

The 'New Turkey' and its Discontents
Foundation for Defense of Democracies Discussion
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HANNAH: I don't need to tell this audience, obviously, that while the focus of today's immediate headlines might be on Syria, it's quite obvious that what happens in Turkey will continue to have a major impact on how that crisis unfolds over the coming days, weeks, and months. Indeed, Turkey will continue to be a major player across multiple issues that are of vital concerns to the United States from the future of Syria and Iraq to the war against ISIS and other strands of radical Islamist terrorism. From the containment of Iran and Russia to critical questions concerning refugees and European stability, energy, and the fate of the NATO alliance.

Indeed, it's hard to turn around anywhere, at least in the region these days without finding that Turkish policy for better or increasingly, some might say, for worse is not a significant consideration that US policymakers have to take into account and try to manage as best they can.

One of the main questions that we'd hope to focus on today is whether that challenge of managing Turkey in the context of American national security policy could be about to become a lot harder in light of the upcoming referendum on April 16th. One way or another, it does feel like this could be an important inflection point in Turkish history, at least the de jure transformation of the political system from an often dysfunctional parliamentary one that we've known for most of Turkish history to a highly concentrated form of presidential power that is inextricably tied to the personality of one very talented but extremely controversial political leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, of course.

What's the likely result going to be on the 16th? What will be the impact both inside of Turkey and outside of Turkey of either a yes vote or a possible no vote? Is Turkey about to become a greater or a lesser headache for American policymakers?

To help us think through these and a host of other important questions on Turkey's future and what it all means, I'm very pleased to be joined by a really excellent panel of experts. Let me start with our guests WALDMAN and Emre Caliskan, who are the authors of ... Where is it? This book that Cliff mentioned, *The "New Turkey" and its Discontents*. Simon is currently a Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at King's College London, while Emre is working on his PhD in international relations at St. Anthony's College at Oxford. As Cliff said, copies of the book will be available once the event is finished. I'd urge everyone to pick up a copy. I think we can maybe entice our authors to stay behind a few minutes and you can take advantage of the opportunity to have it signed by them.

Joining Simon and Emre will be my colleague here at FDD, Aykan Erdemir. Aykan, of course, was a former member of the Turkish parliament and is currently a Senior Fellow at FDD and really the engine of FDD's program on Turkey.

The way we'll work this is I'll start with some questions for the panelists and engage them in a conversation for about 30 or 35 minutes before opening it up to all of you and your questions. We'll go to about 1:15 or so. I'll bring it to a close.

Okay. Let me get us started by just let's get the headline of the day out of the way. Last night, we had nearly 60 US cruise missiles against a Syrian airfield as punishment for the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons on Tuesday, very swift reasonably dramatic use of American power. Indeed, the first use of U.S. force directly targeting the Syrian government since this conflict began. Certainly, the sort of thing that, at least in the recent past, the Turkish government has been begging the United States to do.

I'm assuming that they will probably welcome this action. I think they probably have already but at least let me just pose the question to all of you as we start. How will Turkey react over time and how is this escalation in US involvement in the conflict likely to impact on Turkish policy? Simon, let me throw it over to you. Welcome.

WALDMAN: Okay. Thank you for having me here. I thank you to everyone who's been involved in the organization and really appreciate it. I'm not going to spend any more time thanking you. I'll do that after because we want to talk about the issues.

Yes, absolutely right in terms of the initial Turkish response has been to welcome these retaliations, these strikes by the US against the Assad regime because of the chemical weapons attack. What I think this will do is send Turkish policy towards Syria in a tailspin. There has been a problem from the Turkish perspective, from the position of Ankara since the start of the civil war in Syria. That is, they found themselves with three strategic threats or three threats which they identified. One was their opposition to the Assad regime. It took a little bit of time but they insisted that the Assad regime did not have a future and should go.

Then, they had the threat with the Kurds in the north of Syria, especially with the PYG, which they saw as an offshoot of the PKK. Then, with the rise of Islamic State, there's an additional security threat for Turkey.

There's three security threats but what Ankara has so far failed to do is identify and prioritize one of those threats and meet that threat accordingly while balance the other two. Instead, Ankara is trying to meet all three of these security threats at the same time without a pragmatic policy and without the means, the capability, and the resources to deal with all three threats at the same time.

With this situation now, at first, you had Ankara backing off a little bit about its opposition towards Assad. Now with the US, it seems finally taking the same kind of view as Ankara has always been saying, they're going to find themselves, again, with these three strategic threats but without the choice, without making that really tough leadership decision which is which is Turkey's main priority in dealing with threat? Is it ISIS? If it's ISIS, then you have to make alliances with other actors accordingly and deal with that threat before you deal with the other two.

That leadership choice, I think Turkey's going to have a very hard time actually making. Once again, it's going to try and fight off all the security threats emanating from Syria at the same time. That could be a very dangerous decision to make.

HANNAH: That's very interesting. My impression is that they've actually been forced to move towards that choice with the Russian intervention. Their issues with Russia, the Assad regime seem to have faded, the idea of getting rid of Assad. I'm not sure ISIS has ever been at the top of their list. They really did seem to have begun to focus on the YPG and the Kurds but it'll be interesting to see what this American intervention does to it.

Emre, let me get your thoughts.

CALISKAN: I share some of the views that Simon already expressed, but actually Turkey jumping into conflict more than maybe supposed to be. If you look at the countries surrounding Syria, for example, look at Jordan. Jordan almost chases same position with Turkey in a very ... Neighboring country, hosting refugees, and very important Syrian neighbor but Turkey had been the most affected country by Syrian conflict.

