Introduction
People power and the Arab Revolutions

Towards a new conceptual framework of democracy in the Middle East

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From late 2010 a series of dramatic and unprecedented events swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It began in the quiet Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, where a young street vendor set himself alight in response to the corruption and oppression that surrounded him. This desperate act of self-immolation resonated with a deeply disgruntled population and led to weeks of popular protests across the country. On 14 January 2011, the 23-year autocratic rule of President Ben Ali came to an end. These events led to several scattered protests in other Arab states, most notably in Egypt where tens of thousands of protestors eventually took control of Tahrir Square in Cairo. A stand-off ensued between elements loyal to the government and the popular uprising. Although he remained obstinate that he would introduce reform and see out his term, by 11 February the Arab Revolutions had claimed their second dictator in President Hosni Mubarak. These events led to free and fair elections in Tunisia (23 October 2011) and Egypt (28 November 2011 to 3 January 2012)— events international observers hailed as great successes. In both

Tunisia and Egypt, Islamist parties claimed victory, amassing well over 40 per cent of the vote—the Ennahda (Renaissance) party in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt. Today, while there is certainly cause for optimism in Tunisia and Egypt, turning the ideals of the revolution into a reality is proving an enormous challenge as the process of political reform encounters the many intractable problems that have plagued the region for decades.

It is also important to note that some of the Arab Revolutions have come at a very high price. Even in the successful examples of Tunisia and Egypt the toppling of tyrants was accompanied by a high body count. Elsewhere the cost has been much higher. In Libya the movement turned into a brutal civil war. While the 'rebels' controlled key Libyan towns, Colonel Gaddafi used his entire arsenal in an attempt to quash the resistance. With key regional and international institutions like the Arab League condemning such actions, the UN authorised the use of 'all necessary measures' to protect civilians in Libya. Gaddafi was eventually captured and killed on 20 October 2011 in his birth place of Sirte, paving the way for the National Transitional Council (NTC) to declare the liberation of the entire country.

Meanwhile, citizens across the region continued to stage (mostly) peaceful protests in their struggle against oppression and towards equality, human rights and democracy. In Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Jordan, Kuwait and Iraq, these movements have been met with a mixture of brutal suppression and modest political and economic reforms designed to placate the citizens rather than commit to genuine change. But the lethal cocktail of violence and politicking has been most potent in Syria and Yemen where President Al-Asad and President Saleh have responded to civil unrest with a series of swift and deadly military manoeuvres carried out in cities and towns across the two countries. Some of the more troubling events have occurred in the economically prosperous kingdoms of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In Bahrain the Youth Movement and the various Shia opposition groups were quashed when King Hamad Al-Khalifa used not only his own helicopters and tanks to attack the protestors, but called on the military of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to intervene under the umbrella of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) defence agreement. For their part, the

Saudis have met their own protests with a series of multibillion dollar reforms coupled with live fire on open crowds, and have run an abhorrent ideological campaign which asserts that Islam and social protests are incompatible.

This complex set of events pose a number of critical questions that need urgent and in-depth scholarly attention. This volume will be the first of its kind to address the Arab Revolutions and the varying analyses, debates and discussions that they have stimulated. It seizes a unique opportunity to reflect on these seismic events, their causes and consequences, as well as on the core issues facing the region in the future. However, this volume aims to be much more than a collection of detailed thematic essays on the Arab Revolutions. The central arguments and the key contributions of this book are twofold. Firstly, the book aims to situate the Arab Revolutions within their broader contextual background, arguing that a unique set of historical events as well as local, regional and global dynamics have converged to provide the catalyst that triggered the recent revolts. Secondly, this book will attempt to situate the events within a new conceptual framework. The argument here is that the Arab Revolutions pose a very specific challenge to conventional wisdom concerning democracy and democratisation in the Middle East.

The Contextual Background

The story of Western interference in the MENA region goes back to the very earliest days of the colonial period, beginning with Portuguese ventures into North Africa in the fifteenth century. The ensuing centuries saw the establishment of trading posts, permanent settlements and then fully occupied territories controlled by European empires across the region. As the moribund Ottoman Empire waned in power from the eighteenth century, European influence grew across the region, particularly in North Africa and the Gulf. With the help of the Arab Revolt of 1916–18, the Ottoman Empire finally fell at the end of World War I and Britain and France extended their dominion into the Levant and Syria-Mesopotamia, hastily designing nation states and installing or supporting pliant monarchs and governments to rule on their behalf.

