

MARC LYNCH

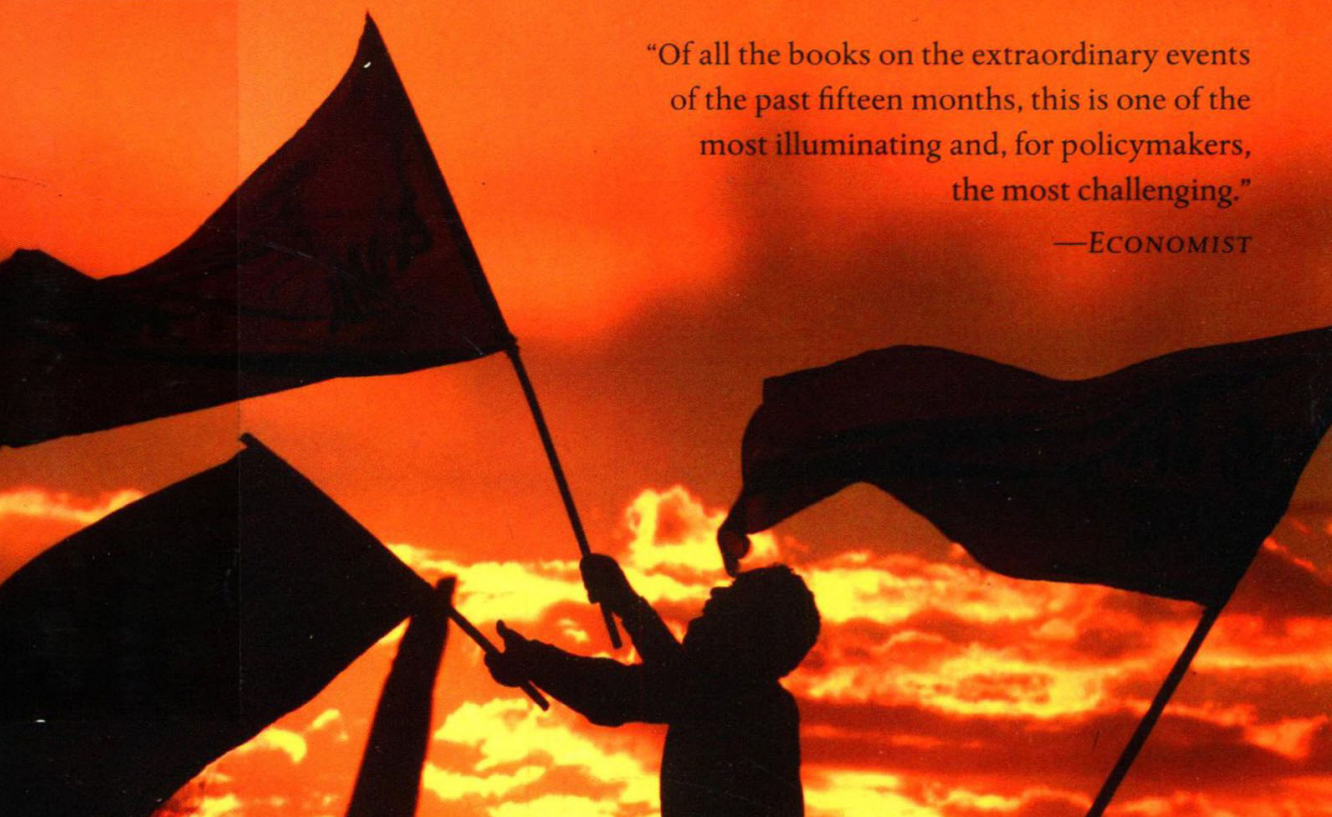
# THE ARAB UPRISING

THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS  
OF THE NEW MIDDLE EAST