Ankara at the same time, in the eyes of the government, Turkey felt lonely and even sometimes Turkish officials say they feel betrayed because they assume that United States is going to jump into Syrian conflict and push for the regime change in Syria. That's why Turkish government wanted to be inside of this process and jumped earlier than supposed to be.

Of course, there was different motivations for Turkey. First of all economy. Syria is Turkey's neighboring country but the highest number of trades for them between Turkey and Syria was \$2.2 million in 2010. This is a very little, small economic trade volume for a country like Turkey. Even, I was a journalist in Syria between 2009 and 2010, working for BBC Turkish. When I was there, even Turkish ambassador's income were being paid in Turkey and transferred to Syria. At that time, Turkey and Syria enjoyed a great level of relations but they couldn't achieve a financial exchange through bank system.

Also, deterred motivation either Turkey solve Syria to opening of its Middle East foreign policy but when Ankara felt that they left alone, they try to approach other countries. At the same time, nation and international secure issues become important for Turkey. As Simon mentioned, like the rise of ISIS, the Kurdish question.

Meanwhile, Turkey has so much ambitions which was put by foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, there are less capabilities to implement these foreign policies. For example, in 2010, when I was in Syria, there were only six people in Turkish foreign ministry who can speak Arabic. I know the personal from the foreign ministry and from the other departments. They have no understanding about the reality of Syria. They have the ambitions but they have no capacity to implement this foreign policy.

Now, after the coup, especially what we see, and even before the coup, Turkey had a military action in Syria in the Suleyman Shah tomb, which is a very simple operation but even which calls casualties. One Turkish soldier dead in the operation.

Basically, Turkey lost its capacity to implement a foreign policy in Syria without the support of the other countries. Turkey was waiting for a support from United States. It doesn't

came true. Turkey goes to Russia. The idea or the hope from the Turkish policymakers that yes, push for a policy and Turkey might follow.

HANNAH: Aykan.

Aykan Erdemir: Great analysis and let me just spend a minute looking to the future. I think the attacks will prompt Turkey to re-articulate its demands for a no-fly zone, for safe zones in Northern Syria. This might also give Turkey some new ideas about what to do in these safe zones. Ultimately, I think the question from Ankara will be as a country that's working both with Russia and the US in Syria. If the attacks force Russia and US to go different ways. Ankara will have to make a choice. I know it's a NATO member and the choice should be obvious, but as we've been arguing, Turkey lately is not your average NATO member. It's what we call it a rogue NATO member. It will be interesting to see how Turkey goes on from here.

HANNAH: Okay. I'm sure we may pick that up again in the Q&A.

Let me stick with you Aykan and just turn to the referendum. Can you just explain in a technical way what's going to happen now with the Turkish constitution? What are the things, the political changes, if there was a yes vote, what are we talking about in terms of the kind of changes we will see in the Turkish political system. What's at stake?

ERDEMIR: Yes. The upcoming referendum on April 16th for the most part appears to be about transition from a parliamentary system to an executive presidential system, a centralized presidential system. The debate around the referendum is basically on this issue, whether the parliamentary system is inefficient, whether it's sluggish, whether Turkey needs a strong man's role, whether Turkey needs efficient quick decision-making from the office of the president but I would argue, and this morning, I have a piece in the Cipher Brief for those of you who are interested in this.

I argue that this is a fig leaf, that the referendum is not actually about the executive presidential system. Erdoğan does not care whether his de facto presidentialism is transformed into a de jure presidentialism because he calls the shots no matter what and he will continue to call the shots no matter what.

But he is concerned about two key issues. That, I believe, is what the referendum is all about. One is extending his term limits. His first term as president will end in 2019 and a second term would end in 2024 but with the referendum and there's a complex math to it but basically he will be able to serve four terms. That gives him power of the presidency and the immunity until 2034. I think this is his one big goal.

The second goal is immunity beyond that because with the new constitution, he will not only enjoy basically a super immunity as long as the AKP holds onto 200 seats in a 600 seat parliament which is confident. No matter how badly the AKP performs, he believes he can still have 200 seats. That could block a Supreme Court hearing, a court case against him.

Second, with the new constitution, he will enjoy those protections lifetime and not only for himself. Overnight, he can appoint any of his family members and colleagues as either vice

president or ministers without a confirmation hearing or a parliament approval, a parliament vote. Those individuals would also get the same immunity.

I think we are approaching a real turning point in Turkish political history. We'll see whether Erdoğan and individuals handpicked by him will be completely outside the realm of law, basically, whether we will have a new caste of untouchables in Turkish political history.

HANNAH: It is fair. This is not a change to anything that remotely looks like a US presidential system of checks and balances and different branches with competing powers. This will really be a presidency that's largely unchecked. Is that a fair assessment?

ERDEMİR: Erdoğan is not embarrassed to say it out loud. He calls this presidentialism a *la Turka*. He argues that this is a Turkish version. Although these days, he has realized that he needs to emphasize checks and balances, earlier, he made the mistake of really saying it out loud what he really has in mind. He said, "I want unity of powers," and he made a reference to Germany. That was a big, big scandal back then and he never repeated it again but we know what he has in mind. He has this unity of powers where executive, judiciary, and legislative would be basically embodied by himself.

Don't get me wrong, this might sound really crazy for a DC audience but back in Turkey, I think there are significant numbers of people who see this as a good idea because they think, "You know what? This will make a strong leadership. It will make a strong state. It will make a strong Turkey." We know why that logic, of course, is flawed but it will be a very close call, ultimately.

HANNAH: Yeah, yeah. Emre, if you can just expand on what your view is of the implications of a yes vote and Erdoğan getting what he wants in terms of Turkish democracy. I think there was recently an article by Dexter Filkins in *The New Yorker* in which I think he basically said, "This could be the death of Turkish democracy." Is this exaggerated? Should we have greater faith in the resilience of Turkish institutions to act regardless of these changes in the constitution? What's your thought about that?

