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TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION: A NEW HOPE?

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. KIRISCI: Good afternoon to you all. I'm Kemal Kirisci, the TUSIAD Senior Fellow leading the Turkey project here at Brookings. We are well aware that there are very good competing events on Turkey today elsewhere in Washington, D.C., so we're very grateful that you're here. And I'm hoping that this will be an event that will make your presence worthwhile here.

We are meeting at, may I say, historic times. You may have just heard that two -- luckily only small -- explosions have occurred in Ankara yesterday, just two days before the long-awaited announcement from Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, who is currently in prison on the island of Imrali in Istanbul.

I do not have any intentions of going into details of the Kurdish question but, nevertheless, I wanted to just make a few broad observations on how we have come where we are, before I turn the floor to the panelists.

I do believe, as someone who has studied the problem for awhile, we are at a historic crossroads. We are talking about a country that until just about two decades ago denied the actual existence of Kurds, and the Kurdish identity. Early '80s, we saw the beginning of a long period of violence. When the European Union finally decided to engage Turkey as a candidate country for membership in 1999, it was also the year when Abdullah Öcalan was apprehended and sentenced -- first, to death, but because of the EU process, the death sentence was commuted to a life one. And together with that, Turkey embarked upon a reform process that's so modest, but important reforms to support Kurdish cultural rights' being introduced. This was roughly the early 2000s up to mid-2000s.

And then the current prime minister of Turkey seemed determined to address the Kurdish problem -- to take, if you wish, the bull from its horns, approach it

from a political perspective. In the summer of 2009 we saw the launching of what came to be known, translation from Turkish the "democratic opening." However, that opening very quickly fizzled away when this incident at the Habur border crossing with Iraq occurred, that saw the return of PKK militants. But the manner in which they returned back to Turkey and, it was hoped, into regular politics unleashed a nationalist backlash in Turkey.

I think this is the point at which I'm going to stop, because our first speaker, Aliza Marcus, that I'm sure you are very familiar with from her columns, particularly on the Kurdish question, in leading international newspapers -- but, much more importantly, her book *Blood and Belief* that focuses on the Kurdish nationalist struggle -- will address precisely what is going on today: How did we come where we are? What are the details of the negotiation process that's going on. And we agreed that Aliza will take a somewhat critical, if not maybe a bit cynical, view of the negotiations process.

Our next speaker will be Ömer Taspinar. I need not introduce him to you. You're very familiar with Ömer. Ömer is going to try to challenge Aliza's position --

MS. MARCUS: And fail.

MR. KIRISCI: -- and maybe take a position somewhat a bit more closer to mine, that this is a historic moment. And, hopefully, on this occasion, a breakthrough will -- or at least a breakthrough as a process that might bring us to -- I find "resolution" a very difficult, tough word to use, but somewhere closer to a solution of the Kurdish problem.

And, lastly, Gönül Tol, from the Middle Eastern Studies Institute, who leads the Turkish studies program, and teaches at George Washington University. Gönül writes extensively on a very fascinating aspect of the Kurdish issue in Turkey right now,

Turkey's relations with northern Iraq, the Kurdish regional government. And I think it would be very difficult to understand, appreciate, comprehend where we actually are today without looking at Turkey's relations with the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq.

So, I don't wish to take up any more of your time. I'd like to turn the floor to Aliza.

Aliza, we have 10, 12 minutes to take a critical view of what's going on. Thank you, Aliza.

MS. MARCUS: Thank you, Kemal.

Tomorrow Abdullah Öcalan is supposed to issue a message via BDP that may or may not call for a cease-fire and some sort of phased withdrawal. This is a very risky time for analysts like myself to actually say anything because, for once, you can hold me to a standard, did I get it right or did I get it wrong? Which is why, perhaps, one reason I don't want to discuss the actual messages, the contents of the message, although I will touch on them.

But I want to talk about the dangers I see in this process, and my opinion, which is that Erdogan has really tried to stage-manage this process -- that, essentially, he's trying to come to an accommodation, as opposed to actually negotiate and come to a peace deal. And what I think Erdogan is missing, what the prime minister is missing right now, is the point is you don't get a deal on the cheap. The Kurdish problem is something that has been going on now, in one form another, for nearly a century -- really, you know, even before the Turkish Republic was formed.

The PKK is actually in a very strong position. Militarily, it did very well last year. If anything, there was almost a stalemate between the PKK and the Turkish military, in terms of attacks and casualties. The group remains well financed, it's well

equipped. It has no problem getting new recruits. What's been going on in Syria, which I think Gönül will touch on more, has really strengthened the PKK because, really, for once, on the ground it's managing territory, and it's gaining both support, experience, and a certain international legitimacy from that. And at the same time, Kurds in Turkey are highly politicized now. They've had years to develop real political outlook.

So we don't know exactly what Öcalan's message will be tomorrow, but one thing we do know is that whether or not it reflects actual Kurdish demands, it actually reflects what Turkish intelligence and what the prime minister want. And this, to me, doesn't bode well for a successful peace deal.

Why do I say that it reflects their views for sure? Because they've stage-managed this. They've gone out of their way to choose Öcalan as a negotiating partner, as opposed to BDP, which is a legitimate representative, elective representative of the Kurds. Erdogan has gone out of his way to actually elevate Öcalan, to almost recreate him in the dictatorial role that he held when he was running the PKK from Syria, in order to make it easier for Erdogan, in my opinion, to reach an accommodation that would suit the prime minister.

Why does he do this? Because Öcalan, in many ways, is seen as easier to manipulate. Öcalan is isolated. He has limited information about what's going on. He has limited contact with people on the group, with political representatives, with Kurds -- and because Öcalan isn't actually the experienced negotiator that he thinks he is. He's never been a real politician, and he doesn't actually represent people's mass demands in the same way that, you could argue, BDP does -- and because, I think, ultimately, in 1999, Öcalan made clear that one of his main interests was getting out of prison. And so this, in many ways, was the perfect negotiator for the prime minister.

In some ways it's shocking, given the depth of the problem. Remember, this is a problem that has legal ramifications, constitutional issues, military issues. You could have thought that Erdogan would have chosen a more experienced, more representative interlocutor, but he didn't.

So, in my opinion, instead of choosing somebody, a group, that could produce a democratic solution for the Kurds, that could actually represent their demands, he sought to undermine legal representatives, the BDP. He did a very good job of weakening the PKK's political structure on the ground, through the mass arrests of the KCK. And he also, at the same time, decimated, in some ways, the Kurdish, the non-PKK Kurdish activist and intellectual class through the mass arrests over the past three years, of human rights members, lawyers, politicians and others.

Even the delegations that have visited Öcalan over the past few months have been stage-managed by the prime minister. There's been every attempt made to cut any ability for these delegations to negotiate. The people have been chosen by Erdogan. He switched them around. There's been no continuity. In short, what Erdogan has wanted and gotten is an interlocutor with limited experience, limited contact, a dictatorial approach to politics and how you make decisions, and a real interest in doing what it takes to get out of jail.

But tomorrow there's going to be an announcement, and this changes the dynamics slightly. We know it's going to include a cease-fire. I mean, I think it's pretty safe to say that. And it's very likely that it will include some sort of plans for a future phased-withdrawal of the PKK.

From Erdogan's side, this looks like a huge victor. And the Turkish media, for sure, has already hailed it as such. But it will only be a victory if Erdogan manages to continue with this process, and if it develops into a further dialogue. And the

fact is that Öcalan, as erratic as he is, and as much as he's focused on his own personal situation, he's laid out certain expectations, and he has made clear that, in one form or another, the parliament needs to take the next steps to move this process forward.

