

# **The Middle East and Learning from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Arab Spring is a populous movement aimed at shifting the Middle East toward sound governance. Its basic demands are freedom, transparency, accountability, civic engagement, and economic prosperity. The movement, however, do not follow a practical model. While Turkey, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates (TIE) provide successful economic and administrative models for governance in the Middle East. They, however, are not suitable to be duplicated elsewhere in the Middle East due to these models' particularities, historic circumstances, and socio-geographical factors. Therefore, the Arab Spring may benefit from other models in the world, especially ones that are successfully practiced in the developing countries. A particular model that can be beneficial to examine is that of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC). Although not all aspects of this model can apply to the Middle East. Its resiliency for growth and innovation, however, can be inspirational. This paper explores how learning from the BRIC model can offset challenges facing the Middle East through the proper use of opportunities by credible public administrators.

**Keywords:** Arab Spring, Middle East, sound governance, model, public administration.

### **Introduction**

Since the region of the Middle East involves many countries with varying systems of government, attempting to analyze issues of governance on regional level and as one coherent set is difficult. Yet, and because of the interconnectedness of the region and its shared interests, values, and history, the ripple-effects of events in one part of the region may have consequences extending to the entire region. Governmental policies in each particular country in the region will then respond to that event based on its own calculus. Hence, a phenomenological approach to understand governance in the Middle East may be useful. While we cannot treat the region of the Middle East as a whole and as one set or coherent block, we can, nevertheless, appreciate its interconnectedness and the impact of events (phenomenon) on its social, economic, and political trajectory. This paper will attempt to underline the challenges facing the Middle East as a region, and opportunities available for offsetting these challenges through learning from different models that may be suitable, in some aspects, for the region.

Shared interests, history, culture, and interconnected dynamics are among the region strongest elements. The Middle East can build on these shared trends in order to tackle its many challenges and balance out disparities through collective planning, shared resources, and common vision. Treating the Middle East as a cooperative region can be useful for the region's overall progress toward peace and prosperity and establishing a regional economic "cooperative" based on the regions shared elements is perhaps what the Middle East needs the most.

By minimizing political differences between the various countries in the Middle East, eradicating outdated regimes such as that of Assad in Syria that stand in front of progress, and maintaining the Arab Spring as an ongoing process in order to brush aside the opportunistic political forces, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, that temporarily had ridden the political wave created by the Arab Spring for their own narrow interests (Bradley, 2012), the Middle East can

put all its eggs in one basket and through collective planning and strategies can assess its challenges, capitalize on its opportunities, and move forward as a cohesive and cooperative block. It can learn from the coordination and cooperation between Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) in creating a model for such a functional cooperative block (PWC, 2013), and within time offer its own regional model of success to the world.

There are more commonalities within the countries of the Middle East than between Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Yet, and despite the few commonalities between Brazil, Russia, India, and China, these four countries were successful in creating an economic block that is beneficial to their economy in particular and to the global economy as a whole. Even though political differences between these four countries are vast, these differences did not become barriers for the creation of their “cooperative” block. The Middle East can learn from such a model, especially when it has more opportunities for success than the BRIC model because of the region’s shared attributes.

This is why treating the Middle East as an economically cooperative region can be useful in order to build on the regional shared interests, history, and culture, and because of the region’s susceptibility to changes and events. This is particularly true at the aftermath of the Arab Spring as changes in governance is taking place and the entire region going through a transformative phase in its trajectory.

The models that best can provide guidelines for the envisioning of a regional “cooperative” can be both from the region of the Middle East itself or global. On the regional level, the economic model exemplified separately in the three Middle Eastern countries of Turkey, Israel, and the United Arab “Emirate” (TIE) can serve as a guide (Sayan, 2011). The problem, however, the model of success is particular to Turkey, Israel, and the UAE separately as the three countries do not act as an economic cooperative the same as the BRIC model. Hence, the measure of success in each of these three countries can be studied and projected forward for possible application on a larger scale. The “cooperative” between the seven sheikhdoms (emirates) itself that formed the United Arab Emirate (UAE) is on its own another good example to observe (Rugh, 2010). The problem, however, the UAE cannot be project to the entire Middle East because all the seven members of the UAE share common economic, political, geographical, and linguistic similarities, which is not the case with the region of the Middle East.

