



Beyond the Headlines
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Pelin Gundes-Bakir
Member of Parliament, Turkey

Turkey's Role in Syria and the Region

Gunay Evinch: My name is Gunay Evinch; I serve on the Board of Directors of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations. Welcome to the Capitol Hill Club. The topic is hot today, and will be hot for a while. We have a great speaker from Turkey. Let me tell you a little bit about my organization, the ATAA, which is a co-sponsor. We are a democratically elected membership organization, and we are based on a secular democracy. Our organization has—it's not just Turks from Turkey, but we have Turks from America, we have non-Turks; for example our VP for the LA region is an Italian-American woman. And I hope you are liking your traditional food here, goat cheese ravioli. *[Laughter.]* And we are very active in the integration of Turkish-Americans into broader American society.

When our speaker said that she'd like to come to United States, I said, you have to come speak about Syria. And I said, well how are we going to do this and who are we going to talk to? And so I said, you know, the ATAA, half of our leaders—our elected leaders—are women at the Assembly of Turkish American Associations. We support women in leadership positions—at this point I'd like to thank my mother and my wife. I think we're only as good as our teams are. And we now thought—more importantly is, when we started to put this program together we reached out to Patricia Ellis at the Women's Foreign Policy Group. And we were—we have been in communication with Kimberly Kahnhauser. And I want to thank Kimberly. Kimberly, where are you? There she is, stand up Kimberly. *[Applause.]* Kimberly is amazing. I tell you, multi-tasking and awareness and hard work—that's what is Kimberly, and she did a great job today, and her whole team.

I would like to now also thank, from our board of trustees on the ATAA side, Ms. Oya Bain. *[Applause.]* She is our—one of our most mature leaders at the ATAA. You know, I played soccer—really high up soccer—and we always had a team mother. And I tell you, Oya Bain, she is our team mother. She keeps us going, little dynamo. Oya Bain, please stand and say hi to everyone. *[Applause.]*

I wasn't going to speak today—Oya Bain was going to speak, and Dr. Esma Akin, also from our board of trustees, was going to speak. But Dr. Esma has to tend to one of her most important patients today, her father. Unfortunately she is at the hospital with her father.

Okay, so we're starting today, and I would like to introduce to you and call to the podium Dr. Gundes-Bakir, the parliamentarian from the Turkish Republic, please. *[Applause.]* And Ms. Patricia Ellis, co-founder and president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. *[Applause.]* Ms. Bakir is going to speak briefly giving a general overview of the issues, and then Ms. Ellis will engage in a question and answer period, which we think will be very exciting, very educational. You have the biographies of both speakers—of our next speaker, Ms. Gundes-Bakir. But I'd like to say that, you know when Turkey passed the law to give the right to vote to women, and to be elected to Turkish politics in 1925, we started I think a very important movement, not just in Turkey but in the region. Perhaps also in the world, with Turkish people.

Ms. Pelin Gundes-Bakir is a product of that equal opportunity and of empowerment and of encouragement to empowerment. It's one of the very reasons why ATAA we decided to do a two-day program for her in Washington, DC. And after the Women's Foreign Policy Group, we'll be meeting with former members of Congress at the ATAA. We will be meeting with State Department, Homeland Security, and NSA people regarding immigration and integration. And tomorrow we will be meeting with some of the Turkish-American community about issues of immigration and integration and empowerment.

Ms. Patricia Ellis is, as I said, the co-founder and president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group and highly respected. And also I learned today that men can be members of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. [*Laughter.*]

Patricia Ellis: Absolutely, we welcome them! We have one right here, and another one right there.

Evinch: Gentlemen, you are great, and I'm going to apply after this program. So I'd like to please ask Ms. Gundes-Bakir to the podium to speak. [*Applause.*]

Pelin Gundes-Bakir: Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start my speech by condemning the extensive and systematic human rights violations committed by the Syrian regime. If these arbitrary detentions and executions, disappearances, killings, the persecutions of civilians, massacres and torture tell us anything, it is that the status quo in Syria is not a safe choice for anyone. 1.5 million people have been internally displaced within Syria since the beginning of this conflict. I would like to restate that there can be no impunity for those who commit crimes against humanity. All allegations of human rights violations and crimes must be investigated appropriately and the perpetrators should be brought into justice.

The international community has, up to now, repeatedly sent a clear and firm message that the violence in Syria must end, a democratic transition must start, and Assad must go. We, in the Council of Europe, have adopted three resolutions on Syria hitherto, but still there are more words than actions among the international community. Turkey, in the initial phases of the crisis in Syria, spent every effort to persuade Assad for democratic reform and respond to his people's legitimate demands. However, the regime's extensive brutality against his own people accelerated. At this point, Turkey chose to stand with the Syrian people against the regime to endorse a stable, democratic, and inclusive Syria.

