

Post-Erdoganism? Turkish Politics After the Istanbul Face-Off

A Conversation with Aykan Erdemir, Alan Makovsky, Giran Ozcan, and Merve Tahiroglu. Moderated by Ambassador Eric S. Edelman

DERSHOWITZ: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Toby Dershowitz, and I'm the senior vice president for government relations and strategy at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I warmly welcome everyone here today. Thank you so much for joining us for today's conversation, *Post-Erdoganism? Turkish Politics After the Istanbul Face-Off*. After this weekend's historic election in Istanbul, we're honored to have an excellent panel of experts to discuss this timely topic.

Today's program is one of many from FDD's Turkey program, which provides up-to-date analysis on Turkey's domestic and foreign policies. We're so proud to have support and guidance on this project from a very distinguished board of advisors. For more information about our Turkey program and to learn more about FDD's other programs, I welcome everybody to visit our website, fdd.org.

We're very glad to be joined today by a distinguished audience of diplomats, representatives of the executive branch, including from the Department of State and the Pentagon, many experts from the policy community, and several domestic and international media outlets. Many of our audience members already know that FDD is a nonpartisan policy institute. We are a source for timely research and analysis and policy options that we provide to Congress, the administration, the media, and the wider national security community. We take no foreign government and no foreign corporate funding, and never will.

In addition to the folks joining us here today in this room, I'd also like to welcome those tuning into the conversation via our livestream. We invite all of you to join in on the conversation, which we'll be live-tweeting at @fdd. At this time, I'll also ask everybody to please silence your cell phones.

I'm pleased to turn it over in just a moment to the moderator for today, Ambassador Eric Edelman, who is senior advisor here at FDD and the chair of our Turkey program. As many of you already know, Ambassador Edelman has previously served as U.S. Ambassador to Turkey and Finland and as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. Ambassador Edelman, over to you.

EDELMAN: It's great to be here at FDD this morning. I think it's fair to say that Istanbul throughout its history has suffered a number of earthquakes, and I think what happened on Sunday certainly counts as a political earthquake. Today we have a terrific panel of four colleagues, two of whom are my frequent coauthors, with us.

Dr. Aykan Erdemir, a senior fellow at FDD, former Turkish parliamentarian. Alan Makovsky, many of you know, is a former senior professional staff member in the United States Congress and now a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Merve Tahiroglu is a research assistant at FDD here. And Giran Ozcan is the HDP representative to the United States, and we're happy to have him join us too.

Aykan, let me start with you to just do – I want to go just do a review of the bidding of this election rerun, how it happened. We're calling it a face-off, I think in honor of Alan Makovsky, whose St. Louis Blues just won the Stanley Cup. But how did we get to this election on Sunday? Why did we have this rerun, and what is the significance of the outcome?

ERDEMIR: Let me approach it from two different ends. One is, following the March 31st municipal elections in Turkey, Istanbul provided the opposition a razor-thin victory, and Erdogan basically put pressure on the Supreme Electoral Council and all that election, hoping that he could steal the election in the second round. But this plan massively backfired. Now this is the immediate reason for where we are today. But then, the broader context is a little different and that is I think, there are two factors that brought us here.

On the one hand, Turkey's ultranationalist MHP worked with Erdogan to put together not only a presidential system, but a formal legal system of alliances that paved the way for electoral blocks, electoral alliances to be put together. So that's one important factor that brought us here. On the other hand, on the opposition side, we have seen a greater vision and competence in building bridges across divides which you and I, until recently, thought were unbridgeable.

For example, we have seen center left pro-secular CHP and even the Islamic conservative Felicity party. We have seen the pro-Kurdish HDP, and the let's say moderate national center-like E party, all work together, coordinate to some extent, to put together, not only in Istanbul in the persona of Imamoglu, but also in dozens of metropolises around Turkey. A new alliance. An alliance which Imamoglu referred to as the Istanbulitifici, the Istanbul alliance. In Istanbul, but it's of course beyond that. But Istanbul, in a way, is the best epitome of what that new spirit is. And I think those two developments, are also to understand how we got here.

EDELMAN: Alan, what Aykan was just talking about was quite striking as I looked at the election results. I mean, having gone from a margin of somewhere between 13 to 17 thousand depending on whose count you looked at to a margin of 800 thousand votes seems astonishing. Imamoglu did extremely well, including in districts of Istanbul where you might not have expected it. Ones that are filled with the kind of pious voters who normally have supported the AKP. Did Erdogan go into this with a plan, or was there no plan? He ordered this rerun of the election, most of us I think assume because he intended to win. Yet he ended up losing it by an enormous margin, I think the largest margin in 35 years in Istanbul.

How is this possible? What was going on in his head?

MAKOVSKY: Yeah, it was the largest margin certainly under the current constitution. Not sure about the 50s and 60s. Look, I think this election underscores the fact that Erdogan has really lost his political Midas touch. I think he has been stumbling now for quite a while. He, I think we could trace it all the way at least back to the way he reacted to the Gezi Park demonstrations, which he could've handled so much more smoothly and probably defused. Instead, he inflamed the situation.

The way he reacted on the December 2013 corruption issue. There's been a number of stumbles. And I think really, in fact, the whole alliance with MHP was a major stumble. Because

it prompted CHP to form its alliance. I actually heard somebody from CHP here recently say thank you Tuiyip Erdogan, for doing the alliance. Because it forced us to do a counter alliance. If all the parties had run separately, it's almost certain AKP would've won, because they have first pass at a post system. The AKP is still the leading party in Istanbul, or at least it was, until now.

Now it's a question. So I just think this was a thorough misjudgment, and Erdogan took a defeat and turned it into a disaster.

EDELMAN: Merve, where does the opposition go from here? What's going to happen to this coalition that Aykan was just describing? What's its future, what's the future of the CHP party leadership after this, and where do they go from here? I mean, the problem politically is we've been through a season of election after election going back to 2015. Now we've got prospectively, four years without any election. Although we can get into whether that can possibly be sustained or not. So where does it all go from here?

