PROLOGUE

The Sandstorm

We are no longer afraid.

—Egyptian protester

The most important story of the early twenty-first century is the epic convulsion across the Islamic world. Rage against geriatric autocrats is only one part of it. Most of the region—stretching across three continents, from Morocco on the Atlantic to Indonesia on the Pacific—is also actively rebelling against radical ideologies. Muslim societies are now moving beyond jihadism, not only because of the dramatic death of Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011.

I sometimes feel as if I've finally reached the climax—although not the end—of an epic book that has taken four decades to read. Since 1973, I've traveled most of the region's fifty-seven countries and covered its wars, military coups, revolutions, and terrorism spectaculars. I witnessed extremism's early outbursts, from Iran's 1979 revolution to the 1983 suicide bombing that killed 241 American peacekeepers in Lebanon. In the 1990s, as the trend took wider root, I drove the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule. In Pakistan, I met members of the murderous Army of the Righteous at their training camp. Over four decades, I've interviewed many militant ideologues, from Hamas leaders in Syria and Gaza to the Hezbollah chief in Lebanon and Saudi fighters who fought with bin Laden at Tora Bora.

It's been one of the most tumultuous times since Islam was founded in the seventh century. But after a decade defined largely by the 9/11 attacks, the region is moving toward a different denouement. Two dynamic twists are changing the plotline.

First, from mighty Egypt to Islamic Iran, tiny Tunisia to quirky Libya, new players are shattering the old order. Uprisings in the Middle East—breathtaking in scope and speed, if unnerving in their uncertain futures—represent the greatest wave of empowerment worldwide in the early twenty-first century.

"I was one of the sleeping majority," said an excited Egyptian protester, as he made his way to Cairo's Liberation Square during the 2011 uprising against President Hosni Mubarak. "But now I've woken up."[1]

The awakening has involved hundreds of millions of people. And the political transformations—and tectonic changes—are only beginning.

Second, the far wider Muslim world is increasingly rejecting extremism. The many forms of militancy—from the venomous Sunni creed of al Qaeda to the punitive Shiite theocracy in Iran—have proven costly, unproductive, and ultimately unappealing.

On a balmy evening in 2009, I dined at an open-air restaurant along Jeddah's palm-fringed Corniche with a prominent Saudi editor, his wife, and some of their friends. Two of the men were smoking hubbly-bubbly water pipes. "The jihadis have lost their appeal," reflected Khaled al Maeena, the editor of *Arab News*.

"Every mother in Saudi Arabia or any other Gulf country wants her son or daughter to carry a laptop rather than a rifle or a dagger," he said. "The appeal of death and destruction doesn't carry much significance anymore because the jihadis have failed to provide anything constructive."

The transformation did not happen suddenly. Stirred by the young and stoked by new technology, rage against both autocrats and extremists has been building steadily within Muslim societies. I spent two years going back to key corners of the Islamic world to track the new trends; I talked to Muslims from dozens of countries to identify key trendsetters. The original goal was a book about what happened within the Islamic world in the pivotal decade since 9/11. When I started out, the project represented an intellectual risk in an environment not yet willing to embrace its counterintuitive themes. But the evidence since then—in bold acts of defiance as well as poignant personal stories—is now overwhelming. The rage and rebellions are visible for all to see.

Today, the Islamic world is in the midst of an extreme makeover politically. Its diverse societies are also moving to a different rhythm culturally. Together, they are now inspiring an array of imaginative rebellions.

Neither twist should have come as a surprise, even if they were little understood until raucous uprisings began to sweep across the region in 2011. For a decade, the outside world was so preoccupied with its "war on terrorism" that it gave little credence to efforts among Muslims to deal with the overlapping problems—autocratic regimes and extremist movements—that fed off each other. Extremism emerged largely to challenge autocrats in countries where the opposition was outlawed, exiled, under house arrest, or executed. And autocrats justified not opening up politically on grounds that extremists would take over.

