

BRUTAL TRUTHS, FRAGILE MYTHS – POWER, POLITICS AND WESTERN ADVENTURISM IN THE ARABWORLD. Mark Huband. Westview Press, Oxford, 2004. Pp. 295. ISBN 0-8133-3753-4.

In spite of its great wealth it is now almost a cliché that the people of the Arab world have a long way to go before they catch up with the modern world. The desirability of doing this in spite of the many pitfalls of modernity is rarely questioned, this premise having been accepted, by and large, by the people of the region. Western thinkers and writers have come to view this as an inevitability although many Arab commentators assert that there is a uniquely Arab and Muslim way of being modern. Huband, who is a veteran journalist, who has considerable sympathies for the region, poses the question why the Arab world has made no progress since the cold war and attempts to answer it. He sees the lack of political freedom, social stability and economic improvement as impediments to progress.

His analysis is pessimistic in that he sees few of the leaders of the region capable of initiating changes, starting with the political, that it so badly needs. He considers this to be a pre requisite if the Arab region is to meet the challenges that confront it but observes that repressive regimes will be a feature of that part of the world for the foreseeable future. Crises will be endemic. Huband examines Western adventurism in this context and sees American aggression and Israeli colonialism setting off dangerous sparks in the world's most volatile region.

Written in an appealing journalistic style this book covers different modes of rule in the Arab world; culture, identity and what it means to be Arab; the emergence of the Islamist challenge; the cauldron that is Iraq; human rights and state terror; Israel and Palestine; American power and the new imperialism. This is both a narrative and an analysis not often available in the mainstream media in the West and an essential read for anyone interested in current and potential conflagrations in the Arab world.

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