

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:  
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“At What Cost? The Human Toll of Turkey’s Policy at Home and Abroad”**

**Committee Members Present:**

**Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;  
Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX);  
Representative John Boozman (R-AR);  
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN)**

**Witnesses:**

**Henri Barkey, Bernard L. and Bertha F. Cohen Professor, Lehigh University;  
Talip Küçükcan, Professor of Sociology, Marmara University;  
Eric Schwartz, President, Refugees International;  
Merve Tahiroglu, Turkey Program Coordinator, Project on Middle East  
Democracy (POMED);  
Gonul Tol, Director, Center for Turkish Studies, Middle East Institute (MEI)**

**The Hearing Was Held From 10:00 a.m. To 11:03 a.m. in Room 2200,  
Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Joe  
Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member, Commission for Security and Cooperation  
in Europe, presiding**

**Date: Thursday, October 31, 2019**

WILSON: Good morning and welcome to the U.S. Helsinki Commission hearing today: “At What Cost? The Human Toll of Turkey’s Policy at Home and Abroad.” And we’ll come to order. I’m grateful to the Helsinki Commission Chairman Alcee Hastings for the opportunity to host this hearing on human rights development in Turkey at a crucial time in U.S. relationship with Ankara. I will abbreviate my opening remarks because we have votes this morning and five excellent expert panelists to hear from before we go. I ask that my full remarks to be entered into the record.

As a proven and vocal friend to the people of Turkey I am deeply saddened to see our long-time democratic ally being abused by President Erdoğan. Erdoğan’s actions at home and abroad are contributing to a growing rift between our nations that should not occur. I hold the people of Turkey in the highest regard and serve as the co-chair of the Congressional Turkish Caucus, which is the caucus of friends of Turkey. My record reflects my firm belief in the importance of our alliance with Turkey, and the aspirations of the Turkish people for freedom, prosperity, and security.

But Erdoğan is taking his country and our alliance in the wrong direction. His recent unilateral actions in Syria and pivot toward Moscow highlight serious strategic disagreements that are damaging the long-term security of the Turkish people and the broader region. As NATO allies for nearly 70 years, Turkey and the United States – from the Korean War to victory over communism – have been bound by common commitment to the alliance founding, quote, “on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law,” end of quote.

Sadly, in Erdoğan’s Turkey today these foundational principles are under critical threat. After the failed and illegal coup attempt against the government in 2016, President Erdoğan expanded a legitimate hunt for perpetrators to an over-broad campaign targeting and criminalizing dissent in almost every sector of society. The victims were politicians, journalists, academics, and civil society leaders. There are also thousands of others who were going about their private business until their lives were upended by baseless accusation made in an overheated atmosphere of suspicion. Unfortunately, Turkey’s weakened judiciary did more to abet this collapse of the rule of law than stem it.

My written remarks address this in greater detail, but I want to mention briefly a couple of areas of particular concern to me and the Helsinki Commission. First, the innocent Americans and U.S. government employees caught in Erdoğan’s dragnet. More than three years since his initial arrest, NASA scientist and American citizen Serkan Golge reminds – remains trapped in Turkey on baseless terrorism charges, similar to those brought against Pastor Brunson. In addition, three long-time Turkish employees of the U.S. consulates in the country are also stuck in different stages of judicial process on charges the U.S. State Department says has no merit.

As President Trump prepares to meet with President Erdoğan on November 13th at the White House, I urge our president to build on his record, securing the freedom of wrongfully detained Americans around the world, and assist on the complete release of Mr. Golge and the other consulate staff.

Second, Turkey's efforts at the Organization for Cooperation and Europe to restrict civil society participation in the OSCE's meetings. In Turkey's quest to unilaterally block certain civil society groups from participating in the OSCE meetings it has obstructed the OSCE's broader work on human rights. Through blocking consensus votes and boycotting meetings, Erdoğan's Turkey has helped the cause of authoritarian regimes who have tried for many years to hobble this important work.

If President Trump's meeting with President Erdoğan goes forward next month, there will be a lot on the agenda. But what place should democracy and human rights have in the conversation? This hearing seeks to answer the question by demonstrating how the weakening of democratic principles in Turkey lies at the core of President Erdoğan's most troubling domestic and regional policies. It would not be an overstatement to say that the fate of our bilateral relationship is inextricably linked to the fate of democracy in Turkey.

I look forward to hearing the expert testimony by witnesses concerning this breadth of issues. In particular, I'd like to hear their recommendations for how the United States can bolster the resilience of the Turkish people in the face of so many challenges, and work to rebuild their democracy for the good of all Turkish citizens. Before introducing panelists, I'd like to acknowledge any members to deliver any opening remarks.

Congressman Veasey.

VEASEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And very good to be here this morning. And I think that this is a very timely and appropriate hearing that we're holding on Turkey. I know that we do have upcoming votes, and so I'm looking forward to hearing from the panelists.

But I think that, you know, right now Turkey is really torn between two worlds. They're torn between the world of democracy and freedom for its people, an advancing society that wants to keep up with the rest of the modern world, and another world that is, you know, sadly one that is autocratic and would like to be able to deal with the Russians on issues of defense and what have you, and ignore the alliance that they've had with NATO, that has been, I think, very beneficial for the country. I hope that they do choose ultimately to make the right decision, to be in the right world. But having this discussion today I think is good for the country and world peace, hopefully.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman.

And as an indication of how important our friendship is with the people of Turkey we've been joined by Senator John Boozman from Arkansas.

BOOZMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, I'm excited to hear about the testimony. I've got to bow out in not too long from now, but I wanted to come by and just tell you how much I appreciate you being here and the important message that you have. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Senator.

And this is an extraordinary amount of expertise today. And we appreciate you being here. First, we'll hear from Gonul Tol, who is the founding director of the Middle East Institute Center for Turkish Studies, having written extensively on virtually every dimension of U.S.-Turkish relations. She will provide her recommendations on how U.S. policymakers should understand recent domestic and foreign policy developments in Turkey. Next we have Merve Tahiroglu who will testify on the rule of law situation in Turkey based on research that she has been conducting in her position as the Turkey program coordinator at the Project on Middle East Democracy.

The third witness is Henri Barkey. He is the Bernard L. and Bertha H. Cohen chair on international relations at Lehigh University. He will offer his perspective on recent developments in Turkey and U.S.-Turkish bilateral relations, drawing on his extensive scholarship and government experience. We'll also hear testimony from Eric Schwartz, president of the Refugees International, an independent nongovernmental organization that advocates for assistance and protection for displaced persons. Mr. Schwartz was the U.S. assistant secretary of state for populations, refugees and migration from 2009 to 2011, and will testify on the refugee situation in Turkey and humanitarian situation in northeastern Syria.

And lastly, we want to give a warm welcome to Talip Küçükcan, who just came in last night. And so we appreciate so much him being here from Istanbul, where he's a professor of sociology at Marmara University. Dr. Küçükcan is a member of the Turkish parliament from 2015 to 2018 and served as a member of Turkey's delegation to the Parliamentary Assemblies to the OSCE and Council of Europe. He will testify on the rule of law and migration issues in Turkey. I refer members of the audience to the panel's full biographies that are included in the folders you received as you entered.

I also need to remind everyone that your written testimony will be included in the record. And so we will have a five-minute limit on the presentations. And then a challenge for all of us. We have votes possibly in 20 minutes. And so we would suspend for votes, and then return. And depending on how long the votes are, we never know. That's one of the blessings of democracy.

Dr. Tol, I invite you to begin your testimony.

GONUL TOL: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. It's an honor to be invited to speak with you today about human rights developments in Turkey.

As Mr. Chairman laid out in his remarks, most freedoms under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have been dramatically curtailed. Opposition leaders continue to face arrest and prosecution. Authorities use antiterror laws broadly against those who are critical of the government. Thousands of people, including minors, journalists, human rights activists face criminal prosecutions on trumped-up terrorism charges. The mainstream media is largely controlled by the government and the very few independent newspapers and websites face tremendous political pressure and are targeted for prosecution.

But most concerning of all, however, is the ongoing conflict between the Turkish state and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK. Thousands have been killed in the fighting. Both the PKK and the Turkish state played a role in the destruction of major segments of Kurdish cities. The political ramifications of the fighting have been equally disastrous. The Turkish state response has largely criminalized Kurdish political expression. Hundreds of Kurdish news outlets have been shut down. Thousands of Kurdish activists as well as tens of Kurdish mayors parliamentarians remain in prison.

Turkey has turned increasingly authoritarian under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, but Turkey is not a full-blown dictatorship. Public opinion, elections, and civil society still matter in Turkey. The most recent local elections were a breath of fresh air for those long resigned to the fact that the ballot box does not matter in Turkey, and President Erdoğan was invincible. The opposition captured almost all of Turkey's major cities, dealing a huge blow to President Erdoğan's 17-year rule. The election result is a testament to the peoples of Turkey, the great majority of whom refuse to give up on the idea of democratic rule. It's a testament to the fact that democracy in Turkey, though ailing, is not dead yet, it just needs help.

For decades, Turkey's conflict with the – with the Kurds has hindered the country's democratization, but neither Turkey's democratization nor the Kurdish quest for political rights have occupied an important place in U.S. policy. 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. U.S. policy has long mimicked Turkey's view of the Kurdish problem and treated it as a domestic security matter. In an effort not to destabilize a key ally, the U.S. policy remained indifferent to the democratic struggle of the Kurds. And more recently, the United States allied itself with the PKK's Syrian offshoot in its fight against the Islamic State.

While Kurds died in the thousands in that campaign, the West admired their courage, and called them heroic fighters, but paid little attention to the long history of persecution under oppressive regimes and their struggle for more rights. The Kurdish question is a matter of democratization and human rights. Although Turkey has legitimate security concerns emanating from its decades-long conflict with the PKK, the denial of Kurdish ethnic identity and democratic rights is at the heart of the problem. So the responsibility rests on the Turkish government to acknowledge Kurdish democratic aspirations – such as mother-language education, an end to discriminatory laws and fair political representation.

The U.S. must change its narrative that frames the Kurds as great fighters. This narrative only perpetuates the flawed, security-oriented approach to the Kurds. Instead, the U.S. must recognize the rich history and diverse politics and sociology of the Kurdish people and their common struggle to achieve more rights. This is not just a moral imperative for the U.S., but a practical one too. Today's regional context ties Turkish democracy and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question to the U.S. security interests in the region. Only a more democratic Turkey can address the Kurdish question peacefully.

The U.S. should not see Turkey as a lost cause. There is still hope for democracy in Turkey, and U.S. can help. Given growing support for EU membership and anti-Americanism,

the US would be better advised to work with the European Union for democracy assistance to Turkey. The U.S. should attach democratic conditionality to Turkey-U.S. free trade agreement and military aid and incentivize American NGOs to monitor elections. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Ms. Tol.

