HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The UK's relations with Turkey
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Watch the meeting

Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins, Daniel Kawczynski; Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell, Nadhim Zahawi.

Questions 1-42

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor William Hale, School of Oriental and African Studies, Professor Rosemary Hollis, City University, Mr Ziya Meral, Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, and Mr Bill Park, King's College London, gave evidence.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and to our inquiry into the United Kingdom's relations with Turkey. This is our first evidence session. I am delighted we have such a distinguished panel to do, to a degree, the scene-setting for the Committee's inquiry. I invite our witnesses to identify themselves for the record, starting with Professor Hale.

Professor Hale: I am afraid you must speak up, Chair. I have an infection in my ear, and I am only hearing through my left ear.

Chair: That was not a problem 33 years ago, when we were last acquainted. Professor, if you could just state your name and position for the record.

Professor Hale: My name is William Hale. I first went to Turkey when I was 18 years old, in 1960, and I have been backwards and forwards between Turkey and Britain ever since. I was an academic, first at Durham University, where the Chair was actually one of my students, 33 years ago. Later, I was at London University School of Oriental and African Studies. I ended up as Professor of Politics, with special reference to Turkey. I have written several books on modern Turkish history, politics and foreign relations. I retired 10 years ago, in 2006. For my last year, I had a sabbatical year, and I was offered a job while I was there in Turkey. I stayed in Turkey for 10 years and came back last year.

Chair: Thank you very much. I am really glad that I did not blight your career because you had to oversee me as a student.

Mr Meral: My name is Ziya Meral. I am a resident fellow at the British Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research, which is a civilian and military think-tank that looks into defence and security issues. I work on Turkey and Middle East issues, as well as thematic issues around religion and violent conflict in Africa and the Middle East.

Mr Park: Bill Park, King's College London, based at the Defence Academy at Shrivenham. I am also a council member for the British Institute at Ankara. I am currently writing a book on Turkey's Kurdish problems—in the plural—and I am a visiting scholar at TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Ankara.

Professor Hollis: I am Rosemary Hollis. I am Professor of Middle East Policy Studies at City University. Before that, I was at Chatham House and, before that, at RUSI. I hope I have something to offer in the form of comments or impressions of bilateral relations between Britain and Turkey. I can also perhaps offer a little on Europe and Turkey, in part on the basis of my participation in bilateral dialogues and meetings over the years.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much for that introduction. We are likely to be interrupted by a vote at some time between 3.50 and 4 o'clock. I am not sure exactly when it will happen, but plainly our session will be interrupted, and we will return after the Division to complete the session. My apologies for this outbreak of democracy disrupting our proceedings.

We have grouped subjects for questioning you. Before each group, I will try to indicate which one or two of you on the panel might choose to lead. If any of you take violent exception to what has been said or have a different perspective to offer, I encourage you to break in, but I am not expecting all four of you to comment on each question as we go through the session, otherwise it may take a long time indeed.

These questions will perhaps be aimed at Mr Meral and Professor Hale. I have a general question. Could you identify the countries that are Turkey's key allies both regionally and globally? How strong a relationship does it have with them? I accept that that question, in light of recent experience, appears to have a rather dynamic answer, but I would be grateful if you elucidated the point in your answers. Perhaps Professor Hale would like to start.

Professor Hale: The United States is Turkey's main ally. I do not think there is much doubt about that. They go through difficulties in the relationship, but when the chips are down, the most important strategic foreign relationship that Turkey has is with the United States. That of course is allied with Turkey's membership of NATO, which brings in the other NATO countries.

Among the other NATO countries—most of them are also members of the European Union, so it is rather difficult to separate the two things—

Germany has an absolutely crucial relationship with Turkey. It is primarily economic, but it is also due to the existence of a large Turkish working community in Germany. Germany's locomotive role within the EU economy is also absolutely crucial.

On the whole, Turkey has had good relations with Britain up to now, with the single exception of the Cyprus crisis in 1974, which was an important break. On the whole, relations have recovered.

Among the other countries, Turkey has a very unstable relationship with Russia. Last year, the Turkish Air Force downed a Russian warplane that was said to have flown over Turkish territory. It is generally admitted that it had very briefly penetrated Turkish territory. The Russian Government reacted very harshly to that. Fierce economic sanctions were passed on to Turkey, and that did serious harm to the Turkish economy. There was then a dramatic reconciliation between President Erdoğan and President Putin earlier this year, in the middle of the summer. Now, things seem to be back to Turkey and Russia having a close relationship.

To some extent it is a zero-sum game, in the sense that gains in Turkey's relationship with Russia are likely to correspond to losses in Turkey's relationship with the United States and vice versa. That is not entirely true—you can have situations where Turkey has developed a close relationship with both the former superpowers.

Among the other countries, a critical relationship is that with the Republic of Azerbaijan. It is probably the country that Turks feel closest to. There is a strong ethnic connection there, although there is a religious difference between the majority of the populations.

Turkey has also in the past had a reasonably good relationship with Egypt, which has been fractured recently but is now hopefully on the mend. Again, rather like the relationship with Russia, there is a very unstable relationship with Israel. I would say that the primary ally is undoubtedly the United States. The European countries, especially Germany, are mainly important for economic reasons. France is also an important partner. Then we have other local and regional states. Azerbaijan would be the top of them, together with Israel and Egypt.

Mr Meral: That is a very comprehensive answer. I second all of that, with just a few brief additions.

I think Qatar is a significant ally at this particular juncture, although traditionally it has not been. Overlapping with Qatari ambitions for the Middle East, particularly since the Arab spring, they find themselves sharing more and more an ally kind of relationship. In fact, Turkey is opening a military base in Qatar, so that shows much closer engagement with them. Saudi Arabia is an ambiguous, but at the same time dependable ally. They find themselves overlapping in a lot of their concerns.

Iran is the trouble card, just like Russia. It is a transactional relationship that at any stage can go into a crisis or a closer network.

I second that Germany, and the UK as well, are the two closest allies of Turkey within the European Union. Successive British Governments have been quite consistent in their handling of Turkey, from the Blair Government through the Brown Government and the coalition, to Cameron and even now. That has built a really good rapport between the two states. So, within the European Union, Germany and the UK have been significant. We have seen that with the recent visit of Boris Johnson, the Foreign Secretary, to Ankara. That went really well actually, even after the entire Brexit process. I think that is a really good reflection of the relationship.

Q3 **Chair:** I got a sense that the Turkish Government and authorities pull their potential punches with Boris.

Mr Meral: At a public level, I think they welcomed the delegations that have visited, since the coup attempt, prior to the visit of the Foreign Minister, and even since his visit. Those have been quite high, actually, and have involved a wide spread of British delegations going into Ankara, building up to that momentum.

As far as I can see from sources within Turkey, they were able to separate the personal relationship issues from the strategic interests of both countries at this stage, particularly the Brexit implications. The implications for Turkey are clear—if the UK leaves the European Union, Turkey loses one of its biggest supporters of that membership—but it might also open a door for Turkey to solve that problem, because any deal agreed between the UK and Europe might actually provide a chance for Turkey, as a new category. But in terms of trade, defence engagement, Syria, Iraq and counter-terrorism, those things brought it together very effectively. Behind closed doors, I am not certain.

Professor Hollis: I wanted to add something though. A certain amount of continuity emerges from what has been said in terms of Turkey's bilateral relations with various players, and that they go up and down. I am conscious that as of, let's say, 2011 or the eve of the Arab uprisings, Turkey was in an enviable position. Everything was going well. The economy was booming. Countries like Britain had the perception that Turkey represented a model for how democracy and Islam can be combined. Turkey's relations with all the countries in the Arab world were increasingly positive and there was a kind of lovefest between Erdoğan and Assad of Syria. There was resolution of the Kurdish issues on the cards. It was a kind of golden period, in retrospect, and Turkey even had a formula for regional relations, which was "zero problems with neighbours". My perception is that, since 2011, many things on many fronts have gone wrong for Turkey. That needs to be borne in mind when trying to understand what it feels like to be the Turkish regime and just how much the Turkish Government may see its so-called allies and friends in the west as actually increasing its problems.

Q4 **Chair:** Mr Meral, what is the extent of the Qatari financial relationship with Turkey? How much have they bought influence in the relationship as an investor or otherwise?

Mr Meral: I am certain that I will remember the exact figure in a few minutes, but I forget my birthday as well, so it is a bit hopeless. It is very true—the foreign direct investment from Qatar into Turkey has been quite substantial. That—not only Qatari funding, but the wider funding from the region—has actually helped Turkey a lot vis-à-vis surviving the economic vulnerabilities but also ups and downs domestically and regionally. The figure, which I will definitely come back to, is substantial.

At the same time, they find themselves with overlapping interests; it is not just finance. For example, in the Russian-Iranian-Turkish relations triangle, the geo-economy and geo-energy implications mean that they always have a pragmatic, "At the end of the day, we have to work together" attitude, but with Qatar, in addition to that financial/economic benefit, Turkey finds itself overlapping on questions around Syria and the future of the Arab spring. In the second part of the Arab spring—perhaps 2012-13—they both saw an emergence of Muslim Brotherhood-shaped Sunni dominance across the region, which both of them saw as an opportunity, and they found themselves aligning on that geopolitical agenda too. That makes it a bit different from a merely financial interest, although that is still substantial.

