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TURKEY: POLITICAL TRENDS IN 2016

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS

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TURKEY: POLITICAL TRENDS IN 2016

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:12 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dana Rohrabacher (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. The subcommittee's first hearing of the new year is called to order. To mark this occasion, I can think of no more fitting subject for us to focus on than Turkey. As we watch the turmoil in Syria and the displacement of millions of civilians, no one needs a reminder about the vital place Turkey holds on the world stage. Any lasting solution in that part of the world must involve Turkey.

However, our hope is that Turkey is not only stable and peaceful, but also democratic and secular as well, with a strong and independent civil society and a government that upholds fundamental freedom.

Things are changing in Turkey, and today we ask, are those changes for the better or for the worse? President Erdogan and his party, the AKP, after well over a decade in power, failed to secure a majority of seats in the Parliament during the elections last June. The pro-Kurdish HDP attracted a cross section of secular Turks and Kurdish voters and entered Parliament as the fourth major political party.

Yet following that election, no party was able to build a coalition and form a government, so in November, a second round of voting took place, and the AKP regained its majority. Unfortunately, that may reflect the AKP's appeal to the Turkish nationalists over renewed fighting, and I say it is unfortunate if this is the reason why they are still in power is because there has been renewed fighting, and Turkey may become a more polarized rather than being elected because we have done a more harmonious job. We will be asking our witnesses to comment on that.

During today's hearing, I hope to discuss how these elections, and the shifting domestic political environment within Turkey, will play out over this coming year. What about reports of a crackdown on independent journalism and journalists? How will the latest PKK Turkish fighting affect events in Syria? And how will it affect the people who live in Turkey?

As I stated during this subcommittee's previous hearing on Turkey, our discussions and our comments, and even our criticisms of the Turkish Government, are predicated on a deep respect for the Turkish people and a deep respect for the Turkish nation and the role that it has played over the last century. That said, sometimes friends, and that is what the United States and Turkey are, we are friends, but friends need to speak plainly to one another about problems and about challenges that they both face.

There is a reason for concern. President Erdogan's continuing effort to empower his office by passing a new constitution and creating a powerful, Turkish-style Presidential system is harmful to Turkish democracy. Some of his policies at home and abroad raise alarm bells, and there should be people paying attention to disturbing reports of what appears to be abuses of power.

The natural ebb and flow of democracy in Turkey is being impacted by Erdogan's extension of his already historically long-term epicenter of power in his country. Recent actions against the Kurds appear to indicate a violent strategy based on military action.

That is not the way that we are going to build a more peaceful region, is it? Or, perhaps, it is perhaps not the way you bring peace to your country is basing your, how you say, basing the common good and basically the tranquility of your country on military action and fear.

So today, we are interested in talking to our witnesses, seeing what they have to say about these, as I say, trends of concern about Turkey, and with that, I would turn to my ranking member and see if he has an opening statement.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for organizing today's subcommittee's hearing on the political trends in Turkey, who is one of our most important allies in an increasingly complicated region. And I am especially grateful for the opportunity to look at the domestic situation which drives Turkey's foreign policy.

While President Erdogan enjoys strong support, the Kurdish nationalists rooted HDP was successful in achieving a voice in Parliament. That is a good thing. That is democracy. Much of the concern of the international observers, however, we have been informed that the Kurdish message has been suppressed by the ruling party, and as someone who represents the minority voice in government, here the minority party, also as an African American, where we feel voices are not heard, I am deeply concerned with how Turkey will find a peaceful political resolution to the Kurdish question.

I always equate what is going on someplace else with what we did and what happens in the United States of America, and I think one of the keys in the 1960s with the issues of African Americans, for example, and the genius of Dr. King working with the government was there was a peaceful resolution to the question of African Americans that we still are dealing with.

Clearly, one cannot completely separate domestic Turkish issues from international concerns. For example, Turkey has been doing a commendable job in housing over 2.5 million Syrian refugees. Turkey is taking in those families fleeing Assad's bombs and ISIS'

repossession—repression, while other countries, including the United States, are reluctant to do so.

In this effort, Turkey is carrying the world's burden in the face of evil and addressing a grave humanitarian crisis, and while Germany and the EU seek a more cooperative relationship with Turkey, today's congressional hearing is an important examination of the nature of our relationship with Turkey.

During Vice President Biden's recent trip to Turkey, he rightly stressed the importance of a values-based approach to our cooperation with Turkey, both bilaterally and within NATO. We, in the United States Congress, are concerned with the democratic progress in Turkey. Tolerance in the face of domestic criticism is difficult, and regional events further complicates the situation. Believe me, I know. But nevertheless, we fully defend the fight for academic freedom, for freedom of the press, and for the right of individuals to criticize their governments as well as it may—as hard and as difficult as it may be to hear. People should have the right to voice those concerns.

As we all know too well in America, suppressing these voices only leads to an erosion of democracy and then eventually to violence. And as violence spreads across southeastern Turkey, we are reminded of the delicacy of the balance between security and liberty. Tragically, they are not isolated incidents. They serve to highlight the need of a path to peace between the government and the Kurdish forces.

What could that path look like? Should and will the constitution be changed to accommodate such a process? Turkey's democratic progress in the region is essential for our shared ideas, and today's conversation about the domestic situation in Turkey may be difficult, but it is essential for our understanding.

We need to, I think, as Members of Congress, to try to really understand what is taking place on a domestic basis on the ground in Turkey, just as I am sure that some need to understand, on a domestic basis, what is taking place here in the United States as we are getting involved in our political system in our Presidential election.

So, I thank the chairman for this hearing because we want to learn and understand so that we can make sure that we are working collectively for democracy and working collectively to stomp out those who are threats to us all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We appreciate your very substantive remarks that you set us and inaugurated this hearing with.

Mr. Cicilline, I understand, has a short opening statement as well.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Rohrabacher and Ranking Member Meeks, for calling this important and timely hearing. The issue of Turkey, its political atmosphere, and its role in the region is critically important. A key ally in the fight against ISIS and Syria, Turkey has its own internal political dynamics that are driving its overall military policy. A key factor in this is Prime Minister Erdogan and the AKP's relationship with the Kurds and other minorities.

Erdogan's decision to abandon the peace process with the PKK and undertake a harsh crackdown against Kurds, including civilians, is extremely disturbing. Since July, approximately 230 civilians have been killed during the campaign by the Turkish Government. Tens of thousands of people have been forced from their homes, and the Turkish military has essentially created a war zone within the Kurdish part of southeast Turkey.

Kurdish political leaders have been rounded up and imprisoned without due process, and there has been a widespread crackdown on media and civil society. In line with its targeting of religious and ethnic minorities, Turkey has also continued its policies of antagonizing Armenia by supporting Azerbaijan in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Sadly, the Turkish Government continues to deny the very well-established history of genocide against the Armenian people. Turkey certainly has the right to protect itself from terrorism, but we should all be alarmed by the antidemocratic tactics that Turkey has been using against the Kurds, other minorities, and most widely, against Prime Minister Erdogan's perceived critics.

Turkey was once solidly on the path to democratization, and I fear that it has strayed so far that it may not be able to recover. And while the United States must continue to support Turkey in the fight against ISIS and its absorption of refugees, we do it at our own peril if we let the issues of democracy and human rights fall by the wayside.

So I look forward to working with my colleagues on these issues and hearing the testimony of our witnesses today, and thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the courtesy. I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And we appreciate your presence with us today. The witnesses will proceed, and—following my introduction, and I would just request that if we could, again, have your actual written testimony presented but keeping your remarks down to about 5 minutes.

First we have with us, and I will introduce all of the witnesses. Nate, and pronounce—please forgive me if I mispronounce your name. Schenkkan?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Schenkkan.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Nate Schenkkan is the Freedom House project director for their annual Nations in Transit report. He previously served as senior program officer for Freedom House's Euro/Asia program, which covers Turkey and Central Asia.

Ali Cinar is executive vice president of the Turkish Heritage Organization, a nonprofit group established to promote dialogue around Turkey's role in the world and the U.S.-Turkey relationships.

And finally, Dr. Gonul Tol, got it, okay, is the founding director of the Middle East Institute's Center for Turkish Studies and an adjunct professor at George Washington University. She has written about Turkey extensively and frequently appears in the media. She has earned her Ph.D. From Florida International University.

And Nate, you may proceed.

STATEMENT OF MR. NATE SCHENKKAN, PROJECT DIRECTOR, NATIONS IN TRANSIT, FREEDOM HOUSE

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Thank you. Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you. I ask that my full written testimony be entered into the record.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Without objection.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. I last appeared before this subcommittee in July 2014 to speak then about the future of Turkish democracy. I described how the government led by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan pursued an aggressive society-wide crackdown on dissent in response to the Gezi Park protests of June 2013 and the corruption cases against the government in December 2013.

Since that time, the situation for democracy and freedom of expression in Turkey has significantly worsened, and most significantly, the government has returned to open conflict with the PKK in July 2015, which has resulted in the deaths of at least 230 civilians inside Turkey and 230 Turkish security forces, while the President says that the state has killed 3,000 PKK militants.

The Islamic State's suicide bombers during this time have killed another 135 Turkish citizens and 11 foreign visitors to Istanbul.

The return to conflict is, in significant part, the result of leaving the war in Syria to fester. This has emboldened radical parts of the Kurdish movement in Turkey by showing that violence can achieve autonomy, and it has strengthened the position of Turkish nationalists in Turkey.

Turkish members of the Islamic State, who have traveled frequently to Syria, have entered the fray and are trying to widen this cleavage. In these context, President Erdogan, and the AKP took what I believe is a cynical decision, in July, to return to war with the PKK to strengthen their position in the November 1 repeat parliamentary elections.

This decision has played into the hands of hardliners within the PKK that are threatened by the success of the HDP, the Kurdish Movement Party, which promotes nonviolent integration into the Turkish state in order to realize Kurdish rights.

The conflict is having terrible consequences. There is the horrific civilian death toll that I mentioned. There have been at least 62 day and night curfews for military operations since July, including some lasting up to 2 weeks, and some that are going on now. Tens of thousands of people have been forced from their homes, and the military is using tanks and heavy weaponry inside of Turkish cities.

At least 22 HDP members of Parliament are under criminal investigation, as is the HDP mayor of Diyarbakir. Dozens of local officials from the HDP and other Kurdish parties have been arrested, including 18 co-mayors. Last week, prosecutors requested at least 7 years imprisonment for the mayor of Mardin, Ahmet Turk, who was one of the elder statesmen of the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

These are the people on whom the peace process relied, and without them, it will be impossible to end the cycle of conflict. This crackdown comes on top of one that was already taking place on media and civil society. The government has branded the Gulen

movement officially a terrorist organization, and is persecuting it relentlessly after the movement helped launch the December 2013 corruption investigations.

The newspaper Bugun and the TV stations Bugun and Kanalturk were seized immediately previous to the November 1 parliamentary election. There are over 108,000 Web sites blocked in Turkey, many of these now increasingly are Kurdish Web sites or Web sites linked to the Gulen movement, like the magazine Nokta.

In the last quarter of 2015 alone, there were 93 cases for insult and violation of personal rights of President Erdogan, including against 42 journalists. That is practically one per day.

In 2015, 19 journalists and two cartoonists received prison sentences for insulting President Erdogan or other high officials. The editor-in-chief and the Ankara bureau chief of the country's oldest newspaper, Cumhuriyet, are facing possible life sentences for reporting on the National Intelligence Agency's use of humanitarian convoys to smuggle weapons into Syria.

I have two recommendations. The Turkish Government's attempt to destroy the Kurdish movement inside Turkey, which is, I believe, what is happening, is counterproductive not only to peace in Turkey, but to the efforts of the United States to bring an end to the crises in Syria and Iraq. The conflict in Turkey is contributing to deepening radicalization of Kurds in Turkey and in Syria, and foreclosing a possibility that Turkey will be able to coexist with a stronger Kurdish presence in northern Syria, which is an inevitable outcome of any end to this crisis.

The U.S. should call on its political capital, both with the Government of Turkey and with the Kurdish movement in Syria to bring about a ceasefire in Turkey and to return to the peace process.

Second, when I testified in 2014, I advocated a strong U.S. emphasis on EU membership for Turkey in order to encourage progress on human rights. I must admit such a policy now seems untenable. Despite a superficial commitment to EU accession, the current government has repeatedly and directly rejected the requirements of EU membership in the areas of human rights and rule of law.

They EU's decision this fall to trade Turkish cooperation on stopping refugee flows in exchange for a supposedly reinvigorated accession process has discredited membership by making it a matter of quid pro quo instead of a matter of political and economic convergence.

Advancing Turkish accession to the EU at the expense of the EU's human rights principles has exposed the EU as cynical and shortsighted and has undermined its greatest strength as a rules-based, values-driven institution. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Schenkkan follows:]

Turkey in a Time of War

Written Testimony by Nate Schenkkan
Project Director, Nations in Transit, Freedom House

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Turkey: Political Trends in 2016
February 3, 2016

Introduction

Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today. I ask that my full written testimony be admitted into the record.

I last appeared before this subcommittee in July 2014 to speak about the future of Turkish democracy. In that testimony, I described how the government led by then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had pursued an aggressive, society-wide crackdown on dissent in response first to the Gezi Park protests of June 2013 and then in response to the opening of corruption cases implicating the government in December 2013.

Since the time of that testimony, the situation for democracy and for freedom of expression in Turkey has grown even more dire. Much of this is because of the government's return to open conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in July 2015. Since that time, the return to conflict with the PKK has resulted in the deaths of at least 230 civilians and 230 Turkish security forces, while the president claims the state has killed 3000 PKK militants. Also since July, the Islamic State's suicide bombers have killed another 135 Turkish civilians, as well as 11 foreign visitors to Istanbul just three weeks ago.