And we now begin with Ms. Tahiroglu.

TAHIROGLU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify. I will focus on the alarming deterioration of the rule of law in Turkey and why this matters to the United States.

As President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has consolidated his power, the rule of law has suffered a precipitous decline. Through a decade-long process of constitutional and legal changes, as well as mass purges of judges and prosecutors, Erdoğan has undermined judicial independence and packed the courts with his allies. Today this politicized judiciary is just as a main weapon against government critics and opponents.

Prosecutors employ overly broad definitions of terrorism to crack down on dissent. They use repressive laws to punish peaceful expressions as insulting the state or the president. Inditements often run hundreds of pages, purporting to prove fantastical conspiracy theories through circumstantial evidence and relying on secret witnesses. Due process, in such cases, is often absent. Months or years-long pretrial detentions are common, judges seen as fair towards defendants are reassigned. Alarming, some lower courts have even refused to follow the orders of the constitutional court when the rulings have not been to the government's liking.

The impact of all of this has been vast. Nearly 50,000 people today are in prison under terrorism charges. They include lawmakers, journalists, academics, and civil-society leaders. Many have been ensnared in mass political trials. In one critical case, 16 defendants – which include civic leaders, journalists, architects, actors, and film producers – face life sentences under baseless allegations of conspiring to overthrow the government through the nationwide Gezi protests of 2013.

Politically motivated investigations also target opposition politicians. Scores of Kurdish lawmakers have been jailed since 2015, after they helped to unseat Erdoğan's party from its parliamentary majority. Recently, prosecutors have targeted the Istanbul chief of the main opposition party after she helped the party win a landmark mayoral election in June. This breakdown of the rule of law in Turkey matters not only to the Turkish people, but also to the United States in at least three ways.

First, American citizens, like Pastor Andrew Brunson, have been caught up in the dragnet, tried and imprisoned under unfounded allegations of terrorism or attempting to overthrow the government. U.S. nationals and local U.S. government employees continue to face the risk of arbitrary or politically motivated arrest.

Second, the rule of law crisis fuels the anti-Americanism in Turkey, a NATO ally. The use of the judiciary to silence huge numbers of journalists has left the media dominated by pro-Erdoğan outlets, which continuously publish invectives against the United States. And sham trials like the Gezi case, which tries to pin pro-democracy protests on a Western-led plot to topple Erdoğan, found conspiratorial suspicions about the U.S.

Third, judicial crackdowns on dissenting voices serve to embolden Turkey's aggressive policies abroad. Prosecutions of Kurdish lawmakers have silenced Turkey's only party opposed to the current incursion operation in Syria. Turkey has recently detained nearly 200 people for social media posts critical of this war, further suppressing dissent. Without free public debate, Turkish citizens have no opportunity to check their leader's aggressive impulses, including towards neighbors like Syria or allies like the United States.

There are many issues on the U.S. agenda with Turkey, but it is vital for Washington prioritize support for rule of law. The United States has a direct interest in ensuring fair trials, particularly in cases aimed at promoting conspiracy theories about the U.S. and discrediting Democratic norms. To help ensure that Turkish courts uphold constitutional rights and enforce due process, the U.S. should continue to monitor politically motivated cases and to stand up for freedom of expression and democratic rights.

In spite of the growing repression, more than half of Turkey's population is still trying to resist Erdoğan's authoritarianism, under increasingly harsh conditions. It is incumbent upon the U.S. Congress to stand with the Turkish people in defense of their rights. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions.

MR. WILSON: Thank you very much, Ms. Tahiroglu.

May we now begin with Mr. Barkey.

BARKEY: Congressmen and senators, thank you for inviting me. I will not read my testimony, instead talk. I'm a professor, after all.

But let me start by saying my colleagues discussed some of the issues with respect to rule of law and the Kurdish question. I will argue also, regarding the Kurdish question, its importance in terms of both Turkish-American relations, but in terms of the stability of Turkey in the long run, but also in terms of its impact on Turkish foreign policy, as we saw in the recent incursion into Syria.

The Kurdish question is not new. The Turkish state has been struggling with this since the beginning of the – since 1923, when the Turkish state was founded. Without – oh. So what is – what I would like to argue is there's something different that's going on today with respect to the Kurdish question. And that is that the Turkish government has decided to go after the Turkish – the Turkish Kurdish political party, the People's Democracy Party, or HDP, as it's known by its acronym in Turkish. And this is a political part that the Kurds formed with other allies in society. And for the first time in the history of Turkish politics, there has been a

Kurdish party that entered parliament and managed to cross the 10 percent threshold that's designed to essentially keep parties out of parliament.

The HDP was a very unique party, led by a very charismatic leader, Selahattin Demirtaş. And the party essentially offered the Kurds an alternative to violence and to other types of resistance to participate in Turkish politics. And in that sense, from that perspective, it has been very, very successful. It maybe has been far too successful for its own good, in the sense that Mr. Erdoğan increasingly saw the HDP as a major threat to its rule. And the recent elections in Istanbul, the municipal elections in Istanbul, show that the HDP could play a very critical role in denying Mr. Erdoğan victory.

