

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

KURDS - A BEACON OF HOPE OR HARBINGER OF MORE CHAOS?

Washington, D.C.

Monday, December 5, 2016

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. KIRIŞCI: Well, I decided to be a bad boy and get up and speak from here other than do what I was told to do which was sit in my chair. So, I apologize for that. Welcome to our panel to launch Ayşegül Aydın and Cem Emrence. Her paper, "Two Routes to an Impasse: Understanding Turkey's Kurdish Policy." Part and parcel to our Turkey project policy papers, it's the tenth one. We're very proud of it. We're also very happy that we feel that it's a very timely paper. As you know, both Turkey and the region around Turkey, especially Syria and Iraq, are experiencing considerable (inaudible) and instability at some human cost as well as destruction, especially in Iraq and Syria. And all this is coinciding with a time when we're wondering what shape the next administration's foreign policy towards the region is going to take, what form it's going to take.

We have today with us Ayşegül Aydın, she's a very accomplished associate professor at Colorado University. She's been working especially on third country interventions as well as counterinsurgency policies. She has an excellent book on the topic called "Foreign Powers and Intervention in Armed Conflicts" from 2012. And she has recently also published a book called "Zones of Rebellion: Kurdish Rebels and the Turkish State" from last year, co-authored with Cem Emrence, who is unable to join us. Ayşegül, if you would allow me to share this with our audience because he is looking after their little daughter called Maya. He is being an unusually liberated Turkish gentleman.

Otherwise, he is a visiting professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and he's also an accomplished academic and had a book preceding the ones I just made references to, "Remapping the Ottoman Middle East." A very timely book as well. And I can wholeheartedly recommend it to you. It might give you a glimpse

of how today's rulers see the Middle East and whether there is much of a connection to how the Ottomans interacted with the region.

We have a panel with Soner Cagaptay. I'm sure many of you are familiar with Soner. He is from the Washington Institute and extensively writes on Turkey including the Kurdish issue, as well as Turkish foreign policy. He has had a long interest in Turkey's relationship not with just the Kurds of Iraq but also the ones in Syria. He is the author of a recent book from 2014 called "The Rise of Turkey," with a bit of an unfortunate subtitle that I usually like bringing it up, "The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power." The backlash on the subtitle of the book has led him to work on a new book that I understand is almost done, and if I'm not mistaken, focuses more on Erdoğan as a political actor and his politics.

We do also have Nick Danforth from the Bipartisan Policy Center. He recently received his PhD from Georgetown University, "Memory, Modernity, and Remaking of the Turkish Republic" not today but between 1945 and 1960. Today it's the remaking of the Turkish Republic. And I'm sure Nick must already be contemplating a book project on the latter one, because he extensively writes on Turkey, Turkish foreign policy as well as the Middle East. And the Bipartisan Policy Center has put out a number of very good reports looking at many aspects of Turkey, Turkish foreign policy and how far Turkey is becoming Islamized or not.

There is a lot that is happening right now in Turkey and in it's region. And right in the midst of it I am tempted to argue, not just for the sake of this event, sits the Kurdish issue in Turkey but also in Syria as well as in Iraq. I don't know if you had a chance to look at the report, but I feel both Ayşegül and Cem have done a truly great job in discussing the Kurdish situation in Turkey, it's background, and the different stages through which the issue went through during AKP's rule. They do a good job in dividing

the time under AKP's government in Turkey into three very distinctive periods and examine what is driving AKP's and in the latter day's more Erdoğan's policies towards the Kurdish issue.

But they also do, I think, a very good job in discussing the way in which the Kurdish issue in Turkey has been interacting with the one, especially in Syria, and how the interaction with the Kurds and the developments there in Syria is different than how it was with the Kurds in northern Iraq. They really do a good job in capturing the complexity there and they do make a set of very sensible recommendations to the Turkish government, to the Kurdish political actors in Turkey as well as in Syria, and of course, to the United States, including a warning on what would not work if the U.S. was to adopt a particular policy.

Now, the way we're going to go about this is I will invite Ayşegül to make her introductory remarks for maybe 18-20 minutes, followed by the responses that Soner and Nick are going to offer. The practice is usually that the moderator engages them in a conversation, however, I'll play it by ear to make sure that you also get a chance -- a good 30 minutes of questions and answers. I have also realized that I failed to introduce myself. I am Kemal Kirişçi, the director of the Turkey Project here at Brookings. And thanks for joining us this afternoon. Ayşegül, the floor is yours for a good 18-20 minutes.

MS. AYDIN: Thanks everyone for having me today, and thanks to professor Kirişçi for inviting us and for the excellent feedback that he gave us while we were writing this paper. And also, I want to thank Nick and Soner for taking the time to comment on our paper.

Our paper is about Turkey's Kurdish policy. At the time that we wrote our Cornell book, which was published last year in 2015, the Kurdish issue in Turkey was mostly a domestic issue with a slight international mention. Now with the Syrian Civil

War and the experimentation of Syrian Kurds with self-rule, not only did it become internationalized but it also got extremely complicated.

So, it looks like we're going to be talking about Kurds for a long time. Syrian Kurds I think are of particular interest to foreign policymakers in the United States. And I think drawing from the Gulf War experience there is some believe in the United States that Kurds are reliable allies in the war effort in the Middle East. However, this holy alliance between the United States and Syrian Kurds seems to be affecting Turkey's Kurds quite negatively.

There is now an autonomous region in northern Iraq. It looks like there will be de facto autonomy in northern Syria as well. Obviously, that sets a precedent for Turkey's Kurds, but the problem is that the setting in Turkey is quite different from either of these countries. Turkey's Kurds have to push through institutional politics in order to get their demands.

Let me first start by drawing your attention to an apparent contradiction in Turkey which is Kurdish policy. It's puzzling, to be at least, that until late 2014 there was almost complete consensus in Turkey as well as among international audiences that the AKP governments had taken courageous steps to resolve the Kurdish issue and we could expect to see a negotiated deal any time soon. I think both international audiences and domestic audiences in Turkey were highly optimistic about the peace process, and this is despite the fact that there were two major legislative efforts in this period. This includes the Constitutional Amendment Referendum in 2010, and the Democratization Package in 2014 gave any priority to Kurdish rights. Neither of these legislative efforts included any ambitious solution to the Kurdish issue.

Then in two years there was a change of heart. First peace talks came to an end. Then, particularly in the aftermath of the June 2015 election in which the AKP

lost 9 percent of its vote, an extensive counterinsurgency campaign followed which included a variety of innovative counterinsurgency strategies to disenfranchise HDP votes, the Kurdish mass party. We witnessed a detention of the most prominent Kurdish politicians including Ahmet Türk, who actually entered the Grand National Assembly as a Parliamentarian back in 1973, and co-chairs of the Ethnic Party, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ.

So, how can we explain this change of heart? What happened? In this paper we mainly looked at government policies and we argued that the AKP's approach is best characterized as instrumentalist in the sense that electoral outcomes and foreign policy priorities rather than a genuine interest in resolving the Kurdish issue shaped how the government interacted with Kurdish political actors as well as with Kurdish constituencies. Accordingly, a variety of tactics were employed over time depending on AKP's electoral needs.