The most important reservation of the international community in the initial phases of the conflict was on the divided structure of the opposition. When the Syrian opposition gathered in Turkey in June 2011, the only point they could unite was, Assad should go. Organizational difficulties, lack of experience, Assad regime's provocations, and lack of support from the international community prevented the unity of the opposition until the foundation of the Syrian National Council. They were still told that these were out-of-touch exiles who needed to have wider internal support in Syria, because most people in the opposition were forced to live abroad during the Assad regime.

Early November 2012, the opposition groups came together in Doha and formed a new roof organization called Syrian National Coalition. The meetings in Doha were a substantial step towards a more coherent and unified opposition structure. The relationship between the opposition inside and outside of Syria is established. The new members were included, including the local representatives, members of the military council, members of the business organizations, activists, influential people in the region, and the representatives of some minority groups, as well as the Kurdish National Council and Turkmens. The excuse that the opposition does not represent all Syrian people is eliminated by this new development. The opposition is more coherent now. Turkey recognized the Syrian National Coalition as the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people. It is now crucially important that the group of friends of the Syrian people should immediately come together to approve the results of the meeting in Doha.

Ladies and gentlemen, the number of Syrian refugees in 14 humanitarian camps within Turkey is more than 120,000. And Turkey has spent almost \$500 million from its own national resources for humanitarian relief purposes. With the coming of the winter, a serious mass movement of refugees is accepted in Turkey. Sometimes in one night—in one night—9,000 people enter Turkey to escape the brutality of the regime. The expense of running the camp, shipping 9,000 refugees, is \$2.5 million a month. And our government's first priority is receiving donations from the international community for the future responsibility of our humanitarian efforts. These support and stand in complete solidarity with the Syrian people. And we want to declare very clearly that we will give every humanitarian aid and support to the people of Syria, regardless of their religion, their ethnicity, or their sect.

However, it's also obvious that the scale of the problem is becoming more than Turkey can alone shoulder itself. And we expect from the international community to share this humanitarian burden. It is also apparent that this type of outside Syria humanitarian relief is not sustainable and we should look for humanitarian solutions and camps within Syria. Within this context, my country Turkey has started to transfer humanitarian aid from the zero point in the Syrian border via the Red Crescent. Despite all our warnings, our territory is subjected to continuous shelling during the military operations of the Syrian regime towards its own people. And, actually our borders are targeted. Several Turkish citizens, including children and women, have died from these shelling activities of the south regime. The south Syrian air forces approach less than five kilometers to our borders and bomb the villages adjacent to our border. And at the same time they target our Turkey side very frequently.

However, I should also hereby state our resolve to protect our borders and citizens. Turkey has recently applied to NATO for positioning patriots along the border. Turkey has affirmed that she needs patriots only for self-defense purposes and not for a no-fly zone. But patriots could de facto establish a no-fly zone that could help the protection of the refugees and provide opposition a segment of the Syrian territory secure from the air strikes of the Syrian air forces. Splitting some segment of Syria and military control over a portion of the Syrian territory by the opposition would certainly demoralize Assad and put considerable pressure on his regime. Terrorist organizations are also using the power and security vacuum in Syria to their benefit. I want to declare my great concern over the presence of Kurdish Democratic Union Party, PYD, in northern Syria linked with PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by both Turkey and the United States. Assad has recently announced that he has left his northern territories to this terrorist organization. However it is unacceptable for Turkey to tolerate actions of the PKK-linked elements in northern Syria, which will damage Syria's territorial integrity and political unity. The unity and territorial integrity of Syria is of crucial importance for Turkey.

Distinguished guests, ending supremacy is crucial for winning this civil war-wide opposition. The Syrian regime has 60 Russian MIG-29ers, as well as sophisticated round-based air defense systems equipped with modern Russian missiles and Russian rudders. Last year, new SA-17 batteries have been added to his air forces. In recent months, Assad has been using air strikes and helicopters to attack his own people. From airplanes, barrels full of explosive TNT, break disks, and screws are thrown on civilians without any discriminate target. The possession of 1,000 tons of chemical weapons by the Assad regime is also of grave concern. These all show that we may be avoiding intervention, but intervention may be coming towards us.

However, invasion by multinational coalition forces should be ruled out as a possibility as management of the after effects can be too difficult and costly for a long and uncertain period of time. Furthermore, the experiences with Afghanistan and Iraq show that invasion has also a heavy price in terms of the domestic politics of the coalition countries, and has unpredictable outcomes. Taking the Kosovo conflict as a model—just a model—military experts estimate that 500,000 troops are needed in Syria for a possible invasion. Today, the possibility of a resolution being accepted in the United Nations Security Council that will pave the way for a military intervention seems impossible due to the voter rights of Russia and China. Even if this [is the] consensus in the UN Security Council, the model in Libya, in which air forces were used predominantly for vacating Gaddafi's forces, cannot be applied to Syria, for Syria is more densely populated and the regimes military forces are mainly located in the urban areas.