TAHIROGLU: Well, I do agree that the CHP, the main opposition party, is at this point facing some really big decisions about how it's going to set the tone for the future, and maybe Aykan can later talk about some of the more granular details of that, knowing the party much better than I do from the inside. But I think what this election showed us, I mean given that this was the biggest CHP victory, and I don't really know if we can even call it a CHP victory, but the biggest victory for the party that they've been able to secure over the last few years, it should really communicate something to the party leadership, and it should communicate that to Erdogan as well.

Because I think what this new coalition of the opposition that we're seeing, I love the way Imamoglu himself defined it as an Istanbul alliance. Which I think evokes a lot of imagery, and I think it's just a great slogan, it should be repeated. But what this Istanbul alliance shows, Imamoglu didn't really build his campaign around traditional CHP rhetoric. But he in fact I think embodied more the spirit of the Gezi protests, as Alan said. So I think we can go back to that, too.

And I think there is this new push especially by the youth in Turkey away from identity politics, and away from divisive language. And Imamoglu's success was about leading a campaign on inclusion, on the politics of inclusion. And this is what the people are demanding, I think, they've been doing that since Gezi. I think the rise of the HDP in 2015 on similar principles, emphasizing similar principles, is all part of this wave. And Erdogan has been facing this wave for a number of years, now.

His popularity had stumbled around 50% since I think the presidential election of 2014, where he got 52%. It's always hovered around that, and it's been diminishing since then. So we're looking at a Turkey where Erdoganism no longer works. And I think it's a very important juncture for the opposition to right now take the lessons from this particular election and how they were able to win this.

EDELMAN: And of course incredible irony of the fact that this election occurs, and the trial of the Gezi 13 protest leader starts immediately the next day. You couldn't put the whole thing into sharper relief if you designed it in Hollywood. Where do the Kurds go from here? Merve was just talking about Demortash's pioneering of the notion of an inclusive rainbow coalition in the 2015 election. What will the Kurdish voters and the Kurdish party be looking to see over the next few years?

OZCAN: I think I should probably start from how the Kurds got here, first. Because I think once and for all now, we can put to bed the idea that the Kurds are a democratizing force in Turkey. I think the Kurds have had to prove this on several occasions, and Istanbul on Sunday showed us that the Kurds are committed to democracy, whatever happens. And the HDP is the political articulation of the Kurdish acknowledgement that a solution to the Kurdish question can only come about through the democratization of Turkey.

Now, post Sunday, the expectation is that both camps, because we're talking of an alliance, but the HDP was officially part of no alliance. And the message that came about from Sunday was that both camps have to take their own conclusions from what happened. The CHP and the alliance it formed knows that approaching the Kurds is a winning formula in Turkey. The AKP and the alliance it formed, on the other hand, knows that the nationalist rhetoric, the alienation of the Kurdish people, the criminalization of the Kurdish people, is a recipe for disaster for its grasp on power.

So I think what we're looking for now is to take the onus off the Kurds, and put the onus on the establishment parties. One, the founding political party of the Turkish republic, and the other who's held power in Turkey for the best part of almost 20 years. The acknowledgement and the understanding that there has to be a fundamental change in the way this republic is constructed in order for the Kurds to be integrated into the country in general, but also that if we want progress in Turkey, if we want a redefinition of what the republic has become, that the Kurds need to be engaged in a dignified manner.

And I think that Sunday, it's thrown up an opportunity, but also probably a little bit of a crisis in both camps as well. Because both camps are allied with nationalist parties. And I don't know if I would define E as a moderate nationalist. I have a friend, and I don't know if he would want to be directly quoted, but was talking about E party as the ultra-nationalists that also go to the beach occasionally. And I think that was a better definition of the moderate nationalist categorization. And that's why both sides now are going to have to grapple with that.

EDELMAN: Let me pull the thread on that just a little bit, because I take your point that the Kurds don't necessarily have to prove anything to anybody about the role they can play in helping democratize Turkey. On the other hand, you were saying the onus is off the Kurds. One could argue the onus is on the Kurds now, because if Turkey is as deeply divided as Merve was suggesting, 50/50 as it were between these two alliances, clearly the Kurds are potentially the king makers in all this. And that seems to have been recognized certainly by the AKP in the machinations that they engaged in before the vote on Sunday, trotting out an alleged statement by Abdullah Ocalan saying don't vote for the opposition alliance, et cetera.

What was going on there in your view, and how does that play into the Kurdish role in the future?

OZCAN: I've generally tended not to use the term king maker, especially for the elections in Istanbul. I think rather than making a king, the Kurds took the crown off one of them. And I think that was a very important message to give, because what happened in the run up as well. I think the genealogy of the Kurdish movement needs to be understood by everyone. Abdullah Ocalan is the founder of the Kurdish political existence in Turkey. Now, there have been other Kurdish entities before, but what I mean by this is that in the last four decades, this man ultimately founded a movement that has now transcended Turkey's borders as well.

It has an armed wing, it has a cultural domain, it has a political articulation. And the HDP is a grandchild, a great grandchild actually of the Kurdish political movement. And so, when certain discussions revolve around pitting the PKK against Ocalan, or HDP against the PKK, or Ocalan against numerous individuals, most recently Selatin Dermitas, I think that needs to be understood. And the HDP should be understood as the evolution of where the PKK has come in four decades.

And this for me, is a very promising aspect of what happened on Sunday, but also going forward now as well. And how the Kurds are engaged in the democratization process of the Turkish republic.

EDELMAN: I want to come back to some of the issues that, because they're Kurdish, transcend national borders and take us into Syria. But I just want to finish off the sort of domestic political implications before we get to that, and to the impact of this on US-Turkish relations. So mayor Imamoglu is now back in office. He had a short tenure that was truncated by the annulment of the election. Will Tuyyip Erdogan allow him to function as mayor of Istanbul? We've already seen that Erdogan has used the new powers that he has under the constitution to remove some 40 plus mayors, mostly in the southeast, in Kurdish cities, and replaced them with trustees.

