

Results of Erdoğan's Snap Election Gambit: Implications for U.S.-Turkey Relations  
*A Conversation with Dr. Sinan Ciddi, Dr. Aykan Erdemir, Nate Schenckan, and Dr. Gönül Tol,*  
*moderated by Amb. Eric S. Edelman*  
*Opening remarks by Sen. James Lankford*

SCHANZER: Good morning, my name is Johnathan Schanzer, I am Senior Vice President at FDD. I want to thank you for joining us for today's conversation on Turkey's snap elections. This conversation is part of our increasingly robust Turkey program at FDD chaired by Ambassador Eric Edelman, led by Dr. Aykan Erdemir and Merve Tahiroglu, who is somewhere in the audience, our research analyst, who works tirelessly on this program as well. We're pleased to have with us today a distinguished audience of congressional staff, diplomats, officials from the Executive Branch, experts in the policy community and a wide range of media outlets. If you are congressional staffer and you have questions about today's session or if any of FDD's experts can be helpful to your work, please be in touch with FDD's government relations team, Toby Dershowitz, Boris Zilberman and Tyler Stapleton are all here today and I encourage you to say hello. For those of you who are not familiar with us, FDD is a nonpartisan policy institute. We take no foreign government or foreign corporate funding and we never will. We see our role as research analysis and providing key policy recommendations and an essential element of our mission includes engaging and exchanges of views with policymakers at home and abroad, including today's discussion. In addition to the folks joining us here in the room today, I'd also like to welcome those tuning in via live stream. We invite all of you to join in on the conversation on Twitter. We'll be live tweeting @FDD.

At this time, if you would please silence your cell phones as our program is just about to begin. And, I am now pleased to introduce Senator James Lankford from the great state of Oklahoma. He has been at the forefront in calling out the Erdoğan government's use of hostage diplomacy and in demanding the immediate release of Pastor Andrew Brunson. He and his colleagues have also warned of the consequences if Turkey is to purchase the S-400 system. Senator Lankford, we are thankful for your leadership and we look forward to your remarks today. Please welcome Senator James Lankford.

LANKFORD: I'll just make some brief remarks and say welcome. Thanks for engaging in this. It's good to be able to see this number of people engaging in this issue about Turkey. Turkey is a longtime NATO ally and a friend that we don't recognize anymore. And, that's been the challenge that we have as the United States. We have an ally that we no longer know and we no longer recognize. We'd like to be able to have our friend and our ally back and to be able to know who they are, where they're going and what they're planning to do. 18 months ago now - actually more than that now, it's been almost 20 months ago, Dr. Andrew Brunson, who had lived in Turkey for 23 years, had been very open and very engaged American citizen doing missionary and humanitarian work there. Always in good standing was suddenly picked up by the Turkish government and accused of being a Gülenist and as a Christian pastor that was a mystery to him, how he was suddenly getting involved with the Muslim mystic, but he suddenly was accused of all these things and was challenged in a way that he had never experienced before.

He's been in prison now since October of 2016 and Erdoğan has made public statements that you have our holy man, we have yours.

That's not how you treat an ally. This is not all about trying to grab an American citizen and hold them hostage until you get the leverage that you want to be able to get. We have watched the Turkish government repressing journalism, repressing dissent, controlling the manner and the method of the votes, controlling the communication around election time. This is not an open, free government anymore and it's someone that we have an increasingly difficult time recognizing who they are. And, watching their government reaching out to the Russians at the same time they're working with us to try to acquire F-35, to be able to also require Russian missile defense systems, doesn't align with NATO, doesn't interface with NATO missile defense and it violates the most basic part of the NATO relationship. So, our statements to Turkey has been pretty simple.

We want our friend back. We want to still be able to work in a partnership and an alliance which are key. To be able to know who they are, able to interact and be able to cooperate together. But until we know who they are and what direction that they're going as a nation, I don't believe that we should deliver the F-35s. The initial F-35s have already been handed over in paper form, but they've not actually been delivered. It's more than a year until they're actually delivered. We're pushing to say, hold the delivery so there's not a delivery. There's a lot of questions, because Turkey had the responsibility to be able to do maintenance for all of NATO for the F-35. So, we'll have to look at other locations to be able to do a maintenance for the F-35 other than Turkey.

Turkey also has companies that actually supply some of these parts and supplies for the F-35 as well and obviously it's going to take us a little bit of time to be able to transition away and to be able to say they'll have to be someone else to be able to do that, because we don't know who Turkey is becoming and what direction they're going. Our first challenge though is not to try to be able to push Turkey away, it's to try to figure out who they are and to be able to work together. They have very complicated issues and we acknowledge that. The threats to terrorism to them are on their border all the time, every day. We understand that completely and want to be able to partner with Turkey to be able to help resolve that for their national security and for our national security and the stability of the region. But, they've got to be able to figure out who they are and who their friends are and who their long term relationships are. And friends don't hold other friends hostages to be able to provide a leverage. I made a statement on the Senate floor a few weeks ago that I thought I would never ever say. I'd like to Turkey to act more like North Korea and release hostages.

