

# Jarosław Jarząbek

---

"The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished  
Revolutions of the New Middle East",  
Marc Lynch, New York 2012 :  
[recenzja]

---

The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies nr 1 (3), 142-146

---

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

Union. The book also presents solutions included in the Treaty of Lisbon which significantly modify the role of national parliaments in the EU decision-making process so that their roles could be valued.

Chapter VII (“New roles of the Sejm of RP after the accession to the European Union”) and Ending Chapter (which synthesises different aspects of assessments, conclusions and requests) create a homogenous sequence of analysis with numerous, sometimes brilliant, aspects that are a punch line of all the discussed matters. Special attention should be given to: the catalogue to the “new roles of the Sejm after the accession to the European Union” (pp. 594–602, 622) and remarks and recommendations about the methods and means to fulfil the new tasks (pp. 602–622).

The Annexe and list of data sources and literature increase the value of the whole book showing the abundance of sources that the Author used while preparing her work. The way those sources are discounted in the text proves the Author’s excellent writing skills. Certainly the book will be read by political scientists, lawyers, historians and everyone interested in the way the system of public authority was remodelled in connection with Polish membership in the European Union. A communicative title precisely describes the content of the book.

This work certainly deserves to be recommended to students of various faculties and specialities. Accessible language, clarity, consistency of conclusions and the Author’s easy narration to formulate even the most difficult issues – are also important advantages of the reviewed book. Such advantages are quite uncommon with scientific research. The Aesthetical way of editing fully corresponds with the serious content of this work, which encourages to careful study.

### **Jarosław Jarząbek**

University of Wrocław, Poland

**(rev.) Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, Public Affairs, New York 2012, pp. 304**

The latest book by Marc Lynch is one of the many works published after the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 that aspire to describe this phenomenon and to explain its roots and origins. What distinguishes *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* are a few facts. First, Marc Lynch writes the book not only from the position of a scholar, a professor at George Washington University, but also as an active blogger. He utilized his blog on foreignpolicy.com and his Twitter channel to observe and cover up to date the subsequent stages of the Arab uprisings. Frequent travels to the Middle East on the other hand, gave him an invaluable insider view on the course of events. Second, being an advisor to the members of the administration of the President Barak Obama during the time of the Arab revolts, he is able to approach the events from the point of view of a policy maker and a security advisor.

The *Arab Uprising...* is a well written book, with a lot of information about both the historical background as well as the most present events of the Arab Spring. In the first chapter the author considers the nature and the main features of the Arab uprisings, correctly concluding that they do not meet the conditions of any specific definition of a “revolution”. However, his explanations showing the uniqueness of this phenomenon and the role of a “new Arab public sphere” are not very convincing<sup>1</sup>. Also the use of the term „counterrevolution” to describe the reactions of the Arab governments to the waves of protests and their attempts to crush the uprising is questionable<sup>2</sup>.

The author analyses the previous waves of mass protests, revolts and regime changes of the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1980s in chapters two and three, concluding that popular uprisings were quite common for the Arab societies in the past<sup>3</sup>. The results of those revolts and revolutions of the past were radical and lasting changes of the political systems and structures in many Arab states. This usually meant a collapse of conservative monarchies and the rise of a new type of Arab authoritarianism, strongly influenced by elements of nationalist and socialist ideology. Over the next decades the authoritarian regimes were able to strengthen their position and solidify the political systems with the use of various tricks and sham operations. Despite of this political shift, the social structures remained mostly untouched or underwent only superficial changes<sup>4</sup>. This experience of the past should make the reader cautious about the author’s assumption that “what we have seen in the first year of the uprisings (...) are only the very earliest manifestations of a deeper transformation”<sup>5</sup>.

What has surely changed over the years is that, thanks to the development of new types of social media, the Arab societies are now more closely connected with one

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “revolution” in political and social sciences refers to “a major, sudden, and hence typically violent alteration in government and in related associations and structures”. See entry “revolution”, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, [www.britanica.com](http://www.britanica.com). This definition clearly links revolution with an alteration of power and its structures. Thus we will be able to use this term only to those of the events which will result in an essential, long term change of the political systems and political structures. So far, except the still uncertain case of Tunisia, the Arab uprisings did not change the political systems and structures of the states; thus, the use of the term “revolution” is unfounded.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, many of the so called “revolutions” were in fact counterrevolution themselves, of course in a more common than a scientific sense, as they meant the return to power of the traditional and conservative groups and return the of the old, conservative social order.