The conflict is taking a devastating toll on Turkey's civilians. It is destroying a decade of progress on relations with the Kurdish minority inside Turkey. It is generating a wave of

persecution against media, civil society, and academia that comes on top of the already widespread crackdown I described in 2014.

When protests were wracking Turkey in 2013 and we were watching police pour clouds of tear gas down Istanbul's streets, when the government was passing new laws restricting freedom of expression and assembly, or blocking Twitter and Facebook, one of the few bright spots we could all turn to was, "At least the peace process is still alive." Now that has been lost, too.

Why Did the Turkey-PKK Conflict Restart?

I think it is important to focus on the events that preceded the decision to return to conflict and to understand why and how the conflict re-started. In summary, the return to conflict is in significant part the result of the war in Syria being left to fester, which has both emboldened radical parts of the Kurdish movement in Turkey by showing that violence can achieve autonomy as it has for the Kurds in northern Syria, and has strengthened the arguments of traditional nationalist positions in Turkey that have always opposed pan-Kurdish sentiment through violence. Turkish members of the Islamic State who have traveled frequently to Syria have entered the fray, trying to widen this cleavage in Turkish society.

The PKK and the government had been in an official cease-fire since March 2013. During this time, the government conducted negotiations with the imprisoned head of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, allowing representatives of the Kurdish movement to visit him in prison in order to ensure any decisions would be seen as legitimate within the PKK. On February 28, 2015, the government and representatives of the Kurdish movement made a joint announcement in Istanbul of a roadmap for peace – what is widely known as "Dolmabahçe," because of where it was announced in Istanbul. The ten points of the announcement were vague, and their implementation unclear, but it was extremely significant, because for the first time government and Kurdish movement representatives shared a stage announcing together a joint plan for how to reach peace. On March 21, PKK

leader Öcalan's annual letter read at the annual Nevruz festival in Diyarbakir called for a disarmament congress.

Then something extremely surprising happened. Three weeks after Dolmabahçe, on March 22, President Erdoğan denounced the agreement. He claimed he had been excluded from the negotiations and was not informed of their content. This was in no way plausible, since he had been the head of government only six months before, had essentially appointed Prime Minister Davutoğlu, and Erdoğan's close advisor Yalçın Akdoğan had been leading the government's negotiating team. Erdoğan said that he did not approve of the government and the Peoples' Democratic Party, or HDP – a Kurdish party close to the PKK – making an announcement side by side. Dolmabahçe was dead.

I want to stress how surprising this was. Everyone knew relations between the PKK and the government were fragile. The success of the Kurdish Self-Protection Forces or YPG in northern Syria had increased the strength of hardline factions in the Kurdish movement in Turkey, and made it harder for Kurdish moderates to argue that the best way to achieve representation in Turkey was negotiations, especially as the Turkish government was very reluctant in cracking down on jihadists using Turkey as a transit zone to reach Syria, and opposed to supporting Kurds who fought those jihadists in Syria. In late 2014, the Islamic State's attack on the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobani, and the Turkish government's decision to refrain from supporting the Kurds in that battle, had increased tensions to the point where protests called for by the Kurdish movement inside Turkey resulted in 43 deaths.

But the Dolmabahçe announcement – and the fact that Erdoğan's advisor Yalçın Akdoğan was the one responsible for negotiating it – seemed to indicate that there was still a chance to save the peace negotiations.

So why did Erdoğan come out against the agreement? For the last several years, Erdoğan has argued that Turkey needs a constitutional reform to create a presidential system, one where he would be the president with expanded powers. Because the other two opposition parties in Turkey are completely opposed to this plan, the clearest path for Erdoğan to

achieve presidentialism was to strike a "grand bargain" with the Kurds – they get greater autonomy for regional governments and protections for minority rights, and Erdoğan gets a presidential system. What led to Erdoğan's decision to reject Dolmabahçe is that there was no longer any hope of a grand bargain.

In January, before Dolmabahçe, the HDP had decided to run as a party in the June 7 parliamentary elections. If it cleared Turkey's 10 percent threshold for joining parliament, the AKP would have a harder time winning the seats it needed in parliament to call a constitutional referendum. Then on March 17, the co-leader of the HDP Selahattin Demirtaş said that there would be no grand bargain, announcing the de facto slogan for the HDP's parliamentary campaign: "We will not make you president." It was five days after that when Erdoğan announced his opposition to Dolmabahçe. Over the next four months, Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) campaigned hard against the HDP and urged voters to give it the super-majority it needed for a presidential system.

From June 7 to November 1

The June 7 parliamentary elections were a disaster for the AKP. It lost its parliamentary majority, winning only 41 percent of the vote. Just as important was how it lost it – not only did the HDP easily clear the 10 percent threshold, but the hardline Nationalist Action Party (MHP) also increased its vote share, showing that the AKP's years of negotiations with the PKK had cost it votes on the nationalist right. The war in Syria had strengthened the political position of the Kurdish party, but it had also strengthened traditional Turkish nationalist fears of Kurdish mobilization.

The AKP responded first by stalling in coalition negotiations to form a government, and then by restarting the war with the PKK. On July 20, an Islamic State (IS) suicide bomber attacked a group of young leftists and Kurds gathered to support the people of Kobani in Suruç in southeastern Turkey. The bombing killed 33 and injured 104. A hardline PKK faction retaliated by murdering two Turkish police officers whom it blamed for collaboration with IS. The government then used that killing as the justification to end the

cease-fire once and for all, launching extensive bombing raids against PKK camps in northern Iraq and detaining thousands of people, the most extensive arrests of Kurdish and leftist activists in Turkey since 2011. The military and police also launched extensive operations inside Turkish cities in the southeast, laying weeks-long curfews on entire districts and sending in tanks and heavy weapons to uproot the PKK's urban youth wing, the YDG-H.

Why did the PKK decide to return to the fight? Because it has felt threatened by the success of the political party the HDP, and especially its co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş, which have been gaining ground with a strategy of non-violent political legitimization for the Kurds *within Turkey*. The HDP's success in the March 2014 local elections, and then in the June 2015 parliamentary elections, are threatening to hardline parts of the movement that follow the revolutionary ideology of the PKK. By going back to fighting the Turkish state, hardline elements are weakening the HDP as a political actor and strengthening the hand of militant factions within the Kurdish movement.

For the AKP's part, its political argument was that the June 7 elections results were leading to chaos, and it used the return to conflict as proof. With no coalition government able to form, new elections were held on November 1. The AKP's strategy worked up to a point – it won 49 percent of the vote this time. But the HDP still cleared the 10 percent threshold, meaning that the AKP still did not have the 330 seats it needed for a constitutional referendum.

This long story is important to explain why Turkey is back at war with the PKK inside Turkey. This was a *choice* made by President Erdoğan and the AKP in order to improve his chance at a presidential system, and a *choice* made by the PKK to undermine the success of the HDP as a political party – both of them reacting to changing circumstances inside Turkey due to the war in Syria.

The AKP has regained its parliamentary majority, but it does not have enough votes to bring a constitutional referendum for a presidential system. All of the opposition parties

are completely opposed to the presidential system. But if the AKP can get 13 members of parliament to defect from other parties, it can gain the super-majority needed for a referendum. The most likely place it will get those votes from is the hardline nationalist MHP, so a hardline nationalist policy must continue.

The PKK meanwhile is showing a new generation of young Kurds in the southeast that they should never trust the Turkish state or believe in the promise of politics, and that violent revolution is the answer. This narrative is supported by the success of the YPG across the border in Syria.

The Conflict and the Crackdown on Media and Civil Society

The conflict is having terrible consequences for Turkish society. I have already mentioned the horrific civilian death toll – since July, 230 civilians have been killed in the conflict, and another 135 killed by the Islamic State. There have been at least 62 day-and-night curfews for military operations placed on Turkish cities since July, including some that lasted two weeks. During these times residents cannot reach health care or access water in many cases; children cannot attend school. Tens of thousands of people have been forced from their homes, and the military is using tanks and heavy weaponry inside Turkish cities, leaving widespread destruction. Parts of Turkey's southeast now look like the war zones in Syria.

At least 22 HDP members of parliament are under criminal investigation, as is the HDP mayor of the southeast's largest city, Diyarbakir. Dozens of local officials from the HDP and other Kurdish parties have been arrested, including 18 co-mayors. Last week prosecutors requested at least 7 years' imprisonment for the mayor of Mardin Ahmet Türk, one of the elder statesmen of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Kurdish human rights defender Tahir Elçi was killed in Diyarbakir in November. These are the kind of people on whom the peace process relied; without them it will be impossible to end the cycle of conflict.

The crackdown has extended to media and civil society, and is combining with the attack on the Gülen movement, which the government has labeled a terrorist organization and is persecuting relentlessly after the movement helped launch the December 2013 corruption investigations. The newspaper Bugün and the TV stations Bugün and Kanaltürk have been seized by the government. There are over 108,000 websites blocked in Turkey; since July an increasing number of these are Kurdish websites and critical sites the government considers linked to Gülen like the magazine Nokta. Turkey is by far the most aggressive country in the world in seeking to remove content from Twitter through court orders, accounting for 408 out of 442 global requests in the first half of 2015. Turkey is second only to India in content removal requests on Facebook.

In the last quarter of 2015 alone, there were 93 cases for insult and violation of personal rights of President Erdoğan, including against 42 journalists. In 2015, 19 journalists and 2 cartoonists received prison sentences for insulting President Erdoğan or other high officials. The local monitoring organization Bianet counts at least 30 journalists currently in jail, including the editor-in-chief and the Ankara bureau chief of the country's oldest newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*. Prosecutors are seeking aggravated life sentences for these two journalists for reporting on the National Intelligence Agency's use of humanitarian aid vans to smuggle weapons to militant groups in Syria.

Recommendations

- The Turkish government's attempt to destroy the Kurdish movement within Turkey is counter-productive not only to peace in Turkey, but to the efforts of the United States to bring an end to the crises in Syria and Iraq, especially as the United States is working closely with the Kurdish PYD in northern Syria to fight the Islamic State. The conflict in Turkey is contributing to the deepening radicalization of Kurds in Turkey and in Syria, and foreclosing any possibility that Turkey will be able to coexist with a stronger Kurdish presence in northern Syria, which is going to be a part of any conceivable end to the war there. The United States cannot turn a blind

eye to what is happening inside Turkey in exchange for Turkey's help in Syria. **The United States should call on its political capital both with the government of Turkey and with the Kurdish movement in Syria – which is closely connected to the one in Turkey – to bring about a cease-fire and urge a return to the peace process.**

- When I testified here in 2014, I advocated a strong United States emphasis on EU membership for Turkey in order to encourage progress on human rights. I must admit that such a policy now seems untenable. Despite a superficial commitment to EU accession, the current government has repeatedly and directly rejected the requirements of EU membership in the areas of human rights and rule of law, and instead the EU is cravenly making concessions to the government's authoritarianism. **The EU's decision this fall to trade Turkish cooperation in stopping refugee flows in exchange for a supposedly "reinvigorated" accession process for Turkey has made membership a matter of quid pro quo instead of political and economic convergence. Advancing Turkish accession to the EU at the expense of the EU's human rights principles is exposing the EU as cynical and shortsighted, destroying its greatest strength as a rules-based, values-driven institution.**

Conclusion

The return to war in Turkey is another way in which the decision to allow the conflict in Syria to fester has created a widening spiral of violence and destruction across the region and beyond. The United States' limited goal of destroying the Islamic State will not end the war in Syria, nor will it end the many new conflicts the war has spawned and old ones it has re-ignited. The United States needs to cease compartmentalizing its approach to the Middle East, including to Turkey, and avoid focusing on short-term objectives at the expense of long-term goals. The meeting of President Biden with critical journalists in Turkey during his trip in January was a positive action, but ultimately it is only symbolic without a

concerted effort to bring the Turkish government and the PKK back to the table. Without negotiations, I am afraid that Turkey is doomed to go further and further into the region's cycle of violence.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Cinar.

STATEMENT OF MR. ALI CINAR, PRESIDENT, ASSEMBLY OF TURKISH AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS

Mr. CINAR. Dear Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here today. As an American with a Turkish descent and a longtime community leader, I am honored to be one of the witnesses of "Turkey: Political Trends in 2016."

Mr. Chairman, I would like to summarize my written statement. I believe 2015 was an extraordinary year in U.S. and Turkish relations. Whether it was in foreign or domestic policy, economy or military, there was no shortage of critical developments and cooperation between two nations.

Just to give you an example, over the past 12 months, the U.S. and Turkey have continued to work together to fight ISIS, provide assistance to 2.2 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey, and strengthen economic cooperation during the G–20 summit. Most recently, the U.S., along with other NATO-ally countries, stood behind Turkey in downing of Russian's fighter jet that violated Turkish airspace in November 2015.

I believe it is important to emphasize that most of these critical developments took place at a time when Turks were experiencing critical domestic challenges. Results of free, fair, and peaceful second election showcased the strength of the democratic process in Turkey. Despite their differences on various issues, the U.S. was in need of a strong and secure Turkish Government that was, first and foremost, ready to cooperate in the campaign against ISIS and play a critical role in Syria.

Having put all these developments behind it, I would like to briefly highlight Turkey's priorities in 2016. National security. For over 30 years, Turkey has confronted violence by a militant terrorist group known as Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK. During this time, more than 40,000 lives have been lost in Turkey. PKK attacks have, once again, flared up in Turkey since July 11, 2015, when the PKK announced the end of the ceasefire that had existed for 2½ years.