And, it felt like a very odd thing to be able to say, but that tells you how far and how broken the relationship has really become. I've discouraged anyone from doing new business in Turkey and what I've told American businessman in Oklahoma that are considering going to Turkey, I would not do that right now, because you cannot guarantee the safety of those individuals knowing that the emergency powers that their government is still operating under. At any point, you could have one of your employees travel to Turkey, they could be swept up and held without charges for a year and a half or more. That is not something I want to explain to one of the family members that are still back home, why one of your employees in your company has

now been held hostage, because they ate the wrong restaurant, because they talked to the wrong person on the street accidentally or because they tweeted a picture they shouldn't tweet. There's no way to be able to know. So, until we know again that's not a place that I would encourage American businesses to actually engage until we can form a consistent relationship and know where they're laws and the direction the country are going. Again, it sounds like I'm trying to be able to push hard on it, but quite frankly, I miss our friend.

This is a long term alliance that's slipping away from us and we hope for a re-engagement with the Erdoğan government. We hope for an active re-engagement with the people of Turkey that they have the opportunity to be able to still continue to be able to speak out to issues that they choose to disagree on. We just had a Supreme Court case settled this week in the United States that was on a very interesting issue of free speech. It was when the government has one opinion and private citizens have another, can the government compel a private citizen to change their speech to government speech? Our Supreme Court came back and reaffirmed again a longstanding American tradition. The government may have one opinion and private citizens may have another and that's okay. Individuals can have an opinion and express it that's different than the government without fear of repression from their own government. I think it's a good value for us to be able to share worldwide as well. And, I look forward to that ongoing friendship and returning back to that. I appreciate your engagement. Please do your research and continue to be engaged. We have many Turkish friends around our nation and we want to be able to stay engaged with those friendships and those relationships and welcome an open partnership in the future. Thank y'all.

SCHANZER: Thank you Senator for those remarks. Very much appreciated. I'm now pleased to hand over the conversation to Ambassador Eric Edelman, who is Senior Advisor to FDD's Turkey program. As many of you know he previously served as U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Finland, as well as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Eric, over to you.

EDELMAN: Jonathan, thanks very much. Thanks to Senator Lankford for kicking us off and let's get into this, because we've got limited time and I want to be disciplined with our time. So first, let me introduce our panelists. To my immediate left is Nate Schenkkan, who is the Project Director for Nations in Transit at Freedom House and who has written a very informative review of what happened in the Turkish referendum on a constitutional changes last year. Actually, his writing on that was quite prescient about what happened on Sunday. To Nate's left is Dr. Sinan Ciddi, Executive Director of the Institute of Turkish Studies and Visiting Assistant Professor at Georgetown's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

Looking over the podium I see to Sinan's left is Dr. Gönül Tol, the Founding Director of the Middle East Institute Center for Turkish Studies and on the far left and that's only a geographic designation is Dr. Aykan Erdemir, who is a Senior Fellow at FDD, a former member of the Turkish Parliament and my occasional coauthor. So, Nate, let me start with you. Because, as I said, you had written about what happened during the referendum in April and, you know, the National Archives, which I drove by as I came here, says past is prologue. So, was this a free and fair election? How would you characterize it?

SCHENKKAN: Thank you and thanks to Aykan for inviting me and it's an honor to be on a panel, especially with three Turks, you know, three Turkish citizens who I really admire for their work. To your question Ambassador, no. It's not a free and fair election. I think it's been an interesting conversation that's taking place among Turkey experts and followers of Turkey the past couple of days. Personally, I've been a little surprised at some of the search for silver linings in the conduct of the election. I'll start with the conduct and then I'll go to the results. I think we're grading Turkey on a massive curve. If we try to say that a country where one of the most popular candidates, one of the most popular politicians in the country, had to run from prison when he hasn't been convicted of a crime yet. Where 50,000 people have been arrested in the last two and a half years.

Where \$11,000,000,000 worth of companies have been expropriated. Where there's still a state of emergency that enabled all of these powers which comes with a very steep restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Where literally hundreds of people will be arrested in a single week for social media posts when there are major political issues. That this is a free and fair competitive electoral environment. If you want to get into the structural issues, if you want to get into the details about how elections in Turkey are conducted, we can certainly do that. I recommend everyone read the OSCE preliminary report which came out on Monday morning. It'll obviously be followed by a fuller report. They always use the very neutral, very calm kind of understated language, but read through that report if you have the time and the inclination, take a look at some other similar OSCE reports from neighboring countries where OSCE does this kind of monitoring. Look around at Serbia. Look around in southeastern Europe. You'll see the Turkish election is considerably worse than what's going on in countries that are not effectively consolidated democracies in Europe. In terms of results, in terms of the outcomes, again, I've been a little surprised at some of the silver lining kind of hunt for silver linings.

Yes. The AKP does not have a majority in Parliament. It does have 295 seats. I think there's a lot of focus on 42 percent. So, you know, AKP was sent a signal here of dissatisfaction with their policies because their percentage went down from November 2015. Six seats short of a majority is not very much. Look at who is going to be making up that majority, most likely the MHP. For those who are familiar with the MHP, this is not a party with a very strong commitment to what we would consider the main values of democracy. Most likely we see a redoubling of the nationalist trend and the hard right, hard nationalist direction in policymaking that's been going on for the last three or three plus years in Turkey. Additionally, and most importantly, this isn't about Parliament. Turkey used to be a parliamentary republic.

