

FROM INSPIRATION TO ASPIRATION Turkey in the New Middle East

Executive Summary

The Paper in a Nutshell

Turkey as a prosperous, democratic, Muslim-majority state offers a potentially powerful model for Arab countries emerging from autocratic rule. By borrowing judiciously from Turkey's experience—applying lessons sector by sector and issue by issue—the Arab world can support, sustain, and consolidate economic development, state-building, and democracy. If Turkey and the West act in unison to strengthen the rule of law and democratic governance in the region, it will prove that the Turkish model is worthy of imitation and a lasting success story.

Defining the Turkish Model

Secularism, democracy, and political Islam: Turkey is one of the few states in the Muslim world that, while openly embracing and enforcing the principle of secularism, has allowed for the emergence of political Islam.

Civil-military relations: The military played a leading role in establishing the modern Turkish state. Its position as guardian of republican principles gave Turkish society enough confidence to allow political Islam to emerge and eventually acquire executive power.

Market-state relations: Following three decades of economic liberalization, Turkey is now the world's sixteenth largest economy.

It has a powerful industrial base geared toward exports and a large domestic market with increasing levels of purchasing power.

Links to the West: Since the founding of the republic, Turkish leaders have sought to embed Turkey in the West. It is a member of NATO and aspires to join the EU.

State traditions: Consolidated democracy requires a state capable of carrying out its main functions—protecting citizens, collecting taxes, and delivering services—in an orderly, predictable, and legal manner. Turkish public administration successfully fulfills this role.

Relevance of the Turkish Model

Choose carefully: Not all elements of the Turkish model apply easily to the new Middle East. Secularism, for instance, was imposed by authoritarian means unlikely to be tolerated by today's protest movements. Turkey's strong Western orientation is likewise distinct.

Recommendations for Turkish Policymakers

Mentor political parties: Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) should strengthen cooperation with like-minded parties across the Middle East, highlighting the benefits of pragmatism, moderation, and pluralism.

Train security officials: Turkey should contribute to security sector reform by boosting its already considerable education and training programs for police and military personnel.

Improve economic integration: Trade around the Mediterranean is currently hindered by a complex web of bilateral agreements among eleven different countries. Turkey should extend its customs union with the EU to Middle East and North African countries, thereby creating a Mediterranean free trade zone and spurring economic growth.

Encourage financial reform: Arab countries urgently need to overhaul their banking systems so that capital is allocated rationally, rather than on the basis of political ties. Turkish financial authorities, having just undergone a similar transition, should help build local capacity through exchanges of information and expertise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Sinan Ülgen is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, where his research focuses on the implications of Turkish foreign policy for Europe and the United States, particularly with regard to Turkey's regional stance. He is also chairman of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), an independent think tank in Istanbul.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

A full-length version of this study is available on the web at: CarnegieEndowment.org/ulgen. For more information or to speak with one of our scholars, please do not hesitate to contact our government affairs manager, Scott Toussaint, at (202) 939-2307 or stoussaint@ceip.org.

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