Q5 **Mike Gapes:** How important is the diaspora? The diaspora community in Germany is obviously very large, but there are diaspora Turkish communities in lots of countries. Do they play a role in determining whether or not Turkey has good relations with those countries, or is it the other way around? Related to that, Turkey's relations with some countries have been affected by their attitude to the Armenian genocide issue. I would be interested in your comments on countries it has a bad relationship with and why.

Mr Meral: I have a few ideas. The fact that there are, I think, more than 4 million Turkish citizens in Germany makes it a substantial block. Now that citizens are able to vote from outside the county as well, that has opened the door for Turkish parties to actively seek votes in Europe and other diaspora communities. In terms of the impact on their domestic politics, they clearly can play a part, particularly in Germany. When it comes to Britain, I think the number of dual citizens—British citizens with Turkish citizenship also—is around 250,000, if I am not mistaken.

Mike Gapes: Mainly Turkish Cypriots.

Mr Meral: I think they are a larger number. Turkish politics also plays itself out in those communities. There is the segregation: you have the Kurdish blocs; you have the pro-AK party blocs; you have the anti-AK party blocs. That is why it would be very difficult for a Turkish MP to emerge from elections to the House of Commons: the profile and identity would really impact on that. You see a substantial presence in Germany, and the Turkish Americans are also very effective on the networking and

business side of it—they are much more organised in terms of activities in DC—but that is not really duplicated much beyond there.

Professor Hale: Just to add to something that Ziya said, on the other hand, the expatriate communities in Germany and other countries have extraordinarily little impact on Turkey's domestic politics. In other words, there is not that much backflow, if you like. One of the reasons is that until now, most Turkish citizens living abroad have not had a vote in Turkish elections. They are going to reform that, I believe, and that could make a fairly substantial difference, but of course it is also the case that the community in Germany is divided very much between Turks and Kurds, so they are not going to speak with anything like a united voice in Turkey's own politics. My impression about the Turkish community in Germany particularly is that now we are getting into the second or third generation, these people are virtually Germans. That is to say their links with Turkey are getting weaker and weaker all the time.

Mr Park: If you look at the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in Europe over time, I would say they have had quite an impact. Kurds in Europe could organise as Kurds—establish Kurdish organisations, speak a Kurdish language, and so on. It was the same with Islamists when Turkey was under secular rule. There was a blowback into Turkey from the capacity of Turks in Europe to organise in ways that were denied them in Turkey. I would say that the face of Turkey has changed because of those capacities of diaspora communities to organise and develop agendas, which in Turkey was made too difficult for them—especially Islamists and Kurds.

Q6 **Chair:** If I can turn from allies to enemies, of the four enemies I might list in order of priority, which is the most important of the enemy forces paragraph to address—sorry, I've put that in a soldierly way—and what has changed since 2011? Mr Meral, perhaps you will start and then Professor Hale can comment. Of the four priorities between countering Islamic State, countering the YPG, countering Iraqi Shi'a militias or countering Assad, put those in a batting order for what the top Turkish priorities are and then explain any changes since 2011. Plainly, President Assad would have been at the bottom of that list, if on it at all, in 2011.

Mr Meral: You are absolutely right. Particularly in 2012 and 2013, Assad and the Syrian regime would have been at the top of that list, but with the changes in the field and the expansion of the YPG, in addition to the collapse of the peace process in Turkey, it has actually put PKK-related groups as the top, No. 1 national security threat, officially. Secondly, it has put the Islamic militants increasingly as a direct threat to Turkey. From 2011 until 2013 there was an assumption that somehow these militants would not necessarily attack Turkey. They could have some sort of power over the Sunni tribes in the Mosul area and they could manage some of these complex relationships, but I think that ISIS taking over the Turkish consulate in Mosul and kidnapping briefly—I think for a few weeks—Turkish diplomats and military personnel was a genuine wake-up call, and we have had a lot of seaside bomb attacks since then. So that has put the ISIS threat at the top.

I think Assad is a direct threat to Turkey. It is still there, but it has weakened. Even though Turkey still insists on this policy that there is no future with him in Syria, which is a fair point—a point the British Government share as well—the priority of that is not necessarily there any more as it was in the 2013 period.

In terms of Iraqi Shi'ites, the Shi'ite question was not a direct threat for Turkey. In the first part of the al-Maliki Government, they were able to work with him. It was only in the later stage that they really fell out. In Iraq, until pretty much that time period when they fell out with al-Maliki, they went from seeing the entire Iraqi development as a security threat vis-à-vis the independence of Kurds to now realising that they could actually work with the Iraqi Kurds, because they want to be a state and you can have a rational relationship and energy, business, trade and security matters. Since the fall of the al-Maliki Government and the resurgence of Iran, particularly its importance in Syria and in Iraqi affairs, Iraq has become yet another geopolitical ground between Turkey and Iran—just as we see in Syria and just as we see in Iraq. So the tensions that we have now between the Shi'a Government in Baghdad and the Turkish Government are much more reflective of the deeper tension, with Iran and Turkey finding themselves at odds. But I am not aware of any security statement or official stand that sees the Shi'a militias or their expansion as a security threat to Turkey.

Mr Park: While we have been sitting here, the news was coming in that Turkish forces have increased in Silopi. Erdoğan said that if the Shi'a militias approached Tal Afar, which is a largely Turkmen town, they would regard that as a serious problem. The Defence Minister has accompanied this build-up of Turkish forces with the statement that they have to be ready for all eventualities. One of the Turkish eventualities now in northern Iraq is the Shi'a militia. I think they are really worried about that. They have been backing Sunnis, and Nujaifi brothers have a militia group. They have been helping to train them to get some kind of foothold in Mosul, and I think the Shi'a militias offer a threat to the Turkish game plan for the region. The Shi'a, at least if it is only this little window, have really increased in their visibility in the Turkish thinking about security.

Professor Hollis: On that point, I believe the UK might have some sympathy with Turkish concerns that what replaces ISIS in Mosul would not necessarily be an improvement.

Q7 **Chair:** Mr Meral, you described Turkey's misappreciation of Islamic State, if I can put it like that, in the early days. Of the armed groups that Turkey is supporting post the Arab spring, would you define any of them as extremist?

Mr Meral: It depends on which side of the fence we look from. There was definitely a sense in Ankara—particularly between 2012 and 2014—that pretty much any of the groups that might want to topple the Assad regime might be a group that we can work with. Prime Minister Davutoğlu did continually say, though, "Unless we step in and take proactive actions, these groups will radicalise and go more extreme," and I think that

happened. Some of the groups have evolved and new groups have emerged—I think that more than 1,000 different militant groups have floated in Syria since the start of the crisis. Some of them would definitely be counted as extreme.

Technically, some of them definitely have affiliations with al-Qaeda. Some of them have affiliations with different groups with different patronages and clientele. Some of them are like warlords with local networks. Some of them have tribal alliances and so on. That is why it is a genuinely messy situation. Turkey has come under a lot of criticism, particularly for its alleged engagement with the al-Nusra front, which is often thought to have some kind of direct or indirect relationship with al-Qaeda, or to work in unison with them. That has been the main area of criticism of Turkish engagement.

Q8 **Chair:** Are they up to anything in Libya?

Professor Hale: May I add something to that? There is a good deal of speculation about what sort of agreements affecting this there have been behind the scenes between the Turkish and Russian Governments. One version of what has been going on is that there is an agreement between Turkey and Russia, basically that Russia will not intervene to prevent Turkey from going through with Operation Euphrates Shield while, on the other hand, Turkey will not interfere in what is going on in Aleppo and will try to persuade the FSA people on the other side of Aleppo to drop their relationship with al-Nusra and the other suspiciously radical groups. The Turks may be trying, somewhat late in the day, to regularise a more effective relationship, which would also bring them into closer alignment with the western position on this.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

Chair: We will now resume the meeting. I shall try to be as clear as I can for the benefit of Professor Hale. Mr Meral, I would appreciate it if you could transcribe anything that I or my colleagues say that is worth transcribing if Professor Hale doesn't completely hear it the first time. We will try to be as clear as we can.

We will move on to discussing the issue of the Kurds. I invite Nadhim Zahawi to recommence the questioning.

Q9 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Thank you very much, Chairman. Clearly one of the issues that the Turkish Government have is with the YPG/PYD.

Chair: My apologies—I should have indicated that I would like Mr Park to lead off on these questions. The rest of you can then come in behind.

Nadhim Zahawi: Even better. The Turkish embassy said in its submission that it is convinced that the YPG has direct links to the PKK, and that the PKK has been, if anything, spreading its wings not only in Sinjar, when the Yazidis were driven out by ISIL/Daesh, but with the PYD/YPG on the Syrian side of the border. Can you describe to us the relationship—the dynamic—between the PKK and the YPG? Obviously, the KDP on the Iraqi

side of the border don't have a particularly good relationship with the YPG. In fact, they tell us that they are not permitted to operate in YPG territory where there is a big KDP following that they want to service. The PKK is close to the PUK, and then of course there is the operation in Shingal. What is the relationship between the PKK and the YPG?

Mr Park: There is something called the Kurdish Communities Union, which incorporates groups from Turkey, Syria and Iran. It includes HDP, the Turkish Kurdish party—the PKK—the YPG and the PYD in Syria, their Iranian counterparts and even groups in Iraq, plus civil society groups, local political parties and so on. They are all under one umbrella, and they all in some way owe allegiance to Abdullah Öcalan.

