

Euphrates Shield Developments in six months



Analytical
Report





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Introduction

Euphrates shield Operation which started on 24/8/2016 formed a change in the Syrian crisis and its regional and international interactions.

It was the first direct Turkish intervention in the Syrian territory, changed the local situation between the Kurdish groups, ISIS and the Syrian regime's forces in north and northeast of Syria for two years at least.

It moved Turkey from the affected to the role of side effects, to the direct actor in the Syrian event

The local impact of Euphrates shield forms a reflection for international attractions, because this is a project which was disabled by Washington for years, then it passed through Turkish-Russian agreement without Iranian satisfaction.

Also, it came in a special time and phase, it was after the freezing relations between Russia and Turkey, in the last months of American president's role (Barack Obama) when the Turkish -American relations were at its lowest level.

This report reviews the developments during the first six months of Euphrates Shield, the course, achievements, and what can be done in the next months.

First: the course and achievement

1- Military Theme

-The first phase

Euphrates shield has begun on August, morning of 24 2016 by a Turkish military operation with coordination of international alliance forces to support a group of FSA to get rid of controlling ISIS in north of Syria and to prevent Kurdish forces which follow the democratic union party (PYD) which Turkey considers it as the Syrian branch for Kurdistan workers' party, from linking the Kurdish cantons between Afrin and Kobani and from

making progress specifically in the west of Euphrates area that the operation takes its name from

Forces of democratic Syria (which PYD forms its main root) has seized Manbej after battles against members of ISIS and these forces do not get out the city after liberating it, despite American pledges ,and this led to motivate turkey to begin the operation ,in addition to some international circumstances which preparing for such this moving ,the most important is naturalizing Russian-Turkish relations and skipping the crisis between them after dropping the Russian aircraft on November 24 2016.

The operation succeeded in its first test to expulse ISIS from Jarablos and its countryside in record time, and also from the areas between Jarablos and Izaz.

This rapid progress in Jarablos has been attributed to the organization's Neglecting for this city in addition to the far distance between the city and its points of power especially because of tribal nature of the city which did not engaged in works with the organization as what has happened in other cities.

And that the organization probably did not want to repeat its experience in losing boarder cities such as Ain Al-Arab (Kobani) which it defended by it for a period and then lost it, as well as the decline in capabilities of the organization over time.

On the other hand, in spite of the threat of Kurdish militias to ISIS, but ISIS was confident that turkey will not allow Kurdish militias progress to the east of Euphrates and this led to a lack of focus on military preparation in the region.

-The second phase

The second phase started on September 2013 to link regions controlled by opposition in Jarablus by the eastern countryside of Aleppo, then to Izaz in the northern countryside and went to south of Jarablus, especially areas adjacent to the eastern side of Euphrates river, which was controlled by democratic forces of Syria.

The opposition with the Turkish aviation controlled some villages such as: Beer Tahtani , Beer Fouqani , Al-Halwanyeah , Al-Hameer, Tal Shaeer ,

Ras Al-Jouz , Arab Azza , Al-Fursan and its farms , Lialea , Kanao farms , Al-Atharyea , Al-Nahdha, and Al-Mathmanah.

a lot of fronts were opened in this phase which required more effective intervention by the Turkish forces , and ended by securing the borders between Jarablus and Izaz for 90 km ^{"1"} , and the total region of control was about 680 S.Km ^{"2"}

-The third phase

The third phase has begun on 16/9/2016 in order to control Al-Bab city, which has been done in the last day of the sixth month on 23/2/2017.

By ending the first and second stages, turkey has been able to provide safe zones for a large number of Syrian refugees, and a lot of Jarablos's inhabitants start returning to their homes, also the safe zone helped in reducing the numbers of Syrian refugees to turkey Significantly.

The third stage was trying to control Al-Bab city after the expulsion of ISIS from the remaining area between Turkman and Mare'e, which Dabeq is located in it and has a symbolic status for Turks because it was liberated by Sultan Selim I, and also has an interest of ISIS because it related to future issues such as the great battle and Signs of the crack of doom.

Until October 17 ,2016 the Turkish artillery provided the ability for FSA forces to liberate a lot of areas and reach by liberating them to outskirts of Al-Bab which is the most important strongholds of ISIS in the eastern countryside of Aleppo.

