



## PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

# The UAE's School of Government Can Help the Arab World Live Up to Its Potential

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Since its establishment in 2005, the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG), formerly known as the Dubai School of Government, has emerged as a leading school of public policy in the United Arab Emirates. The quality of its researchers and resources, as well as its partnership with Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, make it a premier Arab institution in the sphere of governance. The MBRSG can play a significant role in steering broader developments in the Middle East and the Arab world.

The main obstacle in the way of the Arab world's living up to its potential is neither over-devotion to tradition nor overreliance on natural resources. It is the inability of the public sector to deliver services efficiently and effectively. Shortcomings in the fields of education, public health, public administration, and regulation must be addressed in order to provide young Arabs with a better future.

Western analysts expected the so-called "Arab Spring" to usher in a wave of reforms that would bolster development and raise living standards in the region. Subsequent events disappointed these expectations and showed that the region will not be rescued by politicians' speeches or promises. What the Arab world needs most is for its best minds to devise and enact micro and macro reforms that can make a genuine difference.

The UAE can contribute greatly to the modernization of the Arab world by empowering the best and brightest young students of the Middle East. If the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government annually granted the 15-30 top undergraduates from each country in the region the opportunity to pursue a master's degree in public administration in exchange for a

commitment to serve their respective countries as government advisors for two or three years, the seeds of better governance could be sown across the Arab world.

Many talented young Arabs pursue graduate programs in the West that address problems and challenges very different from those that confront the Arab world. It would make more sense for the best minds of the region to learn approaches and solutions to the challenges faced by their native lands. This strategy would enable the region to save millions on the hefty fees charged by foreign consultants while providing young Arab professionals the opportunity to discuss and devise cutting-edge solutions to administrative and governance issues across the Middle East.

The region would benefit in an additional way from this strategy. Placing graduates of this program in the top echelons of regional ministries would foster bonds and cooperation at the highest level. This could contribute as much as Arab League summits to furthering Middle Eastern peace and integration. Indeed, one can imagine a scenario in which Middle Eastern heads of state set agendas that are then acted upon by officials who studied and bonded in Dubai.

In this context, Israeli guest lecturers could share the experience and lessons of Israel in spheres such as health, education, science, and technology. In so doing, they would help to reinforce the growing realization in the Middle East that the state of Israel is devoted to the peaceful progress of all nations in the region.

Precedents for such a program exist elsewhere. For decades, the top graduates of France's ENA have been recruited by ministers to craft domestic policies. Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry is likewise an employer of the country's brightest undergraduates. There is no reason for the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government not to train the technocrats who will solve the daunting challenges facing the Middle East in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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