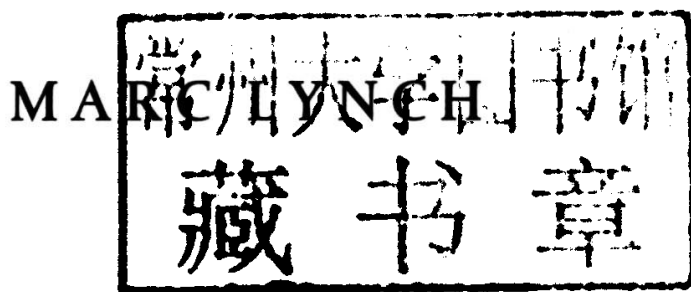
"Of all the books on the extraordinary events  
of the past fifteen months, this is one of the  
most illuminating and, for policymakers,  
the most challenging."

—ECONOMIST



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OF THE NEW MIDDLE EAST



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## Praise for *The Arab Uprising*

"Lynch has written a clear-eyed, highly readable guide to the forces in the region that gave rise to the Arab uprisings and the very real challenges they present for the U.S. Indispensably, he presents the material in a way that is neither excessively romantic about democracy's chances nor excessively fearful about the greater role Islamists will no doubt play in a newly empowered Arab public square."  
—*Washington Monthly*

"*The Arab Uprising* is a joy to read. It should appeal to a non-specialist audience looking for a nuanced and short but engaging narrative of the ongoing Arab revolts without descending into obscure academic jargon. . . . For scope and depth, as well as the empathy he imbues in the book, Lynch remains within the unusual bracket of scholars who possess a genuine concern, not only for his own state's national interest, but also for those who have been sacrificed for it."  
—Madawi al-Rasheed, *Middle Eastern Studies*

"One of the most profound books about the nature of the transformations under way, of the consciousness of the public squares and the new popular anger in today's Arab world."  
—*Al-Ghad* (Jordan)

"[Lynch], who has been following recent events closely . . . reexamines important precedents in mass uprisings that took place in convulsive waves during the Arab Cold War of the 1950s, and were brutally suppressed . . . [he] also examines the key role initially played by the Al-Jazeera network in coverage of the Tunisia uprising, keenly watched by the Egyptians in convincing them their own efforts could be successful. . . . A timely survey of complex historical and current events."  
—*Kirkus*

"A nuanced, insightful analysis of the Arab insurrections, with ample historical context. . . . In this thought-provoking book, Lynch earns his right to implore U.S. citizens to trust Middle Eastern countries to reshape their political space."  
—*Publishers Weekly*

"Lynch, a political scientist and advisor to the Obama administration, analyzes the recent and ongoing political changes taking place in the Middle East and ventures some predictions about what may come. . . . Timely, informative, and recommended for current events and regional history collections."  
—*Booklist*

“A wonderfully thoughtful book that captures a truly historic juncture in the Arab world. By chronicling the first volatile year of the Arab uprisings, Lynch has provided the essential guide to understanding what happens next—both for the participants living through it and for the anxious outside world surprised by the passions unleashed.”

—Robin Wright, author of *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion across the Islamic World*

“The extraordinary events associated with the Arab Spring have produced a chaotic mix of transitioning democracies, reactionary autocracies, and civil strife. But, as Marc Lynch explains in his brilliant new book, *The Arab Uprising*, regardless of the fate of individual rulers or the course of particular movements, the nature of politics in the Arab world has been forever transformed. A new generation has leveraged twenty-first-century technologies and tapped into a sense of interconnectedness and common identity to obliterate the old order. Nobody is better suited to navigate the reader through these turbulent waters than Lynch, one of the world’s top Middle East scholars and a pioneer in the study of new media and social activism in the Arab world. Lynch has produced the most comprehensive and balanced account yet written of the origins and implications of the changes currently sweeping this vital region. *The Arab Uprising* promises to remain essential reading on the subject for years to come.”