This period of colonial control was deeply unpopular and, in the aftermath of World War II, the MENA region saw a wave of

independence movements that sought to end European influence, leading to the emergence of two distinct postcolonial types of Arab regimes. The first included those in which independence was not accompanied by a movement seeking to oust the existing elites. Within this category, monarchies or governments that had been designed and propped up by Europe remained intact after formal independence. Some of these regimes remain to this day, including, for example, those of Jordan, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In the second type of regime, calls for independence were accompanied by popular revolutions which also sought to usurp the governments put in place under colonialism. These popular upheavals led to the creation of new, independent postcolonial regimes across most of the MENA region, including those in Tunisia and Egypt, which have endured until recently. Both Ben Ali and Mubarak had been part of this postcolonial movement and each inherited their Presidency from their mentors and comrades, whereas in Libya Gaddafi came to power as the heroic champion of Libyan independence in 1969. Elsewhere, independence ushered in a tumultuous period of military coups and counter-coups that eventually saw strong centralised governments emerge in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Despite these divisions and setbacks and despite the differences between the two types of postcolonial states, the post-independence period saw some attempts at reform and modernisation built atop a platform of oil-fuelled economic prosperity, civic strength, and the early promises of Arab political ideologies such as pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism.

However, the promises made to the Arab people by the champions of independence soon proved empty as the vast majority of political elites across the region became increasingly autocratic and entrenched. Personal liberties and freedoms were quashed, civil society, political opposition and media freedoms were curtailed or controlled by the state and, in the worst cases, coercion and oppression reached levels comparable to the most tyrannical of regimes. Power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of an elite few while economies stagnated, unemployment skyrocketed and infrastructure eroded. A sizeable and ever-widening economic gap emerged between the elite of the Arab world and the 'Arab street'. As

university graduates were left unemployed, living standards plummeted and the people became all too aware of the endemic nature of corruption in their societies, this reinforced the belief that the Arab system of governance was quickly losing legitimacy and credibility. People lost faith in their leaders and became increasingly critical of their government and its stranglehold over key institutions such as the military, the police, the media and the judiciary; they began to call for reform, freedom and justice and to more openly challenge the state.

These localised dynamics were compounded by a set of regional issues which have routinely galvanised Arab public opinion. Foremost among these is the Israel–Palestine conflict which has for decades been a central political concern for many in the Arab world. The Israeli government's treatment of Palestinian Arabs and the failure of the Arab political elite to read and reflect public sentiment, to unite behind the cause and meaningfully engage the international community on this issue, further exposed the weakness of the Arab regimes. Arab public opinion also rallied against the political elite of the region during the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, but especially with the 2003 invasion and occupation. The 2003 war frustrated many Arabs, not only because it lacked international legitimacy or because of its unacceptable human and economic cost, but also because of the ineffectiveness of Arab leaders to energise debate and adequately voice Arab sentiment on the global stage. Instead, some Arab states (Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia) went so far as to allow the US to use their territories and facilities to coordinate their deadly intervention.

Finally, globalisation and recent advances in communications technologies such as satellite television and the internet have brought the world into the living rooms of the MENA. The 1990s and 2000s saw the development of stations such as *Al-Arabiya* and *Al-Jazeera* as well as increasing access to the internet. These new media outlets allowed otherwise sensitive topics (whether culturally taboo or officially banned) to de discussed and debated in the public sphere. Suddenly, issues such as the role of religion in a modern state or women's position in society became part of popular political discourse. So too did political dissent: Arabs now had an effective

platform from which to question their leaders, expose corruption and nepotism, and to call for a more equitable and democratic future. As Marc Lynch put it:

> Rather than imposing a single, overwhelming consensus, the new satellite television stations, along with newspapers, Internet sites, and many other sites of public communication, challenged Arabs to argue, to disagree, and to question the status quo. These public arguments, passionate in their invocation of an aggrieved Arab identity, sometimes oppressively conformist and sometimes bitterly divisive, sensationalist but liberating, defined a new kind of Arab public and new kind of Arab politics.[1]

Taken together this set of historical factors, as well as the key local, regional and global dynamics, served as a potent cocktail that exposed the increasingly ineffective Arab regimes and severely eroded their legitimacy. Indeed, the nature of the Arab state system itself, which had endured for almost half a century, was no longer sustainable and was beginning to show all the signs of decay and self-destruction that any outdated mode of governance displays in its final fleeting moments of power. Most Arab regimes became increasingly fragile and lacking in legitimacy while a media savvy and highly educated citizenry were hungry for change.

