

TURKEY: HUMAN RIGHTS IN RETREAT



DECEMBER 9, 2016

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2017

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
234 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-1901
csce@mail.house.gov
<http://www.csce.gov>
@HelsinkiComm

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 2 p.m. in room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Everett Price, Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Panelists present: Everett Price, Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Dr. Y. Alp Aslandogan, Executive Director, Alliance for Shared Values; Dr. Karin Karlekar, Director, Free Expression at Risk Program, PEN America; and Dr. Nicholas Danforth, Senior Policy Advisor, Bipartisan Policy Center.

Mr. PRICE. Good afternoon, distinguished guests and colleagues. On behalf of Chairman Chris Smith, I would like to welcome you to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe's briefing on human rights and the rule of law in Turkey.

My name is Everett Price, and I'm a policy advisor on the Helsinki Commission.

This is a particularly timely briefing today because tomorrow is the International Human Rights Day where we commemorate the United Nations General Assembly's adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

If it's your first time coming to an event hosted by the Helsinki Commission, it may be helpful for me to begin with a few words explaining the Commission's work. The public law establishing the Helsinki Commission in 1976 mandates that the Commission is authorized and directed to monitor the acts of the signatories of the 1975 Helsinki Act, quote, "with particular regard to the provisions relating to human rights and cooperation in humanitarian fields," end quote. This has been our mission for the past 40 years on the Helsinki Commission, and it serves as our motivation today as we gather to discuss the topic of human rights and rule of law in Turkey.

We consider our work to be a constructive enterprise, part of the task of fostering positive relationships between countries. Turkey is a friend of the United States and a powerful NATO ally. It is central to the difficult work of responding to humanitarian crises in the Middle East and countering terrorism. But any sincere friendship requires candor and it is in that spirit that we wish to gain different perspectives on the situation in Turkey.

In just the past couple of years, Turkey has faced security challenges of historic proportions. On October 10th, 2015 ISIS bombers killed 103 people in Ankara, marking the deadliest terrorist attack in modern Turkish history. This year on July 15th, a shadowy clique inside the government attempted to overthrow Turkey's democratically elected leadership, prompting common citizens to flood into the streets to fight and die for their freedom; 265 died in the violence.

Additionally, since June 2015, the terrorist PKK, or Kurdish Workers Party, has executed a bombing campaign that has left scores dead across the country. Faced with such challenges, the question is not whether Turkey has the right to pursue justice and stability, but rather how that justice and stability is pursued.

In seeking the answer to this question, we are guided by the central insight of the Helsinki Final Act; that is, a uniquely comprehensive view of security that considers human rights and the building of democratic institutions as key pillars of a sustainable regional order.

I'm honored to introduce a distinguished panel that will help us to grapple with these issues and come away with a better understanding of what is at stake in Turkey's ongoing crackdown.

We will begin immediately to my left with Dr. Alp Aslandogan. He is the executive director of the Alliance for Shared Values, a 501(c)(3) in the United States, that, according to its own mission statement, provides factual information about the Hizmet or Gulen social movement to educate the public about its origins and activities. As someone who works with Mr. Gulen, Dr. Aslandogan will offer the perspective of the group that has been accused by the Turkish Government of orchestrating the July 15th coup and that, as a result, has borne the brunt of the government's sweeping purges of civil servants and the seizure of private institutions—or closure of private institutions.

Next we'll hear from Dr. Karin Karlekar, director of PEN's Free Expression at Risk program. Before joining PEN America this year, Dr. Karlekar worked for the past 14 years as director of Freedom House's Freedom of the Press project. She will offer us her expert assessment of freedom of expression and media freedom issues in Turkey, as well as academic freedom, I believe.

Finally, we will have Dr. Nicholas Danforth, a senior policy advisor with the Bipartisan Policy Center. Dr. Danforth is a Turkey expert whose writing has been featured in publications such as The Atlantic, The Washington Post, Foreign Policy, Al-Jazeera and Foreign Affairs. He will set Turkey's human rights and rule-of-law issues in a broader political context and share his assessment of how the United States should approach such issues in a bilateral relationship.

After the speakers provide their perspectives, I'll kick off the question-and-answer session before turning the mic over to the audience for their questions.

Without further ado, I'll turn it over to Dr. Aslandogan.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. Good afternoon. Thank you, Everett and Congressman Smith and the Helsinki Commission, for the opportunity to speak to you today about what has quickly become a human rights crisis in my country of birth, Turkey.

As Everett mentioned, I am the executive director of the Alliance for Shared Values. We are an umbrella organization for six regional organizations. They promote peace, mutual respect, and dialogue among faiths and cultures. These are some of the core values of the so-called Hizmet movement—"Hizmet" means service in Turkish—also

known as the Gulen movement, after the Turkish scholar and social advocate Mr. Fethullah Gulen.

All of you surely are familiar, if you have been watching Turkey, about the horrific July 15 coup attempt. It was an attack on Turkish democracy, and it was immediately and repeatedly condemned by my organization and by Mr. Gulen. This denial and condemnations did not stop the Turkish Government from blaming the coup attempt on Mr. Gulen, although they have been unable to provide any evidence that he was involved in any aspect of it. I'm sure the Turkish Government will claim, and they have claimed, that they did provide that evidence.

But today's briefing is not about the events of July 15, it is about what has happened since then. Unfortunately, the attack on Turkey's democracy and human rights did not end when the coup attempt was stifled and stopped; it got worse. Turkish President Erdogan and his government have systematically concentrated their power over the courts, the media, the government bureaucracy, military, and law enforcement through a series of purges and persecutions of innocent people and government critics alike. They have seized assets from everyday Turks who have built businesses and lives through years of hard work.

While the Hizmet movement has been the primary target of the Erdogan government's persecution since July, it has not been alone. Kurdish citizens, Alevis, journalists, teachers, some nationalists, even soccer referees have all been targets of Erdogan's massive crackdown.

As of December 4th, more than 115,000 people have been fired from their jobs; 80,000 people or so have been detained; more than 37,000 people are still in jail—they are arrested, awaiting trial; 6,000 academics have lost their jobs; 4,000 judges and prosecutors were dismissed; 2,000 dormitories were shut down; 195 media outlets were shut down—most of these have nothing to do with Hizmet movement, by the way; 145 journalists arrested; 15 universities shut down; 35 hospitals shut down or changed hands forcefully; and 7,000 doctors were fired. To this day, I have yet to hear an intelligent explanation as to how doctors and hospitals may have anything to do with the attempted coup. Nine Kurdish members of the Turkish Parliament were arrested in November. The attack has been waged on every segment of society that does not march in lockstep with the Erdogan government.

We have identified 12 different categories of human rights violations, and we have documented these claims in a document that we've published and is available on our website in digital format called "Perspective" on "The Mass Purges." And these have been all done under a declared state of emergency in which many legal rights have been denied. I will try to walk through these categories with some examples.

The first category is inhumane detention conditions and torture. Of course, the ultimate violation is taking life, causing somebody's death, and there have been numerous reports of deaths in detention, over 20 deaths in detention. And I'm going to use an example: a relatively young teacher who died while in detention, probably suffering from his diabetes condition, might have been denied medical care. We don't know. But he died in his late 30s in detention. A businessman—and this is an example also—middle-aged, died in detention. There are more than 28 people who died in detention.

Groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reported that those being detained are subject to the physical abuse, including beatings, rape and var-

ious forms of torture, being denied food and water, adequate space and medicine. U.N. Special Rapporteur Nils Melzer, speaking to a group of journalists Friday, December 2nd, said, and I quote: “Torture and other forms of ill treatment seem to have been widespread in the days and weeks following the failed coup.”

Our office, for example, received reports of an individual who was deprived of water and was forced to drink from a toilet bowl. As a result, he developed an infectious disease. You might try to imagine this yourself, under what conditions would you accept to drink from a toilet bowl?

We also received reports of an individual in detention who was threatened with the rape of his wife. We received multiple such reports of people being threatened with the rape of their wives in front of their eyes if they didn’t cooperate. We also received a report of an individual whose wife was raped and told his husband that he could divorce her because of that.