On global level, there are the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union. NIFTA, however, is not precisely an economic cooperative (Kay, 2011) the same as the UAE or BRIC and its success is very limited. The European Union (EU) on the other hand is an economic cooperative and is relatively successful despite its financial problem and the difficulties of the Euro Zone (McCormick, 2011). Yet, it is not suitable for the Middle East because the vast differences in economic progress between Europe and the Middle East.

This brings us to the BRIC model. All members of the model, with South Africa currently joining the block to make the model hence known as BRICS (The Economist, 2013) are developing Third World nations. They share many characteristics with the Middle East in this regard. The innovative approach in the BRICS model and its unique use of human capital can also be another learning element for the Middle East. Thus, the contrast between the TIE and the BRICS models can provide a useful blueprint for identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) facing the Middle East and device strategies for planning an environment suitable for the emergence of a regional cooperative that may lead the Middle East toward prosperity and force governance to be more responsive to citizens’ needs. Learning from the BRICS model can also provide an environment for the training and development of a credible, transparent, accountable, and competent administrative cadre that can become instrumental in moving the region forward through coordination and collective planning and decision-making process (Jones, 2012).

The basic formula for envisioning such a possibility rests on the region's shared interests, history, and culture, and its correct adaptation of change through interactive learning process from the BRICS model. This mechanism requires a credible public administration in order to see it taking hold and moving forward. Hence, public administration through its regulatory systems and public forum can act as leverage for balancing out between regional challenges and opportunities and guiding collective the decision-making process toward sound governance (Farzamand, 2004).

## **Opportunities**

The Middle East is a rich region. It has the world's largest oil reserves located in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Libya, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Oman (Black, 2011). A large segment of the population in the Middle East is also skilled and highly educated, with the youth constituting a large portion (Djerejian, 2009). The region's wealth is also complemented by richness in history, culture, and past scientific achievements (Goldschmidt, 2005).

The region's diversity in languages, social and ethnic groups, folklore, and deeply rooted societal values also contribute to its resiliency against internal and external threats (Lust, 2013). This is in addition to the region's capacity to adapt and learn from other models (Bradfer, 2011).

Another opportunity is networking with expatriates from many countries in the Middle East who had migrated abroad and gained sufficient expertise, wealth, and knowledge that can be beneficial for the region. Some of these expatriates are Nobel laureates, scientists, artists, economists, journalists, and political leaders. Networking between the region and these expatriates can promote venues for openness, and increase technological, academic, artistic, social, economic, and scientific developments. Networking can also involve cooperation with global organizations in the fields of arts, sciences, and technologies to foster progress through innovation and change.

## **Challenges**

There are many challenges facing the Middle East as a region. The most important are the following:

1. **Economic Disparity:** Although the region includes some of the wealthiest oil-producing countries and the per-capita in these countries are among the highest in the world, majority of people in the Middle East are among the poorest in the world (Aydin, 2005). This economic disparity, coupled with increasingly alarming over-populated poor communities is becoming recipes for discontent, upheaval, and unrest. The Arab Spring is an example for such malcontent (Gelvin, 2012).
2. **Political Tyranny:** Many governments in the Middle East are nondemocratic, authoritarian, elitist, and governed through police-states (Heydemann, 2000). This is true before and after the Arab Spring. Basic forms of individual rights and freedom are missing. Accountability, transparency, ethics, and citizen participation in governance are virtually non-existing. On the other hand, nepotism, censorship, political oppression, unlawful detention, torture, kidnapping, and summary execution are ramped (Habeed, 2012). Such a challenge can lead to social upheaval and unrest. The current revolution in Syria against the despotic Assad regime is an example.

