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Review by **Barin Kayaoğlu**, Independent Scholar

Nicholas Danforth is the consummate scholar and intellectual. Danforth recently finished his Ph.D. in Cold War international history at Georgetown University but he has been busy outside the ivory tower for years. His articles on current events for leading media outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, and *Foreign Policy* are always original and informative.

"Malleable Modernity" brings together its author's strengths. Through the collections of the State Department, the Joint U.S. Military Mission for Aid to Turkey (JUSMMAT), the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Danforth analyzes how U.S. policy-makers used ideas of modernization to justify their country's budding alliance with Turkey and to measure the effectiveness of U.S. assistance programs in that country at the onset of the Cold War. The article also paves the way for future researchers who wish to study U.S.-Turkish affairs and the history of U.S. relations with the world.

"Before the articulation of an academic modernization theory in the late fifties," Danforth writes, "American diplomats, soldiers, and economists working in Turkey had a very clear of idea of what it meant to be modern [i]n an American way...being modern" meant being "democratic, participatory, literate, and [socially] mobile." However, Danforth warns us, "the diverse, even contradictory ways [U.S. officials] could apply these values to any concrete situation were highly variable." When dealing with Turkey in the 1940s and 1950s, American policy-makers used modernization to justify their support for the single-party regime under President İsmet İnönü's Republican People's Party (CHP), to celebrate the democratic election of Adnan Menderes's Democrat Party (DP) in 1950, to defend Menderes from charges of authoritarianism during the decade, and to begrudgingly accept the coup that removed the DP from power in 1960. (477). That malleability drives Danforth's study.

The first section of the article, "modernization as policy," describes the variegated U.S. ideas on Turkey. Not only did different agencies of the U.S. government hold inconsistent ideas on this strange land in the 1940s and 1950s, even the same reports by those bureaucracies reflected erratic views of Turkish modernization and America's role in Turkey. For example, U.S. descriptions of İnönü and CHP's single-party rule prior to 1950

were so “sufficiently ambiguous that pro-government papers could interpret them as praise for İnönü’s fundamentally democratic character while opposition papers could read them as a critique of his authoritarianism” (482). One CIA report from April 1950 opined that “the Turk has been accustomed to being pushed around” but would “object most strenuously” if the state were to interfere with in his newly won right to vote (482). Americans saw virtue in statist economics under CHP and, after 1950, backed the DP’s attempts to create a supposedly free-market economy. Turks were somehow “stolid” and “very conservative” but also extremely forward-thinking and eager to modernize. Turkey was democratic and Western-oriented yet “Oriental” and lacking in “political maturity” (485), a problem that became more visible as the DP turned to authoritarianism and provoked religious fervor among the masses after the mid-1950s. According to Danforth, Americans thought that the Turks’ traditional respect for authority made their military “less likely to initiate a coup, but also less likely to resist one once initiated” (488).

Such contradictory views notwithstanding, U.S. officials were sincere about helping their new ally. At the beginning of the second section, “modernization as program,” which focuses on U.S. military assistance to Turkey, Danforth notes how “even as Americans adjusted their ideas about what modernization *meant*, they remained genuinely convinced that it could and should be applied to Turkey” (490). War with the Soviet Union was a real possibility in the 1950s, so U.S. aid aimed at “providing Turkey with modern equipment, training soldiers to use this equipment, and instilling the modern psychological attitudes that, Americans believed, were necessary for winning modern wars” (491). To that end, “the U.S. military wanted to replace what they saw as a culture of blind obedience and slavish devotion to authority with a new spirit of initiative in which responsibility would be delegated to younger officers” (492-494).