Journalist Aysenur Parildak sent a letter from prison to Cumhuriyet daily reporting that, in her interrogation that took eight days, she was subjected to violence and sexual abuse by drunk police officers. BBC recently aired an on-camera testimony of a victim who was subjected to rape by trying to insert a police baton into his body. Thirteen specific examples of torture are documented in the October 24th report of Human Rights Watch entitled “A Blank Check: Turkey’s Post-Coup Suspension of Safeguards Against Torture.” Human rights violations such as verbal and physical abuse are by no means limited to detention. They occur also outside of detention.

The third category is violation of freedom of expression. Turkish authorities have waged an all-out attack on independent media. In addition to closing media organizations, seizing them and transferring them to friends or the family of the regime, the government has arrested many journalists simply for doing their jobs: uncovering and publishing hard truths. Among them there is a 72-year-old veteran, Nazli Ilicak, who has been charged with membership of a terror group. She is a Turkish liberal, not affiliated with the Hizmet movement or any other group. And she has devoted her life to journalism, not terrorism, as she was dedicated to democracy against any military interventions. There are many other such journalists. If I were to list their names I would use all the time allocated for this panel. Some examples are—[inaudible]—Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan, Sevcan Atak. Those pictures are available on the social media. Even some foreign journalists also were targeted and deported.

The fourth category is violation of right to travel. The Turkish Government has canceled the passports to prevent ordinary citizens from leaving the country. The passport, in a famous case of Dilek Dünder, the wife of journalist Can Dünder, the former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet daily, was confiscated, causing the family to be separated. Her husband is a secular journalist, and their paper repeatedly criticizes—[inaudible]—so their—[inaudible]—has nothing to do with their relationship. And the passport of Sevgi Akarçesme, the former editor-in-chief of Today’s Zaman, was cancelled while she was in Belgium, leaving her unable to travel.

A more stunning example is of a Hizmet sympathizer family that attempted to travel to Cuba with their sick son, who was suffering from a form of cancer. They were seeking a nontraditional form of treatment in Cuba, and they were denied exit of the country at the port, at the border. And the family begged the officers to allow at least their son with another family member to leave the country. That was also denied.

The fifth category is denial of lawful employment. As part of the purge, Turkish Government employees have been fired without any investigation. They are denied positions in other government agencies. When private companies offer them jobs, they are also followed and threatened. Professional licenses of 21,000 teachers have been canceled, and other professionals. Big numbers of people who graduated from Hizmet-affiliated schools have also been canceled. All of a sudden, they are not graduates anymore; they don't qualify for many jobs.

The sixth category is defamation, humiliation and slander. As President Erdogan seized control over the Turkish media, either through acquisitions of pro-Erdogan businessmen or through self-censorship, media smear campaigns against foundations, companies and individuals have been the norm. An example of this phenomenon—again, because it's striking—is the targeting of singer Sila. When she refused to perform in a pro-government rally after the coup attempt, she was targeted with media smear campaigns, lost contracts, could not do her job.

Mr. Gulen was also a primary target of the defamation and slander campaigns. AKP public officials were silent in public rallies where puppets representing Mr. Gulen were hanged and burned, and signs calling Gulen, in this particular example, for instance, a dog of Zionism—in English—and also in Arabic Abu Jahil, which is the archenemy of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) in Islamic history. So this sign is being displayed in a rally in Turkey clearly targeting English-speaking and Arabic-speaking audiences outside of Turkey. And in other signs that are displayed in—[inaudible]—for those not familiar, they were calling Hizmet sympathizers the dogs of Fethullah's terrorist organization. Slander also included absolute lies, claims such as Gulen getting a Vatican passport—which is, of course, false.

This kind of slander expanded into people. In this particular example, a fish seller is saying Gulen sympathizers—he's not using that term obviously—have no business here, they cannot do transactions here.

The seventh category is denial of right to due process. And the eighth category is denial of right to legal defense. Lawyers accepting to defend Hizmet sympathizers are routinely threatened, detained, and their offices are raided. An example of this phenomenon is Muniş Ermiş, deputy head of the Contemporary Lawyers Association. This is not affiliated with Hizmet movement. They were simply democrats representing anybody needing help. And their offices were raided, and this gentleman was put under arrest.

So let me quickly conclude with my conclusion. There are a dozen different categories of human rights violations. We have seen reports in the press by human rights watchdogs and heard through anecdotal stories from those facing these repressions personally in Turkey. By all means, the coup perpetrators must be brought to justice. They committed a horrible, horrible act. But the way the Erdogan government has reacted goes above and beyond the measure called for by law, by what is expected of a NATO ally, and by the standards of common human decency.

I ask that each of you use the leverage you have with the members of Congress and with the incoming administration to keep pressure on the Turkish Government to stop this unending parade of abuses of innocent people, and to lift the state of emergency that is being used as an excuse to deny basic human rights and basic legal rights.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you very much, Dr. Aslandogan.

I'll turn it to you, Dr. Karlekar.

Dr. KARLEKAR. Thank you so much, Everett.

Members of the Commission and guests here today, I'm honored to be part of the briefing convened here today to discuss human rights and the rule of law in Turkey. I currently serve as the head of our Free Expression Advocacy Team at PEN America, an organization which has a long history of engaging with the challenges to freedom of expression both globally and at home in the United States. Over the last several years, and particularly since the attempted coup in July of 2016, we have been drawing attention to the heightened threats to free expression and press freedom in Turkey, as well as advocating on behalf of individual writers and reporters at risk.

Turkish authorities already had a disturbing track record of suppressing free expression and other forms of opposition. And this suppression has intensified significantly over the last few months. In the wake of the failed coup attempt this last July, President Erdogan's government declared a three-month state of emergency and passed laws sanctioning an even harsher crackdown of press freedom and free expression. These aggressive violations of protected freedoms go well beyond justified attempts to ensure national stability and bring the coup planners to justice. Erdogan's government is, instead, using the state of emergency as an excuse to further silence any and all critical voices in the country.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey has the highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world currently, surpassing even well-known human rights violators such as China and Iran. The country is rated "not free" by Freedom House's 2016 report on freedom of the press. Its use of the penal code and anti-terrorism laws to punish reporting has occurred on a large scale for the past several years, even as critical outlets and columnists have been defanged by changes in media ownership.

Press freedom has deteriorated significantly following the coup attempt. At least 140 journalists are reportedly now in prison. These journalists are wrongly accused of publishing subliminal messages in support of the coup, or being affiliated with terrorist organizations, among other charges. There are credible reports of torture and ill treatment of those in police custody, following Turkey's derogation from the European Convention of Human Rights. In addition, many journalists have been forced to flee the country, and at least 50 have had their passports rescinded. And as my colleague mentioned, family members of prosecuted journalists may also face persecution, harassment and travel bans as well.

Among those journalists imprisoned is Asli Erdogan, a well-known novelist, human rights activist, columnist and board member for the newspaper Ozgur Gundem, who was detained by Istanbul police on August 16th on suspicion of printing propaganda for the Kurdish Worker's Party, which is listed as a terrorist group in Turkey. Translator Necmiye Alpay, a linguist, as well as prominent writer Ahmet Altan and the academic Mehmet Altan, his brother, also remain incarcerated—to name but a few—of the people currently behind bars in Turkey, many of whom have not faced any charges at all yet.

On October 31st, police raided the Istanbul office of Cumhuriyet, Turkey's most vocal opposition paper, and detained 12 of its employees on suspicion of aiding terrorists. Former editor-in-chief of Cumhuriyet Can Dündar had previously been sentenced on charges of aiding a terrorist organization, espionage, and disclosure of classified documents. He announced in August that he had been forced to step down from his position

and remain in exile, and that returning to Turkey would be similar to putting his head on the guillotine.

Turkish academics have also faced increased persecution over the past few months, according to scholars at Risk Network. Criminal and administrative investigations were launched in January. And there's more than a thousand scholars, many of whom have since been suspended or dismissed from their positions, while others have been detained, arrested, or prosecuted. On July 23rd, state authorities issued a decree ordering the closure of 15 private universities that were suspected of being associated with the Gulen organization.