As I traveled, I was struck by the disparate range of political rebellions. They fall into three broad categories. Each has its own characteristics. Specific catalysts have varied. So have the opposition movements. But the accumulative impact has produced a history-making phenomenon.

One category covers the Arab revolts, which have erupted in homogeneous societies as well as deeply sectarian countries, in military dictatorships as well as monarchies, in modern states as well as traditional tribal nations, in pitifully poor countries as well as oil-rich sheikhdoms. As of 2011, every one of the twenty-two Arab countries faced a serious political challenge. And every single one of them will come out different in some significant way, even in countries that forcibly tried to put down the uprisings.

The second category is the counter-jihad, which is unfolding in the wider Islamic bloc of fifty-seven countries as well as among Muslim minorities worldwide. The counter-jihad is the rejection of specific violent movements as well as the principle of violence to achieve political goals. It has been palpable since 2007, as Saudi and Egyptian clerics who were once bin Laden's ideological mentors began to publicly repudiate al Qaeda. Iraq's tribal leaders mobilized a militia of 90,000 people to push al Qaeda of Mesopotamia out of the most volatile province. Pakistanis turned on the local Taliban commanders. Indian Muslims marched against their militant brethren who engaged in terrorist attacks.

Every reliable poll since 2007 shows steadily declining support for the destructive and disruptive jihadis, even in communities where politics are partly shaped by the Arab-Israeli conflict. The counter-jihad has been especially evident among Sunni Muslims, who account for more than 80 percent of the Islamic world.

The third category is the rebellion against Islamic ideology, which is most typified by Iran. Its Shiite theocracy—in the first state to be ruled

by clerics since the faith was founded fourteen centuries ago—had redefined the world's political spectrum after its 1979 revolution. It became the hub for movements that then altered the political landscape in countries with Shiite pluralities, such as large, oil-rich Iraq and little Lebanon, a longtime bridge between East and West. Shiites account for between 12 and 15 percent of the Muslim world's 1.57 billion people.

But in 2009, millions of outraged Iranians launched multifaceted civil disobedience against the regime after a disputed presidential election. The streets in several cities echoed with chants of "Where's my vote?" The peaceful protests evolved over the next six months into an outright rejection of rigid theocratic rule. They included economic boycotts and social media campaigns as well as street demonstrations. Tehran's theocrats used every ruthless tactic—mass arrests, prison rapes and torture, Stalinesque show trials, and executions—but the new opposition refused to submit. The Green Movement tried again in 2011. The theocrats got even tougher, persecuting men with stellar revolutionary credentials. But the Islamic Republic, the prickliest thorn for other Muslim nations as well as the West, only appeared more desperate—and more vulnerable than at any time since its revolution.

In each category, the rebellions are far from over. The process of change launched in late 2010 may ripple on—in diverse forms and bumpy phases—for years. Many of the new movements still face staggering obstacles; countries may face long periods of political uncertainty and economic instability along the way. Transformation is inevitably messy. In the Islamic world, it is complicated by the price of and access to oil, sectarian and ethnic divisions, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran's controversial nuclear program, Pakistan's nuclear capability, and border disputes, to name but a few issues. Then throw in poverty.

The bottom line: Uprisings produce a heady euphoria and sense of hope. The day after confronts raw realities, including the quest for credible leadership and solutions to wrenching problems. No country will get through its transition quickly or painlessly. Expectations will never be met fast enough. History is also replete with rebellions derailed.

Yet the drive to be part of the twenty-first century—rather than get stuck in the status quo of the twentieth century or revert to the ways of the seventh century—now consumes the Islamic world.

The profound political stirrings are supported by a strong culture of change. In the struggle to define their place in the twenty-first century,

Muslims have become quite creative in many other idioms as well. The social transformations are as pivotal as the political upheavals. Activists are not only adapting the technology of Facebook and Twitter to their causes. They are also experimenting with culture—from comedy to theater, poetry to song—as an idiom to communicate who they are and to end isolation caused by extremists within their ranks.

