

Turkey's Snap Elections: Erdogan's Gambit

*A conversation with Dr. Soner Cagaptay, Dr. Sinan Ciddi, Dr. Aykan Erdemir, and Dr. Liesl Hintz, moderated by Amb. Eric S. Edelman
Introductory Remarks by Jonathan Schanzer*

SCHANZER: Okay. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jonathan Schanzer. I'm Senior Vice President here at Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I want to thank you all for joining us for today's conversation, which is *Turkey's Snap Elections: Erdogan's Gambit*. We have an excellent panel of experts here to discuss this timely topic. We're pleased today to be joined by a distinguished audience of diplomats, representatives from the Executive Branch including the NSC, State, Justice, The Pentagon, many experts from the policy community, and domestic and international media outlets. I'd note just for the record here that FDD is a bipartisan policy institute. We take no foreign government or corporate funding and we never will. We see our role as research, analysis and providing of policy recommendations. An essential element of our effort to fulfill that mission includes engaging in professional exchanges of views and information with policy makers at home, abroad including today's discussion.

In addition to the folks joining us here in this room today, I'd like to welcome those tuning in over livestream. We invite all of you to join in on the conversation online, which we'll be live-tweeting at @FDD. At this time, I'd like to ask everyone to either turn off their cell phones or at least put them on vibrate so as to not interrupt our panel, and with that I am very pleased to turn the microphone over to our moderator for the day, Ambassador Eric Edelman, who is a Senior Advisor here at FDD's Turkey Program. As many of you know, he previously served as US Ambassador to Turkey and as the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, so Eric, thank you and take it away.

EDELMAN: Thank you very much, Jonathan. It's great to be here at FDD having another in a series of events we've had over the last three or four years about elections in Turkey dating back to the 2015 election, elections plural, and we really do have a distinguished panel today. We've got — I see four doctors on the, actually five, I'm a doctor too, so we have enough doctors to open up a wing of a hospital here. Perhaps, given the topic, a psychiatric ward.

Let me introduce our panelists, all who are good friends and colleagues of mine: Soner Cagaptay is the Beyer Family Fellow and Director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Dr. Sinan Ciddi is the Executive Director of the Institute of Turkish Studies and a Visiting Assistant Professor at the Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, my colleague and occasional co-author Dr. Aykan Erdemir is a Senior Fellow at FDD and a former CHP Member of the Parliament, and my SAIS colleague Dr. Liesl Hintz is Assistant Professor of International Relations and European Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, so a very very distinguished panel.

So Aykan, let me start with you. For months and months, President Erdogan swore up and down on a stack of Qurans that he would not call an early election. In fact, he said early elections were the mark of immature democracies, not a mature vibrant democracy like Turkey's today. Why did he call for snap elections? Was this something that his hand was forced by

Devlet Bahçeli, who called for early elections? Was this a well thought out strategy or an improvisation?

ERDEMİR: Erdogan not only called early elections a sign of underdevelopment or immaturity. He even called them treason, but clearly something forced him to take this treasonous path. There are two takes on this. If you check Turkey's pro-government press, the next day the headlines read, "Checkmate." Even one Islamist columnist said, "War is deceit," quoting a hadith and said that this was Erdogan's mastermind move to deceive the opposition. My take is different. If you take a look at the details of how this happened, I think his hand was forced to it. This is more an improvised gambit.

When Devlet Bahçeli, the MHP leader called for early elections on April 17th, I think Erdogan was caught off guard. Some of the columnists who were with him at that moment report that the AKP cadres were surprised. In fact, an hour later, Erdogan himself addressed the Parliament, and in his talking points he still referred to a November 2019 election, so his talking points were not yet revised, and in the next day's meeting, as opposed to Bahçeli's unwise date which was August 26th and which is very typical of MHP, they rarely do their homework right — Bahçeli pinpointed on the pilgrimage period for Turkish elections, and then Erdogan convinced him that this was not a wise idea.

Now the big question is why did he go for a snap election only 67 days later, which forced really a condensed electoral calendar which coincided with Turkey's university entrance exam, meaning victimized 2.3 million students and their families, and missed opportunity for a slam dunk on July 15th, the anniversary of the aborted coup, which would've been great for Erdogan, so my take is from all this mess that this was really a makeshift reaction not that well planned, so rushed that they really missed on some of the key issues.

For example, the university entrance exam, the fact that they didn't have enough time for a proper electoral calendar with primaries. They even did not have enough time for a proper diaspora voting registration, so everything had to be condensed to the extent that electoral laws followed afterwards, meaning early elections were called at a time when Turkey did not yet have the updated laws for the new system, so it was really I think a big mess.

EDELMAN: Okay, let me just follow up on it. To what degree do you believe the deteriorating economic situation in Turkey played a role in Erdogan's calculations? Lira has dropped by 10% since the start of the year, a lot of concern about the future of the economy, and the last quarter was super overheated. The government has been clearly feeding the fire and now feeding it even more with this new proposed bag of goodies that is being handed out to Turkish voters to bonuses for pensioners this year, etc. What role did the economy play in all this, do you think?

ERDEMİR: I think there were two issues here. One is the economy clearly, and it was also apparent to some extent in Bahçeli's comments. He said in Parliament that the current condition cannot be sustained. He was vague, but you know, you get the logic, but at the same time I think once they realized that they can't keep the Turkish economy on life support any longer, they went for an ambush, and the idea was let's have a snap election so that IYI Party,

Meral Akşener's new center right Nationalist party, cannot compete in the elections which ultimately backfired, so I would at this point still argue that this makeshift gambit resulted from both a fear for economic collapse and then a sinister move to ambush Meral Akşener's IYI Party.

EDELMAN: Liesl, I want to turn to the opposition now, in both because the election that's been called is going to be both a presidential and a parliamentary election, there are two elements to this. One is who will emerge as the presidential candidate who can best challenge Erdogan, and the other is the surprising to me, perhaps not to you, ability of the opposition to actually compose it's differences, and in the parliamentary election, move in a direction of a common effort in order to deny AKP a majority as occurred in June 2015. On the presidential side — just one — I'm going to let you comment as you would like on both of those questions —

HINTZ: You're very generous.

EDELMAN: — but on the presidential side, I would hope that you could address at least a little bit this odd circumstance with Abdullah Gül having had a visit from Hulusi Akar the chief of staff and also allegedly Ibrahim Kalin along with him, and then Abdullah Gül's decision not to stand after giving a very odd, somewhat sour I would say, speech explaining his reasons for not standing as a presidential candidate, but also reports recently that perhaps Ali Babacan might start a — not as a presidential candidate, but might start a movement of disgruntled AKP types that might actually split AKP. If you could address the opposition writ large?

