

Turkey After Erdogan

Featuring Henri Barkey, Sinan Ciddi, and Merve Tahiroglu. Moderated by Nate Schenckan, with introduction by Jonathan Schanzer

SCHANZER: Welcome, everyone, and thank you for joining us for today's event hosted by Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Jonathan Schanzer, FDD's Senior Vice President for Research. We're pleased to have you here in person and tuning in live for our event on Turkey's upcoming elections. This is a timely discussion. The opposition has just announced their candidate to challenge Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the May 14th election. We have a first-rate lineup of experts to discuss Turkish politics, the economy, the impact of the devastating earthquakes, and what the West can do to encourage a democratic restoration or resurgence in Turkey. Today's event also marks the release of my colleague Sinan Ciddi's terrific new monograph, *Turkey After Erdogan*, which explores many of the issues that we'll be discussing today. We encourage all of you to grab a copy of the report in the lobby or give it a read online.

Now for the cast of characters today. Sinan Ciddi is a Non-Resident Fellow here at FDD. He is also an Associate Professor of National Security Studies at the Marine Corps University. We're also delighted to have Henri Barkey. He is an Adjunct Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and the Cohen Chair in International Relations at Lehigh University. We're pleased to welcome back to our stage our former FDD colleague, Merve Tahiroglu, currently the Turkey Program Director, I understand this is a recent upgrade, the Director at the Project on Middle East Democracy. Today's panel will be moderated by Nate Schenckan, who is the Senior Director of Research at Freedom House, where he leads their work on countering authoritarianism. Nate, thank you for guiding our discussion today.

Before we dive in, just a couple of quick words about FDD. For more than 20 years, we have operated as a fiercely independent nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. It is a point of pride for us that we do not accept foreign funding and we never will. For more information on our work, we encourage you to visit our website, fdd.org. You can also follow us on Twitter at FDD. That's enough for me now. Nate, over to you.

SCHENKKAN: Thank you. Thank you, Jonathan. Thanks everyone for coming. I think we're going to have a very lively discussion. We already started backstage. So I know that with this group, no one's going to hold back from saying what they really think about what's to come. Let me set the stage just slightly more than what Jonathan said to elaborate. So yes, we have a date, very likely May 14th for these elections that we've been waiting for. We have a date, we have a candidate for the opposition, the CHP leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and we have a coalition for now that we need to, I think, discuss some of the fractures within that coalition as part of this conversation. But we also have a very, very volatile political situation. We have dissent within the Opposition Coalition itself about the candidate. It was evidenced last week when the second-largest party in the coalition briefly backed out and then returned three days later.

We have dissent over the so-called Kurdish issue, which we're going to be talking about, and we have a country in mourning, frankly, still grappling with two enormous earthquakes that struck just over a month ago, killing more than 50,000 people, displacing millions, and with unclear consequences, I would say, politically, in terms of which way that cuts and to whose benefit. So we have a lot to discuss. We're going to jump right into it. And I want to start with Sinan, who has written the wonderful monograph report that brings us here today. So my first question, Sinan, to you, which is that, I would say the monograph is moderately pessimistic, from my perspective, and I know obviously with something like this, you were working on it for quite a long time, so before some of the more recent shocking events.

It's pessimistic in my opinion in that it's a bit critical of the Opposition Coalition and the configuration of it, and it's skeptical regarding the resources that President Erdogan may bring to bear to shape the election. So what would need to change for you to be less pessimistic, and as the election approaches, are you becoming more or less pessimistic?

CIDD: \$10 million question. Whether I'm less pessimistic, I think the jury's still out on this, but let me put it out in a couple of ways. I think there's a difference between what I call procedural realities as well as political realities. You're right on the money, we now have an opposition candidate. Finally, after 13 deliberations of the Opposition Alliance meeting, we found out they actually discussed the candidate for the first time just a couple of weeks ago, and then they fell apart to be reunited after somewhat agreeing over the nomination of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, which is okay. I still do not think he is the ideal candidate, not because I don't favor him. Simply because I try to go by numbers and the numbers seem to still suggest to me that the money is on Ekrem Imamoglu taking the election by a higher margin, a safer margin to defeat Erdogan in what I call a procedural reality, as in just a clean vote.

But at this point, the relative amount of optimism goes up as far as voters are concerned, especially people who just want Erdogan gone, because I think one person said it best, I can't remember the name who said this, right now, if you are a voter in Turkey who is adamant and just decisive that Erdogan has to go or be voted out, then it doesn't necessarily matter who you vote for, that you don't really care who the opposition candidate is. And that's been emboldened, that ticket has been emboldened with the nomination of not just Kılıçdaroğlu, but also Mayor İmamoğlu and Mayor Yavaş being Vice Presidents with strength and executive powers. It still gives me concern simply because this was not supposed to be about the Presidency. This was supposed to be about winning the Presidency in order to transition Turkey back to a parliamentary democracy. The fact that the opposition has been hand ringing and arguing for so long as to who the nominee's going to be suggests to me that they have a great interest in someone becoming President. Why?

It just seems to me they're fixated not necessarily transitioning Turkey out of the Presidential system. Then there are what I call the political realities, and to your question, I think this is where the pessimism comes in. Let's look and take it at face value. We are looking at literally, not figuratively, the most corrupt, ruthless, and I would call illegitimate President that Turkey has ever had. We're not even having a discussion on whether he's eligible to run he does not have a college diploma. But nevertheless, he's running.

We have seen that he's not willing to abide by the rules of the game. In 2019, when Imamoglu was decisively elected by the Istanbul vote, he annulled the vote. So, these political realities, I don't want to pooh-pooh in the political opposition, or the Turkish mood that is seeking change in Turkey, but we have some really difficult problems. We have a Supreme Electoral Council, the body which governs the electoral process, stuffed to the brim with Erdogan loyalists. How can we be sure that they will administer the law of elections?

In the past, they went against existing law and procedure, where they allowed unstamped ballots to be counted. Those were just primers in the past years, so that's just one concern. Another political reality is, well, will it be a free and fair election? I don't know. What is the status of the HDP, the main Kurdish party? Will the Kurds be allowed to run? We were just talking about this prior to stepping up here, it seems that the government, or the courts, may just be able to close the HDP down one day before the lists for parliamentary candidates are posted, which would disable, or make impossible for the Kurds to rally and nominate alternative candidates.

Will observers be allowed in Turkey, to ensure that there is a free and fair ballot? And not to play politics with this, but in the earthquake-stricken zones, what are we going to do with voters? What are we going to do about the process of voting? If the YSK, the Supreme Electoral Council, was serious about holding a

free and fair election, then this is not an insurmountable problem for them. A lot of these people who lived in these provinces have migrated to other provinces, and with family members. They presumably still have ID cards. They should be able to walk up and vote anywhere, based on the technological availabilities. Will they be permitted?