Government authorities announced on September 1st that over 2,300 academics had been dismissed for having alleged ties to the coup attempt. So the closure and the suppression of academic freedoms is on par or even greater than that of freedom of free expression. As PEN and other human rights organizations with whom we're working on these issues, we call on the United States Government to respond to this broad-based threat to free expression in Turkey, through regularly expressed concern about the situation, and urging our Turkish counterparts to better protect journalists, writers, and academics to avoid silencing and to respect their obligations under international law during this period of emergency.

Maintaining financial assistance for local and international nongovernmental organizations who can provide financial and other forms of support for journalists, writers and academics at risk is very important during this key period. And in addition, sending direct official assistance, including the granting of a small number of humanitarian visas to those currently at imminent risk of persecution, would help those at grave risk.

In the name of defending democracy, President Erdogan has significantly undermined two institutions—free expression and press freedom—that are essential to its continued existence. Turkish authorities must not use the state of emergency as an excuse to crack down on all forms of peaceful dissent. All journalists, writers and academics imprisoned solely for exercising their right to free expression must be released immediately, and opposition viewpoints should not be considered as terrorism.

Thank you for your attention to this troubling trend. And we look forward to working with you on this issue. Thank you.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you to Dr. Karlekar.

We'll turn it to Dr. Danforth, from the Bipartisan Policy Center.

Dr. DANFORTH. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you all for coming. Thank you, Everett and the Commission, for inviting me.

I'd like to begin by making two points. The first is that Turkey has faced very serious threats over the past few years stemming from a brutal insurgency led by the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or the PKK, and a coup attempt which most experts agree members of the Gulen organization played a significant if not a major role in organizing.

This brings me to my second point—that in response to these threats, the Turkish Government has acted with remarkable disregard for the rule of law, which has caused innocent people to suffer and has exacerbated rather than reduced the threats that Turkey faces.

To begin with the way the government responded to the Hizmet movement, what is striking is that in arresting and dismissing tens of thousands of alleged members of this movement, the government has been quite candid about the fact that it is making no

effort to distinguish between those members which might have been aware of or participated in the group's illegal activities and those who did not. And I think perhaps the most striking evidence in this regard actually comes from a document that the Turkish Government itself put forward specifically to refute the idea that it was engaged in a witch hunt by laying out some of the criteria that it uses to distinguish what it called the innocent and the guilty.

Among these 16 criteria we have, like number six, giving support to the Fethullah Gulen terrorist organization on social media; number 10, being subject to reliable denunciations, testimonies and confessions; number 11, visiting Fethullah Gulen terrorist organization-linked internet sites regularly. And, number 15, being mentioned in the information given by colleagues and friends as a member of the Fethullah Gulen terrorist organization.

Now, this attempt to err on the side of caution, we'd say—this overzealous approach may be understandable when dealing with the Turkish military and intelligence organizations, groups from which the government continues to face a real risk. But this still overzealous approach has been extended to, as the previous panelists have discussed, civil servants, teachers—high school teachers, university teachers—and members of the business community.

To put this into context, I think it's worth stepping back and looking historically at how this kind of disregard for the rule of law, this overzealous response to real threats that the government faces has created a vicious and destabilizing cycle throughout the last 30 years of Turkish history. Going back to 1980, Turkey experienced its first military coup, following which the military government arrested, tortured, engaged in extrajudicial killings of a number of people who were seen as enemies of the state—leftists, Islamists, predominantly Kurdish activists.

In response to 20 years of behavior like this on the part of the Turkish military, when the AKP government came to power, they—and specifically members of the Gulen movement—led an effort to prosecute the military for a series of coup attempts that they were alleged to have engaged in. As this persecution went on, it became increasingly clear that these charges were largely fabricated and had little bearing to the actual crimes the military had committed. And yet, for a number of people watching, they were willing to go along with this persecution precisely because they felt that the military had done bad things in the past, it was finally getting its due.

Fast forward now to the present, when the political tables have turned and it's now the Gulen movement that is on the receiving side of the government's persecution. Once again, there are a number of people who have been quiet in the face of the government's disregard for the rule of law because, again, even if they feel the specific accusations that are being made might be exaggerated, they feel the Gulen movement is getting its due.

The risk, of course, is that as the government continues to do this, the cycle will simply continue and further retribution of this kind will become standardized in Turkey's political future. Already we've seen evidence of the government using the accusation of being a member of the Gulen organization to target leading members of Turkey's main political opposition party. On a more practical level, the government's disregard for the rule of law—the Turkish Government's disregard for the rule of law is also going to have serious negative consequences for U.S.-Turkish relations.

The question of extraditing Fethullah Gulen is going to be one of the major bilateral issues between the United States and Turkey. In order to do this, of course, Turkey needs to provide reliable evidence linking Gulen himself to the coup attempt. The most reliable, plausible evidence for this would come from the testimony of leading participants in the coup. So far, Amnesty International has testified most of the testimony these people have given was done after being tortured. This would make it inadmissible in a United States court of law, undermining the government's extradition efforts, along with the fact that the United States, as signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Torture, cannot actually extradite someone to a country in which they are likely to be tortured.

I'd made a similar set of points in regard to the Turkish Government's current treatment of those affiliated with the Kurdish nationalist movement. Once again, the government faces a real terror threat from the PKK. They just respond to this in a disproportionate and counterproductive way. Several months ago, Erdogan went on record as saying he sees no difference between a terrorist holding a gun or a bomb, and those who use their position and hand to serve the aims of terrorists. This ambiguity has opened the way for the government to, again, as Karin testified, prosecute Kurdish journalists and members of the country's largest Kurdish political party on the charges of terrorism.

What's most troubling about this, besides the abstract rule of law issues that it raises, is that even those who are willing to defend this within Turkey on procedural grounds are still hesitant or unwilling to explain why these measures will prove more effective today than similar repressive measures have in responding to the terrorist threat in Turkey over the last three years. For the United States, the fact the Turkish Government is currently cracking down against the Kurdish nationalist movement in a way that is likely to further inflame the political tensions in Turkey is particularly important.

The ongoing conflict between Turkey and the PKK has already proved a recruiting boon to ISIS in Turkey. And it also continues to present one of the biggest obstacles to United States efforts to defeat ISIS in northern Syria. Currently Washington's two closest partners in the fight against ISIS—Turkey and the Syrian Kurds—are more focused on the threat posed from one another than they are focused by the threat against ISIS. The fact that the Turkish-Kurdish conflict could worsen further raises a very real possibility of open conflict between Turkish and Kurdish forces in northern Syria, which would give ISIS a reprieve that the world can ill afford.

In conclusion, I'd simply say that erosion of rule of law in Turkey has already begun transforming the country from a partner in preserving stability in the Middle East, into a source of instability in itself. If this erosion isn't reversed, the consequences for the United States and for the region will be severe.

Thank you.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you very much, Dr. Danforth.

There's a lot to unpack here. I'm going to use my prerogative as the moderator to begin with just a couple questions to start to deal with them, and then we'll have the audience help us with some questions to dig into this a little bit more. But I thank you all for your perspectives.

I want to begin a little bit with how particularly the West, the United States and the EU can use their positioning to try to influence Turkey on the topic of human rights and the rule of law. It seems to me there's a bit of a balancing act going on here between keeping Turkey at arm's length when it comes to some of these abuses of human rights

and international standards—and that needs to happen—yet on the other hand not pushing them too far that they fall completely into the embrace of more authoritarian powers to their east.

Do you agree with this formulation that Turkey's ambitions to join the EU, and this particularly under the AKP government over the past 14 years, has been an important and salutary effect in certain regards, in pushing certain regards for Turkey to take? So it's an important piece that—not to lose but, again, balancing that with, again, being very clear-eyed about what's happening there on the rights and rule of law front. Do you agree with the way I've kind of set that up? What thoughts do you have about how to approach that going forward? I'll let any of you take that.

Dr. DANFORTH. Do you want to start? To your first point, I think it's what's so discouraging about this situation right now, that there was a moment certainly when the EU process was on track, when the United States and Turkey had better relations, that it seemed like the international community did have much more leverage in promoting these values in Turkey. Unfortunately, that seems much less to be the case today.

