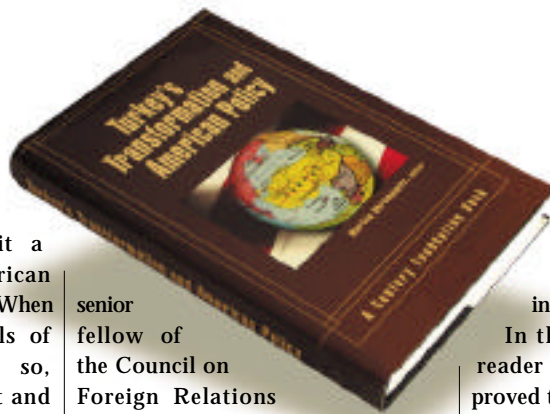


Turkey's Transformation and American Policy

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It is not often that a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State undertakes to edit a comprehensive book on American foreign policy toward Turkey*. When someone with the credentials of Morton Abramowitz does so, influential circles in the West and especially present American policy makers, for whom this book is mainly intended, are bound to sit up and pay attention. At least one hopes they will, since this book appeared just before the change of administration in Washington and there is as yet little indication as to how much of policy thinking on Turkey reflected in this study will remain a constant during the Bush presidency.

Morton Abramowitz, former Ambassador to Ankara and President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, one time Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, and recently advisor to the Kosovo Albanian delegation in the Rambouillet Peace Talks, is also a

senior fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations which publishes the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*. He has gathered around him for this book equally distinguished former colleagues from the State Department, Turkey experts Alan Makovsky and M. James Wilkinson, as well as academic scholars of Turkey such as Prof. Heath Lowry of Princeton and Philip Robins of Oxford. Two Turkish writers are also on board, the journalist Cengiz Çandar, famous for coining the term "post-modern coup" for the February 28, 1997 military intervention in Turkey, and Prof. Ziya Öniş, a prominent economist.

The book's objective, as Abramowitz states it in his introduction, is "...to examine ...American policy toward

Turkey over the past decade ...and some important issues in the U.S.- Turkish relationship, including possible future ones."

In this respect, for a common reader such as myself, this volume proved to be a revelation as well as a disappointment. It was a revelation in the sense that the three chapters directly dealing with American policy are fascinating and first rate accounts of recent official thinking in Washington concerning Turkey. It was a disappointment though, because the four chapters "devoted to the Turkish scene and Turkish attitudes toward the United States", albeit interesting, throw the book off balance.

The reason for dividing the book thus is quite justified, of course, for Ambassador Abramowitz emphasizes repeatedly that Turkey's "internal instability began to be a matter for concern" for American policymakers recently and therefore the "internal factor" has once again become an

*Morton Abramowitz, ed, *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy*, New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2000, Hardcover 298pp.

important issue for American policy toward Turkey. In fact, the overall message of this book is loud and clear: Turkey is more important to the U.S. than ever strategically, but it is not doing so well internally. In the words of Alan Makovsky Turkey has presently "a higher profile presence in U.S. policy than it had even during the cold war", but also, in the words of Morton Abramowitz, its internal instability leads American policy-makers to "fear a disruption in Turkey's basic strategic contribution". So there is ample justification for devoting four of the seven chapters to internal problems in Turkey, with direct bearing on its regional and geostrategic importance.

That being said, however, this still is an uneven book. I would have much preferred to have the benefit of State Department experience on all of the issues addressed and to hear from other former officials of the same caliber as Abramowitz or Makovsky (such as Strobe Talbott or Richard Holbrooke), as I would have preferred, for instance, the views of ex-IMF or World Bank officials on the Turkish economy, as well as the American perspective on the Kurdish issue and their connection to policy perceptions.

What we have instead are disparate views on Turkish problems. Heath Lowry's analysis of recent political developments amounts to an educated guess about possible "political turbulence" ahead; Philip Robins' account of the Kurdish issue is full of useful points but reflects a predominantly European view of the conflict and, as is endemic to European accounts, fails to address it as a regional rather than just a Turkish problem; Cengiz Çandar provides interesting historical background to the recent rapprochement between the U.S. and

Turkey, but I doubt what he has to say is news to anybody even on the fringes of what Abramowitz likes to call "the policy making environment"; and Prof. Öniş' cool headed, critical approach to Turkish failure in achieving macro-economic stability or attracting long term foreign investment, including American capital, has little reference to what the U.S. can do to help. So much for Turkey's transformation.

The three chapters on American policy, on the other hand, form the crux of the book, since it is here that we trace the transformation of American policy toward Turkey, so I shall concentrate on some of the principal views that are expressed in this context.