If the same technique in Libya is used in Syria, then large numbers of civilian casualties should be expected.

Arming the opposition has been recommended by many, but again in this we have to be very, very careful. The possibility that the sophisticated weaponry, such as the anti-craft and anti-ship missiles—missile systems—can be handed over to terrorist organizations is of great concern. It is known that real-time electronic satellite and human intelligence regarding the weaknesses of the Assad regime are crucially important. Experts advocate that the disintegration of the regime, as well as the defections of the Syrian military and the political figures, should be worked on. It has been reported that after the 18th of July bombings that killed three senior political figures close to Assad, the desertions and defections from the regime have been accelerated. Similar techniques can be used in the collection of intelligence, as well as in controlling the computer systems of military command and control air defense networks, computerized weapons systems and communications. Supporting the opposition by providing online intelligence, real-time information against the regime, and increased funding are crucial.

Another scenario for the future, other than invasion could be the deployment of the peace enforcement troops in Syria after the opposition makes some progress. If the Bosnia conflict is taken as a model, there are some calculations. And these calculations show us that a similar peace enforcement operation would require the deployment of 200,000 troops within Syria as a minimum. This, at the moment, seems the most viable option.

Distinguished guests, Syria is not Libya where societies are unconnected to their neighbors. The conflict occurring within Syria has the potential to spread out to Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, which have similar mosaic societies from different sects, ethnicities, tribes, and religions. The spread of the conflict to these neighboring countries paved the way—would pave the way—for instability, insecurity, and intensifying violence in the whole region, aggravating the already very fragile situation. Permanent security and economic prosperity will be achieved in the Middle East if, and only if, the Arab-Israeli conflict is peacefully resolved. I personally believe that this to a large extent depends on the improvement of the Turkish-Israeli relations, Hamas-Fatah reconciliation, and cooling relations with Israel—a more conciliatory style—and keeping lines of communication open are imperatives for lasting peace in the region. Sustainable security can never be achieved to military action, but through democracy, freedom, job creation, and alliance building. The situation in Syria is a chess board for a new cold war. This once more reinforces the unique emerging position of Turkey in the Middle East as the only NATO country bordering Syria and a close ally and a strategy partner to the United States. The Middle East owns more than half of all oil reserves commercially feasible in the world and one-third of all oil production globally. For this reason, the region's importance should not be underestimated. The future of Egypt and Iran, the civil war in Syria, and the Arab-Israeli conflict are all intertwined. And intelligent, modern, and moderate leadership in the region could resolve Israeli-Arab conflict, calm down the situation in Iraq, repress Iran, and enforce the Assad regime [to] step down.

Looking to the future now—forecasting 25 years ahead—what are we predicting for Syria? Of course, we should have Syrians build a new Syria, respectful of human rights, the rule of law, and the rise of ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities. Women's empowerment is a must if we are to achieve permanent stability and democracy in Syria. Societies that oppress women cannot achieve any progress. I, of course, do not have a crystal ball for the future, but first and foremost in order to make a forecast for Syria for the next fifteen years, we should make a forecast for the world.

Distinguished guests, I believe that the 21st century will be the century of the United States and Turkey and their strategic alliance. By 2025, Turkey, strategically located between the crossroads of Russia, Europe, and the Middle East, will appear as a regional power. Turkey is now the world's 17th largest economy. And by 2025, it will be among the top ten economies of the world.

Distinguished guests, towards 2025, Russia's role is also very important. Russia, I predict will work on reestablishing its sphere of influence in the Cold War days including central Asia, [the] Caucasus, the

Balkans, the Baltics, and Eastern Europe. Russia has now a strategy instrument to control Europe—the valve on the natural gas pipeline. Belarus, Armenia, Serbia, and Ukraine will be close allies of Russia. In the next 15 years, I predict that there will be considerable threats toward the territorial integrity of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Serbians—ethnic Serbians. Russia's close ally, Serbia, will want to unite with the northern Kosovo, Republika Srpska, that is one of the entities of today's Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Montenegro and establish a state of Greater Serbia. Turkey cannot allow this, as more Bosnians than Bosnia-Herzegovina and more Albanians than Kosovo are leaving Turkey as Turkish citizens. The United States cannot allow this either, as these successions from Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina will increase Russia's sphere of influence in the Balkans and contract that of the United States.