Until 1/11/2016, the regions of control in Euphrates shield was about 1350 s.km, and the opposition made progress to be 2 km near al-bab after progressing to Joub Barazi, Douwyarah , Barat Barshaya and Joub Al-Damm after clashes with ISIS.

In contrast, although the fast progress of opposition, but Qabasen city which locates northern of al-bab , and Bazaa east of Al-Bab which form the first defensive line for ISIS from the northern and eastern sides of Al-Rae ^{"3"}.

So, the opposition did not control these areas, then ISIS controlled them but opposition launched intensive attacks to break the defensive in the national hospital, Shaikh Aqeel mountain which looking to the city.

Then the opposition made progress towards neighborhoods of the city and change the battle to street war, then controlled the city "4" completely on 23/7/2013

Until releasing this report, the areas of regions controlled by Euphrates shield is about 1880 S. Km, the third phase increased the areas of these regions "5" about 1200 S.Km.

2- The Service Theme

Turkish authorities launched a developmental and humanitarian path in conjunction with the military path since start of Euphrates Shield Operation, and took over management for most of service sectors in the city, while semi-governmental and private associations provided humanitarian aids for inhabitation.

Due to stable situations in Euphrates shield areas, managing the daily life of people in these areas should be stable in order to incite people of these areas to return, and to provide a developmental model different from all other Syrian areas. This will serve the Turkish project significantly.

1-Health: Turkish health ministry opened the hospital of Jarablus on 25/9/2016 (about a month after the start of Euphrates Shield operation).

the hospital provides medical service for civilians in Jarablus and its countryside, and seeks to reduce pressure on the Turkish hospitals and boarder gate of Jarablus which receives a lot of emergency cases for treatment.

2-Aids and services: Turkish charity association in cooperation with Gaziantep municipality and the local council of Jarablus opened a bakery to produce bread in December 2016.the production capacity is about 70 thousand loaves of bread daily "6" to cover needs of city's people ."7"

Also, another bakery in Karkamesh produces 10 thousand loaves daily for needed people in cooperation with local councils of some villages and towns "8".

3-The infrastructure: A private Turkish company at the behest of the Turkish government to establish electric transfer stations in the Turkish city (Karkamesh) which is adjacent to Jarablus.

Land cables were extended to connect electricity for Jarablus and its countryside with a capacity about 31.5 KW of electricity and sent them via High-tension line to stores to reduce the effort to 20kw and transfer the reduced electricity through cables of 10 megawatts to Jarablus ^{"9"}.

But the electricity cut out several times due to damages in the electricity network and increased use of electric power in winter.

Gaziantep municipality made a research by a specialized team to provide water for residents. They found and rehabilitated 4 wells, and bring generators to pump water to the city.

4-Education:The Turkish government supported opening of many schools, and supported the scientific and educational process in Jarablus and its countryside, the schools were opened and equipped to receive thousands of students.

5-Security:Turkey opened a headquarters for general security and police in Jarablus eastern of Aleppo, immediately members of police started working after training by Ankara for 5 weeks within camps in Mersin.

This authority includes 440 members ^{"10"}who they were recruited from displacement camps in Turkey, they had trained on policing, criminal, counter terrorism, dealing with armed parties and arrest of thieves.

Second: Stances and Reactions

The international reactions were various related to Euphrates shield operation, some active countries supported the operation while other countries were hesitating between supporting or reservation, also some active countries did not issue any clear attitudes since beginning if the operation until now.

1-Internationa reactions

United States declared it support for the operation at least in the announced statements, and consider it as (the last example for important support by Ankara to fight ISIS ^{"11"}

USA through the international alliance for fighting terrorism, participated Euphrates shield operation by targeting sites for ISIS, but this participation

stopped according to what the Turkish foreign minister said, to return to launch 4 airstrikes near to Al-Bab in coordination with Ankara on 18/1/2017 "12".

Russia did not have any clear attitude since the beginning of the operation, after two weeks, a statement of Russian foreign minister to express the its concern about the Turkish intervention in the Syrian territory.

the statement said that this military operation conducted without coordination with the legal Syrian authorities, and without an authorization of nu security council, so that the rule of Syrian Arab republic and territorial integrity are doubted" and considered the attitude of Damascus which rejects the Turkish, military operations in the Syrian lands is justified and correct in term of international law's point of view "13".