And the final thing, and I'll leave it to this, is let's assuming we have a clean win, what does Erdogan do? I only recently found about the process of power transition under this new presidential system, it's never been tested before. There are a lot of question marks unanswered, so I'm cautiously pessimistic.

SCHENKKAN: I think we're going to go through several of those question marks, and I wanted, Henri, to turn to you next to speak specifically about the Kurdish issue, being the issue of how will very large Kurdish minority in Turkey be politically represented? And particularly, will they be, on the one hand, brought into the opposition coalition through the HDP, which is the largest party representing the Kurdish movement in Turkey? Will the HDP be allowed to be brought in by the Erdogan regime? And additionally, will we see other manipulation of this issue by Erdogan, and by the apparatus that he controls?

BARKEY: Thank you. Thanks for inviting me. The issue on the Kurds is somewhat complicated by the fact that the candidacy of Mr. Kilicdaroglu was just decided this week. And today, the putative leader of the party, who's in jail, sent a letter to Ms. Aksener, who's the number two person in the opposition coalition, a nationalist who has been very anti-Kurdish. Not as much as her brethren in the [ruling coalition of Mr. Bahceli, who borders on real fascism. But beyond that, she had refused and objected to the HDP being included in the coalition of parties. So, the HDP had been set aside. And I have to say, the HDP managed this period very well without making too much of a fuss. But now that there is a leader, now that there's a candidate, the question is what are you going to do with the Kurds?

It seems to me that Kilicdaroglu wants to talk to the Kurds. He has said it, he said, "I'm going to be the representative of 85 million Turks," and the Kurds represent approximately 6 million votes, and that's nothing to sneeze at. They're the third largest party today in the Turkish Parliament, and they're likely, by the way, to remain the third largest party, assuming they don't get banned.

So, one hypothesis I have is that the future of who wins the elections will very much depend on what happens to the HDP. Sinan mentioned the fact that the Supreme Court agreed that it will take up the question of HDP'S banning, because the government has asked for the HDP party to be banned, and today they announce the date. It's going to be the 11th of April, which is one day after when every party has to provide a list of candidates to the Supreme Electoral Council. Once you do that, you can't change the names.

So, if on the 11th, or it doesn't have to be on the 11th, it can be at the end of April, they ban the party, then what happens to all those candidates? And I'm not sure, legally, I'm not that sophisticated in terms of the intricacies of the Turkish electoral system, what happens to all those people who are nominated under the HDP banner. They won't be able to create another party in time, so will this mean that you'll be disenfranchising all the HDP voters? One possibility is that the Kurds will get so upset that they will vote en masse for the Republican People's Party, which means that the Republican People's Party will emerge as, by far, the largest party, and will ensure victory for Kilicdaroglu. So, it's not clear what Erdogan is going to do, because he's damned if he does and he's damned if he doesn't. So, it depends very much on his calculations.

In that sense, the Kurdish issue is critical. The other thing, of course, is, as I said, Mr. Demirtas sent a letter to Ms. Aksener to respond to, he has, I think four questions or six questions, basically saying, "We are Turkey citizens, we are voters. Yes, we are of Kurdish origin, don't we have a right to say what we want." She's not going to answer those questions, obviously. But she also is playing a very intricate

game in the sense that she is a product of the Turkish extreme right. She has moved slightly to the center, she's not as extreme, as I said, Mr. Bahceli, who's in alliance with Mr. Erdogan. But she can't move too far to the center because then she risks losing part of her voter base to Mr. Bahceli, and that would be a loss for the coalition.

So, in some ways, looking at it from her perspective, she also has a difficult decision to make. I think what she will do is ignore Mr. Demirtas' questions, which will play well with her base, but also not antagonize him. And so, this is going to be a very intricate ballet, if you want, where everybody's going to have to be a ballerina of some sort, from Erdogan to Aksener.

SCHENKKAN: I think that's maybe one of our quotes, that everybody will be a ballerina from this event. It's interesting, you're talking about this very nuanced, subtle trap for the HDP, and just wanted to mention as well, the trap that was set around at Ekrem Imamoglu in similar fashion, where this criminal judgment against the Mayor of Istanbul who was regarded as maybe the strongest challenger to Erdogan if he were to be nominated after his conviction, which was then suspended on appeal. There was this Damocles sword, if he was to stand as president, he could potentially be struck from the list if the conviction was upheld. And the result, perhaps, has influenced that Kilicdaroglu is now the nominee, which many people think is perhaps a more favorable nominee.

BARKEY: Can I just say one thing?

SCHENKKAN: Please.

BARKEY: I think the opposition played that poorly, because they should have nominated the Mayor of Istanbul as a candidate, and you know that immediately the government would've banned him. In which case, then Kilicdaroglu would have emerged as a candidate, and you would have had this protest vote coalescing behind this Mr. Kilicdaroglu. They should have played it a little bit more smartly.

SCHENKKAN: Yes. And that's the ballet. I wanted to turn to Merve, and I want to note also that as we were sitting backstage, you were saying you're not as pessimistic. So, I definitely want to let you speak about that, about why you're on the less pessimistic side, or even on the optimistic side. But I also want to hear you talk about some of these issues around free and fair elections. I think one of the big concerns, especially for the international audience, is will these elections be free and fair? Likely not, but in very specific and subtle ways that are very specific to Turkey. So, if you could speak a little bit about the quality of the elections, about the issues that you are most concerned about in terms of freedom and fairness, but also perhaps about your optimism. I want to give you the chance not to give in to, perhaps, Sinan's pessimism, maybe even my pessimism.

TAHIROGLU: Thank you, and thanks for FDD for having me again back here. It's so nice to be back here. I appreciate the question. I was telling Nate before at backstage, when I saw his questions, I said, "Why the doom and gloom? All of your questions are so negative." I'm so optimistic at this point. I'm actually more optimistic than I've ever been about Turkey's future since the political events of Monday. And I'm looking at the two of you having your facial expressions here, and I'm like, "What is this?" I really think in this specific moment, we have more reason to be optimistic about Turkey's election delivering an opposition win than we have ever been in the last 20 years. So, I just want to start off by saying that.

Now, caveat, yes, it's not going to be a free and fair election. But I still think the opposition will win. And so, I'm going to explain that. I take all of the points that Sinan and Henri have made. There's a lot of challenges facing the opposition right now. Everybody already knows at this point with Turkey that Erdogan controls about 90% of the media, so there's basically no freedom of expression and free press in Turkey. But on the other hand, because of that, everybody's on social media. I've been seeing and hearing about discussions of Turkish presence on Twitter. The other day, I listened to a panel discussion

and somebody said that about 5% of conversations happening on Twitter are in Turkish, and this is actually way more than Arabic. It's comparable to Spanish language-

SCHENKKAN: [inaudible 00:36:53] to me sometimes.