HINTZ: Sure. In so many of our policy discussions, when we're trying to figure out if 50% of the country hates Erdogan with a passion, how is it that the opposition hasn't been able to unite? How is it that they haven't been able to put forward a persuasive front? And I think there are a lot of potentially irreconcilable, at least at this stage, divides amongst the four parties that joined in this electoral coalition, and it's actually interesting that it was the AKP's move to change electoral law such that if you are in one of these coalitions or alliances, your party doesn't have to pass the 10% threshold, so say if you're Saadet Partisi, the Felicity Party, and you get 3% of the vote, if you are in a coalition and one of those parties breaches the 10% threshold, then you also can enter Parliament, so that was maybe something that the AKP didn't necessarily anticipate.

I don't think that they thought that these parties would be able to form that kind of alliance. That being said, I think that this is a very strategic pragmatic alliance. I don't think they've papered over their differences. I don't think — We saw, even to transition a little bit over to the presidential question, there was a lot of lobbying to try to get Meral Akşener to pull back, to not be a candidate. Once they realized that she wasn't going to move on that issue, then Temel Karamollaoğlu steps up as a presidential candidate from the Felicity Party, and then we see Muharrem İnce being nominated as the Republican People's Party candidate, so I think that this is not a united front in terms of anything that they can agree on. I think that they can agree that they are against Erdogan. I don't think that they can agree on what they're for.

From a policy perspective, I don't see those parties being able to have anything past the election, and unity in opposition is actually really predictive of stability in government later and democratization when we look at the failed colour revolutions. Those parties or those coalitions

that were more unified going into elections like we saw in Serbia tend to have more democratic outcomes than say in Ukraine, where it was a very fragmented opposition and all they knew was they wanted to get that candidate out.

In terms of the presidential side of it, I made a promise I wasn't going to talk about Abdullah Gül again, because there was so much is he, isn't he, why isn't he-

EDELMAN: I'm sorry.

HINTZ: No it's okay, I like it. You forced my hand just like Devlet Bahçeli forced Erdogan's hand, and I disagree with Aykan a little bit. I think maybe Devlet Bahçeli's calling for early elections was kind of a gift for God as Erdogan might say, because he wanted early elections but he promised he wouldn't, so I don't know about that, but I trust his insight more than mine. Again, Abdullah Gül, I think from a lot of perspectives, yes he might have been a unity candidate, but actually a unity candidate in a first round doesn't make a whole lot of sense. You actually want a number of different candidates so you can increase voter turn out. Then you get to the second round and then maybe you can bring people together.

What's actually really interesting to watch in the run up to this, or will be interesting to watch, is that you're not going to see, I think, I would predict you're not going to see the typically divisive rhetoric that you would because they want to leave the space open to come together on a unity candidate, but the fact that you have a helicopter land in Abdullah Gül's garden, and it's carrying the chief of the general staff and supposedly Ibrahim Kalin, the advisor and spokesperson, and what's fascinating about that is Abdullah Gül then says, in this bitter restrained speech, he said it was a visit and he said that there was no threat nor disrespect. I think that shows a little bit of why we shouldn't have been talking about Abdullah Gül in the first place, is they-

EDELMAN: They didn't even need to threaten him.

HINTZ: Well, they didn't need to — Or he was threatened and he's not willing to say that he was, and he's never been super outspoken against Erdogan. Maybe that would've come up discursively in the election back and forth if they were the two candidates, but during Gezi, during he kind of spoke out against him, he's like, "We should go more EU," but I just didn't see him as a formidable opponent to Erdogan. He's never expressed himself as though he could be, and I think he showed in this interpretation of what happened that that's exactly who he is.

EDELMAN: Yeah, going back to my time as ambassador from 2003-2005, people have been talking about this potential split and etc., so it's been like waiting for Godot.

HINTZ: Yeah, very very much so. Gül, Godot, same thing.

EDELMAN: What about Ali Babacan? Is there anything there, any there there?

HINTZ: So this — I think it's too early to tell. Ali Babacan has a ton of respectable credentials within the AKP in terms of — And this is interesting right, when you look at what are the issues that individuals are most concerned about, and right now it's the economy, and he has particular expertise in that, obviously. He would potentially be, because people are always like,

"What happens next after Erdogan? Can there be some kind of intra-AKP division or at least former supporters?" We know that there was a recent Metropole survey that said that 30 to — Let me make sure I get this right, 30-40% of former AKP voters are not happy with what's going on, and 10% said they would not vote for the AKP again, so there is potential for defection from within or from former ranks, and I do think that both his credentials, staying clean out of scandal, as well as his economic experience would prove powerful.

EDELMAN: Is there some small — I'm trying to draw out some hopeful signs from our group. Sinan, I want to get in to the question of will this election in June be a free and fair election, so I'm going to get to the free part when I get to Soner, but I want to just concentrate on the fair part. We're going to have an election in a country where we are still under a state of emergency, and have been under a state of emergency since July of 2016, July 15th 2016 when the coup took place. On top of that, there's been a sorting of the Turkish media over the last several years that have put the bulk of it into the hands of government supporters or cronies of the President's, family members of the President. Turkey now has the dubious distinction of having more journalists in jail than any other country in the world, and it's not even on a per capita basis. It's on an absolute basis.

How can the opposition, even in this more united state than it's been before, get a fair hearing in this kind of Erdogan-dominated landscape?

CIDDI: Interesting question, thank you. One of the things that I've come to typologize in my own mindset about what's going to happen on June 24, as best as I can describe it, I think this is an election just in name. This is not an election, and I think the political opposition in Turkey, i.e. anybody outside of the Justice and Development Party, as well as Tayyip Erdogan himself, they're caught up in the machinations of this whole process that's about to play out as if it were an election like a previous election, as in there's going to be a kerfuffle, there's going to be a whole bunch of shouting, meetings across the country, Erdogan will say his peace, we'll try to outdo him, we'll do our best, maybe we can revivify the conditions of the June 2015 elections whereby Tayyip Erdogan can receive a shock, but just from my perspective, I do not think this is an election.

I'd rather say this is a showdown on part of Erdogan himself in an attempt to force legitimacy on the system of government that he is seeking to impose upon the Republic of Turkey, and I say that quite forcefully simply because the referendum that took place in April 2017 by no stretch of the imagination can be called legitimate. There's widespread confirmation that this was a sham of a referendum, and a system of government change on Turkey has been imposed, and what we're about to see unfold — in June 2014, so I don't think I can give you a lot of optimism on the outcome of this is we will see one way or another probably I would like to guess in the first round of voting a victorious Erdogan that will have gone through some of the processes of electioneering, but absent all the democratic checks and balances that can be called at the most basic level an election.

Why do I say that? Aykan has followed this much more closely I think in terms of the legal changes that has been put forward in the electoral law, but just some of the highlights, one

of the things I'm most frightened of, and I think if you're an observer of Turkey, I think you should probably look at this on actual voting day because I think we're likely to see this, one of the most scary items that I see on there is something called ballot box consolidation. The authorities or let's just say the state, if it deems for any reason that a particular ballot box in any world voting precinct is in danger of being assaulted or some security oriented decision to say, "We shouldn't have this box here, we should move it to another precinct and voters in this precinct should go there to vote," I think we're about to see a widespread use of closing down of ballot boxes in certain electoral districts where Erdogan may be weak so that voters in that region who would ordinarily not vote for Erdogan will effectively be shut out of voting.

