

ZEMENIDES: Welcome everyone to this session that I've been really excited for in the Third Southeast Europe and Eastern Mediterranean forum hosted by Delphi Economic Forum, HALC, and Kathimerini, Tom Ellis from Kathimerini [is here]. This is a discussion of the strategic nexus of the Eastern Mediterranean. I'm particularly thrilled to have it hosted at FDD, which I think has been doing cutting edge work and leading work on the Eastern Mediterranean, but you're not here to hear from me, so I'm going to call up my great colleague and friend, Jon Schanzer, to introduce our All-star panel.

SCHANZER: Thank you so much for your introduction, Endy, and a warm welcome to all of you who have joined us today here at FDD. We're delighted to be able to have you all join us as part of the Delphi Economic Forum Program. By way of housekeeping, I will just note here that FDD is a non-partisan research institution, exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. We accept no funds from foreign governments. For more information on our work, we encourage you to visit our website, fdd.org. You can so follow us on Twitter at FDD. With that, I'd like to kick off with a few comments on today's discussion.

The Eastern Mediterranean has been an epicenter of great power competition for over two millennia owing to its strategic location, its cultural significance, and the intersection of crucial maritime routes. There is a major reshuffling going on in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East today that will have lasting implications for the future. There have been a number of positive developments, such as the Abraham Accords, the Eastern Med Gas Forum, Three Plus One which brings together Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, and the United States, the U.S.-Greece Mutual Defense Cooperation, and the easing of the U.S. Arms Embargo on Cyprus and growing U.S.-Cyprus cooperation.

At the same time, there are some growing challenges. There, we can speak about the Iran nuclear talks and the growing concern about Iranian hegemony, Turkish leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's belligerent and irridentist posturing in the Eastern Med and across the Middle East, the Biden Administration withdrawing its support from the Israel, Cyprus, Greece Pipeline, and last but not least, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To discuss what challenges and opportunities exist for this budding region, I am very pleased that we have a stellar line-up with us today. We have George Koumoutsakos, who is a member of the Hellenic Parliament. He previously served as the alternate Minister for Migration Policy in 2020 and 2021 and was the alternate Minister for Citizen Protection responsible for migration policy from 2019 to 2020.

We also have my colleague Brad Bowman, who is FDD's Senior Director on its Center on Military and Political Power, otherwise known as CMPP. He previously served as a National Security Advisor to members of the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committee. He was also an active duty U.S. Army Officer, a Blackhawk pilot, and an assistant professor at West Point. Welcome, Brad.

We also have Michael Rubin, a personal friend of mine and also a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute where he specializes in Iran, Turkey, and the broader Middle East. A former Pentagon official, Michael has lived in post-revolution Iran, Yemen, and both pre- and post-war Iraq. Welcome, Michael.

And we have my colleague Aykan Erdemir who is senior director of FDD's Turkey program. He recently served as a member of the Turkish parliament from 2011 to 2015, including in the EU Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee and the EU Harmonization Committee. And finally, we're privileged that today's discussion will be moderated by a very talented journalist, Lena Argiri. Lena is the Washington DC correspondent for Greek Public Broadcasting. She covers the White House, State Department, the Treasury, and Capitol Hill on issues related to the Eastern Med. Lena, over to you.

ARGIRI: So, thank you Jonathan. Hello, everyone. It is my great pleasure to moderate this fantastic panel. George, thank you. I know that they have a lot of great insight for us, so let's get right to it. Brad, starting with you. So today

we have both a very different America, a very different Eastern Mediterranean than the last time that Joe Biden, Tony Blinken, and Jake Sullivan were in office. So what does the new U.S.-Greece Mutual Defense and Cooperation Agreement tell us about the new challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and the way that the U.S. might be inclined to deal with them?

BOWMAN: Well, thank you for that question, and it's a pleasure to join each of you, and thanks for the folks that decided to come out today to listen. I'm eager to hear from you all as well. When I look at the MDCA, the Defense Cooperation Agreement as the U.S. Ambassador to Greece has said, I'm mindful of the fact that a lot of the positive progress that we've seen started under the Trump Administration and has now been expedited or sped up by the Biden Administration, right? And so at a time when Republicans and Democrats can't agree that the sky is blue, right, when you find something like this where there's bipartisan agreement, I think that is worth taking note of, and it's positive. And I can see why there's bipartisan agreement because of someone who comes primarily from kind of a DOD perspective. When I look at the Eastern Mediterranean, I first think of the way the Pentagon kind of divides the world up into areas of responsibility based on our combatant commands.

You think of European command and as General Hodges, the former Commander of U.S. Army Europe often says, when you look at a European command map, you have the Black Sea and Greece kind of down there on the bottom, right. It's almost like an afterthought. You have CENTCOM, you've kind of got the Eastern Mediterranean just barely on the left of the map, and you've got AFRICOM, and it's not there at all. And it's kind of falls in the seams, if you will, between these different area is a responsibility for the three combatant commands.

But the fact is, particularly in this world that we're seeing that is more complex and dangerous than any time in my memory, a lot of the most important activities is happening at those seams, from an American perspective, and I look to the Eastern Mediterranean as a place where Iranian terrorist proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah are increasingly a threat in the maritime domain. When you look at the May conflict with Israel, we saw Hamas trying to target offshore infrastructure. We know Hezbollah has been developing the capabilities of target maritime vessels for quite some time, and we see Iran's proxies being more and more aggressive. And I won't even mention the Houthis there.

And meanwhile, we know that China's been active economically and diplomatically, and the Russians have long been active, of course, since Syria and in the region as well. And so that makes me think, from an American's perspective, that our Souda Bay, our base there, is more important than ever. It's been important for a long time. I think it's importance is going to only increase.

And I was privileged to author, in October, with my colleague Aykan in *Foreign Policy*, when I think one of the great advantages, and maybe we were a bit prescient on this, is the new, expanded Defense Cooperation Agreement gave us increased access to bases like Alexandroupolis which we've seen, if you look at what's happened at that at port, just since October, I was reviewing in detail what the U.S. Military has done at that port since October, it's been quite extraordinary. We had one instance where we had 736 pieces of military equipment off-loaded at that port, including dozens and dozens of AH64 and UH60 Blackhawk helicopters. Well, that sounds very wonky, why should I care?

Well, as we said at the time, there would be a chance that the Southern entrance to the Black Sea might get blocked at some point in the future, and we would need a ground, what we call a military-ground line of communication, a means to reinforce NATO's Southeastern flank, primarily Romania and Bulgaria through land routes, going through that port up through Greece up north. And sure enough, that's exactly what we have.

And of course, we couldn't foresee exactly what would happen with Russia's invasion, but to me, when you look at the geo-strategic events related to Russia, the importance of increasing the deterrents on NATO's Eastern flank, particularly the Southeast, right after 2014, the Baltic has got a lot of attention. I think we were a little slow in recognizing that we needed to beef up NATO's Southeastern flank. Greece is going to play a fundamentally important role in that. So whether I look at Russia, whether I look at Iran, whether I look at terrorist groups, those are three of the five leading threats that Americans generally think that we confront and Greece, a stronger defense cooperation, security cooperation with Greece will be good for Americans, good for Greece, good for NATO. So I think our security partnership is stronger than it's ever been, but there's more room to grow. And for my part, I want to do all I can to encourage that.