TAHIROGLU: Yeah, and there's a reason for that. So, yes, much of the media is under Erdogan's control, but most people aren't really engaging with that anyway. So, I think that's a very good thing. And the social media is going to play a huge role.

Again, let me caveat that. Now, there are things, of course, the government can do. They can ban or restrict access to social media. That is one of my big fears about what might happen, not necessarily in the lead up to the election, but on the day of the election, especially when the vote is being tallied. For me, when I'm looking at what are the major threats facing this election and the integrity of this election, that would be one of those things. But then, there's a lot that the international community can do about that. We could put pressure on the Turkish Government not to take such a step on that night, and what that might mean, especially if there are election observers.

And that brings me to this other point. Another major worry that I have, and why this won't be a fair election is that the judiciary could try to go after some of the political candidates. That is, as Henri explained with the HDP, the court case they're already facing, as you mentioned with Imamoglu. But I think the opposition has learned lessons from the past few elections. And I think when I look at what the opposition is doing now, as you all know, there's a six-party coalition running right now, and the two Mayors of Istanbul and Ankara have been also pulled into the discussion of the election now, that the opposition explained that they will be appointed as vice presidents. So, when I look at the opposition, I'm seeing eight people running, not just one person. I'm seeing Erdogan, and a bit of Devlet Bahceli, his Nationalist ally, against eight people. And those eight people, Nate, you called them fractured, I call them diverse, and appealing to a broad spectrum of Turkish and Kurdish voters.

I think each and every one of these people appeal to a certain faction of the electorate. If you are Henri, and you're looking at it at the election, and you're thinking, "Oh, Kilicdaroglu," and Sinan, "Oh, Kilicdaroglu's so boring, he's so old," well, you have Imamoglu, who's going to be campaigning now alongside him, because he's been pulled in to have an active role in the campaign season. You can just tune into that. If you are a Kurdish voter and you are unhappy about the IYI Party leader, Aksener, being part of the election campaign, well, you can tune into Kilicdaroglu or Imamoglu who are going to be more palatable to you.

I think each and every one of these people appeal to a different segment of the population, and so I think this has the potential to rally voters in Turkey in a way that we haven't seen in previous elections, and have seen a preview of in the 2019 election. These are all relating to, I think, how the election will not be fair, past elections have not been fair. We have multiple international observers, groups attesting to that. But my major worry has always been, with this particular election, is that it might be Turkey's first unfree election if there is an actual massive voter fraud, or rigging of the actual ballots. That is, I think, a serious concern.

We've unfair but free elections up until this point, so this might be unfair and unfree. But then again, I'm going to bring in my optimism, I have this worry, but then I have to give agency to the Turkish opposition parties, to civil society in Turkey, and the international community, and the OSCE. There is a lot that these actors can do to try to prevent that. I think the most important thing in this election is going to be to ensure that there is an independent ballot box observer, election observer at every single polling station, every single ballot box. I think Turkey has around 200,000 ballot boxes. In the 2018 election, I've read that about 11,000 of those boxes were just unmanned by anyone other than the government-appointed poll officials.

So, I think this opposition grouping has been working really hard. Yes, they've had 13 meetings in the last year, and they maybe haven't really talked about the candidate that whole time, but they've been talking about important things like how are we going to mobilize enough volunteers to make sure there is a person at every single one of those ballot boxes? They created delegations among themselves to ensure that they will have people there observing what's happening, noting it down, and keeping their own tallies of the vote on the night of the election. That's critical. Civil society is mobilizing independently of this. They're not just trusting that the opposition will handle this situation, they are creating their own volunteer groups, trying to reach millions of people.

I think it'll be critical that there will be international observers there too. And if we can ensure all of these things, then I think this will seriously constrain the government's power to actually rig the votes. Even in the past instances, past elections, we've seen them tampering with the vote here and there, counting empty ballots, et cetera. But this, as I understand it, has only really impacted about 1% of the vote. So, if the opposition can win with a much larger margin, and by much larger, I mean like 3%, not 10%, I think we don't even need that, then I think they won't actually be able to manipulate the results and rig the election. So, there is a lot that the opposition has been doing. I think it's been really smart. I think, on Monday, the unity that they showed with all of these eight people speaking, it really rallied voters. I think it created a huge sense of optimism and hope in Turkey.

And also, I want to make just one quick mention of this unique moment we're standing in. Turkish people have been really disillusioned with President Erdogan and his regime because of the devastating economic crisis that they have been facing for the past year, at minimum. And on top of that, they are now not just disillusioned, but outraged. Outraged at the government's irresponsible and incredibly slow and inadequate response to the earthquake disaster. And so, I think with all of these factors combined, I think we're going to see a very lively, vigorous campaign season, and an election night. And yes, it will not be a fair election, but there's a lot we do to try to make sure that it's as free as possible.

SCHENKKAN: Great. I want to give Henri, and Sinan as well, a chance to speak about that if you'd like to. If there are things that the US and other allies, international community actors, can do to try to ensure that, as Merve says, the opportunities are constrained, at least, for manipulating the vote. Are there things that can be done in this period? And then we'll talk a little bit about after the election, perhaps.

CIDDI: Just a couple of points of reflection on Merve before I touch upon that. The first thing I would say, on the cup half-full side, if you're a person who is looking for change in Turkey, one thing that we should not underestimate is, look, the government, as far as we can tell, is in full crisis mode. It's an emergency response. And I don't mean that in a relief or emergency response management side, I'm saying panic. And how do we know this? First 48 hours of the earthquakes, Erdogan was not only missing, but when he goes on the airwaves, that photograph you see on front of the monograph is that's President Erdogan facing the nation, and he literally threatens people.

He's taken to sterilized environments, like model tents where earthquake survivors have resources, but that's not a reflection of reality. Most people are missing drinking water in the province of Hatay. There's dysentery, disease going around, people are angry. And the government response is responding with threats and anger, "We will go after you. Everyone will get their due once these elections are over," that's what President Erdogan said, I think, yesterday. I don't think they have a pulse on what to say. I don't think they quite know what they're doing. This deinstitutionalization of the country is in a pretty bad state, and they know this. And they also know that they don't really have the response to move public opinion back on their side. So that's, I would say, on the positive side if you're seeking change.