—Colin Kahl, associate professor, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East

“If you read only one book about the uprisings sweeping the Arab world, it should be this one. Marc Lynch coined the term ‘the Arab public sphere’ a decade before anyone in the West knew it existed and has been an active observer of and participant in it ever since. He chronicles decades of Arab protests, pan-Arabism, and Arab government repression to provide vital context for present events and draws on his deep country-by-country expertise to map future challenges for American foreign policy across the Arab world.”

—Anne-Marie Slaughter

**THE ARAB  
UPRISING**

原书缺页

*For Lauren, Sophia, and Alec*



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# INTRODUCTION

**O**N FEBRUARY 10, 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped before the TV camera for the third time since the January 25 revolution began. Massive crowds in Tahrir Square quieted. President Barack Obama and his closest advisers turned up the television volume on al-Jazeera English. After weeks of escalating protests, tense clashes in the streets, turmoil in the ruling elite, and fierce international pressure, virtually everyone expected Mubarak to announce his resignation.

Instead, casting himself as “a father to his sons and daughters,” he delivered a meandering, condescending address. He assured, paternalistically, that “as a president I find no shame in listening to my country’s youth”—but showed no sign of having actually done so. He laid out a time line for a transition of power over seven months, which made clear that he had no intention of immediately stepping down. The hundreds of thousands of Egyptians gathered in central Cairo roared with rage.

Seconds after the speech ended, I received an e-mail from one of President Obama’s top advisers on his way to a meeting in the Situation Room: “What do you make of *that*?” This book is in part my attempt to answer his question, and my own, about the dramatic changes that have unsettled so many assumptions and certainties in the Middle East.

It is commonly said that nobody predicted the upheavals in the Arab world that began in December 2010 and defined the following year.<sup>1</sup> But that does not mean that nobody saw them coming. The crumbling foundations of the Arab order were visible to all who cared to look. Political systems that had opened slightly in the mid-2000s were once again

closing down, victim to regime manipulation and repression. Economies failed to produce jobs for an exploding population of young people. As the gap between rich and poor grew, so did corruption and escalating resentment of an out-of-touch and arrogant ruling class. Meanwhile, Islamist movements continued to transform public culture even as Arab regimes used the threat of al-Qaeda to justify harsh security crackdowns.

Regional politics was equally stalled. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which remained central to Arab political identity and discourse, had long since gone on life support. Arab states seemed indifferent to its collapse, though, and even cooperated openly with Israel on the enforcement of the blockade of Gaza. In the spring of 2010, the Arabs were unable to even organize a single Arab summit meeting to discuss the problems of Palestine and Lebanon due to the bickering of the competing regimes, as Egyptian and Saudi leaders declined to travel to Doha in support of Qatari initiatives. A debilitating “cold war” between America’s autocratic allies and the forces of *muqawama* (resistance) such as Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah dominated the official agenda of regional international relations, spreading in its wake a nasty Sunni-Shi’a sectarianism that divided many Arab societies. To many Arabs, the behavior of their leaders contributed to the perennial failures of the Arab order. The need for change had grown urgent and painfully obvious to frustrated youth who had long since given up any hope that their leaders might themselves change.

All of these frustrations festered at a time of radical, revolutionary change in the information environment. Perhaps the Arab regimes had always been bickering, incompetent, corrupt. But now, thanks to satellite television stations like al-Jazeera and the spreading presence of the Internet, their follies were on full display to a skeptical Arab public. Arab leaders could no longer go about their business in private while crushing any sign of discontent. Their people now had access to information and an ability to express their opinions publicly far beyond anything the region had ever before known. When Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid in protest over abusive police on December 17, 2010, the Arab world was ready to respond.

