



Research Paper

Operation Peace Spring: Burden for Turkey's Sovereignty

Mumin Ahmad Khan

Department of Islamic Studies

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India 202002

ABSTRACT

The Turkish Armed Force launched an Operation "Peace Spring" on October 9, 2019 by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after receiving a green signal from President Donald Trump through phone conversation on 6th October 2019 together with the Syrian National Army mainly aimed to maintain peace and stabilization of country's sovereignty. The Turkish government gave the permission to the establishment of a "Safe Zone" within the area of 30 km near the Northern Syrian border and facilitating to return of 30 million Syrian refugees to their homes. Operation "Peace Spring" trunks from Turkey's political-military necessities and defence, imperatives of securing operational depth to confront the terror threat posed by Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), People's Protection Units (YPG), and Daesh (Islamic State) terrorist organizations, as well as to prevent the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) affiliates in the Middle East region from establishing a fail accomplish situation along the borders of Turkey. It was the third military campaign of the Turkish Army across its borders. The bloodiest Military coup was occurred on 15th of July in 2016 against the Ankara Government. After this incident, Turkey successfully launched two significant campaigns (Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch) in Northwest Syria.

KEYWORDS: Turkish sovereignty; terror threat; peace spring; safe zone; Military campaign; northwest Syria

Received 04 Jan, 2021; Revised: 17 Jan, 2021; Accepted 19 Jan, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan succeeded in putting pressure on Donald Trump's government to withdraw American Troops from north-eastern Syria on October 6, 2019. The Turkish Armed Force, together with Syrian National Army, launched Airstrike on Tuesday, October 9, 2019, in the name of "Operation Peace Spring" against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), SDF, which was led by People's Protection Units (YPG) and Daesh (Islamic State) militants in northern Syria. To create a "Safe Zone" within the area of 30 km near the North Syrian border. Turkish government resettle Syrian refugees to their Homeland.

BACKGROUND OF THE TURKISH MILITARY'S INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

Operation "Peace Spring" was the third Turkish military operation inside the country's borders since 2016. Before this operation, Turkey has launched two crucial missions (Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch) in northwest Syria (Kabalan, 2019).

According to Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the operation expected to fling out all terrorist groups mainly; PKK, YPG and Islamic State (Daesh) while the United States considered as their allies to fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) in the Middle East region. Turkish President Recep, Tayyip Erdogan, tweeted on October 9, 2019.

"Our mission is to prevent the creation of a terror corridor across our southern border, and to bring peace to the area". Erdogan another tweets is;

"Operation Peace Spring will neutralize terror threats against Turkey and lead to the establishment of a safe zone, facilitating the return of Syrian refugees to their homes. We will preserve Syria's territorial integrity and liberation for local communities from terrorists,"(Xinhua, 2019).

Turkey got mixed reactions after launching the operation by the international community. Some of them condemned as well as favour this operation to resettle the 300,000 refugees at their homes in Northern Syria. While the Turkish Defence Ministry said, before starting the process at 4:00 pm, we have informed the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany, France, Italy as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States Secretary-General as of 2:00 pm Local Time (1100 GMT). Turkey considering

this operation "Right to Defence itself", but on 15th October Russia strongly condemned the operation launch by the Turkish government.

Since 2012, the Turkish government has been trying to create a "Safe Zone" together with the border of Northern Syria, along with the administration of Obama. But the US denied its support to help Turkey create safe zone in Northern Syria. The Turkish Military also opposed Erdogan's strategy of militarily intervention in Syria before 2016. As of Obama's response, Erdogan also didn't support the US who declared a war against the ISIL in Iraq. The fall of Mosul occurred in June 2014. In this rebellion, the Iraqi Army was defeated by the ISIL led by Abu Abdulrahman al Bilawi. ISIL took control over Mosul city an estimated 500,000 civilians affected and fled due to that conflict. Later, Iraqi Army initiated an offensive mode on October 17, 2016. After one-year Iraqi Army succeeded in retaking the city in July 2017. Therefore, the US did not permit Turkey to use Incirlik Airbase in the region of Southern Turkey war against ISIL. Besides, America used Syrian opposition YPG against ISIL as a local substitute. But after a long gap, in the summer of 2015 Turkey agreed to allow the US forces to use their land to fight against the ISIL, until the Russian Armed Forces entered and eliminated the situation of Syria's conflict with the help of the Syrian government. Turkey fulfilled its formalities in this conflict. Another major crisis rose when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane near its border (Marwan Kabalan, 2019).