Some were attempting to mischaracterize recent events as Turkish hostility toward all Turks. However, the reality is far different. Ethnic Kurdish citizens of Turkey are an integral part of the nation. Turkey established strong relations with the Kurdish regional government in the region, which are not limited to military support and financial aid.

Honorable committee members and Mr. Chairman, I would like draw your attention to PKK's recent terrorist attacks. PKK and the Kurdish citizens in Turkey are totally different. 221 Turkish security personnel and 89 civilians have been killed by PKK; 1,170 security personnel and 477 civilians have been wounded by PKK; 14 security personnel and 110 civilians have been kidnapped by PKK.

In recent years, several Kurdish language television and radio stations have been established in Turkey, courses teaching Kurdish language and dialects have been created, and the Turkish Kurds have significant representation in the Turkish Parliament and elsewhere in the government.

Presently, there are more than 120 parliamentarians out of 550 of Kurdish origin in Turkish Parliament from various political parties. Most Turkish Kurds don't support PKK, which ended the ceasefire on July 2015.

In addition to PKK, Turkey is threatened by ISIL, terrorist acts such as those in Suruc, Ankara, and Istanbul. Border security and control measures around the 511-mile border have improved significantly. It is my understanding that strengthening of this border security has always made important contributions.

Humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations, Turkey shelters the largest number of refugees in the world. Total expenditures for Syrians is $7.6 billion, and rapidly edging toward 8 billion U.S. dollars. Turkey has announced it offers Syrian refugees work permits in order to encourage fewer of them to migrate.

Freedom of expression and media constitutes an important pillar of human rights priorities for Turkey. It is a fundamental freedom guaranteed under the constitution and relevant legislation. Turkey is putting a series of comprehensive judicial reforms in line with both our international and European Union standards and principles for the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and media.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members, I am optimistic about Turkey's future and U.S.-Turkish relations. I believe, starting this year, Turkey will begin to effectively address its domestic and foreign policy challenges, strengthen its global position.

I believe that strong partnership and friendship, rooted with common values and interest, will be reinforced by the enduring links between the people of both countries, will continue to get stronger this year. I would like to thank you, again, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for giving me this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cinar follows:]

NAME: ALI CINAR

TITLE and AFFILIATION: EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, TURKISH HERITAGE ORGANIZATION (THO)

COMMITTEE: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA AND EMERGING THREATS

DATE: 2/3/2016

TITLE OF HEARING: TURKEY: POLITICAL TRENDS IN 2016

Dear Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee Members,

I am honored to be one of the witnesses of "Turkey; Political Trends in 2016" hearing at the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats.

As we look back on 2015, we see that whether it is in foreign policy, economy, or military, there was no shortage of critical developments and cooperation between Turkey and the U.S. Over the last twelve months, the US and Turkey have worked together to fight ISIS, provide assistance to the 2.2 million Syrian refugees living within the country, and strengthen economic cooperation during the G20 summit. Most recently the US along with other NATO-ally countries stood behind Turkey in the downing of the Russian fighter jet that violated Turkish airspace in November, 2015.

Most of these critical developments took place at a time when Turks were witnessing an extraordinary political period in their history, which involved having two national elections in one year.

Turks went to the polls twice in one year to elect a national government, a unique occurrence in the history of the 65-year-old multi-party parliamentary system. Results of the free, fair, and peaceful second election showcased the strength of the democratic process. It is important to emphasize that the elections came at an important time in U.S. – Turkey relations. Despite their differences, the U.S. was in need of a strong and secure Turkish government that was first and foremost ready to cooperate in the campaign against ISIL/DAESH and play a critical role in Syria.

U.S. has always re-emphasized the close coordination and commitment to advance shared political, security and prosperity agendas with Turkey. It also provided constructive criticism when it was due. Following the election results, U.S. continued to raise concerns about the challenges of going through a period of domestic changes and developments. Despite advantageous election results, which ensured that there was a secure government in place to cooperate, Washington continues to urge their partners

and friends in Ankara to strive for being the model of democracy and beacon of stability and economic growth in a challenging region.

Turkey's Priorities in 2016 and Beyond

1. **National Security**

For over 30 years, Turkey has confronted violence by a militant, terrorist group known as the Kurdistan Workers Party, or "PKK." During this time period, more than 40,000 lives have been lost in Turkey. PKK attacks have once again flared up in Turkey since July 11, 2015, when the PKK announced the end of a cease-fire that had existed for two and a half years.

Some are attempting to mischaracterize recent events as Turkish hostility towards all Kurds. However, the reality is far different. Ethnic Kurdish citizens of Turkey are an integral part of the nation. Turkey also enjoys strong relations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq.

For example; in February, 2015, Turkey loaned $500 million to the Kurdish Regional Government to help meet the budgetary needs of the government. In addition to monetary support, Turkey continues to provide military support to the Kurdish Peshmerga Forces.

So far, Turkey has trained and equipped over 2,300 Peshmerga forces and facilitated the transfer of the Peshmerga from northern Iraq to Syria through Turkey to fight against ISIL/DAESH.

PKK

The PKK was formed in 1984 as a militant, separatist movement seeking an independent, Marxist-Leninist state. The PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization

internationally, including by the United States, Canada, Australia, the European Union, Japan, and by NATO. The U.S. designation has been in place since 1997.

Honorable Committee Members, I would like to draw your attention to PKK's recent terrorist attacks in Turkey.

- 221 Turkish security personnel and 89 civilians have been killed by the PKK
- 1,170 security personnel and 477 civilians have been wounded by the PKK
- 14 security personnel and 110 civilians have been kidnapped by the PKK

It is important to emphasize that Turkey made peaceful resolution of the PKK issue a priority. PKK's recent terrorist attacks directly target Turkey's security and unity. Upon ending the ceasefire, on August 13, 2015, the PKK announced the unlawful creation of "autonomous administrations" in four Turkish cities and has set up trenches, planted mines or other explosives near barricades, and converted houses into ammunition depots near the barricades. Since then Turkish authorities seized enough explosives, firearms, and heavy weapons to create chaos in the region.

In recent years, several Kurdish language television and radio stations have been established in Turkey, courses teaching Kurdish language and dialects have been created, and Turkish Kurds have significant representation in the Parliament and elsewhere in the government. Presently, there are more than 120 parliamentarians of Kurdish origin in Turkish parliament from various political parties. Most Turkish Kurds do not support the PKK. Nonetheless, PKK, which felt threatened by the ongoing democratic reforms, has abandoned the "solution process" by declaring on 11 July 2015 that the "cease-fire" was over. None of this potential for future progress can continue until the PKK denounces violence and lays down its arms.

ISIL/DAESH

Turkey shares borders with Syria and Iraq. As a result, the threat of extremism is greater than any other country in the region. However, Turkey is determined to fight against growing extremism.

Turkey designated "DEASH" as a terrorist organization long before some other members of the international community acknowledged it as a national security threat. As a nation that has been dealing with various types of terrorist groups, Turkey continues its fight against ISIL/DAESH with determination.

As the situation in Syria got worse, ISIL/DAESH gained strength, and began to pose a direct threat to Turkey's national security. Although Turkey continues to cooperate with other western powers to fight against ISIL/DAESH, increased presence of radical militants along Turkey's 511-mile border with Syria constitutes a direct and serious threat to Turkey's national security and internal stability.

It is important to underline the fact that Turkey has been the "Lone Gatekeeper" in the face of ISIL/DAESH and other extremist groups. Border security and control measures along the 511-mile border have improved significantly.

2. Humanitarian Assistance

According to the UNHCR, Turkey shelters the largest number of refugees in the world. There are around 200,000 refugees from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia and others -in addition to Syrians. Total number of biometric registries of Syrians is tantamount to 2,207,936. Four out of twenty-five temporary protection centers (TPCs) in Turkey were set up to house Christians and Yazidis. (Currently, there are 13,942 Yazidis in Turkey. 5453 of those are in TPCs.)

Ten refugee camps for Kurds from Kobane as well as Arabs, Christians and Yazidis set up and run by municipalities. Total expenditure for Syrians is 7.6 billion USD /rapidly edging toward 8 billion USD. This is the largest investment made to date. Greater than the total 5.5 billion USD in 2015 budget requested for all 5 countries hosting Syrian refugees under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan of the UN (3RP)

Total contribution received from the international community, bilaterally and multilaterally, stands only at 417 million USD. Operations conducted by the Turkish Coast Guard cost 5 million Euros per month that has to be met from national resources. Since the beginning of 2015, Turkish Coast Guard has rescued almost 55,000 migrants from sea. This number is more than the total number of rescued migrants at sea in last 5 years. Total number of migrants saved from the sea in Turkey between 2007-2015 is 78.880.

Under a November 2015 EU-Turkey 'action plan', the EU pledged to provide 3 billion Euros ($3.2 billion) in aid for the more than 2.2 million Syrian refugees sheltering in Turkey, in exchange for Ankara reducing the flow of refugees into the EU. It also pledged to consider visa-free travel for Turks to Europe and to kick-start Turkey's EU accession negotiations. Turkey has announced it will offer Syrian refugees work permits in order to encourage fewer of them to migrate. Yet so far there has been no sign of a significant reduction of migration into Europe from Turkey.

3. Freedom of Expression and Media

Freedom of expression and media constitutes an important pillar of human rights priorities for Turkey. It is a fundamental freedom guaranteed under the Constitution and relevant legislation.

Today, media in Turkey includes a diverse and wide variety of domestic and foreign print, television, radio and online news outlets. In Turkey there are currently 6,800 newspapers and journals as well as 263 TV stations and 1,058 radio stations that reach

national and local audiences. Each regularly exercises free speech without intervention from the government.

In recent years, Turkey has undertaken a series of comprehensive judicial reforms in line with both the international and the EU standards and principles for the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and media.

There is no Turkish legislation which includes any provision that would lead to imprisonment of journalists on account of their journalistic work. Everyone is equal before the law without any distinction as to their profession.

According to the Turkish Government, concerning persons referred to as "journalists in prison", it should be underlined that contrary to what is suggested, these persons have been charged with serious crimes.

Academic Freedom

Freedom of expression is safeguarded in Turkish Constitution and other relevant legislation. Yet it goes without saying that academic freedom should not be abused for political ends. Article 130 of the Turkish Constitution clearly states, and I quote: "Universities, members of the teaching staff and their assistants may freely engage in all kinds of scientific research and publication. However, this shall not include the liberty to engage in activities against the existence and independence of the State, and against the integrity and indivisibility of the nation and the country."

It is well known that Turkey is combatting PKK terrorism which has been recognized as a terrorist organization not only by Turkey but also by the United States and the European Union.

The measures Turkey is taking in the face of the current direct and imminent terrorist threat to its security and stability are fully in line with its international obligations.

However, the declaration signed by a number of academics in Turkey on January 10th contains not a single critical mention or condemnation of the PKK's reprehensible activities targeting both security forces and civilians.

It is because of this highly biased nature of said declaration, issued at a time of extreme sensitivity due to the PKK's intensified attacks in the east and southeast Turkey that the relevant Chief Prosecutor's inferred that it went over the limits of freedom of expression and constituted a crime in terms of the relevant laws and initiated an investigation in this context.

Can you imagine a group of academicians signing a declaration here in the United States that underestimates significant national security threats, polarizes the country by altering people's perceptions of a terrorist organization such as ISIS or Al-Qaeda? What would your action be? Would you still defend their right to do so or would you do what is required by the laws?

In conclusion,
In 2016, the world will see the continuing growth of a strong, united friendship between the US and Turkey. Having experienced several ISIS bombings now, Turkey seems even more determined to put an end to ISIS related terrorism plots with the US by its side.

2016 is an important twelve months for the entire international system in solving critical issues such as the conflict in Syria, global economics, climate change, and global terrorism.

The US-Turkish collaboration will be able to spearhead the problem solving initiatives that will be needed to tackle these pivotal problems causing turmoil throughout the globe.

I would like to thank you again Chairman and Committee Members giving me an opportunity to speak at the hearing. Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you. And Dr. Tol.

STATEMENT OF GONUL TOL, PH.D., DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR TURKISH STUDIES, MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE

Ms. TOL. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, it is an honor to be invited to speak with you today.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You need to move a little closer, please, and if it is on.

Ms. TOL. It is on.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Can you move it a little closer to you? There you go. Thank you.

Ms. TOL. Mr. Chairman, I will summarize my statement now and submit the full text for the record.

2015 was a difficult year for Turkey. The Islamic State launched three attacks inside Turkey, killing more than 140 people and wounding hundreds. Journalists have been fired, detained, prosecuted, and physically attacked. Economic growth has slowed sharply, and several factors have left Ankara more isolated in its neighborhood.

The ongoing chaos in Syria, Turkey's downing of a Russian jet, Ankara's deployment of troops in Iraq without the approval of Baghdad, joining a Sunni alliance with the Saudis to counterbalance Iran, but most concerning of all, however, is the ongoing conflict with—between the Turkish state and the PKK.

A string of clashes in the mainly Kurdish region between the PKK and Turkish security forces has left hundreds, including women and children, dead since the 2-year-old ceasefire broke down in July. Areas of the Kurdish region have been subject to round-the-clock curfews since then.

During state-imposed curfews, the wounded have been denied access to medical treatment, neighborhoods have had their water and electricity cut, and they have been left without access to food.

For decades, Turkey's conflict with the Kurds has hindered Turkey's democratization. Neither Turkey's democratization nor the Kurdish quest for political rights have occupied an important place in U.S. policy toward Ankara and the Kurds. Turkey's democratic shortcomings have been ignored by U.S. administrations for the sake of greater geostrategic interests. In a similar fashion, Kurdish rights have been overlooked in the game of power politics.