ARGIRI: Thank you, Brad. Let's see what Greece thinks. So George, from Athens' perspective, from Athens' point of view, how does this new defense agreement between the U.S. and Greece enable Greece to play a great original role, both in the Mediterranean and in the Western Balkans? And is the development of that leadership role seen as a threat by countries like China and Russia?

KOUMOUTSTAKOS: First of all, thanks to FDD for organizing this very timely event. Lena, before I get to the core of your very pertinent question, I would like to share some thoughts on the Ukrainian crisis and its repercussions to our thinking and policies, because it's very much related with MDCA and the Greek-American strategic partnership.

First of all, the savage aggression and invasion of Putin's Russia into Ukraine is a wake-up call to all of us, to the Western democracies of the world, to both NATO and EU. This aggression has shown how crucial, how fundamental is our unity and close security and defense cooperation and political and economic cooperation based on common values and shared interests.

The crisis, that as well, shown us that it is a mistake to underestimate or not take as seriously as they deserve, the signals of revisionist policies and aspirations. They defy or openly violate international law, international treaties which was fundamental for building stability and security in very sensitive, geopolitically-speaking, regions, including the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. And I think that we should be even more alert when these kind of revisionist policies are nourished by illiberal or authoritarian regimes.

And that's why I think that what we did, vis a vis Putin's aggression, is the policy that we need to follow from now on. That is containment policy. Containment policy, political, diplomatically, and if need is, military. And I think that this is important because we do realize that the limitation of the appeasement policy sometimes go against our interests. Having said that, I do believe that the closer ties and the strategic partnership between United States and Greece is of fundamental importance.

In the core of this framework, we have the new, amended, and strengthened MDCA. And I think that it is a very positive development in at least two aspects. First of all, it is a stable foundation for long-term planning for both countries. Secondly, with MDCA, a more visible U.S. Armed Forces defense and security footprint in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans is very important in view of the growing tensions in both these crucial regions.

The upgraded MDCA sanctioned Greece's role as a pillar of stability and security in the region. The new MDCA increases Greece's political, diplomatic, and strategic weight within the Alliance, but as well as a partner of the European Defense Identity, which is now gets a new momentum. With MDCA, Greece becomes an ever stronger link between – from the one hand – the European Defense Identity, and Transatlantic partnership on the other. So we do have a link role

to play which has been increased exactly because of the importance of the new MDCA, and I think that this is a positive development for both countries, both USA and Greece.

And I will close my remarks by stressing that Greece has always fought side by side with the democracies of this world. This is what we did in this last recent crisis throughout our history. And in particular, in critical times, we didn't hesitate to take sides. We were never on the side of the invasive neutrals or the aggressor, and this exactly why we wait, we ask, and we deserve the support of our partners and allies when we face revisionist policies coming from illiberal regimes. So I think that we have now, with the new MDCA, we have now built a very strong knot between Transatlantic security, Greece, USA, and Europe in a very crucial crossroads region which is Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. All in all, it's a very positive development.

ARGIRI: Thank you, George.

KOUMOUTSTAKOS: Thank you.

ARGIRI: Aykan, let's talk a little bit about Turkey, and let's say if Turkey feels threatened by this new defense agreement between two countries, and Ankara seems to have underestimated the strength of the partnerships being developed in the region and overestimated, as always, its own strengths. Now it seems that Erdogan is trying to change course, actually, he's trying to correct course. And so where is Turkey headed and what does it mean for the Eastern Mediterranean region?

ERDEMIR: Thank you, Lena. And also thank you to the Delphi Forum. And it's really a great honor for me to be with this stellar line-up. And let me build my answer on George's comments. Erdogan pursued three revisionisms simultaneously. The first one being Ataturk's secular Republican tradition at home, revising it with Islamism and Neo-Ottomanism. Then replacing the "Pax Lausanne" with irredentism and belligerence on multiple fronts. And then in the international domain, revisionism all the way from pushing for the Muslim brotherhood and Hamas, going for regime change which failed, as you said, overestimating his own hands.

ARGIRI: Mm-hmm.

ERDEMIR: And also, at the level of transnational and supranational relations, trying to be the spoilers within NATO, within the Transatlantic Alliance, trying to play Russia against the West, playing the spoiler role within the Council of Europe. For example, not voting for the suspension of Russia and so on and so forth.

So, all these revisionisms, I think, as of last year, and definitely as of this year, have hit a wall. Erdogan realized he's bankrupt economically and politically at home, his revisionism will not work. He realized regionally, he will not be able to change the existing status quo by use of force, by use of proxies, jihadists and others.

And also internationally, I think Erdogan is now waking up to the fact that his buddy, his close ally Putin, is not necessarily an asset, that he will no longer be able to balance Russia's interests or use his relationship with Putin as leverage to extract concessions from NATO, from the European Union, from the Council of Europe, and others. So ultimately we now see the bankruptcy of three revisionisms. The question is, does this also mean, as George said, the bankruptcy of an illiberal and authoritarian regime because ultimately all of Erdogan's outreaches that we see today, from Egypt to the UAE, to Israel, to Saudi Arabia, now even to Greece are, I would argue, not good faith attempts at walking back the clock, rather, they are a last-minute attempt at political survival.

That is, Erdogan is looking for ways to survive the next elections, and we have seen earlier today his new draft bill which will reshuffle Turkey's election law to give his ultra-nationalist, Islamist coalition much greater number of seats than the votes they receive in the upcoming election. So ultimately that is a big question mark. That is, if we assume, revisionism that is forced by the geostrategic developments will also force him to change his revisionism vis-a-vis democracy, rule of law, due process, and pluralism at home. We might be, let's say in for a surprise because never underestimate Erdogan's, let's say, capability for survival and re-inventing himself.

ARGIRI: Thank you, Aykan. Michael, let's go back to the relationship between Greece and the U.S. And in addition to this very strong relationship we're talking, we've seen the best ever relationship between U.S. and Cyprus, and you have written extensively about the security aspects of this relationship from the Arms Embargo to the drone situation there. You wrote about the danger of Turkey developing drones in the occupied areas, and how can a positive U.S.-Cyprus relationship shape the area, the Eastern Mediterranean, for the better?

RUBIN: Thank you very much. And I want to begin also by thanking the Delphi Forum and the FDD. I also want to thank the Greek, more broadly, the Greek Security Establishment, it's hard being on the front line, and oftentimes the United States doesn't appreciate those that are on the front line until the crisis strikes. And now what we're seeing, and I mean myself, I also haven't been fully appreciative over the years, but now we really see what's at stake. Not just in the Eastern Mediterranean but also the broader region. And this is why I'm thrilled, and as Brad has said, that this is such a bipartisan movement not only in the United States but also in Greece, to recognize the common interests and to work together towards that common security. But I'll answer your question.

When it comes to are the issue of Cyprus. Broadly speaking, as Brad said, you have Souda Bay, and if you compare our, I mean, Souda Bay on Crete, not Cyprus, of course. But if you compare the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf versus in the Eastern Mediterranean, basically all we have at our disposal right now is Souda Bay. Rota, of course, in Spain is on the Atlantic side of the Strait of Gibraltar. Naples is more of an administrative outlet for the U.S. Navy and others. So you've got a situation where we're becoming ever more reliant. Now, when it comes to Cyprus, Cyprus is certainly on the front lines. One lesson, which we should learn right now, is just how weakness is provocative. That was certainly the lesson when it came to Ukraine, not wanting to arm Ukraine ahead of time, for fear that we would- not wanting to arm Ukraine ahead of time for fear that we would provoke Vladimir Putin. Well, we didn't and then look what happened. So, I would actually argue that if we want to counter the chance of conflict in the region, we actually need to ensure that our allies, and Cyprus has been doing everything it needs to do to be an ally in good standing, have the basic means to defend themselves.