In the next 15 years, I predict that Russia's Europe front will certainly be a fault line. The Caucasus region, on the other hand, will be another fault line. Russia will not want to give up Chechnya; rather, given the chance, it will try to penetrate to the south within the borders of Georgia. There are two countries in the world that will not allow Georgia to be invaded. One is the United States, and the other is Turkey. Central Asia's energy resources are important for Russia, and Russia will not want the influence of the United States in central Asia anymore. Given Russia's absolute to enlarge its fare of influence in the next 15 years, the rivalry between the United States and Russia will be more severe. These are all predictions. The Istanbul-Bosporus, the strait between the Aegean and the Black Sea, is a barrier for Russia against reaching [the] Mediterranean. I believe that by 2025, Turkey and the United States will be very close allies, with common goals and interests in the region. I would like to thank you all for listening and I would like to say that I am ready for questions. Thank you very much. [Applause.]

Ellis: Thank you so much. First of all, I just wanted to start by thanking our co-sponsoring group. It's a pleasure working together with you and [to *Gundes-Bakir*] it's an honor and privilege to have you here with us today to hear a firsthand report on what's going on in Turkey, where there are so many pressing problems. I will be asking you a few questions on a few different areas that you actually covered, and then we will open it up to the audience. I will try to get to as many questions as possible.

So I would like to begin with Turkey's request for 18 to 20 patriot missiles, and I would like to ask you: doesn't this risk an escalation of the conflict with Syria and an expansion of the conflict throughout the region? And how likely is it—these missiles, if and when they are approved and come, will be coming from Germany, Netherlands, along with troops, but I read that it will take over a month—so how likely is it, one, that you have the psychological impact on the neighbors, and what they're thinking about getting missiles and troops there is, and also, it is going to take a little time for them to come? So I'd like you to address in a little more detail the impact of getting patriot missiles, which is a substantial change.

Gundes-Bakir: Actually, Turkey is a member of NATO and we well know that from the last months—the developments in the last months—that [the] Turkish border has been attacked by the Syrian regimes' airplanes. As I have said before, there were five deaths, all of them women and children. And also many more people were wounded. Everyday a shell fragment falls to the Turkish part of the territory. So actually our security is threatened—this is one thing. So we have to find a solution for that and this is patriots, only for defensive purposes; they are not for attacking any country or not. All our interest is defending our borders—this is our first priority. And the second is, the number can be seen high but we have 910 kilometers border with Syria. So that's a huge border and it is difficult to control all of this border. And we know that [in the] Aljazeera region, which is to the northeast of Syria, there are PKK terrorists. And Turkey has to defend itself against these kinds of developments. PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization, not only by Turkey, but also by the United States and the European Union—it is definitely a terrorist organization and it is a very brutal terrorist organization. So we have to find a solution for this security problem. That's why Turkey asked for the patriots, actually. And the number is so high because the border is so long—910 kilometers border is a huge border with Syria.

Ellis: You mentioned, though, that if you got the patriots, it might lead to a no-fly zone. I mean, how likely do you think it is that this will happen? Also, you mentioned that the Syrian opposition has joined together now. How crucial do you think that is to the resolution of the conflict, because I'd like to turn from both the fighting side to the prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria, and what role you think Turkey will play, and what are the ideas for getting the Russians and the Iranians onboard in order to make this happen?

Gundes-Bakir: Actually starting from the no-fly zone, of course de facto, if you put patriots, this will be some kind of warning to Assad, first of all, that our borders are protected very well. But, in terms of the no fly zone, definitely we need that no-fly zone because we know now that inside the Syrian border, there are camps. And in those camps there are civilians, children and women living now. Turkey is sending, inside Syria, via the Red Crescent, humanitarian aid. But last week we heard in the newspapers that these camps were bombarded by the Russian, sorry, Syrian airplanes. And so, that shows there is no safety—there is no safety in those camps within Syria. And, as I've said before, we have a large number of refugees—Syrian refugees—within Turkey now; its 200,000 people and we are supporting them wholly from our own national resources.

And these are only people who are living in the camps. But we have also Syrians—upper and middle class Syrians—who came with their passports. And, yeah, their numbers are not that high and they are very well monitored because our police takes their—they have to take a permit to enter Turkey and we know their location very well. But now they are middle class, but by time their money will run out and these refugees will also be taken after by the public funds of Turkey. So the number of people we are looking after will tremendously increase in the near future. So we definitely need to find a solution within Syria for these humanitarian camps and shelters and aids. To do that, we need a no-fly zone. Perhaps not all of the north of Syria, but I would propose the province of Idlib within Syria, where the opposition has gained some successes—victories—and in that region, if we can achieve a no-fly zone that would serve two purposes. The first purpose is that it would shelter many, many refugees from Syria, because now there are 1.5 million internal displaced Syrians. These are official figures. But some say this may be as high as 3.5 million—some resources talk about this number. So we have to find the region where we can protect these people. This is one. And the second is that we'll demoralize Assad regime. You know, the morale of the regime is also important. There should—we should encourage the disintegration of the regime. And to do that, a no-fly zone would be very helpful. And the second question is a peaceful resolution?