<sup>3</sup> M. Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*, New York 2012, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Instead of creating new political, social and economic elites of the countries, the Arab authoritarian regimes preferred to rely on the old ones, traditionally including members of some specific clans and tribes, major landowners, local notables, members of religious groups and minorities, the army officers or just friends, comrades and members of family of the political leaders. R. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, London 2008, pp. 34–35.

<sup>5</sup> M. Lynch, op.cit., p. 5.

another and to the world than before. As a matter of fact, the role of media and new technologies in the Arab Spring are very well described and analyzed in Marc Lynch's book. It is easy to see that all the issues related to the social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as to satellite television and news programs (Al-Jazeera) are the author's particular object of interest. The deeply analyzed role of the media, together with a well depicted atmosphere of the events of the Arab Spring of 2011, are the biggest advantages of Marc Lynch's newest book. The author describes the cases of Tunisia and Egypt in chapter 4, while in chapter 5 he focuses on what he calls "hashtag protests" in other Middle Eastern states<sup>6</sup>. Though not all the protests and uprisings were so successful in toppling the governments as those in Tunisia and Egypt, all of them had numerous common features and the later ones repeated the patterns designated by the previous ones.

Concentrating on the influences of the new Arab public sphere, the hashtag protest and the role of mass media in spreading the patterns of the uprising all over the region, author almost completely ignores the core and most important factors lying behind the desperate protests and furious antigovernment demonstrations. People in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other Arab countries, went out to the streets not because they heard about the meeting on al-Jazeera or read about it on Facebook, but because of poverty, unemployment, critical economic situation and lack of hope for a better future. Other factors, like authoritarian political system, religious disputes, lack of civil liberties, ubiquitous corruption, or ethnic conflicts also stayed behind many antigovernment actions, but usually they either were rather short or could mobilize only relatively small parts of the society. Additionally, the governments had quite a few tools to deal with the problems of political, ethnic, or religious nature. Much more dangerous were the economic difficulties, as most of the authoritarian regimes did not have any ideas or solutions for them. They were also operating in a much longer period of time and the gap between the rich and the poor parts of society was widening constantly. The economic factor did mobilize the Arab societies and did force people to stand against the authoritarian regimes more effectively than any other<sup>7</sup>, but reading Marc Lynch's book one could have an impression that revolts and uprisings are just in the Arabs'

---

<sup>6</sup> The name related to the hashtag dates of the mass protests which occurred in a different states and are a result of the development of the new Arab public sphere. As noted by the author "The hashtags that began as a casual coordination device quickly became a symbol of the unification of diverse national struggles into a single campaign. The hashtags very explicitly defined each uprising as one chapter in a single unfolding story". M. Lynch, op.cit., p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> The role of the collapsing economy as a major threat for the stability of the authoritarian Arab regimes has been widely analyzed for example in C.M. Henry, R. Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, New York 2011; S.J. King, *The New Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa*, Bloomington 2009; D. Long, B. Reich, M. Gasiorowski, *The Government and the Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, Boulder 2011; B. Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East*, Cambridge 2008.

nature and they were waiting ready for a tweet or an announcement in al-Jazeera to start one in 2011.

In chapters 6 and 7 the author describes the responses of the Arab regimes of the respective states to the protests. Lynch starts with Bahrain, where the demonstrations of the Shia opposition were brutally crushed by the local police supported by the Saudi Arabian forces<sup>8</sup>. The other Arab monarchs, King Abdullah II of Jordan or King Muhammad VI of Morocco, whose budgets lack billions due to some moves on the political scene (like the dismissals of the most unpopular officials), promises of reforms, and some concessions to the opposition; however, they were able to appease the critics and retain power. Some revolts (or revolutions, as Marc Lynch calls them) lasted so long that they finally stalled. The uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt stalled after overthrowing the old regime, when the transition to the political reality already started. In Yemen the protestors split into many different groups and the revolt lost its initial dynamic, leaving the country with a new president, Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi, who substituted Ali Abdullah Salih, but with the same old regime.