Beside it, Turkey faced another failed bloodiest military coup attempt on July 15, 2016, which targeted the top places of Republican Turkey like Istanbul, Ankara, Grand National Assembly (GNA) and Presidential House by a faction of Turkish Armed Forces. The Turkish government blamed on the leaders of the Gulen Movement, which was declared as a terrorist organization by the Turkish government (but Gulen itself denied any involvement behind this Coup), led by Fethullah Gulen a Turkish Islamic preacher (US-based cleric) and a businessman who lives in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania since, 1999 (Al-Jazeera, 2017). About 241 peoples lost their lives and 2,194 others were injured during a failed military coup in 2016. According to CNN (2016), an International News Channel, Mr. Erdogan (President of Turkey) appeals to US President Obama.

"I call on the United States and President Barack Obama. Dear Mr. President, I told you this before. Either arrest Fethullah Gulen or return him to Turkey. You didn't listen. I call on you again, after there was a coup attempt. Extradite this man in Pennsylvania to Turkey! If we are strategic partners or model partners, do what is necessary".

Fethullah Gulen is a leader and founder of the religious movement "Hizmet" (service), Associations, Media organizations and Schools in Turkey and other countries. During Erdogan's early political struggles in Turkey. Gulen was a great ally of Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP). The relation between Gulen's organization and Erdogan's party grumbled by the incident of Mavi Marmara Raid in 2010. A tension was born between Erdogan's party and the Hizmet Movement after arresting a renowned businessman and senior office-bearer by Gulenist police officer who was close to the AKP (Aljazeera, 2017).

After the one month of military coup of July, 2016, Russia expressed his sympathy and support towards the Turkish government and Erdogan was allowed to join the Russian Armed Forces. The Operation "Euphrates Shield" was launched in southwest Syria to clear the area from ISIL and the YPG, in which Iran also joined later. In January 2018, Turkey launched another operation named "Olive Branch" to expel the YPG and Daesh terror groups from Kurdish majority Afrin District, Northwest Syria with the cooperation of Free Syrian Army (FSA).

OPERATION EUPHRATES SHIELD IN NORTHERN SYRIA

Just after 40 days of unsuccessful military coup of July 2016, Turkey had launched Operation Euphrates Shield on August 24, 2016, under Article 51 of the UN charter. Turkey utilized its "Right of self-defence" with the intension of striking Daesh, ISIL, YPG, and Democratic Union Party (YPD) targets in northern Syria. Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) lasted from August 2016 to March 2017, and it was Turkey's first significant military intervention in Syria. This operation had been totally against the ISIL. Besides, the primary aim of this operation was intercepting the Syrian Kurdish YPD and YPG from merging their three shelters, namely- Kobane, Jazira, and Afrin, along the Syrian-Turkish border. People's Protection Units (YPG), Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the PKK were identified as terrorist organizations by Ankara as well as by the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). To carry out this operation, Turkey faced many internal and external barricades, like Turkey seeking the normalized relations with Russia, which had been disrupted due to the downing of the Russian fighter jet in 2015. However, Turkey got the green signal from both the United States and Russia before launching the OES (Kasapoglu&Ulgen, 2016).

After recapturing Jarablus, Dabiq, and Al-Bab from the rebel groups, Turkish military cleared and pushed back IS and Kurdish militants out of Manbij. Turkey successfully pushed back Islamic State and PYD away from its border about 100 kilometre of area and also stopped the local advancement of Kurdish fighters.