There have been charges against mayor Yavash in Ankara, there have been charges raised against mayor Imamoglu that could serve as a pretext for their removal. With an 800 thousand vote margin, will Erdogan dare to do that?

ERDEMIR: Now from a rational perspective, one would assume that Erdogan would stay away from appointing new trustees, especially given the horrible track record of trustee mayors. Now that HDP mayors have replaced some of those trustee mayors after the elections, they have exposed horrible waste of public resources.

EDELMAN: I'm shocked.

ERDEMIR: To, not to the shakafars, but. Basically, it has undermined the AKP's messaging. But still, Erdogan could go along that way. What we've heard is yesterday, the governor of Urdu, who was involved in a spat with Imamoglu is now putting pressure on some of

the airport employees to go testify against Imamoglu. So this could be seen as laying the ground work for further law cases against Imamoglu –

EDELMAN: This was when Imamoglu went to the Black Sea coast to campaign.

ERDEMIR: And he wasn't allowed through the VIP gate, which politicians normally use, and then the allegation is that he insulted the governor of Urdu. And now Erdogan is using that as a legal pretext to basically first, commit him to a prison term, and then based on that prison term, sentencing that this makes him ineligible to run for office. Of course, this is very ironic because this is exactly the same case as Erdogan's own rise to power. Erdogan has always criticized the fact that the secular establishment used similar legal pretext to ban him –

EDELMAN: - to remove him.

ERDEMIR: - from office. So now he's, let's see if he's desperate enough to do it. In Ankara, what we are seeing is Erdogan is putting a lot of pressure on Yavash using various kind of municipal means to block him. Recently the government changed the way in which municipal budgets work to get an immediate five percent cut from their budget to pay for the subway costs. Also, today's news is Mansur Yavash is desperately trying to change the board of one of the municipal enterprises, and Erdogan again blocking that through various means.

So it seems this is going to be kind of a long term battle between mayors, municipal councils, and Erdogan as he tries to cripple these institutions. That's however, I would argue, could backfire yet again. We see that Erdogan is repeatedly making mistakes, as we have seen with the trustees, and I think such a battle, especially during an economic downturn which makes municipalities crucial instruments for delivering social aid and services, could really hurt Erdogan. Because ultimately, the people in Istanbul and Ankara, especially the urban poor, could blame the president for incapacitating municipalities, which could be their last resource.

EDELMAN: Alan?

MAKOVSKY: Yeah, I just wanted to say, I think one of the – what made the difference between the March 31st election and June 23rd election in many ways that many of the people who normally vote for Erdogan's party voted for Imamoglu. It was a rejection of Erdogan's methods, and I think he's got that lesson. So I don't think he's going to try to remove Imamoglu judicially. He may use the judicial process for pressure. However, he has so many other levers. And just today, and I haven't read this in detail, but there was an announcement of a new regulation that the environment ministry will have new authority over urban renewal projects.

I mean, it's a presidential system. He can issue regulations all the time that circumscribe the power of the municipalities, he'll do that. He's also got an AKP majority in the municipal council in Istanbul, even though the mayor is from the opposition party. And of course, as Aykan mentioned, there's budgetary issues. Municipalities usually get 50% or more of their budget from the central government.

EDELMAN: So Alan, okay, I get it. Erdogan is likely to order his factota in Ankara and Istanbul municipal councils to be as obstructive as possible. Got it. But he can't be very happy about this outcome, and there's already rumors about heads rolling inside the AKP, potentially even including his son in law, although I personally will believe that when I see it.

MAKOVSKY: Me, too.

EDELMAN: But what happens inside the AKP? There has been for years speculation about Abdullah Gul, the former president, former prime minister, co-founder with Erdogan of the AKP, leaving the party. Ali Babajan, Amit Davotolu, is this the point at which AKP is finally going to fracture? Is that in the offing, or will he hold it together? You said he's lost his touch, so.

MAKOVSKY: Yeah. He's lost his touch, so I guess all bets are off. I'll stick with that. Look, I find it hard to believe that he's lost his touch so much that he can't keep AK party together. I don't think I'll also believe, you said you'll believe it when you see it, regarding Al Byrak's departure. I'll believe it when I see it when this Gul party actually gets formed and takes off.

EDELMAN: No one's made money betting that Abdulla Gul was going to leave the AKP so far.

MAKOVSKY: Correct. Correct. I think an interesting guy always to watch in AKP is Bulent Arinc. He has forced Erdogan's hand over the years a few times, including in nominating Gul for president in 2007.

EDELMAN: Right.

MAKOVSKY: And he had a falling out with Erdogan, now he's sort of been brought back in –

EDELMAN: Into the tent.

MAKOVSKY: - to the outer circles. Kind of watch that guy, if he would do something dramatic, there might be those in the party who might be willing to follow him. Otherwise, you can count me among those who will be shocked if the party fractures.

ERDEMIR: But if I may, that is one recent development. Erdogan has just put together a new consultative body with lucrative positions, and Arinc has been offered one of these positions.

MAKOVSKY: Correct, that's right.

ERDEMIR: Alongside other former speakers of parliament. So Erdogan is trying to co-opt some of the AKP heavyweights. At the same time, he's putting pressure on both Gul and Develioglu. Over hundred Turkish diplomats were interrogated, and some of them tortured to basically extract incriminating information about Develioglu. This is to put pressure on him -

EDELMAN: - This is after the coup.

ERDEMIR: This May, just a month ago.

EDELMAN: Right, but it's part of the post-coup –

ERDEMIR: But interesting, they waited almost two years to go after these diplomats, and then when it comes to Gul, they just got after one of his in-laws, right before the elections. I think that's also a message.

EDELMAN: Merve, so we said that there are no elections until 2003. On the other hand, the Turkish economy continues to be in a very, very serious economic crisis, a debt crisis. *The New York Times* had an article over the weekend about the enormous sums of money that are involved in public debt and private debt. There's been a little bit of, I think, inattention in the media to this because it isn't sovereign debt. But the private debt, which is going to be very hard to repay under current circumstances, is enormous. It dwarfs any kind of bailout that the IMF has ever attempted before.