So what is now going on is the systematic dismantling of the HDP, step-by-step. Its leaders are being thrown into jail. Mr. Selahattin Demirtaş has been in jail since 2016. It's always being accused nebulously of participating in terror, belonging to terrorist organizations. And as my colleague Merve Tahiroglu has suggested, the Turkish government is very good at coming up with fantastic accusations. There is one very important author by the name of Ahmet Altan who's in jail. He's been sentenced to life imprisonment because he sent subliminal messages over television the day before the coup. I personally have also been accused of organizing the Turkish coup of 2016 and there's an arrest warrant on me.

So the Turkish state creates this fictitious sets of accusations in order to get rid of its opponents one by one. And this is what's happening to the HDP. And eventually, we will see that it's not just with respect to the HDP's leadership in parliament, but also at the local level. Every single mayor in the east and southeastern parts of Turkey, HDP-led, has now been kicked out of his or her job by the government and replaced by a bureaucrat centrally appointed by the government. The reason is because the municipalities are essentially the building block. And Mr. Erdoğan knows that very well, having been the mayor of Istanbul. It is the building block in terms of creating support and political power.

So the upshot of this is that Turkey is that Turkey is going to become much more – much more unstable as the Kurds look for other ways to resist. The Kurdish question is not going to go away. The Turkish government cannot will it away, cannot make it disappear by jailing people. However, we are also seeing how that problem is creating – is influencing foreign policy. A large reason why the Turkish government went into Syria is not because there was a military threat from northern Syria, but because there was a political threat from Syria.

And that is what – and that is the fact that the American – they were afraid that the American government, just like it did with the KRG in Iraq, would be the midwife to a new autonomous region in Syria controlled by the Kurds. And that's what Erdoğan wanted to stop. And that has to do with the fact that domestically the Turkish government is afraid that another autonomous region in the Middle East would lead to Turkish Kurds also demanding the same thing. Thank you very much.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Barkey.

And we now proceed to Mr. Schwartz.



SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Chairman Wilson, and Representative Veasey, and Senator Boozman, for this hearing on this very compelling issue. My name is Eric Schwartz and I'm the president of Refugees International and a former U.S. assistant secretary of state for population, refugees, and migration. This week Refugee International's Vice President for Policy and Programs Hardin Lang was at the border between northeast Syria and Iraq. And my testimony is informed by his findings.

Less than a month after Turkey launched its offensive some of our worst fears have been realized. Thousands of civilians are newly displaced. International relief groups have been forced to evacuate. And there have been credible reports of grave abuses of human rights. Airstrikes, shelling, and fighting on the ground has reportedly killed dozens of civilians and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in northern Syria. Aid agencies report being overwhelmed, with supplies cut off and aid workers either evacuated or themselves displaced.

Since the incursion by Turkey, tens of thousands of people have been displaced. More than 139,000 people remain displaced inside northeast Syria, including nearly 60,000 children and about 35,000 women. So far, some 12,000 Syrian refugees have crossed into Dohuk Governorate of Iraq, and the pace of arrivals is accelerating rapidly with aid officials bracing for the arrival of some 50,000 in the coming weeks and months, though that number could rise substantially or even enormously.

There are also serious human rights concerns. Amnesty International has gathered evidence of indiscriminate attacks on residential areas carried out by Turkey or its Syrian proxies. Witness testimony and verified video footage confirm that Hevrin Khalaf, a Kurdish female politician, was pulled from her car and executed on October 12th. Turkey has indicated that it plans to establish a safe zone in Syria's northwest to resettle more than a million of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey, which would violate international law and would cause huge demographic changes in the region.

Within Turkey, while Ankara initially took important measures to integrate Syrian refugees, Turkey's policies have now largely given way to an increasingly antagonistic environment. Ankara has built a wall nearly 500 miles long on its southern border with Syria. And Turkish military forces have even shot and killed Syrians attempting to cross into the country. Moreover, in July Turkish authorities conducted widespread identity checks, followed by a wave of deportations of Syrian men to Idlib province at a time when the military offensive was at its worst.

President Erdoğan has threatened to send millions of Syrian refugees to Europe's doorstep in an attempt to dissuade EU member states from imposing sanctions, and also an attempt to secure financial support to help resettle refugees in the so-called – the so-called safe zone on the Syrian side of the border.

Before I turn to recommendations, I feel I have to mention the implication of tragic policy blunders in Washington. Nearly all policy experts understood that diplomacy combined

with carefully calibrated departure of the U.S. troops over time could promote stability in northern Syria, prevent humanitarian suffering, and ultimately promote a political dispensation for the region. President Trump's indefensible decision to quickly withdraw U.S. troops has instead led to the suffering of hundreds of thousands. My written statement includes a range of recommendations in detail. But, in short, they include increasing support for locally-based NGOs trying to provide humanitarian assistance, surging of support and resources for refugees in northern Iraq and for refugee resettlement of Syrians, sanctions against Turkey relating to the offensive, and holding Ankara accountable for human rights violations.

In conclusion, I want to thank the Commission again for your concern about the humanitarian crisis unfolding along the Turkish-Syrian border. As we have seen over the last few weeks, there are many in Congress willing to take action to protect civilians and displaced population, and that is a source of comfort.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Secretary Schwartz, and we now are grateful to have Dr. Küçükcan.

KÜÇÜKCAN: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the kind invitation. I came all the way from Istanbul to be part of this hearing. I am a professor of sociology and I am a former member of the Turkish Parliament.

In this hearing, we are debating domestic and foreign policy developments in Turkey that deserves a closer look as a U.S. ally for decades and as a member of the NATO, OICE, and the Council of Europe.