Towards a New Conceptual Framework

The failure of the MENA region to produce robust democracies led to a conceptual crisis as academics, journalists and policy makers struggled to assess and interpret the reasons why the region languished in autocratic and ineffective models of governance. A key assumption of the colonial period was that the entire non-European world and the Arab people in particular were simply incapable of democracy. It was thought that while Europeans possessed a unique culture of civility and tolerance that was critical for democracy to flourish, the Afro-Asiatic world was trapped in an inviolable web of cultural stagnation and barbarity that was conducive only to 'Oriental despotism'. If democracy was ever going to flourish in the MENA, it would only happen at the hands of Europeans who had

been given the responsibility to civilise the rest of the world—by occupation, by enslavement and by brute force if necessary. In his stinging critique of such *Orientalism*, Edward Said revealed that in Europe such notions had in fact been distilled down from 'essential ideas about the Orient— its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence'.[2] Said's critique certainly had a dramatic effect on Western studies of the MENA, forcing many analysts to re-assess the prejudices and assumptions implicit (and sometimes explicit) in much of the work on the region. However, Said's work did not provide an appropriate alternative framework through which to interpret and understand the failures and prospects for democracy in the region.

The need for an appropriate alternative framework has been addressed in quantitative research by political scientists, economists and social scientists from the middle of the twentieth century. They sought to capture in formulas and numbers the degree to which one country or another was democratic and the prospects of them becoming even more so. This led to a flurry of scholarly research that asserted five key preconditions for democracy. First among these was economic development, with scholars such as Anthony Downs and Seymour Martin Lipset asserting a strong correlation between economic prosperity and democracy.[3] As Lipset famously hypothesised, 'the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy'.[4] The central premise here was that with economic prosperity would come higher degrees of literacy, education and urban residence, all of which would encourage support for, and participation in, democratic institutions. Building on the economic factors was the second key precondition of democracy, that of requisite social structures. It was thought that wealth would also generate a healthy and nonviolent sense of competition among various stakeholders. Autonomous social classes, regional groups, labour unions and ethnic and religious minorities would collectively create a sense of civil society or communal pluralism that would limit state control and curtail the centralisation of power.[5] As Barrington Moore so succinctly put it, 'No bourgeois, no democracy'.[6]

To create this sense of communal pluralism, democracy's third precondition was the need for a certain civic culture. In other words,

citizens needed to hold in common certain values and beliefs about politics and were required to have a high degree of mutual trust, tolerance for opposing views, a capacity for empathy, and a willingness to participate and compromise. This led to assertions that some cultures (notably Anglo-Saxon Protestantism) were more conducive to the emergence of democracy than others[7]. Beyond such civic culture, aspiring democracies also needed to meet a fourth precondition: a functioning state ruled by elites who have at least a nominal interest and commitment to move towards democracy. The state itself must be sovereign, be governed by the rule of law and derive its legitimacy from and extend its influence over its entire territory (that is not just among the elite and wealthy of the capital). Democratic transitions were thought to be most successful when strong political institutions were developed before popular political participation was increased[8] and a failure to do so would turn any transition towards democracy into a bloodbath.[9] In terms of the elites, they needed to make political pacts among themselves for the duration of the political transition and restrict mass participation until democracy had emerged.[10] In this context, the people's commitment to democracy is not as important as the efforts of the political elite who must be determined to see democracy grow and spread.[11]

The fifth and final precondition that many saw as necessary for democracy to flourish was the role of external influences. Such scholars argued that the bulk of democracies that had sprung up throughout the twentieth century had done so under 'Western' tutelage. As Samuel P Huntington put it, in recent centuries the spread of 'democratic institutions could be ascribed in large part to British and American influence, either through settlement, colonial rule, defeat in war, or fairly direct imposition'[12]. The argument was built on the earlier colonial era literature which asserted that the West had a unique proclivity for democracy and an obligation to spread it across the world. Indeed, most of the literature which asserts key preconditions for democracy follows this profoundly Eurocentric logic. For scholars such as Lipset, Moore, Almond and Verba, democracy had flourished in the Euro-American 'West' (and not elsewhere) because it was home to a uniquely 'interrelated cluster of economic development, Protestantism, [declining] monarchy, gradual political change, legitimacy'.[13]