Clearly, the last decade of the twentieth century starting with the Gulf War has completely transformed American strategic perceptions of Turkey and this book explains why. The Gulf War itself is obviously the major factor that promoted Turkey in U.S. policy. In fact, Iraq and the related Kurdish issue tower over this book, quite understandably so, since it is paradoxically the locus of greatest divergence as well as convergence between the two countries' interests. Most of the contributors refer to it as a probable future sore point in relations, and Ambassador Abramowitz even qualifies it as "the acid test of the U.S.-Turkish relationship", especially in reference to Saddam's future.

What this book more importantly achieves, however, is to bring out the larger and longer term significance of the Gulf episode which, according to Abramowitz, "brought home to Washington once again(Turkey's) political and strategic significance, including the value of Turkish bases for operations in the Middle East" even though, at the same time, Turkey's role

in NATO "was being diminished by the implosion of the Soviet Union".

The fact that Turkey has found an even more important strategic role for itself in the post-Cold War era in the American sphere is crucial. The significance of Abramowitz's book is in documenting how this happened, through the eyes of policy makers who had a direct and significant part in its shaping.

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and U.S. special Cyprus coordinator M. James Wilkinson, in his chapter on the difficult relations with Greece, declares: "In the U.S. strategic calculus of the post-Cold War world, Turkey has become considerably more important than Greece."

A seasoned Turkey expert of the State Department for 11 years and political advisor to Operation Provide Comfort during 1992, Alan Makovsky, in his excellent chapter on the shifts in U.S. Policy, echoes: "By the end of the 1990s, the U.S.-Turkish alliance had successfully completed a transition from a single-issue Cold War paradigm to cooperation based on a multitude of issues."

Morton Abramowitz also points out "the increasingly ramified nature of the U.S.-Turkish relationship and Turkey's new influence across a number of regions" and significantly adds that because of this increasing complexity in relations, "Turkey brings much more to the table than before, and its interests cannot be shunted aside."

This last bit is pivotal I think, especially if one reads between the lines. Abramowitz states it even more clearly in the Introduction: "Turkish governments have disliked the U.S. approach toward Iraq, but Turkey's importance to that policy has ironically increased U.S. policymakers'



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respect for Turkish interests".

One can safely assume then that respect for Turkish interests was not so robust, nor was sensitivity so keen, about what the Turks are sensitive to, ten years ago in Washington. Continuing to read between the lines, I sensed in this book indications of a major and more subtle shift from regarding Turkey as a strategic ally toward a willingness to seeing Turkey as a regional partner, and the book seems to catch this shift in process.

In his analysis of the recent closeness in American relations with Turkey, Alan Makovsky makes much of the psychological factor and pays a great deal of attention to the semantics of regarding a country a "friend" as well as an "ally". But only in one instance (actually the only instance in the book) does Makovsky use the term partnership, in a quite significant context and worth quoting: "Rather than leverage, the best assurance of Turkish support for U.S. policy initiatives ...resides in Washington's persistent cultivation of a climate of genuine partnership, mutual interest and respect." The only other reference in the book to Turkey as a partner comes in a quotation from Clinton's much lauded speech to the Turkish Parliament during his visit in 1999. Presidents are wont to use lavish rhetoric, as are journalists, since both deal with the symbolic in politics, whereas policy makers have to deal with hard facts on the ground and thus are more wary in choosing their words.

Nevertheless, reading this book one gets the impression that relations are indeed poised at that sensitive border where the makings of a "special relationship", and even of a partnership, are in the offing. Of course there are snags, and big ones. We see why once again between the lines, in Alan Makovsky's statement to the effect that "Despite its growing strategic importance ...few Americans see Turkey as a nation that fully shares their values", especially in the area of free speech, full democracy and human rights. In this respect Turkey has its own homework to do and difficult choices to make, before its friends can become its partners, even though its strategic importance for the U.S. remains an overall constant. This is the main message with which one comes away from this book, with a strong sense of real friends worrying over "what to do about Turkey"!

There are other reasons why Turkey's stock has risen in American foreign policy, of course, and chief among these is the change of perception in policy toward Russia. In the initial years of the Clinton administration Turkey's stock was not so high, despite the Gulf War, mainly because Russia's integration to the West had priority, with Strobe Talbott as the chief architect of that policy, though this is not spelled out in the present volume. In the mid-1990s, however, as both Makovsky and Abramowitz make clear in their analyses, perceptions of Russia shifted

significantly and Turkey became more prominent. Both writers emphasize Richard Holbrooke's now famous statement to a Congressional hearing in 1995 as the turning point, where he declared that Turkey was the new "frontline state" (as quoted in both Abramowitz and Makovsky) and that Turkey "stands at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the U.S. on the Eurasian continent" (as quoted in Makovsky's article). No wonder, then, that Richard Leone, the president of the Century Foundation which published this book, confidently declares in his foreword that given the list of nations with the potential to become the center of American attention "Turkey ..deserves a place high on such a list".