However, a healthy debate should be grounded on a rationally-described political context that would lead us to understand the specific cases without becoming hostage to ideological bias, prejudice, misinformation, and demonization of others.

Therefore, I would like to start with few observation(s) on the current regional and global context that would help us to better understand Turkey's policies at home and abroad.

Modern nation states and democracies have been increasingly facing new challenges in recent years such as rising populism, far-right extremism, religious radicalism, ethnic separatism, sectarian conflicts, collective violence, terrorism, that are all detrimental to the rule of law.

Moreover, retreat from multilateralism, erosion of rule-based international order, and support provided to authoritarian political regimes have also a damaging impact on functioning of democratic institutions.

Today, the whole world is witnessing, unfortunately, rising ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts, growing anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, hate speech, terrorist violence, and displacements of people. Responses to such developments differ from one country to another,

depending on their political culture and history as well as their geopolitical positions and national security concerns.

This is the context which we should all take into consideration when debating Turkey or any other country that is located especially in a volatile and unstable and conflict-ridden region like the Middle East. Otherwise, we would run the risk of not seeing the full picture but only a small portion of it. That would lead us, all of us, to a strategic blindness about our partners, friends, and allies.

Mr. Chair and the members of the Commission, let me look at the foreign policy of Turkey first and its influence on the northern Syria. Turkey's operation in Syria started after the – President Trump's consent and that has created a huge debate and that debate continues. Debates on Turkey's operation have, indeed, centered around the objectives of Turkey, the future of Syria and the Syrian refugees in Turkey, Turkey-U.S. relations, and counterterrorism operations against Daesh and the PKK-linked PYD.

Turkey repeatedly stated that Operation Peace Spring draws on international law for self-defense and will be limited to, first, creating a safe zone for voluntary resettlement of Syrians, second, a removal of armed conflict or armed groups linked to PKK, which the U.S., NATO, the European Union recognize as a terrorist organization, and Turkey has the right to remove this organization from its border.

The third aim of the operation was to contribute to the preservation of territorial integrity of Syria, which is a fundamental issue for the neighborhood. Now Turkey faces accusations that Syrians will be forced to return to operation zone and that demographic engineering will take place.

The evidence, Mr. Chairman and the members of the Commission, on the ground suggests that these claims are founded on false presumptions because there have been no demographic shifts following previous operations, namely, the Euphrates Shield in 2016 and Olive Branch in 2018.

Following these two operations, only 340,000 out of 3.6 million Syrians were returned on a voluntary basis and Turkey has done a lot in terms of fighting Daesh in that region, especially during the Euphrates operation where Daesh terrorist organization lost 3,000 members.

Some critics of Turkey falsely claim that Turkey will pursue a policy of ethnic cleansing following the Peace Spring Operation to cast doubt on Turkey's policy and delegitimize its action. Both the U.S. and Russia now confirm that armed groups linked to PKK have withdrawn from the designated region, which means that Turkey will only monitor the implementation of the agreements with its allies rather than actively continue the military operation.

Now, Turkey is now hosting 5 million refugees regardless of their ethnic, religious, and sectarian identities, and no country on Earth will turn a blind eye to the emergence of an armed group on its immediate borders that would constitute an existential threat. As the U.S. will never

allow, for example, Daesh terrorists to carve a land along its border, Turkey will also behave like the U.S. when it comes to PKK-linked terrorist organizations along the Syrian border.

In the eyes of Turkish authorities and Turkish public – I would like to underline this – PYD and YPG cannot be legitimized simply because they fought against Daesh. Refugees who are forced to flee from Syria to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon have the right to return to their homeland. International community and leading powers such as the U.S. have moral, ethical, and a humanitarian responsibility to facilitate the return of Syrians back home.

Now I would like to refer to some of the developments that is taking place in Turkey. Turkey's domestic political developments and evolution of its democratic institutions should be discussed against a background of single-party period lasting from 1923 to 1950 and military interventions since 1960s, which took place almost every ten years.

Turkey's democracy can be described as an interrupted democracy, which has been gradually evolving despite interventions by the military that has been supported by certain sections of the academia, bureaucracy, political elite, et cetera, and Turkey's democracy was intervened in 1960, '71, '82, 1997, and 2007.

Interventions and interruptions in Turkish democracy took different forms. For example, the ruling Justice and Development Party, which came to power by elections in 2002, faced court case for closure in 2008 on the claim that the party violated the principle of separation of religion and state in Turkey, and the party survived by a margin of only one vote against its closure in the Constitutional Court.

The last attempt, as the chairman has alluded to, to overthrow the democratically-elected government in Turkey took place on July the 15th, 2016. Two hundred fifty people died. More than 2,000 people were injured in defending democracy, human rights, and the constitution in Turkey.

The trials of those who directly took part in the coup attempt or those who supported them are open to international observations and all observers now are in Turkey. They can go to the court and see the procedures. Nothing is hidden. Of course, the courts may not function as proper as they were before because of the coup attempt, because after the coup almost 3,000 judges and prosecutors were kicked out of the institution. It will take some time to become a normalized, I think, country in that sense.

Turkey is going through a political trauma and that trauma still is haunting the Turkish politicians and Turkish, I think, people. So we need some time to recover from this part. And being aware of the disruptions, the government has launched recently a judicial reform package to consolidate the rule of law in Turkey in close cooperation with the Council of Europe.

WILSON: Doctor, not to interrupt but if you could –

KÜÇÜKCAN: I will wrap up.