Turkey is not wrong in saying that those groups are related. Salih Muslim, the head of the PYD in Syria, spent time up in the Qandil mountains with the PKK. Indeed, there are calculations that suggest that up to a third of PKK fighters in Turkey in the past have been Kurds of Syrian origin crossing the border, so that interlocking relationship is really very close. Technically, they are different—they have a different label on their front door—but ideologically and organisationally, they are very much under one umbrella. They meet on a regular basis and interact in all sorts of ways, so Turkey has a point. It is worth making that point, because when Turkey sees that the YPG might take control of northern Syria—Turkey's border with Syria—what it sees is the PKK, and it is not wrong. It would be a second front, if you like, for the PKK to confront Turkey.

I was looking at Twitter before I came in here, and one of the things the Defence Minister said in the context of what is reported to be a build-up of forces in Silopi, which is going on as we speak, was, "We can't allow the PKK to gain a foothold in Sinjar," which is slightly odd, because they have had a foothold there for two years now. In any case, this force seems to have all sorts of possible targets, one of which is the presence of the PKK in Sinjar. Why? Because the YPG and the PKK forces move from Turkey through Iraq to Syria. It is not so much about the Turkey-Syria border. That is their route—it runs north of Mosul. It is an important part of the fight that is going on in Syria, and if the circumstances change, it would also be an important route for the fight with the Kurds going on in Turkey. Turkey is right to say that these are more or less the same group.

Q10 **Nadhim Zahawi:** If you go back historically, even Prime Minister Erdoğan took a very different view to what is now the KRG, and the coalition of the KDP and the PUK, in the early days. If you remember, in Gulf war 2, he wouldn't allow the coalition operations to come through his territory and into northern Iraq, and he was deeply entrenched against any form of autonomy for the Kurds in Iraq. Slowly but surely, over time he has changed his mind, and now there is an economic relationship, as well as a political relationship. President Massoud Barzani spoke at the AK party congress a few years ago in Kurdish, and they have spoken together in Diyarbakır in Kurdish. Is there a possibility that all the stuff in Syria is a bit of posturing, and that one day you could see Turkey accepting Kurdish cantons in a similar autonomous-type shape in Syria?

Mr Park: First of all, the relationship that Turkey has with the KRG is much more with Barzani and his party, the Kurdish Democratic Party, than it is with PUK or Gorran. It's based on all sorts of things, including family business—where does the oil money go?—co-operation against the PKK, and so on and so forth. You mentioned economic trade and Turkish investment, which is substantial.

However, there is also a struggle going on in Syria between the PYD—let us say the PKK-associated Kurds—and groups that are closer to the Iraqi Kurds, especially Barzani but also to some extent PUK, and the Taliban. Michael Gunter, an American scholar, wrote a book about the PYD that was called "Out of Nowhere", because everything that everybody understood about the Syrian Kurds over years did not include much discussion of the PYD. They came from nowhere; I think they were only formed in 2011.

Most of the Kurdish groups there were Barzani or Taliban-associated; they related more to the Iraqi Kurds. What you have is a Turkish-Barzani alliance, especially, against the PYD: Turkey because the PYD is PKK; and Barzani because these guys have supplanted his people in Syria. There is a sort of Kurdish split that reinforces this relationship between Turkey and Barzani that exists for all the reasons you mentioned, including the trade and the co-operation against the PKK and so on and so forth.

Professor Hale: If I could just add something, the other issue is that within the area of Rojava, which is the Kurdish name for the area that the PYD controls in north-eastern Syria, about 40% of the population is not Kurdish. Some of it is Turkish, but the big majority is Arabic. Whatever happens, there is said to have been a good deal of ethnic cleansing within that area. Certainly, if you're looking at a town like Manbij, which has been occupied by the YPG—they are refusing to withdraw—only a quarter of the population of that part are actually Kurdish.

In the longer term, there is bound to be a conflict between the Arabs within Rojava and the PYD, in which Turkey is overwhelmingly likely to take the Arabic side, obviously. On the idea that somehow or other you can convert the PYD into some sort of co-operative force, which is what the Turks were very anxious to do originally, it is very hard to see how that can be achieved now, because of the conflict within Rojava.

Mr Meral: I think that is an excellent point. The fact that they are able to turn 180° on Iraqi Kurds reflects that pragmatism—the fact that, at the end of the day, business, security and stability win. At the same time, as long as PKK remains as a domestic security threat to Turkey, because of the direct link that Bill explained, it will be impossible for any Turkish state to bypass that. The fact that the same militants crossed the border to fight Turkey, and then crossed the other way to become freedom fighters—that's not just going to work in any shape or form.

Initially, even Salih Muslim, the head of PYD, visited Turkey. There was a lot of direct engagement. Turkey did hope that it might go that way, which is how it engages with Iraqi Kurds. Actually, a Kurdish-governed, stable

northern Syria could be a really good asset for Turkey, particularly given the fact that Syria is bound to be very unstable and fragmented in the near future. Again, however, that depends on PKK.

From a strategic perspective, if PKK had not sought to declare independent zones, and if the peace had not collapsed in Turkey, we could possibly have seen a completely different dynamic unfolding. However, unless PKK pulls its militants out of Turkey and declares a ceasefire, and the Turkish Government also somehow goes back to the political process as a solution, and not this heavy-handed, military kind of response, I am afraid that Turkey will continue to perceive any advancement of Kurds in northern Syria as a direct security threat to itself, which would lead it to take action.

Q11 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Because, of course, the peace process originally envisaged that the PKK fighters would leave Turkey and effectively go into what is KRG—northern Iraq.

Mr Meral: Pull out of the country, and ultimately, the politics were going to take the main stage. In 2013, there was that genuine momentum and hope, but some cynicism and critical perspectives. In 2014, we saw it slightly crumbling. In the lead up to the presidential elections in 2014, there was an assessment that somehow this was the end of Erdoğan; the AK party was losing votes and so on. Also, developments in Syria meant that every party involved in this process lost the incentive for peace. The AK party did not get as many Kurdish votes as it used to get in that election, and it was clear that it was losing that bloc. Clearly, PKK saw a brand-new horizon and could pursue a whole other direction. Suddenly, we lost an historic opportunity.

Q12 **Nadhim Zahawi:** On that point, we heard from senior politicians in the AK party that the Gülenists may have played a part in sabotaging the peace process.

Mr Park: That rumour was around at the time. There were kind of two peace processes. One was in 2009. Suddenly, you started to get, while the peace process was going on—what was then called the Oslo process, as it applied to the Kurdish issue in Turkey—you had all these Kurdistan Communities Union people being arrested. There were about 8,000 or 9,000 arrests, and there was this idea that Gülenists were behind it. Maybe they were; maybe they weren't. The problem is that these things are only ever allegations, and in any case, the Government did nothing to stop it, and did not even make any negative comment about it.

I am very wary about this idea that the Gülenists are behind it. I mean, we have just had the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper closed down for backing both Gülenist terrorists and PKK terrorists. So the Gülenists are against the PKK, but *Cumhuriyet* is in favour of both of them. Gülenists are everywhere; they are now saying that it was Gülenists who shot down the Russian plane. We do not know what the truth is. Certainly, the Gülenists had penetrated the police and the judiciary. There were a lot of arrests of Kurdish activists in that 2009-10 period.

Q13 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Is there circumstantial evidence?

Mr Park: Well, this is about Gülenism, rather than the Kurdish issue.

Chair: We will come to the Gülenists later, in slightly more detail. Before we get deep into them, we are on the Kurdish issue.

Q14 **Nadhim Zahawi:** My final question: is there a risk that the conflict with the PKK is spreading through the south-west of the country, given the developments in Syria? Is that a risk for Turkey?

Mr Park: The PKK have said that they intend to spread it to the whole of Turkey. Whether they will or not—

Q15 **Nadhim Zahawi:** Do they have the wherewithal?

Mr Park: That is one of the problems. The PKK are very involved in the south-east and they are very involved in Syria, so whether they have the capacity to start this war going in the south-west or west of Turkey—and whether it makes sense for them to do so—is another question, but they have rhetorically said that they will take this war to Turkey proper.

Mr Meral: If we look at the last 16 months or so, since the suicide bomb attacks by PKK militants in Ankara, in a very crowded rush hour, there is another group related to the PKK, the TAK—the PKK is great at creating acronyms, so when there is an acronym, it often goes back to the PKK. They were also involved in firing small-scale explosives towards the airport, and undertook some other suicide operations as well. That is the only possibility—that we might see more suicide bomb attacks exploding in western Turkey. They did that in the '90s, and had kind of vowed that they would not do it again, but in the last year, they have lapsed. There have been attacks on Turkish soldiers—I think they have taken the lives of more than 1,000 Turkish soldiers over the last 16 months or so—but I think the fierceness of the fight seems to have calmed down a bit at the moment. Perhaps the PKK is focusing its energies more on Syria at the moment, and sustaining their advantages there, rather than fighting in Turkey. It seems like the Turkish Government have really shifted gear into a much more proactive engagement with the PKK, which makes them vulnerable, definitely, to attacks across the country.

