

## Turkey's Entente with Israel and Azerbaijan: State Identity and Security in the Middle East and Caucasus

By *Alexander Murinson*

London: Routledge, 2010, 219 pages, ISBN 9780415778923, £80.00.

In this timely book Alexander Murinson explores the forces behind the entente between Turkey, Israel, and Azerbaijan. He juxtaposes these three countries, which he characterizes as “garrison-, like-minded, ‘Westernistic’, secular, constitutionally nationalist and lonely states.” (p.143) Those features depict the identity construct of the three states, which on the face of it, may seem to have conflicting interests in the turbulent Eurasian region spanning the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans. Each of the three states is a *sui generis* actor on the global stage – post-imperial, western-oriented Turkey with global ambitions ruled by a post-Islamist party, a Jewish state encircled by Arab neighbors, and an oil-rich post-soviet republic with an autocratic regime. Thus, the author seeks to understand how the common identities of the three countries on the one hand led to the formation of this peculiar alliance, and on the other hand what factors could and in fact do undermine the Turkish-Israeli-Azeri security relationship. Departing from the more classic, neo-realist approach to international relations, where the homogenous states – the so-called billiard balls are the sole actors on the world stage, the author draws from the constructivist importance of identity as the driving force of states’ behavior and their foreign policy. He looks deep into the tissue of the three states and the regional and global context to decipher the emerging patterns and trends in Ankara’s relations with Israel and Azer-

baijan. As “all the three states have special relations with the world hegemon,” (p.147) it is warranted to say that the United States is the “fourth leg” of this triangular axis. Washington plays a key role in regional affairs and is interested in forging cooperation between countries potentially capable of counterbalancing the regional alignment between Russia, Iran, and Syria.

In his book, Murinson comes up with an original theoretical framework that combines refined and enriched, multivariate constructivism with a transnational approach. Another original aspect of the book is that it examines the rapprochement between these three countries. Indeed, a “triangular relationship” or “trilateral axis” is a novel concept in literature as we are rather used to viewing international and interstate relations from a bilateral perspective. Thus, the author is right to contend that he contributes to the “debate about the nature of multilateral alliance formation in the post-Cold War era.” (p.6)

In chapters 3, 4 and 5, the author elaborates on the institutional drivers – both state and non-state of the rapprochement between the three countries, emphasizing the security dimension of the trilateral axis, which he calls the heart of the entente. “No analysis of the Turkish-Israeli-Azerbaijan axis can be complete without ascertaining the role the military-security institutions played in its formation in the 1990s and early 2000s,” (p.42) asserts rightly Murinson. In addition, he adds that this

“axis came into being because many strategic threats and interests of the three states overlap.” (p.94) The role of the military-security apparatus in Turkey, Israel and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan has been extensively researched elsewhere, nevertheless Chapter 3 is worthy of note as it sets a solid foundation for further analysis. One of the strongest points of the work is that the author does not limit his elaborations only to investigating state institutions. In Chapter 4, Murinson broadens his analysis by studying the informal networks and transnational levers of the axis, emphasizing the role of epistemic communities – “amalgam of intellectual and political networks” (p.63) which influence foreign and international policy indirectly. Here, the author examines the explicit role of the American Jewish community in cementing the triangular relationship, along with the lesser known think tanks and transnational corporations most interested in advancing the energy cooperation between the three protagonist countries. He notes that “in contrast to the United States, where epistemic communities have established their position in the policy process since the beginning of the twentieth century, think tanks and other independent research centers are still a novelty in all three countries under consideration.” (p. 82)

The book covers the period between 1992, the year Azerbaijan gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and 2005, when the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey consolidated its power. The systemic changes, which took place after the demise of the communist block and bipolarity of the world system, unleashed new opportunities for the countries no longer constrained anymore by the cold-war confrontation and top-down im-

posed geopolitical roles. At the same time, the geopolitical revolution stirred up new threats, such as the Kurdish problem, rising Islamic radicalism, menaces posed by Syria and Iran, to name just a few, which were perceived as shared threats by the three countries and consolidated their alliance. However, the author missed a good opportunity to look at the developments beyond 2005, which have brought about the weakening of the ties between Turkey and Israel. The author is right to note, on the very first pages of his book, that the entente is “susceptible to fluctuations in domestic politics and shifts in the foreign policy calculations of its members,” (p.2) emphasizing the “fluid nature of international environment.” (p.8) The developments, which have unfolded in the past couple of years – both in the realm of the Turkish-Israeli relations, and to a lesser extent the weakening of the ties between Ankara and Baku demonstrate the volatility of the trilateral alliance. The shift in Turkish-Iranian relations (Turkey and Brazil brokered the nuclear fuel swap agreement which was rejected by the Western powers), rapprochement with Syria, attempts undertaken to normalize relations with the all-time foe Armenia have all proved crucial for the watering-down of the alliance. The author himself writes, “as a result of profound changes in the domestic and international arenas in the period between 1999 and 2005, an involution of the trilateral axis occurred. In other words, the axis became increasingly exposed to perturbations and fluctuations in the domestic politics of the three countries.” (p.115)

One major criticism that can be leveled at the book is that the author did not exploit Turkish literature sufficiently (especially Turkish newspapers would be a valuable

source of additional information on how the press reflecting the popular identities perceives the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement). Notwithstanding other minor flaws (the Turkish constitution was ratified in 1982, not a year before - p.32; the chief of staff in Turkey did not hold the post of secretary - General of the National Security Council as suggests Gareth Jenkins quoted by Alexander Murinson - p.157), Murinson's original and though-provoking work is a major contribution to the existing (and in recent years proliferating) scholar-

ship on modern Turkey and the emerging strategic, geopolitical, and military constellations in the Middle East and the Caucasus. The book, as a whole, stands out not only as a valuable source of facts not widely known even among scholars studying modern Turkey and regional developments, but also as an inspiring work which helps readers look at international politics from a different theoretical angle.

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## Shoah: Turkey, the US, and the UK

By *Arnold Reisman*

Charleston: BookSurge Publishing, 2009, 345 pages, ISBN 9781439240229.

"I was alive only because I had a Turkish passport," tells Lazar Russo in Arnold Reisman's *Shoah: Turkey, the US and the UK*. Lazar Russo was living in France when the Nazis occupied it. As with the other Jews, it was impossible for him to leave the country. However, remaining meant certain extermination. Only after the Turkish Consulate in Paris offered him a passport could he escape. He went to Turkey. It was an unusual move from a foreign country those days. But according to the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, France was only "one of the countries where Turkish diplomats worked to save Jews."

Thanks to Professor Reisman's extensive research, many personal stories of European Jews who, like Russo, made it to safety through Turkey are accessible to the reader. Professor Reisman, a Holocaust survivor himself, combines archival documents with individual testimonies

throughout his book. The result is a work that bears the features of both a novel and a documentary. A plethora of first hand historical materials, previously unpublished, is undoubtedly an added value for future academic reference.

Professor Reisman argues that Turkey played an overall positive role during the Holocaust and that this fact has been widely omitted in English language literature. He goes even further, implying that Turkey was a prime player in helping Jews escape the Holocaust. Although not always in a consistent sequence, the author proves his point quite well. Supported by statistics, cables, individual stories and other valuable documentation from the archives of Yad Vashem, the FDR Library, the USG Shoah Foundation, the British Foreign and Colonial Offices (sic) and others, this work indeed shows that Turkey did much more than has been traditionally believed.