3. **Ineffective Public Administration:** Many countries in the Middle East suffer from a heavily politicized, inept, incompetent, and corrupt public administration (Long, Reich, and Gasiorowski (2010)). In effect, public administration in the Middle East reflects the decadent nature of the region's political reality by emphasizing the deficiency of transparent and accountable civic institutions, lack of merit-based professional cadre, and the absence of apolitical civil service systems (Dabashi, 2012). Ineffective public administration in the Middle East also contributes to the institutionalization of corruption, incompetence, low-productivity rate, lack of sound planning and evaluation, and a paralysis in public service.
4. **Reactionary Cultural Traditions:** Some reactionary cultural traditions and their residuals are decapitating the Middle East and holding it from living up to its fullest potentials (Djerejian, 2009; Heydemann, 2000). Examples of these reactionary traditions are disempowering women, suppressing voices of dissent, oppressing minorities, and favoring collectivism over individual freedom (Moghadam and Karshenas, 2006). Instead, outdated norms are enforced and justified as traditions, such as tribalism, chauvinism, bigotry, honor killing, female genital mutilation, and misogynist behaviors (Joseph and Slyomovics, 2000).
5. **Lack of Accountability:** Most governments in the Middle East are notorious for avoiding accountability, shifting blames outward, and enforcing the sense of victimhood (Dabashi, 2012). The result is the avoidance for self-criticism and the inability to arrive to realistic solutions for social, political, and economic problems. Moving through crisis without any meaningful solution while blaming outsiders for the crisis becomes a justification for maintaining the status quo and avoiding any obligation to accomplish real services for the public (Lynch, 2013).
6. **Mistrust:** There is an old saying in the Middle East states that "we agree to disagree." This notion is based on centuries of mistrust in the Middle East between governmental apparatus and the public. This, in return, had contributed to the lack of transparency and accountability in governance, the institutionalization of corruption, and the prevalence of unethical conducts and abuse of power (Moghadam and Karshenas, 2006).
7. **The Curse of Oil:** The reliance on oil as the source of public revenue in the Middle East has eliminated the needs for a system of taxation to support governmental functions. As a consequence, governmental accountability to the taxpayers has been eliminated (Chaudhry, 1997). The reliance on oil revenue, as such, is enabling governments in the Middle East to be unaccountable for the public while benefiting the very few who reside at the helms of political power (Heydemann, 2000).
8. **Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:** The unresolved Israel-Palestinian issue has enabled governments in the Middle East to manipulate the issue in order to shift attention away from them (Dabashi, 2012). The false slogan of "resisting Israel in support of the Palestinian people" by Iran and Syria, for example, has been a clever disguise to camouflage these regimes' despotism and an excuse to justify their lack of democratic reforms (Heyemann and Leenders, 2012).

Historically, most attempts in addressing these challenges were political and lacking any true service-oriented programs that can have real impacts on improving the standards of living and peoples' lives. Examples of these political solutions were nationalism, socialism, Marxism, liberalism, and political Islam (Cleveland and Bunton, 2012). All these attempts, with the exception of some limited and marginal success of the socialist approach, had failed in answering the basic needs of the citizenry. The failure of these attempts added to the sense of frustrations by

the public, which soon created a vacuum filled by extremist groups and ideologies.

### **Offsetting Challenges**

Understanding the opportunities available to the Middle East as avenues for capacity building may represent a window for finding solutions for the region's pressing challenges. How to utilize particular sets of opportunities in order to offset a specific challenge? The answer to this question requires a need for a credible, competent, neutral, accountable, transparent, and effective broker that can act as leverage in applying one set of opportunity to upset a set of challenge.