CALISKAN: I would ask first has Turkey ever been a democracy? Turkey, I would argue, has never been a democracy but there was a hope in Turkey when first Erdoğan came to power in 2002 because through the EU democratic reforms, Erdoğan managed to weaken the military's power and pushed for democratic opening. Actually, eventually, this actually make him stronger in a sense because in Turkey, we have a history of ambitious politicians which dominated the political landscape throughout their time. Erdoğan, of course, is one of the most successful ones but there are others including İsmet İnönü, Menderes, Demirel, Özal.

The army nearly was a democratic institution but played an ultimate check on the power of ambitious politicians but when actually AKP came to power, the military tutelage in Turkey had been declined but this didn't bring democracy because what we argue in our book, Turkey, while never a democratic state, there was a balance in Turkish state institutions. This was a weak state.

I'm sure Simon will follow more about what we mean about the weak state but what I'm trying to say, when the AKP came to power, there were changes undergone, especially in media, judiciary, bureaucracy. Those changes yielded to check and balances in Turkey.

The success of Turkish bureaucracy, they were always with press with the elections so each party bring their own people in the echelons of bureaucracy but when you have a party in the government for 15 years, this ill-balanced system, ill-balanced balance actually collapsed.

In the past, you had a left or Alevis or Kemalist, but now the appointments in bureaucracy are only being by the ones who have conservative backgrounds. This is not based on meritocracy, of course. Erdoğan, he came to power, he had a cooperation of, collaboration with the Gülen movement. Then, these actually replaced Gülen's post, replaced with other groups.

For example, today in Turkey, if you look at the health ministry, it's controlled by Menzil religious groups. There are many posts who are being filled by mostly Erbakan's "National Outlook Movement" or nationalist party.

Turkey has never been a democracy but there was an ill-balanced balance. I think the biggest challenge for the constitution has changed today that this institutionalized of Erdoğan's single man which actually may not bring changes in the long-term, will not actually bring changes in bureaucracy which is a fundamental aspect of democracy.

HANNAH: I want you to speak to this as well, Simon but let me just ... There is a theory out there. I don't know if it includes Turkish analysts in Turkey but certainly here in Washington and I would guess in parts of Europe that yes, this is all worrisome about this concentration of power in Turkey but from a Western standpoint, it may be the best thing possible if Erdoğan himself is able to win a relatively convincing victory, get the executive presidency, finally has the thing that he's wanted for so long and that once he has that in his grasp, we'll then be able to set aside the hyper-nationalism that we've seen the last several years that he's exploited so effectively both to concentrate his power, going after the Kurds, really maybe in a qualitatively different way tilting against the West that all of that might have been quite tactical and utilitarian from his standpoint in order to get the presidency but once with that in hand, we might have a return to an earlier version of Erdoğan who is more about peace processes and internal reconciliation with other groups in Turkey. If you can just include an assessment of that.

WALDMAN: How much time do you want? Give me half an hour of your time and maybe we could ...

Okay. In many respects that kind of theory, I have heard those kind of theories. They're really more ideas of optimism as opposed to what could really happen. In terms of how much more powerful would Erdoğan be, it depends on how successful he is in the referendum. If he wins and it's by 51%, that's not the vote of confidence. I've just come from Istanbul. There was a time when I was counting how many no adverts I saw compared to how many yes adverts I saw. It's just overwhelming how much investment, how much space, how much dominance the yes campaign has against the no campaign. The state funding is being used for the yes campaign. In other words, it's overwhelmingly on the side of Erdoğan and the AKP where the means of

communication lies. If only 51 or 52% of Turkish voters vote yes, that's not exactly the sign of confidence that Erdoğan would really hope for.

But beyond that, I think there's something that we should really understand about Turkish politics and what Erdoğan wants. What's really driving Erdoğan? Is it power for the sake of power? Perhaps, but it's actually something which Emre alluded to, like the way in which we understand Turkey is by really accepting that Turkey is not a country where it's an embattled democracy that's needing US support or anyone else's support. It's not a bridge between East and West and different civilizations. Turkey should be understood and recognized as a weak state.

By a weak state, we're not talking about necessarily a country which is weak in the international system or weak international power. We don't mean that. We also don't mean weak state in terms of a government which doesn't interfere in citizen's life or deal with infrastructure or things like that. We mean a country where there is low levels of social cohesion, where the primary security threat in Turkey is not external, it's domestic and where there are enemies in every corner or where the institutions themselves are divided.

When we think about, for example, the Fethullah Gülen organization and the parallel structure, the idea that Gulenists have infiltrated every Turkish institution, even being able to try and attempt a coup last July, it shows that within Turkey's institutions of state, there are subversive elements who are loyal to an exiled Islamic preacher as opposed to an elected government regardless of how authoritarian it's tendencies can be.

From Erdoğan's perspective, what he's trying to do is strengthen the state. The argument that he's kind of making which is behind the headlines, if you like, is by giving him these additional powers, he will be able to strengthen the state, get rid of those subversive elements. But as Emre just said, what's really happening is the rhetoric that he's using when he's replacing Gulenists or anyone else considered disloyal to the state, he's replacing them with individuals who follow his idea of what it is to be a Turk, his idea of what the Turkish nation is. In doing so, he's actually once again undermining the state and leading to a decrease of social cohesion. This works in every single sphere of Turkish elements of security threats. It's the same thing, again, with the Kurdish issue as well.