And I hope that Erdogan understands that Öcalan's popularity and authority really rest on his ability to continue to deliver. This is some thing Öcalan knows, and it's something that in some ways, despite what I've said earlier, does keep him as an honest interlocutor. But there's only so much he can give up before he loses his authority. And the prime minister has to be careful, in my opinion, not to push too far.

So the challenge for Erdogan now, for the Turkish parliament, is to show it can grapple with the underlying causes. Because Öcalan is going to make, in the most likelihood, a vague, general statement, and put the ball next in parliament's court, as it were, for parliament to set up some sort of system that would allow a phased withdrawal, and to take the next legal reforms that are needed to somehow better integrate Kurds and answer their demands.

And this means that the prime minister has to take BDP as a partner. Because short of giving Öcalan a seat in parliament as an AKP member, that's all he has right now. And this means he needs to look, he will have to look, and that BDP, I believe, will push this at the underlying causes.

What are those? They're legal changes that will give Kurds more equality. They're constitutional changes that will remove certain blocks on Kurdish equality. They're calls for self-rule that have been made, both on the ground from Kurds, and from BDP, and, in 2009, in Öcalan's own road map that laid out very clearly a road map for self-rule.

At the same time, there's going to be a need for free political activities, activities that are nonviolent, that don't call for any overthrow of the state, that would, in essence, allow the PKK to enter as a legal political party.

At the same what are other underlying issues? Release of prisoners, both the PKK prisoners -- who may number up to 10,000 -- and KCK prisoners, and an honorable return for PKK.

These are the issues that have to be addressed for a permanent and a fair settlement. And it doesn't matter how much the Turkish government, prime minister, or Öcalan would like or be willing to settle for something else. The problem won't go away and won't be settled without these being answered.

Erdogan has touched on certain changes recently, over the past few months. As you know, there have been a few dozen people released from the KCK trials. They're still on trial, but they've been released from prison, which is a nice public relations step. There's been the completion of the fourth judicial package, reform package, which makes some changes in how you can judge people for alleged terrorist activity.

Unfortunately, they don't go very far. And I think, on the ground, the constitution still remains very top-heavy. There hasn't been, it's unclear what sort of changes, if any, Erdogan is in favor of there. And Erdogan, himself, has shown a remarkable intolerance for free speech. I'd like to just remind everybody about what happened to Hasan Cemal, recently, and how he was essentially forced -- he was forced out of Milyat, basically because the prime minister didn't like what he had written. This isn't the sort of tolerance that is going to allow the free speech needed to reach a permanent agreement.

Let me just quickly go -- what are the gains for Erdogan for doing this? Why is he going even after this? This is something Ömer will touch on in more detail.

You've got the presidential race in 2014. Erdogan would like BDP support for changes that would give the president's post more prominence. And at the same time, there are regional issues. And I actually believe he wants to end this. I don't doubt his sincerity that he wants an end to the war. I just doubt his ability to reach, and to understand what needs to be done on the Kurdish side.

And there are huge risks, now that Erdogan has started this. First of all, a poorly thought out withdrawal of PKK forces from the southeast leaves a vacuum, a vacuum that can be filled either by the village guards, who are armed, and angry, and have all sorts of conflicts with local people. A combination of a poorly thought withdrawal with, let's say, a breakdown in the peace process could strengthen the Turkish Hezbollah. I met with their legal representative last year in Turkey. He runs an association with Diyarbakir. And I was surprised at how nationalistic he was in Kurdish terms. They have really changes their rhetoric. In some ways they sound even more nationalistic than the PKK at times. Plus, they're arming themselves.

This is a huge danger. They could fill this vacuum. And having Kurdish Hezbollah running around the southeast would be a big problem.

At the same time, a lack of movement, combined with a cease-fire, could lead, some, a possible split in the PKK -- young, radical members of the PKK, who don't necessarily have the same allegiance to Öcalan as the first and second generation, coupled with a sort of disaffected youth in the southeast, who have shown themselves to be hard to control in some demonstrations over the past few years, you could have the potential for a split. Remember, in 1999, you did have some people split off. You did have attempts to form alternate groups. It broke down in the end, but nonetheless, there have been examples of this. And I think there is more of a danger now than any time in the past.

And, finally, collapse of a peace deal could lead to renewed fighting -- and, really, much bigger, all over Turkey. And that's a big danger.

So, Erdogan started something. And it may look good, but he's really got to see it to the end, and see it to an end in a way that satisfies Kurds -- doesn't just satisfy his interests.

And I just want to say that I don't want to sound like I'm belittling what the prime minister is doing. I actually give him credit for this. And I think he's doing it at great personal risk to himself, and political risk.

But, you know what? This isn't something that can be solved with half measures. And he stood back from Habur, and he stood back from Oslo. And I don't think there's a third opportunity right now to stand back and recover.

And that's it.

MR. KIRISCI: Well, Aliza, very convincing presentation there.

I think there's a lot to be said concerning observations of Aliza. But still, I'd like to turn to Ömer, whether he might be able to salvage something a little bit more promising from this picture that Aliza has drawn for us.

MR. TASPINAR: Thank you, Kemal. It's hard to challenge Aliza's points, because they make sense.

But let's start with an analysis of the last two years. I think we are all familiar that the prime minister basically wants to become the president of the republic, so he has a plan to change the constitution, and to basically switch to a semi-presidential system. And he wants to become the president. And that's the plan for 2014.

And public opinion in Turkey, overall, considers the Kurdish problem as the most important problem. But because there has been bloodshed in the last two years, I think, overall, we have a situation where tackling the Kurdish problem at a time

when the PKK is very strong, at the time where there is bloodshed, is not a political winner for Erdogan.

A lot of people thought that he would just play it safe, and not address the Kurdish issue until 2014 -- go for, basically, the security-oriented approach, not talk to the PKK, not engage in dialogue, not open another Oslo-like dialogue process after what happened in 2009. In 2009, with the Habur border incident, Erdogan witnessed that whenever there is a disappointment, whenever there are high expectations, and when there is a crisis, it's actually the nationalists in both camps that end up winning. MHP, for instance, benefitted greatly from the Habur incident, and the lesson for Erdogan was basically to put on the brakes. He continued, to some degree, dialogues with the PKK, but his goal was very simple: to stop the bloodshed, to stop, basically, violence.

And his tactic -- and that's where he's a tactical genius, in my opinion, is to essentially create a situation where he can address the root causes of the problem. The root cause of the problem is essentially more democratization -- to talk about federalism, to talk about decentralization, to talk about culture rights, language reform, constitutional reforms. But he realizes that he cannot do all this as long as there is bloodshed, as long as there is PKK violence.

So his top priority has become a cease-fire, disarmament of PKK, and to be able to address all these issues, the structural factors, once he has a deal with the PKK, once there is law and order, once there is some calm. And I don't think he's concerned about the vacuum that Aliza is talking about, because he believes that the AKP, his government, is strong enough to fill the vacuum once the PKK withdraws. He believes that the second most important actor in the region is his own political party. The only rival is BDP and the PKK.

So, in many ways, he's taking a very serious risk, at the time when the MHP, the CHP, the nationalists, the secularists, the Kemalists' camp is very much opposed to this deal, is very much opposed to multiculturalism, is very much opposed to decentralization, he's willing to go that route. But first he needs to have a deal with the PKK which stops the violence.

And his big question mark was whether Abdullah Öcalan is the right person to talk to. Why doesn't he go to the BDP?