I think everyone's still thinking of it as a parliamentary republic. It's not. It's not. It hasn't been really for four years, but it's really not now. The constitution's been changed. We have a super executive presidency, a hyper presidential, hyper personalized system. Erdoğan is the head of state, the head of government, and the head of the AKP, all at the same time. He's going to appoint the government. Unilaterally appoint ministers and vice presidents without any confirmation process from the Parliament. So, I think we should be realistic. I'm not here to, you know, rain on everyone's parade and that's certainly not the goal, but I don't think we should try to kid ourselves that the trajectory that we've been watching and that everyone, most people and many people in this room have been concerned about for the last five years or longer. 10 years in some people's cases, isn't going to continue.

So, I'll save other remarks for later. Thank you.

EDELMAN: Thanks Nate. That was a great introduction to the results of the election. Sinan, picking up on that, if you look at the OSCE Election Monitor report, you know, which highlights the incredibly uneven playing field and the media in which the election campaign played out. The fact that it was a snap election called intentionally to try and put the opposition on their back foot, the instances of irregularities that are highlighted in the report and with all that, Erdoğan was only able to go from 51 point something percent against a very weak candidate four years ago, Professor Ihsanoglu to 52.5 percent in this election. You know, from one point of view, that's not that great a result. Can you unpack for us the winners and losers here? You know, who were the big winners in this? Who were the losers?

CIDDI: Thank you Ambassador and thank you to FDD, particularly, Aykan and Merve's team for including me in this important discussion. And thank you. That's a tough question in terms of winners and losers. I would say the ultimate loser is Turkey and Turkish democracy. If you want to sort of speak on - In terms of abstracts and we should be shocked, but not surprised in terms of what happened over the last two days. Just a couple of sentences on - To pick up from where NATO particularly launch this. I would actually start by trying to lead discussions here or anywhere else that talks about what happened in Turkey from the perspective of not normalizing this in terms of an electoral analysis.

I will challenge the legitimacy of the outcome of this process that we saw on Sunday. To say that Erdoğan got 52 percent and then his main opponent got 31 point something percent, this is all to a certain extent, highly circumspect and just watching how the process unfolded during the evening of January 24th, sorry, June 24th was just astounding. Although we should have expected it. We had the incumbent President of the country stand up before one third of the votes had actually been tabulated, declaring victory, followed shortly by Head of the Supreme Board of Elections going on the record saying again, probably around a third of the votes being tabulated, saying the remainder of the votes counting process is not going to change the outcome. Therefore, I declare Erdoğan as the victor.

Who incidentally ended up becoming, as I understand, a member of parliament the next day.

Okay.

And finally the balcony speech that came in shortly thereafter in the early hours of January or – sorry - June 25.

People push back and say, "Well, what evidence do you have?" And the evidence is an engineered process that we're not supposed to have. Pick up the - Be able to tabulate how this happened because the YSK, the Supreme Board of Elections has been compromised. Because the votes that were still being counted in the early hours of the next day to midday next day, we still don't know.

When people say there were certain skirmishes around the edges and although it was, you know, relatively common peaceful, I have to underline that people died as a result of personal attacks and mobbing of certain individuals throughout the country. And so I do not want to be in a position where I normalize this as an electoral outcome and I personally do not recognize the legitimate outcome of this election. We should all take very serious lessons from this and say this was an election which was intended to legitimate and consolidate the power of one man rule, as you said. So, the clear winner out of this for the short term is Mr. Erdoğan. Had this been fair and free election, we should have also been notified on what the transition process had - Would be had there been a different outcome than we might - Than we saw on Sunday. What was that?

Do we know?

Had there been a different outcome in the unlikely event that Muharrem Ince was the clear winner, what was the transition process? Who became - Who would have become president? Was it going to be next day? Was it going to be over the next month? Who the hell do we know? We do not know.

And so I think -

The other winners, I would say are the resiliency of the Turkish public, I think. There's no discounting that. Given a short space of time, resources, and the intimidatory tactics that were used against lack of free press, one news agency doling out results and not even differentiating between ballot boxes opened versus votes counted and tabulated. And, the mainstream press.

90% of which was going forward towards Erdoğan's victory speech. Despite all of that, we had a resilient campaign. So none of the problems that Erdoğan faced or the country faces have disappeared. They have continued to exist, and they will continue to exist. Some of them Senator Lankford mentioned just on the bilateral relationship. We have a situation whereby there are no new ideas. We do not have a vision, and as a result of that, the people could also lose out of this in Turkey as well as bilateral relations, very much so. I have a lot more to say, but that's just an initial look. Thank you.

EDELMAN: It's a good place to start. I'm going to go, Aykan, to you, and I'm going to let Gönül kind of bat cleanup here. But Aykan, picking up from Sinan's comment about we don't really know the degree to which there was chicanery at the ballot box. The reason we don't know in part is because the leading opposition candidate, Muharrem Ince, chose not to contest this result despite admitting in his comments that the AKP stole a lot of votes. Why did he do that, and what is the prospect now for the CHP and the opposition more broadly?

ERDEMİR: I think Muharrem Ince and the opposition in general are thinking about the long game. I know it's a gloomy day, this is a gloomy panel, but I still would like to go back to some of the silver lining. I think Muharrem Ince was thinking ahead. He thought, "Do I fight this battle now, which we are sure to lose, or do I retain some of this momentum and credibility for the upcoming March 2019 local elections?" I know there have been a number of op-eds in pro-government dailies claiming and recommending that Erdoğan cancels local elections once and for all and starts appointing mayors directly.