We called this the Instrumentalist Approach. We see two dimensions of AKP's approach to the Kurdish issue. One is the domestic dimension regarding the PKK conflict and the Kurdish Ethnic Movement, and the other is international and it accounts for the effects for the Syrian Civil War on Turkey's Kurdish question.

In case I don't have time at the end of the presentation, I also want to summarize our recommendation for future action as the Politics of Moderation. Right now we don't see a win-win situation regarding the Kurdish issue. I think the Kurdish conflict was already quite complicated. The Kurdish conflict in Turkey was already quite complicated. And the Syrian Civil War added one more layer of complexity to all of this. All sides including Turkey, the Kurdish Ethnic Movement, and Syrian Kurds we think should exercise some restraint, and the United States should act as an arbitrator, making sure that it uses carrots and sticks to deescalate the conflict. Giving Turkey a free hand

in its domestic issues, including the Kurdish issue, in exchange for Turkey's support in the Syrian Civil War is not a solution, and, obviously, it doesn't help Turkey's Kurds.

Before I start talking about the AKP period let me say a few things about the pre-AKP period; what happened in the 1990s. The Kurdish conflict has been a particularly long one, starting in 1982. Today it continues as a low intensity conflict. There are two layers of the conflict. One is the military dimension, which claimed more than 40,000 deaths. And this number includes insurgent casualties as well as security casualties. There is not a lot of civilian casualties in the Turkish Civil War, which is great.

The Kurdish conflict has been a particularly localized conflict concentrated mostly in southeast Turkey. So, first attacks in the Kurdish conflict took place in remote border districts and then the insurgent organization expanded into Turkey. Most incidents, most PKK attacks, actually took place in 13 provinces in southeast Turkey. These are Kurdish populated provinces. Interestingly, before the PKK had any activity in any of these provinces these areas were already put under emergency rule by the state -- in the state of emergency for 25 years until 2002. Obviously, I think there was a preventive logic here, mostly guided by historical precedence rather than the reality on the battle field.

The other dimension of the Kurdish conflict is political. The war started as a guerilla warfare but extends into institutional politics. So, in the late 1980s and 1990s are the critical episodes in which a Kurdish Ethnic Movement came into being. The Movement organized hundreds of protest events. It particularly utilized insurgents' funerals and (inaudible) to take it to the streets. State repression taking place in this period was instrumental in political mobilization. It actually helped the Ethnic Movement. The early detention (inaudible) in response to the PKK Hezbollah is a violent Kurdish Islamic Group. Hezbollah's extrajudicial killings helped activists to mobilize civilians. The

same activists I was talking about also formed the Mass Party in 1991 which turned out to be highly successful and resilient over the years despite all the pressure.

While the party remained strong over the years, I'm not sure if you can say the same thing for the PKK. I think Turkish counterinsurgency was highly successful in pushing PKK back, which retreated to the bases in northern Iraq at the turn of the 21st century.

The political outcomes for the PKK also remained pretty uncertain. The guerrilla warfare that took place in the countryside, but we don't see any territorial control achieved in the countryside. And this is despite years of guerilla fighting. In urban areas, however, the situation is a bit different. There are a few neighborhoods in which there is insurgent control. The insurgency was successful in chasing the state out of these neighborhoods but we don't see any public goods delivery by the insurgency in these areas, which is unlike FARC and Tamil Tigers. Importantly, most of these neighborhoods were completely wiped out in the 2015-2016 Counterinsurgency Campaign.

There are two legacies of the 1990s. There is crippled insurgency and there is a strong Kurdish Mass Party. But what happened in the AKP period? Please allow me to start with the domestic dimension. Distinct periods of AKP rule required alternative approaches to the Kurdish issue in order to secure favorable electoral outcomes.

As Professor Kirişci has mentioned in his remarks, we divided the AKP period into three phases. The first phase is the expansion period. So, it starts in 2002, that's the election in which AKP got one-third of the vote. But we see that there is not a lot of enthusiasm among the Kurdish electorate. There is room for expansion. It's in this period that Kurds were offered several incentives, for instance, political reforms to ease EU excision, raised hope among Kurds after a long decade of state repression. Public

goods delivery, especially in the health and education sectors, significantly improved in southeast Turkey which meant more teachers and more doctors. Finally, economic transfers convinced most Kurds that AKP had good intentions such as credit offerings, municipal spending skyrocketed in this period, and there was significant government support to the private sector. We also see new bank branches in this period.

Kurds joined the AKP's ranks which completed the winning coalition and led to a landslide electoral victory in the 2007 election. I think the 2007 election was end of the expansion period. There was this winning coalition that the AKP had a strong incentive to preserve. So, in the second phase, starting in 2007, it was critical to keep the winning coalition intact. But in this period, the PKK was still a burden. It had the military capacity to escalate the conflict. So, it was critical for the AKP to keep the PKK at bay and make sure that it avoids security casualties that could actually turn the public opinion against the government. I think a very innovative strategy was put into place to do exactly this.

The peace talks. The government initiated talks with the imprisoned rebel leader Öcalan. This was actually a pretty strange process. Nobody knew exactly what the talks were about. The opposition party is the Grand National Assembly and the public were not informed about the substance of the talks and the representatives of the Kurdish Mass Party, the HDP, were utilized as messengers between Öcalan and the PKK. So, it wasn't a transparent democratic process. Since Öcalan was the sole decision-maker and the talks were secret the government acquired an enormous leverage on Kurdish political actors without facing any pressure from the public.

However, in spite of the talks, neither the Constitutional Amendment nor the Democratization Package significantly leveled the playing field in favor of the Kurds. Meanwhile, the Kurdish party was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 2009 while

the peace talks were ongoing. And another detention wave targeting the new urban organization of the PKK affected at least 2,000 individuals.

But there is an important legacy of the peace talks which I want to talk about a little bit. So, the first outcome was it pacified the PKK, allowing the government to enter successive elections without being bothered by violence. Ironically, however, the successive electoral victories, especially the presidential election, reduced the relevance of the Kurdish issue for the government.

The second important consequence of the peace talks is basically Kurdish politicians and activists carefully avoided allying with the opposition in Gezi movements as well as the presidential election and the Constitutional Amendment Referendum hoping that staying on the good side of Erdoğan would lead to a favorable deal.

The peace talks came to an abrupt end in 2014, especially after the Kobani demonstrations. I think Erdoğan was pretty disillusioned. I think the June election, June 2015 election, is the start date of our third phase. The AKP lost 9 percent of its vote. The PKK started escalating the conflict in southeastern Turkey in the aftermath of the election. A massive counterinsurgency campaign followed these developments. We see that the counterinsurgency effort was part of a political package that included replacing HDP mayors with trustees, relocating or combining ballot box, all aimed at reducing electoral support to the HDP.

That was the domestic dimension. Let me say a few things about the international dimension and let me conclude with that. I'll be happy to talk about the specific strategies that we had in our paper for the parties involved in the Kurdish issue.