But as you mention, Mr. Chairman, today's regional context ties Turkish democracy and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict to U.S. security interests in the region. Turkey still considers the PKK and the PKK-linked PYD in Syria a bigger threat than the Islamic State. Therefore, Ankara has not played the effective role the United States has been seeking from its NATO ally in the fight against ISIS.

Although Turkey has recently stepped up its effort to counter ISIS, at times, Ankara worked at direct odds with the U.S. anti-ISIS strategy by targeting Washington's most effective partner on the ground, the PYD. Turkey's refusal to engage with the PYD also complicates the U.N. talks on ending the Syrian civil war.

Recently, Turkey has warned the United Nations and the United States that it will walk out of the political process if the PYD is involved, included among the opposition to the Assad regime, and

the U.N. envoy decided not to invite the PYD to the meetings in Geneva.

The exclusion of the PYD from future meetings is likely to complicate efforts to find a political solution as they are the most powerful Kurdish faction, controlling around 10 percent in Syria.

If Turkey fails to find a peaceful resolution to its Kurdish question, Ankara will keep attacking the Kurds, rendering U.S. strategy against ISIS less effective and derailing the political process. The prospects for both the government and the Kurds to de-escalate the conflict, however, remain slim in 2016. Therefore, it is necessary for the United States to use its leverage over both parties to push for a ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table.

The fighting is likely to intensify in the spring when more PKK militants return to Turkey from their winter bases in the mountains. Escalation of the conflict will deal a further blow to Turkey's democracy and harden ethnic identities on both sides, making it even more difficult to resume negotiations. It will also undercut U.S. efforts to counter ISIS, pursue a political solution to the conflict in Syria, and promote an inclusive government in Iraq.

Without a rapid political solution to the Kurdish problem, Turkey will remain an ineffective partner in the fight against ISIS, derail future efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict, and fail to play a constructive role in Iraq and the region. To secure Turkey's full cooperation in Syria, Iraq, and the fight against ISIS, the United States must use this leverage. Washington has leverage over the PYD and the PKK.

U.S. cooperation with the PYD has been crucial for the group as it boosted the PYD diplomatically and militarily. Washington has influence over Ankara as well. After the crisis with Russia and the ongoing chaos on its doorstep, Turkey has rediscovered its Western allies. Turkey feels threatened by Putin's actions and values its NATO membership more than ever, which gives the United States more leverage over Ankara than it had a few months ago. The United States could use both Ankara's current vulnerability and isolation in its immediate neighborhood and several trust-building measures to secure Ankara's cooperation.

As a trust-building measure, the U.S. could redeploy patriot missiles in Turkey. That would ease some of Turkey—Ankara's security concerns stemming from Syria and show Ankara that the United States is committed to Turkey's security. Washington could also eliminate another sticking point in Turkey-U.S. relations.

Turkey has long opposed engaging the PYD, arguing that it is linked to the outlawed PKK and that the PYD fights alongside the Assad regime. If Washington can convince the PYD to take a clearer stance against the Assad regime, it might be relatively easier for Ankara to drop its opposition to the PYD's involvement in the political process.

The PKK sees the conflict in Turkey through the lens of the developments in Syria. The U.S.—the U.S.–PYD cooperation in Syria, therefore, is crucial for the PKK's strategic calculations. The United States could use that leverage to pressure the PKK to de-escalate the conflict, and that, in turn, could give Ankara a face saving way to de-escalate its heavy-handed military operations. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Tol follows:]

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, it is an honor to be invited to speak with you today about the political trends in Turkey in 2016.

2015 was a difficult year for Turkey. The Islamic State launched three attacks inside Turkey, killing more than 140 people and wounding hundreds. Journalists have been fired, detained, prosecuted and physically attacked. Economic growth has slowed sharply. The ongoing chaos in Syria, Turkey's downing of a Russian jet, Ankara's deployment of troops in Iraq without the approval of Baghdad and joining a Sunni alliance with the Saudis to counterbalance Iran have left Ankara more isolated in its neighborhood.

Most concerning of all, however, is the ongoing conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). A string of clashes in the mainly Kurdish region between the PKK and Turkish security forces has left hundreds, including women and children, dead since the two-year-old cease-fire broke down in July. Areas of the Kurdish region have been intermittently subject to round-the-clock curfews since then. During state-imposed curfews, the wounded have been denied access to medical treatment, neighborhoods have had their water and electricity cut, and have been left without access to food.

For decades, Turkey's conflict with its Kurds has hindered Turkey's democratization. Neither Turkey's democratization nor the Kurdish quest for political rights have occupied an important place in U.S. policy towards Ankara and the Kurds. Turkey's democratic shortcomings have been ignored by U.S. administrations for the sake of greater geostrategic interests. In a similar fashion, Kurdish rights have been overlooked in the game of power-politics.

Today's regional context, however, ties Turkish democracy and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question to the U.S.'s security interests in the region. Turkey still considers the PKK—and the PKK-linked PYD in Syria—a bigger threat than ISIS. Therefore, Ankara has not played the effective role the United States has been seeking from its NATO ally in the fight against ISIS. Although Turkey has recently stepped up its efforts to counter ISIS, at times Ankara worked at direct odds with the U.S. anti-ISIS strategy by targeting Washington's most effective partner on the ground: the PYD. In October, Turkey confirmed that the country's military attacked fighters from the PYD in the northern Syrian city of Tal Abyad after the town was annexed into a Kurdish enclave.

Turkey's refusal to engage with the PYD also complicates the U.N. talks on ending Syria's nearly five-year civil war. Recently, Turkey has warned the United Nations and the United States that it will walk out of the political process if the PYD is included among the opposition to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. After a delay amid disputes on which Syrian groups should attend, U.N. envoy Staffan de Mistura decided not to invite the PYD to the meetings in Geneva. Although few expect significant progress to emerge from the talks, the exclusion of the PYD from future meetings is likely to complicate efforts to find a political solution, as they are the most powerful Kurdish faction—controlling around 10 percent of Syria.

If Turkey fails to find a peaceful resolution to its Kurdish question, Ankara will keep attacking the Kurds, rendering U.S. strategy against ISIS less effective and derailing the political process. The prospects for both the government and the Kurds to de-escalate the

conflict, however, remain slim in 2016. Therefore, it is necessary for the United States to use its leverage over both parties to push for a cease-fire and a return to the negotiating table.

Background on Turkey's Peace Process with its Kurds

In 2009, Ankara began secret negotiations with the PKK, culminating in what became known as the Oslo Process. During the talks, both the Turkish security forces and the PKK scaled back their offensive operations. However, the initiative ran aground in the run-up to the Turkish general elections in June 2011. This resulted in a re-escalation of violence that increased casualties to a level not seen in more than a decade. By late 2012 it became obvious to both Ankara and the PKK that no clear winner would emerge from this new round of violence. Late in December 2012, President Erdogan announced that Turkey's national intelligence organization (M.I.T.) had been holding talks with the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan in an attempt to convince the PKK to lay down arms and withdraw from Turkish soil. Unlike previous peace attempts, which were very secretive, the public was informed of this round of talks and was somewhat supportive. These negotiations also had the backing of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), many civil society organizations, and the mainstream Turkish media. In contrast to the previous peace attempts, Ocalan stood at the center of the negotiations with a seemingly softer approach. In meetings with pro-Kurdish party's members of parliament, the PKK cadres in Europe and Iraq also expressed their support for the peace talks. Erdogan seemed intent on pushing the negotiation process forward and had considerable political capital at his disposal, as long as the process delivered peace and quiet in the Kurdish southeast.

The broad outlines of the agreement between Ocalan and the M.I.T. included a cease-fire declaration by the PKK, the release of Turkish hostages held by the PKK and a peaceful withdrawalinto northern Iraq after laying down their arms. In return, the Turkish government was expected to craft legislation to overhaul the definition of terrorism, which would pave the way for the release of hundreds of imprisoned Kurdish activists. As part of settlement talks, the PKK declared a cease-fire in March 2013 and in May began its withdrawal from Turkey toward its camps in northern Iraq. The PKK, however, halted the withdrawal to bases in northern Iraq shortly after, complaining of the government's unwillingness to carry out the agreed upon reforms. Despite intermittent clashes, the cease-fire mostly held until July 2015 when the PKK killed two Turkish policemen in retaliation for the death of more than 30 pro-Kurdish activists in a suicide bombing carried out by an affiliate of ISIS. The PKK viewed this attack as Turkish collaboration with ISIS. Seeing this as an opportunity to weaken the pro-Kurdish HDP and appeal to nationalists, the government responded with a heavy-handed military campaign in city centers and imposed curfews in the Kurdish region. Since July, more than 200 Turkish soldiers and policemen have been killed in attacks by the PKK. The army says about 500 militants have been killed since December, when curfews were imposed in seven cities. Human rights activists report more than 100 of them were civilians.

Neither party seems willing to back down. The government vows to push on with the operations until, in the president's words, the fighters are "annihilated." In an equally

determined statement, the PKK's senior leader Murat Karayilan has vowed revenge over civilian deaths caused by security forces.

There are three factors that make the parties unwilling to de-escalate the conflict in 2016. First, the government, the HDP, and the PKK have hardened constituencies. Second, due to President Erdogan's push for switching to a presidential system, the government is in a constant electoral mood, which makes resuming negotiations with the Kurds politically risky. Finally, the developments in Syria have emboldened the Kurds and heightened Turkey's fear of a Kurdish corridor stretching from Iraq to the Mediterranean.

Hardened Constituencies

After the AKP failed to capture a parliamentary majority in June elections, Erdogan pursued a strategy of "controlled chaos" to appeal to Turkish nationalists and mobilize his party's own supporters. The strategy seems to have worked. The AKP captured 49 percent of the popular vote in snap elections in November.

The AKP seems to have won largely at the expense of the ultra-nationalist MHP. Interestingly, the AKP seemed to have also gained votes from the pro-Kurdish HDP. Election results indicate that resuming the fight against the PKK after June elections convinced the nationalist voters—who deserted the AKP in the last elections—that the peace process was dead. Additionally, the renewal of conflict also convinced the ruling party's own supporters that the country would be facing further chaos and instability in the absence of an AKP majority. Erdogan was able to successfully present the ruling party as the only solution to a problem that was mostly of his own making.

In an interesting twist, the AKP seems to have won some of the conservative Kurdish voters it lost to the pro-Kurdish HDP in June. The party increased its votes in Kurdish cities and regained 18 deputies from the pro-Kurdish HDP. In Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurds, the AKP won 2 of the11 seats to be filled, doubling its June tally. Frustrated with the breakdown of the cease-fire and disappointed by the HDP's inability to prevent the PKK from resuming violence, some of the conservative, middle class Kurds seem to have returned to the AKP fold.

As a result, the AKP has a base that prioritizes the restoration of law and order, which requires a heavy-handed military response to the PKK.

In November elections, the pro-Kurdish HDP lost the non-Kurdish votes that it captured in June elections. In the run-up to June elections, the HDP ran a campaign focused on democratization, transparency and equality. The HDP presented itself as "a party of Turkey" as opposed to an ethnic Kurdish party. The party appealed to the non-Kurdish segments of the country attracting voters from the main opposition CHP, liberals, environmentalists, women's rights organizations, and minorities. After the two-year cease-fire broke down in July, many non-Kurdish supporters of the HDP blamed the party leader Selahattin Demirtas for not taking a hard stance against the PKK. In November elections, the HDP once again became a predominantly Kurdish party focusing on the Kurdish cause. It has a hardened constituency that is not ready to give up fighting at a time when the Turkish government is imposing curfews on Kurdish cities, conducting mass arrests, and carrying out a heavy-handed military campaign.

The PKK has also been emboldened by domestic and regional developments. It has significantly expanded its diplomatic, economic, military, and political power both in Turkey and the region. The cease-fire with the Turkish state and the PKK's battles in Syria and Iraq have opened a window for the PKK to establish civil society groups and build local institutions within Turkey's Kurdish region. Relative democratization and the partial withdrawal of the Turkish security forces have opened up a democratic space for the PKK in the country's southeast. Quasi-state structures with legal and fiscal trappings, such as courts and tax collection centers, have emerged. The PKK has also stepped up recruitment of militants and has enlarged its insurgency capacity in cities via its Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H). Russian and American backing of the PYD forces in Syria has boosted the militant group's confidence and its international image. Its young fighters are more radical, confident, and less likely to cease fighting for cosmetic changes than previous generations.

Erdogan's Push for Presidentialism

Creating an executive presidency has always been President Erdogan's top priority. His presidential ambition has been constrained by a skeptical opposition and public who fear that a presidential system under Erdogan would herald an increasingly authoritarian state. The public fears the new system would have neither checks and balances nor judicial independence. The AKP's electoral victory, however, has revived Erdogan's ambition. He is now preparing to take the issue to a referendum in the fall. The government does not have the necessary parliamentary support to take the proposed constitutional change to a referendum. The AKP currently has 317 seats in the parliament, 13 seats short of the minimum number of seats required.

Erdogan is confident that he can convince the people. His plan is to garner enough public support to pressure opposition parties into changing their position, which puts the government in a constant electoral mood. At a time when the government is anxious to please the public and rally support behind its presidentialism agenda, it is unlikely to de-escalate the conflict with the PKK. In fact, Erdogan might have just the opposite in mind. Since he managed to achieve his electoral victory in November by confronting the PKK, he might escalate the fight further in his pursuit of regime change in the country.

Developments in Syria

Developments in Syria have heightened Turkey's fear of a PKK-linked independent Kurdish entity on its doorstep and played an important role in Ankara's wholehearted return to a security-oriented Kurdish policy.