That said, there's still certainly things that—I won't speak to the international community writ large—but that the United States could do. I think unfortunately the tendency that the United States has had is to at times be very outspoken about democracy and human rights issues in Turkey, and then when it seems like we suddenly find ourselves in desperate need of Turkish cooperation, to suddenly fall silent on those issues.

This inconsistent response has led people in Turkey to, somewhat understandably, conclude that United States commentary, concern about the rule of law and human rights is purely opportunistic. The response obviously to this is to be much more clear and consistent about what our standards are. I think we can be very honest about the fact that there are certain areas in which we are going to continue to cooperate with Turkey. No matter what happens, Turkey will remain a NATO member. The fight against ISIS will continue to be important.

But at the same time, the United States can make it clear that it's not going to silence the very real concerns that we have during that process. There are also similar minor things that the United States can do to increase its leverage as part of all this. My organization, the Bipartisan Policy Center, has produced several reports arguing that reducing the United States' reliance on Incirlik Air Base would be a very concrete and important step. This is one of the things that in very real terms does often give Turkey leverage over the United States. Certainly, in the perception of many Turkish politicians it gives them leverage over the United States.

It's a very important air base that was crucial during the Cold War, has been crucial during the fight against ISIS. But the United States does have good alternatives in Jordan, in Cyprus. Starting to look more seriously at some of those would make it easier for the United States to take the kind of honest and consistent approach that I think we should going forward.

Dr. KARLEKAR. Just quickly—I would agree with what Nicholas said. I think it's been incredibly difficult, even more than for the U.S., for Europe. But given Turkey's role in the refugee crisis, which has sort of engulfed Europe, I think it's been really almost impossible for many of the European governments to really be critical or speak out on these issues, because they are dealing with so many other issues in which Turkey is playing a key role or is the key partner. So it is a very delicate balance.

But I do think it's very important for both the European governments and the U.S. to continue speaking out against these issues. And it's hard, because there's a balance. But I think we need to all speak out, and complain, and criticize when there are grave human rights violations taking place, and to also point out, I think, that it's not in Turkey's interest either to sort of undermine a lot of the institutions of democracy, in the way that's been happening. So it's not just sort of lip service on behalf of—[laughs]—Western values, but it's also in Turkey's best interests, I think, to have a strong, stable democracy.

And just to put it also, I think, in some historical perspective, you can see this in some of the Freedom House reports if you look back 10 years. And under the AKP government, the trajectory at the beginning was very positive. And there were improvements in many areas of human rights, rule of law, media freedom during the early years of that government. And so, just to put it in perspective, it hasn't just been a downward trajectory. There was sort of an arc, I would say, of improvement, and then, like, slow backsliding, and then now this really severe crackdown. But I think it's important to put it all in a longer perspective as well.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I'd like to actually recall a view that was part of the BBC's latest report on Turkey. That is, I think it's overdue that we look at the human rights abuses and polarization—and persecution issues in Turkey as not just human rights issues anymore, but we need to look at them as helping or harming longer-term interests of the world in the region. Because there is now a fight against ISIS and other radical groups, al-Nusra in Syria and Iraq, and for that fight Turkish collaboration is needed, militarily speaking. And to contain the refugees from reaching Europe, Turkish collaboration is needed.

These are short-term goals where Turkish collaboration is needed, but allowing and not severely criticizing and not doing anything about the ongoing persecution and human rights abuses is also undermining the longer-term goals vis-à-vis these very same issues. That is, is this persecution and human rights abuses, is it risking destabilizing Turkey? Because all the major fault lines in Turkey are exacerbated by the ongoing regime.

The fault lines between Kurds and Turks, between the seculars and the observant Muslim Turks, between pro-hardline and against-hardline folks, these fault lines, the tensions are always increasing. And there's a serious destabilization and chance of Turkey becoming the next recruitment ground. It is already a recruitment ground for ISIS and other radical groups. So this is pushing Turkey to become part of a much larger problem rather than being part of the solution. So I think the world, the U.S., should not look at these issues simply as human rights issues anymore.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you very much. I think that makes a very important point that all of you made, that these issues should not be viewed as being raised opportunistically or as some kind of expression of American or Western animus towards Turkey, but rather issues of genuine concern for Turkish stability and what will guarantee that in a sustainable manner going forward, and then also, because that stability is so important for so many people in the region.

I wanted to follow up with one other question, particularly for Dr. Aslandogan, because we're talking about rule-of-law issues today. I wanted to raise a common accusation concerning the Gulen movement's involvement in state institutions. There are many Turkey analysts who say that Gulen followers have long been part of the problem plaguing state institutions, that their involvement has biased these institutions, particularly the judiciary, but many others, and thereby undermine them.

Do you believe that this was a problem that required corrective measures?

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I think the state of Turkish judiciary independence and the proper function of Turkish judiciary should be considered in two periods, at least in terms of the recent past, before October 2014 and after October 2014, because in October 2014 there was an election to the higher—[inaudible]—and prosecutors, which decide the various appointments, promotions, et cetera, of the members of the judiciary.

And in this election, a pro-Erdogan group, with the support of moderate groups in Turkey, won the elections, and they declared the victory. And after that, I think investigators can find a pattern in judge appointments or dismissals. When the court verdicts were not in line with the government's position, you can see those judges quickly being dismissed or moved to other positions. So that election was a milestone in terms of the political influence over the judiciary in Turkey.

Now, if you look at the pre-October 2014 judiciary, then Erdogan did not declare Hizmet as the enemy number one. There are members or sympathizers of the Hizmet movement in every government sector, just as there are in the private sector. And the ideas of the Hizmet movement are legal and ethical action. So we'd like to believe that those people in those positions, they should uphold those ideals, and if any individual had not—has not lived up to those ideals, that would be against the core values of the Hizmet movement.

I have seen many reports in the Western media and Turkish media, obviously, of the proceedings that took place between 2007 and 2008 up until 2013, claims of impropriety or manufacturing evidence. And we also have seen the claims of Gulen sympathizers being in those institutions. But I have not seen a court case in which a Gulen sympathizer, member of the judiciary, was actually found guilty of misconduct. If anything, this demonstrated, if they were shown to have any vote in such an action, that would be clearly against the core values of the Hizmet movement.

I also want to add this, that in many institutions a counterclaim can be made that Hizmet participants have actually held up the standards of those institutions for those exact same values.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you.

And I don't mean to confine that question just to Dr. Aslandogan. I don't know if, Dr. Danforth, you have anything to add about the role of Hizmet in state institutions.

Dr. DANFORTH. I think I'd just say that, following up on the cyclical nature of the rule-of-law violations that I tried to highlight in my initial talks, I think this is one of the chief problems, that as a result of the fabricated evidence, the excesses, the politicized nature of the proceedings that took place in 2008–2009 against the military, an opportunity for actual accountability and actual justice about the military's crimes over the past 20 years was missed.

By the same token, the politicized way, the propagandistic way, that the government is going about conducting these purges, conducting this witch hunt against the Gulen movement today is also, in the exact same way, preventing the Turkish public from ever getting a real, honest reckoning of what happened during the previous era when the movement was very active in the judiciary.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. If I may, just one?

Mr. PRICE. Yes.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I'd like to remind observers and followers of Turkey abroad that there's simply no comparison between the alleged improprieties and violations of rule of law during the 2008 to 2012 period and the current period. In the current period, we're talking about 80,000 people being detained, 37,000, 47,000 people being arrested. And these are all—99.9 percent of them are through guilt by association. There is no direct linkage between them and any activity that is related to coup attempt. So this is guilt by association.

In addition to these wrongful imprisonments, there is torture. There are numerous reports of credible evidence of torture.

There are private property confiscations. According to AKP officials, according to their own statements, the government seized \$4 billion worth of private assets during this period. So, when you look at the kind of treatment that people are receiving, they are losing their benefits, they aren't able to find jobs, their passports are canceled. If you go through the checklist of a genocide according to the United Nations, many of those items are actually checked within this period. So I simply—without actually judging the previous period, I just want to say that there is no comparison at all.