Just one thing I just want to say is even though we look at the Kurdish issue and the policies of the AKP and Erdoğan as a peace process, it wasn't anything close to peace process. It was a dialogue of how to get to a peace process. It wasn't even close. I'm not saying that one side is more responsible for the conflict that ignited from the summer of 2015. Both sides are equally to blame but in terms of the Kurdish issue, this represents another security threat internal inside of Turkey. When you think of Turkey's policies towards Syria, it's actually a domestic security threat that Turkey is dealing with. It is from this perspective that Turkey views its relations with Russia, with the United States. It's something that policymakers in Europe and in the United States or anywhere else have to bear in mind when they think about the orientation and the future policies of Erdoğan.

HANNAH: Hmm. Aykan, let me ask you to pick up on that, both if you can just talk about the strategy that Erdoğan has pursued to actually try and get to a yes vote, the divisions

that we see that exist in Turkish society, what a yes vote, no vote, the implications of that for the cohesion that Simon has talked about, and what it means for the future governance and stability of Turkey. If you can just talk through some of those questions.

ERDEMIR: Yeah. The optimists, what I would like to rephrase as the naïve analysts would assume that all of this hate mongering polarization, Erdoğan's firebrand rhetoric, it's just tactical. He has a lever. He has a button. He can push it on and off. He's doing it until April 16th. The next day, he will be a born-again democrat. The tensions will be gone and he will relax and things will get back on track.

We have seen this again and again and again. We heard the same arguments in the run-up to the November, 2015 election. After a summer of hell, basically, when both the PKK and Erdoğan really escalated the conflict in Turkey and also ISIS. People are saying, "Give Erdoğan the mandate. Give the AKP the one-party mandate so that they relax and the civil war is over."

We have seen what happened since November, 2015. None of that happened. I, myself, both earlier as an academic, then as a politician, kept on hearing this from well-meaning colleagues. They told me, "Kurdish question? You can't really deal with it with the Turkish public. We need a strong man to do it." Other would say, "Armenian rapprochement? Only Erdoğan can do it. You can never pass this if it were a referendum. We need a strong man," or, "Minority rights?"

People would always have this logic. "Give Erdoğan the power rather than long and tiresome deliberations, consensus building." I think this is the biggest mistake Turkish democrats, liberals and Turkey's western allies have made. They thought that dealing with Turkish public was tiresome, long, resource-demanding. They said, "You know what? Let's delegate it to an enlightened despot who will solve the Kurdish question, who will solve the Cypress problem, who will hand rapprochement with Armenia and others. We have seen again and again how that caused disasters both at domestic and international levels.

I would argue so short answer is, the day after, no matter what happens, Erdoğan is the same Erdoğan. He will not be able to de-escalate. Even, let's be naïve or optimist, let's assume he wants to de-escalate. It's no longer a Turkey that can be de-escalated, meaning what he started, the wheels are turning. We now have people with knives and cleavers and guns, armed with hate, anti-Semitism, anti-Christian, anti-Western, anti-Americanism. They are out there to get anyone. I think we all will have to live the consequences of investing so much in polarization and hate in Turkey.

HANNAH: Hmm. Before I turn to the audience, can I just get a quick prediction from everybody? We likely to get a yes or no or is it simply too close to call? Simon?

WALDMAN: I really can't predict this one. It is too close to call. That's not a cop-out. I'm really, really sorry. I would really like to be able to say like in Brexit, "I've got a feeling that it's going to be a Brexit," but I just can't do it on this particular election. What I would say is like as I've mentioned before. This in terms of let's call it what it is, propaganda. The propaganda has

been overwhelmingly on the side of the yes campaign. Even if it's close 50/50, that is not what I would think that Erdoğan or the AKP or the MHP would consider a success.

HANNAH: Emre?

CALISKAN: In UK, some say we have a Tory effect so basically Tory vote is conservatives. They don't say they vote for conservative party because they are shy to say that but then it comes to voting day, they vote for conservatives, as far, there's always misrepresentation in the surveys and the results.

In Turkey, people likelihood to say they will vote for Erdoğan but they may not vote for Erdoğan or they may not vote for yes in the referendum but the question is whether Erdoğan will respect the results of the referendum or not. As Mr. Erdemir said, In November, in the June elections, Turkey voted different parties and the Kurdish party got more than expected and no, it was a surprise. It wasn't on the surveys but then, they couldn't manage to establish a coalition government. Turkey went to another election, swap election. Would Turkey go to another referendum if it files no? I'm not sure about the election. I'm not also very optimistic.

HANNAH: Aykan? Just quick.

ERDEMIR: I don't know whether it would be a yes or no but I think the result will be 52 to 48.

HANNAH: Would a no vote lead to an equally difficult future for Turkey as a yes vote?

ERDEMIR: I think it would be more difficult for Erdoğan than Turkey. Then, it will be the beginning of a new chapter for Erdoğan, not in Turkish politics but within the AKP.

HANNAH: Yeah. The AKP. Interesting.

Okay. We're going to open it up. Yes, please. Wait for a mic, identify yourself please and right here in the front. If we can keep it to a question, a short comment.

CIDDI: Sure. Just a short comment and a question for Aykan, if I may. Thank you for ...

HANNAH: Just identify yourself.

CIDDI: Thank you for your book which I actually read last week.

ERDEMIR: Introduce yourself.

CIDDI: Is it working?

HANNAH: Yes. It's working but just tell us who you are.

CIDDI: Oh, I'm Sinan Ciddi from Georgetown University.

ERDEMIR: We know who you are but still.

CIDDI: Sorry. Thank you for answering some difficult questions. The short comment would be up until now, this particularly goes to Simon's point, Erdoğan has always lead the AKP in the polls, his presidential was 52% to the AKP's 40 something odd in the last elections.