Well, here, in this very room, we had the BDP leadership, Selahattin Demirtaş, last year. And I asked him the question: The BDP is like Sinn Féin to IRA -- and that's the analogy we often use in Washington. And he said that the analogy is not right, because Sinn Féin has leverage over IRA, he said. He said, "We don't have leverage over PKK. It's the PKK that is stronger." He basically made it clear that Abdullah Öcalan calls the shots. And it's very hard for him to do something against Abdullah Öcalan. Despite the fact that he's in jail, despite the fact that he doesn't have access to information, he is someone that manages, still, to exert a considerable amount of control over the movement.

And I think what convinced Erdogan to once again establish dialogue with him was the way he handled the hunger strike situation, the way, basically, he was able to send messages to Pandit, and to Europe, different wings of the PKK, and at least he appeared to be someone that has a semblance of control over the movement. And, more important, both Pandit and Europe did not really challenge the fact that Abdullah Öcalan should be the counterpart. I yet have to see, basically, very strong BDP points saying we need to be the counterpart, not Abdullah Öcalan. They seem to be okay with Abdullah Öcalan being in charge.

So, and the BDP may have also more maximalist imams than Abdullah Öcalan. So, tactically, it makes sense for Erdogan to speak to a weakened leader who is in prison. That's why I mean he is a tactical genius.

But, in many ways, it remains to be seen -- and here I agree with Aliza that the strategic genius is not there. Because the strategic part of this problem, beyond the tactical victory, will be to address the root causes of the Kurdish problem. And the root causes of the Kurdish problem have a lot to do with constitutional change, they have a lot to do with democratization. They have a lot to do with a change in the political culture of Turkey, strengthening of democratic institutions, freedom of speech -- and those are the areas where Erdogan is not very strong.

There seems to be a kind of authoritarianization of Turkey taking place right now. The image of Turkey, in the West, is no longer a country that is in an axis shift towards the East. It's not the Islamization threat that we're talking about, but we're talking about, more and more, about a creeping authoritarianism in Turkey. And here, of course, the absence of an effective opposition is important. The opposition is in disarray.

But you need to have a strong media, a strong civil society to oppose the government. In the absence of the military that used to play the role of a balancer, there is no more opposition in Turkey. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad that the military is out of the picture. The military should not be in the role of playing the balancer. But we need in Turkey a stronger media, a stronger civil society, along with a stronger civilian opposition.

And I think those are the areas where Erdogan is missing. He's very much focused on the security situation. He was a deal with the PKK. And, as always, he basically kicks the can down the road and says, "I will address the democratization problem once I become president," -- once the constitution changes, once I'm in charge fully, I will go to the root causes of the problem. That's post 2014.

Now, we can take him at his word but, obviously, the Kurdish problem right now is the major impediment. And this is why I think the cease-fire matters. If there is a cease-fire, and if there is, really calm in the region for the next year or so, that may create the window of opportunity for structural reforms, for constitutional reform.

And, ideally, one would have hope that he would have addressed these issues earlier, because there's a clear correlation between violence and the absence of democratization. But he decided that he cannot address democratization while there is violence. So he decided to crush the PKK. He realized that the PKK was getting much stronger than it was in the past.

The dynamics in Syria played a major role. He realized that he can't play -- he can't play -- a very active role in foreign policy in the reason because of Turkey's Kurdish problem, because of Iran's and Syria's willingness to play the Kurdish card. He kind of neutralized Iraqi front -- I'm sure Gönül will talk about from all the dynamics -- but I think the crisis in Syria led him to address the PKK issue, and led him to believe that by just crushing the PKK, by just addressing the security issue, he won't be able to solve this.

So he wanted to go for a dialogue with Abdullah Öcalan. And he raised expectations now.

To conclude, I think we're at a very critical time, because there's nothing more dangerous than raised expectations. The Kurds have very high expectations now. Not only do they want cultural rights, but they also want, I think, something that is very similar to federalism. They want what they call "democratic autonomy," which to me sounds like federalism.

And I think the political culture of Turkey, the unitary nature of the Turkish street tradition, is not able, will not be able to address this -- even with a new

constitution. But the days when we could address the Kurdish problem just ending assimilation, giving Kurds cultural rights, giving them the right to have education in Turkish, I think they're done. We're at the point where there's a Kurdish generation in Turkey which has much higher political expectations. And they go beyond multiculturalism. They look at, probably, different type of models. I mean, Turkey should be at the point to talk about, maybe, it's a model like Catalonia in Spain, or different types of federalism.

But we're not there yet. Those are the root causes of the problem. And how Erdogan will be able to address this -- even when there is a cease fire -- to me remains to be seen.

And I'm not very optimistic about his ability to address the root causes, but I'm impressed by his tactical genius of trying to get this cease-fire at the time when he needs a cease-fire, he needs calm, in order to address at least the cultural dimension of the problem.

MR. KIRISCI: Thanks, Ömer. I think you brought us another very interesting perspective, that to the strategic picture, one must also include that the EU is not in the picture anymore. The only time when we saw major reforms that were adopted in Turkey with respect to the Kurdish problem was a time when there was still an EU credible offer for membership to the European Union. And that is also missing, and which additionally complicates the situation there. At the time, there, I completely agree with Ömer that the demands from the Kurdish side have risen in the meantime.

But I'd like to turn to Gönül. A fascinating aspect of this picture here is Erdogan's and his government's relations with the Kurdish regional government, itself -- not to mention that there are now extensive, deep, social, as well as economic and

commercial relations between northern Iraq and Turkey, the kind of relations that maybe only four or five years ago we would have not expected.

Gönül, how do these relations, how this level of integration between Turkey and northern Iraq, at large -- and then this rather close, almost intimate, relationship between the government of Turkey and the regional government in Kurdistan there, impacts on this process.

MS. TOL: Thank you, Kemal. I will be talking about Turkey-KRG relations, but I also want to talk about the Syrian crisis --

MR. KIRISCI: Very good.

MS. TOL: -- and the situation in Syria, which is a very important component of the (inaudible).

In 2009, when the government launched this Kurdish initiative, I think we had the perfect regional context. Turkey had the full support of Syria, full support of Iran and Iraq, and the Kurdistan Regional Government. But due to the domestic context, it was a PR failure, so there was problems, I think, domestically, and Turkish society was not really -- or the actors, political actors, were not really ready for the opening, and the opening failed.

And now what we have is now it's the other way around. I think despite everything Aliza raised -- I agree with most of them -- there are problems at the domestic level, but I think we still have reasons to be optimistic at the domestic level. But regionally, I think it's a mess. And the Arab Spring changed everything. It reshuffled the strategic cards.

And, especially, I think, the Syrian crisis has challenged the (inaudible) in three ways. And I think the first one is scholars have been talking about how the Syrian crisis regionalized the PKK issue. But I think the PKK has always been a transnational

movement. So there is nothing new there. But what the Syrian crisis did is it emboldened the Kurdish political movement in the region, and which might be a problem, because it might make Kurds less willing to compromise. Because the Kurdish political movement now things that we are on the verge of a historical breakthrough, so why do we compromise now?

And this is the first aspect.

And the second one is: I think the Syrian uprising has turned the PYD -- the PKK Syrian offshoot -- into an important political and military actor. And that is very important. The PYD has been around, it was founded in 2003, but only with the Syrian uprising it has become an important political and military force.

And there are reasons for that. Why is the PYD so strong and so popular, and it has such an important contacts on the ground?

First, they are organizationally very strong, and they have a very centralized decision-making.

And, second, they provide important services. They provide social services. They provide food, medicine, and they carry out municipal work.

And the third one is -- and I think this is the most important one -- they provide security in the Kurdish area -- so they have, through their military wing, YPG.

So, all of a sudden, with the Syrian uprising, PYD is an important actor. And I'm going to talk about why that might be a problem for Turkey.