Dr. DANFORTH. Could I just add one?

Mr. PRICE. Yes, go ahead.

Dr. DANFORTH. I mean, perhaps the most discouraging facet of all this is that in the 2008–2009 period, the judiciary still felt the need to forge evidence. Now the standard of evidence is so low that there's hardly any need for it.

Mr. PRICE. Interesting. Thank you very much.

We have a couple of roaming mics that I believe our colleagues Beni and Aron will have for folks to ask questions. In the back.

Mr. MILOSCH. Hi. My name is Mark. I'm the chief of staff with the Helsinki Commission.

My question would be, if you just fantasized for a moment that you could—each of the three panelists, that you get the call to go to Trump Tower and meet with the president-elect, Mad Dog Mattis and the incoming national security adviser, and they were to tell you something briefly like, look, we all see this relationship with Turkey as extremely important. We know they want Mr. Gulen returned. They're going to be asking for all kinds of other things we don't want to do. Very important relationship; lots of very complicated moving pieces with Russia. And, none of us three, the president-elect or General Mattis or Mr. Kelly, have made their career as human rights advocates. And yet they're all—they all grew up on this soil and, as Americans, the idea of returning someone like Mr. Gulen to a land where none of them believe that he could ever have anything resembling a fair trial, it would be repugnant to all of us. And these are the basic outlines of the problem that anybody can see.

What could a Turkey expert tell those three people as they think about this equation of the basic lines of our relationship with Turkey, the human rights quandaries we're in, the necessity that the United States, in order to hold its head high, has to remain the United States and doesn't return people to dictatorships where there's no hope of them having a fair trial, and yet, there's going to be—and yet there are so many almost vital or first-level and second-level American interests in play that the questions are serious ones and the answers are not easy. What would each of you say from the point of view of your expertise?

Thanks.

Dr. DANFORTH. I mean, I think, Mark, you've already made the case very well for what we might say. Those are many of the points that I would mention as well.

Specifically on the subject of extradition, I think the important thing to understand in that and everything—we've written about this—as non-lawyers, we still tried to explain as best possible—is that there are two components of the extradition process. There has to be a political decision on the part of the United States administration, and there has to be legal evidence that will be evaluated, in this case by a judge in Pennsylvania, who makes the final decision. And so separating these two parts of the process, I think, is important.

Part of the problem is that there's already the suspicion—you could even say refusal to believe—in Turkey that the independence of the judiciary in the United States is real. The actual fact is that the United States could not extradite Fethullah Gulen if a judge in Pennsylvania decided not to.

In the past, there's actually been significant bilateral tension between the United States and Britain when Margaret Thatcher wanted the Reagan Administration to extradite members of the IRA. The Reagan Administration was very eager to comply, but judges blocked that process. This is the way the United States system works. This is the way the United States system should continue to work.

And so I think it's important in keeping our rhetoric consistent, to make it clear to the Turkish Government to not make promises about the United States' ability to bend its own rules, to not suggest that this process is more political than it is, to not create the expectation that the United States can do favors at the expense of the rule of law. And rhetoric that makes it seem like this could happen, is either going to prove very damaging to U.S.-Turkish relations if it turns out that the administration simply can't, doesn't have the evidence to follow through with the extradition, or, even if it does, perhaps -if the administration was able to secure Gulen's extradition, it would be even more damaging because it would, in a while range of other situations, undermine the United States' ability to point to our own values as a limitation on our behavior.

In other situations Turkey has already demanded that, say, the German Government prosecute a German comedian who made fun of President Erdogan on television. The United States can't give the impression that this is something that Turkey can and should be able to ask for.

Dr. KARLEKAR. Just to add to that point, I think governments and countries where there is no separation of powers and no independent judiciary would push for things that they don't realize are not possible in the U.S. if we're going to uphold the rule of law and systems in place in the U.S. So I think that's a very important point, to keep pointing out what the rules are in the U.S.

And I think even with this particular case, the fact that it's seen as such a politicized case makes the standards of evidence so much higher, that would have to be presented by the Turkish Government in order for an extradition to take place. So if there's any suspicion that it's a politicized request or that there definitely would not be a fair trial in Turkey, it's going to be even harder to get the U.S. to agree.

So I think to keep pointing out what the actual limitations are in the U.S., that there is an independent judiciary, are really quite important in this and in any other case where we were being asked to extradite somebody.

But, that being said, on sort of some of the broader issues, I mean, I think to try and point to areas of cooperation and the fact that these sort of restrictions on free expression, the violations of human rights, are really, I don't think, in Turkey's best interest as well, and trying to continue to point out that it's not a good path for Turkey to go on. It's not going to—as my fellow panelists have pointed out, it's only worsening the issues in Turkey already with regard to the Kurdish minority, with regard to the sort of clash between more secular and religious values. There seem to be improvements in many of these areas as of five years ago, and now we're seeing a backsliding again. So I think there are connections between the level of human rights and free expression in Turkey and Turkey's ability to negotiate and deal with some of these issues on a national level.

Mr. PRICE. All right, I think we'll take another question.

QUESTIONER. Thank you. Hi. I'm Albert Wolf. I'm from Congressman Chabot's office.

I'm going to ask you a question about academic freedom in Turkey. I think it was about a year ago the International Political Science Association tried to basically pull out or stop their conference from taking place in Istanbul. You've seen a number of academics either being fired or—[inaudible]—they've gone on, quote-unquote, “extended leave.”

I'm just curious what your take is on the state of academic freedom in Turkey. And the second—we haven't really talked about Iraq. I'm just curious what your thoughts are on—Erdogan has made a lot of hawkish statements on going into Iraq in the event that the Turkmen are attacked or they're being slaughtered by the Hashd. I'm just curious what your take on all this is.

Thank you very much.

Mr. PRICE. I think, for the Iraq question, we can also focus on how that plays into how the United States relates to Turkey on the human rights and the rule of law issues, because if we go into Iraq, we'll be here all night. [Laughs.] Go ahead.

Dr. KARLEKAR. I can jump in on the academic freedom question in particular. I mean, similar to other areas of free expression, there's been a huge crackdown on academic freedom, particularly since the coup, but these trends were apparent beforehand.

And dozens of scholars, academics, are trying to leave the country. Many are in prison. Many more have been dismissed from their positions. We work closely with the scholars at Risk Network, which is based in the U.S., and which assists scholars at risk around the world and helps them in many cases to receive fellowships to come to safety and continue their academic work.

They've actually had to hire extra staff this year to respond to the number of cases coming out of Turkey. There have been, I think—they told me over a hundred cases of people who are reaching out to them for help. So they've actually had to hire extra staff this year just to deal with the Turkish crackdown. And Turkey actually is providing the most cases of any country in the world right now for their network. So I would say it's really an unprecedented situation that we're seeing on all levels of free expression, but including academic freedom.

Mr. PRICE. We can talk about Iraq.

Dr. DANFORTH. On academic freedom, I might also just follow up to say, certainly from my perspective, I've been very attuned to what's happening on account of English-speaking university professors that I know personally that I'm following on Facebook and am friends with and have mutual friends with, and that's been understandably the focus of a lot of the international concern and in a way the part of the problem that the inter-

national community has the easiest tools to remedy, because there are people that, as you said, can and should be invited to the United States, to Europe, to the extent possible. I'd keep in mind that the extent of the problem goes way beyond that and that it's elementary school teachers in parts of the country that people have never heard of in the United States.

As for Iraq, I think the bigger concern right now is Syria. I think if there's a situation where there's really likely to be a clash that would fundamentally put United States interests at risk, it's between Turkish forces and Turkish-supported rebels in northern Syria and sort of YPG Kurdish forces that are there. And it's the United States that has devoted a considerable amount of energy to try to manage that conflict and prevent it from exploding. And yet at the same time, the longer those efforts have gone on, the more frustration has been built up in the Pentagon and the State Department with Americans who are dealing with this and that—I think that does run a very real risk now that—what was the quote in *The Washington Post*?—a U.S. official had honestly said something like, the Turks are either going to have to support our efforts or get out of the way and that if frustration on the United States' side gets too high and we stop coordinating with Turkey to the extent we have, I think that does dramatically intensify the chances that—Turkish forces are already in Syria—instead of continuing the fight against ISIS, they'll turn and fight against the YPG. And again, that would be a godsend for ISIS.