To counterbalance against that, I think the opposition has to bring its A-game, and I'm not necessarily seeing that. And the whole point about 13 meetings of the opposition alliance, and not once talking about the candidate, and then talking about it at the last minute, and the whole show falling apart is

pretty serious, I would say. It's just not good enough. There seems to be a complete lack of structure in terms of how these leaders agree on whatnot. And behind the scenes, I think the more troubling aspect is they have not been too concerned about how to re-institutionalize the rule of law in Turkey, and how to rebuild the country. It's been more about, well, how many seats is the CHP going to get? Are we going to get any? Is the DEVA Party going to get any cabinet ministers?

More concerningly, with Aksener, the second biggest party in the opposition, we've just been hearing over the last few weeks is what her main problem seems to be is these crony cap companies that have so far been loyal to Erdogan, the so-called gang of five, which are these gigantic construction companies, telling Aksener, "Look, we just basically want things to continue in the economic realm, the spoils be given to us. We're not really too happy with Erdogan, but what are you hoping to give us if we back you?" And it seems to be about the continuity of the economic spoil system as far as the Aksener-supporting group of capitalist corporate entities are concerned.

This is where the whole democratic vibrancy and dynamism dies of death in my world, simply because, just lurking behind the scenes, it's like, well, the main beneficiaries from this sort of system that's been in existence for the last 15, 20 years of spoils, they just want the show go on. Whoever can provide that for them, and it doesn't seem to be Erdogan at this point, they just would like that to continue. That's not something that we talked about in the report, because that's a little bit more shady and unsubstantial, at least on the... But how does the opposition bring its A-game, in terms of really mobilizing the sentiment of existing voters' dissatisfaction with the government? That's what they should be focused on. And I'm glad at this point that Imamoglu and Yavas will get, hopefully, a front row sort of seat in galvanizing voters of different persuasions. Because Mr. Kilicdaroglu, as good a person he is, I don't think he's necessarily just boring or old, my main concern with him is that he just feels that the office of president is owed to him. And that's not good enough. Who owes you what?

If we're going by numbers and strategy, there is a clear strategy. You have a dynamic presidential candidate who defied Erdogan in the Black Sea Region in the summer, nominate him. And they say, "Well, there's procedural hurdles against... They'll ban him." So what? That's how Erdogan ran in 2002. What are you scared of? Run the candidate. Get him to run. He can still run, if they ban him, if they do not give him the certificate to assume office, then make sure you have a concerted civil response to that. What's your strategy for a president who may be voted in with 60% of the popular vote? Are you just going to sort of let that fall apart, or you're just going to say, "Well, they might ban him, so let's go with the second best." These are not the times I would argue for half measures. These are the times when they need to be bringing their A game, and I just don't see it coming, on top of all the unknowns in political malfeasance that we will see. Because here's what we'll say, and this is what I really push back with, with critics of our pessimistic view, especially the Turkey based analyst, they quite often point out saying, "Well in 2019, Imamoglu won, and Erdogan had to give him the mayoralty of Istanbul, even though he announced his result the first time and he ran again. Therefore, democracy works in Turkey." The only problem with that view is that was not an existential battle for Erdogan at the time.

He would've preferred the AKP hold onto Istanbul, but giving up losing the presidency is existential for him. He does not have the luxury to just say, "Well I lost. That's a fair..." Like Mr. Bolsonaro, I can't see him migrating to Florida and eating fried chicken on the eve of power transition, and just saying, "Well I lost that. Let's just see what happens in five years time." This is an existential battle. And to the critics of that, I just don't know, given what we know of him, how we would just walk away from this in a decisive defeat. Sorry, I didn't even answer the actual question [inaudible 00:51:36]

BARKEY: Look, what can the outside world do? I think almost nothing. Only because if Erdogan... You heard Sinan say this is existential. So if an issue is existential for you, do you think that United States or

Europe saying, "Well, if you cheat we will do X, Y and Z, we will deter him?" No. It shouldn't. It doesn't make sense. The one thing, and I don't know if this is the reason United States did this, but we did see something happen this week which was I think a drawing of a red line. Because one of the concerns has been that he may manufacture a crisis in Syria, in Northern Syria and move troops because that will galvanize a nationalist vote, and he'll be able to guide the people that are on the flag. This is one traditional way most politicians have worked in the past.

And if you notice that this week, and this may have been prepared a long time ago, I don't know, but General Milley was in northern Syria this week. And I think that's the clearest way we could send a message to Erdogan saying, "Don't mess with Northern Syria." Whatever you do, that's not going to be accepted. The Northern Syria and the PYD is way too important for somebody of Milley's stature to make a trip there. So that, I think is one signal. And I don't know if he had... Maybe Milley wanted to go. It may not be political. Nobody's told me one way or the other. But to me, that was a very clear signal. So yes, we can send, we meaning the Europe and United States, can send messages. But whether or not Erdogan one listens is another matter. We've seen the past that he doesn't necessarily take us very seriously. So yes, we should maybe say it but don't expect much.

SCHENKKAN: I'm going to let you respond because I know you want to. And then I'm mindful of time, and I want to give us some time to talk about post-election.

TAHIROGLU: Okay, thank you. I just think there is is... Yes, of course ultimately, this is going to be up to the Turkish opposition and civil society, but I do think there's a lot that the international community can do. Not a lot that they can do, but I think they have a pretty vital role to play. And one of that is.. All these scenarios that we talked about, I'm worried about, yes, I do think that if Erdogan loses the election, with a small margin especially, that he may not want to give up power. I think in a moment like that, it is very likely that the opposition supporters are going to take to the streets. I don't think, in that moment, the Turkish police or the army is going to fire at these protestors. It's not Iran. Turkey's not Iran yet. They might do tear gas, right? They might try to use water cannons to disperse.

There could be violence. That is a real scenario. So I think the international community, especially civil society, can try to help Turkish people in that moment. That is one concrete thing that they can do. Second, I think any of the reactions, the possible spectrum of reactions that could come from Erdogan in the event that he loses the election will be restricted if there are international observers, especially foreign government officials on the ground. So I think between now and the election, every single interaction US officials, whether congressional members or with administration officials have with their Turkish counterparts, they have to really stress hard that the whole world is watching these elections very, very closely, and there has to be at least a semblance of democratic process involved. And if there's a blatant, for example, if these elections end up being blatantly unfree, if Erdogan does try to pull a January 6th situation, I think the message needs to be clear right now, not at that time, but from right now until May 15, that the world is watching.