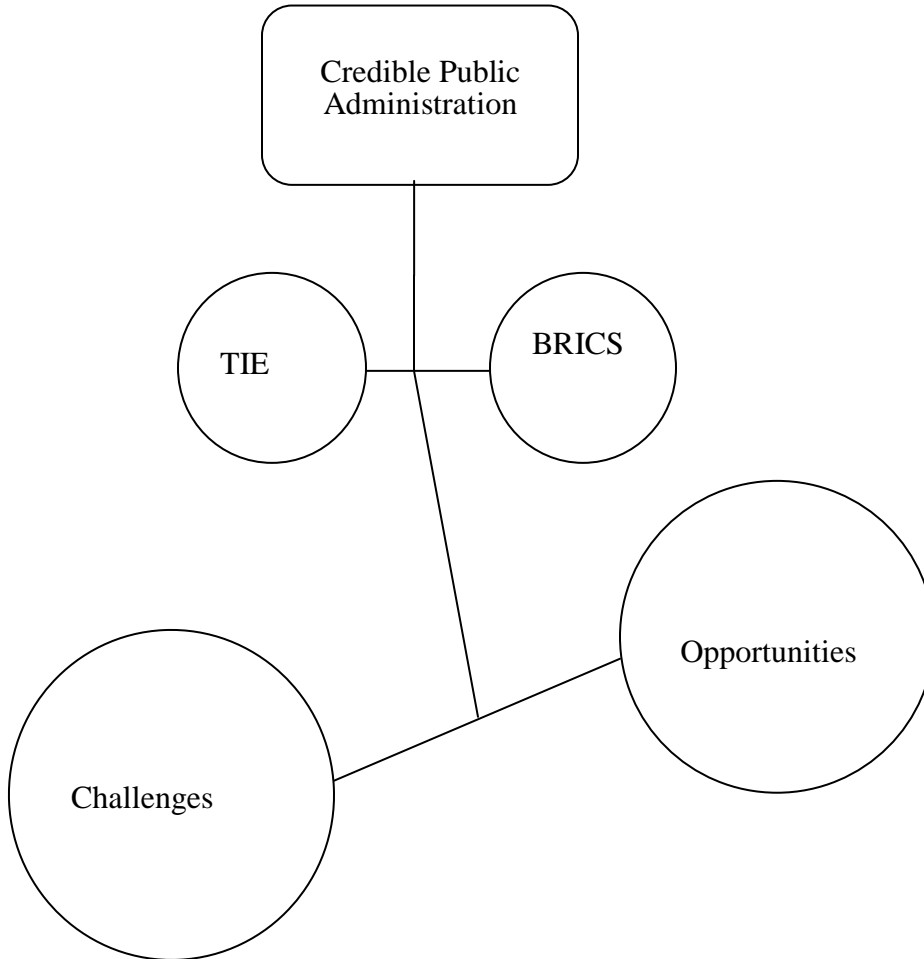
Middle Eastern history, especially since the independence of its current nation-states from Western colonial powers teaches that the opportunity for the emergence of a credible, apolitical, and competent public administration in the Middle East did not materialize. Hence, there always existed a gulf and disconnect between regional opportunities and challenges because there was no leverage to connect them (Berggruen and Gardels, 2012). The reason for the absence of a credible and competent public administration in the Middle East is because of the absence of sound governance. Without sound governance there could not be a credible public administration (Farazmand, 2004). And, without a credible public administration the gulf between opportunities and challenges will remain wide, with opportunities going to waste while challenges remain unresolved. The availability of sound governance is thus an important ingredient for resolving the region's challenges. Sound governance not only will enable the Middle East strengthen the TIE model and make it regionally open for growth and participation (Aydin, 2005; Bradfer, 2011), but it will also enable the Middle East itself to become a model of success for the world.

What can the BRICS model provide in this process and how would it help in shifting the dynamics in the Middle East toward sound governance, especially when many governments in the BRICS model itself are neither sound nor democratic? Also, not every element in the BRICS model is applicable elsewhere (Mezaev, 2013), such as:

1. There are differences in experience, evolutionary socio-economic trends, and response to globalization.
2. Skilled and cheap labor that is available in the BRICS model is not available in the Middle East.
3. The legal protection of investment in the BRICS is limited or risky in the Middle East.
4. Most countries in the Middle East still are galvanized by social and political unrests.

Despite these differences and limitations, the BRICS model, coupled with learning from the TIE model as well, do provide a resiliency for growth and innovation that can be adapted by the Middle East as a learning element for the creation of a credible and competent public administration that can lead the region toward sound governance. This emerging broker will then act as leverage to tilt the regional pendulum more toward opportunities and strengths than weaknesses and challenges.

The new public administration in the Middle East can then create new realities on the ground, bring to light better, more open, transparent, and accountable public forums, eradicate outdated and dysfunctional norms and practices, and morph governance in the Middle East toward sound governance. The graph below illustrates how learning from the BRICS and TIE models can tilt the equilibrium in the Middle Eastern toward offsetting challenges by a credible public administration.



## **Conclusion**

In order to learn from the BRICS model, expand on the TIE model, establish a credible public administration and devise a formula for offsetting challenges through the correct use of opportunities, the following recommendations are needed as preliminary steps:

1. Creating transparent and accountable civic institutions while encouraging partnerships between the public and civic institutions through continuous dialogues, openness, evaluations, and assessments.
2. Improving the standards of public service through a merit-based system and direct accountability to the public.
3. Supporting freedom of expression and assembly in order to eliminate past practices of censorship and to respect voices of dissent.