So this is where Turkey is at this point, that in "mainstream" pro-government publications now, people are voicing canceling local elections altogether. But still, assuming that we will have local elections in March 2019, I think Muharrem Ince's thinking, "Do we have a chance of ending this where it all started?" Erdoğan was elected mayor of Istanbul in 1994, and he owes his multi-billion-dollar war chest to basically corruption and embezzlement in Istanbul. And to this day, Istanbul continues to be at the root at the source of his kind of war chest in politics.

So I think there is still hope. We're at this cautious hope and optimism in the opposition. They want to continue to fight this fight. I would argue that there is still a muscle memory of parliamentary democracy in Turkey. We have seen a residual muscle memory coming back as the opposition joined forces, and also we have seen that there is some residual social capital that survived Erdoğan's attempts to destroy all connections, all civility, all everyday interaction from the religious Felicity Party to the center-right Democratic Party and Good Party to the center-left, pro-secular CHP. And the HDP, pro-Kurdish HDP. We have seen how parties and movements criminalized, marginalized, smeared by Erdoğan could come together, not only interact in a civil manner with one another but act in solidarity.

Just to give you a few examples of Turkey's democratic muscle memory. To begin with, CHP loaned 15 deputies to the Good Party to make sure they can thwart Erdoğan's attempts to disqualify them from the elections. Then CHP asked its 1.2 million members, "Go provide signatures for all the candidates across the political spectrum so they can run as presidential candidates, so they can reach the 100,000 signatures needed." Then both Good Party and CHP earmarked seats for the minor parties. The Democratic Party leader was elected from the Good Party list. Three of the religious parties, Felicity Party's lawmakers were elected from the CHP seats. This is pretty unprecedented. Moreover, I think, again, for the first time in Turkish history, we have seen all these parties, including Good Party, moderate nationalist center-right Good Party, with the pro-Kurdish HDP come together under one platform called "a just election" platform. This was a semi-successful, semi-failed attempt to monitor the ballot boxes, but at least they tried it.

Now, what's the take-home message? Let me end with this. I think the opposition's take-home message is, first of all, a realization that an effective campaign and effective ballot monitoring are not enough. I think they're not focusing more and more on the unfair part of the election cycle. That is if you don't have media, you stand no chance. And Turkey is learning, with no offense to the print media here, broadcast is king and broadcast is kingmaker. And if you're an opposition that has neither has broadcast nor print, that only has some digital and some social media, then you don't stand a chance. So will it be possible to remedy this in the run up to March 2019? Possibly not, but at least there is a recognition that social media is not a replacement, digital is not a replacement.

Furthermore, I think the opposition will continue on this solid foundation of solidarity and cooperation. Despite attempts by Erdoğan and pro-Erdoğan media to play a spoiler role, I think they will find a way to stick together to some extent, and I think that's the silver lining. I know Sinan will probably beat me at the end of the panel for going back to a silver lining, but I think there is still a very slight glimmer of hope.

EDELMAN: It's going to be very civil on this panel. There'll be no beatings. Gönül, let me ask you to comment on one thing that kind of comes up a little bit out of Aykan's remarks. He mentions the HDP. There was a lot of commentary before the election that the Kurdish community were going to be the kingmakers in this election that they were going to determine the outcome. So on the one hand, HDP did get into the Parliament. They got over the 10% hurdle that's been erected. That is obviously a check mark in the positive column. On the other hand, Demirtaş's vote in the presidential was lower than that. So where do we stand now with regard to the Kurdish community in Turkey, and what are the prospects for trying to bring an end to the violence and helping to resolve the Kurdish issue in Turkey given the likely composition of the next government, which is going to be an AKP, MHP coalition?

TOL: Well, let me start saying I share Sinan's and Nate's pessimism, but like Aykan, I haven't entirely given up hope on Turkish democracy. As Aykan mentioned, Turkey civil society works under very difficult circumstances, and yet Muharrem Ince managed to mobilize, and civil society managed to mobilize people. And something that we have seen, especially with the young people, that they have realized that they have to take matters into their own hands. So that civic culture, I'm happy to have seen that, and that's why I'm a bit hopeful.

And also, I think another silver lining is the fact that a CHP candidate can reach far beyond his party's traditional constituency. The fact that Muharrem Ince, the CHP's presidential candidate, captured 30%, he could be able to attract votes from the Kurds. Given the problematic history of the CHP with the Kurds, that is remarkable. And also, I think he also captured votes from the Islamists, and I think that is also remarkable.

But on the other hand, I think, and this is the reason for my pessimism, the CHP and the opposition has structural problems here. So Muharrem Ince led a great campaign, and we found out that in fact with a new leadership, the CHP can do a lot of great things. But on the other hand, I think these election results once again showed us that the opposition has structural problems because Turkey is a deeply nationalist and religiously conservative country, and there's so much that a new leader under a center-left party can do in such a country.