Ellis: Yes, what are the prospects for peace and what are ideas for getting the Iranians and the Russians on board?

Gundes-Bakir: Well actually in the Council of Europe, I gave three speeches—two speeches—on behalf of the European Democrats because I am in the Bureau of European Democrats. And we talked then that—even in January and April—that Russia and China and Iran, perhaps, should be on the table when we are negotiating, because otherwise we cannot find a permanent solution for the problem. And they should definitely be called to the Friends of Syria meetings perhaps, and they should be included in these negotiations. Of course, our permanent aim is peace there—nobody wants war. And the best—the worst peace is always better than the best war. That we should not forget—never. So what can be done is perhaps we should wait until the opposition makes some progress in Syria and then the peace enforcement forces should be deployed there—definitely—to make the situation—this peace as permanent. And then, of course, a democratic transition is in the agenda.

Ellis: You talked about the economic strain caused by the influx of huge numbers of Syrian refugees. I'm wondering—has your country reached a breaking point? Are they thinking of closing the borders? You talked about establishing more camps inside of Syria. So could you elaborate on that a little more?

Gundes-Bakir: Actually, as I have said before, we will never close our borders to the people of Syria. We have an open border policy towards the people of Syria. And, regardless of their religion,

regardless of their sect, and regardless of their ethnic identity, that's for sure and we stand in full solidarity with the Syrian people. That will never be the case. But actually we want to give a good quality help—humanitarian aid—to them. Currently, in the camps, we are giving three times daily meal to them. And also there are education facilities. If there are those of you who want to visit those camps, you can, actually, by getting permission from the Turkish government. They give really super service to these immigrants. They're our hosts, they are not refugees to us—they are our guests, I'm sorry—I am a little bit tired. *[Laughter.]* Because yesterday I came from Turkey. They are our guests and they are not refugees for us. So their children can have schooling facilities and up to four o'clock they reapply the Turkish curriculum to them. There is kindergarten, primary school, high school. And also four o'clock in the afternoon, they apply their own curriculum in Arabic. Their education for children continues indefinitely. And then, there is electricity in every tent. There are television facilities. There is open cinema in the camps. And within Syria also, we send two times daily meals. But recently the refugees have complained that, okay, your appetite is different from ours. *[Laughter.]* So we started to give them some cards and we load money in that and then they can buy whatever they want and then they can cook their own food. That's another thing. And in every tent we gave them tables, chairs, beds, and etc. and there are children's playgrounds in the camps.

I visited three camps 10 days ago, approximately, and every face was smiling, and there are washing machines and the women were so happy because those women are women who have never seen a washing machine before in their lives. And they said to their husbands, "Okay, you see this. When we return back to Syria, you should definitely buy me one; I won't wash the clothes by myself anymore." *[Laughter.]* So they are really happy. Also for the other—washing dishes and etc.—there are machines. There's no doubt about it. And there's no problem with the drinking water. And the toilets and the showers are above the recommendations for the United Nations. So every 20 people, there is one shower for instance. So we have no problem with that—water supply we have no problem. We have hospitals and medical care for the refugees. And also, we have security also for them. We have also the police and 24-hour monitoring—so that there is no security problem for them in their camps. And also there are security personnel always in the camps. And I don't know if I should say also that there are religious services. If they are Christian they have church, if they are Muslim they have mosque, and so on.

And then we have courses for them—for the women, because we try to keep them busy, you see. They are people who have come from big traumas—they have lived big traumas. There was a woman there whose son was killed and she was crying sometimes, and there are children whose fathers were killed. So we want to keep them busy so that they can forget their agonies actually. So there are a lot of courses for women for sewing and for painting and for ceramic courses and so on. And what I notice—there are Turkish courses for the children and the children were speaking fluent Turkish when I came there. I wish I could show you the videos. They were singing Turkish songs to me. So they were smiling, they were happy refugees actually. So the service in the camps is very good. And what I noticed, the location of the camps was very nice. It was a mountain place full of pine trees in the province of Hatay of Turkey, which is very nice place actually. And one of our parliamentarians told the camp director, "If there is one tent empty in the future, spare it for me. I want to stay in this camp." *[Laughter.]* It was a nice place actually.

Ellis: So my last question is about Turkey's role in the region and [the] events [that] seem to have overtaken the zero problem with neighbor policy. But Turkey has been involved in the talks in Egypt with Hamas and there is some talk now of the Turkish prime minister going with a Hamas leader to Gaza. I don't know if this is going to happen, if you have any information on that. But Turkey is involved in a lot of different aspects and you mentioned the importance of trying to improve relations with Israel, which have been strained. And so I'm just wondering if you could kind of wrap all these things together. Actually, today is the day that there's the vote at the UN on giving the Palestinians non-member, observer status. And so if you could just talk about how Turkey is navigating those things and then we will open it up for questions, so get your questions ready.