So, about the international dimension of the Kurd issue. If you look at the 1990s, the international dimension was two-fold. In Europe we observed the PKK

affiliated organizations which were legal. And we also observed new pressure on Turkey regarding its human rights record. But more importantly, the issue was the rebel bases in northern Iraq and (inaudible) in Syria. I think rebel bases were part of a painful reality for the Turkish state because they played an instrumental role in PKK's survival. However, starting in 2003 the PKK retreated to northern Iraq. AKP was in power. And until 2011 we can say that the relations between Syria and Turkey were pretty good.

The critical turning point is the Syrian Civil War, and I don't think that it was clear at first how it would affect Turkey. Turkish policymakers were, I think, expecting an easy conflict with a clear winner, but I don't think they had an idea about what they or everybody else was getting into. So, indeed, the war had grave consequences for Turkey's Kurds. Let me mention two of them and I'm hoping to conclude with that.

Two consequences of the Syrian Civil War are important. One is Turkey's support for (inaudible) groups in the Syrian Civil War also radicalized groups inside Turkey. So, many Islamist Turks actually went to Syria, joined the jihad and they were exposed to pretty radical ideas. So, they came back with those radical ideas and they spread those ideas to others. They became very radicalized.

And when they came back home they targeted the Kurdish party and affiliated peace networks. One of these incidents was actually the deadliest terror attack that ever took place on Turkish soil, the Ankara bombing which led to at least 100 civilian deaths.

The second important consequence of the Syrian war was the situation in northern Syria. Syrian Kurds, assisted by the United States, have acquired some territorial control. They started experimenting with self-rule and autonomy. This is a dangerous development for Turkey because unlike Kurds in northern Iraq, Syrian Kurds

preach the form of Kurdish nationalism that is directly influenced by Öcalan's preachings. These developments led to a direct confrontation between the Turkish government and YPG. Today we're observing that there is a battle taking place between Turkey and YPG almost on a daily basis.

Just to conclude, one final note about the international dimension. I don't think we did justice to Russia's role in the Syrian Civil War in this report, and I'm very much hoping that my colleagues as well as colleagues in the room today will raise this issue. Russian intervention balanced the capabilities on the battlefield.

There are two conflicts in the Syrian Civil War right now. One is a center-seeking government between the Syrian rebels and the Assad-Russia alliance. And the other one is a localized conflict in northern Syria. It doesn't look like either Turkey or the United States have any say in the center-seeking conflict. Turkey might have lost hope that it can affect the war in the center, but the localized conflict in northern Syria is important to them and it looks like they're going to stay in the conflict to deny YPG more territory.

So, it's important at this point that Syrian Kurds as well as anyone else in the war might remember that this is not northern Iraq. It's northern Syria, so it's a more complicated and a different conflict. But also for Turkey's Kurds, unlike northern Iraqi Kurds or northern Syrian Kurds, the Kurds in Turkey have to push through their (inaudible) through institutional politics. The United States can actually do -- so, again, giving Turkey a jail-free card in exchange for its support in the Syrian Civil War is not going to do the trick for Turkey's Kurds.

So, I'll stop there.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Ayşegül, before I let you off the hook, at the very beginning of your presentation you made references to moderation, capturing your

recommendations. Maybe if you could in just two or three minutes reflect on what you're suggesting the parties should be doing to improve the situation rather than aggravate it.

MS. AYDIN: We had big recommendations for each party involved in the conflict. Maybe I can say a few things about three of them which are important for Turkey, Syrian Kurds, and the United States.

It doesn't look like there is a win-win situation in the Syrian Civil War at this moment, and especially with Russian intervention things only got more complicated. So, we suggested in the paper that given that conflict parties cannot maximize their payoffs so there is not optimum strategy and they should go for second best options and moderate their demands.

So, for instance, we believe that Turkey should exercise some self-restraint in Syria. We understand that the Turkish government invested heavily in changing the Damascus government and replacing it with Sunni government. But this is no longer a reasonable scenario, and that's mainly because of Russia's alliance with Assad.

But that doesn't mean that they should now change targets and start blaming Syrian Kurds for what happened. We think that Turkey has a more important task at hand, which is making sure that it comes up with an affirmative action plan for its own Kurds rather than fighting Syrian Kurds.

Syrian Kurds, I think, seem to be the only winner in this conflict, but the self-restraint idea also applies to them. So, trying to acquire more territory will only mean more Turkish intervention which would escalate the conflict.

As I mentioned earlier, modern Syria is not really northern Iraq. The Gulf War was a simple clean war with a clear winner. That is not the situation in Syria. The Syrian Civil War is very complex. The distribution of capabilities on the battlefield are

even. So, there is quite a balance which means that the conflict will be longer and it's only going to escalate.

So, what does this mean for the United States? I think the United States is now between a rock and a hard place because foreign policymakers in the United States base their calculations on the information that their allies provided them. So, the United States has to find a way to manage Turkish and Syrian Kurds which don't seem to have any restraints. Think about the situation in Turkey. The Turkish government doesn't really have any restraints at this point. There are no budgetary constraints, the public opinion is on the side of the Turkish government. The only limit is basically their own military capabilities.

It is the same situation for Syrian Kurds. There is this window of opportunity that they're trying to exploit. So, they will do all they can in order to acquire more territory and combine them so that they can have an autonomous region. So, except for their military capabilities, the only other restraint for Syrian Kurds as well as Turkey is the United States.

And I'll stop there. Thank you, so much.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Ayşegül. I agree with you that we do need to bring the Russian and Russian-Assad coalition there as to how it might impact on what happens in northern Syria.

However, in the meantime, I'd like to turn to Soner. There is indeed a very rich recommendation section in the report. I'd like to ask Soner, on page 18 Ayşegül and Cem argue that AKP needs to address the trust deficit between the Kurds and the Turkish state and take no less than legal steps to secure the rights of Kurds as citizens. It's quite a specific recommendation there, supported by other ones as well. And I know, Soner, you've done a lot of work on this topic, published extensively. I'd like you to

reflect on how realistic that recommendation is, but also what could Ayşegül and Cem have in mind when they say legal steps to secure the rights of Kurds as citizens. Very interesting. Not as a minority but as citizens there.

MR. CAGAPTAY: I'll take my crystal ball out. I'd like to extend, of course, my sincere thanks to you for inviting me here to the Brookings Institution, for organizing this debate. I think it's very useful to look at Ayşegül's work and I'm very happy to be on the same panel with Nick and Ayşegül today.

MR. KIRIŞCI: And me?

MR. CAGAPTAY: Yes, of course, you. (Laughter)

I thought it's a good question to look into the content of the paper because the assumption here is that at some point the PKK's jailed leader, Öcalan, who has been incommunicado for a while now will be allowed to speak. He'll tell the PKK to lay down their weapons, they'll listen to him. Turkey will be back to peace talks and negotiations.

I think that could hold to an extent given that Öcalan has significant, almost cult-like followership among the PKK's rank and file, he still does. This also applies to the PYD's base in Syria. I think we shouldn't underestimate the Öcalan factor. In other words, when he does come out, of course, many members of the PKK leadership will listen to him.