And the third is, I think we now have something which we didn't have in 2009, which is a strained relationship between Iran and Turkey. Before, Turkey and Iran reached an agreement, and they were cooperating against the PKK. Not anymore. And, reportedly, according to Turkish media, in October 2012, for instance, there has been --

the Iranian regime cut a deal with Pejak against Turkey. And at least at the perceptual -  
- that's the perception in Turkey.

So, the cooperation between Turkey and Iran is not there. And, of course, there is the PKK's Iranian offshoot, Pejak, operating in Iraq, which complicates things even further.

So, within this regional context, ironically, the Kurdistan Regional Government is the only regional ally of Turkey. And there is a full economic integration underway. The KRG and Turkey signed energy deals recently. And also, the two are on the same page on Syria. Both Turkey and the KRG, they want the fall of the Assad regime. And both are very concerned about the PKK presence in Syria. So they are, strategically, they have become strategic actors, not just economic allies, but strategic allies.

But this is not the whole picture.

So, imagine, PKK might reach an agreement with the Turkish government, and it might agree to withdraw from Turkish soil. We still have the PYD, and the Pejak operating in Iran and in Syria, because these groups, although they share the same ideology, resources, and the leadership with the PKK, they have different political agendas. Pejak's priority is to fight the Iranian regime, and the PYD has been trying to carve out a military and political role for itself in Syrian politics.

So, regionally, even if the PKK in Turkey agrees to withdraw and disarm, and withdraw from Turkey, the PKK will not really be organizationally dismantled in the region. And that's what Murat Karayilan, the acting leader of the PKK means when he said that, commenting on the road map of Öcalan, he said, "We will follow Öcalan's road map, taking into consideration that the regional context is in our favor." So that means

that if the PKK's demands are not met, they will still have the organizational and military capability in these countries, and especially in the chaotic environment in Syria.

So, despite the KRG's support, I think it's very essential that the KRG and Turkey are now finally on the same page. But I think at the regional level, the peace process will come down to what's going to happen in Syria. That's very important. What's going to happen to the Syrian Kurds.

And there are a few different scenarios. If the PYD, if the PYD's military wing gains ground in Syria, that's a problem. That doesn't need explanation. That will be a problem for Turkey, because it could mean that there will be a strong PKK presence on Turkey's southern border.

But there can be another scenario, in which the PYD can actually become part of mainstream politics in Syria and, in that case, it might follow the lead of the KRG, and establish, maybe, economic -- cultivate economic relations with Turkey -- and, of course, if Turkey can successfully fix the Kurdish problem.

But I think for the second scenario to happen, we need a few things. First, I think the Syrian opposition really has to address the Kurdish rights, Kurdish demands. And, second, I think the Syrian opposition really has to deliver social services, because that's one of the strengths of the PYD on the ground. That is, the Kurdish National Council, which was created -- it's an umbrella group of Kurdish parties which was basically founded by Barzani, and they cannot, they really don't have -- they have international legitimacy, and yet they're not powerful on the ground. And it's because of this reason the PYD can actually work on the ground. And in the Kurdish liberated areas, they provide services.

So if the Syrian opposition can actually step in and provide those services, I think that might integrate the PYD, and might weaken the military wing. And,

of course, the most important thing is, I think, the Syrian opposition has to break the monopoly of the PYD in providing security. And now that there is an interim Syrian prime minister, I think things might move in that direction, because the aim is for the new prime minister to actually work within Syria, and work on the ground.

So this is, I think, the overall strategic end picture. And I would like to end on a positive, and maybe a cautiously positive note.

I think that the Kurdish genie is out of the bottle, and there is no going back. But at the same time, yes, there are problems on the domestic front, but I think the regional situation just complicates matters more. So there will, I think, certainly, be quite a few bumps on the road.

MR. KIRISCI: Okay, thank you Gönül.

Before I turn to the floor, I'd like to follow up on the genie that has come out of the bottle. I think the genie has come out of the bottle for some time. But the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the way in which the Arab world, or the Middle East, has drifted now into an even deeper instability, with it looks not immediate prospects of coming out from that state of instability, I have a feeling it has triggered some new, interesting reactions in Turkey.

And one of those reactions is that having bashed the European Union rather cruelly, and liberally, I'm beginning to see, in Turkey, the beginnings of a desire to try again the European Union path. I think here also comes the United States.

In Turkey, in the public, there is a recognition of the way in which things have developed in the Middle East. There is also a recognition that the only way in which Turkey may move towards -- may continue to move along reform and economic growth, is by maintaining stability in the country. And I have a feeling that though the young people that Aliza has been referring to in the Kurdish ranks may not be appreciating this,

this is deeply appreciated in business circles, in the southeast of Turkey -- chambers of commerce, industrial unions, et cetera.

And this is, I think, Gönül, also reinforced by that close relationship that you referred to between the northern Iraq and Turkey.

This leads me to reach, or this encourages me to reach a conclusion that is somewhat a bit more optimistic. I do agree with Aliza's observations. I do agree with Ömer's point that the strategic picture there is missing. But I also wonder how long the prime minister can maintain his authoritarian course -- an authoritarian course that may derail the economic performance of Turkey, the economic growth of Turkey.

And I think we are at a critical crossroads in that respect, too. And when addressing the Kurdish issue, and these very recent developments, one needs to be aware of that broader picture, as well.

And, with those remarks, I'd like to turn to the floor and take questions. I would encourage you to shy from comments, or at least comments, and when you raise your questions, please do mention your name, and to whom you are addressing.

I'd like to take maybe two or three questions in a row, and then turn to the panel.

SPEAKER: No comments, just two brief questions.

First of all, I want to ask Ömer how exactly Erdogan's presidential ambitions settle with calls for further democratization?

The second question that I want to address to any of you is how the imprisonment of Turkish officers affect the military, in terms of command-and-control, and the motivation of the soldiers? And did it affect in any way on the Turkish military capability to meet threats from the PKK or from Syria, from the PYD, et cetera.

Thank you very much.

SPEAKER: Thank you. This is another question for Mr. Ömer. It's also a follow-up question.

Don't you think Erdogan is thinking about, when he's thinking about presidential system, one day its CHP leader, or MHP leader can sit on this chair and govern the country, and then don't you think the design, then, he is thinking of is a little bit more reliable -- I mean, convenient for checks and balances?

MR. KIRISCI: Okay, maybe one more question.

Yes?

SPEAKER: My name is (inaudible). My question is about the Syrian aspect of the issue -- to Gönül.

You mentioned about one of the motivating factors for the government is that developments in Syria. I talked to PYD leader Salih Muslim a few days ago, and he was supportive of this process -- but with the condition that he also mentioned that he has some reservations, some fears, that many Kurds that we spoke to share, that the Turkish state might manipulate them, might deceive them again.

So, what do you think Mr. Erdogan is trying to achieve in Syria, through talking with Öcalan? So what is the ultimate goal that the Turkish government is trying to achieve?

MS. TOL: In Syria?

SPEAKER: Yes, in Syria -- through Öcalan.

MR. KIRISCI: Maybe, additionally, do you see any prospects of a relationship similar to the one with northern Iraq evolving? Are there signs of it?

Let me turn to Ömer. I think you got quite a number of questions -- and then we'll turn to Aliza.

MR. TASPINAR: Two questions are on the presidential system, from different angles.

I think what Erdogan has in mind when he becomes president is the ability to have a stronger executive power, and the ability to, to a certain degree, to bypass the parliament with presidential decrees. He has a self-image of a democratic leader. He equates, in my opinion, democracy with a majoritarian understanding of democracy. He represents, in his opinion, now 50 percent. When he becomes the president -- if he manages to create law and order, and address the security dimension of the Kurdish problem -- it's likely that a referendum on the constitution may pass with maybe 60 percent, 65 percent, and he will associate, basically, his vote with the 65 percent.