Some of the more reliable polling out there in Turkey, two or three institutions would seem to suggest that despite that positive overwhelming campaign that Erdoğan is not getting his way, this seems to be a bridge too far, even discontent with an AKP loyalist, voters within the MHP. There seems to be an overwhelming barrage of public opinion that he's not able to penetrate. That could be a problem. The question for Aykan is based on your background. Let's assume a no vote comes. What is the CHP's position? Is there a strategy in place in terms of how to capitalize upon it if there is one? Thank you.

ERDEMIR: I think in the run-up to the referendum, Turkey's main opposition party stated its goal. They said, "What we really need ..." and they actually drafted a bill, a stronger parliamentary system. The game plan for CHP is to solve some of the shortcomings in the parliamentary system that John alluded to and, in fact, those are the shortcoming or "the inefficiencies" that Erdoğan and others before him have used as pretext to call for a very strong centralized executive presidency.

I think ultimately the task for Turkey and not just for the main opposition is, let's assume there's a no vote, where to move from here? How does Turkey strengthen both the state, as Simon said. When I say a stronger state, I mean a more effective apparatus but more importantly, stronger governance because that's one thing I think the Turkish public often misses, a strong leader does not mean strong governance. That's why Turkey's Public Tender Law has been revised over 100 times under the AKP because it's horrible governance. Every other month, we have to fix something because you never do the committee work, because you never do consensus building, because you never consult with a wide range of experts. Although you might dictate your will overnight but all your bills and legislation end up being ineffective, imperfect, incomplete.

I think the key question for both the HDP, CHP, and also for the dissidents in MHP is how to strengthen governance in the aftermath of a no vote.

HANNAH: We go here to Amberin.

ZAMAN: Amberin Zaman, Turkish journalist. I have a question for all of you, actually. You spoke of the weakness of the Turkish state. Are you suggesting that Turkey could become a failed state? You spoke about the demons that were unleashed by this polarization. Could we see civil conflict in tandem with the failure of the Turkish state and its eventual dismemberment?

HANNAH: Simon, why don't you start?

WALDMAN: Okay. No. The short answer to your question is no. I do not see Turkey becoming a failed state whatsoever. If we look at the different kind of criteria of what makes a failed state, what makes a weak state? These are all very much contested terminology. Not only would it not become a failed state, it's not even the weakest state in the region.

What I think is important to recognize, though, is that Turkey does fit the criteria of many aspects of a weak state. It's by stripping away these constructions, these hopes, these optimism that Turkey is a rising democracy or an embattled democracy, that it could be this bridge between east and west. It could be a model for the Muslim world to emulate. Those have to be stripped away and to understand Turkey exactly how it looks.

Yes, in terms of bad governance, it's certainly there. It's not the worst governance. Emre's been in Africa doing research. From what he tells me, Turkey in comparison is like Sweden but nevertheless, compared to Europe, Turkey's in bad shape.

One of the other aspects of this is this continued crisis of legitimacy which the AKP, especially and Erdoğan constantly have to address. In other words, 50% of the Turkish population never believed that Erdoğan didn't have an Islamic agenda. Fifty percent of the population. If you look at the different policies that Erdoğan and the AKP had enacted, whether that's closer relations with the European Union. That was mainly about shoring up domestic legitimacy, trying to convince the population and also the international community that he was not authoritarian and not an Islamist. It's by understanding Turkey as fitting the criteria as a weak state that you start to understand these different policies.

If I can quickly refer to your point that you made. I think it's typical that when a leader has been around for such a long time, there is a decline in his or her popularity. I think what may happen, especially after this referendum, if you like, is a process of and I don't want to get too theoretical of what Max Weber, the German sociologist, called the routinization of charisma. In other words, when you have this charismatic figure emerge and is a popular figure, it's all great. They're able to maintain their rule but there comes a point where it gets dull, it gets boring, and it causes discontent. When that discontent happens, then the ruling figure tries to routinize this charisma. In other words, instill it in institutions create myths and the mythology part is very interesting because what we saw last July in the attempted coup and the period after was a new mythology being built around Erdoğan and the people together resisting this attempted coup. This is a deliberate constructed attempt to shore up his rule.

HANNAH: Very good.

Emre, did you want to get in on this on the question of failed state or not?

CALISKAN: No. He could follow up, actually.

HANNAH: Okay. Let me go in the back to David Pollock first and here to Morrie Amitay and then to Laurie.

POLLOCK: Thanks very much. Very interesting. David Pollock from The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. I want to ask about two aspects of the Kurdish issue. One is, it seems like about half of the Kurdish electorate votes for pro-Kurdish parties and the other half doesn't. Erdoğan is actually looking for electoral support, even in the referendum from Kurdish voters, apparently. I don't know if it's all just a charade when he goes to Diyarbakır or whether there's something to it but I'd be very interested in a comment about that and how that relates to the possibility of resolving the Kurdish question or whatever you want to call it without reference to Kurdish nationalism or Kurdish ethnic rights. In other words, based on Islamic values or social peace or integration or something like that and support for Erdoğan.

The flip side of that, in a way, is the possibility that someday, under Erdoğan or maybe somebody else, that Turkish relations with the PYD in Syria could become something like Turkish relations with the KRG in Iraq. Is it possible to imagine a future in which Turkey accept Kurdish autonomy, not in its own country, unfortunately, but at least across the border?

HANNAH: Emre?

CALISKAN: Okay, yeah. In our book, we had a chapter about Kurdish opening. We don't call peace process. We call Waltz of Öcalan, actually.

WALDMAN: Yeah. The Waltz with Öcalan.

CALISKAN: Yeah. We had a chance to talk to very influential people from both side who represent Kurds and Turks. I think we should be reminded this is a problem. The Kurdish issue is a problem not only affecting Turkey but affecting the region by itself. Another way of saying, in my opinion, Turkey cannot solve Kurdish problem without actually solution in Iraq, in Syria, and in Iran. Given the conditions in the region, this seems quite difficult. Also we should be reminded, HDP has been representing the Kurdish votes.