Turkey has become increasingly uneasy about the emergence of yet another Kurdish entity on its frontier after the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish groups established autonomy in northern Syria. The military and diplomatic boost that the PKK has received from the West and Russia through its effective fight against ISIS has heightened Turkey's fears. The PKK-linked PYD has effectively become the West's best hope for on the ground troops to counter ISIS. The West has worked with the PKK and Peshmerga in Iraq to halt the jihadi group's advance into the autonomous region of northern Iraq. The PYD helped thousands of Yazidis escape from the western part of the region as ISIS attacked. The PYD's success against ISIS has won the group positive reviews in Western capitals and media. Since the group started

its assault against ISIS in northern Iraq, there has been talk in Western capitals about removing the PKK from the terror list.

Adding to Turkey's concerns has been the Russian military buildup in Syria. Moscow's direct involvement in the Syrian civil war and the tension in Ankara-Moscow relations after Ankara downed a Russian jet have led to a closer cooperation between Russia and the PYD. Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to help the Kurds consolidate their territorial gains in northern Syria by linking the Kurdish held town of Kobane with Afrin. Reportedly, Russia delivered weapons to the 5,000 Kurdish fighters in Afrin in December.

Turkey is concerned that the weapons sent to the Peshmerga and the PYD might ultimately end up in the hands of the PKK at a time when Ankara is waging a war against them.

These three factors make both the government and the PKK unwilling to de-escalate the conflict. The fighting is likely to intensify in the spring when more PKK militants return to Turkey from their winter bases in the rugged mountains. Escalation of the conflict will deal a further blow to Turkey's democracy and harden ethnic identities on both sides, making it even more difficult to resume negotiations. It will also undercut U.S. efforts to counter ISIS, pursue a political solution to the conflict in Syria, and promote an inclusive government in Iraq. Without a rapid political solution to the Kurdish problem, Turkey will remain an ineffective partner in the fight against ISIS, derail future efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict, and fail to play a constructive role in Iraq and the region.

To secure Turkey's full cooperation in Syria, Iraq, and the fight against ISIS, the United States must use its leverage to push both parties to return to the negotiating table. The United States has leverage over the PKK/PYD. U.S. cooperation with the PYD has been crucial for the group as it boosted the PYD diplomatically and militarily. Washington has influence over Ankara as well. After the crisis with Moscow and the ongoing chaos on its doorstep, Turkey has rediscovered its Western allies. Turkey feels threatened by Putin's actions and values its NATO membership and Western partners more than ever, which gives the United States more leverage over Ankara than it had a few months ago.

In my personal opinion, the United States could use both Ankara's current vulnerability and isolation in its immediate neighborhood, and several trust building measures to secure Ankara's cooperation. As a trust building measure, the United States could redeploy patriot missile batteries in Turkey. That would ease some of Ankara's security concerns stemming from Syria and show Ankara that the United States is committed to Turkey's security.

Washington could also eliminate another sticking point in Turkey-U.S. relations. Turkey has long opposed engaging the PYD, arguing that it is linked to the outlawed PKK and that the PYD fights alongside the Assad regime. Many AKP officials have recently cited the latter point in justifying their opposition to the PYD's involvement in the talks in Geneva. If Washington can convince the PYD to take a clearer stance against the Assad regime, it might be relatively easier for Ankara to drop its opposition to the PYD's involvement in the political process.

The PKK sees the conflict in Turkey through the lens of the developments in Syria. The U.S.-PYD cooperation in Syria, therefore, is crucial for the PKK's strategic calculations. The United States could use that leverage to pressure the PKK to de-escalate the conflict.

That in turn could give Ankara a face saving way to de-escalate its heavy-handed military operations.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you all for your testimony today, and—so let me just ask the basic question of each of you. Is the situation in Turkey a greater concern today than it was a year ago?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Sir?

Mr. CINAR. It is improving, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It is improving, okay. We have got one sort of "not improving," one "improving," and Dr. Tol?

Ms. TOL. Turkish democracy——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You have got to push that button. We can't hear you otherwise.

Ms. TOL. It is certainly worse than it was a year ago.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So we got two votes for worse and one vote for better. Oh, improving. Well, better is improving, isn't it?

All right. Dr. Tol, your suggestion that we have influence over the Kurdish population in Turkey and in their conflict with their own government. Could you expand upon that a little bit because it seems that your suggestions were predicated on the fact that we have that type of influence.

Ms. TOL. I think, I believe, Mr. Chairman, Washington has leverage not over the Kurdish population, but over the PKK and the PYD in Syria, because after the U.S. air-dropped weapons to the PYD in 2014, the PYD's international image has changed. It has been transformed. And the PYD today is working very closely with the United States in Syria. The PYD have almost become the ground troops for the anti-ISIS coalition.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What would you have us do? What kind of pressure would you have us put on them?

Ms. TOL. I think on the PYD, the U.S. Government could certainly pressure the PYD to take a clearer stance against the Assad regime. That has been one of the concerns of Ankara. Recently, Prime——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Excuse me. Could you repeat that? A clearer stand against——

Ms. TOL. Against the Assad regime. Because recently, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said that one of the reasons why Turkey is opposed to any role for the PYD in the Syrian opposition is that the PYD has close links with the Assad regime, and they are not. They are fighting alongside the Assad regime. So I believe if the PYD takes a clearer stance, then Ankara will have a face-saving way of changing its stance, vis-à-vis, the PYD.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. And is it the United States' interest that the Assad regime then ceases to exist? Is that what you are saying?

Ms. TOL. Excuse me, could you repeat the question, please.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So you are predicating that on a belief that the Assad regime would be better for the United States if the Assad regime would collapse and go away?

Ms. TOL. In my personal opinion, I think it is in the U.S.'s interest and Turkey's interest to see the Assad regime toppled, but I think the Obama administration, its first priority is confronting the Islamic State, not toppling the Assad regime.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Well, that is what I was trying to get at. It seems to me that the Assad regime, whatever happens there,

it is just like what happened with—too bad our Bush Presidents didn't understand that what Saddam Hussein did within his own country wasn't worth American intervention, and Assad may be killing people who want to kill us, and that may be a good thing.

So what is your assessment of that, Mr. Cinar?

Mr. CINAR. I mean, for Turkey, ISIS, PKK and PYD are the same. Thousands of PKK militants are fighting on the frontlines of PYD. The chain of the command for both terror organizations and their leaders are related to Mount Qondil. Both adopt Abdullah Ocalan, who is the founder of the PKK terrorist organization. And I would like to highlight the PYD declaration of 2013 stating the PYD is undertaking a revolution to build a democratic society in west Kurdistan. Later on, time will come for north Kurdistan, which is in Turkey.

So Turkey is against the PYD because they are, right now, encouraging some Kurdish citizens to declare autonomous, which four cities right now is in trouble right now, and start to target to the Turkish security personnels. So Turkey is respect to the Turkish citizens, but PYD has a different objective showing that they are fighting with ISIS, but at the same time, they are collaborating right now, PKK, with a big threat to Turkey.

And as I said on my statement, Turkey is also helping the other Kurdish groups, including militarily and also financial aid to the Kurdish groups that are also fighting against ISIS.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I think you made your case very well that Erdogan's government, they knew the Government of Turkey had some major steps aimed at trying to either of reconciliation or reach out to the Kurds. I would like to get Dr.—or Mr. Schenkkan's reaction to that.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Specifically on the question of outreach to the Kurds?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yeah. The gentleman is suggesting—your suggestion was is that there is more repression.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Correct.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And journalists are being thrown in jail, opposition parties are being charged with criminal offenses, you know, corruption, et cetera, which I don't think that ever happens here, but it is happening there, and that this gentleman, on the other hand, thinks that the government has reached out to the Kurds, and there is no excuse——

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Well——

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. For opposition to become violent opposition.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. If I may, the sequence of events, I think, is very important, and I wrote about it in my written testimony, which is that there was a ceasefire with the PKK, and so if we looked back directly a year ago, we would be looking at a period of time when the ceasefire was still in effect and when there were negotiations ongoing between the Turkish Government, this government, and the PKK.

There were delegations going to visit Abdullah Ocalan in prison in order to have his voice be heard in those negotiations, and at the end of February, there was a joint announcement by the Turk-

ish Government and the leaders of the Kurdish movement, members of the HDP, of a roadmap for how to get to peace.

And we could talk perhaps about whether that roadmap was implementable, but it was a roadmap and it was a joint announcement. Three weeks after that, 3 weeks later in March, President Erdogan rejected that roadmap, said that he had never been informed about these negotiations, which was never plausible, and even these weekend, his deputy prime minister, Bulent Arin, another of the cofounders of the AKP said explicitly he knew about the negotiations, he knew exactly what their contents were.

Why did Erdogan denounce this agreement? I think that is a very, very key question. What happened in March 2015? I believe that what happened is that Erdogan recognized he would not get his constitutional reform, he would not get his Presidential system through a negotiation with the Kurdish parties, and if he couldn't get it through the Kurdish parties, the only other source he could get it from would be the nationalist parties in Turkey. And therefore, nationalist policy is what he had to pursue, and that is what he did pursue from March through June 7 in the first elections where he did not succeed in getting a parliamentary majority, and then, again, in the new elections.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So it is your position that his turnaround on that, what you considered to be a very pivotal negotiation, has actually spurred violence——

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Absolutely.

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. In the country and thus created a cycle, we have violence, repression, et cetera?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Absolutely.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. And Mr. Meeks, would you like to take over from there?

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me—you know, we have got some Americans that may be looking in, and I want to make sure that everybody, you know, clearly understands various issues. That is important, because we are talking about and trying to focus first on the domestic situation within Turkey.

So during each of your testimony, some talked about the PKK, some talked about—and I know I mentioned HDP, some talked about PYD, some talked about the Gulen movement, and some talked about the Kurdish movement, so—and when we just, I think, simplify this to say it is a Kurdish problem, or is there a problem within certain sectors within the Kurdish community, is that domestic or international, you know, for example, from what I am hearing, PKK is not domestic. PKK are outside of the boundaries. We are trying to infiltrate the boundaries of Turkey.

HPD is part of the government, but they are Kurds and what the situation is there. The Gulen movement, what is that, and you know, who is involved there? Then the PYD, who is in Syria, and then you have the Kurds who are in Iraq and that scenario, so can someone just, you know, explain when we are talking about the Kurdish problem, what are we talking about, and who are we talking about?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Sure, if I may. I would separate out the Gulen movement. Let's set that aside for now as a different set of questions that maybe we can come back to later.

The HDP is a political party primarily representing Kurds. Most of it is constituents. Most of it is votes come from Kurds, either in the southeast or in Istanbul, which actually has the largest Kurdish population in the country, people who have moved to that city.

The PKK is a Turkish Kurdish organization. Now, its militant basis are primarily in northern Iraq, or in northern Syria in areas controlled by the PYD, which is very closely affiliated with the PKK.

And so you ask, is it a Kurdish problem? It is. This is a—it is such a trope in Turkish politics that everyone says "the Kurdish problem." This is what everyone says for just talking about it, they say "the Kurdish problem."

Mr. MEEKS. Let me—I want to make sure everybody is in agreement with what he just said, the other two witnesses.

Mr. CINAR. Mr. Ranking Member, I don't agree about the PKK. It is a terrorist organization. I just want to make sure.

Mr. MEEKS. Okay. But do you agree, he said that the PKK is affiliated with the PYD. They are fighting together in the northern part of Turkey and Syria and Iraq. Is that correct? So we could make sure who is aligned with who. So the PKK is affiliated with the PYD, but does not necessarily have anything to do with the HDP. Is that correct?

Ms. TOL. Yes. The PKK is a Turkey-based militant organization——

Mr. MEEKS. Okay.

Ms. TOL [continuing]. That has been waging a war.

Mr. MEEKS. So——

Ms. TOL. But the PYD is in Syria.

Mr. MEEKS. So again, I am just trying to focus right now on the focus of this hearing. That is the domestic issues within Turkey, okay.

So if what I am hearing is correct, then Turkey, because—no, let me ask another question before I say that. So is the PKK and the PYD focused on changing the government in Turkey? And if they are focused on changing the government in Turkey, are they focused in doing that in a political process or by a military operation?

Ms. TOL. May I? The PKK is not focused on—the PKK has a political wing, which is the HDP, and they are in the Parliament right now. So they are not interested in toppling the government. The Kurds——

Mr. MEEKS. So hold on. I don't understand. So now you are telling me that the PKK—I mean, the HDP is part of the PKK, but they are the political wing of the PKK?

Ms. TOL. They represent—their base consists of people who are sympathetic to the PKK, but it is larger than that.

Mr. MEEKS. Okay.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. If I may, similar to the Irish Republican party in Sinn Fein.

Mr. MEEKS. Okay.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Just as an analogy.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

Mr. CINAR. Yes, HDP is a kind of part of PKK, but Turkey is very clear that HDP can't deal in the Turkish Parliament, not in using the PKK. I mean, when we look at right now in four cities,

they declare autonomous administrations in four Turkey cities and set up trenches, planted mines or other explosives near barricades, and converted houses into a munitions depots near to barricades. So every week, 20 Turkish personnel are killed by PKK, and Turkish army right now is taking action against some, not the Kurds.

Mr. MEEKS. But what I am trying to figure out then, if HDP is part of the government, do they have the right to voice their concerns within the government and the freedom to do that as a minority party since they were elected to be part of an existing government and they are now trying to do something militarily against the government, as some others, from what I am hearing, want to do?