So, he will have this kind of almost "I am the state," "L'etat c'est moi," attitude, a kind of republican monarch, if you will. And he will address the questions that he thinks need to be addressed -- including, in my opinion, issues that have to do with freedom of speech, freedom of association, further decentralization.

But he wants to do it from a position of strength. That's part of the Turkish political culture. Turks don't like to do big things when they're in a position of weakness. That's why they want to have, basically, a very strong hand at the table. He wants to strengthen his position before going forward maybe a big democratization, big bang.

But I'm not so sure that conditions will converge to create this. First of all, we have a situation where power has been personified in Turkey too much, and there is already a very centralized Turkish system.

In my opinion -- and that may be addressing the second question, which asked about different political parties' leaders ability to come to the presidency -- in my

opinion, what Turkey needs is not the personification of power. We already have a political culture which is patriarchal. We already have a political culture where it's driven by a big man, be it Özal in the past -- it starts with Ataturk, of course. But then you always have these party leaders, and not enough inner-party democracy, not enough grassroots politics, not enough decentralization.

To me, what Turkey needs is a stronger parliament, a strong checks-and-balance, a stronger judiciary, strong grassroots, stronger regional leadership. One way to address this may be to address, basically, decentralization in a more generic framework, rather than talking about a Kurdish federation, to talk about different regions of Turkey needing decentralization, and having basically a system where governors are elected, for instance, instead of being appointed by Ankara. It think Özal, to a certain degree, played with that idea of elected governors, seven different regions, all with a regional governor elected by the people, so that we have a decentralization. That would address the Kurdish demands, without making it very transparent that this about the Kurdish question, but more about generic democratization, generic strengthening of local authorities, municipalities.

That's the kind of reform I'd like to see, instead of a presidential system which will further centralize the system in Turkey, and may exacerbate authoritarian dynamics. Not all presidents that we may have in the future may be as powerful as Erdogan. They may have different intentions. It may create, basically, political deadlock. I mean, think of France, when they have one president from a political party, and the prime minister is from a different political party. In France they have this problem called "cohabitation." It creates major issues. So, I'm not sure that the presidential system would be the right way to democratize the country.

But the real issue here is that Erdogan is still young, and he still wants to govern. He still believes that he has the authority to govern, and the legitimacy to govern. And when you look at the last 10 years, you can understand why. The economy is still doing well. Overall, the country is well governed. And the level of services, socio-economic services, municipalities, people are happy with what they see. And he believes that he can actually address the bigger problems, including the Kurdish problem. And I think he envisions to still be around during the centennial of the republic, 2023. He put the deadline 2023 for the EU -- if by 2023 Turkey is not an EU member, he said, fine, we're through with the EU.

But the way he talks, the way he campaigns, leads me to think that he wants to stick around for another 10 years. He can't do it as prime minister. He committed himself to end his prime ministry after three terms. He needs a different institution.

But we shouldn't be at the mercy of, basically, one leader, in terms of thinking about how to strengthen the institutions of Turkish democracy. We should have a more institutional approach. That's my issue.

Very briefly, on the military -- Erdogan is very concerned, in my opinion, about morale in the army. That's why he went to the hospital to visit one of the generals. That's why he gave an interview where he said, "We don't have admirals anymore in Turkey, they're all in jail." And he is concerned.

And I would argue that he feels that the days of military tutelage, and the days of military takeovers are really over. That's where he really differs with the Gülen group. The Gülen community believes that there is still a potential danger looming around. That's why they are, more than Erdogan, willing to continue the Ergenekon trial, willing to go after the deep state, as they say it. That's the big difference -- domestically,

that is. There are difference with Gülen community on foreign policy areas, too. But if you think about the Gülen community as a very powerful political force in Turkey, the civil-military relations, I think, is one area where you can see Erdogan being worried.

I'm not sure that the morale issue has had a huge impact on the way the Turkish army fights the PKK or Syria. I think you still have enough generals, you still have enough of an esprit de corps in the military to flight the PKK -- despite conspiracy theories about the military actually wanting to stick around, and wanting to, in a way, strengthen the PKK so that they can justify their presence in the security realm. I don't buy, really, these conspiracy theories.

But I think there is a morale issue at the political level. The military has lost a lot of prestige in Turkey, and Erdogan, as a politician who has to govern, who has to have a good relationship with the military, is much more troubled by the fact that the military now is in such a moral decay -- I wouldn't say "moral decay," but lost their morale, compared to the Gülen community, who doesn't think that we should stop. I mean, I think that's the major problem that he has with the internal power struggle with the Gülen community.

MR. KIRISCI: Aliza, your reflections?

MS. MARCUS: So, basically, discussing on the military and its morale, I partly agree with Ömer, and partly disagree. I think the morale issue is a big problem, and I think, more than that, is the experience that's been lost with the jailing of so many top-level members of the military. That's not to say I think Erdogan's been wrong to go after military men accused of trying to undermine the state, or that he shouldn't push them out of politics.

But there's no question that there was a great deal of experience that the military gained in the '90s fighting against the PKK, and it wasn't easily gained. It took

them years to really get the upper hand militarily. And a lot of that was lost. And I think that many of the people in jail are the ones who really understand how to fight the PKK.

And morale is certainly low. And if you're an average soldier somewhere in the southeast, and you see everybody in jail, why do you want to put your life on the line? And I think we can see the sort of -- I would argue that there's been a military parity, in terms of the fighting the past two years, between the PKK and the Turkish Army. And I think it's partly -- it's not that the PKK has gotten so much better, but it's partly that the Turkish Army has lost a certain interest, and certain experience, because of the jailings.

I just want to comment something on Syria and the PKK, which is that, you know, the PKK has -- I believe that the PKK would last give up on the PYD. By that, I mean that it's very easy for them to cut off Pejak, because Pejak, to a certain extent, is a smaller organization. It's very heavily dependent on Kandil. I mean, it's based in the same area.

But for the Syrian Kurds and PYD, it's a slightly different situation. You have a huge number of Syrian Kurds in the PKK who have now gone back to Syria to fight. The Syrian Kurds have more of their own identity, and more of their sort of camaraderie, in terms of their fight. They actually control territory now.

And I think for the PKK, turning its back on the PYD would be incredibly difficult. And it's one reason that I think, you know, it's important to remember that lack of violence is not the same thing as a peace deal. So the only way to ensure that armed PYD members or YPG members in Syria are not ultimately used against Turkey, is really to have a full-scale deal with the PKK, because, otherwise, that is always going to be the PKK's card, in my opinion. You know, even if they were to say we want to, you know, cut

off the PYD, I don't think the PYD would cut off from them. It's not so simple in the case of Syria.

MS. TOL: And that's why I think a peace deal with the PKK has to address the PKK presence in Syria -- which is going to make things even more complicated.

MS. MARCUS: Right.

MS. TOL: And, as an answer to your question, I think the timing is important. We've been talking about why now? And, yes, there are domestic factors, but regionally, I think the Syrian uprising has made the resolution of the Kurdish issue urgent for the government, because it has revealed that the Kurdish issue is Turkey's soft underbelly.

And if Turkey can fix the problem, it won't have to worry about Bashar Assad regime, or any other actor in the region, using the PKK card against Turkey. And that's a strong motivation.