So I think that's why one of the lessons learned for the opposition should be its not enough to mobilize your position. It's not enough to unite your position. But the CHP, as the largest opposition bloc, has to address the existential concerns of the religiously conservative people. So that was the main failure of the CHP and Muharrem Ince. He could be able to appeal to the Kurds, he could be able to appeal to the nationalists, but he wasn't convincing enough for the religiously conservative people who feared that under a CHP rule, the religious liberties that they enjoyed under Erdoğan would be in jeopardy.

And another reason for pessimism is what this and prior elections tell me is that Turkish politics is trapped in identity politics. So if you look at the elections, let's start with 2014, for instance. In 2014, President Erdoğan captured 51% in presidential elections. In 2000 referendum, he captured a similar vote. And on Sunday, he got 52% despite everything that the country has gone through, including economic problems, including problems in foreign policy, backsliding in democracy, and the failed coup attempt. So despite all the problems, almost half of the country

still supports him, and I think that's why we shouldn't just dismiss this as election rigging and say that, "I don't want to analyze the results."

But we should look at this fact and see that if you look at Turkey's electoral map, you will see that it's divided into three. The CHP is still the educated, secular, economically well-developed, western coastal regions is still the stronghold of the CHP. And you have on the other hand a religiously conservative, nationalist, central Anatolian heartland that is the stronghold of AKP and MHP. And you have the Kurdish region and the pro-Kurdish party is leading in that region. So this picture tells me that Turkish politics is trapped in identity politics, and we haven't seen a change in that map for a long time.

So this is difficult. It's difficult for the opposition to break that cycle, and I think the solution for the opposition is to broaden and not just address the leadership problems of the party but also the ideology and shatter the image of the CHP as a radical secularist party, although I think the party has done a great job in terms of modifying that image, but I think it has to do more.

And back to your question, Eric, about the Kurds and MHP, yes, we all argued that the Kurds would be the kingmaker in the elections, but I think none of us really considered and foresaw how well MHP could do. So if MHP hadn't done this well, I think, yes, we would have seen a completely different picture. What we didn't see was MHP didn't even hold rallies. I think the leader of the party held only six small meetings. And on the other hand, you had a splinter party, İYİ Party that split with the nationalist MHP. So we all thought that the MHP would be on the losing end, and instead the party captured 11%. But how did it capture that 11%? It captured votes from the disillusioned AKP voters.

And I think the new electoral system, for the first time in the country's history, voters elected simultaneously the president and members of parliament, so I think that paved the way for strategic voting. And that allowed some AKP supporters who voted for Erdoğan for the presidency, but they were also those who were disillusioned wanted to punish the party by voting for the MHP. So this whole picture tells me that still this is a very nationalist, religiously conservative country. And even though the pro-Kurdish party is in the parliament, that is good news, but the fact that Erdoğan heavily relies on the ultra-nationalist party, it doesn't bode well for Turkey's Kurdish question.

And I don't think this is - Well, I would like to think that Erdoğan is a very pragmatic leader, and in the past he switched from allying with Kurds to the Gülenists to the liberals, but some of my colleagues argue that this is more an organic alliance, this Erdoğan-nationalist alliance, and it's here to stay. And if that is the case, it's going to be very difficult moving forward for the Kurdish political movement to resolve the issue. And I think also the fact that Erdoğan relies on the MHP is also not good news for Turkey-US relations. And I'll stop there.

EDELMAN: Thank you, Gönül. You've actually prompted the last question I'll ask, and I'm going to ask everybody to comment really briefly, for maybe just a minute or two each before we go to Q&A. And that is precisely on the issue you've just raised, which is what are the

implication - it's what Senator Lankford started us with. What are the implications of this election result for US-Turkish relations? We've got a lot on the plate.

There is the whole question of hostage diplomacy that Merve, Aykan and I have written about and Pastor Brunson, who's back in court on July 18th. We have the S-400 sale, which creates not only problems for the US-Turkish relationship but more broadly for NATO. We're about to have a NATO summit in the next couple of weeks. There's the whole question of potential congressional action that Senator Lankford raised blocking the sale of F-35s, although as he noted, there are a lot of complications. There's a danger we could be cutting off our nose to spite our face because of the role that Turkey plays as a tier one partner in the F-35 program.

And then there's the entire vexed question of Syria, of Turkish troops in Syria, in Idlib province and moving in around Manbij and the Manbij working group and agreement. A lot on the plate. The president apparently had a phone call with President Erdoğan. President Trump had a congratulatory phone call with President Erdoğan. From the readout on both the Turkish and U.S. sides, at least the public readouts, it seems like it was a lot of happy talk. It doesn't seem like a lot of these other issues were addressed in that conversation.

Very briefly, what approach should the U.S. take to this very important but incredibly vexed bilateral relationship? And I ask the panelists to really be succinct in their answers. Nate.

SCHENKKAN: Yeah, I'll try to be succinct. Obviously, it's a very big menu. And I'll summarize or I'll just say the big thing, which is I think the question, as Senator Lankford said, what does Turkey want? And specifically, what does Erdoğan want? He's in the driver's seat in terms of spelling out his desires or spelling out his perspective. In my opinion, when I look at Turkey or try to understand what Turkish decision makers and Erdoğan and those around him want or how they see the situation, I think it's much more radical than what we are yet geared up to address. I believe Turkish decision makers for several years, and this predates this current administration here in Washington, have believed that they're enmeshed in this collapsing regional order -

Perhaps a collapsing global order. It's a very apocalyptic feel. They believe that the post Arab Spring, post invasion of Ukraine, post EU institutional crisis, have shown that the current order is weak and falling apart, and that Turkey's alliances and friendships and the ways in which it is embedded are not going to serve it. They're not going to preserve it, in that in a way it's kind of a dark mirror version of Dabodolu's more optimistic, kind of transformational view on the regional order and on the global order. But in this dark mirror version, I think they are looking to radically revise if necessary, to hedge against further threats.