Gundes-Bakir: Okay. So I think this is related to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Actually for peace to be permanent there, I think the first prerequisite [is] to establish one authority from the side of Palestine. Two authorities, one Fatah and one Hamas—actually this will not solve the problem. And the second thing is, they should come together, they should unite their forces, and this will actually pull Hamas into the legitimate area. And that will help the integration of Hamas to our normal world, and [to] see the realities. You see, I think to reject the reality does not help anyone, and today Israel is a reality in the Middle East. So you have to accept it. There is this state there and you have to live in peace with this state. Because war—as I have said before—the worst peace is better than the best war. So people are dying and these deaths do not help anyone. And I think Hamas in the near future will also understand this. But we have to give them a chance and actually come together and form a coalition, and go in the future perhaps to elections. And whatever the people of Palestine want, we have to respect that. And if we can pull this Hamas into the arena, that will actually change them, by time. That's what I believe. And we should not isolate them or reject them, rather we should try to pull them to the political arena so that they can see the realities, they can integrate into our world today.

Ellis: Okay well let's go to questions, and if people could please just go to the mics, identify yourself.

Question: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm David Saltzman of Saltzman & Evinch. Thank you very much for that illuminating talk. You're here in Washington, steps away from the capital. I know you'll have a variety of meetings with our government while you're here. You've touched upon patriot missiles and talked about a no-fly zone as well. What is your message? What are you going to request of the United States government while here?

Gundes-Bakir: Actually, the message is clear. I think we need, definitely, at some part of the northern Syria, not all perhaps, but we need definitely a no-fly zone for the sake of refugees. And last week's developments—you saw—that Assad's airplanes bombarded the camps of Syrian people. And those camps are there without any defense towards the air strikes of Assad. So we definitely need, for sure, we definitely need a no-fly zone. Definitely. That's the clear message I think.

Question: Hi, I'm Marlene Kaufmann with the Helsinki Commission. Thank you very much for a very informative speech. Just back to the no-fly zone—given the Chinese and Russian vetoes at the United Nations, who would enforce this, NATO? And has your government asked NATO for a no-fly zone in addition to the patriot missiles? And if I could, just quickly, on the Iran and Russian involvement in a settlement with the Syrian National Council, the Syrian opposition—given Iran's support for Assad, the fact that their forces are in there murdering Syrian civilians, will the Syrian National Council and the coordinating committees accept Iran at the table, do you think?

Gundes-Bakir: Actually, perhaps not Iran, but definitely Russia. We should put him on the table. Not Iran perhaps, but you are right. You corrected me. Not Iran, but definitely Russia. We should negotiate—continue negotiating—with Russia. Of course, also, I want to send a message to Iran from here. How can a state, who is saying that it is Islamic, support a dictator who is bombing Muslim people? That's the contradiction. An absolute contradiction and that's not acceptable. It shows a hypocrisy, a type of hypocrisy actually—you are right. And then we could put, we should definitely sit into the negotiation table with the Russians, but that's not questionable. And, as I've said, perhaps the patriots, they could establish a no-fly zone, de facto, but we need to sit on the table for diplomacy actually. Now it's the diplomacy time. But to do that, Turkey alone cannot do it. We need the support of the international community and that's why I am here actually. Thank you very much.

Question: Hi, my name is Esin Efe. I am a graduate student at the George Washington University. And thank you for being here today—especially your predictions for the next 15 years were most illuminating. I was wondering if you could make a prediction about—you already touched on Iran—Turkey's relationship with Iran, especially, you know, we've been trying to have a good relationship with them, a healthy relationship with them, but given everything that's going on in Syria and just the dichotomy there, could you speak to what you think is going to happen in the next 15 years with Iran?

Gundes-Bakir: With Iran? With the relationship with Turkey and Iran? Actually I talked about some of my thoughts when I was answering the lady. Actually, Iran has to, has to go through a period of transition, I think. Perhaps we need an Iranian Spring, in addition to Arab Spring. [*Laughter.*] Indeed, indeed. And it cannot go on like that. I'm really concerned of some of the news I read in the newspapers. That some—for instance, I will give you a small example, but it's important to me, since this is [the] Women's Foreign Policy Group. From a lot of universities, the Iranian female students, they cannot—they are not allowed to attend—a lot of universities. So some departments are solely for boys, or let's say male students, and some departments are solely for female students. And that is, I think, very, very dangerous, though they are thinking that some professions are not for women, some professions are only for men, and this type of backward thinking, it will take a country nowhere. And I have just spoken about hypocrisy. It is a big hypocrisy that they are supporting this dictator, who is killing innocent people and the same time, they are supposing—they are saying that—"We are Muslim." This is not acceptable. This is another thing. And also, to be realistic, they don't show a good example of Islam to the world. Islam is not this—what Iran is showing to the world. And because of their image, they are damaging Islam, they are giving damage to all the Muslim people—1.5 billion Muslim people in the world—and they are scaring people actually. That's another thing. So definitely, we need an Iranian Spring, in addition to Arab Spring. And I was serious when I said that.