And, regionally, it will definitely, Turkey will definitely become a more confident actor in regional affairs. And even in Syria, I think it might play a more effective, and maybe a more legitimate role. Because one of the reasons why Syrian Kurds, kind of they were on the sidelines of the revolution because they were very skeptical about Turkey's involvement in the Syrian opposition. So if Turkey can deal with its own Kurdish problem, then it really can play a more, it can be a legitimate actor, a legitimate force in Syria.

And how possible is it to form the relationship formed between KRG and Turkey? Is it possible to do the same thing with the Syrian Kurds? I think it all depends on what's going to happen in Syria. I mean, again, the Kurds, they have to be included in

the process because if you don't, if you push them out of the system, whatever it becomes, then they will be marginalized. That will mean radicalization.

So I think, until now, Turkey's strategy has been trying to marginalize the PYD, and I think that's not the right way to go. Because you really have to -- it's an important force, and you really have to involve them in the process -- and not now, but even for the post-Assad system.

So I think it is possible. Why not? I mean, I don't think if you asked anyone 5, 10 years ago, no one could really foresee this close alliance between Turkey and the KRG. So it is possible. But, again, it all depends on how -- it all depends on the course of the Syrian revolution, and where the Syrian Kurds will end up. So, in that regard, maybe the peace process, or carrying out these talks with Öcalan is just one way of Turkey's ways of dealing with the regional PKK problem.

And the second approach Turkey has taken is forging close ties with the KRG. But I think there is a problem there, because Turkey has put all its eggs in the KRG basket, and there is a problem there. Yes, Barzani, he wants to be the leader of all the Kurds in the region, but at the same time, I think he has limited leverage. He has some influence -- definitely more than Turkey -- but still, he doesn't have that much power. And you can look at, he's been trying to, in July 2012, he's been trying to bring together the KNC, Kurdish National Coalition, with the PYD. And there is no agreement between them. So he has a very limited role in that sense.

So that's why I think the best approach is, first, solve the internal problem through democratization, and then try to engage all Kurdish actors in the region.

MR. KIRISCI: Mm-hmm. Thanks, Gönül. I'm glad that you referred to the relationship between Barzani and the northeastern corner of Syria that's there.

Yes?

MR. BEYOGLU: I'm Kemal Beyoglu. I'm on loan to the State Department from the National War College, a colleague of Ömer TaSpinar.

My question is really for all of you. I'd like to have you sort of comment on foreign minister Davutoglu's sort of concept of strategic depth and zero problems with our neighbors -- in light of the uncertainties, or growing uncertainties of the Arab Spring.

MR. KIRISCI: Thank you.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) Voice of America.

I have a comment about Aliza's point of view about Öcalan as a partner of this process, peace process. And she said that because Öcalan is isolated, so she suggests that the BDP will be the better partner in this process.

But the thing is, we see that BDP itself looks like they're taking orders from Öcalan. For example, we see the strike before months ago. They end the strikes by Öcalan, one word from Öcalan.

So my question is, don't you think that Öcalan himself, as an individual, became the center of this peace process?

MR. KIRISCI: There's one question at the far end. We need to engage the other half of the --

MR. GANUS: My name Essan Ganus, I'm a Kurd.

Well, the talks mainly focused on the talk between the leader of PKK and also BDP. As I was in Kurdish region just a month ago, and to my knowledge, BDP and the PKK are not representing, or not appealing, to most of the Kurds anymore.

Do you think there will be a peace without an apology to people who suffered greatly during the war between PKK and Turkey? And also, all of you, most of you know that the Turkish government hasn't even apologized to the families of the Roboski massacre.

Thank you.

MR. KIRISCI: Okay, thanks.

I think I'll turn to the floor, and then maybe have one last round of questions. We still have a little bit of time.

Ömer, when I hear the "zero problems" policy, I can't help but --

MS. TOL: It's your favorite topic.

MR. KIRISCI: -- look at you.

MR. TASPINAR: Yes. Do I look like a zero-problem?

Yes, the tired old joke that you've probably heard is that the zero-problems policy is gone, and that now we have zero-neighbors-without problems.

It's true that it was well intentioned. I think it makes sense. It goes without saying that Davutoglu is not the architect of this, it started before him. One can argue that the slogan of Ataturk -- "Peace at home, peace in the world" -- is based on that. There's nothing revolutionary about declaring the intention to have good relations with neighbors.

Yet, where the AKP proved successful was exactly to take the Kurdish question out of the equation with the neighbors to a certain degree. Because when you think about the 1990s, when Turkey had problems with all the neighbors, it was mainly because of the PKK. It was mainly because of the PKK that there were problems with Syria, mainly because of the PKK that there were problems with Iraq, and Iran, to a certain degree, in addition to the Islamic revolution-secularism problem. With Russia, there were PKK offices in Moscow. Abdullah Öcalan ended up being caught getting out of the Greek embassy in Kenya, so there was a Greek connection. So the PKK poisoned Turkey's relations with all the neighbors.

Then, in 2002, there was a sense of calm, and AKP managed to address the Kurdish question with cultural reforms. That was the golden age of the EU that you referred to, Kemal. And that was the time when Turkey engaged Syria, Turkey improved its relations with Iran, with Russia, with Greece -- it started with (inaudible). So let's give credit to people before Davutoglu who actually started that. Let's give credit to Abdullah Gül, who was foreign minister, and who actually was the architect of Turkey's EU momentum leading to opening of accession negotiations in 2005.

So what happened? Why Turkey now has all these problems with the neighbors?

Well, Turkey did not opt to have this crisis in Syria. When Syria erupts, can we say that, well, AKP followed the wrong policy? Well, AKP sided itself with the West. We could have easily seen a policy coming from Davutoglu or Erdogan which would have said, you know, Bashar is my brother, I really trust him for democratization, we should give him more chance. Let's engage him. Sanctions won't work; we don't need to alienate him. We know democracy took time -- 200 years in the West. Why aren't we giving him more time?

Instead of playing that game, they decided to side themselves with the opposition.

Now, some people criticize there is a now Sunni undertone to Turkish foreign policy, because of the problems that Turkey is having with Bashar Assad, with Maliki, a Shiite, with Iran. So there is a certain level of Sunni-fication of, maybe, Turkish foreign policy.

But, in my opinion, I think those are products of Turkey taking sides. Turkey was unable, unwilling to take sides before. The Arab revolutions pushed Turkey to take sides. And, overall, I think Turkey's on the right side of history. Overall, I don't see how Turkey could have said, you know, we still want to have a balanced relationship with Damascus, we still believe that, you know, we can do business with certain leaders in the region who do not respond to their people's aspirations.

So, I blame the failure of the zero-problems policy not to AKP's short-sightedness, but to events -- events changed, the context changed. The vision that Davutoglu had was the right one, socio-economic integration, modernization, let's try to basically have incremental democratization. It didn't work.

And I don't see that as a major failure of Turkish foreign policy. The problem we have now is the Kurdish reemerging again, poisoning, to a certain degree, Turkey's potential in the region.

I think the image of Turkey in the Arab world, compared to a couple of years ago, is more negative now, because there's a perception that Turkey is unable to really solve its own problems. There's a perception that Turkey talks a good game -- especially as a regional power which is willing to solve the problems. For instance, remember the slogan of Davutoglu: "Regional solutions for regional problems." That's

wonderful as a slogan. You want regional leadership. He believes Turkey is the regional leader, a central country, that should be able to solve problems.

Well, Syria erupts, and if you're Barack Obama, and if you want to lead from behinds -- the way you did in Libya -- you expect Turkey to play leadership role. So you ask Turkey, "What is your strategy? How will you deal with Syria?" And there, they realized that there is no Turkish strategy. Turkey wants United Nations Security Council resolution. Turkey wants, basically, the Arab League. Turkey wants multilateralism. There is no Turkish unilateralism here.