If we're talking about an arms embargo, for example, and then loosening it to allow in non-lethal goods, well, Cyprus doesn't need meals ready to eat, and it doesn't need warm sweaters. It needs to be able to counter the growing drone proliferation because if Turkey turns northern Cyprus into a forward operating base, it puts the entirety of the Eastern Mediterranean at risk. So we need to provide the means for Cyprus to counter whatever Turkey might be doing.

Now part of this also is, unfortunately, in the perspective of the United States and American policy makers, and this is a broader cultural problem we have here, that for most Americans, ancient history goes back 10 years. And, therefore, most people working in the State Department, most people working in the Central Intelligence Agency, most people working in the Pentagon, assume that the Turkish presence in northern Cyprus is the natural state of affairs. It's not.

It's an occupation as illegitimate as the Russian occupation is of Crimea, of Donetsk, of Luhansk, of South Ossetia, of Abkhazia and so forth. And so we've got to start looking at the broad picture and working to ensure that we don't

allow aggressors, and as Aykan said, irredentists like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to try to create new facts on the ground simply with the passage of time.

When it comes to Cyprus, a, we need a fresher, a more holistic perspective. We need to give the Cypriots the ability to defend themselves because Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is trying to change the status quo right now, and if he's trying to change the status quo, I mean, frankly, everything for which we're fighting, for security, for freedom, for democracy, for liberty, for safe passage, for national sovereignty over territorial waters, is at risk, if Cyprus isn't given the means to defend itself, if the only people changing the status quo are the irredentists like Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean or Russia further afield.

ARGIRI: Thank you, Mike. Brad, back to you. We've talked about China. We talked about Russia and, of course, the war in Ukraine. Can you talk a little bit about the East Med, but in the wider, the broader context of great power companies or other transnational challenges?

BOWMAN: Sure. Well, thank you. I talked a little bit about that earlier. I'm mindful that Greece has been playing a very important role in cooperative, combined military exercises for a long time. And one that comes to mind is the INIOCHOS exercise that Greece hosts regularly. And I published a bit on this and I'm mindful that the role that Greece has played in having Israelis attend that and also UAE. And there were some sensitivities in the past now about do we hang our flags next to each other now, post-Abraham Accords. It's is like, gosh darn right, we're here. And because we have common interest. And so I just applaud the leadership that Greece has played in hosting that exercise. And I'd note that you've had Egypt and Jordan be observers in the past.

And it seems like a wonderful opportunity, maybe, if you have Egypt and Jordan and UAE and Israel all be full participants in future exercises, then that would have the benefit of helping each of those militaries improve their individual readiness, helping them operate more effectively together. And I also think, as I've argued, it would send a very positive deterrent message to Iran and Tehran's proxies. So that's not great power competition, but that, I think, it's a core threat to the region.

And I just completely agree with what you said about how weakness is provocative. The chair of our center, H.R. McMaster, wrote a book recently that if you haven't read, I encourage you to check out. It's called *Battlegrounds*. And in that, he talks about this idea of strategic narcissism. And it's a malady that I think Americans are particularly prone to having. It's this idea that if something bad is happening in the world, it must be our fault.

Right? Oh, we have troops there, therefore, oh, that's why. So just if we remove our troops, then everything will go well and be beautiful. And it's kind of arrogant, right? It's like, actually there are other people in the world who are just authoritarian thugs, and they're going to take as much as they get. And they don't really give a darn what we're doing. And the only question for us is how do we respond? Or, as American learned on 9/11, there's actually just terrorists in the world who want to kill us. Right? I mean, they don't like us. They don't like our values and they want to kill us. So, the question for us – and that's not our fault, right? If someone wants to murder innocent people, that's not our fault. That's their fault. The question is how do we respond?

And so I worked in the U.S. Senate for nine years. I was there after the Crimea invasion, and I remember when the head of Ukraine came and addressed a joint session of Congress and said, "Thanks for the blankets, but I can't defend my country with blankets." And we have this provocation premise. "Oh, my goodness. If we give – We, the Obama administration, give Ukraine javelins, it might incite an invasion." And just go back and consider the last nine to

12 months. When do you think Putin made the decision to probably invade Ukraine? Right? When do you think? Right? I don't have evidence of exactly when, but let's just say there's good reason to believe that he made a decision that he was probably going to invade early last year, right? Early last year. And let's just say that the Pentagon had good indications early last year that something was afoot.

And it was clear for the whole world to see in October and November that something was coming. And Secretary Blinken said in November that an invasion was coming, publicly. And then, look, and then all this time, look at the discourse here in the United States. Wringing our hands like, "We don't want to do this. We don't want to do that. Oh, the former commander of the U.S. Army command was told that he couldn't even visit Ukraine because that might be provocative." Right. And so, I'm not saying we just deploy thousands of missiles in Ukraine, don't worry about how that's – But I'm just saying, maybe as a general rule, we as Americans and our allies, should spend a little less time worrying about provoking authoritarian thugs and a little bit more time in making sure that democracies are prepared to defend themselves before the invasion happens.

And then you might actually deter the invasion. And if the invasion comes, we'll be more prepared to defend our interest and values. So, I know that's very general, but if you buy what I'm saying, that has real ramifications for U.S. defense posture in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has real ramifications how much we support our Greek allies and what they're doing, how much we exercise together, what we do in Ukraine, what we do in Bulgaria and Romania, and going way out of region, what we do right now in Taiwan, right now in Taiwan. So this is a principle that I think has very specific ramifications around the world, including in the eastern Mediterranean.

ARGIRI: Thank you, Brad. George?

KOUMOUTSTAKOS: I couldn't agree more.

ARGIRI: We all agree. No. So let's look – Let's keep on talking about this region and looking at the region through a wider lens and you serve as the head of the Greece-Libya Parliamentary Group. So how does the instability, the situation in Libya, affect the Eastern Mediterranean, George?

KOUMOUTSTAKOS: Actually, at present Libya is not governed. Not because it does not have a government, but because it has two governments. And, actually, this is a source of concern. Elections has been postponed. We don't know when elections will take place. For us, for Greece, this is an important element. We attach particular importance on having elections in Libya because otherwise the country will not be stabilized. Otherwise, foreign forces and militias will not leave the country, which is an element of destabilization in the country. And the truth is that we have enhanced our presence in Libya. We have an embassy and a general consulate in Benghazi. So there is a new momentum for Greece's policy, for Greece's attention in this country. But, but at the same time, the fact remains that Libya is a black hole in the security architecture, if there is one in eastern Mediterranean, because it is not a governed country.

And this might be a source of huge problems in the future. After the Ukrainian crisis, what will happen and how I see the role of Libya. First of all, I don't know what the role of this country will be when it comes to identify new roots of energy and new sources. That means that there is an additional reason for us to try to stabilize this country, because otherwise we're going to miss the energy, the natural gas and oil that could come from Libya. As long as Libya is in a political turmoil, we are losing a possible source and alternative road. Of course, for Greece, what is important, and I have to stress it, is that we try to cancel the illegal MOU concerning the delimitation of maritime zones with Turkey.