I think the question for the United States right now is going to be, the big question, is NATO in that basket. Does Turkey's leadership perceive NATO as a threat? Does it perceive NATO as an asset, or part of their strategic backbone? And I think one of the ways we're going to find out is on the S-400. That's going to be one of the clearest ways to understand what that position is. Because the S-400 is a strategic issue for NATO, and for the United States, and the response to that will help us understand if that's really where Turkey's headed.

EDELMAN: Alright. Sinan.

CIDDI: Thank you. Some of the continuities that exist prior to the election and that will probably I think continue to filter through decision making in Ankara, is we've read and analyzed quite a bit. Especially my colleagues here, of the notion of, especially since the coup attempt of 2016, an increasingly paranoid and conspiratorial mindset of not only the President, but also his close advisors. And I think that continues, and is likely to continue. The problem that compounds it is, as each year passes, particularly since the heightened sense of fear and emergency or of losing his seat of power, is the people who surround the Erdoğan and the presidency are not the A-team. The quality of advisors keeps on dropping, and the kind of advice that's being given to Erdoğan and the kind of decisions that are being made or threatened to be made, whether it's in regard to the purchase of S-400's, or heightened aggression against U.S. action in Northern Syria, and lack of cooperation. This is likely to probably get worse, because these people haven't changed and his mindset hasn't changed.

And the last thing I'll say is a salient feature of authoritarian regimes or increasingly authoritative regimes is the notion to keep alive a permanent state of emergency, that there are enemies out to get us. Every time some of my colleagues, all of us here I think on this panel, well, he's a FETO Jew, or she's a FETO Jew, because that's what they say against Erdoğan. So, enemies' and friend's narratives continue, and they will likely continue, and that's how I think they will approach bilateral issues. Erdoğan wants to work with the West and the United States, but he wants it on his own terms. He wants to have his cake and eat it. And those permanent, that need to invent enemies, anything that's perceived to undermine his authority or his worldview, his team is constantly going to push against us, as well as any sort of constructive criticism.

EDELMAN: And you saw that in Ibrahim Kalin's twitter response to Congressman Adam Schiff. I take it that the folks who were speculating on a kinder, gentler Erdoğan after the election, based on his comments before the vote, that he might lift the state of emergency. You're betting no lifted state of emergency?

CIDDI: He could probably lift it, but still continue doing all the things under the name.

EDELMAN: Under the new constitutional review. Right. Fair enough. Gönül.

TOL: Well I think that Turkey-U.S relations, if you think that's possible, will enter an even more difficult process. With MHP in the picture I think yes you can expect more of what we have been seeing from Turkey. More aggression against the Kurds, not just at home but in the region. Of course particularly in Syria, and that is not good news for the U.S., although we don't know what the U.S. is planning to do in Syria. I got a sense that the U.S. could be a little pragmatic in terms of its Kurdish policy, not to lose Turkey. But I think the bigger problem here might be Iran. Given the hawkish approach of the current U.S. administration, and the debate about asking U.S. partners and U.S. allies to stop purchasing Iran in oil, that's going to be a major flashpoint because Turkey depends on Iran for its energy needs. So that will be something to watch.

And I'm afraid there is little U.S. can or is willing to do in terms of addressing Turkey's democratic deficit, or pushing the sides to come to the negotiations, to the Kurds and the Turkish state. And I think the U.S. will keep pursuing a very pragmatic and transactional approach. Very much like probably the European countries.

EDELMAN: Thank you Gönül. Okay Aykan, you get to take us out of here and into the Q and A.

ERDEMIR: Okay. So my message is again, Turkey is not Erdoğan, even if he imprisons, beats, lynches, and shuts up the opposition. He still can't get over 50%. So, there is still another half. Two, engage Turkey. I know this is the wrong time to say this in Washington. But engage Turkey through the transatlantic alliance. It has to be both sides of the Atlantic engaging Turkey together. We need it. When I say engagement, two levels. One, engage Erdoğan and make no mistake, appeasement is not engagement. Engagement means concrete incentives, and disincentives. Carrots and sticks. And I don't believe we have them at this point, Senator Lankford is an outlier. He has been very clear about incentives and disincentives, I think we should hear more of that from both sides of the Atlantic. But engagement also means engage the opposition. The other Turkey. The 50%. And we have to find new ways of engaging the other half, which to a great extent, pro-West, pro-NATO, pro-EU. And looks forward to a pragmatic future of coexistence.