If we see those voters migrate to the box where that ballot box has shifted, then there's another process that's likely to be put in place, which is any citizen can call upon law enforcement to say that there's intimidation around the voting box, and therefore you're going to see skirmishes. One of the things that you also alluded to is the state of the media. I think there'll be independent monitors that will count the number of minutes that will be granted or given to Erdogan and AKP candidates on TV stations including national carriers as well as opposition figures. I think it was last time, they gave ... I can't remember the TRT. It was hours, a certain number of hours to Erdogan and four minutes to Demirtaş.

HINTZ: It was like 90%.

CIDDI: Right, so I don't understand how this is actually going to be called an election, where we're likely to see widespread intimidation, where we're likely to see widespread breach of the most basic norms of electioning, and elections being the most basic condition or definition of being a democratic society. One light of hope that we could put in there from the opposition in terms of — and I like Liesl's point here in terms of, if it's true, whereby the opposition candidates have not started calling each other names or really so that they can possibly coalesce if there is a second ballot, who knows. Is this character, Muharrem İnce, who is now the CHP candidate — He's an interesting character, because if you look into his political past, a lot of Turkey watchers would say, "Well, this might not be an ideal candidate."

When he was nominated to be the candidate, I smirked and said, "Really? This is the guy you come up with after all this time, but okay?" We should take one look at him. A former Minister of State from the Motherland Party years [inaudible 00:22:43], he was on TV a couple of days ago, and he implored Mr. Erdogan and said, "Mr. Erdogan, we come from the same electoral districts as Mr. İnce, or I do," he said. "I implore you not to engage him in the way that you think you're going to engage him. You cannot outdo him." Muharrem İnce has even succeeded in Erdogan getting to say that he's been surprised by İnce. This is a demagogue. He is a terminator machine that does not know how to stop. He's like the Energizer Bunny. He will not yield, so one of the things he said, which I thought was quite innovative, he said, "If the media refuses to cover our electoral platforms, then I will conduct my meetings outside of TV stations." He is going to stick it to Erdogan 'til the last minute or unless he's incarcerated.

I don't know if it's necessarily a ray of hope, but I'm just saying this guy, he's going to be unconventional and the result of this, which I think is already predetermined, this election, is

going to have any chance of changing, then I think we're going to need some people who think outside of the box and closer to the line to what ruffles Erdogan's feathers.

EDELMAN: I want to come back to Mr. Ince in a couple of questions, so thank you for raising that, Sinan. What you're describing alas puts the election campaign in Turkey into a very uncomfortable basket that Liesl will be familiar with from the social science writing, which is the idea of electoral authoritarianism, which there's a growing literature on this alas because of the broader democratic recession or retrocession that we've seen over the last few years, so sticking with that theme of, Soner, of the question of free and fair election, in the past, and you and I and others on this panel have had this conversation, in the past we frequently would say the elections in Turkey might not be fair because this is not the only time that the media has been not a level playing field, although it's never been quite this un-level, but that at least the ballots got counted in a more or less corruption-free way.

That's getting a little harder to maintain about Turkey in light of the mayoral election in Ankara a few years back, the irregularities that Sinan talked about with regard to the referendum, particularly in the southeast but elsewhere in Turkey as well. Now with the new amendments to the electoral law that Sinan also referred to, he covered some of these things but there also now the potential for unverified ballots to be counted. There's discussion about how many ballots are actually being printed. It seems like the number of ballots being printed is vastly in excess of the 50 million or so voters on the rolls in Turkey. What are the odds that we're going to see an actually free election? Sinan raised the question of, "Will there be a second round," which is another interesting question. Does Erdogan get over 50% in the first round? What is your take on that?

CAGAPTAY: Sure thing Eric, and thanks again for inviting me, and I'm happy to be at this panel with my colleagues and friends. I've already learned a lot. It's a great discussion.

On the question of free and fair elections, as far as I can recall from political science literature, there is not a case that, if a country has unfair unfree elections, it has free and fair elections again, meaning if elections become unfree and unfair, that trend is never reversed. I think there's only one case, Dominican Republic I believe, which had unfree elections and the US intervened and they went back. Turkey's not Dominican Republic in terms of its relationship with the outside world and-

EDELMAN: No matter how much some people in Turkey believe we're going to intervene.

CAGAPTAY: Yeah no, I don't think so. I think Dominican Republic is a great country, but of course Turkey's dynamics are very different, so OECD reports issued after the referendum said that elections had been, or the vote had been unfair as a result of an unfair campaign, but the vote was largely free. I think that's how it's going to be this time also. I cannot see the campaign season itself being free unfortunately, and that really breaks my heart. Turkey has had free and fair elections longer than has had Spain, another great country, but Turkey has been doing elections for 70 years. Of course it'll be very unfortunate that this will be the second time voting

takes place at the end of an unfair campaign season, and of course the media environment underlies all of that.

But to get to your other question, and I think I'll pull a Liesl on this and respond to some of what my colleagues have said-

EDELMAN: Please.

CAGAPTAY: The second tour issue, I believe that — One of the reasons that I love to study Turkey is that it's a fun country to study. Second is that I think that if countries could be vegetables, Turkey would be an onion. It never has a core. You always take a peel off and you think you got to the core and it's not there. There's one more case. We all thought this was a done deal. Erdogan always wins, and maybe not because law of unintended consequences, the electoral pact idea that Erdogan invented mainly to help his small fledgling ally MHP, Nationalist Action Party, cross Turkey's high 10% electoral threshold to enter the parliament has also forced Turkey's opposition to unite for the first time, and that's a very important development.

Often when I do lectures around the country, people ask me and they say, "Hey, we read your book," *The New Sultan*, I just want to make a shameless plug to it. They say-

EDELMAN: A very good book.

CAGAPTAY: "You write that half of Turkey opposes him. Why can't they vote him out if they're half?" I say, "Well sometimes and often, the gap between opposition blocks is bigger than the gap between them and Erdogan, which is why he's been able to manipulate their differences and divide them, and that's what these politicians do," but because the electoral pact has allowed parties to come together for the first time to run on a joint list, not only it allowed Erdogan's MHP to unite with AKP and cross the threshold, but it also forced the opposition to come together, and this was a very I think Machiavellian decision on part of opposition parties.

They, in my view, in the first place decided to electoral pact because they realized that, and of the six parties contesting in the elections, only two are guaranteed to cross the threshold, so four of them realized that if they don't electoral pact, they'll go into oblivion. They'll disappear off the parliament, no more politics for the next five years, they'll disappear and they said, "Huh, we don't want to disappear, hold our nose, make an electoral pact with these guys we disagree with," so law of unintended consequences, which is I think the most exciting development of this election, and I would say it's formed Turkey's most interesting political force running in an election since the founding of AKP in 2001, this opposition bloc.