And you won't get the F16s, and you will maybe have sanctions coming from the EU and the United States. You aren't going to be tolerated in international multilateral institutions that you are a part of where you have been trying to obstruct the processes anyway, like the Council of Europe. And so I think these messages can be very clearly conveyed right now. And one big message that I think all US officials should be giving at any engagement that they have with their Turkish counterparts is, it is very important for the credibility of these elections that the Turkish government does invite for an observers, that they are allowed, that you do have OSCE presence on... The OSCE has already recommended to its members that they want to put together a mission. They do think it's necessary. They did a report back in December. And I think for that to actually happened, the Turkish government would have to invite

them in. If they don't, it would be, I think, a huge step back for Turkey, because in previous elections, they have been invited.

So it's very important that every time a US official meets their counterparts, which is happening between now and May 14, they say clearly, "You have to invite these observers." That is one thing, the minimal thing that you should do. And if that is the case, if you do have a large presence, and if you have both on the ground, but also if you have people watching the election and there's a clear message that the US Congress is watching the election very closely, the Biden administration is watching, the EU is watching, Germany is watching, I think there are a limited amount of things that Erdogan will be able to do in order to completely steal this election. And so I think that's one very concrete thing that I would recommend as a policy for Turkey's democratic allies.

SCHENKKAN: As a representative of an international human rights organization, I feel obliged to cosign those arguments in that I think there are things that can be done. I won't disagree entirely with the notion that there may be places that those actions can't go or won't, things they won't change. But I think they're worth the effort, and I think they have a shot, and I think it's worth bringing them to the table. We only have about 10 or so minutes before we get into questions from the audience. And I wanted to use that time to talk with the group a little bit about after the election. I'm going to skip over the question of what will happen if Erdogan loses. I think we've talked quite a bit about that in various ways. But I want to hear your thoughts about what are the main tasks of the opposition if they win.

I think there's probably a lot of interest in this audience around issues, around the rule of law, issues around deinstitutionalization, perhaps to combat the de-institutionalization of recent years, and also around foreign policy, of course is a big concern for folks in Washington. Anyone, I'll open it up perhaps to Sinan first. It's your monograph. You're the reason we're here. But I'd like to hear from everyone because I think this is, of course... In some sense, this is the optimistic part. Even if you're maybe not completely optimistic about what the task will look like or how difficult it will be, this is the optimistic part. This is a chance for a country that has gone through a lot and has been through a very, very difficult period, this will be the chance to get some things right and to have a transformative period potentially. So what does that look like? What are the tasks on the table for the opposition if they win?

CIDD: So I think this is the part of the project that, when I was doing this took the longest time because it involved just sitting there and looking and thinking about what does the new government, assuming that it takes power, or the new president's office, what is it... It's so vast, the problems that you're looking at. I just didn't know how to begin to conceptualize it. It proved to me very, very difficult. I remember a few years ago, when I read one of my predecessor, Aykan Erdemir's work, he talked about the need to reestablish a new social contract between the state and the people of Turkey. I can't think of a time when that's more prescient than now. We're not just talking about change of government. The optimists in Turkey say, "Oh, in two years' time the economy will be straight and things..."

There's, at some level, a need for societal wide therapy in Turkey in terms of just how much people have gone through socially, politically, and economically in the last 10 years that they've become so numb and desensitized to bad governance. And it's really quite a herculean task. I think that's the adjective that I used. But let's say that's what we're faced with. Well, the problem for any incoming government is it's not a rosy picture. Just the economic portfolio alone is going to be humbling. Turkey will literally need to turn to international institutions to essentially to seek aid, not just because of the earthquake. This was true even before the earthquake. And the Erdogan government's been hopscotching around sort of the need for international finance due to lack of investment through currency swaps and other sort of financial tools which are not essentially geared towards a prudent economic management, but just keeping liquidity alive in the economy.

They will need to essentially now try to have an economic plan, such that 81 million people, plus a significant refugee population, plus earthquake devastation, can have a realistic path towards redevelopment economically, and that will need a figurehead. We've had other figureheads in the past, not least of all, Kemal Derviş back in the early two thousands, who reached the successful IMF standby agreement. This time it will be harder simply because they'll have to open up the books. Turkey's economic books have not been open since the 2010s, and that's going to display a whole truckload of government mishandling and misuse of public funds, corruption. If you can believe it, the Turkish central bank, and I'll put it in air quotes, donated 30 billion lira towards the earthquake. In any normal situation, that would trigger an automatic state investigation. You can't donate the people's money to any cause, like a private individual or a private or corporation.

So this is what we're talking about just on the economic realm. On the political and institutional level, again, I think the Turks will need to really seriously think about reins, institutionalizing a meritocratic system of civil service governance, accountability, transparency. I think a lot of this needs to be rethought, but also just governance culture, which has been eradicated. People look at the sort of the supposed pre-Erdogan and elitist Vanguardist, Kemalist state. Sure. But at some level, it was accountable and meritocratic to a degree, and much more predictable in terms of decision making. That, I think is very, very problematic. How do you do that? Presumably they will have to essentially screen present employees. They will have to essentially determine who should be in what position based on how they were appointed. I think this is going to take time, but that's just on a personnel and staffing level. The other aspect, obviously is the big promise that the opposition is promising, which is how to transition Turkey back to a strength and parliamentary system. What does that mean?

And that cannot happen without two-thirds majority in parliament, which is necessary for constitutional change that will revert or that will put language in that constitution to transition Turkey back to a parliamentary system. And that does not happen if the Kurds aren't on board with it. And this is the problem. Now, let's assume that the HTP is not shut down by this present government, or it reinvents itself under new guise. If they're shut out by the nationalists, Aksemer people, or they're not permitted a voice... They're not really asking for that much. They're not looking for cabinet positions, they're not looking for this or that. They do want to have a voice being the third largest party in parliament right now. But if they're shut out and they do not support the opposition, or they don't have a voice, how is the new parliament going to achieve constitutional change without the support of the Kurds?

It's impossible. And therefore, you may have a successful president who's defeated out Erdogan, but they'll fall very short, they could fall very short in transitioning Turkey back to a parliamentary democracy, simply because they might lack numbers. So that's a significant challenge too, but I'll shut up there for now.

TAHIROGLU: One point, which is they could try to take it to a referendum with three fifths majority, which is-

CIDDI: Yes.

TAHIROGLU:... easier to do. But yes, I think taking HDP out of the equation makes everything harder, but they could do it maybe with the three fifths. And I think they could have three fifths of the parliament after this election.

BARKEY: Look, the biggest problem in this election is that it's really about Erdogan. That is to say almost like our 2020 elections. People are voting not because they liked your opposition or they're really enthusiastic about your opposition. They just want to get rid of Erdogan. So that creates a problem for the opposition if it were to win, because it doesn't really have a very concrete mandate. In part, you also see it in the fact that I have no idea what the platform is all about. Is there really a platform out there?