Is it possible that this continue without prompting some kind of political upheaval in Turkey?

TAHIROGLU: Well, I think that the March 31 municipal elections was actually a response to that. I mean, people are noticing across the country the deteriorating economic conditions. And there's been speculation now for over a year that Turkey has to go to the IMF at the end of the day if it wants to go back to some semblance of normalcy, and that the amounts that are being discussed are really, really significant. So I think this is what's causing Erdogan to become a bit more paranoid and worried and kind of explain some of his blunders. And with the regards to the AKP questions, by the way, I think Erdogan's actions themselves, those are going to splinter the AKP and they are splintering the AKP on their own.

With that, I think just to get back another positive message, because I think Sunday, we should still be happy about it.

EDELMAN: We're all happy about it. It was a great day for Turkish democracy.

TAHIROGLU: Well, I think this kind of connects to the economy question as well. We've been seeing in Turkey, but also around the world for the past few years now, that there's a growing, increasing local resistance and local politics are becoming all the more important. And local resistance is becoming all the more important. So we've seen examples of this in Turkey, elsewhere. Even in the United States in 2018 for example, after President Trump withdrew from the climate accord, we saw a number of cities come out and make these decisions saying that we're going to adhere to the accord on our own.

So this is a model that we're seeing around the world, and I think that's why the Istanbul municipality and this particular win and the fact that this resistance and movement is brewing out of Istanbul is really important. So hopefully, Imamoglu, if he's allowed to govern properly, can

bring back meritocracy and bring back, try to alleviate the economic troubles that people are facing, especially the workers are facing in Istanbul, which is a very important constituency for any political party.

EDELMAN: We talked about, you spoke at length about and eloquently about the role that Kurds have played in the democratization of Turkey, but the Kurdish question is not only for Turkey a domestic question, it's also very much a foreign policy question, and probably the foreign policy question that gets more of Erdogan's attention than any other, which is what to do about Syria. How do you see this election result playing out in terms of Syria policy for Erdogan? I mean, he's already got a problem managing the so-called cease fire that he and Putin negotiated in Idlib, where the regime is engaged in a lot of activity.

But that doesn't mean that he's forgotten that there's a problem in the northeast.

OZCAN: So, for me, it all comes down to who takes what from Sunday. Because I don't generally define Sunday as a victory for democracy. Well, no more than when it was a victory for democracy when Erdogan was getting more than 50%. What I think the victory was, and the actual victory was the victory of the politics of reconciliation over antagonization. A victory for the politics of inclusivity over alienation. And probably a victory for peace over war. And that's why, and referring to the title of the actual panel as well, I'm very curious to see what kind of Erdogan we're going to get post-Erdoganism. And that's I think going to be more decisive than anything.

We don't have elections now, for three or four years, or we don't think we'll have elections for three or four years. So he's still governing the republic of Turkey. And hopefully, Sunday will show everyone, including the government, including the decision makers who will, in the following days or weeks, think about what kind of repercussions the S400 purchase is going to have, they're going to think about whether they want to unilaterally enter Syria and fight the Syrian Kurds.

These are all decisions waiting to be made by the Turkish government right now. And I'm hoping that Sunday has showed especially those decision makers that Turkish society, especially Turkish society, I believe has had enough of this polarization. And public opinion is going to be very important, and public opinion told us on Sunday that this ultra-nationalist rhetoric, this absolutely tense, this raising tension in the country is not benefiting anyone anymore.

Whether that's the economy, I'm no economist, but apparently that's not good for the economy, too. And when that comes to, when push comes to shove, are they going to continue to antagonize the Kurds, or is Erdogan going to take this message, and transcend what he has been doing for three or four years. Because what made him take this course of action was 2015, and I think we haven't talked about 2015 yet. But when he lost his majority then, he took this nationalist turn.

EDELMAN: Right.

OZCAN: We're at another point where he's lost public support, and what direction he takes now is going to be decisive on how he engages with the Kurds, will the meetings with Ocalan continue? Was that just an election ploy, or was that an investment into something bigger?

EDELMAN: And what's your bet? On which Erdogan we see?

OZCAN: I'm not a betting man.

EDELMAN: Good answer.

OZCAN: I am a hopeful man. And I'm hoping for the sake of the peoples of Turkey and the region in general that he takes the message on Sunday and sees that the people voted for peace.

EDELMAN: So that he goes back to where he was essentially before June 2015.

OZCAN: In certain respects.

EDELMAN: Okay. I'm glad you raised the S400 sale. Of course, the first shipments of S400 missiles from Russia are anticipated to arrive next month. We've talked a little bit about the IMF and Erdogan's allergy to going to the IMF. He knows if he going to the IMF – I mean, there's nobody else to bail them out. You're talking about 150 billion dollar bailout package. It's not going to be the Russians, it's not going to be the Chinese, it's not even going to be the gutteries who dropped 25 billion into the Turkish economy a year ago and watched it just disappear, so.

He has no choice, and if we're going to the IMF, it means he's got to come to Washington and deal with us. So clearly one of the reasons he doesn't want to go to the IMF is he doesn't want to deal with us. This S400 thing is a problem for him as well because he's got both the Department of Defense, which in the person of the former acting secretary of defense Pat Shanahan sent a letter to his Turkish counterpart, General Akhar, explaining that if the Turks go ahead with the S400 sale, it means they're going to be out of the F35 program.

Congress is teeing up to impose all sorts of punishments and sanctions on Turkey if they go through with this. It's striking to me as a former US ambassador to Turkey how much the fund of, and Alan can speak to this as well. There used to be a reasonably sized Turkey caucus that I could count on for help in various points in time, when I needed help in the Congress to help manage the relationship. It's astonishing to me how little support there is for Turkey in the US Congress right now.

There's only degrees of how much people want to punish them. I'm not sure everybody in Ankor understands that, least of all Tuiyip Erdogan, but I think it's a reality. So it's been pretty clear, Aykan, that he thinks his get out of jail free card is Donald Trump. And he's going to have a meeting with the president on the margins of the G20. How do you think that's going to go? What's going to happen? Where does this take US-Turkish relations?