WILSON: Hey, we are grateful. You've been more than five minutes and, again, I want to point out we have votes and so there will be an interruption. So, please, come to a –

KÜÇÜKCAN: OK. On the issue of Kurdish question, only a few minutes. On the issue of Kurdish question, Turkey has done a lot. For the first time in Turkey's history, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the party has recognized that there was a Kurdish issue in Turkey and the denial of their identities stopped in Turkey, and the Kurdish television was introduced. The restrictions on Kurdish language was also lifted by the government and there was a peace process between 2013 and 2015. It was also introduced by Erdoğan's leadership. However, the JDP and the PKK, unfortunately, did not follow the agreements between state and the related parties and the violence started, and Turkey, of course, responded heavily to the violence.

One of the normalization that took place in the Turkish political history is the normalization of secularism, actually. In the past, Turkey had a lot of problems because of the restrictive secularization. Many people with a head scarf were prevented from having a higher education in Turkey.

But, recently, we have seen that those restrictions were lifted, and not only that but also non-Muslim minorities in Turkey enjoy a lot of rights compared to the past. For example, their properties are now returned back to them, which were confiscated by the state in the 1960s, and that was done by the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The Akdamar Church in Van was opened. The Grand Synagogue of Edirne – this is Europe's third largest synagogue – it was also opened by this government. The Bulgarian Church in Istanbul, again, opened.

Let me finish with one thing. Turkey celebrated the 96th anniversary of its establishment, and in the 96 years there was no single new church was established in Turkey. But Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on the August of this year, laid down the foundation stone for the new church in Turkey to be built. I think this shows the intention and courage of Turkey in terms of democratization.

As far as some recommendations, I think U.S. should respond positively to Turkey's concerns with regard to the existential threats and also U.S. should encourage European Union to take Turkey as a full member. And also I think U.S. should put more pressure on JDP to disassociate itself from PKK and PKK-linked organizations so that the civilian and political sphere is more open. Any punishment – any sanctions on Turkey will, I think, make things worse, so that I think U.S. should refrain from any kind of punishing activities on Turkey.

Thank you very much.

WILSON: Thank you, Dr. Tol – Dr. Küçükcan. And I'm grateful that, again, for each of you your testimony. We'll begin now five-minute rounds, and we've been joined by Congressman Steve Cohen of Tennessee and so we're very grateful and, indeed, it's a very fluid morning with the different votes we have and we may be in a situation of recess, depending on how things proceed.

Ms. Tol, given the long history and current dynamics of the U.S.-Turkey relationship, what, if anything, can and should Congress and the administration do or not do to encourage Turkish leaders and the people to strengthen institutions and practices dedicated to the rule of law and civil liberties?

TOL: Well, as I mentioned in my remarks, anti-Americanism in Turkey is at an all-time high. That makes U.S. a difficult partner to work with for the Turkish administration. But I think, again, as I said, public opinion still matters and elections still matter, and I think the U.S. should refrain from losing Turkish public. That means you really have to differentiate in your remarks from – the Turkish people from the Turkish government and work through the European Union.

Support for Turkey's EU membership is quite high among – within Turkish population and for the United States to work with the European Union so that Turkey could take democratic steps, I think, would be a wise step.

And also in the last few years, American NGOs have withdrawn. They stopped their operations in Turkey, and I think encouraging – for the Congress, encouraging those NGOs to continue their operations and work with Turkish nongovernmental organizations, particularly in election monitoring, would be – would be a useful step.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

And Ms. Tahiroglu, Turkish authorities have been removed from dozens of elected officials in recent years, leaving – after levying terrorism charges against them. What happens after Turkey removes elected officials from office? Are there elections held to replace the persons who have been removed?

TAHIROGLU: Thank you for your question, Mr. Chairman.

Actually, there is really no remedy to this problem that we've been seeing and, oftentimes, even when lawmakers or politicians are released they will soon be rearrested under different charges or often, I have to say, same charges, just couched and framed in a different way under a different investigation. So it is an ongoing problem.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

And, Dr. Küçükcan, for how long is President Erdoğan likely to dominate Turkish politics and what do you foresee for Turkey when his power diminishes? What factors – for example, the economy, refugees, regional developments, personal leadership – will most influence Turkey's future political trajectory?

KÜÇÜKCAN: Well, the next elections in Turkey will be in 2023 and it seems that there is not going to be any early elections. So he will be in power at least until 2023. Then, of

course, Turkey is a democratic country in terms of elections. We have both free and fair elections. So he will go back to the people again.

So it depends on Turkish people, whether they would like to continue with Erdoğan or not. And, of course, with regard to the Syrian refugees – I think the second part of the question – Turkey has spent almost \$40 billion until now.

But this situation is not sustainable and Turkish government must look at this issue in cooperation with the U.S., in cooperation with the European Union, because now we are having 3.6 million Syrians but in total we have got 5 million refugees. I think this is not something that's sustainable that Turkey can look after this number of people for more decades.

WILSON: Thank you.

And, Secretary Schwartz, since mid-2015 when Turkey was hosting 1.7 million registered Syrian refugees, President Erdoğan has talked about creating a so-called safe zone in northeast Syria, moving most of these refugees into this. This past July, international human rights groups began reporting that Turkish officials were forcing some refugees to return to Syria. In his testimony, you cite that the economic struggles, including unemployment, are issues.

What domestic, political, economic, or other factors have changed that would make it more likely for President Erdoğan to pressure or force, potentially, millions of Syrian refugees to return to Syria?