Q16 **Ann Clwyd:** The Kurdistan Parliament has had no meetings in the past year. How does that affect relationships between the Kurds and the Turks? Who speaks for the Kurds in the Turkish Parliament?

Mr Meral: Do you mean in Turkey?

Nadhim Zahawi: The KRG?

Ann Clwyd: Yes, the KRG. There is no Parliament meeting.

Mr Park: The KRG is itself hopelessly split. Remember, they had a civil war in the 1990s between the KDP and the PUK. You now have the KDP, the PUK and Gorran, which broke away from the PUK, so there are three parties. PUK and Gorran fell out badly; they have recently reassembled and are now challenging Barzani and the KDP. Politically, the KRG is really

deeply split at the moment. When the battle for Mosul was approaching, it was not clear that they were going to be able to get over this political division between them.

You ask who speaks for the Kurds. First, we are only talking about Iraq. Barzani speaks for his Kurds, Hero Talabani speaks for her Kurds, and the Gorran leaders speak for their Kurds. There are three groups. They have pretty fixed support. There is not a lot of fluidity between those groups, though there is some. Each group speaks for its Kurds. It is a fairly fixed division of support. That applies only to Iraq, not Syria or Turkey.

Q17 **Ann Clwyd:** But that has affected relationships between the Kurds and Erdoğan. At one time, the Kurds and Erdoğan were very close—

Mr Park: The Iraqi Kurds.

Ann Clwyd: Yes.

Mr Park: It is the case—"always" is too strong—that the KDP certainly has evolved to be more pro-Ankara, whereas the PUK and Gorran are a little more divided, I would say, three ways, between Ankara, Tehran and some commitment to Baghdad—some commitment to the maintenance of some sort of Iraqi enterprise.

Those things have changed over time. Both the PUK and the KDP have not only fought each other, they have both fought the PKK. They have both also entered into face-offs with Turkish forces at different times. These things can be quite fluid. For a number of years now I think we have been able to say that the KDP is the pro-Turkish element of the Iraqi-Kurdish movement; PUK and Gorran are a little bit more divided in their connections, let's say. I would say that is where they are.

I think this is what has happened. I have not spoken to Barzani but I have to a lot of people around him. They did not like Turkey's inaction when Mosul fell. That shook their faith in Turkey. His son, for example, has been quite outspoken about that, and so have some of the others in the KDP. Tehran came to their aid very quickly against Islamic State; Turkey did not. That really shook the KDP leadership.

The other thing that is quite important is that they, like everybody else, are just not sure where Turkey is coming from. They see a loose cannon and they are not quite sure how much to invest in Erdoğan. He is still their most obvious outlet, including for their oil, which goes through a pipeline down to the Turkish coast.

Turkey is still the source of most economic trade with Kurdistan but politically they are a bit shaken. They have nowhere else to go much, but they are a bit shaken and not sure how much to invest in Erdoğan. I think they rather like—at the moment, with the battle for Mosul—the American and Western presence. In a way that, for the KDP especially and maybe for the Iraqi Kurds generally, has become the alternative to Ankara.

Q18 **Ann Clwyd:** One of the questions we talk a lot about in the Committee is

the role of the peshmerga. The peshmerga seem to be composed of several groups. The question was asked of us last week in our IPU conference, "Who is paying the peshmerga?" Because the Iraqis tell you that the Kurds are not paying the peshmerga, so who is paying the peshmerga? Is it the Iraqi Government? And who are the peshmerga?

Mr Park: At one level it is a Dad's army. If you have been to Iraqi Kurdistan you will see these old guys in ill-fitting uniforms standing outside a hotel or on a street corner. As you go towards Mosul, which I did last in March/April, still within Kurdistan but towards Mosul—there are road blocks all the time—you get much tougher, smarter guys, who have got proper uniforms and they are really disciplined, young, fit and trained by the Americans, British, Germans or maybe even by the Turks—whoever. The peshmerga are now very split as a force. You still have the idea that every Kurd will take to the hills with a gun and is expected to do so, but you also have a much tighter, more organised, more disciplined fighting force.

Q19 **Chair:** Answerable to who and paid by who?

Mr Park: Trying to work out who pays for anything or where the money goes in Kurdistan is practically impossible. There have been lots of stories about peshmerga not being paid, but when you see them out there, they have uniforms, they have guns, they look fit and they are ready to fight. They are not ill-fed. The money is coming from somewhere. You might say that the Kurdistan Regional Government pays them, which is what is supposed to happen, but it might not be that. It might come through the Barzani fiefdom or through the Talabani fiefdom—sort of informal money. Also, remember that we are all aiding Kurdistan and the peshmerga in some way. The Germans just made a big deal about what they are supplying to the peshmerga, and that, in terms of equipment or money, finds a way of filtering down. Somehow these guys are fighting fit, but quite where the money comes from and how it gets to them is a complicated question.

Chair: Let's move on to what I hope is slightly simpler territory than the opaqueness of Kurdish policies: the relationship between Britain, the European Union and Turkey. I invite Ian Murray to ask questions and perhaps Professor Hollis would like to lead off the answers, and then Professor Hale.

Q20 **Ian Murray:** We talked a lot at the very start about the historic relationship between Turkey and the UK and the countries' being very strong allies, with the exception of one or two hiccups and perhaps Cyprus in the 1970s. What are the key challenges at this moment? And to split that question in two: what are the key challenges excluding Brexit, and the key challenges post-Brexit, in terms of our relationship with Turkey?

Professor Hollis: When you say excluding Brexit, do you mean if Brexit hadn't happened?

Ian Murray: Yes, because we get caught up in this place and we will

continually be swamped by Brexit, but I would like to hear about the challenges in the bilateral relationship between the UK and Turkey and then maybe talk about the challenges of Brexit beyond that.

Professor Hollis: Okay. In the early dialogues that I observed six or seven years ago, what I was conscious of in the relationship between Britain and Turkey was that the British were thinking of what role Britain would like Turkey to play in the Middle East. In terms of British interests, there was a perception that Turkey could shoulder some tasks that the British couldn't. The perception was that the Turks—because they are neighbours of the Arab states and are in some senses middle eastern, but are also a candidate country for the EU and are getting more and more like us—see our point of view and must be increasingly on the same side as us on a lot of issues, including democracy, human rights and so on. That was six or seven years ago. There was a very strong perception of enthusiasm for the bridge that Turkey could be between the European Union and the Middle East.

I don't believe that in their heart of hearts those British Ministers really thought that with maximum British help they could get Turkey into the European Union. I think the relationship between the European Union and Turkey progressed on the assumption that it was always going to be a candidate country—that one player or another inside the European Union would find a reason and a way to block actual Turkish membership. I, for one, was absolutely astonished when, during the Brexit campaign, there was the claim that Turkey was going to become a member of the European Union. I never, ever found that credible, but I think from a Turkish perspective it was convenient to them to play along with that.

There were a lot of advantages for Turkey during a certain period to go along with the idea that the Kurdish issue could be resolved peacefully. After all, there were a lot of other positive things going on in terms of Turkey's relations with Syria, so the PKK wasn't being used by the Syrian Government against Turkey. Circumstances were auspicious for Turkey to look like a genuine, serious candidate country. Similarly, I think there was a significant constituency inside Turkey that saw the advantages of candidacy for EU membership as a way to get reforms of the kind they would like to see in Turkey.

I was trying to say earlier that, given the number of significant changes and issues that have arisen in the last six years, I think it is in a way perfectly understandable that Turkey has to be seen differently by the British; that there is no way to see it in that positive role. I would hugely caution, though, against latching on to what is perceived as a Turkish overreaction to the Gülenist issue and to the coup attempt on a very high-moral-ground, European Union, human rights platform. Be careful what you wish for in Turkey. I think some of the advantages that Britain and other Europeans have seen to this Turkish role have to do not only with the positive developments on human rights that did exist but with a perception that Turkey can be tough, Turkey can play a buffer role, Turkey can absorb all these refugees and Turkey can handle some of the groups fighting against the Assad regime in a way that no European Union

country possibly could. So Turkey has been valued for, if you like, in EU terms, its faults as well as its virtues, and it would therefore be unwise to leap to the conclusion that everything was going swimmingly towards Turkish membership and now they're blowing it.

This is the last thing I will say on this count is that, in so far as Turkey was expected to play a role for all of Europe and for Britain as a bridge to the Middle East, how come Turkey was not given the lead to do that job, which was supposed to be its perfect role? Instead, you have the French, you have the Germans, you have the British, you have sundry other Europeans, you have the Americans—with or without European co-operation—all doing their own thing in Syria and Iraq. They are in no sense following Turkey's lead. When the Turks say to the British—as they did while Philip Hammond was still Foreign Secretary—"Look, we've always been saying we need a no-fly zone; we need a safe zone on the border," the British say, "Well, it sounds good, but actually we don't want to put our service personnel in harm's way given the Syrian air defences and so on; we just don't think we can put boots on the ground." So the British cannot carry through on their encouragement of Turkey to do certain things. The Brits have got insufficient assets—with Brexit, now less than they had—to be much use to the Turks, it seems to me.

Q21 **Ian Murray:** Professor Hale, you said in your written evidence to us that Brexit was a "nasty shock" and that some of the populist strategies that were put out by the leave campaign verged on xenophobic, in terms of their sentiment. How has that been viewed in Turkey, and how will that affect the Turkish-UK relationship?