I don't want to go into this issue. Probably you are all aware of we are so much against it because it goes against international law and geography itself. It violates not only international law, but geography itself. As far as the role of Russia in Libya, I think that they will try to increase their presence because they cannot afford to have problems in north fronts. There, it seems that they are losing what they wanted to do in Ukraine. This does not mean that this will weaken their position in Libya. They will try to increase their presence and influence in Libya, which is an additional element why we all should focus more than we do on Libya.

ARGIRI: Aykan, back to you. Let's look at some other developments that can have a big impact on East Med. And how do you think the Abraham Accords and Turkey's effort to fix relationships with the countries like Israel and UAE can affect the partnerships in the area and the dynamics also in the region?

ERDEMIR: Now, a great question. Thank you, Lena. By the way, Erdogan's big U-turn over the last two years has been vis-a-vis the Abraham Accords, because you might remember that Turkey joined Iran and Hamas in basically bashing the Abraham Accords. And not only that, Turkey threatened to sever diplomatic ties with the United Arab Emirates for recognizing or normalizing relations with Israel, and the irony here is this was coming from Turkey, the first Muslim majority country to recognize Israel in 1949. And I think now here is another irony. That Turkey, in less than two years, is now not only reaching out to Israel, but also to the United Arab Emirates, to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

And part of the answer is goes back to your first question, that is Erdogan's revisionism has hit a wall at home, regionally and internationally. So he's economically bankrupt. He's politically bankrupt and, internationally, I think Turkey's security establishment has realized how isolated Turkey has become. Turkey is out of the East Med Gas Forum. We've been talking about various military exercises in the region that excludes Turkey. Turkey lost F-35s over Erdogan's erratic S-400 move. Turkey cannot access F-16s and F-16 modernization kits. I think there is a growing recognition that Erdogan's authoritarian and illiberal and revisionist policies have basically undermined Turkey's prosperity, security and future. But now the big question is this, and this also connects to the Abraham Accords.

Is Erdogan's Turkey truly interested in being part of this new set of values and relationships emerging in the Eastern Med and the Middle East or is he just trying to buy time so that he can consolidate power once again. And, after he wins, if and when he wins presidential and parliamentary elections next summer, he will double down on his irredentist, belligerent and revisionist policies.

Now I have always bet my predictions against Erdogan. And when I mean against Erdogan, since day one I have always said, "This is dissimulation, he is not a democrat, he's not a reformer. He will not improve Turkey's relations with the west." And I've never been wrong. Erdogan has always come back to his core values. In a way, I respect his dedication to his core values! He's a consistent authoritarian. He's a consistent Islamist. He's a consistent irredentist. He's not at peace with the Lausanne Treaty. He's not at peace with the Turkish Republic and its secularism. He's not at peace with Turkey's land and maritime borders, and he's not at peace with the existing state system in the Middle East and East Med. He would like to change those regimes, install his Muslim Brotherhood-led puppet regimes.

And, to conclude, I would argue that this is really the moment of truth for the region, meaning, will Erdogan's irredentism and belligerence get a second wind, a second life, or is this a unique opportunity for Turkey to correct course, in part return to some of its earlier positions? For example, bizonal, bicomunal federation in Cyprus, which has always been the Turkish position, which Erdogan suddenly gave up. Back to Lausanne and to the invincibility of the existing borders, which most Turks were very comfortable with back in the days...

But it also means moving beyond what came before Erdogan. And that is a true turn toward pluralism, inclusion, peaceful coexistence with neighbors, looking for diplomatic solutions instead of securitized solutions. So I don't want to be naive. I'm not just arguing that let's get rid of Erdogan and things will get back to normal as they were before. No. Things were also problematic before Erdogan, but they were simply not as bad, but this is a unique opportunity to move forward, hopefully, in the spirit of the Abraham Accords with all of Turkey's neighbors, by finding win-win solutions, not zero sum solutions that Erdogan has been pushing for.

ARGIRI: Thanks again, Aykan. Mike, I have a more specific question for you on Iran and how might a revived nuclear deal affect the region, especially given the role of Iranian proxies like Hezbollah and also what was this Erbil attack on Saturday night all about?

RUBIN: Okay. Well, first of all, it's a great question. I'm going to get to it in a second. I omitted to mention before, and sorry, Aykan just reminded me as he was talking. As the economy wavers in Turkey, just as the economy had wavered in Russia, autocrats, dictators wrapped themselves in the nationalist flag in order to distract. And this is why it's hard to be optimistic right now about peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean, if the United States and other interest that democracies remain passive. The other thing I do need to add when it comes to the drones, and this is one issue that worries me with regard to Turkish drones, but I'll talk about Iranian drones in a moment, is that while Turkey has used its drones to devastating effects, murdering civilians in Artsakh, in Tigray, and doing so with American components in some of these drones, according to downed drones, some apologists for Turkey's behavior are arguing, "Well, look at what Turkey's doing in Ukraine, giving these drones to Ukraine, that this is actually a good program."

It's important to recognize that, nine times out of 10, Turkey is using its drones for reasons which will undermine democracy and regional order and, therefore, all the more reason to control and to give states in the Eastern Mediterranean the ability to counter and shoot down and jam Turkish drones and Iranian drones. And so this goes to the heart of your question. Look, without moral equivalence. I mean, I'm an Iran nerd as many of you know. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps came to prominence during the Iran/Iraq War. And in 1988 when the war ended, they didn't want to go back into the barracks. And so without moral equivalence, they took the equivalent of their Army Corps of Engineers and decided to start investing in the civilian economy. Today Khatam al-Anbia, this economic wing of the Revolutionary Guard, imagine taking the Army Corps of Engineers, merging it with Bechtel, KBR, Halliburton, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Wal-Mart, Exxon Mobil and Chevron. That's what it is. And it controls 40 percent of the economy.

So when we're talking about lifting sanctions or unfreezing assets, that money's not going to the Iranian people. It's disproportionately going to those areas of the Iranian economy, to the Revolutionary Guard, because the revolutionary guard maintains monopolies over construction, oil and manufacturing. So they're going to become much better resourced. A few years ago, according to the Congressional Research Service, the budget of the Revolutionary Guard was about \$5 billion. The smuggling income across the Strait of Hormuz, and I've sat in the Strait of Hormuz and watched on a boat in the strait, watched the smugglers go back and forth. That's another \$11 to 13 billion. And if you look at Persian language sources and look at the no-bid single source contracts, that can be another \$30 to 50 billion.

So even if the Iranian government was to recognize that Revolutionary Guard are a terrorist entity, take their budget to zero, proportionately, the Revolutionary Guard would be facing less of a budget cutback than we did through sequestration. So the point is they're about to become much better resourced. Now, one of the things that worries me when it comes to Iranian drones, for example, is that they've not only exported their drones to groups like Hezbollah, but they've exported the ability to manufacture the drones, which give the Iranians plausible deniability.

The other thing to keep in mind with Iran, and this impacts the Eastern Mediterranean security, whenever something happens, it's natural that our intelligence community will be tasked by the White House to find out are the Iranians truly responsible for this. And so, we're look at the SIGINT, signals intelligence. We'll try to pulse the human intelligence, whatever it is, but that's not the way the Iranian system works.