The foremost proponent of this line of thought was Huntington himself, who used these preconditions of democracy to argue that each region of the globe has its own unique religio-cultural essence that plays a large part in determining receptivity to democratic systems.[14] In his later work, Huntington isolated two such religio-cultural examples, namely Islam and Confucianism, and labelled them 'profoundly anti-democratic', claiming that they would 'impede the spread of democratic norms in society, deny legitimacy to democratic institutions, and thus greatly complicate if not prevent the emergence and effectiveness of those institutions'.[15] Huntington also claimed that the twenty-first century would be marred by a *Clash of Civilizations*—a physical and ideological battle between these anti-democratic forces and the West.[16]

Unfortunately, with the tragic events of 9/11 and the subsequent US-led military interventions and occupations in Afghanistan (2001–) and Iraq (2003–2011), many pundits and politicians dusted off copies of *The Clash of Civilizations* to couch their responses to these events within a false binary comprising the forces of democracy and those that allegedly threatened its pre-eminence, mainly the Islamo-fascists of the MENA region. To counter these threats, the invasion of both Afghanistan and Iraq were followed by ambitious and as yet inconclusive projects that sought to implant obedient models of democracy as part of the Bush administration's broader and very aggressive democracy promotion agenda. This same agenda saw the world's last remaining superpower put unprecedented pressure on allies and enemies across the world to become more democratic.

This led to a sudden flurry of democratic activity across the MENA. For example, in 2005 alone, the region witnessed an extraordinary sequence of democratic developments. These included a successful series of public demonstrations in Lebanon (the 'Cedar Revolution') following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which saw the ousting of Syrian troops and, subsequently, the first free election in many years. In Egypt the 2005 election saw President Hosni Mubarak call on parliament to amend the constitution so that he could be challenged for the leadership in the nation's first multi-candidate popular vote. Saudi Arabia held municipal elections, the first of any kind in that nation for decades and the Palestinian territories held its first ever election, leading to

the ascension of the Islamist Hamas party to power in early 2006. In Iraq a series of free and fair elections and a referendum brought a constitution, an active and critical media landscape and a democratically elected government, albeit under the auspices of US occupation.[17]

However, as the Bush administration's vision of democracy became increasingly exposed for all its deficiencies and contradictions; as people watched the failures of democracy to meet the needs of the average Afghani or Iraqi; and as the tragedies of ethno-religious sectarian violence unfolded, the brief period of democratic openings slowed and then reversed. Many of the gains of the early to mid-2000s proved to be remarkably shallow: revolutions were followed by the rise of new elites with a thirst for power similar to the previous regime's, electoral openings and media freedoms were gradually quashed, hard won reforms were overturned and recently written constitutions ignored. Not surprisingly, scholars began to develop new theoretical frameworks to explain these developments. US democracy promotion was thought to have actually created several hybrid 'semi-authoritarian' regimes in the MENA (and elsewhere) that were able to utilise the mechanisms and discourses of democracy to further tighten their grip on power.[18] In other words, the MENA regimes were thought to be utilising (and controlling) democratic mechanisms such as elections, media freedoms, political opposition and civil society as part of their strategy to retain power. Most recently, in his study of the Arab republics of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Algeria, Stephen J King argues that economic liberalisation and cosmetic democratisation had in fact strengthened their governments' authoritarianism[19]. He asserts, along with several colleagues, that these regimes were increasingly dynamic and ever-savvy to new ways to leverage modest social, political and economic change against calls for genuine change.