It includes a part that's Islamist, another one that's Nationalist, a Center Right and Center Left. Those of you who are students of Turkish politics, that's [inaudible 00:30:12], so I call it the [inaudible 00:30:15] Alliance. Whether they succeed in really pushing back and denying Erdogan a victory, I think he also sees that this four party opposition bloc of course will mobilize a lot of the people who would have otherwise probably given up on the possibility of voting Erdogan out, and I think that the opposition, law of unintended consequences taken to one step further, it will produce an interesting development where what was a tactical alliance of these

four parties joining forces to cross the threshold is turning into a movement where they're actually reaching out, so CHP candidate reaches to HDP Kurdish candidate and says he should be released.

I see CHP people on Twitter retweeting Islamist candidates' message, something you would have never imagined would have happened in Turkey, so that's really fascinating sometimes, because I think the sum of parts in the law of synergy is bigger than the parts put together. It could help boost opposition significantly. Now, Erdogan sees this as well, which is why I think he'll do his best to clean the house in the first round. He knows that if it's to a second round, I think Liesl has mentioned this, it will mobilize the base further so he'll do everything he can to make sure that he wins the first round, because otherwise the second round is going to be extremely extremely competitive.

EDELMAN: Very dicey for him.

Aykan, a year ago our FDD colleague Merve Tahiroglu and I wrote an op-ed in the Washington Post in which we accused President Erdogan of engaging in hostage diplomacy. Very rarely in life do you get to see your words in newsprint vindicated very quickly, because within a month or so, he himself started making offers to swap Pastor Brunson for Fethullah Gulen. I think he really wanted Reza Zarrab but whatever, and just yesterday we had Pastor Brunson back in court in Izmir and his case, based on a new anonymous witness testifying from afar, is being held over now until July, so kicked past the election date. What could the impact of the elections be on Erdogan's practice of hostage diplomacy?

ERDEMIR: First of all, I think the court's new date, July 18th, is indicative of the fact that Erdogan is expecting a second round, because otherwise he could have rescheduled the hearing right after the first round on the 24th of June, so the new date is 10 days after the second round. Also it shows that Erdogan would like to have this issue out of the way until after the elections. He's hoping to win the elections and then go back to his bargaining on a number of issues through Pastor Brunson. Again, on the US side of course this is leading to a lot of calculations. There have been a lot of calls for sanctions, global Magnitsky resignations, visa restrictions on Turkish officials, but I think many in Washington are at least willing to postpone this not to feed into Erdogan's anti-Western anti-American xenophobic rhetoric. People don't want to be talking points in Erdogan's election campaign.

I think if Erdogan wins, all hell will break loose after the second round, but then there's of course one unexpected outcome which might happen. Although it's a long shot, I still believe the opposition has the opportunity to win not only the majority in Parliament. If the HDP clears the 10% threshold, I'm confident the opposition will have the majority in Parliament, but I think they really have a shot also at the presidential elections, and the first promise of the opposition is ending state of emergency, and once the state of emergency ends, all sorts of things change in the Brunson case as well as in the cases of other Western hostages, whether from the US or EU countries.

For example, immediately the pre-trial detention comes down from seven years to five years, attorney-client privilege is re-institutionalized. The secret witnesses is not a result of state

of emergency, so they'll be there to stay, but my experience with secret witnesses in Turkey is, "Trust me, they'll disappear the day after," so these crazy types making up strange allegations who I believe are always almost always closely coordinating with either the police or the prosecutors, they'll suddenly change their mind. They might renounce their former allegations and try to get out of this, walk free from this because they themselves will be implicated, so I wouldn't be surprised if a day comes when we see the entire law enforcement structure that we see today going after these Western nationals end up in prison themselves.

We have seen it with [inaudible 00:35:42], so the entire law enforcement structure who fabricated and planted evidence against secular Nationalist officers and bureaucrats, to their surprise lost their positions and ended up in prison or were purged themselves, so I think we might see a repeat of that, but going back to your question, if Erdogan wins, it will escalate, meaning already we have seen signs of escalation. In yesterday's hearing, they added a fourth secret witness, the accusations became even more outrageous. Clear that in the 62-page indictment, they realized that they haven't done a convincing case so they had to invent a fourth secret witness who suddenly came up with accusations such as, "Brunson is providing the coordinates for US air drops of weapons to the PKK. There was a 20 acre secret base that Brunson and other missionaries set up in the Aegean Region, which somehow the state missed on that under the state of emergency and all sorts of crazy allegations. I think this is not an easy scenario to step back from. Erdogan has upped his ante and this will escalate further.

EDELMAN: I wanted to get into the question of the impact of the elections on relations with the EU and United States in a little more detail, but we've got to go to Q&A, so before we go I just want to ask all of you just quickly to comment on this. I'd wanted to get into a little bit more about Muharrem İnce also, who described himself interestingly as a "revolutionary son of a conservative family," so he's trying to clearly be all things to all people, but the Kurds could play a really outsized role, Kurdish voters, in this election. Demirtaş is going to run from jail, at least in the first round. He's a proven vote getter, so he may do better than people think. What about Meral Akşener and İnce? Can they appeal to Kurdish votes? How does the Kurdish vote play? And if I could ask just starting with Aykan and just working our way around. Everyone just briefly comment on that.

ERDEMİR: I'm sure my colleagues will do a wonderful job. I'll just add one marginal issue on the Kurdish vote. We will see with the next Turkish Parliament for the first time a third sizeable Kurdish group in Parliament, and it will be the Saadet, the Felicity Party Kurdish group, because so far most Kurdish representation is through either the Sunni pious Kurds of the AKP or the progressive revolutionary Kurds of the HDP, but now we will have another pious but not stasused Kurds of the Saadet group and I think that will change Turkey's Kurdish political dynamics.

EDELMAN: Interesting. Liesl?

HINTZ: I'll just add a really quick note on the Kurdish question as well. Demirtaş is of course this very charismatic individual. He refused to be cowed by the fact that he's in jail. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that his candidacy is not allowed. I think the AKP could, I think

Erdogan could use some legal maneuvers to make that possible, but you've got to look at the indefatigable spirit of this guy. He's tweeting, "Oh yeah, I thought I should run. I took a poll in my cell and it was 100% for it." That's awesome, so-

EDELMAN: Great focus group.

HINTZ: It's an amazing focus group. He's like, "Oh, I got mad at myself, so I took another one. It was 50%." If anything, after this election, one of the things I'm concerned about is that there's so much, and with this Tamam thing that's going on right now, so Erdogan said today, "Oh, if my nation says enough, then we'll pull back, we'll step away," and so now you've got at least, before we came up here it was, 500,000 tweets #tamam.

ERDEMIR: Which is trending topic globally.

HINTZ: It's actually the most trending topic globally.

CIDDI: It kind of means "ya basta" in Turkish.

HINTZ: Exactly, but there's this momentum and excitement, and we saw this in Gezi with this carnivalesque atmosphere and people really hopeful, and then nothing happened and I'm worried about that given the machinations that Erdogan has put in place, and it would be fair if someone were to say, "Well, how dare you say that we're going to hold non-free non-fair elections, we haven't held them yet," but the steps that have been put in place to ensure that he wins, I think we can already say that we're not necessarily going to see a major change, so I just want that spirit to continue and that humor and that sense of resilience.

