

**Malcolm B. Russell, *The Middle East and South Asia*
(Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 286.**

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The Middle East and South Asia is a volume of *The World Today Series*, published and updated annually. This series provides both a short historical as well as an updated look at each country of both the regions. The volume looks into the geographical setting, current government, politics, cultures, economic problems and prospects of each country both the regions contain. This up-to-date series for the year 2015-2016, is effectively supplemented with maps, photographs and comprehensive charts. It contains important discussions of current happenings in the Middle East and South Asia, and their implications for the future, distinct sections on each country including occupied territories such as Palestine, Kashmir as well as covering regional organisations.

Russell describes that, today, the Middle East and South Asia are the regions where religions infringe upon politics. Arab and Islamic cultures have traditionally valued human rights but, unfortunately, national governments failed to foster democracy and development. Arab societies suffered from high poverty and unemployment rates. Moreover, economies that adopted free market doctrine proved quite defenceless as the process rose higher worldwide. The Arab Spring endeavoured to bring a cultural shift and emphasised human dignity, women's rights, freedom, justice and democracy.

Water resources are another threat to peace in both the regions. In the 21st century, water scarcity threatens bitter conflicts within a state and among the regional states as well. Israel's systematic denial of Palestinians' right to water, increasing desertification in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Iran and water politics in the Nile basin are affecting the countries' already undersized water resources. In South Asia, too, Pakistan and India have been facing the challenge of sharing water from the Indus River and its tributaries. Bangladesh and north-eastern India struggle with sharing of the Ganges water and it has been a contentious issue for almost 35 years. Unfortunately, logic seems missing in matters

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of water management in these regions. Given the shortages and many failed attempts at peacemaking, troubles still lie ahead.

Countries of the Middle East and South Asia enjoy few natural riches and most of the famed mineral deposits of antiquity have been exhausted for centuries. The great exception is petroleum. From northern Iraq to the Strait of Hormuz, petroleum's role remained largely unchallenged. Russell describes that future conditions for oil and gas seems favourable. The reconstructed oil industries of Iraq and Libya are also likely to continue expanding the crude oil output.

The volume criticises the superficial and slanted reporting that overshadowed the accomplishments by countries in the two regions.

Russell described that, given the endemic corruption and absence of a free society debate in most of the Middle Eastern countries, it will take decades to realize the liberal hopes of the Arab Spring. Although ultra-Orthodox populations are growing, many of them reject the intellectual foundations of Zionism. Their concerns revolve around their own needs. What is happening in the Middle East and South Asia right now is worrisome. The most outrageous physical evidence is the unending brutalities by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The work emphasised that the West should be sensitive towards Muslim sufferings, reactions and their different cultural patterns within the two regions (the Middle East and South Asia).

In the South Asian region, peace requires to win the hearts of the populaces through effective and honest governments dedicated for serious struggle against widespread corruption. Vis-à-vis India, a more vigorous and active role for India is expected on the world stage, remembering that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) brought India into the nuclear arms race. With regard to Pakistan, Russell described that Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif would be remembered for raising the chances of prosperity through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Social and economic developments require freedom from terrorism and other violence. The military recognised the need to eliminate all terrorist groups including ISIS successfully. After achieving this goal, Pakistan will enjoy more progress. This volume predicted that achieving benefits within South Asia will not be easy, however, those on the sides of

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democracy offer opportunities for improved relations and greater balance in the region.

The volume described that the disputed territories of Palestine and Kashmir remained a subject of great emotions in both the regions. The Palestinian uprisings in the occupied territories magnified the division between Jerusalem and Israel. There have been separate areas of residence, social life and work. Many Arab residents of Jerusalem have torn up their Israeli identity cards which symbolises their inferior status in the Israeli scheme. The book explained well the ground realities in Palestine and refer to Teddy Kollek, mayor of Jerusalem from 1965 - 1993, who accepted the fact that "Co-existence in Jerusalem is dead." For Kashmir, the dispute promises to continue. Pakistan demanded a plebiscite to allow Kashmiris to determine their own fate, however, India opposes any of such possible referendum. The volume highlighted that some observers cautioned that popular feelings aroused by revolt and repression, could force one weak government or the other into starting a war.

At the end, Russell highlighted the role played by the regional organisations. The regional organization such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and The League of Arab States showed some signs of maturity and achievement, and shifted their attention from distant problems to the closer regional matters. Despite the signs of progress, the trade between the member nations remained limited. In political matters, the organisations were often immobilised and are unlikely to address the most significant problems of the regions.

This volume is an addition to the existing literature on the subject as it provides important details and analysis for each country with a sharp focus on the current realities of both the regions. It also incorporates latest data, factual accuracy and informed projection which make this an outstanding resource for researchers, practitioners, government officials, media professionals, potential investors, students and libraries.