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USA 2020 ELECTION AND IMPLICATION ON TURKISH-AMERICAN RELATIONS

Jonathan D. KATZ

Jason EPSTEIN

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Panel Notes

On 30.10.2020 (Friday) at 7.30 pm, the panel titled "USA 2020 Elections and Implication on Turkish-American Relations" was held online by DIPAM. Panel moderated by DIPAM Researcher Adinda KHAERANI, Jonathan D. KATZ, Senior Specialist of the German Marshall

Fund of United States, and Jason EPSTEIN, Founder of Soutfive Strategies from the USA, participated as speakers.

Moderator Adinda KHAERANI introduced the panelists and stated that they are experts in foreign policy. And stated that

US Presidential Elections and its impacts on relations with Turkey will be discussed in panel. Speaking about the atmosphere of the US presidential debate, she stated that the debates are contentious. She stated that the upcoming election is critical for US-Turkey relations. Also note that Turkey's S-400 missile defense system which is purchased from Russia caused disagreements between two countries. She also touched upon the bilateral relations and strong ties during the pandemic period. Khaerani has said the post-election US foreign policy towards Turkey is the vague and object of curiosity. First asked "In 2020, why Turkey has a critical reason for the interests of the United States?" question to Jonathan D. KATZ.

Jonathan D. KATZ, criticized some rhetoric like "Relationships at their worst point in decades" and "No longer strategic relations between the two" about US relations with Turkey and note that the statements were not true. He also mentioned that Turkey is an old ally of USA and key actor in the region. Referring to Turkey's geographical challenges, and noted that a regional power cannot be ignored. Katz noted that Turkey's role in many geographic regions and no matter who is president of the US, have to continue to work with Turkey in places like Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan. Emphasize that United States want to continue to work with Turkey, and pointed bilateral relations under NATO framework. He emphasized that it is not only important who will win the elections in the USA, but also the importance of the Senate, the Congress and the relations of these institutions with the President. He cited the dispute between Donald Trump and the Senate, recalling the issue of the S-400. And stated that Turkey and the

United States is very different from 20 years ago, and they have very different dynamics in their relations. Referring to Turkey's position in NATO and has stated that the country has the second largest army in NATO. Saying that Turkey is a major transit route and an important geographical position, it will not change this position and stated that the US and other countries cannot ignore it.

Jason EPSTEIN began his speech by saying that he agreed with most of what Jonathan D. KATZ said. He said there were too many issues that Obama and Trump could not agree on, but there were also points where they both thought the same. He stated that they both think the same, especially regarding the USA's excessive expansion in the Middle East. He evaluated the attitudes of Obama and Trump administrations in the Middle East and talked about their relations with Middle Eastern countries. Epstein said that Turkey is one of the leading countries for US interests on regional basis. He evaluated the US 'attitudes towards Iran and talked about the US relations with the countries of the region on Iran. Both Trump and Biden can see Turkey as a counterbalance ally in region against Russia and Iran.

Epstein, said that in new period of congress there will be no Turkey supporters in the congress. As a notable example, he cited the decision taken by the congress last year on the so-called Armenian Genocide and stated that there were only a few votes that disagreed with this decision. Speaker also mentioned Ankara's effect on this attitude of congress and emphasize that Turkey should take into account not only president but also congress and other institutions. "It is very important for

Ankara to reach the legislature in the United States. The president is not the only person who determines foreign policy. There is a balance. For Ankara, it is essential to make a concerted effort to rebuild relations with members of Congress on both sides of the corridor, whatever happens in the US elections.”

Moderator KHAERANI asked Jonathan D. KATZ “How would you describe the ties between the US and Turkey under the direction of President Donald Trump?”

Jonathan D. KATZ stated that the relationship between Trump and Erdogan is a very personal relationship, and he evaluated the existence of such a relationship between the two leaders. And mentioned that he supports establishment of wider relations between two countries and emphasize importance of taking steps in this perspective. He made evaluations about the Turkish political structure and the US political structure and especially mentioned the importance of the communication between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the US Congress. He stated that the Turkish people saw the US through Erdogan's eyes and evaluate this as a debilitating for bilateral relations. He argued that the relations between the two countries should not only be with the leaders and other factors should also come into play.

Jason EPSTEIN stated that he joined Jonathan D. KATZ with his thoughts on this issue. He claimed that the relationship between Trump and Erdogan was strong and that the two had similar personalities. He also added that there were serious difficulties between the two. He evaluates Trump's foreign policy in his first year of presidency as a disappointment. He stated that disagreement issues such as the Halkbank issue, the Brunson crisis, the FETÖ and Fethullah Gulen issue lost great

opportunities in the first 2 years. As issues where good relations between Trump and Erdogan work; The Eastern Mediterranean issue has shown the Azerbaijan-Armenia problem and the problems in the Arab / Muslim world. He highlighted that in the absence of efforts to restore the relationship between governments or at all other levels, relations cannot improve.

Moderator Adinda KHAERANI stated that Ankara's reaction to the statement made by Democratic Presidential Candidate Biden was strong. She stated that he had certainly received criticism from both the government and the opposition. And asked future of Turkey-US relations under possible Biden presidency to Jonathan D. KATZ.