4. Establishing clear and strict ethical codes in public service and separating public administration from the political process.
5. Eliminating corruption, fraud, abuse, nepotism, cronyism, and misuse of public funds.
6. Eradicating outdated reactionary cultural norms and empowering women and minority groups.
7. Establishing an ongoing network between academia and practitioners to help build a credible, apolitical and professional public administration cadre and providing a medium for experts in public policy and administration to share experiences and examine successful models for governance in the world (such as the BRICS models).
8. Building relationships between international and regional professional organizations devoted to the public interest and democratization and providing legal safeguards for investments and economic developments in the region.
9. Increasing the role of professional public administrators in capacity building and promoting innovation in technology and scientific research devoted to improving the quality of life in the Middle East.
10. Encouraging investments and capital ventures in the Middle East, establishing sound trade policies that will encourage economic growth and employment, and enlarging the TIE model to be more robust and applicable beyond its current limitations.
11. Increasing the representation of women and ethnic and minority groups in governance.
12. Shifting public discourse from personality cults and hero worship toward the building of competent and democratic civic institutions while promoting peace and prosperity in the Middle East and ending all forms of violence.
13. Increasing the quality of teaching and education in public policy and administration in the Middle East, conducting workshops and training for practitioners in public policy and administration, and contributing to ongoing research on public policy and administration.

The path toward sound governance in the Middle East is not going to be easy. Centuries of despotic regimes, tyranny, power abuse, police-states, corruption, censorship, inept and incompetent public administration, lack of civic institutions, near absence of democratic traditions, lack of accountability and transparency, and the persistence of reactionary cultural norms all make the road toward sound governance a very difficult task.

Yet, majority of people in the Middle East, especially the young and educated generation wants to see changes in governance. They demand better lives, more freedoms, and more responsible government. They keep themselves informed through the social network forums and learn about how other people live elsewhere in the world, especially in the Western democracies. They want the same for themselves and their family.

People in the Middle East are no longer satisfied with the status quo and governmental excuses of shifting the blames outward. Making outsiders as the bogymen by these governments who supposedly are causing all misery in the region is no longer acceptable by the public,



especially when the public see how these governments are behaving. People can also see how public funds are squandered by government leaders.

Because of the public frustration and lack of hope, and because of the governments' inability to properly respond to public needs, and often answering citizens' demands with more repressive measures, the Arab Spring erupted in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya were toppled. The regime in Yemen was replaced through mediation and settlement. And, the regime in Syria is continuing to fight its citizens with Russian and Iranian supplied arms.

The governments that emerged after the Arab Spring, however, are not better than those were toppled, if not worst. These new "spring governments" are dominated by Islamic groups that rode the public demand for freedom and democracy, but once in power they ended all forms of freedom and democracy.

The pessimistic lesson from the Arab Spring indicates that perhaps people in the Middle East deserve the type of governments they got since they were the ones who had voted the Islamic groups to power. This view, however, is unjust. It neglects taking into account the centuries long of oppression in the Middle East that had eliminated most voices of dissent and left only the mosque-dwelling political-Islamic groups to remain intact since they were disguised as mere religious groups. After the Arab Spring and the toppling of the despotic regimes, these political-Islamic groups were able to fill the power vacuum and then wipe out any mechanism for opposing them.

This view also neglects to take into account the lack of democratic traditions in the Middle East. It fails to realize that voting, personal liberty, and accountability are all new concepts for people in the Middle East.

The future of the Middle East, on the contrary, is not gloomy and dim but rather hopeful. The Arab Spring is an ongoing process and the setbacks that is currently experiencing are bubbles and will be erupted as the public cry for freedom continues. The genie is out of the bottle and it difficult taming it again.

What also makes the future of the Middle East hopeful is its tradition of resiliency, a quality derived from its glorious past. After each set back in history, the people of the Middle East were able to get back on their feet, adapted to the new environment, and make corresponding changes. This time they will do the same. This is why learning from other models in governance can be important for such adaptation, and this is why learning from the BRICS model can be useful in order to adapt, and make appropriate changes.

It took Europe two major world wars and it took America a revolutionary war and a civil war in order for them to get to where they are today. Revolution in the Middle East for better life and sound governance has just begun. Let us give it a little more time in order for it to adapt, learn, and make true changes toward peace and prosperity.

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