SCHWARTZ: If you'll permit me to address your question in a bit of a broader way, because I just really have to comment on the testimony of Mr. Küçükcan, and if I were in his shoes I would have chosen to filibuster these issues as well.

And it's really important that I get on the record the first point past is prologue in terms of ethnic cleansing and the like. Well, according to credible estimates, more than half of Afrin's Kurdish population was displaced in Operation Olive Branch and the majority of the displacement occurred in the wake of that operation.

And don't believe me. Human Rights Watch reported, and I quote, "that Turkey-backed armed groups in the Free Syrian Army have seized, looted, and destroyed property of Kurdish civilians in the Afrin district of northern Syria. The anti-government armed groups have installed fighters and their families in residents' homes and destroyed and looted civilian properties without compensating their owners."

A report by the United Nations called "Between Iraq and a Hard Place," civilians in northwest Syria essentially made the same arguments. So it's really important to get that in on the record because past is prologue.

On the issue of voluntary return, which the witness referred to, if the government of Turkey is confident about the voluntariness of return, which is nonsense, then have the U.N.

High Commissioner for Refugees consult with people before they choose to go back. But there is abundant evidence of forced return.

Ask the people who were returned as we did to the conflict in Idlib. And the best evidence of this is President Erdoğan himself, who is talking about in a bizarre way, you know, depositing a million Syrians in northern Syria without regard to where they came from, consultation with the U.N.

I mean, it's ridiculous, and, you know, we have to call these issues out. What you do as a policymaker is a different question. But you have to make policy based on facts.

WILSON: And, Mr. Secretary, thank you.

And in conformity with the five-minute rule, my time is up and so now I proceed to Congressman Cohen from Tennessee.

COHEN: Thank you, Representative Wilson. Apologize for being late and not hearing your testimony. I tried to skim your testimony and get the flavor of it.

I have been a member of the Turkey Caucus now for the entire 13 years I've been in Congress. I've been a co-chair the whole time and a strong advocate for Turkey as a longstanding friend of the United States who supported us from Korea on and maybe prior to that, and I have DNA evidence and whatever – that I have certain Turkish family years back. So I have an affinity for Turkey.

But the activities of Mr. Erdoğan has made it difficult to continue having the same thoughts that I've had about Turkey. It's made me think about why my grandfather might have left. It was about pre-1912 that he left, and I've always opposed the Armenian Resolution and voted for it this week, and voted for it because Turkey doesn't seem to respect the United States at all.

I've had this – staff come see me – embassy staff – and I talked to them about how difficult it was when bodyguards beat up folks here in Washington and how that was unacceptable, and he defended it.

And I asked about the Kurds and the possibility of having a zone there with the United States and the U.N. protecting it and being able to protect Turkey for its fear of Kurdish/PKK activities, and they were not interested in that at all. Obviously, they had an idea that this was coming.

I don't know what's going to happen to the Kurds. I think now is when the cease fire has come to an end with the Russian cease fire. And I can just say this, that the mood of the Congress has changed as well. There were never 218 votes for the Armenian Resolution. There were, what was it, close to 400 – 380 something?



This was because of Erdoğan and his tactics. Kemal Mustafa would be turning over. There's probably an eruption in Ankara. What he did for Turkey was heroic and great. He was one of the great men of the world and he was a person I respect greatly. What he looked for is not going on in Turkey.

And when I was there the last time – it's been many years – there were pictures of Atatürk everywhere. Everywhere. I'd never seen anything like it. It was like Dr. King in parts of my community or Kennedy or whatever. Revered.

Erdoğan wants to take Atatürk's place. I don't have any of his pictures. They've been removed. Maybe none. I suspect quite a few. But it's not the same country, and the country doesn't stand for the things those pictures stand for. Atatürk's spirit, Atatürk's visage stands for democracy, human rights, modernization. No longer present.

So, Ms. Tol, you – is it Tol? You say, basically, there are problems but we should not give up on Turkey. And I understand that, but at the same time it's difficult and not – you say the United States is not thought of so well in Turkey. Turkey is not thought so well of here anymore either, and the more they go over to Russia and the more they – whatever happens with the Kurds, I suspect there's going to be some atrocious actions in the next few weeks, and it's not going to help.

TOL: That's right. I completely agree with the fact that it's a very difficult position. But with all due respect, Mr. Congressman, you talked about the genocide resolution that was just recently passed and you talked about that happened and you changed your mind about that because Erdoğan was not cooperating. You talked about his bodyguards' behavior. They were all appalling.

But on the other hand, I think that genocide resolution has to be about genocide and it should not be weaponized and politicized based on the day-to-day relations between Turkey and the United States. Genocide is a historical fact and it should be that resolution should have passed because it's a historical fact.

And also I think it is – Turkey-U.S. partnership has been going through its most difficult period. But on the other hand, one must recognize that Turkey is bigger than Erdoğan. We've seen that in the most recent elections and you have to keep engaging Turkey. You have to keep engaging your position and the other half of the country that is very optimistic about the country's future and that are not happy with what Erdoğan has taken – the way Erdoğan has turned the country into an authoritarian place. So that's why I think for the United States it's important to keep engaging Turkey and not lose hope.

And also the sanctions issue is problematic. If you're going to sanction Turkey, you have to make sure that you do not hurt the people. So those sanctions need to be limited in scope and targeted.

Thank you.