EDELMAN: You're making me regret that I'm not on Twitter, but ... Sinan?

CIDDI: I'll be quick. Can I just echo a sentiment that a lot of my journalist colleagues point out which is, I would say and agree full-heartedly, whoever wins the sympathy of Kurdish votes holds the key to the elections both parliamentary and presidential. They are the single biggest voting block in Turkey who can deliver the keys to both entities in terms of having an opposition majority or an opposition candidate win if they are allowed to vote, and that's why I suspect that the most disputed or interrupted instances of voter intimidation or voter impropriety is likely to occur in pockets where there are Kurdish voters in the southeast or even in precincts that have been identified by the AKP in places like Istanbul. They have done their homework on this. The government has the electoral map sussed out in terms of demographics, in terms of pockets of voters, where everybody is. It's not like they're the opposition saying, "Okay, let's give it our best shot." They are prepared for this.

The last thing I'll say on this note would be to say that it's interesting that someone like Erdogan, who clearly commands somewhere between 38-42% of the popular vote already, he refuses to have a sit down debate with anybody.

EDELMAN: He said he'd meet with İnce but he wouldn't debate him.

HINTZ: Yeah, he wouldn't debate him.

CIDDI: [crosstalk 00:42:01].

HINTZ: Welcome the other guy, welcome him to the palace.

CAGAPTAY: Quickly on this-

EDELMAN: Soner.

CAGAPTAY: — let me add that I think, I'll say that none of the candidates are perfect and that they also all check a right box, so the part where none of them are perfect is that I think Turkey has three main political divides, Left/Right going back to the 70s, Kurdish Nationalist versus Turkish Nationalist mostly 90s, and secular versus conservative Islamist going back to the 80s. None of the candidates cross all of these three divides. Everybody has a weakness. Akşener will have difficulty crossing the Kurdish/Turkish Nationalist towards the Kurds, Erdogan will have difficulty crossing to the secular side of the secular/conservative divide, and everybody will have problems in uniting, so none of them are perfect. Everybody will have difficulty in bridging all these divides, and of course these divides are not mutually exclusive. You can be multiple of these things at the same time.

But having said this, I also think that all the candidates are also perfect because none of them are — There's a term, I guess there's not a term about Turkish politics that I despise much as the term "White Turk," which I should explain. This is the idea that really helped Erdogan rise to power, suggesting that Erdogan represented the common man against the elites, Turkey was run by an elite group called White Turks. It was 95%-5% and he would just overthrow them. The narrative was wonderful, it stuck, it helped Erdogan come to power, so 16 years later, that Turkey's not five versus 95, it's 50 versus 50, so nobody's black or white, everybody's gray.

Having said this, I think because the term has stuck so strongly, the reason why all the candidates are perfect is that none of the candidates are White Turks. It's the first time you're seeing everybody who is basically Anatolian or Anatolian-origin and cannot be labeled as elites, so I think that's everybody's strength, which means the race is going to be one around nativism. Everybody's going to try to prove more than the others that they are more authentically from Turkey than others and that means there are various tones of Nationalism and religion that will play into the race, so I would say anticipate a race that's going to be really rich in strength, strong overtones of nativism running out.

EDELMAN: I feel really good that, as an American, we never have that in our politics ever.

Let's go to the audience. We have about a half an hour for questions. Please wait for the mic, introduce yourself. I'd ask everyone to be concise in asking their question so that we can get to the maximum number of folks in the audience, and please end with whatever you say with a question mark.

SPEAKER 7: Thank you. [inaudible 00:45:00] with i24 News. Thank you. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about the main policy differences internationally between the counter-alliance and Erdogan, especially when it comes to Syria? Thank you.

ERDEMIR: The only hint at foreign policy so far came from Muharrem İnce in his first talk and he started it with saying, "We will get Turkey back on the path to the European Union membership," from which it digressed, so beyond that so far, I think very little.

EDELMAN: Although Erdogan has said they are going to be more incursions into Syria as part of his announcement of his platform.

ERDEMIR: Yes sweeping, so on the opposition side, I think there is at this point little that brings four parties together on foreign policy issues, because even if you check for example Muharrem İnce's EU comment, possibly Temel Karamollaoglu would not be that happy with it. On Syria, I assume Akşener and some of the CHP grassroots could have some soft nativism like refugee skepticism, but I'm not sure whether they will voice it in the campaign, but [inaudible 00:46:27] again could feel more sympathy through the religious line and also on Syria issues. I think it's a very delicate issue, so my guess is, my quick way out of this question is we'll see a lot of constructive ambiguity and silence when it comes to foreign policy, and probably they'll say, "We'll deal with it once in Parliament or we'll deal with it once we head for-"

EDELMAN: Once we're elected.

ERDEMIR: Exactly.

HINTZ: I think the fact that you saw us all hesitate and look at each other blankly, "What do we do with this question," is indicative of a couple of things. One, that there hasn't been an articulated coherent foreign policy strategy, and I think that gets back to the point that this is a strategic pragmatic temporary coalition, and that again these divides that we see, I think a lot of them have to do with domestic politics, but also in terms of foreign policy, would be very difficult to reconcile, and so I think that that's actually indicative.

I want to just touch on the — Eric, you mentioned that in Erdogan's speech yesterday and in announcing the AKP manifesto, that he did indicate that there would be more incursions in Manbij. That would run up again against US foreign policy interests in the region, and just to quickly get at that foreign policy dynamic, the anti-Americanism plays really really well with a number of different elements of the Nationalist base, so don't expect — I think the Andrew Brunson case is case in point. Don't expect any moves on these issues. The fact that the US lobbied so hard and Aykin has been an amazing person who's articulating what's going on, but I don't think we should expect the AKP administration or Erdogan to move on any of those issues that could be seen as making concessions to the US or to the EU in the run up to the election.

EDELMAN: Oh yeah, no. It's only going to get worse before we get to the-

CAGAPTAY: Just quickly on this, if I could jump in-

EDELMAN: Of course yeah, please.

CAGAPTAY: I think I agree with my colleagues. Foreign policy never wins elections, and that's also the case in Turkey, but there are possible areas where Erdogan's hand may be forced. One of them is Afrin. Russia has already said that they want Turkey out and then they went quiet about it. I think it would look really not so good for Erdogan if he was forced by

Russian's to get out. That said, at least for the next two months, the Russians will have a lot of leverage over him because if Putin calls him and says, "Get out," he'll have to say, "I don't want to get out. What would you like in return?"

I think Erdogan has so far — Turkey's not a Russian ally. I think people are jumping to conclusions when they say this. Never will be in my view. Russia's their historic nemesis, but it's more that I think Turkey has dealt and made ad hoc deals with Russia in the last year or so, and I think it will be-

EDELMAN: Somehow the Russians are able to have this transactional relationship with Turkey that is somehow off the table for us.