Mr. PRICE. All right. We'll take another question. Anybody else?

Now I can ask another question as well.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. If I may—

Mr. PRICE. Yes, go ahead, please.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. The community may not be the representation of the world academic freedom situation, but part of the government's crackdown after the coup attempt was shutting down 15 universities and transferring their students to other institutions. And also, in an action that I could not understand to this point, they asked 1,500 deans of all the universities, everybody, to resign from their posts. So clearly many of them had nothing to do with the Hizmet movement or the coup, but they have taken these actions.

And right now, as we speak, I know people who have degrees in social sciences, technical sciences from American universities, who are in jail. In the past some academics published ads in Turkish papers condemning the heavy-handed dealing with the southeastern security situation vis-à-vis the PKK. And there were legal cases against those academics for publishing that ad and for pursuing that advocacy.

So under these circumstances, I think if it comes to anything political concerning government, you can safely say there's no academic freedom. I don't know how they deal with other issues that don't have to do with the government.

Mr. PRICE. And, Alp, if I could also ask you, one of the examples of overreach of the Turkish Government that's really struck me has been the seizure of private institutions, the seizure of the entire bank accounts of different organizations and that sort of thing, and the trusteeships that the government has set up to operate media organizations and other institutions.

You mentioned some of it in your presentation, but I was wondering if you could give us a little bit more of a sense and the sense that—other panelists can also comment on it—what mechanisms does the government use, what justification does it invoke in taking those measures.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I'm not familiar with all the mechanisms that they use. I'm familiar with two of them. But let me start by saying that this kind of targeting private property has never happened in Turkish history. The Kurdish citizens in the past suffered greatly under repressive measures, but never—I don't remember a time when hundreds and hundreds of Kurdish business holders lost their private property. The government has done nothing like this. Even after military coups, something like this didn't occur.

So there's no precedent for the seizure of private property at this level in Turkish history. And according to the government officials themselves, it's reached about \$4 billion.

One of those 15 universities that was shut down was Ipek University, which was established by a holding owner of Ipek, who had to leave the country. And hundreds of millions of dollars in companies under his holding company were seized by the government. And so he's seeking his legal rights outside of Turkey. This is an unprecedented situation.

So the mechanisms that they use, the ones that I'm familiar with, one of them is the one that you mentioned, the trusteeship. The trusteeship—a court, allegedly independently, decides that a company is in trouble or their owners in some sort of wrongdoing, and therefore they place this company under a trustee, who is, again, supposed to be independent. And then this trustee acts like a CEO, and then they decide hiring and firing. They decide what other companies this company does business with. And in all the examples where they used this trustee mechanism, it resulted in basically the original owners losing all control of the company, and sometimes the companies also sank very quickly.

In some cases, they used this mechanism against media institutions. For instance, this businessman—one of his papers and TV stations were acquired this way. And since they changed the direction from being against Erdogan to pro-Erdogan overnight, they lost all readership and they are no longer feasible economically. They sank very quickly.

Another mechanism is under this state of emergency if somebody is charged with being a member of a terrorist organization, then one of the measures they can take is actually to put their assets under government control. And I'm sure our lawyer friends would give you three or four other mechanisms.

And when these issues are brought up, the government response is, these are legal methods; they're not political. But when you actually look at who is doing what, what is the end result, what does it lead to, there's a very clear picture that these legal issues are being used for political purposes, as a political punishment instrument.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you.

I wanted to ask, are there any other questions?

[Pause.]

I wanted to ask Dr. Karlekar as well—I don't have a full idea for the landscape of the media in Turkey, but in your assessment, are there still independent organs that are out there that are getting the word out about things that counter the government's narrative? Do they still exist, or with seizure of many journalists, with Cumhuriyet and that sort of thing, is that kind of no longer in existence?

Dr. KARLEKAR. I would say there had been sort of a slow squeezing of the media space in Turkey over the last few years. Even before the July coup, the number of independent balance voices was quite small. There were several opposition papers but several

also very pro-government. But having sort of papers with the balance of independence was particularly squeezed, and the same was in the broadcast media.

What we have seen in Turkey over the last few years, though, is large numbers of columnists and regular journalists who have been fired or dismissed from their jobs following changes in media ownership at some of the main outlets. So basically with many papers, even sort of those independent voices were being pushed out.

On the positive side, what we did see is that many of those journalists have sort of taken up with online outlets and sort of Internet-based platforms and digital media and are using social media too to get the word out.

So I would say there has been a sort of positive development in terms of more platforms being set up in the digital space. Now, obviously those may or may not have the same reach of their basic newspaper, but we have seen that journalists are really continuing to try do their jobs and to get the word out and to provide independent news and information.

For example, the outlet P24 has been set up by a number of journalists who were laid off from their official positions. So that has, I think, been somewhat of a counter-balance, but not enough to completely counter the large-scale sort of change in the media environment and the closure of independent media.

Mr. PRICE. Sure.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I think the best term to describe the state of Turkish journalism is to say it's in a coma. It is not completely dead; it's in a coma.

There's a simple exercise that everybody here can do. Simply go to those sites which publish the front pages of Turkish newspapers. There are some gathering sites that publish only the front pages of Turkish newspapers. And just count those papers, in how many of them you can actually find a paper that's critical of the government. Out of the 30 or 50, if you find five of them, congratulations.

The level of control is about 95 percent or higher. The notable exception to this is the *Sözcü* daily, which is a kind of nationalist-leftist—Kemalist nationalist paper, which is allowed to continue to publish in high numbers, in hundreds of thousands. And I see two possible reasons for allowing that to continue its critical publication: one, for the government to be able to say, see, we have independent media; we don't control all of them. So they can point on to this one publication.

Secondly, *Sözcü* is also highly critical of this Hizmet movement, so maybe because they're also criticizing Hizmet, they're allowing it to continue to publish. But if you take any measure of independence of the media, Turkish media is in a coma right now.

Mr. PRICE. Are there any other questions?

Oh, sure. Do we have a mic?

Mr. TIERSKY. Thank you. Alex Tiersky, also with the Helsinki Commission.

The speakers today have been extremely eloquent in pointing out some of the problems that we're seeing in Turkey today. What I would like now to point more of a finger at is what hope there is for a change of course.

As power becomes more centralized, as the media becomes increasingly under the control of the government, independent outlets being shuttered, I still haven't heard essentially scope for a change in outlook, necessarily. I don't want to say change in leadership; that's not what I'm asking. We haven't necessarily seen a great responsiveness to

criticism from the outside, which I think has been something that you've all insisted is a necessary part of the response.

So if that's not going to create change, criticism from the outside, where might that change come from in terms of the trends that we're seeing?

Thank you.

Dr. DANFORTH. Yes, I think probably the reason you haven't heard more about that is because no one on the panel seems terribly optimistic on those points.

The only thing I would say—so far the Turkish Government's been very clear about justifying all the steps that it has taken with majoritarian if not necessarily liberal view of democracy. And President Erdogan keeps coming back to the fact that he and his party continue to win elections. And so far those have all been, if not entirely free elections, by and large elections in which the results, the numbers reflect the way people vote, with perhaps some inconsistencies.

What that means, I think, is that there's still—there'd be some hope or maybe the only hope would be that it really did reach a point where the government could no longer want to hold elections that it could actually win, there might be some sense—I mean, so much of the rhetoric has been based on democracy that there would be some sense that once it moved from a kind of majoritarian liberal democracy to an actual authoritarian state that was no longer holding elections, that was no longer holding fair elections, that there might be some more widespread popular backlash at that point. But I wouldn't necessarily hold my breath for that either.

Dr. KARLEKAR. Yes, I would echo that. I've been pretty pessimistic—[chuckles]—about the chances for change right now. I think it might take maybe a lot of these restrictions affecting a broad—they already are facing a broad—or affecting a broad majority—or a group of people, but I think if they started affecting even more people, and/or if, let's say, sort of economic conditions, or there were other issues which were leading to more popular unrest, then there might be some pushback, either at the ballot box through elections or in some other way.