ERDEMIR: My one sentence answer would be never underestimate the role of misinformation in Turkish foreign policy. We are going through a very unique period whereby Ankara has no feelers in DC. In the absence of any respectable pro-government or quasi-government think tank, in the absence of any serious journalistic forays from US, and in the absence of any meaningful input from the Turkish foreign ministry, Erdogan and his narrow circle of yes men and yes women have really a delusional understanding of the bilateral relations.

And my evidence would be, for example, when we had the NATO anniversary event here in DC, Turkish foreign minister addressed a NATO crowd and US decision makers and informed them that Katz's sanctions don't apply because Turkish-Russian deal was signed before the passing of the bill. And American colleagues were like shocked here, being lectured about how US law and legislation works. Or the director of Turkey's defense industry directorate recently said that Turkey can't be kicked out of the F45 consortium.

Our finance colleagues tell us that in Istanbul, all the finance professionals kind of buy the argument that Erdogan will deal with Trump and get a waiver. So, if and when this slow-motion train crash happens, I think we should blame it on the level of delusion in Ankara. Because ultimately, Turkey is very difficult to run, and Turkish foreign policy is very difficult to run from the confines of a 1150 room palace and its increasingly narrowing circle of delusional consultants and aides.

EDELMAN: I'm not sure it's a slow-motion train wreck. Looks to me like the lights in the train are coming right, there's light at the end of the tunnel, it's about to run us over.

OZCAN: Can I quickly just add to that, just to indicate the atmosphere in Congress? As a Kurd, and as an HDP rep, I'm on the hill quite regularly actually almost moderating anger towards the Turkish government, that's how bad it is right now.

EDELMAN: I appreciate that conformation. General position, Alan.

MAKOVSKY: Yeah, I'll just really to underscore and elaborate on Aykan's point. I don't think Turkey, even in the Salaad days, as you described them of Turkish relations with Congress, ever really understood Congress very well. I remember one time I accompanied a group of Congressmen who were part of the US's North Atlantic Assembly, NATO's parliamentary arm, to meet with Erdogan. And this was a very pro-Turkish group. And he lectured them about the 17 anti-Turkish resolutions that were in Congress.

Actually, I looked at all of these resolutions, none of them had more than 10, 15 signatures. They were meaningless. They weren't going anywhere. I actually went up to him afterwards, and I said sir, you really need somebody to explain how the US Congress works. And he said okay. It seemed to me it never happened. And so I think they really don't understand how serious this situation is.

I just want to add if I could, just. Look, I think sometimes people confuse the sanctions and the F35 issues.

EDELMAN: Yes.

MAKOVSKY: And these are obviously related, but two separate issues. Congress, you can pretty much bet your mortgage on it. Congress is going to pass legislation that if Turkey takes the S400, they are never, if the S400 even arrives in Turkey, that Turkey will never take possession of F35s. That I think is a certainty. As for the sanctions, which are contained in CAAATSA, countering America's adversaries abroad through sanctions act.

EDELMAN: Which would be triggered from doing business with Rosanbora export, which is a sanctioned entity.

MAKOVSKY: Exactly. Yes, exactly, doing business with Russian intelligence or security agencies. Obviously, this would be, would fall into that category. I'm a little bit of a cynic as somebody who worked in Congress regarding waivers that if you give any waiver, whatever the level, however high the bar, if the president wants to find a justification-

EDELMAN: He'll get over it.

MAKOVSKY: Yeah. And I noticed the Pentagon said recently sanctions can be a viable option. They didn't say sanctions will happen. And Trump, to my knowledge, has not spoken to sanctions.

EDELMAN: Correct.

MAKOVSKY: Actually, I don't think Trump specifically, Pence has, but Trump has not specifically said they won't get the F35. But that's not going to be up to Trump. Congress is going to pass a law. So I am concerned because of this apparently good personal relationship that Trump and Erdogan have struck, that Erdogan is getting the impression that Trump will take care of all of this. He could perhaps find a justification on the sanctions, if you look at section 236 of CAAATSA, as I read it, as long as he finds an entity sanctionable, he can waive implementation.

EDELMAN: Right, he can't waive the sanctions, but he can suspend implementation.

MAKOVSKY: He can suspend implementation, so in effect, they wouldn't happen.

EDELMAN: Right.

MAKOVSKY: Now obviously, Turkey doesn't want to be declared sanctionable, but.

EDELMAN: Unless the Congress then takes some further action to –

MAKOVSKY: Unless Congress takes further action.

EDELMAN: To remove his ability to do that.

MAKOVSKY: Yeah. And they also pass another waiver which seems wouldn't apply to Turkey, that any country that buys Russian arms but is weaning itself off of Russian arms, seems it was there for India. I guess the president could even find some contorted way to construe that. So maybe Trump would save him, in terms of sanctions. I don't personally rule that out. But in terms of getting the F35, I think he's got no chance in Congress, and I fear he doesn't get it.

EDELMAN: I want to turn to the audience for questions, but before we do that, I just want to throw to anybody on the panel who wants to answer, or more than one. Do we get to 2023 without another election in Turkey? Or is there some other mechanism that would potentially, an economic crisis? Does that prompt the government to collapse? Would MHP pull out? Are there any other factors? The military. Is that a factor, are we in a post-coup era in Turkey? Alan, do you want?

MAKOVSKY: Yeah. Sorry, I don't mean to talk too much here, but. Look, I've looked at the new system very carefully, written about it. There's only two ways to get to early elections, neither of which appears very viable. One is the president can call new elections at the snap of his fingers. But, if he does that, that's the end of his term, and he only gets two terms. So it's virtually a certainty that he will not call new elections.

The other way is that parliament can call new elections as in any parliamentary systems, but in most parliamentary systems, you only need 50% plus one to get the new election. Under this system, you need 60% plus one. Sorry, you only need 60%, not the plus one. You only need 40% plus one to prevent new elections. Erdogan has 295 of the 600 seats. So about 48%. In addition to every party including MHP voting for new elections, you would need a defection of about 55 of those 295 parliamentarians.