Another point, Anti-Westernism is not Turkey's destiny. Yes it's prevalent, but it's not in the genes. It can change. There is an alternative, a clear alternative. The opposition was bold enough in Turkey's Anti-Western climate to voice this again and again. Muharrem just said, "Our path is the European Union. Our path is the West." So there is still almost another half there that still sets its eye on the West; on free markets, on secularism, on democracy, on parliaments, on checks and balances, on rule of law, due process. So let's make sure we see our allies there, and find ways to reach out to them, because Erdoğan's allies not only reach out to him, they reach out to him immediately. Right after the election. You can see Qatar, Hamas, Muslim Brotherhoods, you can see Iran, Russia reaching out. They're smart actors. They know who they're 50% in Turkey is, and they reach out in solidarity. So my question is, do we reach out in solidarity? To our half of Turkey.

EDELMAN: Alright, we've got about 15 or 20 minutes or so for questions from the audience, so I would ask people, I think we've got a mic coming around. So I'd ask you to wait for the mic, and I'd ask you to please introduce yourself and because we've got limited time, make your question brief. Right here in the front row. Laurie Milroy.

MILROY: Laurie Milroy. Kurdistan24. I actually have a few brief questions. One is there is a long history that dates back centuries of Russian aggression against the Ottoman Empire. To what extent is Turkey still concerned about what Russia might do to it? My second brief question, prior to the elections it was said that Erdoğan is playing the Kurdish card. He's being especially plausible towards the Kurds in order to win votes. Are you saying that that's going to continue even though the elections are over? He has some sort of political purpose in that kind of attitude towards the Kurds?

ERDEMIR: May I take the Russia question?

EDELMAN: Please.

ERDEMIR: And I'll leave the Kurdish question to our able panelists. I think it's one of the miraculous things about Turkish politics today that, after 200 years of taking non-stop beating from Russia, in polls Turks say Russia is our biggest ally, and U.S. is our top threat. And Erdoğan manages to pivot Turkey towards Russia. When I'm talking about 200 years, what I'm trying to say is this. Every single family in Turkey has at least one relative who was killed by Russians, who was a prisoner of war to Russia, who had to leave their ancestor lands after some kind of pogrom or genocidal killing by Russian imperial or Soviet forces. So it really is an amazing magic that Erdoğan can pulse with his media and his framing that Turks today believe Russia is Turkey's top ally. It really baffles me. But I still have faith in the opposition and Turkey's allies' ability to change this discourse.

Turkish opinions are very flexible. They're very ephemeral. So I do believe that there could be a day in Turkey when Turks come back to their senses and remember the last 200 years. Remember their fathers, grandfathers, mothers, grandmothers who have suffered at the hands of Russian brutality or expansionism, and see where their real national security interests lie.

EDELMAN: Does anyone want to take Erdoğan's Kurdish card question?

TOL: I can. Well I think it's clear he needs the MHP now. He will rely on MHP to maintain parliamentary majorities. So I don't think, and I said some people are saying that well maybe he could ally with the HTP. HTP they have more seats in the parliament. That is also possible, but again, looking at it now, I see it very difficult. Because it's not just MHP in the parliament. All through Turkish bureaucracy I think the void left by the Gülenists, who were purged from bureaucracy are now filled with MHP sympathizers. So MHP is strong, nationalists are strong in Turkish bureaucracy. And also you have to take into consideration the alliances that are drawn with Turkish military that is deeply, deeply Turkish nationalists. So that's why I think in the short term I don't see, I can't be optimistic about resuming negotiation talks with the Kurds.

EDELMAN: Okay, in the back.

VISHKIN: Thanks for the great panel. I have a question on [inaudible] Sinan did say that [inaudible] one question is [inaudible]. So if you look at the [inaudible], what kind of economic [inaudible] would be [inaudible] delegate [inaudible]. Or that would be the [inaudible] economic cost [inaudible] What is your best guess?

EDELMAN: Sinan, do you want to take that one?

CIDDI: Vishkin good to see you. You should be here. My initial thoughts coming out on this is economic policy-wise, you could see one of two options. I mean we know that he pushes against established economic norms such as interest rates in currency policy. Monetary policy. He just does not like high interest rate. Given even the damage that it's done to the Turkish lira,

against international markets. So if he continues down that road, I don't know what kind of people will be appointed, but maybe he's of the mindset that I want to appoint people who recognize that this is the way I want it done. So you're going to look at a Turkey that has a more closed and inward looking economic policy, devoid of international norms and realities. Turkey has put out calls saying we need reforms, we need sensible macro-economic policy and currency policy and engagement with international institutions.

And the other policy is sort of staffing these institutions with realistic economists who tell it to him like he should want to hear it. I don't think there will be a more sobering experience for him than a full on progressive economic crisis. Where Turkey might have to resign a standby agreement with the IMF. Or other International Monetary institutions. Given where Turkey's headed and all the risk factors that are put up there, he pushes against them because that's helped them electorally saying these are conspiracies. These are just hatched by people who don't want to see Turkey doing great, whether it's the credit rating agencies or other bodies. But those realities are realities. How are you going to reinvigorate the economy, which was heavily dependent on the construction sector, as well as consumption and credit loans guarantees? That's all coming home to roost now. My sense is, if I have to look into my ball, he's going to turn more inward, and try to fight it and say this is how it's going to be done, and build an economic policy that's more inward looking.

EDELMAN: Sinan, would you comment at all on, or care to comment on the reports that have surfaced in the last 24 hours or so that they're considering creating an economic czar, super ministry that they would put together the ministry of finance in economy and trade in one giant bureaucracy, and what that might mean both for economic policy, and what it might mean politically?