But on the other side, AKP also has been issued so many votes from the Kurdish conservative groups. Diyarbakır is not the biggest Kurdish city. Istanbul is the biggest Kurdish city. Actually, the things are much more complicated, I think, than we first see.

Kurdish voters, even the conservative Kurds, started to vote for HDP and this was quite appealing. This was a successful, I would say, charismatic Demirtas. Not only Kurds but also liberals voted for HDP but after the November election in 2015, this approach kind of has been missed out.

And when we have interviews with the HDP members, just after the election, 15th of June. They said actually there was a discontent within the party for liberals or who doesn't represent Kurdish movement because it was a coalition with the LGBT movements, liberals and other groups but this discontent came up after the election but amongst the more hardline Kurdish groups: Why do we have two or more Armenian background MP than a Kurdish MP?

I think the future of Kurdish question is quite complicated, not only versus Erdoğan or HDP but also Kurdish people, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

HANNAH: Akyan, can I ask you to get in on this question of future policy toward the Syria Kurds and the YPG in particular, whether there's any reason for hope or cause for hope that we can replicate what happened in Iraq?

ERDEMIR: Actually, there was an interesting hint by one of the senior advisors of Erdoğan, İlnur Çevik, who reminded that conflicting relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurds. Then, he reminded that we could turn that into a pragmatic relationship with the KRG. He suggested that that might end up being the case with the PYD. That wasn't that well received. That didn't become very popular in Turkey but I think it shows us that even behind the walls of Erdoğan's palace, which we know is a very tight knit, not necessarily a very open space for debate, these issues are being discussed.

We need to have precedent, meaning although today, Ankara seems to be especially in the run-up to the referendum seems to be very nationalistic, very hardliner, we have to realize that it was the same AKP government that worked with not only PYD but also YPG during the three-month shrine operation because it was in coordination with the Kurdish forces, there that Turkey moved an important shrine from ISIS-held territory back to the Turkish border. Yes, there was one Turkish officer who died but it was because of an accident. Ultimately, it was the Kurdish, let's say, protection, it was the pragmatic agreement between Ankara and Syrian Kurds that allowed Turkey to pull that operation off. Turkey can be, meaning Ankara can be, pragmatic but it depends on the will.

HANNAH: Yeah. Just to follow up quickly. Is that a place where you think US policy could, at least at the margins, make a helpful difference in encouraging both sides to come together a little more?

ERDEMIR: I think both the EU and the US have a major role to play. We know that EU is quite introverted these days and they don't necessarily do the heavy lifting, no offense there but no, you're Brexit. That's fine. That's fine. It no longer concerns you, Simon.

But I think the role is this. Turkey allies should remind Turkey that this issue can only be settled once and for all, as Emre said, in all the parts. That is, it requires incorporation of Kurds at home and peace process. It requires a deepening of the pragmatic relationship with the KRG. It requires development of new pragmatic relations. I think Turkey needs friends to remind it that that the HDP is an ally to Ankara in the fight against the PKK. I know this sound controversial for many in Ankara but there are many in Erdoğan's close circle who know this for a fact and who have used it to the Turkish government's advantage because the more you pull the Kurdish youth to democratic politics, the more you basically steal them away from the zone of influence of the militants and the armed groups.

HANNAH: Simon, you want to just say something quickly?

WALDMAN: I just wanted to just add, I think I sympathize with the nature of your question. This is something that Emre and I discuss. When you look at Turkish policy towards Syria, had there been some kind of progress in the process, we won't call it peace process but the

process with the PKK, then of course, if you look at Northern Syria, Turkey would have been in a very good and strong position with alliances with the PYD. That didn't happen. It's important to understand why that didn't happen. It didn't happen because Turkey wants to have this peace process in the end but would only engage in the process where they are the dominant power. They don't want to discuss and debate in the terms which are equal to that of the PKK. With the rise of the PYV in northern Syria, the power balance just changed.

In other words, the PKK and the Kurds and just basically had an upper hand. That put Turkey in a disadvantage and they didn't want to proceed along those lines but there's another things that's happening today when we look at the referendum that's coming up. Within the southeast of Turkey, it resembles, again, a war zone. The reports that I'm reading, I would like to get out to Diyarbakır and those areas myself. It's just not safe and my wife would kill me if I tried to go, as opposed to what happens there.

But we're talking around three to four, even 500,000 people internally displaced. How that would affect the referendum or for them to be able to vote is another question. We're talking about perhaps up to a couple of thousand people who are dead. If there is going to be some kind of process to heal the rifts, it's going to, one, take a long time, and if it's going to be done, one of the problems about the previous process was there was not a strong mechanism for really healing old wounds and what was done was quite superficial but this takes a lot of time and it's not going to happen in time for it to really properly effect what happens in Syria but of course some would disagree with me.

HANNAH: Here in the middle. Morrie Amitay, please.

AMITAY: My question has to do with the integrity of the election. Are we sure it's going to be free and fair election?

HANNAH: Who wants it?

ERDEMIR: I can.

WALDMAN: Do we all want to do it?

ERDEMIR: You're coming from Istanbul.

WALDMAN: I'm coming from Istanbul and my impression so far is it will be free but unfair and especially in terms of reading the reports of international observers from previous elections who have criticized Turkey based on having an unfair means of communication in terms of the campaigning process where state resources or funds are used for the campaign of the AKP or Erdoğan or the yes vote. Turkey has not learned its lessons. It's just closed its ears. If anything, has made it worse.

For example, private broadcasters in Turkey which are unfair in their coverage of the referendum campaigns are not going to be fined. That was a measure that was taken while

Turkey was under the state of emergency. What that means is that they will be promoting the yes campaign.