CAGAPTAY: Right, so the conflicting and making ad hoc deals could be part of that if Putin decides he's going to use Erdogan's soft belly on Afrin to force Turkey out. It wouldn't look very good for him. He would have to stay at least 'til the end of the campaign.

EDELMAN: Yeah, Sinan.

CIDDI: Yes, just a brief follow up with that question there. There's an element to me which is the be careful what the opposition in Turkey wishes for. In the event that Erdogan, which I don't believe is the case, doesn't get elected, in terms of foreign policy making, part of the reason why this is all lacking is because nobody, none of the opposition parties, they've been out of power so long and the foreign ministry has been so bankrupted of actual foreign policy-

EDELMAN: Expertise.

CIDDI: Well not just — Actually being consulted. A lot of the people who have opinions or informed opinions or actually policy experience and international experience in dealing with, they've been either sidelined or made to shut up, or sent out into the world as implementers. They're not asked to do anything. It's seven guys in Ankara next to Erdogan saying, "If we do this, we move this, you're playing a game of Risk." If Erdogan is not there, then how is foreign policy made is another big issue, and part of the silence, why the opposition doesn't really have — The only unexcuseable case, and I'm perhaps being a little harsh on the CHP here, it's the most regimented party, they've been sitting around for the last 15 years. At least if you can't have a national platform to challenge Erdogan, why isn't there some sort of manual, a manifesto or platform, the foreign policy platform, a shadow government, a shadow foreign policy team that clearly has a set bunch of ideas, which Erdogan is still poised to really deliver on, at least in terms of talking points.

EDELMAN: Right, excellent point.

CAGAPTAY: And I would expect Erdogan to do a number of high level, highly visible foreign trips.

HINTZ: Yeah.

EDELMAN: Yeah.

CAGAPTAY: I assume that he might be going to the UK to meet the Queen. All of that will position him as a statesman as opposed to the others-

EDELMAN: He's going to Sarajevo to campaign.

CAGAPTAY: — who'll be seen as politicians. He'll be seen as a statesman because he'll be meeting all these dignitaries, so I anticipate a number of high level visits or visitors to Turkey at the same time.

HINZT: And the meeting with the Pope was also indicative of that trying to show Turkey's role as Sunni Muslim brother in the region, protector of Palestinians and so forth, about the Jerusalem issue.

EDELMAN: Other questions?

MCCARTHY: Uh-

EDELMAN: Wait for the microphone please.

MCCARTHY: Thank you. Thanks to the panelists for great presentations. I'm Paul McCarthy from the International Republican Institute here in Washington. I had a question following up. You're starting to touch on something that I wanted to know about, and Ambassador Edelman, you brought this up, which is Turkey's relations with the West and specifically with the European Union, and I wanted to put out perhaps a heretical hypothetical which is if Erdogan wins and he safely has these constitutional changes under his arm so to speak and his power aggrandized, I'd be interested to hear from the panel whether they think that Erdogan will begin making his peace with the West in some way because of his strength and position, and if you could comment both on the outreach to former Ottoman lands in Europe and then also the EU, the broader EU as such, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

EDELMAN: I have my own views on that, but I'm very anxious to hear my colleagues views, so who wants to go first?

HINZT: I mentioned that anti-Americanism plays very well with several aspects of the Nationalist wings in Turkey. We talk a lot about anti-Americanism under the AK, but it's not new. Anti-Americanism in Turkey is across a wide spectrum or wide spanse of the political spectrum. There's also the anti-EU rhetoric, particularly with Germany and The Netherlands, the use of words like "Nazis" and "fascists," and that also is something that plays well with a lot of his electoral base, being able to say, "We tried on the EU path, and you decided that we were not good enough, and you closed the process, and Merkel says we should only be a special partner and not a full partner, and Christian Club rhetoric and all that.

Pushing back against the EU in general, but then also bilaterally in particular, has played well with his base, so then the question that you're getting at is, once the elections are over, does that open up the playing field for a different kind of a relationship? To a certain extent it does. We've seen Turkey under Erdogan do some very quick 180s on Russia, on Israel, on Assad, so that's possible. One of the things I think to take into consideration is to what would be his intentions in doing so. Whether or not he wants Turkey to be a full member of the EU is in

question, but he would love to have the visa liberalization process go through, because that advantages Turkish business people, so I think that this — Yes, there's going to be an open playing field.

I think the other element of that, and this gets to the visa liberalization question and the question of the economy, is when the Turkish economy does reach this looming crisis that a lot of us have been talking about, yes that's one of the reasons, I think the main reason that the elections were moved up, but moving up the elections doesn't prevent that crisis from happening. Then does Turkey need to consider looking out to the EU, looking out to the US in terms of getting its economy back on track? And when we did see those pivots on Russia and Israel, there were economic factors behind it.

EDELMAN: Sinan.

CIDDI: Picking up on both what Liesl and Soner said a little earlier, I think Turkey's due for a very hard landing in a number of arenas both regionally, whether it's Syria, the most imminent area, and Soner can probably speak to this better than I can, but in terms of the confliction zones, temporary cooperation with the Russians, that's only going to go so far. Now with the impending possible termination of the JCPOA, Turks are worried. What does this mean if the Iranians desire to escalate? Turks are not in favor of Iran basically nuclearizing once again. That presents a considerable problem, so Turkey's going to have to look to NATO and rediscover NATO once again.

The EU is pretty pragmatic. Even at this stage, they would like to re-engage with Erdogan in terms of something. They could actually, if Turkey puts its thinking hat on and reinvigorates the sausage making factory of the foreign ministry, the civilian government, even the national security council as it once existed, they could put together a policy platform and reengage the Europeans in terms of, "Okay, we need to think about how we can overhaul the customs union, how we can work with visa liberalization, even short of full EU membership in return for stop treating the EU in the dirty way that you have." It's unexcuseable.

What Erdogan has done in terms of anti-Americanism and anti-EU sentiment has only, he's only done it for personal gain. He has basically laid the entire reputation of the Republic on Turkey in tatters simply because the more he hits or does a hit job against the EU, calls them Nazis or Christian Club, or the Americans is working with terrorists, et cetera et cetera, he's doing this because he gets a 2% bump and gets a few guys waving flags in Istanbul saying, "Yeah, that's our guy." At the end of the day, he's going to have to come crawling back, because when we do have that hard landing in the economy, the lira today's at 4.3 against the dollar, Turks are going to feel pretty disgusted and get a sour stomach soon for operations in places like [inaudible 00:57:19] or proposed operations in [inaudible 00:57:20] and Afrin when people are finding it hard to get basic liquidity to pay their bills.

CAGAPTAY: Quickly on this, if I can also weigh in, I think-

EDELMAN: Please, absolutely.

CAGAPTAY: Paul had a two-part question, Turkey's relationship to the West and also foreign policy in the Balkans. The first part, I think I'll say that Erdogan is a closet Kemalist. What I mean by that is that he obviously dislikes Atatürk's legacy. He's done a lot to get rid of it.

HINTZ: [crosstalk 00:57:46].