The Supreme Leader is a dictator, but he's a dictator by veto power. You are allowed to do as an O-4, O-5, O-6, anything you're not expressively forbidden from doing, so you're never going to find the smoking gun. And again, this plays into the Iranian plausible deniability methodology. This is going to mean a great instability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Number one, Iran doesn't want the competition, just like Turkey doesn't want any alternate sources. Number two, whenever Iran, in the past, has said, "We're going to prevent the USS John C. Stennis from crossing the Strait of Hormuz", no way they can actually prevent us from doing that. But what happens in Lloyd's of London when they do that? The price of oil and gas goes up. So, if the Iranians decide to use their drones to – so if the Iranians decide to use their drones to target gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean at the very least that's going to drive the price of oil up. Now I'm sorry to rabbit on like this, when you're sitting in Iran, they create – Their fiscal year goes from March 21st to March 20th. They set their budget at an estimated price of what the price of oil is going to be. If the price goes below that they don't have the ability to make payroll, which is when they start making triggers in order to sort of psychologically undermine the market, drive up the prices. So this is what we need to worry about. Now 2006 we've had Hezbollah surprise the Israelis with, what was it? A C-802 missile? I'm not an ordinance specialist. But we're talking about no safe – I mean, missiles with a range of 160 miles. Well how far away is Cyprus from the coast of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel? We're talking about the 6th Fleet area of operation no longer being something you sail through but actively being a hot zone.

The other thing I want to point out is when it comes to the North Sinai, and this may not be Iran but it's Al-Qaeda, we've had situations where there have been distress calls. When you have a distress call at sea you answer it. And when the Egyptian Navy answered the distress call from the fishing boat they were set upon with missiles, which severely damaged the Egyptian frigate that was doing the rescuing. And we've also – The US Navy has experienced some sort of setups for this in the Red Sea as well. We've got to worry, given how the Iranians turned their back on the basic protocols of the post-World War II liberal order. Just this is what they have in common with Turkey, to recognize they're not going to play by the rules and it impacts everyone's safety. The more you resource Iran the less safe not only the Persian Gulf and the Northern Indian Ocean become but the Eastern Mediterranean as well.

I should just say up until 2007 the Iranians – I'm also a Persian language translator for the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth and so I pay attention to the Iranian military rhetoric. They used to refer to themselves as a regional power. Starting around 2007 they talked about themselves as a pan-regional power, meaning the Persian Gulf and the Northern Indian Ocean. Starting around 2011 they defined their strategic boundaries as the Gulf of Aden and the Eastern Mediterranean. And if there's one thing we need to understand from looking at Iran, from looking at Turkey, we got to pay attention not only – I mean, A: what they often say, they mean. Then we've got to judge them by their behavior as well.

ARGIRI: Thank you Mike. Gentlemen I would like to wrap it up with a lightning round. Can you please each give me one thing about the region that leaves you hopeful and one thing that terrifies you? Starting with you Mike, you said you're not optimistic.

RUBIN: Okay. Well you know the old Russian joke about the difference between an optimist and a pessimist? The Russian pessimist is the one who said, "Things have never been so bad, war, famine, conflict, the economy. They

couldn't possibly get worse." And the Russian optimist is the one who said, "No, no, no, they can always get worse." So in a way I'll be an optimist. But what I would say is what really gives me hope, and again I'm channeling Brad here, is the bipartisanship at the root of the US-Greek-Cypriot relationship in the East Med. And more broadly when we look at how the Egyptians, the Israelis, the Jordanians are all – And even the Iraqis are all playing into this. The fact of the matter is people are waking up to the threat posed by Turkey.

What keeps me up at night however, when it comes to Turkey specifically, is the fact that Erdoğan has mismanaged the economy, he's going to lash out. I agree with Aykan that he's not a democrat, he's not going to suddenly change his spots. I always, by the way, use religious freedom as the canary in the coal mine and he fails that test big time. And even if Erdoğan goes tomorrow, look, everyone in the Turkish military owes their career right now to Erdoğan and 30 million Turkish children have gone through school under Erdoğan's indoctrination program. Turkey is not going to change immediately. It's a generational struggle.

ARGIRI: Brad what do you think?

BOWMAN: Hopeful and fearful. Like many Americans ancient history, for me, is about 10 years but in grad school I was honored to study under Donald Kagan a bit and took his Athenian Democracy course. And I'll never forget him talking about from Thucydides, playing to my audience here, how the Athenians sent the diplomatic delegation to Sparta to talk while they finish building the long walls to Piraeus, right? That reminds me of an example how sometimes diplomacy can solve problems and sometimes diplomacy can be used as a stalling tactic while someone builds hard power. And it seems to me that's exactly what Putin has done in recent months. He used diplomacy as a means to confuse us while he built up the ability to conduct the largest invasion since World War II. So I am all for a well-resourced State Department. I am all for a more effective integration of all tools of national power to achieve better results for our country, and for Greece, and for our other allies. But I think we are getting a wake-up call, as you said sir, right now about the relevance of hard power.

John Kerry, after the invasion and annexation of Crimea, talked about, "This is downright 19th century behavior we're seeing here in Crimea." Well, yes, we're seeing some 19th century behavior here in the 21st century. Human nature remains the same, right? Human... power still matters and there's still resources that we're fighting over. So Greece is awake, United States is waking up. We need to have a well-resourced State Department but my goodness we better make sure that we know how to defend our principles and defend our interests. And I applaud, respectfully, what Greece is doing in purchasing weapons. I would humbly say that purchasing weapons is not enough, you better know how to maintain them and you better know how to use them. What that means is appropriate resourcing and maintaining those things, and exercising them. That's why I'm focusing on combined military exercises. So I believe we're at a pivotal moment, a pivotal challenge for NATO and the transatlantic community. So that's what I'm fearful of.

I'm optimistic that NATO, with some notable problems including Turkey, is more unified than it's been in a long time. And if Germany and others follow through, and Greece continues what you're doing in terms of building combat power, and we're working together to make sure we can actually use that combat power if we need to then I'm hopeful for the long run.

ARGIRI: Thank you. George?

KOUMOUTSTAKOS: On the fear side, my main concern is the possibility of finding ourselves in front of two concurrent phenomena. First of all, an energy shortage for the years to come. And secondly, an exacerbation of

migratory flows, migratory and refugee flows, in this very sensitive region. This combination of these events might be nightmarish for the region.

On the hope side, I'm very optimistic seeing United States of America once again being actively engaged in promoting democratic multilateralism. Looking for strengthening their relationship and their alliances with European partners, including Greece. And I think that this is a strong message of respecting, and securing, common values and shared interests. Another positive development which came out of these dramatic events in Ukraine is that we have started thinking more on containment policies and on containment basis than on appeasement basis. I think when you are dealing with undemocratic, illiberal authoritarian regimes that follow revisionist policies you have to follow containment policies, diplomacy, economy, and if needed militarily. I don't believe that this is – I don't believe that appeasement is the right attitude vis-à-vis these kinds of regimes. And I'm very glad that almost all speakers stress this point. Actually I do believe that in our region, and vis-à-vis authoritarian leaders, we need more Churchills and less Chamberlains.

ARGIRI: Aykan, what about you?