OPERATION OLIVE BRANCH IN NORTHWEST SYRIA

Operation Olive Branch was the continuation of Turkey's previous Military campaign, namely Operation Euphrates Shield notable for clearing the Daesh, PYD, YPG, and PKK terrorist groups from the city Jarablus, Dabiq, and Al-Bab in Northern Syria. On January 20, 2018, Turkey launched its second-biggest military campaign across the border against the Kurdish administered enclave of Afrin or Afrin in Northern Syria after a news triggered that the US was planning for establishing a 30,000 personnel "Border Security Force" collaboration with PYD/YPG militants in Northern Syria. Finally, Russia allowed the Turkish Military to use the Syrian Air Space (because Russia had control over western Syria's air space) of the west of the Euphrates River. Besides, Russia announced the withdrawal of their troops from the Afrin city on the day the operation started. Assad regime seized the opposition-controlled Abu al-Duhur Airbase in Idlib without any confrontation while the Syrian regime announced before operation started that they will target Turkish war planes in its Air space; eventually, they didn't do that. It was a preplanned or an agreement between Turkey, Russia, and the Assad regime, which showed on the Syrian battlefield. The objective of this operation was to "Neutralize the terrorists belonging to PKK, PYD, YPG" as well as Islamic State (IS) militants in North-western Syria (Pusane, 2020).

WHO ARE THE KURDS?

The Kurds were nomads and members of large prevalent Muslim ethnic communities during the Ottoman Empire in south-eastern Anatolia, Zagros Mountains in western Iran, northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria, and western Armenia. Most of them speak the Kurdish language and have their own cultural and linguistic tradition. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Western powers assured that Kurds would get their Homeland with an agreement which is known as the Treaty of Sevres. But after three years, instead of what they have promised in accord, they divided Kurds among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria with the minority status.

It came to be known as the Treaty of Lausanne which was signed on July 24, 1923, and Turkey became as a republican state. In present, Kurds population is around 30 Million living among different regions, with about 19% of them in Turkey, possibly as 15 to 20% in Iraq which is the only State of the area to have established Iraqi Kurdistan, while 10% in Iran and 9% in Syria. Since 1923, Kurds are struggling and demanding for the sovereign nation of Kurdistan as was promised under the Treaty of Sevres (O'Grady and Berger, 2019).

Omer Taspinar, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said that for decades Turkey had a policy of "assimilating the Kurds into Turkish ethnic identity, denial of Kurdish ethnic identity and denial of Kurdish linguistic rights."

Kurds are free to be Kurds in Turkey, only if they accept that they're Turkish citizens. "The problem begins when they want a hyphenated identity," Taspinar said.

II. CONCLUSION

Several military coup occurred against the Turkish Government by terrorist groups like ISIL, YPG, PKK, and Daesh militants. All they were regularly creating problems and intervened in Turkish borders along with Syria for a long time. In these consequences it was necessary they needed to secure their border for the sovereignty of the nation. On 16th April, 2017 a constitutional referendum was presented by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the office of the Prime Minister has been removed. The existing Parliamentary system has been replaced by an Executive Presidency and a presidential system. . Erdogan's regime successfully launched a campaign known as "Operation Peace Spring" to maintain peace.

The Operation "Peace Spring" had provided an excellent opportunity for Erdogan and the Turkish government to maintain peace and stability of their country by eliminating the grave threats that have emerged to destabilize and hyphenate the Turkish unity.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Al-Jazeera (2017). *Turkey's failed coup attempt: All you need to know*. Retrieved on Nov 10, 2020 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/7/15/turkeys-failedcoup-attempt-all-you-need-t-know>
- [2]. Kabalan, M. (2019). How Turkey's 'Peace Spring' changed the dynamics of Syria's war. Retrieved on Nov 20, 2020 from <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/10/14how-turkeys-peace-spring-changed-the-dynamics-of-syrias-war>
- [3]. Kasapoglu, C., & Ulgen, S. (2016). Operation Euphrates Shield and the al-Bab Campaign: A Strategic Assessment. EDAM Foreign Policy and Security Paper Series 2017/1
- [4]. O'Grady, S., & Berger, M. (2019). Who are the Kurds and why is Turkey attacking them? Retrieved on Nov 29, 2020 from the Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/11/who-are-kurds-why-is-turkey-attacking-them/>
- [5]. Pusane, O.K. (2020). Turkish Public Diplomacy and Operation Peace Spring. Retrieved on Dec 10, 2020 from War on the Rocks: <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/turkish-public-diplomacy-and-operation-peace-spring/>
- [6]. Xinhua. (2019). Turkey says Operation Peace Spring aims to fight terrorism along border, set up safe zone. Retrieved on Dec 21, 2020 from China Daily: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201910/10/WS5d9e8a0ca310cf3e3556f9a8.html>