Professor Hale: I have to say I was surprised that it didn't get more of a reaction in Turkey than it actually got. I suspect the reason was that there were a lot of other preoccupations on the Turkish side, as well as on the British side. I expected Turks to be much more outspoken on that issue.

The Foreign Secretary went to Turkey at the beginning of last month and was incredibly lucky because the Turkish journalists showed traditional Turkish hospitality and politeness towards guests and refused to ask him the tough questions that, in my opinion, he should have been asked. However, he then went on to talk about building—I think these are his words—a "jumbo" trade agreement with Turkey if we left the European Union. My worry about all this is that, of course we could have a jumbo trade agreement with Turkey, but at the same time an important part of the agenda ought to be the question of human rights and the democratic deficit in Turkey. The trouble is that you can't have your cake and eat it. You can't go out to the Turks and say, "We think you're wonderful, and we want this jumbo trade agreement," and so on, and at the same time say the tough things that I think ought to be said about the democratic deficit in Turkey.

Let me just continue this, because it is something we haven't dealt with very much up to now. We have to wait and see what happens on two

issues. The first issue is the mass arrests and sackings from the civil service, the armed forces, the police and so on. As far as I know, what happened was that, about a fortnight before the attempted coup, Turkish intelligence got hold of information about a communications application called ByLock—a secret communications platform that was used by the Gülen organisation. Everybody in the Gülen organisation apparently had access to it.

Turkish intelligence got the telephone numbers of all the people who were in the Gülen organisation, but they couldn't read the messages so they didn't know precisely who was actually involved in the plot of 16 or 17 July. Obviously they knew some of the people, because they had actually taken an active position, but they didn't know how far the network went into the various Ministries, etc. They had this very large list of telephone numbers, and they just went round and arrested everybody on it. This has carried on. Sooner or later, most of those people are going to have to get their jobs back, because they weren't directly involved in the plot itself. Getting a just solution to that problem is going to be very difficult.

Secondly, under the state of emergency regime, the Government is able to pass what are called decrees having the force of law, which can restrict all sorts of activities, especially the press and so on. Some of those decrees have been submitted to Parliament to be passed as normal statute law. If they are passed as normal statute law, they can then be appealed to the constitutional court eventually. It might be possible to take back some of those steps, but my guess is that the Government is going to be as slow to do that as it possibly can. That is the first set of questions.

The next set of questions has to do with changing the constitution and moving over to a presidential system. We don't know exactly what sort of presidential system Tayyip Erdoğan wants. Does he want an American type of system or does he want a French type of system? We should find out fairly soon. My guess is that it will be a French system, rather than an American one, but that is just a guess.

Chair: We are going to come on to these issues in a moment.

Professor Hale: Sorry, I have gone off the point.

Chair: Ian, do you want to finish off on the EU issue?

Q22 **Ian Murray:** Just very quickly—this is perhaps to each of the panellists—the Turkish embassy submission to the inquiry said that Turkey's commitment to joining the EU remains unabated. Do you think that that is the case, or do you think that the UK's removal from the European Union makes that much more difficult?

Mr Meral: Definitely Turkey is losing a strong ally for its EU bid through the UK leaving the European Union, but Ankara was under no illusion that full membership was going to happen any time soon. Both the EU and Turkey are fully aware of the problems and the limitations. Before the Cyprus issue is solved, there is no way for Turkey to be an EU state. Even without the human rights issues and the questions about migration and

visa liberalisation, there is de facto no possibility until we solve the Cyprus problem. However, it is a strategic interest to maintain that negotiation. That is why the EU is not calling it off, for so many complex reasons. It is one of these processes where the process itself, if not the end goal, has value.

Just quickly on the bilateral relations point, there is a trade deficit at the moment. Turkey exports more to the UK than it purchases from the UK. The drop in the value of sterling may decrease that deficit in Britain's favour. Security co-operation has increased a lot. It was very difficult in the 2011-12 period in regard to foreign fighters, but there is now a lot more close co-operation between Turkey and Britain.

When you look at platforms such as NATO and shared concerns over, for example, Russia, the Baltics and Crimea, Britain finds itself to have a unique bilateral and multilateral shared concern with Turkey, and that will not be affected by Brexit. The future of the eastern bloc and the threat posed by Russia is felt in both capitals beyond the EU conversation. What it will mean for trade is the question. We cannot negotiate a trade deal with Turkey before Brexit is clear, because Turkey is part of the European customs union. They are already looking to update that. The jumbo deal cannot happen, practically or legally. Bilaterally, it is already increasing trade, which is good.

Q23 **Mike Gapes:** May I ask you about the Justice and Development party, the position of President Erdoğan and the ideology of the party? Is the AK party an Islamist party?

Mr Park: The AK party grew out of the range of Islamist parties in Turkey—most immediately the Welfare party. You have to say that it is an Islamist party. What that means is more complicated, but its root is in Islam. When it first came to power, it was also a broad church. It had a liberal element and even an almost secular element. Most of those people have gone. They have either been massaged out of the party by Erdoğan or they have left of their own accord or they were trouble. The party has increasingly come to obedience or loyalty to Erdoğan himself. It owes its position to him. He handpicked most of the MPs at the most recent elections. People depend on him in a patronage system and sympathise with him. I think the AK party has changed quite a lot, and it has become much more a mirror of Erdoğan himself than it could have ever been when it first came to power. It was much broader, now it is not so much.

Q24 **Mike Gapes:** Do the rest of you agree with that?

Mr Meral: I totally agree with everything Mr Park said. The words I would use to describe the AK party are: religiously conservative, yet nationalist. That does not necessarily mean Islamism. I would define Islamism as a political movement that seeks to create a state based on Sharia law and so on. The AK party does not have that. There is no talk of Sharia or Islamisation, but they are religious nationalists. They see Islamic cultural values and identity as having an importance in the public space. It is closer to an American evangelical perspective, with certain symbolic issues

that matter, such as abortion and gun control. It is very similar to AK party's identity politics and culture wars, but its pragmatism is very consistently non-Islamist. They find themselves closer to Muslim Brotherhood, which was not an intention. I was doing field work in Egypt at the time when the popularity of President Erdoğan was really high. Even half of the Muslim Brotherhood does not see them as Islamist—they say "it is a businessman". In fact the fiercest criticisms of AK party mostly come in from Islamists as well.

Q25 **Mike Gapes:** I remember when Erdoğan visited Egypt there was a big demonstration at the airport to greet him. He made some remarks about secularism, and there wasn't a demonstration to say goodbye in the same way. Were Morsi's party and others very disappointed?

Mr Meral: They really were disappointed when he said the constitution should be secular and that was his belief. Then he had to go on to say, "No, when we say secular, we do not mean godless and no space for Islam." In Turkey the demands for Sharia have been dropping, really interestingly. You are looking at 10% to 15% of Turks demanding a Sharia-based system in the country, and the AK party's has some of them in its constituency, but by and large the AK party is traditionally Anatolian culturally and a religiously conservative cohort. That is not really Islamist. In fact, there are Islamist movements in Turkey and Salafism is taking hold in Turkey for the first time in so long, which goes to show that the AK party's excesses in terms of use of power and questions around corruption and business interests have attracted a lot of criticism from Islamists, saying, "Well, this party may be mostly interested in its power and interests. It is not really driven by Islam as an agenda."

Professor Hollis: Can I simply say, have you read David Owen's book, "The Hubris Syndrome"?

Mike Gapes: No.

Professor Hollis: I recommend it. Because I think that would be the concern: when someone who achieves office by fighting up through a party system then arrives in power and starts to exercise it, it is not automatic that they fall prey to the hubris syndrome, but when they do, it can be pretty alarming. It seems to me that a lot of enthusiasts of the AK party became disappointed that the leadership became so internally powerful, then fell out with the Gülenists, and now it is all about perpetuating it in power more than it is about an Islamist agenda.

Q26 **Mike Gapes:** What are Erdoğan's ambitions and beliefs apart from power?

Mr Park: There might be nothing. I think he might be a streetfighter who reacts to the situation he finds himself in, to land a blow and dodge a blow. He looks for fights. Some time back when he was Prime Minister, I was once asked by a Turkish newspaper not to use the words that "the Turkish Prime Minister is someone who could pick a fight in an empty room". It said, "We can't let you say that about the Prime Minister", but I stand by it as an observation. He is a natural streetfighter. I think he is a

great tactician, basically in the sense of a streetfighter, but he has lost just about every friend he ever had along the way.

Ambitions beyond power? I am really not sure there are any. What we has—I think this goes back to the question of Islamism and what it means. Certainly neither in him nor in Turkey is there a big demand for Sharia law, but if you look at the education reforms, the licensing and taxing of alcohol, the wearing of headscarves and social pressures in Turkey, it is Islamist in contrast to the secularism we used to see.

I think he has an image of Turkey that looks a bit like himself and people like himself, but whether he has a grand ambition is another matter. He has a sense that Turkey should be a great power. He does not know quite what that means and how to get there.

Professor Hollis: And he was mates with Assad, who is hardly an Islamist.

Q27 **Mike Gapes:** Over the years his party has reformed the relationship with the military. It has done a lot of reforms that we all welcomed, and then people have gone— Abdullah Gül has gone and Davutoğlu is out. Is Erdoğan now the main power centre? Does he control the whole of Turkey now?