The Turkish government seems to be pledged for Russians to respect the unity of Syrian lands, which present in the Turkish discourse nowadays more than Assad departure, so Russian aircrafts launched its first airstrikes on sites of ISIS in Al-Bab to support the Turkish forces "14"

Regarding to Iran, it has expressed concern about the Turkish intervention , believing that (intervention in the Syrian sovereignty is unacceptable" , although fighting terrorism and seeking to enhance security and stability in the region is a fixed and important principle for countries they want peace , but this topic should not be and must not be justified to violet sovereignty of other countries and launching military operations in territory of another country without coordination with the central government "15"

2-Local reactions

The Syrian regime refused the Euphrates shield operation, and considered it "a violation of Syrian sovereignty," and "that the fight against terrorism on Syrian territory by any party must be conducted in coordination with the Syrian government and the Arab Syrian army," added that what the Euphrates shield operation do is not to fight against terrorism as Turkey claims , but it is bringing to another terror "16". Syrian regime forces are trying since the beginning of the first month of this year, to expand its control in the vicinity of Al-Bab, where they fought against ISIS ,led to the Syrian regime's control over many of the villages , the most important are Eran , Abu Taltal and Tel Abu Jabbar, to be on the outskirts of Tedef which is near to al-Bab approximately 1.5 kilometers.

The main themes of the regime are starting from Quwaeres military airports, and Aleppo International Airport eastern of Aleppo.

The first clash between the regime forces and opposition factions within areas of Euphrates shield operation in the villages of Al-Guz and Abu Al-Zendaen western of Al-Bab, where regime forces wanted to expand their control in the area after breaking in the villages of Deir Qaq and Al-Shammaoyeah after battles with isis, but the opposition It succeeded in repelling the attack of the regime, as the Russian aviation targeting the engagement area which led death of three members from the Turkish forces involved in the armor of the Euphrates and wounding 11 others, along with the fall of the four deaths from the opposition ranks. This occurred in on 02/09/2017.

Moscow has announced that this targeting has occurred by mistake, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences to Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan because of what happened "17".

And the attitudes of the armed factions are various, between dismissive, a conservative and a supporter. Then Fateh Al-Sham Front has refused the operation and issued a fatwa in a statement issued after a month of operation, "the sanctity of the fighting in northern countryside of Aleppo with any regional party or an international coalition, because the reality of the situation is no recourse, but the lack of legal conditions required in this case. "

Sharia council in Ahrar Al-Sham movement issued a statement lately, issued a fatwa in which the movement of the permissibility of coordination with the Turkish army where intersecting interests of both sides, Although the conservative statement language, and not to support the operation through the statement, but it led to a series of conflicts within the movement, and it build these conflicts by dismissing of religious and military members, while others have resigned.

Ahel Al-Elem in Al-Sham gathering issued a statement on 22/9/2016 to issue an advisory opinion that (the coordination with Americans and those they follow them is forbidden, and to consider these forces is a direct occupation forces which are against revolution) , the statement also described the factions which participated the operation as (pentagons factions).

In addition to the regime and the Islamic factions, the Democratic Union Party issued a similar stance, and considered the operation of Euphrates shield as a rejected Turkish occupation. In contrast, other religious, political and military parties issued a supporter statement for Euphrates shield operation, included the Syrian Islamic Council, sharia council in Aleppo, the National Coalition, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Scenarios of Euphrates shield's future:

Despite of the meanings and interpretations in this phrase, and despite the public disagreement about Washington's relation with the Kurdish forces, but this operation was not heading to Manbej where the Kurdish forces are controlling, and they seem that it is heading to Al-Bab where ISIS is controlling.

this is a Turkish attempt to achieve Turkish goals and to wait the American promises but with new influence on the ground according to a new international hard balance between Russia and America, and this lead us to realize that turkey did not rely on America totally and will show clearly the durability of Turkish-American relations if Euphrates shield operation attack Manbej which is unlikely now ¹⁸.

Turkey today looks much closer to achieve what it called for ,for a long time which is a safe zone in northern of Syria with about 100 km length and 50 km depth ,but turkey must be ready to required role and price to get concrete results and this is the challenge ¹⁹ facing it especially with its current demands to participate in liberating Raqqa in Syria and Al-Mosel in Iraq which may create new dimensions in turkey's regional relations that seem to be heading for better with Riyadh and for worse with Iran.