And there's no regional solution. We need the United Nations Security Council. We need Russia involved.

So the limits of Turkish influence, the limits of Turkish soft, hard, and smart power has been proven in Syria. And that, I think, creates a certain sense of humility now in Turkey. And the image of Turkey in the region, because of the Kurdish problem, and because of Turkey's inability to handle Syria -- the high hope that somehow Turkey could have handled that -- has dissipated.

In this sense, now, I think the credibility and popularity of AKP and Erdogan may be slowly diminishing in the Arab world, as well. And the opinion polls show that.

MR. KIRISCI: Ömer, I knew this was going to take awhile.

Aliza, maybe the questions about BDP, and also the very interesting remark the PKK and BDP may not necessarily be representing the overall Kurdish --

MS. MARCUS: The real question is, you know, to what extent is Öcalan central and controls everything. I think you brought up the hunger strike issue, and I'm glad you did, because I think the hunger strike is a good example how I think Öcalan's power has been misunderstood.

By the time Öcalan called for an end to the hunger strike, everybody wanted an end to the hunger strike. The Turkish government wanted the hunger strike to end because they were terrified the hunger strikers would start to die. Kurdish people wanted the hunger strike to end because they simply didn't want their relatives to die. And the PKK-Kandil -- by that, I mean, Kandil wanted the hunger strike to end because they didn't have a Plan B. They had called for this, they had supported this, and then should people have started to die, the PKK didn't know what to do. And it was a very dangerous situation for them.

So, at that point, to arrange for Öcalan to call for an end to the hunger strike was probably the easiest thing that has happened in the past year with the Kurdish issue. I mean, everybody wanted it to end. So it was a no-brainer to get him to say this, and it was -- so it's not that everybody suddenly listened to him, it was that he provided the answer that everybody wanted. And he was empowered, essentially, by all the other actors.

And I think that's really the point. Öcalan, on his own, is somewhat limited. But Öcalan can be empowered by these other actors. But that requires actually taking them into consideration a little bit.

And I think this is the danger: By taking them into consideration, you get a slightly more nuanced understanding of the problem, and of what's needed to have a solution. And this is where I think Erdogan may be missing the point, as it were, or doesn't want to accept that just yet.

Now, on the question that, you know, Ömer raised the thing -- I remember when BDP was here and they all said, "Don't talk to us. We have nothing to say." You know, everything is Kandil.

The fact is that --

SPEAKER: Or Imrallah --

MS. MARCUS: Imrallah -- sorry, yeah, not Kandil, Imrallah.

The fact is, there's a delicate balance. Öcalan's an important symbol. He's a symbol of the PKK's unity, and he's the one example -- I mean, the PKK's still the one group, the one Kurdish group, or leftist group, whatever violent group you have in Turkey, that never split into nothingness. And, really, the reason is because of Öcalan. And this is something Kandil, the Kurds, and BDP understand: They need him as a symbol to hold it together, because otherwise you could have a real split. And they feel off of each other.

But that doesn't mean that BDP doesn't have a say. And I think, over the past few years, since they came here, actually, when Öcalan was isolated even more, they became more active. And the fact is that all those statements that were coming out of Imrallah over the years, were not actually statements crafted by Öcalan. These were pretty much statements crafted by Kandil, passed over by his lawyers, and then approved on by Öcalan with some minor changes.

So the fact is that Öcalan has not played that huge role that it looks from the outside. That's not say he's not important. He needs to be part of any deal, and he will be. But I think even Öcalan understands that this is being passed over now to the next level, which will be the BDP and Kandil.

And, finally, on the question of BDP and PKK not representing the majority of Kurds, you know, it's really hard -- I mean, I argued they represent a majority. And I think you can see that through the voting patterns, you can see that through the support on the streets. You can see that through the demonstrations -- you know, is it -- there's a certain core, obviously, of really activist PKK supporters, and then there's a group of Kurds who support the BDP, and support PKK, simply because it's the most

powerful organization. And if you want to do something on the Kurdish issue, you need to be involved.

And the fact is, the PKK and BDP have worked to integrate other groups into their structures. So, during the last elections, BDP ran a slate that would have included HAKPAR, the Kemak-Burkhai, party, but didn't, at the end, for an internal reason that had to do with who was going to be on the list, and what number. But they did include Sherafet, and LG, and these were really welcomed very much by Kurds on the ground. Because even if they do support the PKK, they want to see a bigger ticket, they want to bring everybody together.

So, I still believe that, no, BDP and PKK certainly lead a majority of Kurds. You know, if ultimately you had some sort of local parliament, would BDP be the number one party? They might not be. But they would certainly be with the leading parties.

MR. KIRISCI: Thanks, Aliza.

Yes, Gönül?

MS. TOL: I would just like to add something on a small regard on the BDP's role after the third meeting with Öcalan which was, I believe, on Monday.

There was a statement, Öcalan, apparently he criticized the way Turkish media portrayed the BDP as basically delivering mail. And he said that the BDP is definitely going to play an important role in the next phase, which is the drafting of the new constitution, and the whole reform process. So the BDP will be an important actor.

MR. KIRISCI: One aspect of Öcalan that I think gets overlooked is that he has had a lot of time for reflection and reading -- reading. He's reading very impressively, and, interestingly, quoting Jurgen Habermas in some of his statements.

Is that good or bad? Is it a product of typical graduate student confusion that we tend to go at early stages in our lives?

But I, on balance, look at it as something very positive.

We still have a little bit of time. I can take two more very quick questions, and then turn to the panel for final remarks.

Yes, please.

MR. ZEBARI: Keran Zebari with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

A question for you, Dr. Tol -- where do you see the relationship going, between Ankara, Erbil, and Baghdad in the near future?

And Dr. TaSpinar, how far will this message resonate among the PKK ranks? The message that we're waiting tomorrow -- perhaps yourself, Aliza, as well?

MR. KIRISCI: Thanks for bringing up the Baghdad dimension there.

You had your chance. I think I need to turn to someone who hasn't had the floor.

Please -- it's right there. You can see it if you get up. Thanks.

SPEAKER: My question is for Ömer.

You mentioned that Erdogan is a tactical genius. Staying at the tactical level, or rather, the operational level, it seems to me that a cease-fire is pretty easy to understand. A cease-fire is a cease-fire until it isn't. But a withdrawal, which is also being talked about, is a little more difficult to measure.

So, my question is, how does the Turkish government, or the Turkish military intend to measure a withdrawal, or enforce it?

MR. KIRISCI: All right. Maybe Gönül, we should start with you, if you have any final remarks -- or the questions, Baghdad, especially, the trilateral relationship.

MS. TOL: Yes, it's great that finally Erbil and Ankara, they're getting along well. But I think it shouldn't be -- Turkey is making a mistake. It shouldn't be at the expense of Baghdad. And that will be a problem, especially considering the fact that the recent energy deal signed between Turkey and the KRG.

And it might work for Turks, because this is the calculation in Ankara: As long as we have an economically dependent KRG, as long as they're dependent on us, we are safe. And we are, at the same time, working on our Kurdish problem.

But I think from the Kurdish, the Iraqi-Kurdish perspective, that is not a wise decision, because it has to be -- it's a constitutional matter. And it has to find a solution within a constitutional framework. Otherwise, they would be just exchanging, instead of being dependent on Baghdad, now they're going to be dependent on Ankara -- which might be challenging for the Iraqi Kurds.

So I think, especially with the peace process, if it succeeds -- and, remember, KRG is an important part of that. The KRG was part of the 2009 democratic, the Kurdish opening. And Barzani, he was on Kurdish TV channels in Turkey, urging the Turkish Kurds to support the opening. And now, the regional leg of the opening, the current opening, is the KRG.