Decidedly, this is an upbeat book overall, basking in a decade of increasing warmth in relations which ex-President Clinton brought to a real polish at the end of his term in office, though the writers are by no means unaware of the pitfalls in the chequered history of the Turkish-American alliance.

A number of policy recommendations follow accordingly. For instance, on the fraught issue of Cyprus and the conflict with Greece which "could adversely affect U.S. access to the region" according to M. James Wilkinson, and therefore has become a security problem of the highest order, "disconnects with the EU ..have undermined the U.S. position" and thus a closer coor-

dination is recommended. Philip Robins also ends his piece on the Kurdish issue with a similar call for closer U.S.-EU coordination and dialogue, as others have done before him.

Both Morton Abramowitz and Alan Makovsky are sensitive to Turkey's security needs. Despite the future possibility of full integration to the EU, Abramowitz rightly suggests that "the Turks -like the British- will try to maintain a special security relationship with the United States". Makovsky, on the other hand, shrewdly points out Turkey's fears of being pushed to "second class status in European security" and goes as far as suggesting that American officials "invite Turkey to participate in the U.S. ballistic missile defense program". On the whole he is convinced that the U.S. "will need to remain actively involved in EU-Turkish relations" and that it should not be deterred "by EU complaints about U.S. interference".

One of the perceptions that comes through clearly in this book is that although EU accession is the single most important issue concerning Turkey's future, the U.S. has been more committed to anchoring Turkey in the West than the EU, and Abramowitz cannot help commenting wryly that "The Europeans will ultimately have to do much more than simply preach to the Turks".

Finally, one of the most useful policy recommendations is Makovsky's suggestion that "high level attention to Turkey (be) sustained", including a high level commission to spur bilateral ties, and that "trips to Turkey should be a regular part of a U.S. President's itinerary".

The need for such high profile contacts has become all the more apparent as I write this. Turkey is once

again in the grips of a serious economic crisis, as a result of the political paralysis that has beset the country. There have been calls from Congress that President Bush should do his utmost to help a "partner in need". On the diplomatic front, meanwhile, fresh rumblings are heard on policy toward Iraq once again. Makovsky's suggestion that where the Baku-Ceyhan energy pipeline option is concerned, the U.S. ought to put its money where its mouth is, will also certainly be borne out by events soon. With cogent analysis throughout, the experts in this book seem to be saying to Western governments, the U.S. in particular, that the time to take Turkey for granted is over, while it is high time to take Turkey more seriously. The message to Turkey, on the other hand, is all too familiar: Help us help you!

Elsewhere, the book is full of unexpected pleasures. Wilkinson's piece is a rare glimpse of American policy in self-critical mood. Not only does the past, in the shape of Henry Kissinger, come in for a lot of criticism, but overall U.S. failure to induce progress in the Cyprus issue gets an airing too. If think-tanks are even remotely symptomatic about mood changes in overall "policy environment", this piece heralded to me that things are about to change on the Cyprus front.

Of course, there is no guarantee that the Bush administration will have its share of State Department "Young Turks" of the Holbrooke - Grossman - Makovsky - Wilkinson stamp. But the serious engagement in Turkish issues that Alan Makovsky represents in this book must be agreeable to Turkish ears, provided they don't lapse into complacency. When Private View published a special issue on "Redefining Turkish American

relations" in Spring 1999, Makovsky had concluded his contribution with a gentle warning, and he rings the same note in his contribution to this book as well: Geostrategic location may attract you to a neighborhood "but a sense of community makes you want to stay". Ultimately, though, it is what the Bush Administration will make of these analysts' experience that matters most.

Finally, Morton Abramowitz's article in the book had its high moments for me. American ethnic politics and the notorious lobbies are not news to anyone anymore, but to have an insider's view on them is, again, a revelation. I hope Turkish policymakers use their highlighters when reading those passages. Similarly, snippets of Ambassador Abramowitz's memoirs from his tenure in Ankara during the Gulf War were a privileged glimpse and perhaps a foretaste of what his published memoirs might be like in the future. They made me wish that he had written this book himself, along the lines of his recent study of "American Policy Toward North Korea", or at least that he had formed the present book consistently from a State Department perspective. Nevertheless, the book as it stands is a welcome document of the sea change that has occurred in the space of a decade.

Anti-American opinion in Turkey, including the religious right wing, and Turkish conspiracy theorists, of course, will have a field day with the book. But somehow, as Cengiz Çandar so clearly shows in his article, that doesn't mean so much anymore. That, in the final analysis, is the extraordinary transformation of a relationship which this volume conveys so well.

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