ERDEMIR: To be provocative, I'm hopeful because of a tweet I've recently seen. Following Turkey's outreach to Israel, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Greece, and Armenia, a young journalist, a young Turkish Journalist I know, posted a tweet with a photo. The photo belonged to former Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem, the architect of the Turkish-Greek rapprochement. And he said, "After all these U-turns everyone is now rediscovering İsmail Cem and his policies." Now this journalist probably was an elementary school student when İsmail Cem was last in power and alive. So despite 30 million Turkish youth inculcated with hate under Erdoğan's regime, people still remember – Or people still read and discover a different past, and a different path toward cordial relations. So that's my hope.

My biggest fear is status quo powers will appease a revisionist power, namely Erdoğan, and will prolong the term of a bankrupt autocrat, of a bankrupt revisionist power. That's my biggest fear and that's what I'm seeing now with Ukraine. Erdoğan is really playing this very skillfully and if he starts extracting concessions from NATO, from the European Union, from the Council of Europe, from Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors, I think then that tweet might no longer be the hopeful message that I find in that tweet.

ARGIRI: Thank you Aykan. Thank you gentlemen. And with that the moderated part of our discussion has been concluded. I think that we can move onto the Q&A session of this event. Endy's having here the microphone ready, so I think that any questions that you might have are now welcome.

ZEMENIDES: There we go.

ARGIRI: Aram?

ZEMENIDES: Aram Hamparian, head of the Armenian National Committee.

HAMPARIAN: Thank you Endy. So in the wake of the Turkish exclusion from the F-35 program President Erdoğan came back and asked for F-16s. Any insights as to what – How might you explain that? And how do you get the sense that DC is responding to that request?

RUBIN: Want to start?

ERDEMIR: Let me start. I was really thrilled when Erdoğan reached out to Washington the day after he hosted Israeli President Herzog in Ankara because it proved my point. I was arguing all along that a lot of Ankara's outreach was basically instrumental just to procure F-16s and F-16 modernization kits. This was basically a move that did not stem from a change in values and orientation. This was simply a move that resulted from desperation.

Now what we don't really get is the black box of decision making in Ankara. What really pushed Erdoğan to change course? Is it his appreciation of Turkey's growing isolation, as well as inability to procure critical defense products? Or do we begin to see a semi-autonomous security establishment in Turkey realizing Erdoğan is a liability, to such an extent that although, let's say, the belligerent wing of Turkey's security establishment has thrived under Erdoğan they have also become weakened by the nature of the isolation that results from Erdoğan. So I only approach this from Ankara's angle but at least I think that reach out, and its timing, I think provides us important clues as to how narrow-minded the thinking is when it comes to either Erdoğan or Erdoğan and the Turkish security establishment.

BOWMAN: I would just add, if I may, that – I mean, to state the obvious but I think it's worth stating that Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 isn't that kind of the epitome of a decision that doesn't wear well with time? I mean, my goodness what a horrible decision, right? Let's call a spade a spade. What did Turkey do there? They acquired a cutting edge air and missile defense system, as a member of NATO, from the leading threat to the Alliance. I mean, that's what they did. I mean, that's – Yeah, of course we know that. But, I mean, think about that for a minute. That's what they did, right?

Forcing us, of course, to withdraw them from the F-35 program; otherwise, we'd give those S-400s daily practice recognizing what an F-35 looks like on the radar, that they'll use against us, God forbid, if we ever have to toe-to-toe with the Russians, right? And, by the way, they'll spread that to the Chinese and everyone else. So of course we had to do that. But, I mean, now think of that decision, to acquire the S-400, in the context of what we're seeing now, the largest threat to NATO since its existence in 1949. So my goodness what a horrible decision and it's really going to be time for Turkey to decide whether they want to start acting more like a member of NATO.

ZEMENIDES: Tom Ellis from Kathimerini.

ELLIS: Hi. Two questions. First how does the US establishment assess Turkey's position right now with the Ukraine situation? They're trying to be with both sides, kind of a mediator. I don't know if that works but – okay. Are they upset? Do they appreciate that? It could go both ways. And to you, Aykan, my question would be, assuming Erdoğan loses or goes away some way would the present political establishment in Turkey be different? And how different would it be towards us, I mean, Greece, Cyprus, maybe the region? Going beyond the kids that grow, the ones that we see right now, the four or five people who are trying to create an alliance despite their differences, how different would their policy, assuming they become president, prime minister, whatever, be than Erdoğan in the near future? The day after I mean? Thank you.

BOWMAN: I can start very quickly. I can't – You're not asking me to, but I can't speak for everyone in The Pentagon and the State Department, but just as someone who's in touch with folks in both places regularly, and has been watching what's happening on the battlefield in Ukraine closely from afar with great respect and admiration for the Ukrainian – The bravery and skill with which the Ukrainians are defending their homes, I would say they're – It's an objective truth that the TB2 drones have been very, very effective. I mean, that's just a fact that if – That has been one of the most effective tools that the Ukrainians have employed to target the invading Russian forces. It is my understanding that

after – that Turkey has sent subsequent deliveries of those TB2 drones that Ukraine desperately needed, at a time when, frankly, Ukraine’s struggling to get other air assets. I think Polish MiGs and other things like this.

So, I think they’re – I suspect with confidence that there’s appreciation for that fact, if I’m just being honest, in The Pentagon for the fact that Turkey has been supportive in providing those TB2 drones. And I suspect that is a view that’s widely held in the Pol-Mil Bureau at the State Department as well. But there’s also – They’re looking at what they’ve done with respect to access to the Black Sea. That’s where I’d maybe, Aykan, turn to you if you have anything you want to augment to what I’ve said there?

ERDEMIR: Sure. Again, I would echo Brad’s comments. I think once the history of the Ukraine war will be written with more documentation and access to records, I think Turkey’s high point in all of this will be the continued supply of TB2 drones, as well as ammunition that goes with them, through Poland. By the way Ankara doesn’t advertise it. When asked, the Turkish deputy foreign minister said, “We’re not supplying any military aid to Ukraine.” He said, “It’s a private company exporting products to Ukraine.” But, nevertheless, I think the high point of Turkey’s position, vis-à-vis the Ukraine war, will be the TB2 drones.

The low point, the big risk that I see in the making, is not just Turkey closing the Bosphorus to NATO or Turkey voting against Russia’s suspension, or Turkey refusing to sanction Russia, I think the big risk we have here is Erdoğan might complete the trifecta. He first helped Iran evade sanctions, he then helped Venezuela evade sanctions, and I see the initial steps into what might turn out to be the biggest ever Russia sanctions evasion through Turkey. So that’s, I think, the big risk that we see here. Would you like to continue this? If not I will answer Tom’s other question.

KOUMOUTSAKOS: No, nothing –

ERDEMIR: So, Tom I think it’s a very challenging question because I can see – Let’s assume Erdoğan loses and he concedes defeat. That’s also important, right? He concedes defeat. Then we have a new big tent coalition ruling Turkey. I think it can go either way. Meaning we have both the pro-Western, pro-democracy transatlanticist figures, leaders, among Turkey’s next set of political elite. And we will also have people under the influence of Eurasianism, pro-Russia, pro-China Eurasianism. Because Eurasianism, keep in mind, comes in all shapes. Eurasianism can be an ally to Erdoğan and work with Islamism. And Eurasianism in Turkey by nature has been very rigidly secular, so they can reinvent themselves to be allies to a new secular government, which means that could turn Turkey into – Or prolong Turkey’s West-skeptic, Euro-skeptic, NATO-skeptic stance, and sustain Turkey’s belligerence and irredentism.