The question of how long the fighting goes on, whether it becomes so severe that when Öcalan comes out and speaks it's too late because so many people will have suffered so much that they just don't want to listen to his solution. What Öcalan's solution will be is, I guess, the other question. Will it be securing his release and his house arrest? Or will it be more extensive rights including, as Ayşegül and Cem say, legal steps to secure the rights of Kurds as citizens? What would that be?

One of the reasons I like this paper is that it's well researched, there are a lot of details -- I'm a nerd so I like to see all the numbers. But one of the reason that I liked it is because it has some very creative approaches to the Kurdish issue, not only in Turkey but across the region. It suggests, for example, on page 3, that the solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey has got to be different than the solution to the Kurdish issue in other countries in the Middle East: Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Why? In Iran, Iraq, and Syria, Kurds live in their traditional homelands. The overwhelming majority of those countries' Kurds live in their tradition homeland, Kurdistans. In Turkey that is not the case. The majority of Turkish Kurds do not live in their traditional homeland, and an overwhelming majority definitely live far away in large cities of western Turkey. So, a solution to the Kurdish problem in Turkey cannot be territorially based because it will not answer the political demands of all Kurds, it will only answer to the political demands of a minority. Whereas a territorially based solution has been realized in Iraq, it's conceivable in Iran and Syria because there Kurds do live in compact territories, historic homelands, many of them haven't moved out of those areas.

Which means, I think, that a solution in Turkey has to be political, not territorially based. And that will include extension of -- and here I'm only guessing what Ayşegül is saying when you and Cem say legal steps to secure rights as citizens, would only mean, I think, extension of broad political rights to all citizens, obviously including Turkey's Kurdish citizens as well.

Moving forward, I also like this paper because I think it brings forward the interconnected nature of Turkish domestic politics, the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Syrian Civil War, and the U.S. efforts to combat ISIL. All these four issues that were at one time or another were definitely separate tracks are now joined together, and the paper fleshes that out really well, the trans-nationalization of the Kurdish issue in the Turkey -- that's the

subtitle of one of the chapters. And I think the crux of this interconnected nature of these four issues really goes through understanding the very close relationship between PKK and PYD. The PYD, as you know, has militia, a YPG fighting ISIL in Syria.

Of course, many people like to think that they are separate organizations but they really are not. I think of PKK and PYD as sort of branches of the same company; one is United, one is United Express, meaning you get different names but the same experience. I think that goes through understanding why those issues are now interconnected. Turkey cannot tolerate PYD advances in Syria because that means recognizing PKK victory in Turkey and in Syria. By the same token, I think where things have become really complicated -- and this is generally where I am an optimist but I have to insert a tone of pessimism into the paper -- is that although initially the PYD was mostly subservient to the PKK because the PYD is a sister organization and PKK is the mothership, lately I think because the Kurds have made so many gains, the PKK's base has been excited politically by the gains of the Syrian Kurds and they try to transfer some of these gains into Turkey which is one of the reasons why I think the peace process broke down.

I think the paper would benefit from an improvement in terms of bringing not just the Turkey side of what went wrong but also the PKK, PYD side of what went wrong in the collapse of the peace talks. Maybe there are people in Turkey who were ready to fight with PKK, that's true. But PYD and PKK rank and file were also excited that the cease fire had broken down, hoping that they could bring the Kobanî model into Syria; the idea of getting territory, establishing autonomy, that they could import this into Turkey. I think that was a highly unrealistic dream, thinking that they could defeat the second largest army in NATO to establish autonomy. That failed, but of course, it also meant the failure of peace talks overall.

So, I think it leaves us on a crossroads in the sense that Turkey can no more address this issue going forward without looking at the layout of the Syrian Civil War. And I also agree with you, Kemal, that I think bringing Russia into the paper perhaps at a later phase would be useful in terms of looking forward to scenarios. Of course, we all have to look at how this will work out with the new U.S. administration. Maybe we can do that in the later Q&A.

Why don't I stop here for a minute.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Soner. And thanks for those last words because it builds a bridge across me to Nick.

Clearly the United States is a critical player here, as was the case, as Ayşegül has pointed out, in the early 1990s and throughout the 1990s. We must not also forget that AKP, and even before AKP, some constructive steps were taken towards meeting those citizenship rights because the United States had turned in Öcalan, who had fled to Kenya, to the Turkish authorities. I wonder where we would be today if that critical event had not taken place, and whether AKP, even under the banner of the European Union, would have been able to introduce what is commonly referred to as cultural reforms for Kurds.

So, the U.S. is a critical player, Nick. And I would, again, like to go back to this magical page 18 where Ayşegül and Cem argue that the U.S. has to aim for a compromise in norther Syria that includes the FSA, that's the Free Syrian Army, the Turkish government, Syrian Kurds, and perhaps the Assad government. Again, Ayşegül, Russia is missing there. But let's see from your point of view whether the United States, in its toolbox, has the means of bringing about this compromise and whether the new administration will have the will to do it.

MR. DANFORTH: Thank you very much. First let me thank you, Kemal,

for inviting me. Thanks to all of you for showing up. Thanks to Ayşegül and Cem for such a fascinating paper, and on a different note, thanks to Professor (inaudible), who in part peaked my interest in this when he taught an undergraduate class on Turkish Nationalism and Identity that I took some years ago.

It's exciting to read the recommendations that they make. I'm coming here from the Bipartisan Center where just this morning we released our set of recommendations for the new administration in Turkey. And we very much agree on the key point here, which is for the United States to think that it can isolate the situation in northern Syria, give Turkey a free hand domestically, ignore the conflict that's going on between Turkey and the PKK within Turkish territory in pursuit of tactical concessions in northern Syria and the war against ISIS. This will be a short-term and unsuccessful strategy. It's less my position to advise the Turkish government or the Kurdish National Movement, but I also completely agree with your call for moderation on both sides there.

I thought in the course of my comments today what might be interesting to say is to look ahead a little bit and think on the off-chance, as Ayşegül has suggested, the parties involved might not take her excellent recommendations on what that future scenario looks like, and what in that situation the United States might be able to do to prevent what is already a very difficult situation from getting worse.

I think, as this paper lays out, part of the paradox that we're facing now is based on the history of this conflict, both parties, the Turkish government and the Kurdish movement, recognize that in the abstract some form of political solution will be necessary. The problem is that the immediate steps both sides are taking, rather than the moderation which is recommended, are steps that are not necessarily conducive to creating this political solution. On the PKK's side, we've seen, and as Soner mentioned, in the past year there is simply not the military force to stand up and win a

military victory against the Turkish Army. In light of that, the way that the PKK could potentially escalate, and this is something PKK leaders have alluded to, would be by launching a more sustained set of terrorist attacks in western Turkey. In this case, the consequences would actually be very damaging for the movement. As we've seen in the case of several terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Ankara over the past year in which dozens of civilians have been killed, this poisoned Turkish popular opinion creates immense and justifiable anger in a way that makes the possibility of returning to the negotiating table much more difficult. And it also very quickly undermines the international legitimacy, such as it is, that the PKK and the YPG have succeeded in establishing.