I have been deeply immersed in the evolution of what I call a “new Arab public sphere” for well over a decade. My 2006 book *Voices of the*

*New Arab Public* had focused on al-Jazeera and the satellite television revolution that had shattered the Arab regimes' ability to control the flow of information or the expression of opinion. Most of my academic writings have focused on the impact of new communications technologies and their effects on political and social action. I had written about Egyptian bloggers and their political activism, as well as how Internet activism was changing the perspectives of young members of the Muslim Brotherhood. I had written about how al-Qaeda and radical Islamists used the new media, including Internet forums, to spread their narratives and their propaganda. I had written about al-Jazeera's talk shows and news coverage, and how they spread both a pan-Arabist identity and a political orientation highly critical of the authoritarian status quo. All of these writings pointed toward the evolution of a new public sphere that would inevitably challenge the pillars of Arab authoritarian domination.

I also played an active role in the Arab public sphere through my own blog, "Abu Aardvark."<sup>2</sup> While written in English (like many of the more influential Arab political blogs), Abu Aardvark was deeply immersed in Arab political debates and discourse. I tried to translate the debates in Arabic for a Western audience, while engaging personally in the contentious debates that consumed Arab discourse. When political discourse moved onto Twitter, so did I (you can find me at @abuaardvark). In the spring of 2010, I helped to launch the Middle East Channel on ForeignPolicy.com, where I solicited and personally edited hundreds of essays by leading academic experts as well as commentators from the region. My dual personalities had never felt more intertwined than on January 25, 2011, as I watched the Egyptian revolution unfold in real time on Twitter, while sitting on a stage moderating an academic panel discussion about the Tunisian revolution.

Through my own blogging and research, I got to know many of the leading Arab Internet activists personally, both through online engagement and during my travels to the region. I followed in real time over the course of a decade the struggles, travails, and successes of the new public. I saw them fail to force immediate political change, but argued repeatedly that they were nonetheless driving a generational revolution in expectations and attitudes. I struggled with the moral hazard inherent in encouraging their political activism while leaving them at the tender

mercies of state security. And I struggled every day with the vast chasm that separated their views of America and the Middle East from what I heard every day in Washington.

I also became deeply involved in debates about American foreign policy. In the years following 9/11, I urged the Bush administration to take Arab opinion seriously and to engage more effectively with the emerging Arab public sphere through a reinvigorated public diplomacy. I challenged the neoconservatives aligned with the Bush administration to reconcile their avowed support for Arab democratization with their adoption of policies and rhetoric that infuriated exactly the people they claimed to want to empower. In the fall of 2008, I warned a congressional audience (and later, in private, the CENTCOM strategic review team tasked by General David Petraeus for the incoming Obama administration to review the foundations of America's strategic presence in the Middle East) that the crumbling Egyptian state and steadily closing political space would be unsustainable (a version of which I published on the blog).<sup>3</sup> My involvement with these policy debates sharpened my sense of urgency in translating academic expertise into real impact on these issues about which I cared so deeply.

I moved to Washington, D.C., in the summer of 2007 to join the new Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University, and signed on as a Middle East policy adviser to the then long-shot presidential campaign of Barack Obama. I worked as one of the small core group of policy advisers to the campaign on Iraq and the Middle East until election day. I opted not to go into government service after the election, but remained close to many administration officials. When the Arab uprisings began, I found myself consulting frequently and intensely with administration officials from across the agencies. I attended dozens of off-the-record working groups and expert engagement sessions, spoke privately with administration officials at all levels, and debated Egypt policy with President Obama himself.

From these multiple vantage points, I can say from deep experience that many of us in the community of scholars warned of the crumbling foundations of Arab authoritarian rule. The canard that liberals or Middle East experts did not believe in Arab democracy could not be farther from the truth—if anything, these communities were too quick to

identify with popular movements and too instinctively suspicious of the intentions of ruling elites. But I would not pretend to be anything other than stunned by the enormity or speed of the Arab uprising that finally came. I had anticipated a slower, generational transformation. It was the difference between seeing structural changes happening below the surface and watching the chaotic reality of politics.