Mr Meral: Before the coup attempt of the summer, I would still say Erdoğan was only as successful as his constituency wants him to be. But since the coup, it is very true that he has centralised power more than at any other moment. His constituency is more behind him, which enables him to do things. That fact is often missed in analysis. Erdoğan reflects his constituency. He reads it really effectively. He meets their grievances.

Q28 **Mike Gapes:** And his constituency is the poor?

Mr Meral: No, not necessarily. It is no more the case that the secular Turks are rich and the conservative ones are poor. In fact, there is a really wealthy religiously conservative elite in Turkey. It is the Turkish culture wars between the traditional Kemalist establishment/coastal Turks, and the conservative Turks on the other hand, with much more Anatolian cultural values. It is the history of 100 years of grievances, management, military regime and reaction to it.

If there is one ideology, I explain it from a sociological perspective, vis-à-vis a constituency that is always scared. This coup attempt confirmed their fear that if Erdoğan and the AK party were to fall, they will go back to where things were. In other words, there will be a much tighter military Ankara-secularist regime that excludes them. That is why there are all these expressions of, "Stand firm. We are behind you. If he falls, we fall." You hear a lot of that fear. The closest I can get to an ideology is maintenance of that grievance that that cohort will lose if AK party was to disappear. Without Erdoğan at this moment, there is nobody, and that is his making. We have seen how Davutoğlu was effectively sidelined and pushed out of the party in a beautiful choreography. So "House of Cards Ankara" is an extremely tense political machinery.

Q29 **Mike Gapes:** Are there any other power centres in the country?

Mr Meral: Not at the moment. Businesses are really powerful, and there is a huge business interest that sustains them too. There is a religiously conservative business network that is really important for the AK party's future.

Mr Park: When you have purges, it is not Erdoğan who sits there and identifies names of air force officers who should be sacked.

Mike Gapes: It's not Stalin.

Mr Park: Well, I think Turkey is becoming a party state. A better example would be Hitler. There will be different factions, and what is happening down the system is that both nationalist elements and AK party or Islamist elements—I don't know what label to put on them—are basically doing Erdoğan's work for him, for whatever reason, out of fear that if they are not zealous, he will come down on them, or out of opportunism or ideological commitment. But it is people down the system who are determining which military officers go, which bureaucrats go, exactly which media get closed down, which journalists get arrested and which just get sacked. There is some discussion that within this purge, there are different groups. At the moment, they are operating in accordance with Erdoğan's wishes and taking the country in a similar, parallel direction, but it is not necessarily the same groups. It is not one man up there pulling the levers and everybody is a puppet.

Professor Hollis: In terms of the Kemalist tradition, I don't know how it works now but kids in schools used to be brought up to understand that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was the nation, the hero, the leader and so on. It is not new to the AK party.

Professor Hale: It is also quite an important social element in Tayyip Erdoğan's political discourse. There is a speech he made quite early in the AKP where he talks about the white Turks and the black Turks. By the white Turks, he means the old Kemalist establishment—a large proportion of whom, incidentally, were drawn from refugees from Russia, the Balkans and other countries—whereas the black Turks implies the native inhabitants of Anatolia, who are now the majority in coming to power. He says, "There has been a division between the white Turks and the black Turks, and your brother Tayyip is a black Turk." So he is making a distinct appeal to that section; but what is also very interesting about it is that he does not come from a peasant background. It is not a rural background. His father was part of the generation which migrated into the city—Istanbul—during the '40s. Tayyip was born and brought up in this tough, working-class waterfront area, down in Kasimpaşa; so he is representing the peasant or country people who have been transferred into the urban working class. What is also interesting is that he still presents himself as a Kasimpaşa type—the man from Brixton, or—

Mr Park: Canning Town.

Professor Hale: That was a mistake.

Mike Gapes: Canning Town a mistake: as a West Ham season ticket holder—

Professor Hale: There is a fascinating social and cultural dimension apart from the Islamic aspect, which is what makes the AKP's appeal so strong—plus its incredibly good grassroots organisation, compared with all the other parties. They have far more people on the ground. They can get their people out in elections and referendums, and so on.

Chair: That was fascinating. Perhaps we can now move on to their former brothers in arms in coming to power, the Gülenists.

Q30 **Daniel Kawczynski:** We all, obviously, watched the coup unfold on our televisions screens, and it was very concerning that such an event could take place in a NATO partner of ours. How close did the coup come to being a success—to actually succeeding?

Mr Park: There is a lot of debate about that. I think not very close. To engineer a coup you need a lot more soldiers on the ground, and they need to know what they are doing. They had max 8,000 and they didn't know why they were there—even the very simple thing of closing one end of a bridge in Istanbul and not the other. You need to close down or capture all the media outlets; they went for one. Turkey has hundreds of media outlets. You need to round up the politicians; they didn't round up one. You need to neutralise those military leaders that are not with you—and they didn't. They even, for a while, held the chief of the general staff, and somehow he escaped. Also, they did crazy things—bombing the Parliament. The Parliament is not the centre of governance in Turkey—or even anywhere. I am sorry to have to say this but it is not where you would go if you are looking for power. So I do not think it was ever going to really succeed.

Chair: It doesn't stop us being a target.

Mr Park: So it was a very strange night—and we are only talking about one night. What there is, though, is, I think, a certain substance to those suppositions which say that people like the chief of the general staff and the head of the navy, who went AWOL for the night—even their head of intelligence—seemed to know what was going on, or that something was going on, and did nothing. Many people interpret that as meaning that they were waiting to see how it unfolded. It might well be—Turkey is full, as you will know, of conspiracy theories—that there was a conspiracy, and that either some people knew about it and waited to see how it unfolded, or encouraged it so that it happened, and then stood back so as to expose the conspirators. So there are all these stories going around. The truth is we do not know. There is a parliamentary commission in Turkey looking into it. Basically, it is not allowed to ask the right questions of the right people, so it is not going to produce any insight. I think that is where we are.

Professor Hale: I am a little bit sceptic about this idea. I think it is likely that the intelligence people had found out—had certainly got the list of the

Gülen organisation. Secondly, they knew that a large number of the people in the military—in the air force as well as in the army and the police—were members of the Gülen organisation; but they couldn't put their fingers on the precise people who were going to take the action—who was going to take over the general staff, who was going to take over the Parliament, etc. I suspect that the conspirators discovered that the intelligence people were on their tracks and expected that they would probably have been sacked in the—

Mr Meral: High military council.

Mr Park: There is a meeting in August.

Professor Hale: Yes, the high military council meeting, which would have been at the end of July or the beginning of August. They therefore struck probably three, four or maybe five hours before they had originally intended. They struck at 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening in Istanbul, which is entirely the wrong time to launch a coup d'état. A coup d'état has to be launched in the small hours of the morning when everybody is in bed. They had the ludicrous situation, when they attempted to take over the Bosphorus bridge and a number of other strategic points, that the armoured cars and tanks that they sent to do that job got stuck in the rush hour traffic. So it was incredibly badly handled and mistimed.

They appear to have thought that they could have talked the chief of the general staff, General Hulusi Akar, around to supporting the coup. I have no idea how they thought they could do that, but apparently they did. Of course, he absolutely refused, as did all of the other four force commanders—sorry, the three force commanders; the commander of the navy had gone away into hiding, so they never kidnapped him. They kidnapped the chief of the general staff, the commander of the land forces, the commander of the gendarmerie and the commander of the air force. Those four senior people absolutely refused to support the coup. The point is that to bring off a successful coup d'état in Turkey you have to have the support of the top brass, because a large number of people in the army are not particularly either pro-Government or pro-Opposition. They are not terribly political, but once they see which way the top brass are going, they will fall in line. Secondly, they will fall in line with whoever they think is going to win, and they could see clearly that they were not going to win and by, I would say, the small hours of that night, that the coup had already been defeated. Once they had failed to persuade Hulusi Akar and the other force commanders to come in on it, they were lost.

Q31 **Daniel Kawczynski:** So it was a badly planned coup, but were the Gülenists responsible? Would you say that they were responsible for the coup?

Professor Hale: Some of the people who were responsible for the coup were Gülenists. When Hulusi Akar was taken hostage, incidentally by his own aide de camp, and held in the general staff office, he was told by his

aide de camp to telephone Fetullah Gülen in Pennsylvania, so presumably they had lined up Fetullah Gülen to come in and try to persuade the generals to support the coup. How they thought that was going to work, I don't know, but I can't believe that Fetullah Gülen didn't know anything about it, and I can't believe that, if he did know something about it, he couldn't have stopped it. I find that impossible to believe. Apart from that, there were a number of officers involved in the coup who were probably not part of the Gülen organisation. Those were old, standard, hard-line pro-Kemalist opponents of the AKP who had probably backed earlier attempts by the military against the AKP back in 2010 and so on.

Mr Park: The military brass had claimed—in fact, I went to a meeting recently in Washington and there they all were, the head of the Turkish military intelligence and so on—and they said, "We tried to interest the Government in the Gülenist takeover" and they were not listened to. One of the problems with this idea that Akar was told they could put him in touch with Fethullah Gülen is the assumption that this organisation, which can take over the state in a secretive way and more or less take over the economy in a massive way, is so dumb as to say to the chief of the general staff, who is going to oppose them, "Look, we're Gülenists and you can phone this guy." It is contested whether he was given that opportunity. The aide de camp who apparently gave him that opportunity was beaten up badly when he initially said, "Yes, that's what I did." So I am not sure we can say that there was going to be a phone call to Fethullah Gülen if only the chief of the general staff wanted to make it.