Are there any economic ideas out there? At least not... I try to read every day, but I haven't seen anything. But we do know one thing, however. The first task of the new government will be to deal with the earthquake, because the earthquake has been mishandled and something has to be done, and the task is enormous.

The advantage is that there's likely to be a great deal of more support from the outside for a non Erdogan government because people are reluctant to help Erdogan beyond kind of the humanitarian aspects of the earthquake. Because one need is really a major plan as to what do next, so the earthquake is going to be the short term focus point, which in some ways may work for the opposition because it gives them something they can work on and they can show results, if they can. That's one. Secondly, as Sinan said, it's the economy stupid. But that's very, very difficult. The Erdogan economic policy was one of growing the economy at the expense of the rate of inflation, using the construction sector, such as it is now we know as the main engine of growth. And that has burdened the state with huge debt which has to be paid, but it's also has not been that productive.

Turkey has an enormous opportunity here because there's major shift going on in the world in terms of with United States trying to move manufacturing away from China. I'm not saying that Turkey will replace the apples factories in China. However, Turkey does have a very educated and very efficient workforce that has proven in the past, capable of producing stuff that's exportable. So if you have an imaginative leader and you can start thinking in long term as how you going to try to use your location... Turkey's location being so close to Europe is an enormous advantage. But there are two also big unknowns in terms of the future, and that is foreign policy. You can't expect a new government to change everything immediately, or even in a medium term. So what will happen with Ukraine, Turkish policy towards Ukraine? What will happen with respect to Cyprus and this whole AGN business, and also northern Syria?

On all these things, I expect that the new government will try to not create problems for itself because it does. They will need help and support from the outside. If you think at what Erdogan did when he first came to power, which was amazingly smart, he adopted a policy of democratization and opening and doing everything that previous Turkish governments had never thought of doing or never tried to do, and garnered enormous amount of support outside, if that's what the new government, and also appear in the government wants to do, that means you don't invade northern Syria, you don't take a very, shall we say, nationalistic line on the AGN, and so on and so forth. But that's not easy when you're trying to also change the economy, et cetera.

SCHENKKAN: Thank you. I think with this time, I think we should just go ahead and go into our Q&A. I'm sure there are many questions in the audience. I'm going to let the FDD staff manage the microphones and all of this. Just when you ask a question, please state your name, affiliation, please ask questions. Ask questions. I think we know what that means. And if you want to direct it to someone specific, please do. Otherwise anyone will take it. Aykan, I believe you have the first.

ERDEMIR: Thank you. Thank you, Sinan, for this wonderful report, and thank you to our panelists who refuse to be intimidated. So two questions. One is, in the run up to the elections, and in the immediate aftermath of the elections, this is to the panel, do you expect, first of all, a campaign of scapegoating, of Turkey's, vulnerable minorities, including ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual minorities? And in the aftermath of the elections, if you expect some social unrest during the transition or the failed transition, do you again see a similar targeting of vulnerable minorities? And a second quick question, if the opposition wins, what do you think will be the impact on Iran, which will lose access to a country which was the main facilitator of its sanctions, evasion schemes, as well as some of its supply chains throughout the Syrian Civil War. Thank you.

CIDDI: I can take a stab at maybe the first one and a half questions. So it just made me think and based also what Henri was saying with the foreign policy portfolio, whatever Erdogan does leading up to the election, one of the things I'm fairly sure he won't be able to do, or I'm just guessing he won't be able to do is rely on sort of anti-western, anti-American, anti-Israeli sentiments to fire up based voters, right? That's become very difficult for him, because anywhere from Israeli to Iraqi to you name the country has sent relief workers, so that the whole anti-western rhetoric, fiery rhetoric that he's used in the past couple of years at least, or even longer, but let's just say at a heightened level, I don't think you can utilize that right now because I don't think it's of use to him, mainly because people are very happy with or very inspired by foreign relief workers coming to help them.

I don't think that's the road you go down, but also just the amount of aid that's come to Turkey from partners and allies. So what does that leave in terms of who you can demonize, dehumanize, delegitimize? And the easy that answer that comes to me, and this is something that interior minister Soylu is extremely good at, is basically otherizing Turkey's minorities, whether they are racial or gender-based or identity-based and minorities. They've already basically gone down the path of saying, "We're going to disestablish LGBTQ in Turkey because this is an abomination," right? that they will do their best, that this is not part of our culture. That is something that they could obviously use, but how effective that could that be? Given on the ground reality, I think that would be off message. Some people might be receptive to it in Turkey, I'm sure, but my suspicion would be not in a way that was in a previous sort of pre-earthquake Turkey.

That would be my initial suspicion. On the Iran question, that's a really good one. We do know that despite the Zarrab and Halkbank scandals, I can't directly say the government has been continuing this. But we at FDD have kept on with violations of Iran sanctions going on by close associates of Recep Tayipp Erdogan. There is a person who has been designated and sanctioned, one degree of separation between him and Erdogan, as in their very close colleagues. The name of Sitki Ayan] has been designated and sanctioned by the United States Treasury for continuing to sell Iranian fossil fuels to China, and the proceeds of that money has been going to things like the al-Quds, the Quds force for the IRGC, as well as, I think Hezbollah, if I'm not mistaken, in Lebanon.

So they've continued this, as far as I can see. Now, what happens if there is a change of government? That is a good question. I am not prepared to answer that yet, simply because I'd have to see who's in power. But my hunch is, if it is a decisive, let's say Kilicdaroglu victory, that that might have to come to a complete and immediate stop. That's my hunch, but I'm not sure if it's the right one.

SCHENKKAN: Please.

TAHIROGLU: Yeah, just very, very quickly. Yes, of course, minorities, gender, ethnic, religious are going to be extremely vulnerable, I think, in this whole election period, process. I think they will come under attack and especially if there's unrest after the election. That's just a very sad reality for Turkey. I just have to add, as someone that follows Turkish civil society very closely, Turkey's minorities are the most resilient people like on earth, especially when it comes to trying to protest against the government. The Pride Parade has been banned in Turkey for the last like what, 10 years?

CIDDI: 10 years.

TAHIROGLU: Exactly. 10 years. Every year they march. Women are banned from having Women's Day rallies. Yesterday, they still march. So these people just don't care that the police is telling them no. The Kurds, they vote. The government takes over their municipalities, they vote again for the same guy. You can't really intimidate Turkey's minorities. I think they're extremely, extremely resilient. So there's the positive note on that. On a similar vein I think, I don't know about government policy, Turkey's government policy towards Iran, but I do hope that a pro-democratic regime change in Turkey can

provide much needed inspiration and morale for our Iranian neighbors as well. So that's my other positive take on this election.