Mr. CINAR. They do. I mean, they have the right to talk and speak at the Turkish Parliament, but the biggest problem, Mr. Ranking Member, the HDP leaders are engaging and motivating some Kurdish groups in southern part to Turkey to supporting the declaration of autonomy. I mean, can you imagine a city in the United States, some groups declare autonomy and try to have an independent region in the United States? I mean, of course——

Mr. MEEKS. Texas tries it sometimes.

Mr. CINAR. So this is unacceptable. I mean, there are ways that you need to talk in the Turkish Parliament, talk about the investment, how the Turkish Government should bring to investment, economic investment to the region.

Mr. MEEKS. Let me—and I am out of time, but let me just say this, in my opinion, because I am just a—in the United States, if someone wanted to talk about being autonomous, they could talk about it, they could try to gather support for it without it being that someone goes to jail or is prosecuted for it. They don't gain the support, they can't gain the support.

I can't imagine them gaining the support to break up the United States in that regard. I mean, that happened once in the United States history, and that was called the Civil War. But if you ask me today, you know, I know, for example, in New York City, one of the boroughs, Staten Island, had a movement to separate from the city of New York, and the democratic process went on.

And we didn't go, you know, against those folks that wanted to separate the borough, so all I am trying to understand is the democratic process within the country. Now I understand that if somebody is a terrorist organization outside of militarily trying to overthrow you, the government has the responsibility to protect the government, but if you are within the government and within the people, you are not doing it in a violent way, then you should have the opportunity to voice those concerns. I mean, that is from my thought of view, and I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you, Mr. Meeks. We are going to have a little quiz on the meaning of each and every one of those abbreviations, and we get them right. I remember—can we all remember LAPD, Los Angeles Police Department, you know. All right.

Just again, to get more serious, the fact is that we have been talking about an area that now, in the last 4 years, has been—and especially in the last 8 years, but especially the last 4, have drifted into chaos and violence, and hundreds of people, if not thousands of people are losing their lives. Some of us are very concerned that

Assad's hatred—excuse me—that the hatred by Erdogan of Assad, for some reason, the regimes hating each other, has, in some way, convinced Erdogan, and we are going to go into this in greater detail, that he should be supporting Islamic opponents of the Assad regime who may be radicals, and it looks like that to some of us.

Colonel Cook, could you take over from there?

Mr. COOK. Thank you very much. Right now, I have PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder after listening to all the acronyms. The question I have for Mr. Schenkkan, and that is, the relationship of Erdogan with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Can you give me your opinion on that? I think there has been a radical shift which is affecting a lot of the region, if you can answer that.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. I will do my best. It is not my area of specialization, but I will say that the now-President Erdogan and his government have pursued a strategy in Syria. Their goal in Syria from the beginning was to empower the equivalent of Muslim Brotherhood actors inside Syria.

Mr. COOK. Yeah, but hasn't there been a—the whole country, in fact, is—and you mentioned or somebody mentioned about how secular it was, perhaps one of the most secular nations in the area, and that this shift is going on about Hamas, can you comment about Hamas?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Well, the relations—you know, Hamas has had individuals who resided in Turkey at times, and those have been tolerated by——

Mr. COOK. Did this contribute to the stress that Israel had with that particular country?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. I am sure it does.

Mr. COOK. Okay. Moving on a little bit on Erdogan and any activity about the Christians' persecution.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Well, Turkey has officially—has officially recognized Christian communities in the Greeks and the Armenians. There are still churches.

Mr. COOK. But would you say that situation has deteriorated?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. I would not say it has deteriorated in the last year. I would say it has always been a very tense and very unpleasant relationship, to say the least. Certainly the ethnic cleansing and the genocide against the Armenians that took place in Turkey is a scar on Turkey's history.

Mr. COOK. Okay. One other thing I had, or a couple of things. Mr. Chairman, I recommend next time, if we review this, that we actually have a joint Foreign Affairs House Armed Services Committee because the hidden elephant right here right now is one of our most important NATO allies; at least when I was in Turkey, I was really, really disturbed at the restrictions, the restrictions that were placed upon our military personnel, particularly in select—other places, and this is huge. And I think we—we have got to attack—ask these questions because it is going to affect us, and it could just destroy that whole NATO relationship.

Moving on a little bit, and that is, in regards to the border that—where so many people have fled through Turkey and what Turkey is doing right now to close that off, and I am talking about that border, particularly with Syria. Anybody, can they address that

shortly, because I am running out of time, and I have got about 10 more questions.

Ms. TOL. Well——

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Go ahead.

Mr. COOK. Doctor.

Ms. TOL. Turkey recently stepped up its border patrols. There are 330 kilometer of trenches on the border.

Mr. COOK. Is it working?

Ms. TOL. There is a war. It is not working because there has been—Turkey has been trying—doing more, but on the other hand, there are illegal crossings, and we have seen that in the recent Ankara bombing, who the attacker, he crossed into Turkey very easily, so there have been illegal crossings.

Mr. COOK. Doctor, let me ask you another question. Is Turkey involved with Libya, politics of Libya right now?

Ms. TOL. Yes.

Mr. COOK. Could you go into that a little bit?

Ms. TOL. Yes, it has been working. It has his—it has been working with local Salafi organizations, and Turkey has always——

Mr. COOK. Muslim Brotherhood?

Ms. TOL. Yes.

Mr. COOK. Would you characterize it as extreme groups?

Ms. TOL. They are extreme groups.

Mr. COOK. I yield back. No further.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So if I could summarize, we have Turkey, there are questions about a level of repression, or one gentleman—one of our witnesses believes the situation has actually gotten better because he points to different negotiations that have taken place.

Our other witness suggests that after negotiations, the President reneged on the agreement that was made to make things better. So we have an increase of tensions, of killing, of violence. We have now the concept of that same government, same person who is in power who is involved with providing weapons to people who are radical Islamists, whether it is in Libya or whether it is in Syria in the name of stopping Assad. So we will go to Mr. Sires.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you for that resume. Thank you for that, Professor. Well, now I got a little bit straight now with these letters, but I am still a little bit confused.

You know, with Turkey, I always look at Turkey as taking one step forward and two backwards. I mean, they seem to have come a long way, and then this crackdown on journalists, putting people in jail for insulting the President, for being against the President, I mean, to me, that is just taking two steps backwards, and I think it is the oldest playbook in the world where you have an election coming up, you go after these people in order to control the outcome.

So to me, you know, I don't know. Turkey just is an enigma to me. It is a country that has so much potential, and yet they do these things, and quite frankly, I don't even know if Turkey should join the EU because the EU is a mess, and you know, they could wait a little longer and see what happens with the EU.

But you know, with all this going in Syria and the amount of refugees and everything else, it seems that Cyprus has been forgotten,

or an effort to bring a solution to Cyprus. Since 1974, the Turkish have been in Cyprus. They have about 30,000, 40,000 troops, and the Cyprus people seem to have crossing the green line, and millions of times, and just when they are getting a little bit closer to come to some sort of understanding, they just walk away.

I have been to the green line, I have been there, and one of the things that I think after 1974 in an effort to bring some sort of solution, I think the Turkish should take down that flag that they have on the hill, which is kind of insulting when you have a whole side of a hill with a Turkish flag and then they light it up at night.

I mean, I don't think that is necessary to have that if you want to come to some sort of an understanding and get the Cyprus issue resolved.

So I am just wondering if the economic situation in Turkey gets worse, where do we go from here? Do we continue to go after these people as an excuse, or do we try to resolve the issues in Turkey? Can you——

Ms. TOL. Of course. May I just say a few words on the Cyprus negotiations. I think there are negotiations going on between these two parties, Greek Cypriots and the Turkey Cypriots, and they are both hopeful that something is going to happen this year, but they haven't yet discussed the most contentious issue of Turkish withdrawal of troops.

So that is going to be a main problem because it has to be a solution that Erdogan can agree to. And on your question about economy——

Mr. SIRES. How can you have a solution when you are wanting to leave the troops there?

Ms. TOL. Yes, that is——

Mr. SIRES. That is the problem.

Ms. TOL. Yes. They haven't discussed that yet, and it is going to be a problem. And on the question of economy, I think that could be a good thing for Turkish democracy. An economic crisis could be a good thing for Turkish democracy because contrary to many people—what many people in DC believe, the people in Turkey, those who are voting for the AKP, they are not voting for the AKP because they have Islamist suits, or Islamist values. They vote for bread-and-butter issues, so—and we have seen that in June. Many people thought that Erdogan—it was not possible to beat Erdogan, but in June, in fact, the party lost its parliamentary majority, so it can happen.

So if there is a problem in Turkish economy, I think we will see the weakening of the AKP, and which I believe will translate into a better democratic—more democratic country.

Mr. SIRES. Mr. Cinar.

Mr. CINAR. Congressman, regarding the Cyprus, as you know, during the Kofi Annan, the original Kofi Annan term, there was a referendum, and then the Greek Cypriots declined to reunification for—with the north part. So I mean, if the Turkish army has to leave the island before they agree each other, it seems like State Department and the administration, I think, is working right now with all parties to get some negotiations, and the President of the northern Cyprus are also optimistic to might get reunification on the island.

Regarding the economy. When you look at the, as you said, European Union, they are still in trouble. Turkey is doing much better compared with the other countries, so it seems like Turkish economy is still stable. We don't—I don't think so, there will be a recession in 2016, and they are taking also more investment plans for this year.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Well, I will just speak on the question of the economy and whether Turkish voters get a chance to have a say again.

The issue is that Turkey has been through a run of elections now, four elections in 2 years, and they don't have more unless the government decides to call early elections. So essentially, the political agenda at this point is whether the AKP, the President Erdogan's party, can reach the super majority necessary to call a constitutional referendum on a Presidential system.

And if such a referendum is called, that would be the next moment when we find out whether President Erdogan still has a mandate. But barring that or barring early elections, we don't have another vote when there is a time that this train stops.

Mr. SIRES. Just one last question. It seems that Turkey seems to depend on Russia for about 20, 25 percent of its energy. I would just warn Turkey that the Russians cut off the gas to the Ukraine in the middle of winter, so I would be a little bit concerned knocking down their planes.

Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Marino.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Chairman.

Good afternoon, and thank you for being here.

Turkey is clearly the linchpin of American interests and policies in many areas. Turkey is an ally of the U.S., and we appreciate that relationship. I have been to Turkey, I have been to Istanbul, the people and the government were extremely generous to our codel that visited there.

I do have a concern about the restrictions concerning U.S. military personnel in Turkey, and I hope that the President takes that into very serious consideration when addressing the relationship with the U.S.

But I want to switch gears here a little bit. I want to talk about Turkey's relationship with Russia via Turkey's relationship with the United States. Just recently, Defense Secretary Carter said that Russia is one of the top threats to global order. In fact, he put ISIS down, I think, either third or fourth on that.

I would like you to give me some insight, each of you, and I would like to start with Dr. Tol, ladies before gentlemen, what you see are Turkey's relationship with the United States and then Turkey's relationship with Russia concerning the interests of the United States. You understand my question?

Ms. TOL. Sure.

Mr. MARINO. Please.

Ms. TOL. Turkey, as Mr. Congressman just mentioned, Turkey is dependent on Russian energy, and that has made things very difficult for Turkey. And that was one of the reasons why Turkey could be able to compartmentalize its relations with Russia despite

different stances in Syria until very recently, until Turkey shot down a Russian jet.

Mr. MARINO. That was in Turkey's airspace.

Ms. TOL. Yes. But it had happened many times. It just happened recently again.

I think, right now, the main concern for Turkey in Turkey-Russia relations is what Russia is doing in Syria. So the Russian military buildup poses a great challenge for Turkey's strategy in Syria. Turkey has been asking for a no-fly zone in northern Syria, and now there is a no-fly zone, a de facto no-fly zone enforced by Russia. Turkish planes cannot fly in northern Syria because of the Russian S–400 missiles.

And the Russians, they are attacking the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition groups. They are attacking the Turkmen. The Turkmen, they are ethnically related to Turkey, and they have almost been Turkey's B plan in Syria. They have been training them militarily. They have been working with them closely. And Russians, they have been bombing them.

So Russian military buildup in Syria has been a great challenge for Turkey. And also in Iraq, Russia is trying to play an important role in the region that really make things very difficult for Turkey's Middle East policy.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you.

Mr. Cinar.

Mr. CINAR. So Congressman, regarding the U.S.-Turkish from the military aspect, I would like to share a small quote from the General John Allen, what he said on the testimony on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

He said, we must not forget the Turkish Government, a critical partner in this fight, which recently increased its participation in the coalition, opening its bases to U.S. and other coalition members, and conducting air strikes on ISIL targets inside Syria alongside other coalition aircraft. This cooperation has already had an impact and will continue to have significant impact on our operations in Syria.

So when we look at Russia right now and the Pentagon also, when I look at the statements, Pentagon also said Russia air strikes are not targeting the ISIL 100 percent. 80 percent of the air strikes, Russian air strikes targeting the Assad regime's opponents. And we know the United States and the other coalition's strategy on fighting against ISIS and Turkey's on that coalition.

So there is actually right now a big argument between both sides. And I believe Turkey and United States will have a much stronger military strategic partnership in this year.

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Schenkkan.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Thank you. I will follow on what Mr. Cinar said.

I think there is a temptation to see Russia as an ally in Syria because of the Russian messaging about what its goals are in Syria, but I think the fact is, Russia, under its current government, defines its interests in terms of opposition to the West. This is how the current government of Russia defines its interests, whether it is in Syria, or whether it is Ukraine or in Europe.

And given that, it is impossible to see how those interests are going to converge. Russia will move its goals if it sees them converging with the United States, because its goal is to increase its leverage against the United States in any possible outcome in Syria.

Mr. MARINO. I see my time is expired. Thank you very much.

Yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We will have another hearing on Russia to go through those issues, whether or not Russia is basing its policies on what criteria. Some people think that we have pushed Russia in that direction with an endless hostility. Others believe that Russia is just playing on its heritage of, for the last 100 years of being an adversary of the United States.

Mr. MARINO. I look forward to that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So we will have an honest discussion on that. Both sides will always be presented in my hearings.

Ms. Gabbard.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Schenkkan, I will start with you, if you can talk about Turkey's standing within NATO. I think both you and Dr. Tol have talked about different examples of where Turkey has worked in a direct opposite manner to the objectives that the United States and our NATO allies are working toward in the effort to defeat ISIS.

Why is it that stronger accountability measures have not been taken against Turkey from different NATO allies with respect to the open border with Syria and the continued open flow of foreign fighters who are going and working with ISIS, al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, and other Islamic extremist groups in Syria, who are working to overthrow Assad so that they can take over all of Syria and establish their caliphate, the direct and indirect support that Turkey provides to some of these Islamic extremist groups who are fighting toward that end in Syria, and Turkey's focus on defeating the Kurds rather than standing with NATO allies and the United States against ISIS?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Thank you.

I think the Turkish relationship with NATO has certainly been extremely complicated by the war in Syria. Turkey has seen its interests in Syria as diverging at times from what NATO interests are. I would argue, however, that Turkey has—and this is despite the fact that I have been very critical of Turkish Government, as you can see in my testimony, domestically.

The Turkish Government has, in fact, changed its policies regarding the border. It has taken steps to attempt to seal——

Ms. GABBARD. Why haven't they closed it after all this time and as strong of a military as Turkey has? Why have they not closed the border and stopped these foreign fighters from coming in and out and going back into Europe?

Mr. SCHENKKAN. They would be the ones to answer specifically. But my opinion would be many of those fighters that are fighting in Aleppo, for instance, and who lost their corridor today are also being supported by the United States.

Ms. GABBARD. Well, it is a problem.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. But that is a question then not of diverging from NATO strategy or United States strategy. That is a question

of NATO or United States strategy. So I don't think it is simply that Turkey has gone off on its own tangent completely in opposition to what NATO or the United States have been trying to do.

What NATO and the United States have been trying to do in Syria has been a moving target, and it has changed. It clearly continues to evolve, and it can be at times hard to say what the goals are.

Ms. GABBARD. Mr. Cinar, can you comment on that?

Mr. CINAR. Sure.

Congresswoman, first of all, Turkey is not defeating the Kurds. They are defeating the PKK terrorists. So I just want to——

Ms. GABBARD. But to Dr. Tol's point, they are working against to defeat some of the very same Kurdish groups who are fighting against ISIS on the ground in northern Syria.

Mr. CINAR. Correct. So it is linked with the PYD. That is why, for Turkey, it is a terrorist organization, same as ISIS.

Regarding the border security, yes, you are right, Turkey needs to improve securing the border. And it seems like there is a much stronger cooperation with U.S. and other allies.

And also, let's keep in mind that most of the fighters are coming from the west side, especially from the European side. And if they have the British passports, French passports, and if Turkey doesn't get intelligence sharing from Europe, then Turkey is not to stop them at the borders, and they are going to just use the Turkish as a bridge.

So it is very important that Europe also share the strong intelligence with Turkey.

Ms. GABBARD. Are you saying that Turkey, if there is someone with a British or French passport coming in through Turkey and attempting to enter Syria, that there is some form of—that they are marking that down; that they know which British and French and foreign fighters are coming through Turkey and to Syria, and then therefore able to provide that intelligence back into the EU and other countries?

Mr. CINAR. No. If they get notified by Europe——

Ms. GABBARD. But if they don't know, if these people haven't been identified in the EU prior to their going through Turkey to fight in Syria with groups like ISIS——

Mr. CINAR. Right. If they have a British passport and if Turkey doesn't know that they are ISIS volunteers or fans, and if they don't get notification from the origin country, how can Turkey stop them at the border? So I think it is an intelligence sharing issue that both parties need to solve that.

Ms. GABBARD. So you are saying that they are enforcing the border, just not stopping these foreign fighters from going through. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. CINAR. Correct. Intelligence sharing——

Ms. GABBARD. So the border is enforced by Turkey?

Mr. CINAR. It is 511 kilometers. It is a long border.

Ms. GABBARD. So the 97 kilometers that President Obama talked about and others have admitted that Turkey is not enforcing on the border, that is completely closed and enforced at this point?

Mr. CINAR. It is not completely closed, but what I see is from the State Department statements, ISIS start to encourage some of them to go to Libya or North Africa countries to join the ISIS.

Ms. GABBARD. So that just goes to my point that Turkey has no excuse for allowing these openings in their border, which further helps these Islamic extremist groups.

Mr. CINAR. Right. No excuse, but with the support of the European allies.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you.

Ms. TOL. While both the U.S. and European countries have been pushing Turkey to close the border, in May 2015 Turkey closed the last two border crossings. I think it is a matter of capability and political will. Compared to last year, the political will is, I think, there, but there are still illegal crossings and the security forces on the border, they are turning a blind eye to those illegal crossings.

And I think Turkey has been doing more, and I think it could do more. But I think the Turkey security forces are overstretched, because they have been waging the war against the PKK. And secondly, your question about why Turkey is attacking the Kurds in Syria, it all goes back to Turkey's domestic drivers. I mean, one of the reasons why the ceasefire broke down was Turkey's fear of the PYD's empowerment.

The Kurds, they have been one of the main beneficiaries of our uprisings. They are very strong. The PYD has become a close ally of the United States and Syria. Europeans, they have been supporting that. So this heightened Turkey's fear of an independent Kurdistan and other entity, autonomous entity on its doorstep.

And that is why, I think, that is one of the reasons why Turkey is being very unwilling to go back to the negotiating table with the Kurds, and that is why Turkey attacked the PYD.

Ms. GABBARD. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If at some point in the future you were to hold a hearing on this, on the Kurds, specifically, I think it would give us a good opportunity to really dive into the situation so that we can hear from all sides and understand.

While we hear what Turkey says and why they are attacking the Kurds, from the Kurdish perspective. We saw in the recent elections how the HDP, as soon as they won enough seats in Parliament to threaten Erdogan's power were manipulated, the elections were manipulated and things turned out to that Erdogan was able to maintain his situation. So I hope that in the future we will have the opportunity to dig into that further.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We always appreciate everyone on this committee, your correction and guidance and suggestions. In this case, I will check to see if we have jurisdiction to hold such a hearing. Kurds may or may not, but the fact that the Kurds are part of Turkey, you know, at least there is a connection there, because this is not the Middle East, of course, subcommittee. But I will check to see if we can get permission to do that and appreciate that suggestion from you.

We now have Mr. Connolly, who will make his disagreement with the chair absolutely clear.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank my friend.

You know, I sometimes wonder on our committee, when we talk about Turkey, whether we can step back a little bit and look at context and attributes as opposed to looking for fault only, none of which is to diminish the legitimate concerns all of us have about various trends in Turkey, and about the role of President Erdogan and his philosophy about accreting power and how to use it.

Turkey is, and has been, a reliable NATO ally since the founding of NATO. Turkey has been an interlocutor between Israel and its neighbors in the Middle East, and has played a pivotal and positive role in that regard since the founding of the State of Israel. It has accepted 2 million refugees from Syria without much help from the international community, 2 million.

It shares an enormous border with Syria and an enormous border with Iran. It is a dangerous neighborhood. It is key to a Cyprus settlement. There won't be a Cyprus settlement if we are not involved in Turkey in a meaningful way.

We share a military base on Turkish soil. Mr. Schenkkan mentioned four elections in the last 2 years. I believe, Mr. Schenkkan, I am right, that our own State Department has said, by and large, they have been free and fair.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. I will not speak to—the OSCE has said they were free but questioned the fairness in it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, I sometimes question our elections, how fair they are, but, I mean—it is not perfect, but where else in the region can you point to? And I will point out Erdogan suffered, in a sense arguably, two losses: First one outright; the second one, you know, he didn't get the super majority he wanted and needed because the voters in Turkey had a different point of view.

None of this is to whitewash real issues, but there is a context here. We want to make Turkey a more stable democratic state. It is in our interest to have European integration with Turkey, not to push it away.

History has a lot of umps and a lot of tragedies, and it should be recognized. But it shouldn't be dispositive. We are where we are, and this relationship is a critical one. Let's not kick it away.

Having said that, Mr. Schenkkan, you outlined concerns and I share your concerns. There are anti-democratic impulses that have manifested themselves in Erdogan's own approach with respect to the press, with respect to dissent. And, you know, I guess I invite you to comment on that a little bit, and the other two witnesses as well.

How worried should we be about that? And are there countervailing forces that can be looked to to try to redress what is, in fact, happening in Turkey? From this distance, it is alarming.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Thank you. It is very alarming, and I think we should be very worried. I think the return to violence and a return to an open conflict inside the country comes on top of what was already a very grave situation.

You asked, are there things within the society that might hold it back? Yes, there are. Turkey is a diverse country. It is a pluralist country. You are correct to note that the electoral system functions better than many other electoral systems in the neighborhood. There are major concerns about the media environment and how

that affects the ability for voters to access information or to make judgments fairly.

But there is diversity, there is still outspokenness in Turkish society, even though it is punished quite frequently. So I do think there is some hope, but it is grim and it is getting grimmer.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Cinar.

Mr. CINAR. Congressman, yes, there are some issues in Turkey and, as I said, there are some improvements that I see.

And I will give you an example about the freedom. Recently I was on the discussion many times about academic freedom. Freedom of expression is safeguarded in the Turkish constitution, legislation. Yet, it goes without saying that academic freedom shouldn't be abused for political ends.

Article 130 of the Turkish constitution clearly states, and I quote,

> "Universities and members of the teaching staff, and their assistants may freely engage in all kinds of scientific research and publication. However, this shall not include the liberty to engage in activities against the existence and independence of the state, and against integrity and indivisibility of the nation and the country."

So since I don't have the media credentials and I sometimes write articles, and I respect my colleagues and journalists, but some of them, if they are sharing the national intelligence information to the public, then the

Turkish Government says that it is illegal, they can't do that. So there is lots of discussion going on. I mean, there should be an improvement on that sense.

But there are also regulations that there is no threat for the Turkish unity in the country.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, if I might be allowed just two more points. One is just to comment on Mr. Schenkkan, what you talked about Russia and Syria, and you characterize their behavior as just anti-West. They don't like us. And I guess I would respectfully suggest to you it is maybe a little more than that.

I mean, Syria sends Hafez al-Assad, was the Soviet Union's one client state in the region, and that goes back to 1970. So almost 50 years of investment. They have got a military presence in Syria. It is all they got. And Putin, in a long tradition, now a Russian tradition, previously a Soviet tradition, doesn't want to give it up, and is going to fight and can be expected to fight.

I am not justifying his behavior at all, but, I mean, I think it is more that than it is culturally anti-West. I think it is protecting Russian interests, perceived interests that is fueling a lot of his behavior with respect to Syria. I mean, I wouldn't deny either there is a patina of anti-Western bias and chip on the shoulder that Putin has, no question about it, but I do think they are looking at this not so much from a cultural, even political point of view, it is a geostrategic point of view where if they lose that, they lose all toehold in the region. And they don't want to do that.

And you may want to comment, but before you do, just one more thing, and then I will cease and desist, Mr. Chairman. I would like all of you to have an opportunity if you wish, from the United States point of view, and I worry how much this causes friction in

our relationship with Turkey, increasingly here, certainly in the Congress, I think, we see the Peshmerga as a very positive force with which we can work. They are pro-American; they are willing to fight; they will gain territory; why wouldn't we partner with them, equip them, train them, and help them along the way in recapturing lost ground to ISIL? And I sense that that puts us on a collision course, frankly, with the Government of Turkey, because they don't distinguish between PKK and the Peshmerga.

And we most certainly do. And with that, I will be quiet, and if the chairman will indulge, to allow the panel to respond.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you very much. I will have to say that this is somewhat of a miracle hearing my distinguished colleague from Virginia giving the benefit of the doubt to squirrellish charges against the Putin regime, for giving benefit of the doubt to the Putin regime on this. They are just being mean and nasty because they are mean and nasty, not because of their habitually being mean and nasty.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yeah. Let's not go crazy, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. And let me note that this hearing has been very good and that we have now some challenges ahead of us: One is to have a hearing specifically on the Kurds, and all of these issues dealing with the Kurds. We will also have a hearing and, again, every one of my hearings we try to have both sides represented, I insist on that, and to give everybody a chance to make their case. So we will have one from Russia as well.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, I don't think any of us on our side of the aisle would ever question how fair you have been. No question about it. I just wonder if he will indulge the panel to respond to that last point.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Go right ahead.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Sure. Regarding Russia just briefly, I didn't mean to imply that this is a culture war or that there is some kind of a central Russianess that leads it into conflict with the west. I think your characterization is correct. However, I would argue that the Russian definition, this current Russian Government's definition of its interest is whether its gains vis-à-vis the West.

And so it simply can't align them right now with the United States because it constantly redefines them in terms of its position and its status vis-à-vis the United States and that makes it—you know, I know the Secretary of State and others are always seeking nonzero-sum outcomes, but you can't have a nonzero-sum outcome if the other partner is changing the equation.

And I will leave the other question.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, actually——

Mr. SCHENKKAN. Oh, regarding the Peshmerga and the PYD. My understanding is that the United States is working closely with the PYD in northern Syria. They are working closely with them not only as spotters for aerial operations, but also probably providing weapons, and perhaps even providing training or other kinds of support.