The bloody civil wars that broke out in Libya and Syria are the subject of the author's considerations in chapter 7, where he tries to explain the reasons of the Western states' intervention in Libya and a lack of such thus far in the case of Syria. The explanation of the complexity of geopolitics in the Middle East and the interrelations between the Arab Spring and the politics of the region's states are strong points of this chapter of the *Arab Uprising...* The reasons provided by the author for the restraint of the US and the European states in sending their warplanes and soldiers to Syria, as they did to Libya, are convincing, but lack at least a few points. First of all, the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt and the civil war in Libya brought to power and significantly strengthened different groups of Muslim radicals and fundamentalists. Potential fall of the Assad regime in Syria would most probably result in the same, but instead of the moderate Islamists of the Muslim Brothers or Ennahda Movement, one could expect far more radical groups to play the major role. The other point missed by Lynch is that, paradoxically, the change of the Syrian regime does not lie in the interest of the most powerful player in the region – Israel. For the Israelis, Syria controlled by the Assad regime, their well-known enemy, but far too weak to pose any serious threat for their security, and aware of its weakness, is much better solution than Syria plunged into chaos, destabilized or controlled by various groups of Sunni radicals and fanatics.

In the final chapter Marc Lynch recapitulates the changes the Arab Spring brought to the Middle East and tries to present his own view of the American policy towards the region in these new circumstances. Once again addressing the policy of president

---

<sup>8</sup> In his chapter Lynch tries hard to defend the position taken president Obama during the events in Bahrain, suggesting that the lack of any reaction by the US government was a result of Saudis pressure and Obama “had little choice but to defer to the Saudis and accept the fait accompli”. It would be really naive to believe it. US government was rather fully informed and fully supportive of the Bahraini brutal crackdown and Saudi Arabian intervention.

Obama and his administration, Lynch strives to present their efforts as genuine, honest and selfless. The approach, he argues, which tried to combine liberal ideals with pragmatic interest became an object of unfair criticism from all the sides, from American neocons to the Arab activists. Unfortunately, his close ties with Obama's administration visibly influence Lynch's attitude towards the current US government policies and deprive him of the capability of critical appraisal. Subsequently, the author concludes that the old status quo in the Middle East has been shattered for good and that the new realities will demand new methods.

I cannot restrain myself from taking advantage of my privileged position and using the most recent events in Egypt, to show how groundless were Lynch's hopes for the definitive change of the old status quo and his belief in the radical change of the US policy toward the Middle East. The removal of president Mohamed Morsi from power by the army in a regular coup d'état and the establishment of an interim government, met with applause from a large part of Egyptian society and rage of the Muslim Brotherhood, which proves that neither the society nor its political culture changed after the Arab uprisings. And clearly they did not become more democratic. Instead, President Obama's restrained reaction to this coup shows that the principles of the US policy towards the Middle East are still subordinated to their interests in that region.

*The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* by Marc Lynch has two different faces. The good and very interesting descriptive part contrasts with a rather shallow analysis and sometimes with simply naive conclusions. At certain points the book also seems to be an uncritical attempt to defend the dull policy of president Obama and his administration towards the Middle East.

### **Artur Malantowicz**

University of Warsaw, Poland

**(rev.) Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, Hurst & Company, London 2013, pp. 288**

"Hafiz died and Hama didn't. Bashar will die and Hama won't". This quote from a Syrian rebel chanting anti-Assad slogans could as well sum up the masterpiece written by a young scholar Raphaël Lefèvre, thanks to whom the significance of Hama is yet once again brought to light. Inquisitively researched, thoroughly analyzed and timely published, *Ashes of Hama* is not only a critical guidebook to the history of the Syrian Muslim Brothers – long missing from the academic literature – but also a great explanatory key to events currently unfolding in Syria. Lefèvre provides readers with a unique account of the development of the Islamist movement in Syria with the landmark of the Hama massacre still present in the public consciousness. All of this is backed by endless hours of interviews with the Muslim Brotherhood activists, independent Islamists, members of the Ba'ath regime, experts, and analysts.