We've just recently had in Turkey a movie which has come out, a biopic of the life of Tayyip Erdoğan. We're seeing all over the streets of Turkey's cities, yes campaigns, yes billboards, posters, adverts on every spot in Turkey you can possibly imagine. It's almost like it's the Rio carnival for the yes campaign. You have to look very, very hard to find a no campaign. All this is happening while under state of emergency, despite warnings from the international community saying, "This is not a healthy time to have such a referendum," but still it's gone ahead. Will the votes be counted correctly? Probably but the campaigning process itself was grossly and has been grossly unfair.

HANNAH: Aykan, did you just want to give those statistic that you had mentioned to me about coverage and ...

ERDEMIR: Yes. I just got the statistics from TRT, that's Turkey's official channel. They have 20% the coverage for the AKP that they have for the main opposition, CHP. You can imagine, that's 200 times the coverage they gave to the pro-Kurdish HDP. This excludes Erdoğan's own time because technically, he is an impartial president so he has his own air time. That's one thing but going back to whether there will be an attempt to steal the votes, I always say there's roughly one to three percent possibility of stealing votes. In this referendum, I think the ballot boxes to watch are those areas, those sub-provinces where MHP plus AKP vote reaches 90%. For example, parts of Erzurum, parts of Yozgat, meaning those ballot boxes where you're not likely to get an HDP or a CHP observer.

You will say, two-thirds of MHP voters are against the referendum but it doesn't matter. Bahçeli calls the shots on the MHP observers. He will hand pick pro-Erdoğan MHP observers. There will be a number of ballot boxes where there will only be yes observers and no observers. As we know from statistical studies before, in those kind of problematic ballot boxes, that's where you get these outlier results. For example, where you get 90% for one or two parties, where you have actually ballot box stuffing. Overall it's very uneven. Let's say, 70, 80% of the ballot boxes could be quite safe, with up to 1% of irregularity but then there are those problem cases where there is gross kind of stuffing of the ballots.

HANNAH: Okay. I want to go right here to ...

MYLROIE: Laurie Mylroie, Kurdistan 24. Earlier this week, I heard another author with work on Turkey speaking in very similar tones to you about the nature of what's going on in Turkey or in Erdoğan's leadership. Among his points was that it is imprudent of the United States to rely so heavily on Incirlik Air Base for its operations against ISIS and for the presence in the region. Is that a perspective that you would be sympathetic to?

HANNAH: Simon, Emre?

WALDMAN: Do you want to go fir- I don't have to.

CALISKAN: You go first. It's okay.

WALDMAN: The short answer is yes. I think that's the case. I don't think that's recent though. I think that from 2003, that's something that the United States should have been very much concerned about when it was practically denied by Turkey to use that base in order to conduct operations in Iraq. Yet, I think in many respects, the United States does depend a little bit too heavily on Turkish bases but at the same time, the consequences of not using them are, at the moment, outweighing the consequences of using them, if that makes sense.

In other words, it's a negative. The diplomatic fall out if the United States were to stop using Turkish bases and locating them elsewhere, perhaps in northern Iraq or other places, the consequences of that are higher than the benefits. It's a very negative reason as to why the United States should continue to use those bases but they should prepare for the possibility of alternative places to launch operations from in the future.

HANNAH: I'd be remiss if I didn't put in a plug for recent FDD study Covering ..

ERDEMIR: Covering the Bases.

HANNAH: .. the Bases. I think which actually examines this question and tried to offer some contingency possibilities for US basing. I'm going to have to move. There was, yes, this woman right here.

QUESTION: Can the panelists speak to the issue of the impact of the domestic economy on the probable vote, please?

CALISKAN: I can.

HANNAH: Emre, yeah.

CALISKAN: You?

ERDEMIR: Yeah. Go ahead.

CALISKAN: One of the biggest successes of Erdoğan is actually management of economy. Turks are not very much capable of managing economy historically. Now that AKP came to power, Turkish GDP get three times bigger compared to 2002. Turkish growth has been outstanding but also there's a slowdown of economy and now this. Turkey's age average is 29. It's a very young population. Each year, there are 400,000 people joining workforce. That means Turkey should grow 5% to accommodate newcomers. In order for Turkey should grow 5%, EU should grow 2% minimum because EU is the biggest trade partner of Turkey. Almost 60, 63% of Turkish export go to European countries.

The projections today, Turkey is going to grow 2% this year and 1.8% next year. This is all the Goldman Sachs projections. Given the conditions and Erdoğan's success has always been tied with economic developments in Turkey. It is true. He is one of the most popular leader of

Turkey, thanks to his economic policies. During this time, social services, transportation and health management had been much better than before. People not only vote for Erdoğan because he's charismatic but also the people who, his vote base, they believe to vote for him because he changed the lives of these people. The question is he going to manage to change these lives? When the economy would actually be negatively impacted?

We had a talk in Oxford like three, four months ago. I went off to person who came to talk was the IMF representative who had to deal with Turkey in 2001 financial crisis. What he actually points out was very interesting. He said in 2001, Turkey had a financial crisis. We managed to give loans to Turkey, to actually insure the public debt is going to be maintained but today, Turkey's facing private debts. The problem that how are you, how is Erdoğan going to manage the economy if there's a high number of private debt.

There's a new attempt from the government to establish Varlık Fonu, Turkey Wealth Fund, to bring all the public companies together but then the problem is who's going to manage this? Now, you look at the people who are going to manage the new fund are the people who have been actually blamed for the mismanagement of the economy. The economy and the biggest problem for Erdoğan is not only he's authoritarian but also the country, the bureaucracy, the governance as Mr. Erdemir said, are run by the people who are not even capable of doing this business.