The message resonates in comedians' jokes and sermons from young satellite sheikhs, in playwrights' plots and poetry contests, in underground music clubs and women's self-empowerment sessions, in new comic book superheroes and hip-hop songs. They often reach an even wider audience than the political protests. Muslims in the West, especially the United States, are playing lead roles in creating a different public face for the Islamic world.

The themes are daring and defiant. The lyrics of Kiosk, an underground Iranian rap group, boldly challenged the fanaticism, repression, hypocrisy, and hidden depravity of Tehran's theocratic regime.

Immoral zealots, fanatic factions,
Chinese-style economic expansions.
Smuggling women to Dubai,
Our noble men turning a blind eye.
Foreign currencies are reserved,
Border movements all observed.
Oil-dependent economy is hooked,
Incentive vacations overbooked.
Counterfeit medication,
Addiction as a recreation.

During Iran's 2009 presidential election, the campaign of opposition candidate Mehdi Karroubi—a septuagenarian cleric—distributed one thousand CDs of hip-hop songs that rapped with pro-democracy messages.[2] As elsewhere in the Islamic world, both the medium and the message were changing.

Al Qaeda is not dead, even with bin Laden's death ten years after 9/11. But it is increasingly passé. In the post-jihadist era, the movement is out of touch with both events and its audience.

The terror network issued a video communiqué after the Egyptian uprising that ousted Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. In a world timed more to warp-speed Twitter and cell phone texting, the thirty-four-minute videotape seemed from a bygone era.

The tape was made by Ayman al Zawahiri, an Egyptian physician who had been arrested with hundreds of militants after President Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981. He served three years on weapons charges, then went into exile. He became leader of Egypt's Islamic Jihad, plotted against the Egyptian government, and later merged forces with bin Laden. He was widely considered the real brains behind al Qaeda. For more than a quarter century, he advocated violence to end Mubarak's rule.

But in the end, as Zawahiri began his tenth year in hiding on another continent, Mubarak was ousted by peaceful civil disobedience. The uprising took a mere eighteen days.

Al Qaeda took almost that long just to get its crude videotape posted. It was roughly dated in the Islamic lunar month of Safar between January 5 and February 3. The message indicated it was made in the early stages of Egypt's upheaval, which began on January 25. But it was not posted on a militant Islamist website until February 18—a full week after Mubarak resigned—and still made no mention of the transition of power. So it was at least two or three weeks out of date.[3]

The message also seemed antiquated. Al Qaeda's manifesto promoted creation of Islamist states. On the tape, Zawahiri rambled on for a half hour about Egyptian history since the eighteenth century, the country's disintegration since Ottoman rule, and the role of Western colonial powers in installing secular rule.

He opined that democracy "can only be nonreligious," as if that discredited freedom.[4] He was totally out of touch with the new Egyptian reality—and the growing demands for democracy elsewhere. Zawahiri's communiqué finally made it to the outside world on a weekend of demonstrations demanding liberty in Iran, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait—events all posted on YouTube almost as fast as they happened.

In contrast, al Qaeda's tape combined a tedious audio over a still photo of Zawahiri, whose scraggly, untrimmed beard had grown white during his long battle in exile.

Al Qaeda is not finished. Its franchises will almost certainly try and

try again. South Asia particularly offers volatile passions and deep problems to exploit. But the movement's remaining leaders and believers also have few options. They cannot simply acknowledge a new era and come in from the cold, as the Soviets did in suddenly becoming Russians when communism proved impractical and their empire collapsed. Al Qaeda's leaders are cornered, politically and physically. Or rather, they have cornered themselves.

More important, the movement has now lost the psychological edge, its most potent asset. Terrorism, in the end, can never win a war. It can only terrorize people enough to scare them into complying with extremists or making concessions.

The political uprisings and the broader culture of change have demonstrated how much al Qaeda has miscalculated, beginning with the 9/11 attacks that scared and alienated many Muslims too. A decade later, its strategic goal—of seizing a Muslim state and recreating the old caliphate—seemed almost silly. In a long treatise after 9/11, Zawahiri wrote,

> Liberating the Muslim nation, confronting the enemies of Islam, and launching jihad against them require a Muslim authority, established on a Muslim land that raises the banner of jihad and rallies the Muslims around it. Without achieving this goal, our actions will mean nothing more than mere and repeated disturbances that will not lead to the aspired goal.[5]

Al Qaeda has killed many, mostly its own brethren. But it has otherwise achieved nothing.

