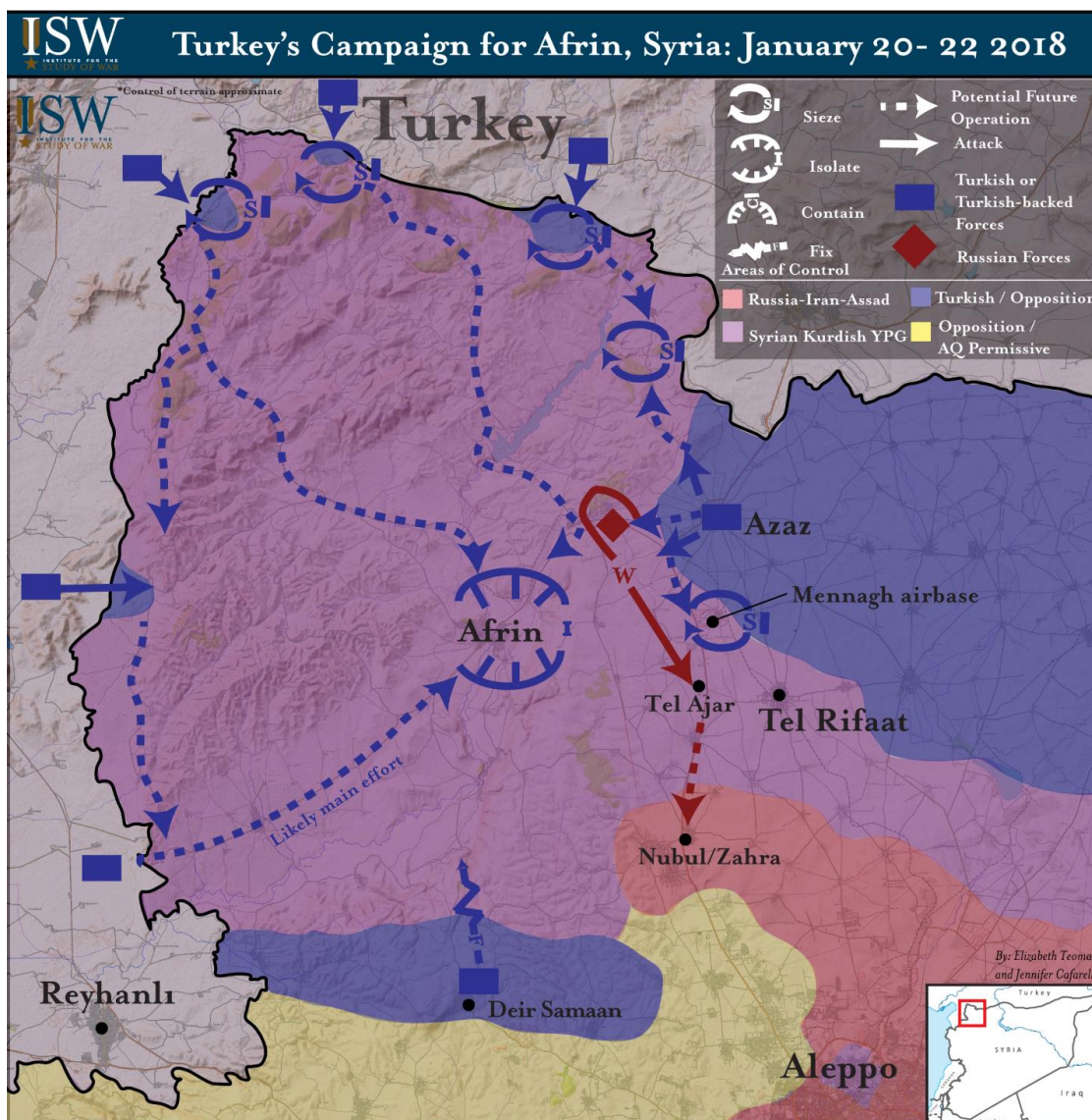


Turkey's Next Phase in Afrin, Syria

By Elizabeth Teoman and Jennifer Cafarella

Turkey is preparing to launch the main effort of its Operation Olive Branch assault against the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in the Afrin area in northern Syria. Turkish forces and Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups have set military conditions for a Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) ground operation in the coming days. Turkish warplanes began an air campaign against YPG military targets along the Syrian-Turkish border on January 20th, 2018. Turkish Armed Forces and Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups attacked YPG forces on multiple fronts along the northern outskirts of YPG-held terrain from January 20-22 in order to fix YPG forces while additional TSK forces, including armored units, mobilized on the YPG's western and southwestern flank. Russian forces, meanwhile, withdrew from Afrin and reinforced Russian positions near Tel Rifaat.



The Institute for the Study of War's January 23 map depicts a possible course of action that would achieve Turkey's likely operational objectives. Those objectives are to secure the Syrian-Turkish border, isolate Afrin city, seize the Mennagh airbase, secure ground lines of communication, and establish a new forward line of troops to serve as a future "de-escalation" line with pro-Bashar al Assad regime forces including Russia. Turkish officials have [also stated](#) that they will attack the YPG-held town of Tel Rifaat. They may pursue that secondary phase after they accomplish their prior objectives. Tel Rifaat is a priority for Turkish-backed opposition groups but not critical for Turkey's goals.

The U.S. has accepted Turkey's offensive against Afrin but appealed to Turkey to limit the scale of [civilian casualties](#). U.S. military officials [are in Ankara](#) to meet with their Turkish counterparts on January 23, 2017. The U.S. goal is likely to prevent Turkey from attacking the town of Manbij, farther east near the Euphrates River, where U.S. forces are present. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan [threatened](#) to [seize Manbij](#) after Afrin.

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