COHEN: You're welcome, and I appreciate your perspective and I understand it, and I mean, I understand on the genocide resolution it was – is it the idea of historians or the idea of politicians. But what I'm saying is just the reality.

There was a break and there was no way to hold back that onslaught and that onslaught came because people said, we've had enough – beating up our guards and people in Washington with disdain and just brute force – and it's that, and you worry what they're going to do to the Kurds. Will it be a repeat of what they allegedly did to the Armenians? And I'm just saying Turkey and Erdoğan, they want to be with Putin. I know some other politicians that want to be with Putin. They're not going to be around forever either.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Cohen.

And we have just enough time for a brief second round, now at three minutes, and then Congressman Cohen is noted for his ability to run to the floor to vote. So I'll be following him.

And I'd like to begin with Professor Barkey. What factors are needed, especially on the ground, for international humanitarian aid workers to be able to return to northeast Syria?

BARKEY: Well, the first problem is that if you want humanitarian aid workers to go back there you need to be able to assure their safety, and at the moment there is no way you can do that in large measure because you have either the Russians or the Turks who control the area, and with the United States having pulled out we have no ability to do anything in the north.

And the problem is, I think, as Eric Schwartz also mentioned, I think that President Trump's decision was hasty. It was not well thought through and, as a result, it has created the humanitarian catastrophe that we are watching now.

What can be done and what should be done, I think, is for some kind of mobilization in order to be able to help some of the internally-displaced people with funds, with an ability to get them to, at least for the time being, find a place of abode, and that – so you can do that, essentially, in areas that are not controlled by the Turks or the Russians.

So that would be either in Iraq or it will be in the areas that the Syrian Kurds control. But that's the only thing that can be done at this stage unless we figure out a way to get the Turks out.

WILSON: Thank you.

And, Secretary Schwartz, what is the history of so-called safe zones that sustainably keep civilians safe? What is the position of Refugees International and other humanitarian organizations on such zones?

SCHWARTZ: Well, if I may, the other – I just want to add to Professor Barkey's comment. Local groups – you know, to the extent that aid – governments – donor governments can find ways to provide assistance to local groups in the north, you know, that should be

prioritized because international aid operations aren't getting in there, and that was the point of my testimony.

On safe zones, we are extremely, extraordinarily dubious because safe zones, historically, are not safe for all the obvious reasons. And, you know, I can take 20 seconds if you like. I mean, it's – you know, they are – you know, governments are not inclined to provide the protection that would be necessary for those kinds of safe zones nor are governments inclined to do it indefinitely or permanently.

So they are – the world's history with safe zones is a very sorry one in which there have been thousands, tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered grievously by ill-founded efforts to resolve or purportedly resolve problems by creating safe zones.

WILSON: And thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I'll now proceed for the final questioning by Congressman Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, sir. I just would like to ask you all if there's anything you'd like to say to the panel about Turkey, its – and the United States and our relationship.

BARKEY: Congressman, one of the great problems with the relationship between the United States and Turkey is that United States has always, in a very paradoxical way, not paid a great deal of attention to what's going on in Turkey, one. And two, when the Turks have pushed the United States has essentially gave in on the assumption that because Turkey is far too important as a NATO country but also because of its location historically and now.

And, in fact, if you don't push back, if you don't stand your ground, you're going to be pushed around, and I think that President Trump's decision the other day was particularly bad because the Turkish president was, in a way, bluffing his way into northern Syria. As long as there was one American soldier on the border, there would not have been a Turkish intervention, I believe.

So what I'm saying is, in many ways we need to start standing up to Turkish demands. There are Turkish demands that are legitimate and that we should consider them. But when they're not and when we talk about a system where human rights and rule of law has completely been destroyed, the United States has to say something, saying – and also doing something.

We can't just criticize and have State Department reports to no end criticizing. But we also need to do something, and in some ways I think what the Congress has done in terms of both a sanction – in terms of the sanctions resolution, I think it's welcome. But the Senate has to follow through, obviously.

COHEN: Thank you. Anybody else want to make a – yes, sir?

KÜÇÜKCAN: Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

And Turkey and the U.S., these are great allies and they have a long history, and from the Turkish perspective, we value our relationship with the U.S. to a great extent. It's been referred to here that there's an anti-Americanism in Turkey that is growing. It is a fact when you look at the public opinion. But it is not necessarily because of what's happening within Turkey but also due to some reactions coming from this country – very strong language against Turkey and its leader. Sometimes that makes things worse.

When it comes to areas of cooperation, I think there's a great deal of areas and the room for improvement – for example, the refugees and migration issue. Turkey has been calling upon the international community, including the U.S. I think there is a lot of room there that we can start off.

So this is something more maybe, as I say, a less touchy area. The universities, for example, between Turkey and the U.S. are filled with a young generation of people. So this is yet another area where we can establish some constructive, maybe, I think, relationship.

When it comes to a few issues I would like to mention on the return of – voluntary return of Syrians is that, in Turkey, I think once you also understand the concerns of Turkish policymakers, in some cities – in Kilis, for example, half of the population is Syrian. In some of the cities in south part of Turkey almost 25 (percent), 28 percent of the whole city is populated by Syrians, and that puts a lot of pressure on public transportation, health services, education, et cetera, et cetera. I think in those areas we can cooperate and that will improve the relations in a better direction.

WILSON: And, Doctor, thank you very much for your very positive conclusion and thank each of you for your participation today – Congressman Cohen – and we shall be departing immediately to the floor.

We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:03 a.m., the hearing ended.]