Even one of bin Laden's sons disowned the 9/11 attacks and condemned the movement. Omar bin Laden, who spent five years in Afghanistan and was there on 9/11, called the attacks acts of "craziness."

"Those guys are dummies. They have destroyed everything, and for nothing," he reportedly said. "What did we get from September 11?"[6]

A decade later, al Qaeda's goals seemed further away than ever. Compared with the vast number of democracy activists, cultural innovators, and new voices in the Islamic world, al Qaeda's extremists looked like pathetic thugs and losers.

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AFTER THE COLD WAR ended in 1991, the notion of a "clash of civilizations" defined debates over the world's new ideological divide. It was always a somewhat arrogant concept. It was also simplistically summarized as a global split between Muslims and the rational rest.

"The crescent-shaped Islamic bloc, from the bulge of Africa to central Asia, has bloody borders," Samuel Huntington wrote in his controversial 1993 *Foreign Affairs* piece, as if countries with other religions had not initiated warfare or engaged in repression.[7] (Ten years later, the United States invaded Iraq on grounds that proved untrue. The US military presence dragged on for almost a decade.)

Huntington concluded,

> The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural . . . The conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating civilizations.[8]

The idea of a civilizational schism ignored an alternative truth: even as the outside world tried to segregate Muslims as "others," particularly after 9/11, most Muslims were increasingly trying to integrate into, if not imitate, a globalizing world.

The Islamic world also no longer has identifiable borders. It now extends far beyond the fifty-seven predominantly Muslim countries on three continents, from Bosnia in Europe to Bangladesh in South Asia, from Iraq in the Gulf to Indonesia on the Pacific, from Tunisia on the Mediterranean to Turkmenistan on the Caspian. In the early twenty-first century, more than one out of every five individuals is Muslim, and they live on all six inhabited continents. Most do not speak Arabic, the language of the Koran.

The world's five largest Muslim populations—Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Turkey—have vastly different cultures, languages, races, and ethnic groups. None of them are Arab. And none are even in the Middle East, where the faith was founded in the seventh century.

India has the third-largest Muslim population—some 164 million people—even though it is a minority. China has more Muslims than Iraq. Russia, which has the largest Muslim population in Europe, has more Muslims than Jordan and Libya combined. Ethiopia has about as

many Muslims as Afghanistan.[9] Islam is growing among Australia's Aborigines and on the tiny Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Tobago.[10] Argentina has the largest Muslim population in Latin America.[11] Only 15 percent of the 1.57 billion Muslims today are Arabs.

The Muslim world is also not over there, far away, somewhere. Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the United States. There are mosques in every corner of the country, from Arizona to Alaska, Minnesota to Maine, Washington state to Washington, DC. Even Salt Lake City, the home of America's Mormons, has a mosque.

A few American Muslims have indeed turned to terrorism. At the top of the list is Anwar al Awlaki, who was born in New Mexico, graduated from Colorado State University, and enrolled in a doctoral program at George Washington University in the nation's capital.[12] He fled to Yemen in 2004, where he has allegedly engaged in fund-raising, recruiting, training, and plotting attacks for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. His acolytes are linked to several recent plots to attack the United States. Both the United States and the United Nations have designated him a terrorist.

But the overwhelming majority of Muslim Americans have integrated in academia, the arts, business, government, the media, the law, medicine, sports, even space. Some have become quite famous in widely diverse ways.