ERDEMİR: I need to add a caveat. Yes, I do agree all about Erdoğan's roads and hospitals and services but we have to keep one thing in mind. When the generals messed up the Turkish economy big time in 1980 during a coup d'état, Turkey was the 16th largest economy in the world. Right now, Turkey is the 18th economy in the world. It's also about perception management. Turkey is losing on the relative scale. Among the emerging markets, there are others that are doing better.

Even if we get the worst benchmark ever, the 1980 coup, Turkey's slipping behind. Second, Turkey is in a middle-income trap since 2008. It's basically roughly \$10,000 per capita income and Turkey is not moving an inch forward. It's slipping back. The economy since 2008 is actually not doing well.

Three, Turkey received over \$600 billion of FDI. What we have been enjoying, the road, the buildings, is this one-time cash influx because there was abundant liquidity in the world. Turkey became a EU accession country. We had this abundant cash coming in. Just like the Greeks, with no offenses to our Greek friends in the audience, we had a dolce vita, just like they did. We had our own moment.

Final point, Erdoğan was such a lucky guy. That also coincided with Turkey's demographic window of opportunity which most countries get only for 20 years in their life. This is that narrow window when most of your population is member of the labor force, they're not retirees, they're not pensioners, they're not children but they are basically taxpayers. That also coincided with Erdoğan. Now, all of those stories are coming to an end. My prediction on April 17th, buckle up, get ready for the impact. What I mean by that is not only private debts and

corporations going bankrupt but also a run on the banks and possibly even Erdoğan taking over people's FX accounts.

HANNAH: Okay. Everybody run out and call your broker. Yes. Right here in the middle. Let's see if we can get two in very, very quickly. Right next to each other.

EPSTEIN: I'll do my best. Jason Epstein, Southfive Strategies. Thanks to all the panelists.

Aykan, just following up what you just said, I'm still a little unclear. Say the referendum goes down. Can you give the scenario what's to prevent snap elections and why couldn't Erdoğan or why couldn't AKP end up with a supermajority?

HANNAH: Then, right next to you, right? There's one more question. Let's do that quickly.

RUVELSON: Elliott Ruvelson, SAIS. You had talked about the alliance between Bahçeli and Erdoğan. I wanted to know if you thought that would have ramifications on diplomatic efforts, particularly Cyprus but also the incorporation of Eastern Mediterranean natural gas into the gas hub.

HANNAH: Okay. First one, Aykan.

ERDEMIR: Snap elections. Actually, one of the senior advisors once again said, "If it's a no vote, it doesn't mean the presidential agenda is off the table. What it really means is there can be snap elections." Erdoğan, again, is being a mastermind. He hedged his bets. Most people miss this. If he wins the referendum, he wins it. If he loses the referendum, he destroys the MHP and he gets a supermajority. He can push the same amendment with this two-thirds majority. If he can also push the HDP below the threshold, he will convert Turkey into a two-party system. He will be, again, an elected king. I think he has hedged his bets. From this perspective, it's a lose-lose for Turkey.

HANNAH: Simon or Emre, quickly on this second issue of the Eastern Mediterranean?

CALISKAN: Erdoğan is playing his national sentiment for the referendum so he needs Bahçeli's support for nationalist votes. Think about diplomatic ties between Turkey and Germany and Turkey and Netherlands also shows that he's playing very well. I talked to one of the AKPs, one of the officials. They said, before the referendum, before the crisis with the Netherlands, the yes votes among the National Outlook Movement, it was 40%. Now, it's 60% and for no votes in among the nationalists in Europe, they were 80% against. Now they are 60% against.

Basically, this also not only targeted to Turkish people in Turkey but also they are trying to target the Turkish people living in Europe who are going to vote in the referendum but the problem is here. The damage is going to stay there. For example, one of the Bulgarian diplomat that I had meeting just two days before here, he said in 1989, we had difficult times, we tried to establish good relations between two countries and we thought we did so, but now, in Bulgarian local elections, Turkish transportation minister say Turkish people would vote for the Turkish

party. He said, "Why did they do in public? They could do it privately and they didn't." Now, everybody who is working with Turkey, Turkish foreign ministry or Turkish party are being followed by Bulgarian security services. He plays to nation's sentiment but how he's going to be damaged and how he is going to manage is another question.

HANNAH: Can anybody speak to this issue of referendum and Cyprus' referendum and natural gas and ...

WALDMAN: Yeah. I don't think that's really the case in terms of the MHP. This is their moment. This is their moment right now where they can actually be or they thought they could be a power broker but that ends after the referendum, whether it's the yes vote or the no vote. If it's a yes vote, they're leading themselves into irrelevance because they're going to be dominated by Erdoğan. If it's a no, then it's going to be the disintegration of the MHP. Can they influence policy? No, they had perhaps at most, two, maybe three months to do it.

HANNAH: Yeah. Try one last time. Aykan, Cyprus and the Eastern-led oil and gas?

ERDEMİR: Yeah. Let's end on an optimistic note, on a positive note. Earlier today, the Greek Cyprus, by a narrow vote, repealed the Enosis bill which was blocking the peace talks. All my Turkish and Greek Cypriot fiends, they're just waiting for the referendum to be over. They see it as a horrible storm. Once the storm is over, they hope to get back to it. And so are some in Israel, they're hoping this will be a moment to revive peace talks, pipeline deals.

Let's assume that at least one consequence of the referendum, no matter what the result is will be for others to continue their reconciliation talks. This is as best as we can get.

HANNAH: Very good. Thank you. I've got to bring it to a close. Please, everybody, join me in thanking our guests. Thank you, all of you. We'll see you next time. Thank you. Thanks.

ERDEMİR: Thank you very much.

HANNAH: Thank you. That was terrific.