The Arab Revolutions and the Significance of People Power
While one cannot blame scholars for not having predicted the Arab Revolutions—a series of events that took virtually all Middle East experts by surprise—the toppling of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan regimes, as well as the mass social upheavals in Yemen, Syria and elsewhere point to the futility of many of the models developed

and employed by political scientists and others to explain the politics of the Arab world. Indeed, the Arab Revolutions, driven by a newly found sense of people power, debunked not only the myths and blatant cultural racisms of the colonial period, but also the very idea that democratic change can be measured and predicted by the kinds of key preconditions outlined above. In terms of economic prosperity, for example, according to the International Monetary Fund and its use of 2010 data to rank 183 nations by Gross Domestic Product, Purchasing Power Parity (GDP–PPP) per capita, the Arab Revolutions have affected not only those among the richest in the region (Kuwait is ranked 14th in the world, Bahrain 34th, Oman 35th, Saudi Arabia 41st) but also some of the poorest (Jordan 107th, Syria 113th, Morocco 117th, Iraq 127th, Yemen 138th). Interestingly, those states in which the Arab Revolutions have led to the toppling of the former regime rank somewhere in the middle of these two extremes (Libya 64th, Tunisia 84th, Egypt 104th).[20] This directly contradicts the assertion that economic prosperity is a useful measure for predicting democratic change.

In terms of the suggested need for civil society, while some MENA governments—like Egypt and Tunisia—were better at fostering a sense of communal pluralism than others, states such as Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia imposed heavy sentences on dissent and went to great lengths to outlaw any organised opposition. This crackdown on political pluralism also affected the civic culture of the MENA region: debate and disagreement, especially public challenges of the incumbent regime, were generally discouraged for fear of repercussions. Another supposed precondition for democratic change—a functioning state ruled by elites who have an interest in democracy—is not relevant to the Arab Revolutions. In many cases, the state itself was increasingly exposed for its failings and inadequacies, with its legitimacy not extending beyond a tight circle of cronies ensconced in the capital, and an incumbent elite uninterested in genuine democratic reform.

Finally, in terms of external influences, while the MENA was occupied during the colonial period and has certainly seen its fair share of US influence and interference, particularly since the end of World War II, the Arab Revolutions may be understood to have happened despite, not because of, Western influence. For most of the

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the West has designed, installed and supported (both overtly and covertly) a series of very undemocratic regimes in the MENA region. They have done so for several key reasons: because such regimes would be reliant on colonial support to stay in power; because the West wanted to secure precious resources like oil; because these regimes more or less agreed not to confront US policy in the region, particularly on the Israel–Palestine conflict; and because they would serve as a bulwark against the threat of ideological enemies such as communism and socialism during the Cold War and militant Islam since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and especially since 9/11. Indeed, one of the key failures of the Bush administration's democracy promotion agenda was that it exposed the gap between US rhetoric and action on the issue of democracy as the US spoke the language of human rights and equality while maintaining strong bilateral relations with some of the least democratic countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia. In this way, the Arab Revolutions can be seen to contradict the five proposed key preconditions for democratic change in terms of economic, social, cultural, political and external factors.

The Arab Revolutions also contradict the deep-seated and long-held claim that Islam—its core teachings and philosophies, its cultural practices and its history—are anathema to democracy. While the revolutions were not strictly Islamist in tone (in the way that Iran's 1979 Revolution was) the overwhelming majority of participants have been Muslims. They appear to see no contradiction between their religion and the call for a more democratic order. While some have argued that the largely secular and liberal impetus of the Arab Revolutions has been 'hijacked' by Islamist political movements such as the powerful Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia, such criticisms are couched within a Western prejudice that defines Islamist politics as inherently anti-democratic.[21] Instead, the fact that Islamist parties have emerged as a credible force in the post-Arab Revolutions MENA demonstrates the fact that the will of the majority is driving politics much more so than under former regimes. If Huntington's assertion that Islam is 'profoundly anti-democratic' were ever true, he forgot to tell the millions of Muslims who took part in the Arab Revolutions and the Islamist parties who have competed in free and fair elections since.

Finally, the Arab Revolutions also bring into question the strength of research which has asserted that the MENA is home to new hybrid forms of authoritarianism. The leaders of the region are not nearly as good at using modest reforms to placate calls for change as was previously assumed. In most cases, rather than tightening their grip on power, the MENA regimes have either had power wrenched from them by the people, or are having to significantly loosen their stranglehold on it.