CIDDI: Sorry, can I just wait in on that slightly more. Just very brief point towards I... So we know about the Ion case, we also know about the guy who's been held in Utah. I forget his name for....

ERDEMIR: Sezgin Baran Korkmaz.

CIDDI: Sezgin Baran Korkmaz, who's now awaiting federal trial for defrauding the United States Treasury. The other guess I'm having is with a Kilicdaroglu presidency, my hunch is there's going to be a lot of people associated with sanctions busting and/or illicit trade and/or defrauding various international actors, not least of all the United States Treasury, who will have to summarily depart Turkey, or at least find ways out. They will have a lot of troubles because they will not, I'm assuming, have state protection.

That would play Kilicdaroglu's advantage to provide it's United States' allies, as well as the Europeans, low hanging fruit in terms of incentives and say, here are some criminals that are associated with the Erdogan government. Here is what they've been up to. That's low hanging fruit. I do not see necessarily any loyalty or benefit for Kilicdaroglu for maintaining the cover of some of these people, or least of all, afford them the opportunity to continue enriching themselves and Erdogan's cronies.

SCHENKKAN: The gentleman here. Oh, sorry. Okay. Apologies.

[CROSSTALK}

MACGILLIVRAY: Oh, great. Hi, I'm Iain MacGillivray from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Thank you to the panel and Sinan for this great monograph. Look, I just want to ask a two part question about the Herculean task of state re-institutionalization. Sinan, you talked about personnel, but it's also a problem of capacity and expertise. What's the panel's ideas around how the opposition, if they do win, are going to be able to do this? There is a history of purging within the state. Will it be a process of retribution or will it be something like truth reconciliation councils or amnesties. The process of state reformation is a very difficult and complex one, so that's the first part.

Second one, kind of similar. We've seen given the struggles between the AKP and the military, this revival of a paramilitary structure within Turkey, the rise of non-state actors being used as forward projection in Libya and Azerbaijan, SADAT Incorporated, these kind of organizations. What's your thoughts about how these will play in Turkish foreign policy afterwards? They've been relatively effective, but will this be a continuation or will we see a reversion back to traditional military engagement, or just diplomatic and keeping a very minimal role with the Turkish military?

CIDDI: Henri, do you want to start with that?

BARKEY: Hmm?

CIDDI: Do you want to start with that?

BARKEY: I was going to think as you were talking.

CIDDI: Good strategy.

BARKEY: So look, rebuilding the state is a very difficult one. In many ways, that's probably the most difficult issue because, A, they've been out of power for 20 years, so they don't have the expertise that is required. Where will they get that expertise? I am not necessarily sure. It's not that there isn't expertise in Turkey. There is plenty of expertise. The universities are very strong. I'm not talking about the AKP universities that were created, but the traditional universities. So you have expertise there that you'll have to mobilize. You're right, it's going to take time and it's not going to be easy.

On the issue of sanctions in Iran, et cetera, and how do you do this? Look, an opposition government that comes to power, given the monumental tasks it has in front of it, will probably pursue a policy, just as alluded earlier in my previous answer to a question, a policy that will seek to mobilize support from where the money is, basically the West. So I suspect that, as I said earlier, they're not going to go after northern Syria. Similarly, they will accommodate the West when it comes to Iran. They won't do things that will create problems here.

Look, Congress today is virulently the anti-Turkish. It has never been like this before. So even if the administration were to be more sympathetic, you also have to worry about Congress. So there are many issues that Turkey will have to deal with that will... Think of Iran, for instance. Where to take steps against Iran? It'll engender a lot of goodwill on The Hill. Forget about the administration for a moment, but on The Hill, this issue is very important. Therefore I suspect the smart strategy would be to do that. And it is not a costly strategy in terms of public support.

Turks don't care about it, whether or not you help sanction busting. Sanction busting had essentially two purposes, three purposes for Erdogan. One was to show that he's tough that he can stand up to the West, and he made a lot of it. Two, it was a way of bringing money into state coffers when he really desperately needed money. Thirdly, many of his cronies were involved in this and were making money out of it. So of these three, number one and number three are not relevant for, let's say, an opposition government. Bringing money in, it's not a huge amount of money, engendering goodwill in the West is actually far more important, so I suspect that's where you will see major changes.

CIDDI: I could just add that, in addition to what Henri is saying, I think the phrase that I keep coming back to is, low hanging fruit. For a new administration in Turkey, they would essentially want to reengage with the West to the extent that is where the money is and that is where they're seeking goodwill from just for the purposes of reconstruction and rebuilding of a Turkish economy or the republic as it lays bare.

Part of that's going to require give and take for with the Europeans. There are certain things I don't think they're immediately going to budge on or give in on, because it's a point of leverage in terms of discussions. So anything pertaining to ongoing, historic problems such as Turkey in the Aegean, the status of EEZs, and continental shelf and territorial waters between Greece, Turkey, the future of Cyprus, those are points of negotiation which Turkey could probably approach, if it chose to do so, in a non-confrontational manner or non-militaristic manner, let's just say.

It is interested in achieving things like a renegotiation with the customs union. They would like to be able to incorporate some aspect of agriculture in that. They're interested in visa free travel for Turkey citizens into Europe. So those are points of negotiation. I agree. I don't think they give stuff about moving quite decisively on Iran, because I don't think that's a huge issue for them to become stuck on. Libya, Syria, I also think it's the same. There are some lower hanging fruit.

Another one we haven't mentioned, NATO expansion. That is something the president, new president of Turkey, can just wave and basically make happen if he chooses to do so. He'll go for parliament ratification, but he could decree if he wanted to.

ERDEMIR: So how about Hamas?

CIDDI: Good question. So how about Hamas? So I would again think my hunch is for a Kilicdaroglu administration, that's not a brainer. Turkey historically has, reference point of the 1990s, had a very strong relationship with the Israeli state, both in the defense procurement, intelligence sharing, joint exercises, in addition to the business run that's continued. I think that should be small pickings or easy pickings for a Kilicdaroglu administration to make a decisive move to actually just expel some of the senior members of Hamas there.

Also kick the organization out of the country and not give it status inside of Turkey, because again, it would cost Turkey nothing diplomatically with Hamas. In terms of if they're interested in rebuilding substantive ties with Israel, which presumably they would be interested in for a whole road of reasons, especially defense procurement, then that would be a sure fire way of doing it.

There are problem areas, I think. If you asked for example, the S-400s, as much as I am a believer in the bona fides of Kilicdaroglu being reengaging with the West, I could also see that as a point of leverage with the West, as in I want to divest this, but how are you going to make it worth my while? I could see that being an area of negotiation, not of immediacy. Things like moving over Hamas, is a good question, but also just terminating aggressive positions over Syria relationships with Libyan entities. I can see them moving much, much quicker on that as well as NATO expansion.