That seems to be certainly the most effective in that region of Syria in the fight against ISIS. One of the core questions, however, is that not all of these parts of Syria, where ISIS, where the Is-

lamic State is successful and operational, are Kurdish areas. They are not inhabited majority by Kurds.

And so a Kurdish group, a Kurdish militia will not have the legitimacy to hold those areas, even if they are cleared of the Islamic State. And that makes it very difficult to say that we can simply outsource this work onto the PYD and say that is how we solve the Islamic State problem. There have to be Sunni Arab allies for the United States in Syria.

And as Congresswoman Gabbard was suggesting, yes, some of these are Islamist groups, if not all of them at this point. And that is the tough choice that the United States is dealing with in its policy inside Syria.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I want to give the other two panelists a 1-minute summary of what you would like to finish up the hearing with. Go right ahead.

Mr. CINAR. Congressman, regarding the Peshmerga and Turkey, I just want to give the facts. Turkey loaned $500 million to Turkish regional government to help meet the budgetary needs of the government. So, in addition to financial support, Turkey continues to protect the military support to the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. So it is not the PYD issue, but Turkey supporting the other Kurdish groups that are fighting against ISIS.

So far, Turkey has also trained and equipped over 2,300 Peshmerga forces, and transferred to Peshmerga from northern Iraq to Syria to Turkey. As you said, Turkey shouldn't kick it away. Turkey shouldn't be punished. I mean, unfortunately, Turkey is not doing a great PR, what they are doing right now.

So Turkey and United States should be closely working. Military strategic partnership should be improved this year and beyond, and I believe that with these kind of hearings and collaborations, both administration will improve their relationship. Thank you.

Ms. TOL. Mr. Congressman, you mentioned that you would like Turkey to be a stable and a democratic country. I believe Turkey will not be a stable country until it is democratic. Yes, you are right, the elections were free, but it is an electoral democracy, and there is more to democracy. Freedom of expression is one of the most fundamental pillars of democracy and it is lacking.

And even in this room, I can count at least two people who have been victimized by a lack of freedom of expression and media freedom and were fired because of their critical views of the government.

And it is not just a matter of lack of freedom of expression or media freedom, but basic rights and freedoms are missing. And that is why there is a Kurdish political movement that is fighting, and that is why we have 200 civilians who were killed in a matter of a few months.

Those people, they are not asking to topple the regime. They are not looking for a new regime. All they are asking for is they want to be able to have the right to have an education in Kurdish. They want a new definition of citizenship, a civic definition of citizenship that is not ethnocentric. And they want to revise the vague definition of antiterrorism law because they have been victimized by that law.

Mr. CONNOLLY. We agree, Dr. Tol.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

And we are going to have two summaries, one by Mr. Meeks and then myself, and then we will close the hearing. Thank you.

Mr. MEEKS. And I will be very brief.

I want to thank the witnesses. And I think in just listening and in trying to educate ourselves, you have helped us tremendously. And if I was to summarize where we are in the conversation that we have had, I think I could do it in one word, well, two words: It is complicated.

For sure, I believe that Turkey has to look out for its own national interests, and that if there was an extremist group that was attacking it, et cetera, just as we would in the United States, that Turkey has to do what Turkey has to do to make sure it preserves its government in moving forward.

But I also believe that the people, just as Dr. Tol had talked about, should have the right to dissent and to give their viewpoints and to run in government, and if they get elected, to participate without fear of being persecuted or prosecuted, that that is what a democratic society is all about.

And from what I have heard, and I just think three excellent witnesses, Mr. Chairman, and the perspectives that you have come from is that we have got to try to figure it out. But most importantly, the Turkish people have to try to—what I call the Turkish people, if you are living in Turkey, whether you are Kurd or not. I am talking about the Turkish people, everyone that is there who are citizens of Turkey, have to figure out how to get to a table, you work it out, and you resolve these differences, because it is important not only for Turkey but in a glowing and interconnected world, it is important for the entire region and, thereby, really important for every one of us.

So, again, thank you for really good insights and helping this committee understand what is going on domestically in Turkey. Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Meeks. We will both do a little course before we have the next hearing on what all those abbreviations mean, those different designations. It does get complicated. It gets real complicated.

Let me just note, again, thank you to the witnesses. We have had some interesting discussion. We have also basically brought forward the need for two other hearings that this chairman and the ranking member will work on, in terms of just one, just specifically about the Kurds, specifically dealing with the Kurds, wherever they are in that region, then one specifically about Russia. And we will have, again, witnesses on both sides of the issues dealing with those particular entities.

Let me just say, that in terms of this issue today, the reason for this hearing, it is evident to some of us—and I am glad we had another witness to explain that there are some other perspectives on this, but that Turkey is going in the wrong direction. And I am very happy, as I say, that Mr. Cinar actually, you know, was able to present some of the positive sides that we should certainly look into and make that part of our decision-making process.

But those of us who are concerned, we see a President trying to change the law to extend his rule. I will have to say that I just vis-

ited Mt. Vernon with my children. God blessed me and my family with triplets 11 years ago, so I brought them up to Mt. Vernon.

And one of the great things that we had in this country was the fact that our first President set down the custom and then it became law after FDR violated the custom, which is that a President last two terms. Eight years, that is enough to be President. And after that it begins to corrupt.

And I think that we are beginning to see that, signs of either corruption or corruption of power, not just money, but of power, desire for power taking place in Turkey. And we see also the incredible problems that are going on right now and that have been going on with Turkey.

There has always been this drug trafficking that has gone across Turkey that has corrupted their society. Human trafficking is a huge problem and a lot of the traffickers come through Turkey and go right into Albania and the Balkans. And that, too, should be an issue of concern to us.

And, of course, we see that Turkey, instead of playing the part of we are a more democratic Islamic country, thus we are going to become a force for moderation and reconciliation to try to find peaceful solutions, we more and more find Turkey looking toward the military and saying, actually, we are going to side with one radical group or another, or even decide that they are going to shoot down a Russian airplane that was over their territory for 30 seconds after it had already left.

And let me just note, American planes and all across the place cross people's borders all the time. Of course, this was in a combat mission. That plane was in a combat mission. We know that. But it was in a combat mission in order—and here is another thing that we will be looking into—whether or not—when we are talking about Assad and his whole relationship to Turkey and Syria, the leaders of these two countries, which obviously are looking at each other as enemies, whether or not simply becoming an enemy of Assad means that those forces that are being bombed are, in some way, democratic as compared to radical Islamic, as well as Erdogan's assessment that the Kurds are, by definition, because they are against him, they are in some way radical.

This is an economy that is—there are connections here in logic that need to be examined to see if that, in any way, is attached to reality or if this isn't just people excusing their own military action against whatever group is against them.

I would suggest—and we will go into—again, whether or not Assad—those people against Assad—I am sure some of them are very democratic, but frankly we heard the same in Libya and we have heard the same in other countries, that it is better sometimes not to help overthrow a dictator unless we know that there will be a democratic government that will replace it instead of a radical Islamic government that wants to be allied with people who want to hurt us.

And that is why when that plane was shot down over Turkey, I assume that that plane would have ended up killing terrorists who want to kill us. And if that was the case, that was not something a friend of the United States should be doing as keeping alive those kind of people.

Finally, let us note this: There are, as I said, I think, and it is clear, that there are people in Turkey, the opposition, loyal Turks, people who love their country, who are very concerned that their country is not becoming more democratic or it is actually becoming less democratic and that there are more controls on journalists than there were before. Clearly there is more control on journalists now than there were before.

And also, on opposition, for example, the Gulenists, I guess that is how you pronounce it, and we have looked into those people and they were a very legitimate opposition. In any other democratic society, they would have been a perfectly acceptable part of the national debate.

Erdogan's regime has declared them the enemy, and they have been arrested. They have been persecuted basically. And this is a group of people, yes, they have a tie of sort of a liberalization philosophy and a humanitarian philosophy, and they are Islamists, but having them repressed, I mean, they had basically been declared the enemy of the government there, just because they disagreed with what the government wants and is trying to educate people to an alternative. That is somewhat similar to the Falun Gong in China who are brutally repressed and actually murdered by the Chinese Government.

These are things that we need to talk about, we need to bring out to public debate. And let us hope that—and I am going to close it with this—let us hope that Turkey does go in the right direction. For those of us who, over the years—and I have visited Turkey many, many times. During the Cold War, I visited Turkey many times and was so proud that they were standing with us at a time when it was the Soviet Union and not Russia.

The Soviet Union had targeted Turkey. They were putting millions of dollars and undermining that government and their freedom and their independence as much as they possibly could do, and the Turkish people stood tall. And we shouldn't ever forget that unanimity we had, that support that we had when it really counted from the people of Turkey.

So with that, we close the hearing. It is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:53 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Chairman

February 2, 2016

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, February 3, 2016

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Turkey: Political Trends in 2016

WITNESSES: Mr. Nate Schenkkan
Project Director
Nations in Transit
Freedom House

Gonul Tol, Ph.D.
Director
Center for Turkish Studies
Middle East Institute

Mr. Ali Cinar
Executive Vice President
Turkish Heritage Organization

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats* HEARING

Day *Wednesday* **Date** *February 3, 2016* **Room** *2172 Rayburn*

Starting Time *2:12 pm* **Ending Time** *3:53 pm*

Recesses [*0*] (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Rohrabacher

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [ ]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Turkey: Political Trends in 2016

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Cook, Rep. Gabbard, Rep. Sires, Rep. Meeks, Rep. Marino, [redacted]

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

Rep. Cicilline, Rep. Connolly,

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes [✓] **No** [ ]
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *3:53 pm*

Subcommittee Staff Director

Statement for the Record
Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia

Turkey is a close ally of the United States and has been a valued member of NATO for more than 60 years. Turkish democracy remains a work in progress, and so long as democratic deficiencies are identified, it is incumbent upon the United States and our allies to engage Turkey on a basis that is consistent with a relationship of mutual respect.

We neglect this relationship at our own peril. Turkey lives in close proximity to several global flashpoints. It is also a strategic ally in our capability to respond to regional crises. Across Turkey's southern border, the Syrian civil war rages, and a foreign terrorist organization with expansionist designs on the Middle East controls a vast swath of territory. The conflict and carnage in Syria have forced more than 4 million refugees to seek safety outside of Syria – more than 2 million of which Turkey has heroically received and cared for. Foreign fighters destined for the battlefields of Syria have used Turkey as their primary transit route, and ISIL affiliates have carried out bombing attacks within Turkey. Terrorists, weapons smugglers, and vendors of illicit oil have exploited Turkey's porous 500-mile border with Syria.

Coordination and cooperation with Turkey is essential to accomplishing our shared goals in region. The U.S. and NATO have condemned repeated violations of Turkish airspace by Russian combat aircraft, and in December NATO announced an air defense package for Turkey to defend alliance airspace.
The U.S. is currently advancing a joint plan to reinforce Turkish border security and surveillance technologies. The U.S. relies on the use of Incirlik Air Base in Turkey to prosecute the ISIL threat. We must have Turkey at the negotiating table if we hope to achieve a political solution to the Syrian civil war. While our strategies have not always converged – namely on U.S. support for the Syrian Kurds and the prioritization of the fight against ISIL – we must reconcile these differences and move forward together.

Foundational to our concerted action with Turkey – and the NATO alliance for that matter – is the promotion of democratic principles. The U.S. and NATO rely on Turkey to be an example of secular democracy in the Middle East. However, as Vice President Biden stated during a recent visit to Turkey, "when the media are intimidated or imprisoned for critical reporting, when internet freedom is curtailed and social media sites...are shut down and more than 1,000 academics are accused of treason simply by signing a petition, that's not the kind of example that needs to be set."

As a co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on U.S.-Turkey Relations and Turkish Americans, I have publicly expressed concern regarding media crackdowns in Turkey and the, at times, unhelpful rhetoric of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

President Erdogan, elected to the presidency in 2014, has increasingly shown a tendency to suppress dissent. That is a concerning trajectory for Turkish democracy, and the U.S. must prioritize the reinforcement of democratic institutions as part of our dialogue with Turkey and as part of each of the innumerable areas of cooperation we have with this close ally.

Despite these very real concerns, it should be noted that 2015 saw Turkey conduct what were by most accounts two free and fair parliamentary elections. The most recent election in November resulted in a ruling majority for the Justice and Development Party (AKP) – the party of President Erdogan. However, the AKP was denied a sufficient number of seats to amend the Turkish constitution and create an executive presidency at President Erdogan's behest. President Erdogan has instead announced plans to hold a constitutional referendum. The concerns expressed by Vice President Biden are not more likely to be addressed if the office of the president is vested with further control of Turkish government. Rather one should hope for more – not fewer – checks on presidential authority.

In recent months, President Erdogan has intensified the Turkish government's longstanding conflict with the terrorist organization, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). The PKK and its supporters must renounce violence and both sides must return to peace negotiations. All parties should have extra incentive to limit conflict during this time of heightened regional instability. We can look toward recently improved Turkish-Israeli and Turkish-Cypriot relations as examples where conflict and disagreement can give way to accord in the interest of greater priorities.

Turkey – as a sovereign nation – has the prerogative to prioritize and respond to threats to its national security, and the U.S. – as Turkey's NATO ally – has a responsibility to safeguard those security priorities through political and military means in a manner consistent with the NATO alliance. However, with that security relationship come certain obligations including the promotion of democratic values, the commitment to prevent conflict when political solutions are attainable, and to endeavor to support common NATO security priorities. A robustly democratic Turkey can play an outsized role – a valuable role – in a sea of regional instability. Our relationship should be focused on enhancing that outcome in every respect.

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