But I think you would need sort of a change from the bottom in terms of support for the Erdogan government. At this point, I mean, they are winning elections, and they do have a large amount of support.

So my—[chuckles]—my prognosis is not very optimistic at this point, no, of any positive changes soon.

Mr. PRICE. Could I ask specifically, to follow up on Alex's question, about the Kurdish situation and whether or not there is an endgame envisioned there? I think fighting one's way to victory against the Kurds seems to come across dubious prospects. Is there a potential avenue to a return to negotiations once certain objectives have been reached? And that also has a lot of implications for human rights and the situation there, considering—also the political repression that Kurdish MPs have faced in Turkey recently.

Dr. DANFORTH. No, I think that's an excellent point. Certainly over the last 30 or 40 years the Kurdish conflict has been one of the things that's consistently undermined democratization efforts in Turkey. And as we see, it continues to do so today, but it is discouraging, as you allude to. I think both sides now, after this conflict has gone on for so long, recognize that some kind of negotiated political solution is necessary. At the same time, both are carrying on the conflict in a way that makes that kind of political solution even more difficult to achieve.

On the PKK side, the fighting over the last year and a half has showed that the organization has no military path to victory against a much larger, stronger Turkish military and that were it to try to—it's kind of the one escalatory tactic that members of the group have alluded to would be carrying out more terrorist attacks in Western cities, which would further alienate the vast majority of Turkish citizens and undermine whatever legitimacy the organization has gathered in the rest of the world through its fight against ISIS.

By the same token, the Turkish Government's approach to this—to even the people who are often defending the Turkish Government are at a loss to explain why the current policy is likely to work. In the past, the government has argued that there's newfound anger against the PKK and that it's using this to win hearts and minds in the Kurdish region, which will undermine the group's support further. It's argued that because it's given more freedoms, cultural freedoms to the Kurdish population, this will give it a better chance to win a political victory. And yet, whatever truth there might have been to these arguments a year or two ago, the longer the fighting continues, the less plausible even those rationales seem.

Getting back to what I said earlier, and I think one of the best things the United States can do, is keep this conflict from expanding within Syria and recognize that if now there isn't necessarily much hope of both sides returning to the negotiating table, certainly if at any point in the future that becomes a real possibility, that this is vital to Turkey's stability, vital to U.S. interests in the region, and that any political pressure the United States can apply in the future towards getting both sides back to the negotiating table is ultimately going to be to America, Turkey, and Kurds' benefit.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. In the early 2000s, when Hizmet participants were supporting the AKP's efforts to move Turkey toward the EU, its candidacy for membership, we now realize retrospectively we were dreaming, because a country and a society don't become democratic overnight in such a short period. This is a country and society, they grew up with an educational system praising and admiring strongly this—glorifying the state, just being happy with authoritarian measures, authoritarian means, and also overall valuing economic well being above many other things. So we were dreaming. We only realize it after 2011 elections.

So a country that is now going to the authoritarian path, can it return back to a democratic path? That's a big question. And unfortunately, the hope lies in very negative or undesirable developments to all the means through which the current government was able to maintain the power is the control of the media and also the lack of an economic crisis. There is no chance that in the near future the control of the media will be eased. So if the only other possibility is that if the economy is not in the shape that it's in today, more people will begin to question the legitimacy of other actions of the government, it could lead to a legitimate removal of the government in an election, if the election's actually fair. Elections have been free, but it's hard to argue that they have been fair with the media being controlled by the government. So there's that possibility, if the economy is not doing as well, that more people may begin to question the government's actions, or there could be popular backlash. But none of those possibilities are desirable. One just wishes that it could simply turn the democratic switch on the government. That doesn't look likely.

Mr. PRICE. I wanted to just piggyback off what you said and then asking for your comment on something else that you mentioned, the history that Turkey has of praising

authoritarian leaders, that there are these—obviously you have a history of coup attempts and that sort of thing, the overthrow of democratic governments. I've heard this argument many times over the years from opponents of the AKP, that it's born from a political Islamic root, and that as a result, the authoritarianism that it's demonstrated, it was kind of an inevitable outcome, that political Islamic movements have this kind of inclination, in that you give it long enough and it eventually bears itself out. I think that perspective is somewhat challenged by what Dr. Karlekar shared in terms of how there was an uptick, there was an improvement, there was this move towards the EU, there were—kind of an opening of Turkey following the election of the AKP for several years.

So I'm wondering if we zoom out from the perspective of just these past few years and everything that's happened, if we look at the broader trajectory of Turkish politics, is there something about the political Islamic genealogy of the AKP that made this all inevitable in the end and that we should have known better from the beginning, as some would argue? Or is there something more elemental that transcends ideology just about Turkish institutions and how power's wielded in Turkey? [Laughter.]

Dr. DANFORTH. I think from the moment Erdogan came to power, there were those that were very outspoken in their criticism of him, not because of any concern about his democratic credentials or rather much more out of concern about the fact that he was an Islamist. The kind of long history of Islamophobic criticism of the Erdogan government, the AKP, I think has helped undermine a lot of what could have been more useful criticism of Erdogan. And it could be based on democratic grounds.

I think now there's an unfortunate situation where—well, that the risk would be that moving forward, a continued focus on the kind of—Erdogan's Islamism, the focus on Islam's foreign policy, his neo-Ottoman dreams, a lot of the stuff that we hear rhetorically a great deal in Washington, again, is going to only further undermine and delegitimize whatever leverage, whatever credibility the United States has speaking out on what should be universal values. To the extent this becomes an Islam vs. anti-Islam thing, U.S. criticism is not going to play well in a 99-point whatever percent Islamic country.

Mr. PRICE. Go ahead.

Dr. ASLANDOGAN. I think we need to distinguish the various definitions of political Islamism and to what degree Erdogan's government subscribes to it. When they formed the party and when they were coming to power, they were claiming that they were simply conservatives, not even Muslim democrats, just conservatives, and the early years were consistent with that promise. But after the second election, all the progress, democratic progress stalled, and after the third election things began to U-turn.

Is it because of the ideology, or is it because of the individuals who are involved in the party, President Erdogan and others around him? There were some more reasonable people at the formation of the party. Later they left. One of them actually said that I cannot recognize the party leadership right now. It is a former, I think, high school friend of Erdogan. He said I don't recognize people around Erdogan anymore. I don't recognize this party anymore.

So something happened along those lines. But I think we need to kind of separate those concerns. There is inherently definitely a tension between the ideology of political Islamism and governing a state that has a budget of about trillion dollars. These people are making decisions about billion-dollar contracts, on bids, so the temptation for corruption, and corruption ultimately leading to having to make a choice between

authoritarianism or allowing democracy under rule of law to continue. All of those elements should be considered, I think, in trying to analyze this.

Mr. PRICE. Thank you very much. I think that's a very interesting and nuanced take on the AKP and its history in Turkey.

If there aren't any other questions and no final thoughts from our panelists, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out. I think these interventions from our panelists have given us a lot to think about, particularly about considering how United States foreign policy should continue to stick to its principles on human rights, whether it's human rights issues that we can raise bilaterally with the Turks and multilaterally in the OSCE with the Turks, and also on the extradition question that these things are in Turkey's interest, they're in the interest of U.S. foreign policy to establish expectations and to maintain norms. I think those are very interesting takeaways for us to ponder as we think about U.S. foreign policy going forward, especially in the new administration and the new Congress.

I'd like to thank also our interns who worked very hard on this event—Beni, Aron, and Jordan, who may be watching back from the office. Thank you all for your participation.

And, with that, we will adjourn the briefing.

[Whereupon, at 3:20 p.m., the briefing ended.]

A P P E N D I X

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. Y. ALP ASLANDOGAN

Thank you, Everett, and thank you to Rep. Chris Smith and the Helsinki Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today about what has quickly become a human rights crisis in my native country, Turkey.

As Everett mentioned, I'm Alp Aslandogan, the executive director of the Alliance for Shared Values. We are an umbrella organization for six regional US institutions that promote peace, interfaith dialogue and mutual respect. These are among the core values of the social movement Hizmet, which means "service" in Turkish, and which originated in Turkey. It is also known as the Gulen movement in popular media, after Mr. Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish religious scholar and social advocate.