Question: Hi. My name is Bahri Aliriza, president for Polytrade International Corp. I'm also president for the Northern Cyprus College for Society and also a candidate for Loudoun County Supervisor. I have a two part question. One, is, I know you've been talking about the patriot missiles and actually there's been a lot of talk about it for quite a while now and I'm just wondering what the delay is. I mean, as far as I understand, it's approved or it's still in the process—Germany is supposed to come on board, mandate it, etc.—if you could dwell on that a little bit. And the other question that I'm a little bit confused about—you were talking about the no-fly zone, but I know the Turkish government has been talking about a humanitarian corridor. So I guess what I'm trying to get is how do you get the food and the supplies to the people that are suffering on the ground and if you could distinguish the difference between a no-fly zone and a humanitarian corridor, if there is one? Thank you.

Gundes-Bakir: Actually to implement a humanitarian corridor, you need a no-fly zone otherwise you can't implement it. He will come and bomb you. That's what the Assad airplanes are doing actually, they are bombing indiscriminately as I have said. And can you clarify the question about patriot missiles—I'm not a military expert so if it is something military, I'm not the correct person...

Question: I just want to know why it's taking so long, if the delay is on the part of the Turkish government or if they're waiting for NATO to approve it; or is it—I think Germany is supposed to mandate it, or something—if you know what the delay is, why it's not there already.

Gundes-Bakir: I think it is not late. Some experts came to Turkey, making calculations—they are doing visibility study at the moment, as far as I know. So we will see in the near future what the result is.

Question: Hi I'm Leah Odinec from AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee]. I—the question actually has already been asked, but you only answered part of it about Turkey's relations with Israel, the upcoming visit. The statements your prime minister made last week were not necessarily—don't lead an observer to believe that relations between Israel and Turkey are going to be cooling. But you said otherwise. So if you could just clarify—is there a change, is there an opening for normalization with the relationship between Turkey and Israel, and is Erdogan—is this a planned visit or is this something that is going to happen because clearly that would be of great concern, certainly to the United States, which views Hamas as a terrorist organization, and the European Union as well does.

Gundes-Bakir: Actually—thank you for the question. What we are looking in the region—in the Middle East—what is our plan for the next 25 years, we want to establish peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, a kind of open economies, open borders, increased trade, and perhaps increased investment of

Turkey to the Middle Eastern countries. This will also include Israel and you cannot exclude it of course. I definitely believe, wholeheartedly, the relations will improve and normalize. But that's how it should be, there's no question about it. What we need is just some time, I think.

Question: My name is Frances Trix; I'm with the Wilson Center. And, I have real problems with this Syrian opposition group. I can't imagine that a group in [*inaudible*] will have a clue how to work in Syria. And the last thing I want is a Salafi group there. I would feel much more comfortable with something from Turkey. It scares me to think what will happen to all the different minorities in Syria, the Alawite, the Druze—Syria's a motley group and we don't need something from the gulf in there. Thank you.

Gundes-Bakir: I think your concern is about the Salafi people there. Actually opposition is formed from different groups. That's what we know, indeed. And it contains some Salafis. But, as far as we know, not all Salafis are members of al-Qaeda. What is dangerous there is al-Qaeda, in my opinion, because they have a different understanding of the world. They are indeed a terrorist organization. So, well also, this is very important—Syria indeed has a multicultural society. There are societies from—there are Christians, Assyrians, Kurdish societies, Sunni Arabs, and so on. So there are many, many groups within Syria. So Sunni Arabs are one group, so we cannot exclude them from the opposition and we cannot isolate the opposition from the social-cultural ties of the Syrian people—Sunni Arabs are also part of the Syrian people.

But, of course, there's a red line between a peaceful application of religion and some perverted applications or interpretations let's say—there is a very distinct line there. And I'm sure, the Syrian people, when there's democracy, after the process of that era, the Syrian people will be able to draw that line very, very definitely. And it will be a democracy. What I am predicting for the future of Syria is a democratic Syria, respectful of human rights, it's a pluralist Syria, and if it is under the influence of Turkey, this will happen because Turkey is a very good example for the Arab countries. It's a liberal democracy, it's a peaceful country, and it's a liberal economy, it's pluralist also. There are many minorities living peacefully in Turkey. And it's a very good example for Syria. And the terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda or groups like that, cannot find base in Turkey because the society is moderate. They will not support these types of extreme groups and similarly for Syrian people. I think we should trust Syrian people and we should understand that. This is true for Hamas also and for Syria. It's better for them that, to take role model Turkey, rather than Iran. So the better the relations of these two—Hamas and Syrian people with Syrian opposition—with Turkey, the better it is for the world.