So, what will make the difference? Of course the vision, courage, and resourcefulness of the next set of leaders. But, and there is here a big but, the vision, leadership, and the resourcefulness of the West as well. Because ultimately I think this is still an open-ended process. If the European Union and the United States; if NATO and the Council of Europe; if the European Union, and OECD, and IMF, and the World Bank, like all the instruments of the post-war liberal international order, if they are put to good use, I think there is a greater likelihood that the next Turkish government looks for Turkey’s future and prosperity in the Western-led international order. But if we drop the ball as the Western – as the Transatlantic Alliance, then trust me, Eurasianists, and ultranationalists, and others, like other illiberals, non-Erdoğan illiberals, will do their best to reinvent a secular version of Erdoğan’s belligerence and irredentism.

KOUMOUTSAKOS: If I may on this? Of course, there is a question where Turkey will go once Erdoğan is not anymore in the forefront but first – not anymore in the forefront but first we have to consider and think what will happen the next day? Because their regime, Erdoğan’s regime, has established very deep roots in the Turkish society. So even if

he loses politically what will happen the next day? If there is a new leadership will this new leadership will have enough legitimacy from the Turkish society to continue leading the country? I have some doubts on it because I think at the end of the day it has become very cultural what happened these 20 years in Turkey. I feel that it will be very difficult to keep this country stable. My concern and my fear is that it will become very volatile for a while, a very volatile country when it comes to its political life.

RUBIN: And very briefly, more towards your first question, I agree with the analysis of Aykan and Brad, I also agree with you George. But what I worry about, looking forward, when it comes to the appreciation or how the United States might look at Turkey's actions vis-à-vis Ukraine, is there's an unfortunate tendency within the State Department and the American policy more broadly to want to reward Turkey for doing things, which frankly should be in Turkey's interest anyway. For example, standing up for democracy in Ukraine and a democratic government against Russian irredentism. What I'm worried about, and if I were in Cyprus today, I'd be very worried that Turkey is going to come with its hand outstretched for more diplomatic chits, for more diplomatic concessions. And not only the United States, Germany and other European powers, have a bad habit of trying to make Cyprus and specifically Cyprus pay the price for diplomatic concessions in order to keep Turkey happy. That's what we need to be on guard right now.

RUBIN: Yes, it's good that Turkey is helping Ukraine. On the other hand I agree with Aykan that Turkey is playing both sides and is setting the stage to play both sides. But the last thing we should do is reward Turkey, if it truly wants to be a NATO member and a responsible NATO member, for doing something it should be doing without getting paid. And Cyprus certainly shouldn't be the one asked to pay that price.

ZEMENIDES: Diliman Abdulkader, American Friends of Kurdistan.

ABDULKADER: Thank you Endy. Two part question. First for Michael, and Lena kind of was heading towards this question, can you tell us a little bit more about the Iranian attack in Erbil?

And what role do you see the Kurds playing in this region as they're stuck right in between Turkey and Iran? And second question for Aykan, where does Turkey stand today in NATO? If you visit the Twitter page of Secretary General Stoltenberg or NATO Twitter page it seems that everything is fine. They're constantly praising Turkey. Is this just a façade to kind of portray that NATO is united, there's no issues with Turkey? What is your opinion on that? Thank you.

RUBIN: First of all, I apologize to Lena for having omitted or forgotten to mention that part of the question. Perhaps I was just subconsciously channeling The White House by ignoring that question as well! But what I would say is, without commenting on the technicalities of what happened in Erbil because I wasn't there, the red line which has been crossed here is there is no plausible deniability. It wasn't an Iraqi militia which launched these rockets. The rockets were launched by an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps base outside of Tabriz in Iran proper. And I would just differ to what I said in my opening statement, that weakness is provocative and if the United States doesn't react then certainly the Iranians are going to become more aggressive.

When it comes to the Kurds, look I'll be blunt, the Kurds don't have any specific role in the Eastern Mediterranean per se. But they have a common interest with other states in the region, countering the Turkish irredentism. Look, it's not only Cyprus which is occupied by Turkey. There are dozens of Turkish operating bases that are in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan without the permission of either entity. Perhaps with the permission of the Kurdistan Democratic Party but that's only because they were established facts on the ground and Marsour Barzani is too much of a coward to stand up to Turkey. Where the Kurds have a role is in recognizing that the problem with Turkey isn't just a Kurdish problem, it's a

Cypriot problem, a Greek problem, an Iraqi problem, an Iraqi Kurdish problem, an Armenian problem. Basically anyone who borders Turkey.

I just came here from hearing President Musa Bihi of Somaliland speak. And they have a problem because Turkey is providing drones that could be used against civilians to Somalia proper. So there is a growing coalition and it's important that all these disparate parts that don't always work together work together to force the United States to wake up to the fact that we have a real problem on our hand, and it's not – I mean, across those bureaucratic boundaries, which Brad spoke about at the beginning, between combatant commands, between State Department bureaus and so forth. We can't afford for Turkey to exploit the seams.

ERDEMIR: So, a quick answer to your question is, I don't envy the NATO secretary general. I would not like to be in his shoes. He's basically trying to continue to encourage Ankara to be helpful in Ukraine, knowing fully well Turkey has really many strategies to play a spoiler role within NATO. Just to give you a couple of examples, Turkey blocked, back in the days, NATO's defense plans for Poland and the Baltic states for over six months. Turkey watered down a NATO statement and action pushing back against Soviet – sorry, Russian, a lot of continuity there – Russian intelligence attacks against a Czech arms depot. Turkey watered down another NATO statement about a Russian hack attempt against U.S. targets. And Turkey again watered-down NATO action and statement, against pushback against Belarusian dictator Lukashenko. So I think these four recent examples show that a unanimous decision-making apparatus such as NATO really depends, to a great extent, on Erdoğan's goodwill. And a "good" in quotes here of course.

Again, that is why I don't envy the NATO secretary general's position. And, to be frank, is there another way out? The answer in the short term is, unfortunately, no. I think Brussels will need to move back and forth between appeasement and containment, when it comes to the Erdoğan government.

ARGIRI: Yes Brad?

BOWMAN: Just very quickly, if I may? Just using your excellent question to make four quick relevant – I mean, these are missiles flying across international border from Iran to Iraq. I mean, where I come from that's an act of war. I don't know. Right? I mean, right? That's an act of war, one. Two, let's remember the previous attack that hit two US bases in the region where more than 100 American service members had traumatic brain injury, right? So, we are seeing increased – I mean, before they kind of hid behind these cowardly attacks using their proxies. We're seeing more and more direct attacks from Iran proper crossing international borders that – I'm not a lawyer but strike me as acts of war. Two, if we do have this Iran deal go forward, they are going to have more money. And what are they going to spend a good portion of that money on? Missiles like this with which to attack us and our allies. So, we will see more of this if the Iran deal goes forward.

And what is their goal of these attacks? What is the goal? One of their preeminent goals is to push US forces out of the region, right? We know one of Iran's leading goals is to get US American forces out of Iraq and they'd like them out of Syria as well, right? Let's not forget, I never miss an opportunity to remind American listeners, that we would still have an ISIS caliphate today in Iraq and Syria if it weren't for our brave Kurdish partners on the ground, right? We'd either still have an ISIS caliphate or you'd have thousands of dead Americans. Instead, we provided air support, we provided logistical support, and our partners on the ground in Iraq and Syria gave thousands of their lives for our common interests. And so I search the world around to find better partners than the Kurds and I think Americans need to remember that.

