin Akarşlan, "Terrorist Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: Turkey's Example", *Defence Against Terrorism Review* 13, (2020): 50.



Considering the impact on Turkey's warfighting capabilities domestically produced UAVs became successfully operative in Operations Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring, and several counterterrorism operations against the PKK in southeast Turkey and northern Iraq.<sup>120</sup> Turkey's products to be labeled as "*combat proven*" and have given Turkey a highly prestigious reputation in the worldwide drone market – as opposed to many of its competitors.<sup>121</sup> Of course, the point to be mentioned here will be deterrence on terrorists and smugglers rather than advancing in the commercial direction. Because these people, whose every movement is observed from both land and air, are forced to move in underground tunnels like moles, cannot move comfortably and ultimately stay away from Turkish borders. Remote control of the border with systems such as UAVs, especially the troops beyond its borders, allows Turkish citizens in border provinces to live fearlessly and safely. It was stated by Defense Minister Hulusi Akar that terrorists could not stay in the same place two nights in a row without effective surveillance and reconnaissance activities.<sup>122</sup>

While providing real-time situational awareness, effective area control, and reinforced survivability, the UAVs have generated force protection in hybrid battlegrounds as an expendable asset contrary unlike fighter jets and attack helicopters.<sup>123</sup> For example, Operation Olive Branch's air campaign marked the highest sortie-rates and the most intensive operational tempo in Turkey's cross-border military record in the last decade. As reported by the Turkish General Staff, on the very first day of the intervention, the air force assigned 72 combat aircraft which is tantamount to roughly 25% of the total F-16 variants and the F-4 2020s in the inventory.<sup>124</sup>

After each operation, new measures were developed against the threats in the region via the cutting-edge military weapon systems. For example, having digested the lessons-learned

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<sup>120</sup> Sibel Düz, *The Ascension of Turkey as a Drone Power History, Strategy, and Geopolitical Implications*, (SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, 2020), 20.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>122</sup> "Speech of Minister of Defence", at <https://msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/2672021-42115> (26 July 2021)

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

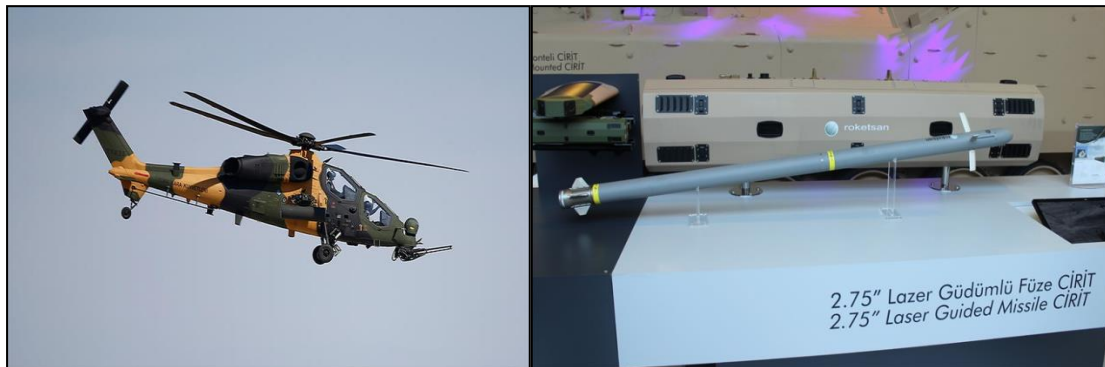
<sup>124</sup> Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen, "Operation Olive Branch: A Political – Military Assessment", (EDAM Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy, 2018), 1.



from the Euphrates Shield, Turkish defense planners now pay utmost attention to eliminating the adversary's subterranean/tunnel warfare capabilities with high-precision smart munitions at the very beginning of the conflict.<sup>125</sup> The use of new generation ammunition has ensured both neutralizing the targets and not harming the objects/people around them. The fact that the commando units in the field knew that there is a continuous and effective combat air support surveillance system over them 24/7 acts as a morale booster and provides them flexibility in planning. Especially, equipped with LANTIRN (Low Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infra-Red for Night) pods which enable low altitude navigation and precision targeting at night.<sup>126</sup>

Under the Close Air Support (CAS) the indigenous T-129 ATAK helicopters made their cross-border debuts and engaged YPG targets with CIRIT-guided rockets during these operations.<sup>127</sup>

**Figure 11.** Close Air Support (CAS) Preferences during operations.<sup>128</sup>



Logistic sustainability and continuous personnel support are very significant for the execution of the operations. In particular, the supply of spare parts and food, and its execution in a terrorist-intensive area, require very careful planning and safety. Notably, KIRPI MRAPs (mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles) joining the campaign are provided with extra protection thanks to ROKETSAN-manufactured RPG shield, or the “cage-armor”. The flexible layered armor cage system is primarily designed for boosting the survivability of land

<sup>125</sup> Ibid p. 5.