All of you surely are familiar with the horrific July 15 coup attempt. It was an attack on Turkey's democracy. And it was immediately and repeatedly condemned by my organization as well as by Mr. Gulen himself.

That has not stopped the Turkish Government from blaming the coup attempt on Mr. Gulen, although they have been unable to provide any evidence that he was involved in any aspect of it.

But today's briefing is not about the events of July 15, it's about what has happened in the aftermath of those events. Unfortunately, the attack on Turkey's democracy and human rights did not end when the dust settled on the morning of July 16.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government have systematically concentrated their power over the courts, the media, the government bureaucracy, the military and law enforcement through a series of purges and persecutions of innocent people and government critics alike. They have seized assets from everyday Turks who have built businesses and lives through years of hard work.

While Hizmet has been a main target of the Turkish Government since July, we have not been alone—Kurds, Alevis, journalists, teachers, even soccer referees have all been targets of Erdogan's massive crackdown.

As of December 4, more than 115,000 people have been fired from their jobs, 80,000 people detained, 40,000 people arrested, 6,000 academics who lost their jobs, 4,000 judges and prosecutors dismissed, 2,000 dormitories shut down, 195 media outlets shut down and 145 journalists arrested. 35 hospitals have been shut down or transferred to new owners and 7000 doctors have been fired. I have yet to hear an intelligent explanation as to how doctors and hospitals were involved in a coup attempt. Nine Kurdish members of the Turkish parliament were arrested in November. The attack has been waged on every segment of society that does not march in lockstep with the Erdogan government.

We have identified 12 different categories of human rights violations that the Turkish Government has inflicted on Turks of all stripes under a declared "state of emergency."

I will walk you through them and provide some examples that show how deeply harmful they are to Turkey's present and future.

The **first category is Inhumane Detention Conditions and Torture.** Groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have reported that those being detained are subjected to physical abuse including beatings, rape, and various forms of torture, and are being denied food and water, adequate space, and medicine. For example, our office received report of an individual who was deprived of water and was forced to drink from a toilet bowl. As a result, he developed an infection. We also received reports of an individual in detention who was threatened with the rape of his wife if he did not cooperate, an individual whose wife was raped and told his husband that he could divorce her. Journalist Aysenur Parildak sent a letter from prison to Cumhuriyet daily reporting that during her interrogation that took 8 days, she has been subjected to violence and sexual abuse by drunk police officers. BBC recently aired an on-camera testimony of an individual who was subjected to rape by inserting a police baton into his body. Other specific examples of torture are documented in an October 24 report from Human Rights Watch entitled "A Blank Check: Turkey's Post-coup Suspension of Safeguards against Torture".

Human rights violations such as Verbal and Physical Abuse, the second category, are by no means limited to detention centers, and they continue outside prior to and post-detention. There are children in Turkey undergoing psychological therapy due to police raids to their home by officers carrying guns, verbally and physically abusing their parents.

The **third category is the Violation of Freedom of Expression.** Turkish authorities have waged an all-out attack upon independent media. In addition to closing media organizations or seizing them and transferring them to friends and family of the Erdogan regime, the government has arrested many journalists simply for doing their jobs - uncovering and publishing hard truths. Among them is a 72-year-old veteran woman journalist and parliamentarian, Nazli Ilicak, who has been charged with "membership of a terror group." She is a Turkish liberal, not affiliated with the Hizmet movement or any other group, and she has devoted her life to journalism, not terrorism. Even foreign journalists are not immune. Beatriz Yuberco, a Spanish student and journalist, was deported from Turkey over tweets about President Erdogan. During her detention, she was deprived of food and water, denied medical care and the right to contact her family and lawyers.

The **fourth category is the Violation of Right to Travel.** The Turkish Government has cancelled countless passports to prevent ordinary citizens from leaving the country. The passport of Dilek Dundar, wife of the journalist Can Dundar, was confiscated at the Ataturk Airport even though she was not charged with a crime. Her husband is a secular journalist who had been jailed, had been the target of an assassination attempt, and now is in exile in Germany. A Hizmet-sympathizer family attempted to travel to Cuba to seek an unconventional treatment for their son as he was suffering from a terminal form of cancer. The family was denied exit from the country. The parents begged the officials to allow their son to travel to Cuba with another relative so he can be treated, but the officials refused them.

The **fifth category is Denial of Lawful Employment.** As part of the purge, Turkish Government employees have been fired without any investigation, and they are denied positions in any other government agency. Private companies offering employment

to them are monitored and threatened. The professional licenses of 21,000 teachers and other professionals have been canceled. School diplomas of professionals who graduated from Hizmet-affiliated schools have been invalidated.

The **sixth category is Defamation, Humiliation and Slander.** As President Erdogan seized control over the Turkish media either through acquisitions of pro-Erdogan businessmen or through self-censorship, media smear campaigns against foundations, companies and individuals have been the norm. An example of this phenomenon was the targeting of the singer SILA for refusing to perform at a pro-government rally. Despite having no connections with Hizmet, she was targeted with a slander campaign and consequently lost performance contracts. Another example is the silence of AKP officials in public rallies where puppets representing Mr. Gulen were hanged and burned, signs called Gulen “Dog of Zionism” in English and “Abu Jahl” in Arabic, the polytheist arch-enemy of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) clearly targeting audiences outside of Turkey.

The **seventh category of human rights violation is Denial of Right to Due Process.** The requirements of the due process according to Turkish legal code have been repeatedly violated during the prosecution of Hizmet sympathizers. The state of emergency and the associated “Directives with the force of law” are often cited to justify denial of legal rights such as attorney-client privilege. The October report by Human Rights Watch has details on this issue.

The **eighth category is the Denial of Right to Legal Defense.** Lawyers accepting to defend Hizmet-sympathizers are routinely threatened, detained and arrested, and their offices raided. Any lawyers who do agree to defend Hizmet sympathizers—and only a few will take those cases—are charging exorbitant sums. What is more frightening is that according to the reports that we received, these lawyers are not asking for these fees for themselves but are transferring a large proportion of the fees to AKP officials as an exorbitant commission.

The **ninth category is the Violation of Private Property Rights.** Private properties of Hizmet-sympathizers are taken away through multiple mechanisms such as appointing trustees, confiscation, and sale to third parties without the consent of the owner. The owners of the largest furniture manufacturing company, which used to employ more than 36,000 people, were jailed. The owner of a media and mining holding company had to flee the country, and his companies worth hundreds of millions of dollars were brought under government control. The university that he helped start was shut down.

The **tenth category is the Violation of Family.** The family members of wanted individuals, including wives, mothers and fathers are detained and sometimes arrested. Children are threatened. Parents are threatened with placing their children in government child-care agencies despite the presence of relatives. As an example, the wife of journalist Bulent Korucu was arrested by police when they could not find him at home at the time of their raid. The 86-year old mother of a lawyer was also detained by authorities.

The **eleventh category is the Violation of Right to Shelter:** Apartment building governing boards throughout Turkey are pressured to evict Hizmet sympathizers. People are encouraged to report their neighbors to authorities. The president’s office established a hotline for neighbors to report alleged Hizmet sympathizers. Apparently the goal is to render dissenters not only voiceless but also homeless.

The **twelfth category of human rights violation is the Violation of Right to Information.** Family members of those detained or arrested have been denied information about the whereabouts and conditions of their loved ones.

These are a dozen different categories of human rights violations we have seen reported in the press, by human rights watchdogs, and learned through anecdotal stories from those facing these repressions personally in Turkey.

By all means, the coup perpetrators must be brought to justice. They committed a horrible, horrible act. But the way the Erdogan government has reacted goes above and beyond the measures called for by law, by what is expected of a NATO ally, and by standards of common human decency.

I ask that each of you use the leverage you have with Members of Congress and with the incoming administration to keep pressure on the Turkish Government to stop this unending parade of abuses of innocent people, and to lift the state of emergency that is being used as an excuse to deny basic human rights.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.



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