EDELMAN: To get the big split in AKP-

MAKOVSKY: A huge split, which I mean, even a party led by Gul in cooperation with Arinc, I think Erdogan knows his delegation well enough that that's not likely, and I am deeply concerned. I fear it's the big problem facing Turkey, that we're going to have a period where Erdogan's credibility, his popularity is declining, the economy's in a swoon, it's a perfect situation where you need a change of government, and there's no way to get there.

And given Turkey's history, you could have any kind of extra-legal, or who knows.

EDELMAN: Extra-legal or the only mechanism for popular dissent becomes protest in the streets, and you could get violence. I think it's a very real possibility.

OZCAN: And I'd just like to chime in and say that as the primary victim of the arbitrary implementation of Turkish laws, my confidence in the constitutional arithmetic in Turkey is not that high. And I mean, let's leave 2023 aside. Depending on certain decisions that are taken by the government in the next few months, I don't want to even guess what we can see in 2020, let alone 2023.

EDELMAN: Okay. Well on that cheery note, we have a microphone somewhere, so I ask members of the audience to wait for the mic, please introduce yourself. And because we have only limited time, please make your questions brief. Laurie.

MYLROIE: Laurie Mylroie, Kurdistan 24. Two part question. The S400 deal is going to happen with implications for US-Turkish relations. Why do you think Erdogan is going ahead with this, and the second part, if there is a real deterioration in US-Turkish relations, which may well happen after the purchase of the S400, what implications might it have for the Kurds in Syria?

EDELMAN: Anyone want to take the first part? We'll let you take the second one.

ERDEMIR: Let me take the first part and maybe get a – I think there are different actors, groups involved in this decisions. For Erdogan, I've argued from day one that, especially since the aborted coup, this is a matter of personal security. The S400s are the best guarantee, best kind of push back against a potential coup attempt, both for his air force one and for his palace. But for Turkey's Eurasianist block, both in the military and within the bureaucracy, this is a unique opportunity to pivot Turkey from the trans-Atlantic alliance towards Russia and toward the east.

And it's basically a path dependency. As we speak, there are almost 100 Turkish servicemen being trained in Russia alongside not only Russian, but also Chinese servicemen. So, this is the beginning of a kind of a new socialization, a new ethos also in the Turkish military. So I think this is a number of factors coming together. The S400 decision.

EDELMAN: Before we get to the Kurds, just on S400. Is there any possibility of some kind of face-saving solution like the S400s get delivered, but not deployed? They stay in their crates, they never uncrated. They go to someplace else to rest for a while, like Azerbaijan or something? Is there any give at all here you think, that could lead to everybody walking away happy?

I'm just asking for a friend.

MAKOVSKY: I think it's very significant that on the day after, well two day after this resounding defeat in Istanbul, that Erdogan personally, while talking about how we have to accept the message of the voters and reassess and consider what our failings may have been, also strongly reaffirmed that the S400 is a done deal.

EDELMAN: Right.

MAKOVSKY: I know people have talked about the Azerbaijan solution. I think that's totally unacceptable to Russia. I just, so it wouldn't solve Turkey's problems with Russia. And again I'd say, the Congressional legislation, at least that I've seen it, is all about taking delivery of the S400, so.

ERDEMIR: And it would be an expensive impulse buy. Two and a half billion dollars.

MAKOVSKY: Yeah, rather.

ERDEMIR: Not to be unpacked.

OZCAN: Laurie, I've been in DC for almost two years now, in this role. And throughout that time, there's been a very visible correlation in the quality of the meetings that I've been having and this deterioration that we're seeing between the Turkish state and the US. Now sometimes, I sit down and like to think that that's because I'm an incredibly talented diplomat, but I do think that has something to do with this deterioration.

Now what this means for the Syrian Kurds, if it's had such an impact on the work I've been doing here, I can definitely say that it'll have some sort of an impact on the relationship between the US and the Syrian Kurds, too. Now what that will result in, it could be anyone's guess. But what we have seen, at least in the last year, is that the president has wanted to leave Syria on two separate occasions, and has been significantly pushed back on both occasions by, let's say, the establishment.

And so, what I think is that yes, the deterioration in the US-Turkish relationship is having some sort of an impact on the Syrian Kurds, and that seems to be more positive than negative.

EDELMAN: All right. I think we've got a question in the back. Fred?

FRADKIN: Hillel Fradkin of the Hudson Institute. Thanks very much first of all, but I wanted to ask you a question based on this notion that was put out early of the Istanbul spirit alliance. The possibility of a new inclusivity. Over against the recriminations and hostility that has been generated in public and political discourse, this is not addressed to any particular member of the panel, but one aspect of that has been the religious discourse in the country.

And I was wondering whether you think there's some new direction that will take as a result of this victory. And in particular, maybe, because of Imamoglu.

EDELMAN: Hillel, just to make your question more, do you mean the government's discourse, or do you mean public discourse in Turkey in general?

FRADKIN: Largely the latter, except that it might be that if there's really a movement towards a new way of conceiving of the role of religion in Turkey, the government might feel forced to adapt to it. I don't know, Erdogan is so singularly doctrinaire that it's hard to imagine, but on the other hand, since it is the religious base that has been so important to him, if he sees that it's being moved in a different way, that would seem to be significant.

ERDEMIR: Again, may I start? I think there are two sides to this story again. One was the smear campaign against Imamoglu. That he's a crypto-Greek, crypto-Christian, crypto-bondian. Which very smartly, he refused to engage. And he has consistently sent an embracing message. He was on the record in public rallies embracing Turkey's Christians, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Kurds. He basically named them one by one during the rallies, and in his victory speech, he again reiterated that message. So that was I think a very important pushback.

Now compare that to former president Gul's response. When he was being quote unquote smeared as an Armenian, he took that person to court, saying that that's an insult. So that's part of the new spirit. The other side of the answer is this. Imamoglu's profile as a pious Muslim who goes to Istanbul's leading shrine, Eyuup Sultan, who can recite the Koran better than Erdogan, but who is at the same time a secular liberal progressive individual. Who managed to get the majority of votes from Istanbul's most conservative district, Fahti, I think that sends a very important message to Turkey itself.