Question: What is Doha doing in all this? Because Doha is paying for all the arms and that makes me so nervous.

Gundes-Bakir: That was a critic saying that the Syrian National Council does not represent all kinds of minorities or all groups. So that was a critic about Syrian National Council. That's why all people came together in Doha. Also there was another critic saying that these people who are in the Syrian National Council, they are out-of-touch exiles who were educated or who spent most of their time in the capitals of Europe and the United States and who had lost touch with the inner Syria. And that was a critic. That's why they came together in Doha: to include all groups, including the local communities—the representatives of local communities. So that all parts—all groups—in the society of Syria are represented in this opposition.

Ellis: So we have time for a few more questions. If anyone else has a question, I'm going to try to take the questions together.

Question: Catherine Read with Crisis Action. You painted a very rosy picture of the Turkish refugee camps. Unfortunately when we've been in contact with Syrians in those camps, it's not quite as glowing as you said. I was wondering why it's the position of the Turkish government not to allow in international humanitarian aid agencies into the camps, such as UNHCR and some of the other big organizations

that deal with this frequently, they have the resources to do it, particularly as you mentioned with the winter approaching.

Gundes-Bakir: Actually, this information may not be correct because two days ago I was in Geneva and I spoke to Erika Feller, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and she told me that she was in Syrian camps and she had just been back from Turkey, visiting Syrian camps. Not the Syrian camps, the refugee camps—Syrian refugee camps. And the NGOs and—anybody can visit our camps. They are open. There is no problem about that.

Maybe you remember Angelina Jolie came with the UN High Commissioner, UNHCR, Guterres. Together they visited all of the camps. And so, the camps are open. As I have said, I wish I brought you the videos. If you don't believe me, you will come with me to the camps. Is that okay? I will take you and we will visit and we will ask the people there, "Are you happy or not?" Believe me. They are very happy because most of the things they saw in these camps, they did not see those living standards in their countries. Especially minorities. They were left there without any service by Assad because they were seen as the spies of Turkey during the time of the old regime. So they were given no service at all. And since now that they have seen washing machines, electricity, cinema, saloons, and etc.—these are new things for them. And the schooling capacity is very good. Hospitals and health services are very good, high-quality standard. So the Syrian refugees are indeed very happy. I can take you. I will give you my card, we will go together, and you will see with your own eyes because to tell is something else, but to see with your own eyes is better. We'll go together.

Question: Hi, my name is Mindy Reiser. I'm vice-president of an NGO called Global Peace Services USA. We work in peace-building and conflict resolution. You talked about the interweaving of the entire Middle Eastern region, and I wonder if you'd say a few words as to how you, as a parliamentarian and a very thoughtful person indeed, see the conflict in Egypt. And what you think Turkey could do, you talked about Turkey as a role model for other countries and clearly developments in Egypt are rapidly spinning out of control with all kinds of consequences. So please share some of your thoughts as to what Turkey could do in terms of its good offices.

Gundes-Bakir: I think democracies are like human beings. We are born, we are in the baby period, we grow to our adolescents' age, then we become mature. And this is the same with the democracy of Egypt. I think Egypt needs some time. And Turkey—of course, Turkish democracy is not new. We have a parliamentary democracy system since 1923. So it's a long time and Turkey is a very good model for Egypt. And Turkey will do everything to develop—let's say improve—levels of democracy in Egypt in the near future. That's what I predict also. I cut my talk at some point here because I did not want to bore you. But if I had been able to speak more, I would come to this Egypt issue. And I certainly believe, at some point in the future, there will be no borders between Egypt or other countries, the Middle Eastern countries—and even Israel, throughout to Turkey—and they will be like open borders and a prosperous region, increasing trade. We will see this. And even the real zero problems occurring in those regions. We will see that, in our lifetime. But we need some time because it's been very new that Mubarak has gone and now the democracy in Egypt is like a baby. And we have to protect that baby, that's very important.

Ellis: I will thank you officially. If you could join me at the podium because we have something to give to you. We've come to the close of an absolutely wonderful program and I just want to thank Dr. Gundes-Bakir for joining us, for coming all the way from Turkey to give us a firsthand report on what's going on with these very difficult issues that her country and the region are confronting. We would like to present her with this certificate. I'll read it first, from the Women's Foreign Policy Group, for leadership and international affairs. We wish you all the very best and hope that you'll be keeping in touch with us and follow how things develop. Thank you so much. [*Applause.*]