CIDDI: I think it spells more of creating or wanting to create institutions that serve his preferences. We have capable independent institutions in Turkey which do set economical monetary policy at least that have not been given free rein, a central bank. And by the way I'm not an economist by any stretch of the imagination. But the central bank fears that Erdoğan pushes back against this. They have raised interest rates recently, but it came too little and too late and it hurt Turkey's debt burden. These are the foreign loan commitments as well as purchase of fossil fuels. So, creation of new institutions that are within his own vision, are they going to be able to operate and devise policy independently of the presidency and put it into motion, as is probably recommended? Or is he just going say thanks for that, I don't like what you said but here's what I'm going do? And I'm going to fire three people and replace with some other people who do espouse my worldview.

EDELMAN: I think we've got time for two more questions, I'm going take two questions right in a row and then we will have the panel wrap it up, so in the front and then Ambassador Swett.

CLARK: Hi, thank you very much, I'm David Clark from AFP, Agence France-Presse. This morning Assistant Secretary Wes Mitchell was over at the Senate and he said that in the event of the S-400 sale goes forward it would be a qualitative difference in relationships from the U.S. to Turkey. He also said that if, what you referred to as the hostages, are not released then

there would be a very different tenor in U.S. relations. Obviously these two issues have very much gotten Washington's attention but is there not a worry that if they dealt with in this bilateral way that these two very precise things – the sanctions and the holding of U.S. citizens – are resolved, then Washington's intentions will drift away from the broader support of what remains of Turkish democracy and providing a carrot if you will, an existing transatlantic relationship that needs to be nurtured than the precise problems day by day.

EDELMAN: Okay let's hear from Ambassador Sweat and then I'll get the panel into this.

SWEAT: Thank you, I am representing the Lantos Foundation, I wanted to address the situation in regard to the American that is being held versus Gülen presidency in western Pennsylvania. I was wondering if you could just comment on how widely known is the disparity between these two claims of incarceration known in Turkey, and we've talked a little about what the U.S. can do with withholding delivery on certain military items. Is there potential that sanctions could also be introduced and would that have any influence or any impact on the Turkish government to release the American?

EDELMAN: Nate, do you want to take the issue of Secretary Mitchell's comments? I think he made some yesterday and on the other side of the Congress as well. And then Aykan can you take the last question and then we'll wrap up.

SCHENKKAN: Sure, it's a great question and I think it's a great point. Obviously, these aren't the two issues that have mobilized Congress. Pastor Brunson and the S-400. It is very important not to lose sight of the larger picture of people who have been in prison including journalists, including human rights defenders in Turkey, not to let them fall off the list. I have also said, and I've testified about this before Congress, not to lose sight of American employees or Turkish citizens who work for the American government in Turkey that are in prison or that are placed under house arrest, which I think there are three at this point. You know, this is one of the things that, I wouldn't say I expect right now, but certainly it's one of the scenarios that's possible, and they can start releasing hostages. This is why you take hostages, so you can release them and not have to do something else, or in exchange for ransom. So I think it's something very much to watch, and I certainly hope that Pastor Brunson is released of course. I hope that if he is released, we can maintain enough attention to understand that that doesn't solve the problems with democracy long term.

EDELMAN: Aykan, you get the last word.

ERDEMIR: I will say this very quickly. I think the ongoing debate on the Gülen and Pastor Brunson spot is a red herring because the initial idea was to swap Pastor Brunson with an Iranian-Turkish gold trader who was the ring leader of the largest sanctions in the world. This is second largest in helping Iran-U.S. sanctions. The idea was, the goal was, to prevent Razahah turning states' evidence because that evidence could be incriminating not only concerning his foreign ministers on Iranian payroll but also for himself and his family circles as well. Now, when that was out of the way, there is enough proof in the court records, by Juliani and Arkazi who were representing Razahah, met with Erdoğan, they were trying to find a diplomatic solution to this case. When that failed we were back to step one and that is Brunson. Now I think

that the problem is, on the one hand, the Turkish public has little idea of how dubious the charges against Pastor Brunson are. It is a 62-page indictment, which I have read numerous times, front to end, end to front. There isn't a single, concrete piece of evidence about the Pastor, and there are accusations which are like science fiction, beyond belief. So, if it's very difficult though, under Turkey's current media environment, for the average Turkish citizen to realize that these two cases are not at all comparable, and this is not how things work in states with rule of law, and that ultimately I think is I think the conundrum we have. This is what can't be, you know, what can't come over. The Turkey side has internalized the executed, giving directions to the judiciary, like, overnight rules and orders, to release, for example, Turkish-German journalists to such an extent that they expect the same from Germany and the U.S. They expect the executed in Germany, Greece, the United States, to just pick up the phone, call judges and prosecutors, and make things happen overnight without due process, without evidence. So, unless this seizes, unless Turkey returns to at least some level Western understanding of rule of law and due process, I think expectations will continue to be unrealistic, barter proposals will continue to come, and hostage diplomacy will continue to be the key of Turkish foreign policy.

EDELMAN: Well I'd like to thank my fellow panelists for a very illuminating and slightly depressing, with some silver linings, analysis of the election and the prospects for both Turkish democracy and U.S.-Turkish relations. Thank you all for coming.