U.S. experts’ constantly changing views on how to modernize Turkey affected the military assistance program. Aside from teaching new techniques to Turkish conscripts and English-speaking officers, U.S. military advisers tried to shake off “the traditions of a Turkish enlisted boy” they feared was “not of the Janissaries but of the patient mute immemorial Oriental infantry, the uncomprehending serf of an inflexible fate” (492). The top-down nature of the Turkish chain of command, based on the allegedly rigid Prussian tradition, had to be replaced with American-style “initiative” and “individualized discipline” from the bottom up. Those ideas, too, were contradictory, as Danforth correctly points out: the U.S. military had readily acknowledged in the last world war that the Prussian school emphasized innovation and quick improvisation on the field of battle, qualities that the Turks had always possessed and, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, updated with help from their German allies (495). In May 1960, the Turkish military proved that it did not have a problem with initiative.

The third section, “modernization as propaganda,” discusses U.S. public diplomacy efforts in Turkey in the latter half of the 1950s, which aimed at “showing off how modern America was [and] encourage[ing] Turks to be more modern themselves, and as they became more modern, [to] develop an even greater appreciation for America, the most modern country of all” (497-498). This section is particularly fascinating for its discussion of how, in radio broadcasts that aimed to showcase American modernity to local audiences, USIS/USIA’s Turkish personnel crafted, tweaked, and improved the message of modernization. Turkish staff suggested changes in announcers’ accents, creating separate programs for well-educated and less-educated listeners, and scrapping unpopular shows altogether. As Danforth points out at the end of the section, many Turks appreciated American modernization but looked at it positively only to the extent that it succeeded in their country.

“Malleable Modernity” is an excellent study that boasts a good research base. With its rich discussion of ideology and modernization in the introduction, the article charts out useful ideational maps. Overall, this study raises three big questions for future researchers who wish to study U.S.-Turkish relations and international affairs broadly defined.

The first point is that, despite the apparent malleability in the rhetoric on modernization, Washington has been quite consistent in its objectives vis-à-vis Ankara from the Cold War to the present: to deny the Soviet Union (and Russia) a strong foothold in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (at least not through Turkey); to that end, to maintain Turkey’s economic growth and social development; and, in order to prevent political and social chaos from reversing gains, to support Turkey’s representative and democratic institutions.

That security-development-democracy template has remained steady from 1960 onward. . While the Eisenhower administration nudged the DP to use U.S. development aid more smartly in the 1950s, Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy publicly and privately told the 1960 junta to return to its barracks. The Nixon and Carter administrations, too, tried to keep the Turkish military away from politics prior to the 1971 and 1980 coups. Despite moments of crisis, such as the Cyprus war in 1974, the subsequent Congressional arms embargo on Ankara, and the Turkish parliament’s decision to deny entry to U.S. forces prior to the Iraq war in 2003, Washington always wanted Ankara on its side on way or another.¹ Of course, the seventy-year-old irony is that the United States still has not found a sure way to anchor Turkey to the West. In that respect, Danforth is absolutely right when he says “discourse only enables us to understand how national interests shaped the way policymakers applied and exploited the rhetoric they were already using and understood an ideology they already believed” (503). Studies focusing on state-to-state relations in international affairs, then, need to go beyond public statements and the occasional bickering between national leaders.

The second lesson of “Malleable Modernity” is that, in making and unmaking modernization/ development efforts, local actors usually played a larger role than American aid and advisers. Danforth correctly states that “modernization [w]as an ideology before it became a theory” in U.S. diplomacy (479). In fact, modernization was in practice in Turkey for decades (if not for nearly two centuries) before American experts showed up. The historian Nils Gilman argues that President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who founded modern Turkey in 1923, was the first leader to “use [t]he word *modernization* to describe a political and economic program, [a] *directed* process of nation building.”² Another illuminating study by the historian Nathan Citino provides ample evidence how Ottoman attempts in modernization in the nineteenth century inspired U.S. development efforts elsewhere in the ‘Third World’ during the Cold War.³

¹ See Barın Kayaoğlu, “Loving and Hating America in Turkey and Iran: A Cold War Story of Alliance Politics and Authoritarian Modernization, 1945-1980” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2014).

² Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 30-31.

³ Nathan J. Citino, “The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40, (2008): 579-97.