At the same time that Turkish government's policy which, in addition to the counterinsurgency operation they've been waging for the past year, now increasingly involves cracking down on elected Kurdish politicians. This is also something, which as Ayşegül's paper explains, has been tried before and has repeatedly failed. And it might be worth pausing to just note that even defenders of the Turkish government, even people who have tried to justify the recent crackdowns from a moral position, from a democratic position, it's noticeable that none of them seem even terribly optimistic about explaining how these strategies would actually result in a successful conclusion of the Kurdish conflict, form even the Turkish government's position.

In the past year you've seen at various points people in the Turkish government make the case that because of the way the PKK has conducted this war there is real anger on the part of the Kurdish population against the PKK, and that maybe that combined with the fact that the government has taken new steps towards granting Turkish cultural rights would mean that even if they rerun the same political playbook they might get better results.

Unfortunately, the events of the past year make both of these maybe once plausible arguments seem increasingly implausible. While people acknowledge there was enormous anger at the PKK within the Kurdish community in part because of their eagerness to resume the war, the way they conducted that war, the longer the war goes on, and the more it seems the government is targeting Kurdish politicians, the more people who know far more about this than I do report that that anger is shifting back toward that Turkish government.

By the same token, even a year ago, the discussion often involved people like Prime Minister Davutoğlu at the time suggested that as the counterinsurgency operations continued Turkey would continue to expand Kurdish cultural rights. Now that approach has very much shifted and it seems the government position is you will not have new cultural rights until there is some kind of military or political victory.

Similarly, to move to the question that Kemal asked, how does this all play out in Syria? There I think you have a similar dynamic where it's simply hard to see how either side brings this current conflict to a successful conclusion. The Turkish government is clearly relying on reaching some sort of agreement with Russia, its rapprochement with Russia, to give it more maneuverability to confront PYD Kurdish gains in northern Syria.

We're already starting to see the limits of that approach. The freehand that Russia gave Turkey does not quite seem to be as free as they would like. There is already some uncertainty about how much further forward into, for example, the city of al-Bab Russia and the Assad Regime are going to allow Turkey to push. Even a couple months ago there was still some discussion that Turkey might be able to reach a bargain with Russia, they gave up. They betrayed the rebels in Aleppo in return for further concessions against the Kurds. Now, increasingly, the bargain seems to be premised on

the fact that Aleppo's fall is inevitable and Turkey's bargaining power has slipped with that.

Were Russia and Assad to move towards something closer to a victory? In the past both the Assad Regime and the Russian government have been very eager to play the Kurdish card against Turkey. There is no reason to think that would necessarily change as they became more successful. Assad will certainly have his work cut out for him dealing with the rest of the rebel groups that remain, and would presumably see no reason to pick a further fight with the Kurds in Rojava. By the same token, Russia would benefit from whatever increased tensions between Syria and Turkey and between Turkey and the Kurdish Movement that continue to exist. This would put Russia in the position of being able to play arbitrator.

The question then, as you actually asked, is how does the United States fit into this, and what can the United States potentially do to change these dynamics in a more positive way? Here it's all too difficult to sound an optimistic note. There is still a lot of uncertainty about how Turkish-U.S. relations will proceed under the Trump Administration. Certainly, President-elect Trump has made very positive and supportive statements about Erdoğan, and this has raised the possibility that they could have a much more cooperative relationship. At the same time, many of those around the President-elect have shown a deep suspicion, hostility even, towards political Islam which raises the possibility the relationship could go in a very different direction.

Similarly, in the case of northern Syria though, I do think there will be reasons to believe there will be more continuity than change. It seems very clear the new Administration's focus, obsession even, with ISIS is going to continue. It would be very similar to the Obama Administration's. This is going to put an enormous priority for both symbolic and tactical reasons on capturing Raqqa. And if you take a quick look at the

map -- it's a complicated map -- take a slightly longer look at the map, it's clear that Kurdish forces, PYD forces, are the only ones that are in a position to be able to take Raqqa in the near future. And because of this, I think if Turkey continues to present an obstacle to PYD forces advancing on Raqqa this is only going to create further frustrations amongst people at the Pentagon and the State Department who have been dealing with this already and are already very frustrated with the Turks.

Now, the risk here, I think -- and rather than talk about how the United States can solve this situation, I'm almost in a position of saying what I would recommend the United States do to not make the situation worse. So far, the United States' tendency has been to deal with Turkish concerns by ignoring them. They've clung to this fiction, as Soner mentioned, that the YPG and the PKK, despite all evidence, are completely separate entities. And we've heard statements -- this was recently an anonymous official to the Washington Post -- that Turkey can basically either support the coalition efforts or stay out of the way.

So far this approach has been actually more successful than by all rights it should have been. The United States has been very slow, hesitant, to intervene when the Syrian Kurds, when the YPG has crossed various redlines that were agreed to with Turkey. So far this has resulted in a lot of tension between Turkey and the Kurds and Syria, a lot of tension between Turkey and the United States, but no clear rupture. There have been skirmishes but there hasn't been an actual fight in northern Syria.

I think this is a real possibility that the United States government isn't necessarily taking seriously enough -- there were questions about whether or not -- how YPG has evacuated all its forces from the city of Manbij. There are questions about whether or not the Turkish government might unilaterally decide to attack YPG forces in Manbij. Were this to happen it would be a dream come true for ISIS. Even were the

YPG to feel the need to move forces away from the campaign against Raqqa to defend their position in Manbij, that in itself would, again, set back the efforts to combat ISIS enormously.

In conclusion, I would go one step further, then, in saying that the issue is not just saying that the United States can't ignore the domestic situation in Turkey in the interest of achieving short-term gains against ISIS and Syria, but even in managing the conflict in northern Syria, as I think you noted in the quote you read, it really is important for the United States to be careful and not give into the temptation to basically rush into Raqqa at the expense of expanding the Turkish Kurdish conflict in a way that would ultimately be detrimental to everyone except ISIS.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Well, thanks Nick. The more I listen to you, the more I realize how complicated the situation is, and the more also I'm glad that I'm not a policymaker. Dealing with that complexity at an intellectual level is challenging, but then actually adopting the policies that can strike the right equilibrium is indeed going to be a challenge.

I frankly would like to add an additional element of complexity and that in a way is captured by what happened in Italy over the weekend and the result of a referendum. And what it to me captures is that I would not want to use the word or the verb unravelling, but it does capture how much what at Brookings is frequently referred to as the international liberal order is in danger, or at stake. We need not go to the details of the challenges that the European Union is facing. Turkey had long been a lynchpin there in terms of ensuring that order -- at one point the expectation of the Obama Administration, before the Arab Spring, was that it would spread out, it would expand. Whereas what's happening is that the order from its very heart is being shaken. And that also, Nick, I think needs to be taken into consideration.

So, all I can wish is good luck to the new Administration.