And I think as they try to, for example, guard detention centers full of some of the world's worst human beings they need our help keeping these people in prison where they belong. And let's remember – And we have a very small number of American troops in Iraq and Syria but they give us great grand strategic value. And Iran understands that and that's why they want us out of the region.

ARGIRI: I think that we have time for one more question?

ZEMENIDES: Last question.

ARGIRI: Okay.

ZEMENIDES: And from a Boston Red Sox fan, so get ready because Dr. Prodromou throws high heat. I want to see who's going to catch is.

PRODROMOU: Thanks Endy. I'm focused on the Celtics right now.

ZEMENIDES: From The Fletcher.

PRODROMOU: From the Fletcher School. Thanks for a tremendous panel and for the hosts, and organizers. I wanted to ask if you'd shift a little from hard power to soft power? Because all of you have talked a little bit, or at least intimated, that time horizons matter and we're talking about generational changes. So I wondered if you could talk about the intersection of public diplomacy and national security? And here I want to ask you about on the one hand the Diyanet, the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, which has an annual budget of \$2 billion which is twice the amount of the Vatican budget, just to put it in some context, and also the Moscow patriarchate in Russia. Both the Kremlin and the Erdoğan regime have really used religion, and culture, as soft power tools to penetrate within the transatlantic space.

So, I wondered if you could say a little bit about things like the use of public diplomacy programs that could focus on religious freedom; the negotiation of bilateral MoUs on cultural heritage between the United States and Turkey; and also work with our allies in Europe, and in particular ensuring that they don't give up on the infringement proceedings against Turkey in the Osman Kavala case. Because that is the stuff that over time exercise a real corrosive influence, particularly when it comes to the so-called Orthodox oligarchs and Muslim oligarchs. If you could talk a little bit about this kind of soft power stuff and whether it is even being considered within the sort of hair-on-fire environment right now that is the Ukraine crisis?

ZEMENIDES: Does anyone want to take the question?

KOUMOUTSAKOS: If I may just – One thing on the Ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople. Yesterday the Greek prime minister was there when he met Erdoğan, but first he met the Ecumenical patriarchate. I think that there, following your logic, is a field on which the West should be clearer in supporting the Ecumenical patriarchate, vis-à-vis the Turkish state. And we really need, particularly now after the Ukrainian crisis, I think that this is the proper time to show that we support this institution, this religious institution, in all possible ways. And I do believe that this is something that the American administration as well has to see in a very cautious way we need, right now, this is the moment, this is the right timing to give more support to the Ecumenical patriarchate in Constantinople.

ERDEMIR: And let me echo George as someone who has written five articles over the last two years on the Ecumenical patriarchate, and warning that Putin and the Moscow patriarchate on the one side, and Erdoğan on the other side, are putting crosshairs on the Ecumenical patriarchate. And I'll also raise the stakes here. I think Turkey's ethnic Turks and Kurds, Turkey's Muslims, should come to the Ecumenical patriarchate's support; for the very reason that the Ecumenical patriarchate is one of the most important sources of soft power, and influence, for Turkey and its NATO allies. So, any Turkish government not blinded by prejudice and hate, and intolerance, would have realized by now what an important Chinese Wall – Or call it whatever you want, the Ecumenical patriarchate and its soft power, and its influence, has been against Russian irredentism. And any Turkish government in its right mind would have seen the clashes as NATO expanded, as democracy expanded, so did the Ecumenical patriarchate's influence and outreach. And any Turkish government in its right mind would have seen what Moscow was up to, what the Kremlin was up to, in undermining that.

So, sadly, Turkey has wasted a century since the establishment of the Republic, in building an inclusive pluralist system that welcomes, and embraces, the Ecumenical patriarchate as a value of the Republic of Turkey, as a value. As an indigenous, as a native value of the secular Republic of Turkey. But sadly that wisdom hasn't arrived during the first century of the Republic. I'm hoping that the next year, the elections could be an opportunity to wake up, especially because what Putin and the Moscow patriarchate have been doing.

ARGIRI: Yes. Yes Brad?

BOWMAN: Ma'am thank you for the question, I think it's excellent. As someone who focuses on defense issues I know enough to know that what you're saying I'd put the label information warfare on that, in that what people think determines what they do, right? So if we neglect what they're thinking then we're going to be neglecting the action that's going to follow shortly thereafter.

That's why I've heard other people say in the last few days, I mean, Putin's not only trying to destroy Ukraine he's in the process of destroying Russia right now, right? Because the Russian people are going to suffer for many, many, many years because of what this evil man is doing right now. And I don't hesitate to use that word because I think there's a moral component to what we're seeing, right? When you deliberately and systematically target maternity wards that's evil. I think we should call it that. That is evil. When you have a humanitarian convoy that was agreed to in advance, led by religious leaders trying to bring food and medicine to innocent civilians who are suffering, and they are blocked by Russian forces that is evil. And of course with this new law passed they're trying to prevent that true information from getting to the Russian people so that they know what's being done in their name in Ukraine. And so I am all for being more proactive in the information space.

I think the US has done much better this time than we did after Crimea in 2014 in trying to get ahead on information warfare, but a lot of that was in the military space. I accept your point. We need to do more of that and making sure that the Russian people – And it's going to be harder than ever, as they clamp down on the free press there, to get this information to them because I don't know – I can't imagine Putin deescalating, right? This is why I'm so concerned right now. What does that look like? He's not known to deescalate and so I think if there's going to be a solution it might have to come from the Russian people. That means we have to make sure the Russian people understand the truth of what's being done in Ukraine that is evil that is being done in their name.

ARGIRI: Mike, yes.

RUBIN: Two quick points. Again, I think it was an excellent question. I would just go beyond the Diyanet. Two issues. First of all when the Turkish government has unraveled the network of Fethullah Gülen, the irony is rather than dismantle that network which they had said, not without reason, was oftentimes promoting an anti-democratic movement. What they've done is co-opt it. So you have not the dismantling of the Gülenist network you have the creation of the Maarif Foundation, which has taken over this infrastructure which is worldwide. This is one of the reasons why I believe that Turkey in the 21st century, when it comes to incitement, is what Saudi Arabia was in the 20th century.

The second point has to do with TRT and Turkish state media. Right now, finally, in Washington there's the stigma attached to RT, Russia's state-run television channel. That same stigma should be attached to anyone who appears on TRT knowing that TRT is an instrument of incitement, it's an instrument of Erdoğanism, it creates an information bubble which isn't based in reality. And ultimately the implications of not responding to the information warfare aspect of what TRT is doing is going to be measured in blood and treasure as this generation is incited upon. It's hard – The West still hasn't figured out how to reverse incitement and we're simply – If every strategy has a diplomatic, and informational, and military, and an economic component we're not doing anything to counter Turkey's information warfare. So, again, kudos on that question because it really highlights where the United States must push forward in Europe in crafting a coherent strategy to counter Turkey's ideological ambitions at this point.

ARGIRI: Thank you gentlemen. Thank you very much for this insightful conversation. Thank you all for being here. Thanks to everybody for organizing this event. Hope to see you soon.