Jonathan D. KATZ said that if Biden is elected, he would look more seriously on the relations and said he believed he would make the logical move in such a situation. He evaluating their views on Biden's democracy has touched on past of relations with Turkey. Speaker, if Biden becomes president, he cannot ignore Turkey who has been a key partner in the region and play important role. He pointed out that the S-400 issue was not only criticized by Biden, but by both Republicans and Democrats. Speaker said that cooperation will continue and relations are not cut off with Turkey in possible Biden presidency. He also evaluated Biden's views about Middle Eastern countries and stated that Biden is very close to and supports Israel. Katz, also touched on the relations with Israel, Greece and South Cyprus and stated that these relations are good under Trump administration. He also stated that US foreign policy may change after the elections, at least the focus may be diverted to other areas.

Jason Epstein, stated that himself and Jonathan D. KATZ are willing to see better relations between US and Turkey whether it's Trump or Biden. He also underlined that he wanted to be optimistic for Joe Biden. Stated that he was curious about 2021 and note that if Biden had been president in the 2000s, relations with Turkey would be much more different. He addressed the issue of public opinion in Turkey and most of the Turkish people and address their views of the Western powers and US. Epstein said that people believes that these powers want to divide Turkey. And emphasize that Joe Biden's remarks on Turkey make inroads on relations. Epstein said that "In case of Biden's presidency I do not want to pessimistic but Turkish side cannot overcome these remarks of Biden." Evaluating Biden's relations with states such as Greece and Armenia and with terrorist organizations such as PKK and YPG, he also stated that Biden took a supportive attitude. Epstein note that Turkey disagree with US in these three issues. He also reiterated that he was worried about the tension this situation would cause.

Moderator Adinda KHAERANI opened the issue of S-400 and touched on the S-400 report released by the Pentagon in recent weeks. And note that in case of Biden's presidency S-400 sanctions could be implemented towards Turkey. She asked Jonathan D. KATZ for her opinions in order to evaluate this situation.

Jonathan D. KATZ stated that he does not know what could happen with the S-400 issue when Biden was elected and stated that Trump was unwilling to impose sanctions despite calls from congress. He stated that Congress will continue to make

these calls and that people see this issue as a direct threat to the national security of the USA. The relationship between the Senate and elected president, stated that will reflect on Turkey-US relations. He also touched on the possible effects of S-400 issue and its effects on bilateral relations and state that after 2016 coup attempt Turkey do not trust Western powers and wants to ensure their safety. He said he believes the S-400 will not be activated, if they are activate S-400 missile system, United States will apply serious sanctions against the Turkey. He stated that these sanctions would target the Turkish authorities and the government, not the Turkish people. He said that he did not expect the future administration to make a quick decision on this issue and that the policy analysis of this issue will be made by the new administration.

Jason EPSTEIN evaluated the relationship between Congress and the White House, referring to the importance of the US Congress. He stated that the Presidents were trying to control the Congress by saying that they do not want to be ruled by the Congress. He stated that Trump remained passive on this issue, but an experienced politician like Biden would not ignore it. And he claimed that Turkey leave "zero problem" policy and transformed into "zero friend" mode. Speaker drew attention to solitude of Turkey in region, in particular Eastern Mediterranean region. Epstein said there is an opportunity for both sides and countries can develop their relations and cooperation despite congress. He stated that the S-400 issue must be resolved and it is possible to overcome it.



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ABOUT DISCUSSANTS

Adinda KHAERANI is DİPAM Researcher. She joined (TASAM) as an expert in 2016. Later, she became a non-resident fellow for the Turkish Heritage organization in Washington DC from November 2019 – June 2020. Her topic of specialization is mainly related to the Maritime Security issues.

In her previous career, after obtaining her Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Mass Communications from the London School of Public Relations-Jakarta in December 2009, she joined the Press Section at the Diplomatic Mission of Pakistan – Jakarta from 2010-2011 as an Assistant to the Press Attaché.

In April 2011, she joined the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey – Jakarta as a Personal Assistant to the Ambassador and resigned in October 2012 as she was granted a Scholarship from the Turkish Government and enrolled in master's program in 2013, majoring in Political Science and International Relations.

She wrote her master's thesis with the title of "The role of ASEAN in Conflict Management in the Case of South China Sea Disputes," and later obtained her MA in Political Science and International Relations in 2016. With the experience of studying in Turkey, she speaks three languages: Bahasa Indonesian (native), English (fluent) and Turkish (conversation and limited business level).

Jason EPSTEIN, is a consultant with more than a quarter-century of professional experience in government relations, media affairs, and cultural outreach. He founded Southfive Strategies, LLC in November 2002, a consultancy providing clients access to members of the executive branch, congressional leaders, important media organizations, business leaders, think tanks, and human rights organizations. Clients have included the Turkish Embassy in Washington, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' Washington office, Muslim World League in Mecca, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy in Baku, Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, World Jewish Restitution Organization in Jerusalem, American Cinema Foundation in Los Angeles, and The Israel Project in Washington.

Jonathan KATZ is director of Democracy Initiatives and a senior fellow with The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) based in the Washington, DC, office. Prior to joining GMF from 2014-17, Katz was the deputy assistant administrator in the Europe and Eurasia bureau at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where he managed U.S. development policy, energy security, economic growth, and democracy, and governance programs in Europe and Eurasia. He led USAID programs in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Eastern and Central Europe, the Black Sea and Caucasus Regions, the Western Balkans, and regional programs that included Russia. Katz served as the U.S. government co-chair of political, economic, trade, and development working groups with the European Union, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Poland, Romania, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Prior to joining USAID, from 2010-14, Katz served as a senior advisor to the assistant secretary in the International Organization Affairs Bureau at the U.S. Department of State. In that role Katz served as a speech writer and advised the assistant secretary and other senior U.S. government officials on key national security, multilateral, and development priorities at the UN and at international organizations.