Ayşegül, we're fast running out of time, and I promised the participants here 30 minutes of Q&A. But we do have the tradition of asking the speaker to respond to what came from Soner as well as Nick. And I will refrain from asking my question and then we'll turn to the audience.

MS. AYDIN: (off mic) going on the PKK side. So, I don't think we have a lot of information about -- about PKK's decision-making. So, I'm still looking for an answer for the question of what happened in June of 2015 that the PKK decided to escalate the conflict. So HDP won more seats in the Grand National Assembly than even before. So, wasn't that really considered a victory for the PKK as well? I mean, what was the PKK's approach? Why escalate the conflict right after HDP's historic victory?

MR. CAGAPTAY: I think we looked at one aspect of this quadrilateral relationship between Erdoğan, PYD, HDP, and PKK, which was that the PKK, although it was the mother organization, was driven by the successes of PYD in Syrian 2015 and overexcited thinking that it could import the Kobanî model into Turkey which is why I think the leadership largely decided to abandon the peace process and go for violence. And that effort failed miserably with grave repercussions, not just for the Kurdish Movement in Turkey but Kurdish citizens and all of Turkey's citizens.

But the other part of this quadrilateral relationship is PKK versus HDP. And I think there it's important to understand that this is kind of similar to the relationship between Sinn Féin and IRA except it's the opposite. Meaning in the Irish movement, the military wing, IRA, was borne out of the political wing and was always subservient to it. In the Turkish Kurdish case, it's been the opposite. The political wing, HDP, is borne out of the military wing and has always been subservient to it. So, the answer to your question, why would the PKK abandon and destroy peace talks at a time

when the HDP becomes the third largest block in the Turkish Parliament? That looks like it's a crossroads point for the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Thus far, people who had ignored the Kurdish issue could no more because the HDP had just become the third largest block in the Parliament, a king-maker with 80 deputies in a 550 member legislative. Whereas previously Kurds could only get 20-30 seats and they would be ignored. Now they could not be ignored.

So, why the PKK decision? I think it was mainly driven by fear, by the PKK that this inverse IRA-Sinn Féin style relationship could not be reversed, that the political wing of the Kurdish Movement could become powerful, Demirtaş could be the rising star, and the PKK simply, I think, didn't want to lose its role as the leader of the Movement. And I think it reverted the Kurdish Movement back to the language of violence at arms, and that basically led to the collapse of HDP, as well as undermining Demirtaş's trajectory. He is a charismatic politician. And I think had the PKK not resorted to violence he would have definitely stayed with a nationwide appeal, which is something he had just grabbed before the elections. And I think the PKK was simply both concerned and scared by this development and it undermined HDP's rise and prevented the inversion of this Sinn Féin-IRA style relationship inverse of that. And I think they succeeded in that, unfortunately.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Very good, Soner. Actually, as I was listening to you I was thinking of the 1990s. I lived through the 1990s and that was the time when I took an interest in this. There was a very interesting alliance, an unspoken alliance between the PKK and hardliners in the Turkish state, that both sides benefited from the escalation of the conflict. And in this way, I think both sides were squeezing out the more liberal, the more moderation-oriented elements.

And, again, my feeling is that in the first decade of the 21st century, we

saw an AKP that was a coalition of liberals, center-right, and Kurdish liberals. And that AKP was very much prepared to play the game of, let's say, liberal politics, or addressing this difficult question through politics. However, dynamics evolved in a different direction in the region, but I would argue also within the AKP.

And a good friend and colleague of ours, Omer Taspinar and Gonul Tol, published two-three weeks ago, about a month ago, in *Foreign Affairs* a fascinating article arguing that there is now an alliance with hardline Kemalists and the government itself. That article, as I read it, really kind of propelled me back to the 1990s, mid-1990, or '93-'94, when the only woman prime minister we had in Turkey, Tansu Çiller, had turned over the whole file of the Kurdish problem to the military and the security forces. There is that added complication there.

It's at this point that I'd very quickly like to turn to you and take a round of questions, maybe two or three questions at a time for the panel and then proceed hopefully for another round. Yes, one there and then you.

QUESTIONER: (inaudible). I'd like to thank Professor Aydin for the excellent paper and presentation, and also Brookings for this occasion. I had a question about the differences of the Turkish government's attitude towards Iraqi Kurds and Syrian Kurds.

There is an economic dimension that we haven't mentioned here. There is a modus operandi between the Iraqi Kurds and Turkey, both in terms of trade and natural resources and oil. And also, in my own mind at least, the line between national interests and personal interests of the current government is very blurred. So, to what extent do Turkey-Iraqi Kurds are driven by economics and personal interests, and how does that play out with the relations with Syria and Syrian Kurds?

QUESTIONER: Thank you all for your remarks. My name is (inaudible).

My question is to Professor Aydin. In your talk you specifically call it Kurdish Ethnic Movement. And why do you specifically call Kurdish Movement as Ethnic Movement in contrary to renowned Kurdish Studies scholars such as Martin van Bruinessen, Robert Olson, David Romano, and so on calling it Kurdish National Movement? Thank you.

QUESTIONER: I'm Eliza Caulson, I'm with the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program. You've spoken a lot about the topic in terms of policymakers and recommendations for policymakers, but my question is for those U.S. scholars going abroad not as policymakers or politicians necessarily, but as cultural ambassadors, how would you suggest -- and this question is for the whole panel -- they would approach the topic in a sensitive manner in their conversations with Turkish colleagues?

MR. KIRIŞCI: Clearly, we do a lot of these stickers you put when you're hurt, you know, cut and bruised. Band-Aid.

Let me take one more question. I'll come back to you on the second round.

QUESTIONER: (inaudible) with *Rudaw*, a Kurdish News Agency from Iraq. President Obama used to blame a lot of what he was facing in the Middle East on his predecessor, George W. Bush. Is there anything that the incoming president can blame on Obama when it comes to the Kurdish issue in the region? Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Ayşegül, let me turn to you and respond to these four questions as you find them fit. Then I'll come to Nick and then Soner.

MS. AYDIN: I'm not sure I have answers to all of them. They're all really great questions, but I'll do my best.

Let me start with the first question. I think that's a very good point. There are major differences between Iraqi Kurds and Syrian Kurds. I think the Turkish government has not viewed Iraqi Kurds as a dangerous group. But that's because of

their societal makeup. It's still a traditional society. It's a highly hierarchic society. There is one leader in charge of everything. It's easy to deal with them since they are transitional. They don't share any ideological commonalities with the PKK. But unlike Iraqi Kurds, Syrian Kurds, YPG, as my colleagues have mentioned, their understanding of the Kurdish problem closely follows Öcalan's writings. In that respect, they are preaching a form of nationalism that the Turkish government has long viewed as dangerous for its own Kurdish question.

So, about the economic dimension -- and I'm sure my colleagues will have much smarter answers. Obviously, there is definitely an economic dimension, but about the details, I think that's kind of beyond my knowledge. But in terms of societal makeup, these groups are so different and one group is viewed as a major security issue by the Turkish government and the other one viewed as someone that you can deal with, someone that you can talk to you, and someone that the Turkish government has been interested with for a long time.

