

# Arab AKPs in the Making?

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**C**an Turkey's experience in the past decade under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government -- blending democracy, close ties with the West, a "Muslim" foreign policy, capitalism and Islamism -- be copied by Arabs, as many claim? Probably not -- except for Tunisia.

Although rooted in Turkey's Islamist movement, the AKP moderated in order to come to power in 2002. And once in power, the party pursued a policy that delivered phenomenal economic growth. It thereby became so popular that it was able to reshape Turkey, bringing the once-dominant military under its control and the Turkish elites -- including the staunchly secular courts, business community and the media -- into its camp.

Yet the AKP has done a near full circle in foreign policy. Initially, the party took issue with the United States on key issues, including the Iraq War, Israel, and Iran's nuclear program, in the hope of casting Turkey as a "Muslim power." But lately, the party has shifted, moving closer to U.S. positions on Iran and also cooperating with Washington in Libya and now Syria. The AKP came to realize that its strategic value is as a Muslim power with strong ties to the U.S. and access to NATO technology and muscle. Accordingly, in September 2011, Turkey made its most strategic decision of the past decade, joining NATO's 21st century missile defense project.

But the Arab states are very different. The first point, almost always overlooked, is that most are either still authoritarian or newly almost-anarchic. For instance, in all six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, plus Jordan and Morocco, monarchs remain more or less firmly in power -- some with weak elected parliaments, some without even that.

In Libya and Yemen, autocrats have been deposed, but the new governments are not effectively in control and remain hostage to tribal, regional or religious militias. In Iraq, the elected government seems to be moving back to, instead of further away from, autocratic tendencies. Syria is locked in a bloody stalemate between a dictatorial regime and an increasingly violent popular uprising. The Palestinians have had neither popular uprising nor

peaceful political change.

That leaves Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, as in Turkey, a relatively moderate Islamist party won a majority in a free election, but still has to compete with secular parties and social groups. Extreme fundamentalists are very rare. Tunisia's population is fairly well educated, with a large middle-income segment. The dominant Islamist party supports the private sector, including tourism and other international economic lifelines, and is cultivating the West. So Tunisia is the best prospect to follow Turkey's footsteps. Tellingly, Tunisia's ruling al-Nahda is the only Arab party that says it wants to emulate the Turkish model.

Egypt tells a very different story. The Muslim Brotherhood's party won a plurality in free elections, but its main competitors are the more extreme fundamentalist Salafi parties. The Brotherhood is trying to centralize political power, from the constitutional committee to the presidency, despite earlier promises of a more inclusive democratic approach. Egypt, sadly, also still suffers from widespread poverty and illiteracy -- yet Egypt's new government has gone out of its way to alienate its friends in the U.S. and Europe over marginal issues like foreign NGOs. The Brotherhood has also publicly disavowed comparisons with the "Turkish model."

So the prospects for the "Turkish model" seem fairly dim in Egypt, at least for the moment. But the odds are better that Egypt will maintain a moderate foreign policy. Its national security and economic needs suggest it, as does its unease with Iran.

Does this imply a different model, an Arab government that is not very democratic, yet friendly to the U.S., hostile to Iran, and not even threatening to Israel? For a startling real-world example, which may be more like Egypt's future, one need look not to Turkey, but perhaps to Saudi Arabia.

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