Thus the Arab Revolutions have themselves demanded that a new conceptual framework be developed which appropriately conceives of democracy and democratisation in the post-revolutionary MENA. The revolutions themselves give us insight into what this model might look like. Indeed, recent events are to be admired for the extent to which divergent voices have been heard, legitimate grievances have been aired, and women and minorities have been involved. They are also to be admired because a balance has often been struck between the pragmatic and the ideal, between the secular and the religious, between the desire not just to oust failing tyrants but to replace them with something new, something that could respond to the varying needs of the citizens. This new conceptual framework must therefore be free from Western prejudices, be dynamic and responsive to the needs of the people, relevant to the cultural norms and in tune with the rich history of the MENA region. As the contributors to this book argue, democratisation and political reforms can only endure and engender positive outcomes if they are developed organically from the bottom up, free of external and ideological agendas. This is the basis from which legitimacy and endurance can be generated and why the outlook for Tunisia, Egypt and Libya seem to hold significant promise despite all the immediate challenges they are facing.

Chapter Summaries

This volume opens with an ambitious chapter from Larbi Sadiki in which he discusses the challenges that the Arab Revolutions pose to traditional Orientalist accounts of the MENA. He argues that for many observers, the presence of political authoritarianism had provided a guiding framework through which Middle Eastern politics could be understood. This same framework was also utilised by various

Western-backed democracy promotion initiatives who viewed the MENA as a passive laboratory for testing out theories on democracy and democratisation, with few tangible results. However, the events of the Arab Revolutions have put the lie to such Orientalisms and forced many to ask deep questions about the regions supposed hostility to the rules of democratic engagement. For Sadiki, this marks a watershed moment in the study of the MENA and a significant opportunity to reassess the region and its politics and to develop appropriate and alternative ways of engaging and understanding it beyond the Arab Spring. Unfortunately, however, Sadiki discovers that this challenge has not been met by many Western observers who have instead relied on outdated stereotypes in their coverage of the Arab Revolutions

The following chapter, by Lamia Ben Youssef Zazyafoon, focuses on civil society actors and their part in the Arab Revolutions. Specifically, Youssef Zazyafoon investigates the role of youth and women in pushing the revolutionary agenda and the implications of this facet of the Arab Revolutions. She argues that the search for authenticity in post-Ben Ali Tunisia is putting women's rights at risk. The growing assertiveness of Islamist groups and the euphoria of the revolution put the concept of secularism on trial as a Western-imposed system. This presents Tunisia, and to some extent the rest of the Arab world, with a crisis of identity. Youssef Zazyafoon argues, however, that this crisis springs from the false divide between secularists and Islamists, and Francophone and Arabophone Tunisians. She points to the importance of feminism in retaining its relevance and agency by engaging with other political forces. Women's struggle has become inseparable from the whole nation's fight for citizenship, and Iadh Ben Achour's Higher Political Reform Commission plays a key role in advancing Tunisian women's agency.

The following two chapters focus on the role of new technologies and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter in the Arab Revolutions. In his chapter, Mchala Nejet argues that, in the case of Tunisia, such communications technologies were critical in capturing and disseminating the regime's early and violent responses to the protests. This catapulted the movement into one of unprecedented civil unrest which ultimately brought down the Ben Ali regime. While Nejet rightly notes that the revolution in Tunisia

somewhat ironically allowed for the revival of the old anti-colonial slogans centred on dignity and national self-determination, he also raises questions about the ways in which Tunisians, along with all Arabs, might reinvent a political language relevant to the struggle of the Arab street beyond postcolonialism and beyond state oppression.

The discussion of the role of social media in the Arab Revolutions is extended by Halim Rane and Sumra Salem who invoke terms like 'Facebook Revolutions' and 'Twitter Revolutions' to describe and analyse these momentous events. Using diffusion theory, Rane and Salem examine the role of social media and the extent to which they can be credited for the emergence and achievement of the protesters' goals. They argue that while social media played important facilitation roles in terms of inter and intra-group communication as well as information dissemination, mainstream mass media are still highly relevant to the process. However, the success or failure of the uprisings largely depends on domestic factors and broader geopolitical contexts. This chapter demonstrates that the use of social media in the Arab Revolutions has significant implications for diffusion theory in terms of contact and identity among the social movements involved.