In fact, there has been some initial study about ballot boxes in Fahti where we have numerous supporters of one of the leading clerics, who has basically ordered his followers never to vote for Imamoglu. We see that they have defected. So even now, religious leaders fail to hold onto their disciples who are defecting to Imamoglu. This could be the Istanbul alliance that we're speaking about. That is, the former cleavages between rigid secularists and Islamist are breaking down. And piety itself, Sunni piety itself is no more the defining feature of this cleavage. And it's more about whether you are secular or not, whether you are pious or not.

Are you for pluralism and inclusion, or are you for one man rule and authoritarianism? This I think will have a major impact on Turkey's state religion and interfaith community relations.

EDELMAN: Of course, Imamoglu's name might have helped him a little bit.

MAKOVSKY: I don't know if you'll agree with this, I think Imamoglu's basic message regarding religion was we're not rolling anything back. We'll stop it where it is here. And I thought it was interesting in his debate, televised debate with Yildirim, which got a lot of attention because it was the first televised debate in Turkey in 17 years. He boasted, or maybe it was clarified, but anyway he made a point of the fact that as mayor of his district, Balikisir, that he had never brought alcohol into a municipality building, or had an event that would involve alcohol.

And he never allowed mixed gender swimming in any of the swimming pools. This is a CHP candidate. So, I think the, I think Erdogan could take some heart actually, that even if this is the end of his political career, that he has moved the center in Istanbul. And I think that was really an important message, and I think, look. I know Imamoglu, as Aykan says, comes from somewhat a different tradition. His father was actually part of Turgid Ozal's center right party, and he comes from a center-right family.

There's a little bit of a message because of Monsieur Yavash being from MHP, and Imamoglu being from a center-right family, although always a CHP guy as far as I know. What CHP needs to do is to embrace a more conservative approach. Now to the extent that just means inclusivity, I mean I think that's great, but you're not asking about value judgements here. You're asking about where the center of gravity is.

So I think Erdogan himself keeps pushing. I think he still keeps trying to change local schools into Imamhatip schools, and forcing people to go to Imamhatip schools as a matter of

convenience rather than choice, and all the other things that he's tried to do to create what he calls a dindar neseel, a religious generation. So I think he keeps pushing, I think that's.

EDELMAN: Merve, you want to comment on the mixed gender swimming issue, or?

TAHIROGLU: I have a lot of things to comment on. But I want to attempt to answer this question as actually part of the Erdogan generation. We of the some 30 million people who grew up and came to voting age under Erdogan and listening to Erdogan and having experienced the first 10 years of Erdogan and what that promised. And as much as when we talk about Erdoganism, I do think that identity politics is a very key component of that. What made Erdogan so successful at the beginning in terms of appealing to a broader coalition of the electorate and not just the Islamist was that he was, while using identity politics, I think he was challenging an establishment on what he called the secular establishment.

That was undemocratic in a way that it disadvantaged the more pious population in Turkey. So whether this is true or not, if you have 10 years of this narrative, and this person, this leader kind of casting himself as combating this kind of undemocratic illiberal establishment, then you take some of those lessons to heart. And people start, and I think this generation that I'm a part of, expects a different kind of Turkey that is not what Erdogan is doing now, because he's kind of adopting this identity politics, and since 2015, bringing in, not making it seculars versus pious people. Making it Turkish versus Kurdish.

I mean, there are so many levels. And there's also the class aspect to it. But basically, now he's using and propagating identity politics in Turkey in the same way that the establishment that he was critiquing that he alleged was doing at the time. So I think Sunday, people showed that they are above that. Because Imamoglu's success was that he rose above this kind of identity politics and dodged the questions that he kept getting from the AKP's media. That effectively tried to, I think, trick him into revealing certain prejudices about one or other types of people in Turkey, about various factions within the Turkish population.

And he didn't do that, and this is the immense success of the CHP. The CHP hadn't tried this, or at least I hadn't really seen them try successfully, this kind of approach to politics before. And this is the lesson that the CHP should get. When we're looking at the biggest success, people have spoken, and I think people are reacting against this idea of what does this mean for the Islamist versus seculars or the Kurds versus the Turks? It's the Istanbul alliance, it's a broad coalition, it's something else.

And I think when we talk about the post-Erdoganism, or post-Erdogan era, I don't think Erdogan is leaving any time soon. But when I think about post-Erdoganism, this is what I think about. It's part of post-Hemalism, it's part of post-Erdoganism, it's just a new phase and a new kind of democratic politics that the people have an appetite for.

SALIH: Balen Salih, VOA. I have two questions, one for Aykan. Aykan, we understood that Sunday's election was a big message to Erdogan. But should we consider it like another message to CHP itself so we can say for example, CHP post-elections, post-Istanbul elections regarding the policies and strategies, is there any chance to have some changes in policies of

CHP from now on? For HDP representative, your decision that you go to support Imamoglu, was it political tactic, or it was kind of agreement? If it was not an agreement, is there any chance to have an agreement with CHP from now on to be one coalition? Thank you.

ERDEMIR: So for Turkey's other half who remember politics before Erdogan, this election brought back memories of the 89 success of the social democratic populist party, which was the CHP replacement after the coup d'etat, 1980 coup d'etat banned CHP. So the 89 landslide victory in Turkey's metropolises for the SHP back then, was, again, a result of a similar alliance as today. It involved urban Kurds, urban Allies, urban poor. And it was a success which the party could not capitalize on, which the party did not really get the message. It failed in service delivery, and of course, it was not just endogenous factors, there was a lot of pressure from the security establishment to destroy that coalition.

I think that's a lesson we have to keep in mind. That Turkey's security establishment always feels, to some extent, threatened by the potency of peoples coming together, especially Kurds and others coming together. And they always have many cards up their sleeves to derail that. But nevertheless, no matter what the external forces are trying to do, the message for the CHP is given the Istanbul alliance, to remain true to the spirit of the Istanbul alliance, first, of course, maybe a soul-searching about the lifting of immunities. That sent many pro-Kurdish politicians to jail.