<sup>126</sup> Terör mevzilerine Kartal ve Pars vuruşu”, Hürriyet, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/teror-mevzilerine-kartal-ve-pars-vurusu-40723074>, (14 May 2021)

<sup>127</sup> Turkey's T-129 helicopters hit PYD/PKK targets in Afrin Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkeys-t-129-helicopters-hit-pyd-pkk-targets-in-afrin/1040814>, (15 May 2021)

<sup>128</sup> Turkey's T-129 helicopters hit PYD/PKK targets in Afrin Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkeys-t-129-helicopters-hit-pyd-pkk-targets-in-afrin/1040814>, (15 May 2021)



platforms against rocket-propelled grenade threats that many terrorist groups around the world use.<sup>129</sup> Improvised explosives and obstacles/traps are frequently encountered in operations against terrorists. Thanks to KIRPI MRAPs, personnel transfer, and handover-takeover processes have been quite fast and reliable.

**Figure 12.** Flexible Layered Armor Cage Systems (RPG shield) and FIRTINA Howitzer.<sup>130</sup>



The new generation FIRTINA howitzers, which are tasked with providing fire support inside and outside Turkey's southern border, have made very positive contributions to operations with UAV-assisted target tracking and continuous fire support. Especially with its accurate shooting ability, it provides continuous pinpoint, precise fire support to ground troops that were operating at the contact line.

#### 4. Conclusion

Although Turkey initially tried to secure her territory with the measures taken on the borderline against the threats originating from Syria in 2011, Turkey could not get enough effective results and must protect its borders with cross-border operations. From the very first day, Turkey has identified as approaching the Syrian issue with humanitarian feelings. The existence of an authority vacuum in certain regions of Syria, and the failure of the administration to establish the necessary state sovereignty, have resulted in the dominance of terrorist organizations in these areas. Terrorist organizations taking advantage of the vacuum of the authority carried out attacks against Turkey and as a result of these attacks, many people

<sup>129</sup> Ballistic Protection Systems, Roketsan, <https://www.roketsan.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/BALISTIK-ENG-email1.pdf>, (15 May 2021)

<sup>130</sup> Remarkable detail on armored vehicles in Afrin” Hurriyet, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem /afrindeki-zirhli-araclarda-dikkat-ceken-detay-40721846>, (15 May 2021)



lost their lives, material damage was caused, and the sovereignty of Turkey has been violated. Therefore, Turkey took a series of measures to ensure the border security of its territory and the security of Turkish citizens.

Terrorist organizations do not own a country and carry out their activities using the country of another state. It is normal to intervene in countries that cannot control the activities of terrorist organizations within their borders. The main purposes of Turkey's operations in the north of Syria were to clear the area from the PYD/YPG and DAESH/ISIS terrorists and to contribute to the reconstruction of stability in Syria by considering the territorial integrity of the country. Turkey launched these operations in conformity with Article 51 of the UN Charter. After Turkey carried out the operations, no important events occurred in the border region, and peace and security were established within the country. This can prove the accuracy and success of the operations. Particularly the establishment of bases and the execution of joint patrols with allied countries in the region ensured that terrorists and smugglers could not move freely. Terrorists trying to attack find sheltered military areas against them and their effects are not as much as civilian settlements. 7/24 surveillance and reconnaissance activities impede greatly the mobility of terrorists and smugglers.

Turkey uses the equipment developed and produced by itself against terrorists to ensure its security. It is widely acclaimed by the whole world with its systems developed especially for cross-border operations and which do not harm the civilian population. Thanks to Turkey's operations in the region, the civilian population has not been harmed, and historical places and religious motifs have been preserved.

The most important result of the operations is that the people who had migrated because of fear, death, and torture, gradually started to return to the areas cleared from terrorists. Creating an atmosphere of trust in these regions is not as easy as it is supposed. Turkey, which has been experiencing numerous problems for decades due to the ongoing chaotic environment in the Middle East, specifically her neighbors, has taken the necessary measures to avoid the same problems in Syria this time with a new proactive approach. Having experienced that the





humanitarian tragedies on her border directly affect her own country, Turkey is now making an effort to intervene directly in the events from outbound. This problem, which has been going on for more than 10 years and is expected to continue, took a long time to be resolved, but when the events started to reach dangerous dimensions, Turkey had to intervene under international law.

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