Another great question is why -- I'm not sure if that was a deliberate choice on our part. I'm not sure if he actually paid any attention to this and I'm so glad that you brought it up. So, why not Kurdish -- why are we using the phrase Kurdish Ethnic Movement instead of Kurdish National Movement. I think we were approaching the Kurdish Movement as a social movement for a very long time. And social movements, as you might be familiar with in the sociology discipline, are either economic or religious or ethnic. And that's why I think we just subconsciously have been using that term. But that wasn't a deliberate choice, and I would very much like to hear from my colleague if he would have a preference here, how he would approach it if he thinks that the Kurdish National Movement phrase is better than Ethnic Movement. But I'll just leave it there.

MR. KIRIŞCI: And what about the Band-Aid question?

MS. AYDIN: I'm not sure --

MR. KIRIŞCI: What recommendations do you have for young aspiring American scholars when they interact with their counterparts and want to talk about the Kurdish issue, and don't want to be physically or emotionally hurt. (Laughter)

MS. AYDIN: Well, that's going to be a difficult conversation no matter what, I think. And I'll leave it there.

MR. KIRIŞCI: My immediate answer to that would be to start praying that Turkey can go back ten years and, again, unleash or encourage an environment that is comfortable with diversity. All kinds of diversity: social, political, economic, but also intellectual diversity.

There was also a question about what could the new president blame Obama for in the region.

MR. CAGAPTAY: I can do that, it's easy. (Laughter)

I think incoming presidents can blame whatever they want to on their predecessors. But with this president you don't know, of course.

So, I actually wanted to look at the other two questions, both recommendations and the Turkish KRG relationship and why that doesn't work with Turkey and Syrian Kurds.

I think, first of all, I disagree slightly because I think energy politics is really diverse. Many political parties, you have KDP, PYD, Halkların, different movements. It's a very sophisticated society with a large urban base. So, it's not that it's not considered manageable, but I think it's the fact that there is a very different security relationship there that has emerged in the last decade. I think (inaudible) was mainly driven by KRG, or initiated by the KRG. And I think it came out of a recognition that with

the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq towards the end of the last decade, the KRG will be left with four neighbors, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.

I actually remember having a conversation with a high ranking KRG official at the KRG capital. I looked at him and said, who is going to be your --you need to pick one friend. You can't be surrounded by all adversaries once the American troops leave. He said, look, it's very simple. The Iraqis and the Syrians have nationalist ideologies for which there is no room for Kurds. We're left with Iranians and Turks. He said the Iranians either give us honey with poison or poison with honey. Turks give us either honey or poison. In other words, you can deal with them. It's clear.

So, I think they made a decision to pick turkey as their ally. The commitment of that was showing that they would support Turkey against the PKK. Turkey reciprocated with some economic incentives. Then came the projects to build pipelines, buy oil and gas, which has made KRG Turkey's significant trading partner. So, important that if KRG was independent Turkey would be its largest trading partner, export/import-wise.

And I think it's just economic commonwealth which really drives the relationship. You could get to an economic commonwealth with Turkey and the Syrian Kurds eventually, although the Syrian Kurds don't have oil and gas. It's still a large enough area, two million people in certain Kurdish areas. They could offer benefits for Turkish companies which are hungry for contracts.

But I think before you get there what complicates is the PYD does not yet feel that it is at that point where it has to decide who to pick as friends after the United States, which is a decision that the KRG made that it had to decide how to survive in a post-American world. And here it's not because the PYD relies on the United States, it's because Russia, which we haven't really brought into the conversation, I think plays a

quote unquote excellent game of pitting everybody against each other in northern Syria. Russia gives Turkey, the Assad Regime, and the PYD just enough so they're all dependent on Russia for their next gains. But it gives nobody exactly what they want so they remain dependent on Russia.

So, the most recent Russian greenlight to Turkey to go into northern Syria included Jarabulus but not al-Bab. So, it's telling Turkey you can almost prevent the PYD corridor, almost. And it's also telling the Assad Regime they can do al-Bab if they want to. Of course, almost. And the PYD can almost take al-Bab. I think it's this perception that each side could do a little bit better if they got along a little bit better with Russia, which prevents the PYD from ultimately deciding not to play cat-and-mouse games with Turkey.

So long as Russia is in the equation, we'll keep pitting sides against each other. Russia does not want either of these three sides to get everything they want because then they would no more need Russia. And I think this prevents a Turkish KRD-style relationship from emerging between Turkey and (inaudible). For that to emerge certain Kurds have to decide if they want to make friends with Turkey, why would they want to make friends with Turkey when Russia is telling them don't worry, we'll help you, or Assad Regime is giving them all these signals.

So, I think we're not there yet, but maybe one day we will get there. I think this will require a change of mind in both Ankara and in the certain Kurdish leadership. It also requires a much more dramatic change, of course, in the transformation of the PYD-PKK relationship. It's going to be a taller task than the previous one. So, definitely a long way to get there but we should all hope that it can happen, of course.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Soner. Nick?

MR. DANFORTH: Just very briefly on two of the questions. I have to admit, the closest I've ever come to seeing a Fulbright student get in a fist fight in Turkey was over the Kurdish issue. That said, I have no particular recommendations, but I think it's enormously important that both sides can continue this sometimes frustrating effort, that people on both sides listen with patience to one another, and that it's good that Fulbright scholars continue to do that. It's good that Fulbright scholars be allowed to continue to do that. And hopefully students from Turkey and the capacities that they currently have will be allowed to come here and also have those experiences.

As for what President Obama can be blamed for, I know there are people who would blame him for far more than I would. I would only specifically say in regards to this issue, the real question I have is in the fall of 2014, when the fighting at Kobani was at its peak, people following the situation in Turkey and abroad were very concerned that given the nationalists rhetoric on the Turkish side, the anger on the Kurdish side, this was a movement where if things weren't managed more carefully the entire peace process could break down.

Now, it may be too late for the United States to try to revive the peace process, but if there was ever a moment when increased U.S. attention and increased U.S. pressure might have been able to keep things on a better track, I think that was the moment.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thanks, Nick.

QUESTIONER: I'm Katherine Scruggs, and no I don't belong to a think tank, but I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Turkey 53 years ago. Since then I've been to Diyarbakır a number of times and I've done some work there. Because, of course, 53 years ago the Turks didn't tell us about Kurds or that there were Kurds, they were just mountain Turks.

But when you speak about -- first of all, I would have expected a little bit more. If we're going to sit here and talk about the Kurds and Turkey, where is the Kurd up on the stage, okay? Because I think we in the States can be a model for those people. That if you're talking about where there is great hate or where the head of a political party has been thrown into prison, that we need to really respect their point of view and not hear from the Lutherans about what's wrong with Roman Catholics.

I have met people from the Kurdish Policy Research Group and I think they could have really presented what it is that they want. When they talk about what is the definition of a citizen in Turkey and they're left out of that conversation and they're left out of that definition. When they would like to have some education in their own language. My gosh, in the United States we have bilingual programs all over the place. Why aren't we involved in those kinds of conversations through think tanks, through policy groups?