Second, to reintroduce with greater courage the discussion about decentralization. Which Kurdish has been on the record a number of times, but to make that a cornerstone of CHP's politics, and third, to be more consistent. For example, in the run up to Istanbul's rerun, Kurdish was on the record advocating education in modern times. Basically, Kurdish, and other local native languages. So to make this a more central and consistent part of CHP's rhetoric as well as coalition building efforts, given there is a party there, E-party, which I called center-right moderate nationalist, and which Giran would call ultra-nationalists who go to the beach, but nevertheless.

Those deliberations are necessary, and I think there is great opportunity, but as the lessons of 1989 show us, also many obstacles as well as traps ahead.

OZCAN: And to understand what kind of alliances can be formed going forward, I think I need to explain what the HDP's strategy was for Sunday. And actually, the local elections before. The HDP did not have an agreement in place with the CHP or the Miletî Defahka. The strategy was that a defeat had to be dealt to, and not just Erdogan, but the MHP-AKP nationalist discourse. That alliance that gave Turkey this ultra-polarizing nationalist rhetoric. That had to be defeated, because in all honesty, going forwards, we're going to see I think a competition between the two camps on who can make the maneuver.

Because we're also expecting a transformation from the CHP as well. So when we do move forward, we as the HDP, we've maintained that we have a third line. And we've called that, we've already called it the democracy alliance. And what we mean by that is, firstly, I myself obviously as a representative of the HDP, I believe that we are the most progressive political party in Turkey. And I can mention several aspects that I think prove that.

Whether it's the co-chair system in which a man and a woman share every position of power throughout the party, whether it's on LGBTQ issues, whether it's on a lot of issues throughout the country, we are the most progressive party. And we're calling on any political force in Turkey to join us in the democracy and progressive camp. So going forward, we're going to hope that either camp believes that the future of Turkey is in democratization, is it progressive politics, is in reconciliation and peace. And whoever's open to that, I think we are willing to sit down with.

EDELMAN: Right over here, and then we'll come back over to the center.

RUVELSON: Hi, Elliott Ruvelson, USUA business council. I wanted to ask, Turkish economic power has historically been concentrated in the hands of relatively few families. That structure hasn't changed as the AKP and Erdogan have accrued power, but those families have. And there's now a circle of oligarchs, for lack of a better term, kind of surrounding Erdogan. Incidentally, these are the people who hold a significant amount of Turkey's foreign currency debt, and therefore a lot of the risk tied to the economy.

So I'm curious, where are they in all of this, post Sunday and the election, and are they worried about a lot of these massive mega projects which are supposed to be the future of Turkey's economy, but are in Istanbul and therefore under the jurisdiction of Imamoglu?

ERDEMIR: So let me start, and maybe someone else can follow. There are now two groups of families, or two groups of conglomerates in Turkey. One the usual kind of more pro-Western, pro secular established conglomerates and families as well as what I might call the nouveau riche, but maybe a better term would be these crony conglomerates. The main difference between the two is the first set has good corporate governance and sustainable business models. The problem with the second group, of what you just referred to as the oligarchs, is they have received tens of billions of public tenders within the last decade, but they also have these outstanding foreign currency debt, which is crippling them.

So, their viability is very much in question. The only way for them to survive 2019 and 2020 is if Erdogan picks winners in bailing out businesses. Which to my terror, Erdogan sees as an opportunity. I think that's one thing to watch in Turkish politics. Erdogan sees economic crisis as an opportunity, whereby the only remaining sector which he doesn't dominate, business, could be reshuffled. That is a reshuffling of wealth, that is he will give all the tax breaks, all the tax amnesties, and all the bailout loans to the crony businesses, which are not competitive. Which have very little value added in the Turkish system. And destroy the established conglomerates with, I would argue, pretty good sustainable governance models and business models.

So, if Erdogan pulls that off, if Erdogan literally adds fuel to the fire of the economic crisis, just to reshuffle wealth and weaken Turkey's, what I would consider to be viable businesses at the expense of his crony oligarchs, then that's going to be really a devastation which will take decades to undo.

EDELMAN: I think we have time for one more question, down here in the front, and then we'll wrap it up.

SAGNIC: Ceng Sagnic from the Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv. My question would be for Giran. You mentioned about the Istanbul alliance, where you called it a peace alliance, democratic alliance, and it's populist motivation there in Istanbul. Do you think it will have an impact on the Kurdish region where HDP has been losing votes since 2014?

OZCAN: Right, firstly. I don't know if the figures support that exactly, if there's a loss in votes in the Kurdish regions. But no I don't, because I think when you look at the political parties, the predecessors of the HDP, at no time in the 30 or so years that the Kurdish political movement has been represented in party politics in Turkey, have we received as high a vote from the Kurds as today. So in a time when the HDP has been criticized for, how would you say it in English, Turkey-ification, at no time before that has the pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey received such a high vote from Kurds.

So, from three million, if we say until about 2015, the pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey had always been very consistent in getting about six, seven percent of the popular vote. In 2015, when certain Kurdish nationalists had criticized the HDP for selling out the Kurdish cause, for becoming a party of Turkey, we almost doubled our vote from the Kurdish base. The jump from three million to six million or seven percent to 13 percent, yes, there can be explained by a jump in the Turkish vote, in the ethnic Turkish vote.

But much more significant was the jump in the ethnic Kurdish vote. So that to me says that the Kurds of Turkey, which is a completely different sociological ball game to the Kurds of the other three parts of Kurdistan, says to me that for the Kurds in Turkey, the solution of the Kurdish issue is seeing with some sort of a dialogue between the Kurds and Ankara, more than anything else. And I would argue that the figures back this conclusion.

EDELMAN: Knowing the subject matter, and my fellow panelists, we could go on and on for at least another hour and a half. But please join me in thinking Alan, Aykan, Merve and Giran for a great discussion this morning, thank you.