And so Barzani is playing an important role. And thinking that, economically, that that's wonderful, and politically, maybe he thinks that by being part of that process he can actually have some influence over Turkey's Kurds.

But with regard to the relations with Maliki, I think Iraqi Kurds, they first have to solve the problem with Maliki, monitor -- I know, I mean, he's been an increasingly authoritarian leader, and there are a lot of problems. And I think, still, they have to, they have to fix the problem within a constitutional framework.

And I know the recent, the Exxon Mobil, the Chevron deal, these are all encouraging the Iraqi Kurds to break free with Maliki. But I think, in the long run, it will be in their best interest to find a solution within Iraq.

So, if everything goes well, probably they will, Turkey and the KRG, will even get closer, and that might, of course, alienate Maliki. And it's not just a problem, the different stances, on Syria, there are problems with Maliki -- and personal problems. Turkey supported, in 2010 elections, Allawi. And that was a main problem.

But I think Turkey has to engage Maliki, as well. But I don't think that will be the case, because Maliki has already been releasing statements criticizing Turkey's approach, and has created some problems for Turkish energy minister in the Arabiya Conference.

So I think that is not the wisest approach on the part of both Turkey and Iraqi Kurds, I think.

MR. KIRISCI: Thanks, Gönül.

Aliza? Briefly?

MS. MARCUS: So, briefly, I just want to just briefly touch on the question of a withdrawal, and managing the withdrawal.

If this problem were just about the PKK withdrawing from southeast Turkey, it would have been solved a long time ago. I mean, if that were the only -- if this were the only issue, somehow, that could make the problem go away. But this isn't the only issue.

And I think we have to be careful not to just focus on these sort of structural elements within the deal. Because, ultimately, remember, the PKK has a very strong civilian militia, or militia supporters in the southeast. If they do withdraw their

forces, they will withdraw them right up to the border, and so they'll be just across the border in northern Iraq. They have a very strong force in Syria.

So, you know, this isn't the end of the conflict. If it gives Erdogan room to maneuver, all the better. But the fact is, the PKK is certainly not going to disarm until there's a final settlement that meets all the political demands. And this is something that Erdogan needs to keep in mind. Because, otherwise, I feel he will be very disappointed. And, not only that, but Turkey will face great problems from further violence from the PKK.

And the thing is that, you know, the extent to which Kurds now trust Öcalan -- and it's partly that they do really trust him, and they want to trust him. I mean, they want to believe that this is leading to a real process. You know, the opposite is true, in terms of their feelings toward the Turkish state. They have zero trust in the Turkish state right now. I mean, I know this from being there, I know this from talking to people this week. I mean, if nothing -- zero trust.

So, the government is going to have to show legal changes. It's not enough to necessarily release people from prison and say, ah, we did it, you see? Because in the back of people's minds is, well, tomorrow, you can change your minds and re-arrest them.

So this has to be a concrete process, or there's going to be no solutions.

MR. KIRISCI: Ömer? Briefly --

MR. TASPINAR: Very briefly --

MR. KIRISCI: -- nothing on the zero-problems course.

MR. TASPINAR: No, no, no.

There was a question, to be fair, about an apology to the Kurds. And I think we should address that.

MR. KIRISCI: Yes.

MR. TASPINAR: I'm not very optimistic. You know, there's a long list of people that Turkey owes an apology. (Laughter) You may start with the Armenians. You may go to the Greeks -- Istanbul had a population of 250,000 Greeks when the Republic was born. Today, there are only 3,000 Greeks left, and the average age is 75, so it's a dying population. And the Kurds, of course, to a certain degree.

But Turkey is not in the business of apologizing. Turkey is more in the business of creating a narrative of victimhood, "We suffered. Who's apologizing for the Turks that have been killed in the Caucasus, in the Balkans? Who's apologizing for the genocides committed against Turks?" -- by the Bulgarians, by Serbs, by Russians, et cetera. So that's the Turkish narrative. Maybe the PKK should apologize for its terrorist activities. That's the answer you're likely to get. I mean, if you had people like Orhan Pamuk here, he would differ. He would apologize. But Orhan Pamuk is Orhan Pamuk, and he would get in trouble. Thank God I'm not him, and I hope I'm not going to get in trouble.

Look, the question about Baghdad -- these are funny times. It's the Americans now who are reminding the importance of Iraq's territorial integrity to the Turks. It used to be the other way around. And it's the Turks who are preaching the virtues of democratization in a post-Assad Syria to the Americans. When Americans came to Turkey in 2003, saying, after Saddam Hussein, there will be a democracy in Iraq, Turks laughed. And they said, what are you talking about? Democracy in Iraq after Saddam is gone? Are you so naive?

Well, now Turkey is saying after Bashar is gone, there will be democracy in Syria. Why should Americans believe that?

So, topsy-turvy world. And Turkey basically is in a position to, I think, believe that the Kurds will have, sooner or later, a much more independent status. They already have an independent status.

The big problem is Kirkuk, what's going to happen in Kirkuk. That's the time-bomb. But the Turkish perception is we need to coopt the Kurds instead of confronting them. We can live with them. They need us, we need them, there's a Kurdish federation there, a Kurdish autonomy. Maybe in the future there will be a Kurdish federation in Turkey. Hopefully, we can merge the two, and that's maybe the new Ottoman dream of our next sultan. So maybe that's the dream of basically having a larger Kurdistan, under the tutelage of Turkey, which plays the big-brother role. I know, as Kurds, you probably don't want a big brother, but that's how probably Erdogan is thinking.

And on the question of withdrawal, the metrics of success for a withdrawal, very simple: If there is less violence, if there is a drop in PKK attacks, if there is a perception that there is now a window of opportunity for reforms due to a cease-fire, that will be the metric of success.

I agree with you that an amnesty is easier than withdrawal, but at the end of the day, it will come down to how many Turkish soldiers are being killed. If there is a tolerable lull of violence, I think that will be enough for Erdogan to declare success, and to go for the constitutional reform, the referendum. He has a deal with the BDP. Apparently Öcalan is okay with him to become president. The BDP is okay for him to become president. And that's the sad state of affairs in Turkey; basically we're going towards a presidential system, and without really having the institutions for a real democracy in Turkey.

MR. KIRISCI: Okay, on that happy note -- Ömer made references to Orhan Pamuk. And it reminded me that when the Green Party of Germany held its party congress in Istanbul, I heard him make a very interesting remark. And I think that remark is still applicable. He said the region will need to learn to be less Turkish, less Kurdish, less -- you know, different ethnicities -- and that it is true that one might actually be able to reach some kind of a solution.

MR. TASPINAR: More what? Swiss? (Laughter)

MR. KIRISCI: More, I think, comfortable with diversity --

MR. TASPINAR: I see.

MR. KIRISCI: -- and the kind of pluralist democracy that you have been referring to, which may elude us if a presidential system is brought in front of us. And it would be yet another paradoxical, ironic situation. You've already made references to these. It is in an effort to address the Kurdish issue or question, that we end up creating a situation where we face what you called, at best, majoritarian democracy.

Today, Ömer is my fan, because he referred to Erdogan as "young," and it happens that Erdogan and I were born on the same year, so that makes me feel good.

MR. TASPINAR: You should be the next president.

MR. KIRISCI: Spare me the trouble. I'm very happy here. And I was happy to be, to have you here.

I really learned a lot, Aliza -- from Ömer and Gönül, too.

I hope you did, too. Thank you very much. (Applause)

\* \* \* \* \*

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