Q32 **Daniel Kawczynski:** How responsible were they, from 1% to 100%? We have heard that they had some responsibility, but would you be prepared to give us an indicative figure of just how responsible they were?

Mr Park: Immediate responsibility—probably 60%. In terms of wider responsibility, remember the only reason you have—I will use this loose word again—Islamists in the Turkish general staff is because the AK party had effected it. The old Turkish military used to ensure that it was a deeply secular organisation. I have worked with the military, and Turkish military officers over years said to me, "Actually, I'm religious, but I can't say that in the armed services." Now, it has become okay to be religious. If there were that many Gülenists in the officer corps, that was on the AK party's watch, by and large. They undercut the capacity of the Turkish general staff to maintain its secular tradition. Responsibility in a deeper sense for there being that many Gülenists in the officer corps, if there were that many, lies with the AK party.

Mr Meral: I have talked to various people and various different groups since the coup and prior to the coup. It is definitely plausible to say that the Gülen movement played a substantial part not just in this coup but in a lot of things that have been happening since 2012. There is a timeline here, from the attempted arrest of the head of Turkish intelligence. Even Gülenists have said to me that, yes, those were their police officers; they were really concerned about the direction of Turkish intelligence. It is shocking that a religious movement could be angry at—in Britain, it would be like, say, the Salvation Army having an issue with the head of MI6 and

wanting to arrest him by using police officers who are members of the Salvation Army. That is just unthinkable. Since then, I have changed a lot of my interpretations. There is a clear political agenda here. They fell off the AK party prior to that moment in 2011 or so when the AK party started clamping down on them, and since then it has been a very dark, fierce battle.

On the coup, from all the interviews I have done, I can see four types of soldiers that came together. The first is Gülenists, clearly. If any Gülenist officer was part of it, they would never have acted on their own; their participation would have gone all the way up. It is impossible for a Gülenist general to act without consulting Gülen and getting his tacit or direct approval.

Secondly, there were definitely Kemalist soldiers, who were grieving, particularly because of the PKK. In the 12 months prior to the coup, 1,000 or so Turkish soldiers had been killed, and there has been a sense that the AK party let the PKK roam free for the past few years under these peace talks, and they were really angry at the way that had been handled. Now that they were also in Syria and so on, there was a lot of discontent.

Thirdly, there were opportunists. I genuinely think there is an element of people thinking, "A coup is happening. Turkey has a history of coups. This is the moment. I might get a promotion. I might get a slice of this." The colonel level, which could be retired or could be brigadiers, is actually a really vulnerable cohort to that, and we see that a lot. Finally, there were conscripts, who had nothing to do with anything. There are videos of conscripts realising that they were part of a coup. They didn't realise. It is a freak storm of all those things that came together.

The timeline of events in Turkey points to the Gülen movement playing a substantial part. Does that mean in any shape or form that a categorical criminalisation of all the people affiliated with the Gülen movement is justifiable? It does not, because the Gülen movement has layers. There is an outer ring of it who are innocent, lovely people who read their Koran and do acts of charity and are inspired by his teachings, but the closer you get to the much more politically active and professional side of the movement—people who are paid by the movement and under the movement's command—you start hearing a lot of this intelligence-type talk: code names being used, secretive apps, and even clear political agendas. The benefit of the doubt was given to them. Until pretty much 2012 and 2013, a lot of people, including myself, gave the benefit of the doubt to these rumours that they had wide networks, but when they fell off the AK party, all that started flashing into broad daylight and we started seeing a completely different side of the Gülen movement that we had not seen that publicly before then. I think it is legitimate to say that they played a substantial role. If they did it without Gülen's direct orders, approval and support, it would have been impossible. Even with that phone call, I don't know exactly. We don't know some of these details. I am inclined to say—

Q33 **Daniel Kawczynski:** There was some involvement, obviously, but is this

the first time that this movement has attempted to destabilise the Turkish Government, or do they have a history of doing that?

Mr Meral: The attempted arrest of the head of Turkish intelligence in 2012 was a major case of it, because it could have put him in court with some other politicians and officials, which would have completely shaken the AK party's Government. The second one was the corruption allegations—the leaks of the tapes that emerged in 2014. Some of them were about corruption, and a lot of them were about issues they had been talking about. Their media outlets and public activities were clearly aligned with it. In 2011, the AK party started decommissioning judges and prosecutors who were Gülenists. Even Gülenists themselves have told me that that is when the tensions began. In 2011 and onwards, the AK party was already trying to contain the threat to it.

I agree with the previous point that the AK party needed the Gülen movement when it was facing combat from the Kemalist establishment in the system. It saw them as an ally. The Gülen movement also got carried away by power and wanted to shape it. Ultimately, they clashed over competition over state control.

Q34 **Daniel Kawczynski:** My last question is, what are the motives of the Gülen movement in a nutshell?

Mr Meral: It is all too Turkish—Nietzsche used to say "all too human". I think an aspect of it is that the state is an attractive thing in itself in Turkey. The state is so powerful and so lucrative. There is no imagination or political or religious influence outside taking control of the state. That is the legacy of a strong nation state that has been governed in a particular way—a political framework, a structured framework.

Theologically speaking, Gülen is not the most creative of theologians. He is not really cited by wider Islamic thought globally. However, the movement is unique. They have done some really great work globally—opening schools, aligning Islamic values with science, and charitable work. That is why their Turkish domestic involvement and their desire to take control of the Turkish state has jeopardised all of their global work. That is the saddest thing.

We give them too much rationale by saying they were wise about things. If they were really wise about things, they would have let go of their ambition to take control of the Turkish state and focused on being a global movement. They are doing great charitable work around the world, with some questions around funding, visas and other issues, which are manageable, with regard to domestic courts, etc. By and large, they have been benign, which is why Gülen has been in the US. Even though the authorities in the US have been divided about him for a very long time—is he a threat or is he not a threat?—it is because of the good global charitable work.

Mr Park: It is worth saying that he went to the US under self-imposed exile because previous secular Governments were chasing him. This is not

just an argument with the AK party; it is an argument with the Turkish state, or Turkish Governments, as they have evolved over time.

I think Ziya is right. In Turkey, quite a lot of things come down to battles for control over state institutions. The Government is calling the Gülenists a parallel state, and it is right, but the AK party and the Kemalists are also parallel states, and you now have a nationalist group, the Perinçek group, which is a parallel state. They are groups that form outside the state and then seek to take it over. The state becomes a battleground for different factions.

Chair: I would like to get into the very important area of human rights, which Professor Hale pointed us to.

Q35 **Ann Clwyd:** When we met a delegation from Turkey in Geneva last week, there were about 12 Members of Parliament, and we asked them for their assessment of how strong Gülen is. They all behaved hysterically en masse and said, "They are everywhere!" Presumably that is the established attitude—they are everywhere and everybody is under suspicion. I wonder how far this clampdown can carry on without civil unrest, particularly in the south-east, where already things are very difficult, and whether it could lead to some kind of civil war between the various factions.

Mr Park: First, you are absolutely correct. Across the spectrum in Turkey, people suspect the Gülenists as being behind all sorts of things. Secularists and AK party people all have that suspicion about Gülenists. That is absolutely true, but the purge has gone way beyond just Gülenists. You mentioned the Kurdish movement. Well, there isn't much Gülenism in the HDP/PKK circles, but hundreds of teachers have been sacked, schools have been closed, mayors have been arrested, and loads—170—of Kurdish media and other media institutions have been closed down. By no stretch of the imagination are those Gülenist organisations.

Look at the military. There should be about 50 Turkish officers at NATO headquarters. There are now nine. I know military people at the embassy in London who are not Gülenists and are deeply secular. Right now they are locked out of their offices and are not allowed to perform their functions. The crackdown is now much wider. Who is insufficiently nationalist? Who might be pro-Western? Who may still be a Kemalist? Who is a liberal and a critic? Look at the media, the military and the civil service. It has gone beyond just Gülenists now, especially in the military and in journalism.

The recent decree under the rule of emergency says that all university rectors will now, in effect, be state appointed. That is to get rid of not Gülenists, but liberal, secular university rectors of the kind that we would recognise, to create much more AK party-type control over the university sector. It is now not just Gülenists. The purges are aiming beyond that.

Q36 **Ann Clwyd:** Is there an effective Opposition party?

Mr Park: No. If there is going to be resistance, one option is that it has to come from within the AK party. Because of all the people who have been ousted and their generation, it is hard to see who will pick up the mantle. Everybody used to invest in Abdullah Gül, and he would never do it. Bülent Arınç is probably the wrong generation. Davutoğlu—maybe, but he does not have roots within the party.

In any case, there are people in the AK party who are nervous about what is happening, so perhaps there could be some resistance from there. The other option—this is more complicated—is that if people from the AK party, the Ministries, the military, the intelligentsia and other political parties can come together and agree that this guy is dragging the country into a dangerous place, there might be a kind of system coup against Erdoğan, in which some factions of the AK party might find themselves aligning with other political parties, bureaucrats, soldiers and so on.