Keith Ellison became the first Muslim member of Congress in 2007. The Minnesota lawmaker took the oath of office on a Koran once owned by Thomas Jefferson. Dr. Mehmet Oz, a cardiothoracic surgeon, became a popular talk-show doctor in 2009 after appearing on *Oprah;* six of his books on health were best sellers. Mohamed El-Erian is CEO of PIMCO, the world's largest bond investment company, with assets of over $1 trillion. He previously managed Harvard University's endowment fund, worth billions. Ahmed Zewail of the California Institute of Technology won the 1999 Nobel Prize in chemistry. (He returned to his native Egypt to help fledgling democratic forces after Mubarak was ousted.) Aasif Mandvi is among the comedic correspondents on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central. And Shaquille O'Neal is one of dozens of famous Muslim athletes. In 2010, he gave an interview—posted on YouTube—noting his intention to perform the hajj pilgrimage.[13]

Among women, Anousheh Ansari, a Muslim engineer and businesswoman, was the first female space tourist. In 2006, she spent eight days

at the International Space Station helping with experiments. In 2010, Rima Fakih became the first Muslim to be crowned Miss USA. In 2009, Bilqis Abdul Qaadir became the first high school basketball player—male or female—to score more than three thousand points in Massachusetts.[14] She went on to play point guard for the University of Memphis—with her arms, legs, and hair covered in keeping with modest Islamic dress.[15]

What was most striking in the early twenty-first century, especially as protests against tyranny erupted across the Middle East, was the commonality of civilizations.

During Egypt's uprising, Muslims and Coptic Christians—who have had deadly confrontations in the past—mobilized together. Ten percent of Egyptians are Christians. Several banners at Liberation Square blended Islam's crescent moon with a Christian cross. "One nation, one people," the banners declared.

In every country, the message of street movements was the same. "We want democracy. We want freedom," said a Libyan protester after security forces opened fire on the funeral procession of a slain demonstrator. "I want to go on the street feeling like nobody is looking after me, not looking over my shoulder."[16]

During a "Day of Dignity," Moroccans marched peacefully in more than one dozen cities to demand fewer powers for the king and more for the people. "Yes to a parliamentary democracy," read one sign.

"We no longer want to be subjects," said Abdelilah Ben Abdeslam, a leader of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights. "We want to be citizens."[17]

Symbolizing a new bridge between civilizations, Egyptian protester Jamal Ibrahim named his firstborn daughter "Facebook" shortly after Mubarak stepped down.[18]

As with other faiths, Islamic identity runs deep. The connection to religion may well deepen during difficult political transitions, for which many societies are poorly prepared. Religions have historically served both as a refuge during repression and a resource to define political alternatives.

"God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?" wrote Thomas Jefferson, a quote inscribed on the wall of his memorial in Washington, DC.

Globalization—or the traumatic transition to it—may also intensify

personal affiliations with faith. Vast numbers from diverse faiths will want a local identity during change that redefines the patterns of governance and alliances, economics and trade, the media and culture. The church, the temple, the synagogue, and the mosque are all pillars to cling to during the transition's tornados.

Yet the uprisings are among the many signals that the Islamic world is no longer an exception to history's forces. A new generation is taking the helm. And the vast majority of Muslims are not attracted to the three major models that until recently defined political Islam's spectrum: al Qaeda's purist Salafism, Iran's Shiite theocracy, and Saudi Arabia's rigid Wahhabism. All three have a singular vision. All three are exclusive of anything else.

The new movements are about pluralism. The alternatives they create—over time, perhaps a great deal of time—may not be liberal in the Western mode. Alcohol and pornography are (sometimes hypocritically) not on the list of freedoms embraced even by liberal Muslims. But most Muslims do want to end political monopolies and open up space—to play whatever music they want as well as to have a genuine choice of political parties.

"The majority of Muslims today believe in Allah, the Koran, the prophets—all of them, dating back to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus," said Ghada Shahbender, an Egyptian poet who joined her children to protest against Mubarak's rule.

"They pray occasionally, pay alms when they can afford, although the majority can't afford it right now, and fast during Ramadan. That is as Islamic as their behavior becomes," she told me. "Extremism today is less attractive than it has ever been."

As hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Cairo, Egyptian protester Ali Bilal put it simply: "We've had enough time stolen."[19]