The most important indication that can be fix in this context and from the continuous Euphrates shield operation ,is the Turkish external policy that has begun to give greater impetus to realistic polices based on hard power against soft policy that was adopted earlier or just focus on certain dimensions of conflict such as humanitarian and maybe we will find turkey with greater intervention in the regional issues in the near future.

On the military level, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeatedly declared that Turkey's goal is to establish a safe zone on the 5,000 square kilometer area in northern of Syria, and the operation will be extended to Raqqa , the main stronghold of ISIS in Syria, but the current controlled areas of the operation are not exceed 2,000 square kilometers, it is difficult to expand to include another 3,000 s.km , as this will require a move to the east of the Euphrates River areas and fighting on several fronts against the democratic forces of Syria and ISIS.

But Ankara's ongoing assertions that the objective is 5000 s.km raised many speculation about ensuring the Turkish government to achieve this, despite the many risks and obstacles that may face either the international community or the armed opposition, which it considers a partner in the military operations of Euphrates Shield.

The following scenarios can be expected during the next six months:

1- Access to the 5,000 km²

If Turkey wants to further expand of Euphrates shield to 5000 km², it should inevitably expand towards Raqqa, and then will extend the borders of the safe zone from Izaz in the countryside of Aleppo to Raqqa and then to its north to include Tal Abyadh, northern countryside of Raqqa, what means that battles with democratic forces of Syria will stop. in this scenario, the operation should control Manbej, as well as the area north-west of Tabaqa, northern f Raqqa. areas of these regions are approximately about 3000 s.km.

To achieve this scenario Ankara should get the approval of the US administration, because it collides directly to the American project in the region there, and based on the support of the democratic forces of Syria. the new US administration's position is not clear until now , and we do not know if the new US administration's position on the situation in Syria will change, or whether it will continue the previous administration's approach to support the democratic forces of Syria as a strategic ally.

It is certain that the attitude towards the Kurdish militia and Euphrates shield operations has been on the agenda of the new CIA director Mike Pompeo when he visited Ankara at the beginning of February 2017. Although the visit did not lead to announced agreement between the

Turkish and American parties, but the acceleration of the Turkish operations significantly, which ended by controlling Al-Bab city on 23/02/2017 could give an indication to reach an agreement.

In addition to the US administration, the success of this scenario requires the approval of Moscow, which wants to ensure the interests of the regime, which is supported. Where it can give its approval if the regime grants the possibility of expansion to ISIS areas in the Syrian desert ,in Palmyra specifically, as well as the east of Al-Bab in the northern countryside of Aleppo, in Deir Hafer, Maskana and surroundings, and then starting to control the strategic city for ISIS (Tabaqa), knowing that the Syrian regime's control according to this assumption will not affect the progress of the operation towards Raqqa, because it will go in the northern region of Tabaqa.

2-Staying in the range of 2000 s.km

In this scenario, Ankara will stay in the range of areas it controlled, and it may work to expand partially towards Raqqa without reaching more than 2500 S.km.

at the same time, it will use the area of 5000 S. Km as a mean to political pressure on the international and regional parties to gain greater guarantees for Turkish interests in Syria.

This scenario will be strengthened more if Moscow decline its approval to Euphrates shield project as a result of the American-Turkish rapprochement rapidly after the arrival of the new US administration, which will be on the Turkish-Russian relationship account in a number of aspects. Russia will work in the case of its position changed to support the forces of the regime, and maybe the Kurdish militias as well, to achieve a field achievements in their battle for control ISIS areas in Raqqa, Deir-Zour and Aleppo.

As the US administration, may not want to grant Ankara the full control of the North-East region, which will end the issue of Kurdish militias that Washington was working to support several years ago, Washington is in this case will intensify its support for Syria's democratic forces within the operation, "anger of Euphrates" in order to enable them to make significant progress on the ground, so the entry of forces supported by Turkey into the city will be more difficult and sensitive.

While ISIS will be able to control Deir El-Zour eastern of Syria, and Raqqa will be the first defense of ISIS fortress, it has been able to progress in the vicinity of Raqqa to secure it, and to compensate its influence losses in the eastern countryside of Aleppo especially if it has control over Al-Bab.

3-joining the multi-safe zones

In this scenario, the project of multi-safe zones in a number of Syrian regions will be applied, so the Euphrates shield will turn into a part of these areas, and perhaps some of the changes taking place in the form of control over the regions.

The project includes a safe zone in the south, and two zones in the north, and these zones may be subject to the control of the regional countries (Turkey and Jordan), or to regional and international alliances.