Following the thematic examination of the Arab Revolutions, this collection turns to some revealing case studies that highlight the challenges ahead. Matthew Gray presents an insightful assessment of the developments in Bahrain. The Gulf kingdom of Bahrain witnessed extensive turmoil, beginning with protests in mid-February 2011 that became increasingly large, and at times violent, and which only ended after the regime's repressive crackdown, backed by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in March 2011. The Bahraini regime is using an awkward combination of co-optation and repression to try to reassert its authority and restore its legitimacy. Gray argues that multiple dynamics were responsible for the Bahraini uprising: Sunni-Shia sectarianism was important, but so too were rentier dynamics, Bahrain's neo-patrimonial state capitalism, its complex autocratic structure and King Hamad's broken promises of reform. The chapter examines the impact of the uprising not only on Bahrain's state-society relationship and social dynamics, but also on the region as a result of GCC intervention in Bahrain. Given the Kingdom's importance as a Sunni bulwark and key US ally in the Gulf, the

regional implications are immense and hold important lessons for other rentier states in the Arab world.

The Bahraini case study is followed by an examination of the explosive political deadlock in Syria. Minerva Nasser-Eddine argues that the Arab revolution is ironic in that it represents a popular uprising against leaders who were once revolutionaries themselves. These leaders were part of a generation who worked to expel colonialism and were critical to the initial pride, hope and optimism of the post-independence environment—an era of pride, hope and optimism. Today these leaders represent corruption, cronyism, autocracy and fear. Now that many of the barriers of fear have been broken in across the MENA, today's Arab citizens are embracing the winds of change and hoping that regime change will bring about real and enduring reforms. This chapter examines the potential domestic, regional and international consequences of a weakened and failed Assad regime. Already political tremors are being felt in neighbouring Lebanon with political tension increasing between the pro- and anti-Syrian camps within the Lebanese political sphere. The response from the international community to Syria has been different from the earlier enthusiastic support for the Arab Revolutions. Nasser-Eddine points to Israel's close proximity with Syria as a key factor in setting the tone of this response.

The regional implications of the Arab Revolutions are difficult to predict but their significance is undeniable: the success of popular democratic uprisings for justice and accountability has been streamed into the living rooms of people far beyond the Arab world. Luca Anceschi argues that the crumbling of the authoritarian regimes of the Arab world is a cause for concern in both Moscow and Beijing. The political leaderships of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China have paid close attention to the mechanisms of these popular revolts and have tried to pre-empt such events in their own country. They have adopted strikingly similar attitudes towards the events that have unfolded in the MENA and heightened their crackdown on democratic dissent. Their concern with power maintenance has also informed their voting behaviour in the UN in relation to Libya, where both Russia and China abstained from key resolutions in the lead-up to the intervention.

Together these chapters provide a significant study of the Arab Revolutions. They include key contextual information regarding the causes of the various people's movements, detailed studies of a diverse range of civil society actors and their critical role in agitating for change, specific case studies which shed light on the intractable problems that confront the potential for political change in Bahrain and Syria, and a discussion of the implications of the Arab Revolutions for international relations and the global order. They also shift debate from outdated assertions of the MENA region's inability to embrace democracy to a new conceptual framework that seeks to engage and understand the region in a more nuanced and less prejudiced fashion. This volume demonstrates that democratisation is at its best when it is done in tune with local norms and customs and is free of foreign interference or totalising ideologies. Democracy is not the West's to give to the Middle East. It is a dynamic system of governance underpinned by virtues of justice, equality and liberty. And these are virtues that the people of the MENA region have proved to understand at least as well as anyone in the West.

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Notes

1   Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 2.
2   Said, *Orientalism*, p. 205.
3   Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy; Lipset, *Political Man*.
4   Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy', p. 75.
5   Dahl, *Polyarchy*; Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies.
6   Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 418.
7   Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*.
8   Dahl, *Polyarchy*; Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.
9   Mansfield and Snyder, *Electing to Fight*.
10   Hertz, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*; O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule*.
11   Dahl, *Who Governs?*
12   Huntington, 'Will More Countries Become Democratic?', pp. 205–6.
13   Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy', p. 85.

14   Huntington, 'The Goals of Development'.
15   —— *The Third Wave*, p. 298.
16   —— *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.
17   Isakhan, *Democracy in Iraq*.
18   Brumberg, 'The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy'; Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged*; Posusney & Angrist, *Authoritarianism in the Middle East*.
19   King, The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa.
20   *World Economic Outlook*.
21   Bradley, *After the Arab Spring*.