SCHENKKAN: So we only have about five more minutes, and I know there's a gentleman who's been waiting here for a question. If I could just say one thing on this foreign policy issue. There's been this big shift in a transactional relationship. That's the language that we started talking about it in Washington about seven, eight years ago. There was a big discussion, is it becoming transactional? It's become obviously transactional. There's really nothing left.

I think the promise, the hope for a new administration and a new government would be to return to a basis of a relationship that's not transactional, that is an ongoing relationship that's based on values. In that, you would hope that it wouldn't be a negotiation on individual items. You give me this, I'll give you that. I'll take away this, you take away that, but would be based on this is our long term relationship and these are our mutual interests.

I think that's the area where there's a lot of questions among Turkey watchers about whether the structure is there to hold Turkey in the US together, the way they used to be held together. That's the hope, is that a true ally doesn't have a transactional relationship. A true ally is in a long term engagement in which we work together and sometimes we disagree, but we find our ways to share purposes.

HYMAN: Thank you. Jerry Hyman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. A comment and then two questions. If I could? The comment is that as the observers, and so on and so forth, if you're in an existential crisis and you're an autocratic government, you're not going to worry too much about the election observers and their views. You want to get that election under your belt. Similarly, it seems to me, as to the opposition, I wish that they wish they had the problem of trying to figure out what to do after the election, but they can't do that until they win the election. So that's the comment.

The question is, assume for a moment that the election comes out in favor of the opposition. Seems to me the question is, what does the security forces do? What does the army do? What do the security forces do? If they side with the election result, that's a whole different story than if they don't. So my question is where do you think that is? The second is, as to the HDP and the coalition, couldn't the coalition indicate that even if the HDP isn't part of the coalition, they are sympathetic to what the HDP and its constituents want afterwards? Wouldn't that be enough to induce the Kurdish vote to support the opposition even if there isn't a direct HDP participation in the coalition? So those two questions.

SCHENKKAN: Please.

BARKEY: Look, Kilicdaroglu is sending messages to HDP and everything the HGP has been saying so far is, look, give us a reason to support you. The letter today that I mentioned earlier to Ms. Aksener is part of that strategy. They're not confronting the Opposition coalition, but they're looking for a way to engage with them. So I think that's going to work and it may even be that the HDP will not put forward the candidate for the presidency, in which case there may be a first round victory for the opposition. So that's what is being negotiated behind closed doors, I think.

Look, the military is a very interesting question. The military has been politicized, just like every other institution in the country is under Erdogan's thumb. However, the biggest question we have not addressed, and it just occurred to me, is let's assume the opposition won and Erdogan accepted. He doesn't have a choice. What does he do next? He's not going to run four, five years later again. He's not going to do what we see here. This is different. He is the state. He is in every office of every little state institution. So you take him out of there, what happens to the opposition party?

First of all, there's going to be a bloodbath as to who's going to replace him. Will he stay on the sidelines and try to influence? If there are all these legal cases against him too, I suspect he's going to look for a way to make a deal and to shut up, which means that the AKP, which is not a party, it's just a number of people with Erdogan on top. You were talking about two thirds earlier. You're going to have a parliament in which you'll have a ruling, the opposition that, let's say, that wins. Then for opposition you'll have nothing. That's actually, in some ways, it's good if you're in power, but also it's bad for the country. You do want the serious opposition.

TAHIROGLU: I just don't know how Erdogan, what he does if he loses the election to try to stay, in part as an answer to your question. I really don't think the Turkish army is going to go out on the streets and shoot at protestors, at civilians. That's like-

SCHENKKAN: The interior ministry.

TAHIROGLU: Oh, yes. So the bigger problem is the police. I'm much, much more worried about the police and that of the interior minister who is-

HYMAN: Security forces.

TAHIROGLU: Yeah, I think the police is much more likely to intervene on a Erdogan's behalf at that point and disperse people. Yeah, I think there's going to be violence, but I think the opposition is going to win.

TAHIROGLU: I think they will win. I think they could. I think that's more likely than the army actually stepping in. I just can't see it. I don't think the soldiers would do it, officers would do it.

CIDD: So I agree. I think at a very basic level, I would say, the one thing I'm confident about is Erdogan does not feel confident in his trust at institutions backing him. In the event there is a decisive electoral defeat, I think all bets are off at that point. Here's something that's embedded and gets weedy in the Turkey state.

I would argue this is true for the Erdogan state and pre-Erdogan state. Assuming Kilicdaroglu wins first round, let's say 58% of the popular vote, he's the president-elect. Three days later, we're hoping for a power transition. So Erdogan scrambling thinking, what do I do? What can I count on, if he's interested in staying in power, the security forces as well? Think about this, if you are commander of the First army in Istanbul, or if you're the chief of police or the chief of the security forces, Emniyet Genel Mudurlugu. Okay.

Then you have to be weighing your options. I'm just betting that some of these people get phone calls from the Kilicdaroglu team saying, you've got a historic decision to make, dude. You can step aside or do the right thing. This is the president-elect. In which case, you can basically step down with dignity and possibly let bygones be bygones. We'll re-institutionalize a new police security force, or if you resist, this guy's going to become president anyway and then you might have to answer for things.

The state does have a way of holding people accountable. This also applies, I would say, to the High Election Council, those holdouts who might want to ban or refuse to issue the president-elect with their Certificate of Presidents, the piece of paper that allows them to take office. You'd have to think seriously about who you're going to say no to, given the reality folding in front of you.

Now, I'm not saying that's going to happen. To your question in terms of, well... I don't think Turkey's Egypt, whereby you have Mubarak bearing down on security forces saying, fire on that crowd or do this, because even then they relented. I would argue that Egypt's, in the region, was the most institutionalized, authoritarian, entrenched regime that I've seen in modern. I don't think Turkey's there. I don't think Erdogan can count on the security forces being there and actually doing that.

TAHIROGLU: Yeah. They would maybe tear gas, but I can't see them shooting. Even the police, I can't see them shooting. Even with the tear gas, if there are international observers there and officials from the United States, embassies, consulates among the crowd or looking very closely, I think that will deter even the level of violence that the police would contemplate using.

SCHENKKAN: So I think with that, I think we're going to try to leave it on a relatively optimistic note. I think that counts as optimistic amongst this group. We even brought Sinan around a little bit. I want to thank all the guests: Merve Tahiroglu, Henri Barkey, Sinan Ciddi. Very interesting discussion. I think very informative. I enjoyed it immensely.

CIDDI: Thank you, Nate, for coming down.

TAHIROGLU: Thank you.

SCHENKKAN: Thank you all for attending.