CAGAPTAY: What was that? More like he's shifted Turkey's place away from what Atatürk thought in foreign policy would be. He's also changed or reconfigured the relationship between government and religion and education, so in this regard, he's an anti-Kemalist leader. He's eliminated much of Atatürk's legacy, but the closet part of it is that like all Kemalists, I think he shares their obsession with being accepted as an equal and key partner by the West, and nothing will hurt him more than if he was isolated from the next gathering of Western leaders before or after the election, so I think that regardless of what the outcome is, Turkey will always be interested in being part of this Western concert of nations together with its European and American allies of course, so I think in that regard maybe that's the silver lining of the cloud going forward regardless of the outcome.

The second part of your question on Balkans, I'd say that after having pretty much failed to make Turkey great again in the Middle East, Erdogan has tried hard at that, it didn't work out unfortunately because of events, because of the way events unfolded in Syria where he confronted Iran and Russia without the tools that Iranians and Russians have in Syria or in international circles. His efforts to make Turkey a great nation in the Middle East have largely failed as he pivoted away from Atatürk's Kemalist legacy in that region, but I don't think he's given up on the idea of making Turkey great in international politics. I think that the next two areas that Turkey's going to be heavily invested in, first number one the Balkans, especially Western Balkans because many of those countries are not in the EU or NATO, sometimes at the same time, and secondly I would say East Africa and Horn of Africa and Sahel, another area where I see significant Turkish political investment and economic investment in the coming days and years, and third maybe to a lesser extent, Central Asia.

The recent visit to Uzbekistan, which is the first in nearly a decade if not longer, but I would say Sahel, Horn of Africa, East Africa, Balkans, especially Western Balkans I would watch renewed Turkish interest both political, economic, and even military in the coming days and years.

EDELMAN: If I could follow up on that for one second, Soner. If Turkey does try to expand its role in the Western Balkans, they will find themselves possibly bumping up against another outside power that's very active right now in the Western Balkans which is Russia. Is there a potential there for competition in the Western Balkans to get in the way of the Putin/Erdogan bromance?

CAGAPTAY: I think there's already some competition. I have heard EU officials describe Turkish influence in the Western Balkans as a concern. It should not be a concern because Turkey's a candidate country. Therefore, it shouldn't be exclusive of the EU's foreign policy division, but it just shows you in the EUs [foreign language 01:00:42] where Turkey stands, I would say that Turkish/Russian interests in Western Balkans would be even more

competitive. Russia's interests are mainly number one, undermining the unity of Bosnia by supporting separatist movements there. This is the last thing Turkey would want to see. I think it will be an area of high level of competition between Turkey and Russia given that they would be with different political blocs across that region.

HINTZ: And we've also seen Turkey back down in terms of Crimea for example, where we thought we might see Turkey speak out, large Muslim Crimean population-

EDELMAN: Tatars.

HINTZ: — there, and it was relatively silent on Russia's actions.

EDELMAN: In the back.

KRAEMER: Thank you. Rich Kraemer from the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Great remarks today very much appreciated. I did some field work in Turkey back in 2017 in the run up to the referendum there, and the individuals with whom I spoke about the possibility of a stolen election, what would that mean given the tradition of thus far generally speaking free and fair elections in Turkey, and there was a real concern that it might be crossing a red line if a party was to go so far as to start stuffing ballot boxes and other blatantly fraudulent means of manipulating the results, so my question then is if that is still a red line and let's say that there is social unrest that is the consequence of that perceived manipulation following the elections, what should the response from the West be on both sides of the Atlantic, one that would be effective and hopefully democratic? Thank you.

ERDEMIR: That line has been crossed before, actually. For example. Ankara elections were stolen, the last elections.

EDELMAN: The municipal elections from [inaudible 01:02:26], yeah.

ERDEMIR: Even before, those who know-

HINTZ: And in Mersin in 2014.

ERDEMIR: — the dirty laundry of Turkish politics knows that there was even a concerted plan by all parties in Mersin to hand over the mayor of Mersin's office from a Kurdish candidate to what they deemed was a proper candidate, so it depends on how it's perceived and how the local actors respond to it. In this case, it will escalate. I think in June elections, certainly Akşener has already signaled that she will not take this kind of treatment. She threatened the Supreme Electoral Council, saying that if you play a funny game, "you will have to scrape me off with a razor from in front of your building."

When you take a look at her track record and some of her colleagues who have come from the gray wolf street tradition, I think her words are backed with a credible threat to pushback, which means if on June 25th, on the morning of June 25th, we see let's say a stronger pushback by the opposition potentially escalating into clashes with the police, clashes with AKP supporters, the key question is will US and EU leadership just issue a dry congratulatory message, which is often the case, or will they take action?

When I say action, don't get me wrong. I mean will they just rhetorically try to do something? As a former member of Turkey's opposition, I don't have much hope of really any — I won't even call it a lifeline, but any real more solidarity. I think Turkey's opposition at this point knows to a great extent, from the Kurdish opposition to the secular opposition, that they're pretty much on their own. There are other pragmatic and transactional calculations at work, and I think that the best response to this would be with a Turkish idiom: "You have to cut your own umbilical cord," as they say meaning, "You're on your own. Good luck, buddy."

EDELMAN: I think we've got one in the back. I'm sorry, I've got the pillar blocking me so I —

ROBBINS: Thank you. Gerald Robbins, also from Foreign Policy Research Institute, nice meeting you. I came in late here, so apologies if this has already been broached, but I'm interested in the overseas Turkish vote, the dynamic, an unheralded segment of the electoral population predominately has gone AKP. Do you see any type of potential in-roads that they might be going Akşener or other candidates?

EDELMAN: Soner.

CAGAPTAY: Very quickly, in case you don't know, I happen to be a nerd and that's one of the things I've been studying on and writing on lately, or actually planning to write on. Overseas Turks are going to be a big part of Erdogan's electoral strategy because they are disproportionately more pro-Erdogan than Turks in Turkey are. That has a lot to do with the nature of Turkish migration into Europe in the 60s and 70s. Most European Turks are from central and eastern Turkey, so they are from pro-AKP parts of the country disproportionately, and therefore if Antwerp-Flanders in Belgium were an independent constituency, it would be the most pro-Erdogan place in the world including Erdogan's home province of Rize. That suggests that you've got a really strong pro-Erdogan constituency already. There is about nearly a million and a half Turkish voters in Germany alone, and another million in the rest of Europe, so that's nearly two and a half million voters.

Turkey has as of last election 58 million voters. I believe that's been updated, and Turks love to vote, so 85% turn out in the elections in general, so that suggests 50 million voters or so, maybe even higher, so that's 500,000 voters, that's 1%. Germany has 3%, Europe has 5%. Not all overseas Turks vote. They feel like they belong to their new countries, they're not feeling passionate about Turkish politics, so turnout in Europe is only 50%. It's gone up significantly after the government passed legislation allowing for voter stations in Turkish consulates overseas. Previously people could only vote if they traveled to and from Turkey. Now it's more convenient. You can actually show up in your regional consulate and vote. Even then, I think turnout is probably going to be about 50 or so. It's gone up a little bit incrementally from mid 30s to 40s to near 50, so that still suggests you've got a really large Turkish voting block mostly in Northwestern Europe.