Understanding dynamics on the ground would allow future researchers to see that, just like Danforth's malleable American modernizers, the local actors themselves could be quite conflicted. In the case of modernity/modernization *alla turca*, the DP leaders who came to power on a platform of modernization and political openness in 1950 began to de-emphasize institutional democracy and individual rights by the end of the decade. Adnan Menderes, the DP's supposedly pro-Western and pro-free market prime minister, set the stage for a tyranny of the majority in the late 1950s and engaged in statist economics even more firmly than CHP's single-party years. For Menderes, authoritarian rule was a fair price to pay for modernization.

DP leaders were not alone in their malleable understanding of modernization. The Turkish military – the supposed guardian of the secular and democratic republic – overthrew the Menderes-led DP government on 27 May 1960 – despite the tragic experience of past Ottoman coups and Atatürk's caveats that the army should stay away from politics.

But perhaps İsmet İnönü best exemplified the Turkish elite's conflicting stance on the role of political actors in creating a democratic, egalitarian, and prosperous country. İnönü, Atatürk's successor as president and CHP chairman, had overseen Turkey's transition to democracy that led to his own ouster and the advent of DP rule in 1950 – a fact he cherished with his famous maxim “my defeat was my greatest victory.”⁴ But in 1960, the former president and leader of the opposition did not take a firm stand against the military junta that undid one of his greatest achievements by overthrowing Menderes. Ironically, after the transition to democracy in the fall of 1961, İnönü became prime minister and faced two coup attempts.

The key lesson here is that Washington could not, even at the zenith of its global wealth and power, get local actors in Turkey (or elsewhere) to bend to its will. Neither high-ranking members of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations nor U.S. diplomats and advisers on the ground could change the course of DP's excesses, prevent the 1960 coup, or stop the junta from executing Menderes in September 1961. America played an important – but not always determining – role in those events. Thus, future students of U.S.-Turkish relations and U.S. international history are well-advised to look more closely into subjects on ‘the other side’ to tell richer stories.

The second point leads us to the third and perhaps most important question emanating from Danforth's “Malleable Modernity:” how did U.S. aid projects in such places as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Thailand, and South Korea influence academic and policy-oriented debates surrounding modernization theory *within U.S. circles* in the late 1950s and early 1960s? Gilman and Citino's works, along with exceptional studies by Odd Arne Westad, Michael Latham, David Ekbladh, and others teach us much about the rise and fall of modernization theory during the Cold War. Meanwhile, the terrific research by Gregg Brazinsky, Brad Simpson, Salim Yaqub, to name only a few scholars, has offered great insights about how modernization affected bilateral U.S. relations with South Korea, Indonesia, and Egypt during the Cold War.⁵

⁴ Quoted in Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İkinci Adam* [The Second Man] (İstanbul: Remzi, 1968), 415.

⁵ Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University

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The next generation of students will broaden our horizons by investigating whether developing tails in Latin America, Africa, and Asia wagged the American dog *in America* – that is, whether the setbacks that modernization efforts faced in places like Colombia or Ghana changed how American officials, intellectuals, and academics thought about India or the Philippines. Aside from ‘big’ matters such as the relationship between authoritarianism and progress, studies on how Americans used their experiences in creating educational curriculum in one place influenced curriculum development in another context, or how a Fulbright scholar’s experiences with radical students in a one country may have affected U.S. public diplomacy efforts somewhere else would be both intellectually stimulating and highly relevant for present-day policymaking.

Any scholars who decide to tackle such key questions in international history should start their work by reading Danforth’s “Malleable Modernity.”

Barın Kayaoğlu is an analyst and consultant in Washington, D.C., where he writes and comments on global events for U.S. and international news outlets. He finished his doctorate in history at the University of Virginia in 2014, and he is currently turning his dissertation into a book, tentatively titled *Loving and Hating America: U.S. Diplomacy, Modernization, and the Origins of Pro- and Anti-American Sentiment in Turkey and Iran*.

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Press, 2008); Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Odd Arne Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).