As for the other political parties, the secular party, the CHP—the Republican People's party—doesn't ever get over 25% of the vote. The nationalists are pretty much now in alignment with the AK party. In some ways, they are even worse. Then you have the Kurdish party. Those are the four parties. Any resistance has to come from within the AK party or AK party-plus parts of the state establishment.

Professor Hale: May I just add something to that? Last year, we had two general elections in Turkey. In the second of those two general elections, the AKP won back a large proportion of the votes that it had lost in the June election, especially in the south-east. The reason was the restart of the campaign of violence by the PKK, which pushed a lot of more or less moderate Kurds away from HDP—the people's democracy part of the pro-Kurdish party—and they went back to the AKP.

The critical thing is that next year, I think there is going to be a referendum on the presidential issue. It is possible that quite a lot of Kurds who backed the AKP last September will switch back to an anti-AKP position in the referendum. That is the first thing. Secondly, quite a lot of people who supported the MHP may be very unhappy about Devlet Bahçeli coming out in an alliance with Tayyip Erdoğan, and will switch their support, possibly to a rebellious group within the MHP. That would not surprise me. The point about a referendum is that the 10% rule does not apply, so you could get a number of local factions setting up on their own and urging a no vote in the referendum. In the past, opinion polls have suggested that some 55% to 60% of those polled would vote no in a referendum. If they vote no in a referendum and the no vote wins, this will be a significant setback for Tayyip Erdoğan and he might not be willing to take the risk. Are you with me? He might back off the idea of a constitutional amendment. It is not his way—I know that—and he will obviously shift heaven and earth to try and win the referendum. The way I see it, it is not necessarily public disturbances, although there probably will be some, but the shift in public opinion against the AKP since the elections last September.

Q37 **Ann Clwyd:** Given the tens of thousands of people now in Turkish jails,

what are conditions like now? Do the Turks still torture?

Mr Meral: Some of the recent reports have been really disturbing. Human Rights Watch has released a few reports—a couple of them recently—that suggest jails are overcrowded. Some of the pictures that have been released have shown some sort of physical impact on the detainees, but the majority of them are reporting prolonged detention, not being able to see their lawyers and not enjoying basic rights at this stage. A state of emergency is always tricky legally. I imagine a lot of these cases will eventually go to the Turkish constitutional court and then to the European Court of Human Rights. I think that a lot of them will eventually be found to be legal for various reasons. There are definitely disturbing reports emerging about physical abuse, but at the moment the reporting is limited.

Q38 **Chair:** I have seen some rather abstruse statistical evidence from the last election, which suggested there was an element of rigging in the election. What confidence can we have that it will be a free and fair process in a future referendum or election in Turkey?

Mr Meral: None of these calculations have genuinely shown a major irregularity that would call into question the ultimate outcome of it. There were certain municipalities in particular areas. For example, the Ankara governorship voting looked like a close vote and that something might have happened there. In terms of national elections, in the Turkish voting system, if all of the political parties do their job, they all get a hand in the counting of the votes, which they witness. They also become electronically available through the official system and also for the parties, too. If each political party is able to be at every ballot box to say, "No, this is the vote that has been counted; give it to me," you could match them as well. We have done some of it in certain areas. That is why the OIC comment was, "By and large, this is dependable." However, the Government has used its privileged position in terms of airtime, state networks and using all the free buses and so on, so it might not necessarily be fully fair in regard to the financial assets, but, as an outcome, numerically, it is still by and large trustable.

Mr Park: You have international observers, plus you have all parties observing elections around the country as far as they can, and there has never been any major allegation of large-scale cheating. The point is, who controls the media? Who licenses a public meeting? That is where the elections are unfair, but in terms of the vote count, it is pretty much okay.

Q39 **Chair:** Thank you for that. I have two more questions before we release you, unless my colleagues want to chip in. Who went back to war with who in south-east Turkey? Professor Hale, you have just said that the PKK went back to war with the Government. The understanding of this Committee was that that was not the case. We understand there was the murder of two police officers, which was then taken as a reason of state to reignite the insurgency and cancel the ceasefire. A criminal action was then used as the pretext for the Government to go back to war in order to reinforce its position before the November election. Which is the most

reliable interpretation of events? You may have individual views.

Mr Meral: I am sure we will have—I will quickly add mine. I think both parties lost incentives for peace in the 2014 and 2015 era. It was coming—it had already been warned of, unless the process was institutionalised and legalised.

I think developments in Syria were actually the main turning point. By the time those incidents happened—the ISIS bomb exploded, the police officers were killed, Kurdish politicians shot, the AK party was behind the ISIS bombing and Erdoğan was already not giving any more incentives at that stage—both parties were already dropping the crystal ball. That is why I am not so certain saying who threw the first stone would actually be helpful.

It is helpful to look at how, in 2014 and 2015, developments in Syria; changes in voting patterns; the PKK's calculation that the season was changing and that this was no more the end of its arms struggle but in fact a whole new horizon—that Greater Kurdistan might very well happen and Erdoğan might crumble, as there had been protests against him since 2013; the AK party's own calculations that it was not getting any more Kurdish votes; the control of the PKK's advance; and the pressure on the AK party from its nationalist voters to do something, all actually led the moment to a crisis. I think it is a much more complex alignment of factors.

Mr Park: Causality is complicated, but after the June election, what the HDP vote had done was taken away the AK party—Erdoğan's party—majority in Parliament. He clearly didn't like that. The crackdown really started from then. Also, Demirtaş, the leader of the Kurdish party, the HDP, had said, "I am not going to support your plans for a new constitution." Erdoğan didn't like that. I think the killing of the two policemen was, from the Government's side, an excuse.

In any case, we called it a peace process. It was only really a ceasefire. Nobody was really talking about anything like devolution or whether Kurdish could become a co-equal language with Turkish. It was a ceasefire and not much else.

From the PKK side, I think Ziya is right. They thought their moment had come. They thought the Turkish Government had just not done so well in the election. The Syrian war had made them ambitious. They had spent the time, as to some extent the Turkish armed forces had done, reinforcing themselves. Ceasefire had been used by both sides to strengthen their capabilities. Also, they had a problem with Demirtaş as well. If Erdoğan had the problem with Demirtaş that he was taking votes from him, the PKK had the problem that he was gaining legitimacy. They didn't necessarily like where he was taking Kurdish politics in Turkey.

I would say that the immediate causality—the trigger—was that the Government started it. I think it sort of imagined that the Americans understood that the deal was, "You use Incirlik; we will say we are attacking Islamic State—but actually, 7:1 our attacks will be against

Kurdish targets." That is the figure. I think the trigger was the Government but, beyond that, neither side really had much faith, confidence or investment any more in—as I say, it wasn't a peace process—the ceasefire.

Professor Hale: Another factor, I think, that undermined confidence in the peace process was apparent fragmentation on the Kurdish or the PKK side. In the first place, we had the emergence of this organisation called Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, who carried out suicide bomb attacks, which is not a traditional PKK tactic, in Ankara, Istanbul and so on. They were clearly connected with the PKK, but the PKK said, "Oh, Kurdistan Freedom Falcons are nothing to do with us." So there was the situation in which you could have negotiated with the PKK, but you weren't negotiating with the people who were carrying out the terrorist attacks.

The second problem was the perception that Abdullah Öcalan was losing control over his own organisation. The talks were conducted through Öcalan in İmralı. I think that was probably the correct way to do it but the trouble was that it appeared that Öcalan had less and less influence as time went by on the PKK on the ground in the south-east.

Q40 **Chair:** What degree of moral responsibility sits upon President Erdoğan for reigniting this insurgency?

Mr Meral: It is phenomenal if you think about what they have done on the political side of this that no Turkish Government has ever done before. They allowed Kurdish television channels to be opened. There were even Kurdistan flags driving across the country. We have to give credit to AK party Governments when the credit is due. They have done things that no Government has dared to do in Turkey's history. From 2014 onwards, the main straining factor is Syria more than anything, and the Arab spring, the chaos within Turkey opposition. Erdoğan started facing the 2013 protests in Gezi, etc. The climate in Turkey was really precarious.

Q41 **Chair:** So it is okay to go back to war—

Mr Meral: Not really. From a normative judgment, of course not. They have sooner or later to bring it back to a political process. There has to be a ceasefire. They have to come back to the negotiation. We can see how it escalated and where it has reached now, because of all these factors. At the moment I do not see any incentive either for the Government or the PKK to back down. That is my pessimism.

Q42 **Chair:** I am trying to find out what you think about our conclusion, in a Report that we wrote in February—that this was a deliberate decision to go back to war for electoral purposes. This Committee found that pretty disgraceful.

Mr Meral: I really would not go that far. For the rest, even voting—I won't comment. I think there are a lot more factors that came together, including Syria and genuine calculations, etc. Yes, he did lose the political incentive to continue the peace process, but that is not the same as saying

that he triggered a war for electoral success. I would not do that. I genuinely think he lost the voting incentive to continue the peace process.

Chair: You haven't convinced me.

Mr Park: I would go almost that far.

Daniel Kawczynski: Very quickly. Professor Hollis gave a very interesting account of some of the really important issues that Turkey is helping us on.

Chair: We need to bring these matters to a conclusion. Thank you very much for your evidence. It has been a brilliant scene-setter. I know we will be able to take up things informally as well. Thank you very much to all four of you for your evidence today. It was a really fascinating session.