I really never met -- and I've met hundreds of Kurds in Istanbul and in Diyarbakır and in Şanlıurfa. And even though they may consider PKK a type of freedom fighter, but they certainly do not approve of the violence, they do not approve of -- and it seemed like every time you were going to talk about Kurds you talked about PKK instead of talking about HDP and the appeal for minority rights. Not just Kurdish rights, but for minority rights.

So, my question for you is: how can we go forward with your panels and with your groups and your books? What is the role? Because I think we should have a role in helping to solve this problem.

QUESTIONER: This will be very brief. I don't want to make a complicated situation any more complicated. But how does Fethullah Gülen fit into this? Is he just a distraction in all of this? If that weren't an issue in Turkey -- it seems like

Erdoğan --

MR. KIRIŞCI: You promised you were going to keep it brief.

QUESTIONER: Well, you know, promises are made to be broken these days, as we all well know. But I'm just curious as to how he fits into this equation. Thank you.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is (inaudible). I have a question regarding the PKK's presence in Mosul and Sinjar who have a sizable number of forces which has the potential to open a front with the Turkish forces. To what extent is this used as a pressure card by the PKK on the Turkish government on one side and (inaudible) on the other side, on the Turkish government to make reforms? Thank you.

MR. KIRIŞCI: I think we'll have just enough time for Ayşegül to have two minutes, and for you guys to have one minute. And a very good question from the Peace Corps. You know, we have a soft spot for Peace Corps. And we have a friend here who has worked from Peace Corps on the Turkish side.

All I can say on that is in academia we have debated a lot who the Turk is. Because though you're looking at us as Turks, who knows, we may have some Kurdish identity here too. That's the way I would respond to it. I recognize your questions, the issues that you raise, but allow me to confess that that's the best we've managed to come up with, but next time we'll try harder.

So, let me start with Nick this time and then we'll give a few words to Ayşegül. I'm sorry I keep putting you on the spot at the last minute.

MR. DANFORTH: I might respond to the (inaudible) question because I think if you think about it from Turkey's point of view the two biggest issues are one, how the United States handles his extradition and the other the United States' cooperation with the YPG. There has been a lot of optimism on the trigger side that Trump might be

able to resolve both of these conflicts. I tend to think it's a little less likely on the one hand. I think there are clear strategic reasons why the United States will still have an interest in preserving the relationship with the YPG. That is less likely to change.

And then on the Gülen side, I think even no matter how much the Trump Administration tries to push this, no matter how eager they are to try to appease Turkey on this, it's going to remain a legal issue, and it's going to remain, therefore, in the hands of the court, not the administration. It does seem like this administration is more eager to do that than other administrations might have been, but, again, there is only so much they can do.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Soner, can I turn to you, but also maybe take Katherine's question very briefly. Because Soner has a whole book on who the Turk is. And a whole PhD on it.

MR. CAGAPTAY: My doctoral dissertation which is titled "Islam Secularism, Nationalism: Who is a Turk." And I concluded that a Turk is anyone who eats baklava in Turkey. (Laughter)

MR. DANFORTH: Does that count me, then?

MR. KIRIŞCI: And then there are those Turks that only drink (inaudible) and then there are those that drink (inaudible) as well. And they don't always get along very well.

MR. CAGAPTAY: Honestly, but I have to add that I'm of Turkish origin but I would hate it if my views were characterized as Turkish because I'm an analyst. And while I think it would be great to have Kurds in the panel, you can discuss Turks or Kurds without having Turks or Kurds in the panel. I can be for the environment but I'm not a tree. So, I can be for Kurdish rights without being Kurdish. I see your concern, of course, and I think we can address that next time.

What I wanted to look at was the Sinjar issue which I think is important. There is some pro-PKK presence in Sinjar, mostly Yazidis, who are obviously safe from ISIS by the PKK that went in when there were abandoned by everybody else. And I think they feel definitely grateful to the organization who would save them. But whether the PKK can establish going forward a base in Sinjar I think is highly debatable. Just as I think that there will not be a Kurdish corridor in northern Syria connecting (inaudible) and Kobanî I also don't think that there will be a Kurdish base in Sinjar going forward, meaning Turkey will do everything it can to undermine that base because it will see it as a strategic threat going forward. So definitely I think it's an issue that we ought to look at, which means the PKK going from being a Turkish-Syrian issue can become a Turkish-Iraqi issue. We're not there yet, but I think there is definitely a risk that it could fall in that direction.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Ayşegül, concluding, one minute.

MS. AYDIN: In this paper we talked about three phases of the AKP period. The first one was the expansion period, the second one was pacifying the Kurds kind of period. So, the idea was to keep the winning coalition going because they had in the 2007 election almost 50 percent of the vote, so one out of every voter actually voted for AKP. So, that was a landslide victory. So, the idea after 2007 was to make sure that the winning coalition stays the way it is.

And I think in terms of pacifying the Kurds if one strategy was peace talks the other strategy was Islamization in southeast Turkey. So, I think Gülen's moment was pretty instrumental in this period. Gülen's schools targeted poor teenagers in the region and tried to kick start an Islamic renaissance in Kurdish populated areas.

We also see in this part of this Islamization package Islamist NGOs multiplying. We also see new Islamist inventions such as the holy birth celebrations. In

Turkish that's (speaking Turkish) to commemorate the birth of the prophet.

All these strategies are part of a package in order to make sure that Kurds stay in that winning alliance. So, I'm glad that you brought up the Gülen moment. I think they played a very instrumental role in making sure that Kurds remain as voters loyal to the AKP.

Just one very final point that I want to make, going back to your question. Unfortunately, in this paper we didn't talk a lot about the Kurdish Ethnic Movement so the paper is written from -- the purpose of the paper is to explain AKP's policy, so government policies, rather than what the Kurdish Movement was doing. Throughout this process, they came up with these maximalist demands which included freeing Öcalan, which is not a very realistic demand to start with.

But another important point that you made, the one of education and Kurdish language. I think it looks like an important issue, but actually it's not as important as we wish it could be. The reasoning is that part of the Democratization Package in 2014 actually included an article that allowed the use of local language on the election train and also education in Kurdish. But if you look at private schools opened in the region, locals actually showed no interest in any of these schools.

So, political rights, political representation may still be one issue for Kurds, but what is more important is basically economic issues. So, if you look at the life quality of Kurds, it's pretty poor. So, they live shorter than Turks. There are so many other things that I think, at least from our perspective, language is not a really big issue for Kurds right now. And I'll stop there, I know we're running out of time.

MR. KIRIŞCI: Thank you. Actually, in her paper she encourages political actors to moderate and not to go for maximalist objectives and goals. She does underline the importance of public services, providing public services to that part of the

country. We have to recognize that AKP's fame to government, to power, to political power, at the end of the day it is public services.

So, I'm terribly sorry that we violated a sacrosanct rule of Brookings and we've gone beyond the time allowed for us by four minutes, but thank you very much for your patience.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020