In about six countries concentrated, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, Denmark, and Erdogan is disproportionately more favored in that group compared to the Turkish population. In Turkey, it's probably going to be a very competitive race. We saw this in

the last few elections. Erdogan wins by 49, 51, 52. That's very important because you talk about two or three percent margin. The votes that he could be getting from European Turks could easily help him offset that, so I would say that voting patterns of overseas Turks will be a big issue for Erdogan. If he can mobilize the German Turks who vote for him two thirds to one third, that is nearly one million votes. That's 2% of the electorate. That could make all the difference, and add to this Turks in other countries in Europe. I can easily see a scenario where European Turks add 2-3% to Erdogan's overall tally, and that could win him the election.

HINTZ: I think it's also worth quickly noting that it was — So I referred earlier to tensions particularly between Turkey with Germany and the Netherlands, and that it was attempts by the AKP to mobilize around the referendum and get a yes vote from German and Dutch voters that can vote in Turkey. But that heightened the tensions, those bilateral tensions. If the AKP, if Erdogan tries again to mobilize in those countries, I think you're going to see, again, a heightened tension in the bilateral relations. I think that's worth pointing out, because particularly in the German case, people have been talking about a slight thawing of relations between Turkey and Germany given the release of Deniz Yücel, given the release of Peter Steudtner, which by the way were cases of Germany being willing to engage in negotiations that the U.S. isn't when we're talking about hostage diplomacy. But that those kinds of releases shouldn't be indicative of the warming of relations, but rather, Erdogan trying to get what he wants. Don't expect that warming of relations to continue, if it's not in his own political interest.

ERDEMIR: Just quoting a German official who was in town yesterday. He said, "As long as a German citizen's held in Turkish prisons for political reasons, there will be no normalization." He repeated it twice, so that's the official German position.

EDELMAN: Sinan?

CIDDI: I would also just, both the questions from the unacquainted colleagues — Excuse me. I would also say this, battering on something that Aykan said, which is none of the U.S. response, with red lines, and all this sort of stuff, or EU response to the outcome of these elections — I don't think any of these things are isolated cases in terms of "What should be the U.S. response if the elections are heavily contested, or their outcome is somewhat — " Whatever. I think there's a whole snowball effect of anti-Americanism, anti-Westernism, the possible unfair and unfree outcome of the elections themselves — There is a momentum building.

Congress, as we've talked in previous iterations of panels like this, has been preparing possible sanctions against Turkey. Targeted sanctions, for the first time — In an age, we haven't heard about these sort of discussions. Turkey may even be jeopardizing its ability to buy the joint strike fighter, some of the things that have been tabled. A "red line" such as this, in terms of if the elections seem to be a sham? That just adds to the fuel of the fire of something that can be used in basically really putting a heavy stance against Turkey. I wouldn't wave that off the books, but I would just exercise caution for policy makers here.

When we talk about "What should Washington do? Should Washington level this, or level that? Should it consider targeted sanctions?" One of the things that I've been saying in the recent past is to suggest that, at this very juncture of U.S. politics, who would take ownership of

such delivery of measures, sanctions, whatever? When we talk about "Washington," it's kind of an empty house right now, in terms of who deals with Turkey. If such heavy measures are going to be taken against Turkey, such as, let's say they put an embargo on the sale of F-35s. What's the next step? If the Turks escalate to say, "Okay, get the hell out of Incirlik." Who's going to think this through? We've just recently got your colleague, I believe, has been nominated for the Undersecretary for Near East. There is nobody at home, so is this the right time to start bashing Turkey down, when the U.S. government is less than firing on all thrusters?

EDELMAN: I think we have time for one more question.

SPEAKER 11: Thank you. I am from Serbian Embassy. Minister [inaudible 01:12:38] I was here many many times. It is my first question ever, and I would do my additional pressure or first time pressure to Dr. Edelman of course. I would be free not to talk about Western [inaudible 01:12:48], but I do agree to the great extent not completely because it is new renaissance of relationship from 1930 between our king then and Kamel Atatürk. Now never better bilateral relations, but there is a limit, Kosovo, but it is not my question.

My question is of course hostages. It seems that United States could do more through secret diplomacy or official communication with North Korea done than with Turkey. Can we expect any move, any move from after the elections which we surely he will win realistically? Is there anyone who could have any influence over President Erdogan regarding the hostages?

EDELMAN: Yeah, after Turkey detonates its first nuclear test, I think the Secretary of State will be on his next plane to Ankara for a secret meeting.

HINTZ: Aykan, you're the expert.

ERDEMIR: Okay, just one angle is this. I think the main structural problem here is what Ankara wants from Washington is difficult to deliver. Erdogan's problem is he assumes the judiciary works exactly the way it works in Turkey all around the world, meaning in the US, he I think imagines a US where the White House makes the call, places a call and says, "Okay, release these guys, extradite these guys."

EDELMAN: Rudy does it, Rudy.

ERDEMIR: "Send these guys on Death Row." I think that's the main deadlock there, meaning Turkey knows that it can fulfill on its end, because Erdogan to a degree has given himself the authority, the legal authority to basically swap anyone-

EDELMAN: Engage in hostage diplomacy.

ERDEMIR: Yeah, engage in hostage diplomacy, but he fails to realize I think that he also needs the counterpart to be able to work in the same manner, which I think is a major shortcoming.

EDELMAN: Please don't give our executive branch any ideas.

CIDDI: It was with that case of the recent charges dropped against Erdogan's protection unit guards in his visit just this time last year if I'm not mistaken. Charges have been dropped

against the officers who assaulted protestors outside of the ambassador's residence, and there was a few other concessions that the Turks got out of the Americans. It just goes to the level of how disjointed the US government is. Why wasn't something demanded in return for that?

I would think that the United States is in a unique position to actually make significant concessions out of Turkey. The Russians did it after Turkey downed the jets. It was agricultural produce, sanctions on that, and tourism.

EDELMAN: Tourism.

CIDDI: Step by step the Russian government implemented it resulting in an Erdogan apology letter. That's almost unheard of, so it just shows in my opinion that the US government is particularly disjointed and not firing on all the thrusters it should be when it can exact quite a lot of demands out of releasing certain individuals such as Brunson or the other fellow we shouldn't forget, Serkan Golge. The guy's a Martian rocket engineer as far as I can understand.

EDELMAN: Right, the NASA engineer, and there are others of course. There are FSNs like Hamza Ulucay and others who have been taken as pawns in this game as well.

I want to thank our panel. I think they've held up their end very well. This is-

HINTZ: Thank you so much.

EDELMAN: — another incredibly informative election panel. We probably need to reconvene this group after the 24th of June to see how their-

ERDEMIR: On the opposition victory.

EDELMAN: Inshallah.

HINTZ: Tamam.

ERDEMIR: Tamam.

EDELMAN: And so with that, I hope you'll all join me in thanking them.