If this project applied, the Euphrates shield forces could be a part of liberalization of Raqqa operation, within the international coalition's strategy to fight terrorism, and the democratic forces of Syria will withdraw from Manbej and surroundings to the east of the Euphrates River in exchange for Ankara and opposition factions involved in the liberation of Raqqa operation, and to hand the Western front of the city in exchange of Syria's democratic forces take over the northern and eastern fronts of Raqqa.

Footnotes

¹ The opposition made progress towards Jarablus by Turkish support, Euphrates shield expanded against ISIS and Kurdish militias, CNN, 28/8/2019. <https://goo.gl/IZZM2x>

² -Euphrates shield is neat to borders, Al-Bab is the next destination, Al-Arabi Al-Jaded, 29/8/2016 <https://goo.gl/VfRKRp>

³ FSA made progress in Al-Bab countryside, death of two Turkish soldiers, Al-Jazeera Net, 6/9/2016. <https://goo.gl/ljCnKE>

⁴ The Syrian opposition started the third phase of Euphrates shield, Al-Jazeera net, 16/9/2016 <https://goo.gl/IN1ahR>

Euphrates shield threaten the last stronghold of ISIS in eastern countryside of Aleppo, Al-Arabi Al-Jaded, 8/9/2016. <https://goo.gl/w9oVme>

⁵ - Ankara: Euphrates shield operation will expand to Manbej and Raqqa, Al-Jazeera net, 27/10/2016. <https://goo.gl/ScH5AF>

⁶ - Euphrates shield expands its control in northern countryside of Aleppo, Al-Jazeera net, 4/10/2016 <https://goo.gl/AuyKyI>

⁷ - A Turkish association opened a bakery in Jarablus with capacity about 70 thousand loaves daily, Anadoul Agency, 25/12/2016. <https://goo.gl/0GI3nR>

⁸ A Turkish bakery sends 10 thousand loaves to Jarablus, Daily Sabah, 17/9/2016. <https://goo.gl/aG4nfC>

⁹ - A Turkish relief committee sends humanitarian aids to Jarablus, Anadoul Agency, 3/9/2016. <https://goo.gl/WnvifC>

¹⁰ - Mayor of Gaziantep checked Jarablus and supervised delivery water for people, Daily Sabah, 8/9/2016. <https://goo.gl/iM1GGI>

¹¹ Police enter Jarablus. factions of Euphrates Shield left it, Al-Moudn, 25/1/2016. <https://goo.gl/Rzyjt5>

The White House, Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 8/24/16: <https://goo.gl/oW8fiv>

¹² American fighter jets assist turkey in Euphrates shield operation, Yildirim demands Washington to revise is relation with Syrian Kurds, CNN, 24/8/2016 <https://goo.gl/xNcCwN>

Jewish Auglo: the international alliances have stopped the air attribution for Euphrates shield, Anadoul Agency, 29/12/2016. <https://goo.gl/nWz1Oc>

¹³ Moscow: Euphrates shield operation put the unity of Syrian territory as doubtful, Russia today, 7/9/2016. <https://Goo.gl/G4lGJe>

¹⁴ The Russian aviation assist Euphrates shield in the battle of Al-Bab, Russia today, 30/12/2016 <https://goo.gl/5LSHlu>

The Russian aviation assist Euphrates shield operation northern of Syria for the second time, Baladi News, 2/1/2017 <https://goo.gl/JEFPDr>

¹⁵ -Tehran Calls Ankara to stop intervention in the Syrian territory quickly, sana news agency, 30/8/2016

<https://goo.gl/KZekp8>

¹⁶ - An official source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates: Syria condemns Turkey's violation of its sovereignty, Foreign and Expatriates Ministry, 24/8/2016: <https://goo.gl/MPb6N>

¹⁷ Turkish soldiers were killed in a Russian airstrike northern of Syria." BBC, 02/09/2017. <https://goo.gl/HMfWDD>

¹⁸ Ceasefire agreement, contents and reactions." Jusoor Center for Studies, 01/16/2017. <https://goo.gl/MDRKM6>

¹⁹ Euphrates Shield aims to secure 5,000 square kilometers northern of Syria and the Turkish army is about 20 km from Al-Bab, Erdogan confirms: we shall clear Manbej too." Al Quds Al Arabi, 10/19/2016. <https://goo.gl/FUYyx0>