The Tunisian uprising and its aftermath demonstrates the radical reality of contingency and randomness in politics. The course of events in each country could easily have gone differently at crucial moments: a panicked soldier in Tahrir Square could have opened fire and started a stampede; the Bahraini crown prince might have struck a reform deal before the Saudis lost patience and rolled in their troops; Syrian president Bashar al-Assad might have decided not to try to crush protests in Deraa. But beneath the random turbulence and human agency, there were deeper forces at work. The uprising would have been impossible without factors like generational change, new technologies, American leadership, and the regional military balance of power, all working together.

This book seeks to make sense of what happened and to offer a guide to what is to come. What we have seen in the first year of the uprisings, I argue, are only the very earliest manifestations of a deeper transformation. And understanding the implications of those changes will require us to move beyond stale ideological debates and outdated theories in order to grapple with the new realities of an empowered but far from triumphant Arab public.





## THE ARAB UPRISINGS

*Why does every nation on Earth move to change their conditions except for us? Why do we always submit to the batons of the rulers and their repression? Didn't the Palestinians resist with stones and knives? Didn't Marcos and Suharto and Milosevic and Barri fall? Did the Georgian people wait for the Americans to liberate them from their corrupt President? How long will Arabs wait for foreign saviors?*

—TALK SHOW HOST FAISAL AL-QASSEM,  
AL-JAZEERA, DECEMBER 23, 2003<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE UPRISINGS that have profoundly shaped the Middle East began in a remote outpost of southern Tunisia on December 17, 2010, with the self-immolation of an unknown young man named Mohammed Bouazizi in protest against abusive and corrupt police. His act could have been yet another well-meant but meaningless protest in an obscure region, accomplishing little. Yet something was different this time.

Within a month of this event and the first, small Tunisian protests, hundreds of thousands of youth protestors had taken to the streets in almost every Arab country. Protestors in different nations chanted the same slogans—"The people want to overthrow the regime!"—and waved the same banners. They fed off each others' momentum and felt the pain of each others' reversals. Within less than a year, three Arab leaders, long in power, had fallen and others faced mortal challenges.

The rapid spread of protests across the entire region transformed what had begun as a fairly typical bout of turmoil on the periphery of

the Arab world into a revolutionary moment—a fully-fledged Arab uprising. Even before Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's flight from his country on January 14, 2011, almost everyone with a stake in Arab politics was already focused on who was next. Every government declared that it was not another Tunisia. Every citizen in the Arab world seemed to hope that it was. Over the next few months, protests did indeed break out in most Arab countries—attracting very different responses from regimes and from outside powers, and producing very different outcomes.

Protests spread so quickly and powerfully from the margins of Tunis because they took place within a radically new Arab political space. A new generation of Arabs had come of age watching al-Jazeera, the Qatari satellite television station; connecting with each other through social media; and internalizing a new kind of pan-Arabist identity. They had protested together virtually in real time in support of the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000 and against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. They had watched together as Lebanese rose up against Syrian occupation in 2005 and then suffered Israeli bombardment in 2006. They had complained publicly about their leaders, stalled economies, and stagnant politics after long decades of keeping quiet—and had noticed the common concerns across the region. Virtually every Arab anywhere in the region could imagine herself in the shoes of these suddenly mobilized Tunisians.

The Arab uprising unfolded as a single, unified narrative of protest with shared heroes and villains, common stakes, and a deeply felt sense of shared destiny. Many of the upheavals after the one in Tunisia became known by the date of their home country's first protest or else of a pivotal moment of escalation or repression, used as a hashtag on Twitter or a promotional spot on al-Jazeera. The rhythm of revolt synchronized across the entire region, with each Friday's "day of rage" seeming to bring the region closer to fundamental transformation. At that moment, anything seemed possible and every Arab population could hope for immediate, peaceful change. The unified Arab world of which generations of pan-Arab ideologues had dreamed had never felt more real.

Then the tight interconnections of regional politics worked in the opposite direction. After the relatively peaceful departure of Egypt's presi-