

clear stalemate. The test of wills continues to escalate, however, with its demands that Americans load more and more missiles on board a ship ready to set sail on a quest to take back the missing limb from liberal theory that Lenin passed on to Mao and he to Ho." Such statements too frequently substitute for hard analysis.

With more sympathy and precision, *A Covenant With Power* could have turned a promising premise into a significant contribution. It stands instead as an opportunity largely missed. **WV**

**INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
OLD RULES, DANGEROUS GAMES
by L. Carl Brown**

(Princeton University Press; xii + 353 pp.; \$35.00/\$15.00)

Sterett Pope

Why is the Middle East such a dangerous place? Why has the history of the region become a train of unsettled disputes, wars, dislocations, and death? An inquiring glance at the day's newspapers provides some partial answers: the implacable hostility of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the uniquely insoluble binationalist struggle between Israel and the Palestinians. There is also the strategic importance of the region's oil exports and reserves and the inscrutable fury of Islamic fundamentalism. The great merit of Carl Brown's new book is that the author offers a persuasive and parsimonious thesis that organizes all of these factors and places them in coherent perspectives.

An interpretive essay in diplomatic history, Brown's book makes an argument that is at once structural and cultural: The regional state system of today's Middle East is highly unstable and conflict-prone because it is characterized by extreme multilateralism and chronic foreign intervention. Brown traces the roots of the problem to the "Eastern Question," the name nineteenth-century European statesmen and their academic chroniclers gave to the byzantine gamesmanship that attended the gradual dismantling of a senescent Ottoman Empire by provincial warlords, nationalist movements, and expanding European powers. A unique "diplomatic culture" resulted from these confusing struggles, one that survived the demise of the Sick Man of Europe and has been reinforced by the persistent multilateral meddling of foreign powers. Given the area's strategic centrality between East

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and West, and its great ethnic and geographic diversity, no regional contender or external power could unite or organize the region. Attempts at hegemony—Brown examines Britain's "Arab Policy," Nasser's Pan-Arabist project, and more recent American unilateral diplomacy—have foundered on this structural fact. In the meantime, internal contenders have continued to settle accounts, while great powers have pursued grand designs in the region and only succeeded in frustrating those of others.

Professor Brown is no doubt correct to rank the Middle East as the most "penetrated" of the world's regional diplomatic arenas. "A penetrated political system is neither effectively absorbed by the outside challenger nor later released from the outsider's smothering embrace.... The degree of penetration is best measured by the extent to which differences between local, national, regional, and international politics becomes blurred. That is, the politics of a thoroughly penetrated society is not adequately explained—even at the local level—without reference to the influence of the intrusive outside system." The hallmark of Middle Eastern "penetration" is a pervasive multilateralism. Local leaders and conflicts mesh with national and superpower actors and rivalries in an ever-changing pattern of confounding complexity. A coup attempt in Amman can provoke civil strife in Tyre, or a local dispute over water rights can prompt imperial improvisation in Washington. Penetration and multilateralism were at the heart of the Eastern Question in the nineteenth century; and Brown argues that the lessons in realpolitik which European

powers gave Middle Eastern elites in the nineteenth century impressed upon them a "bitter sense of their relative powerlessness in a kaleidoscopic, Hobbesian world" and fostered a "cynicism and manipulative spirit which, in turn, helped to sustain the very system that oppressed them."

Carl Brown is at his best when he analyzes the ramifications and dynamics of this system. He cites episodes from the successive "Syrian Crises" of the mid-nineteenth century, the Balkan wars of national liberation, and the Arab-Israeli conflict to show the congruities and enduring features that characterize all these struggles. But the elegance of his argument is often cluttered by involved digressions and trivial correlations. For example, Brown embarks on a discussion of nineteenth-century Islamic movements, and he develops a cogent analysis of the modernization programs of Ottoman autocrats; but those are at best extended footnotes to his diplomatic thesis. Brown also devotes a whole chapter to rehearsing the American habit of seeing Soviet trickery in essentially local or regional disputes. His point: The region's paranoid style of politics infects superpowers as well as ministates. But it is just as characteristic of American diplomacy throughout the Third World in the cold war period.

Professor Brown is more on target when he discusses the interaction of atrophying Ottoman institutions and the indelicate intrusions of European powers. He notes that the weakness of modern Arab states in the fertile crescent derives in part from the Ottoman system of confessional home rule, whereby Constantinople deputized religious and tribal dignitaries to regulate taxation and justice within their communities. This "millet" system was an ingenious response to the ethnic diversity and segmented social structure of the region; but it prompted myriad insular and umbrageous particularisms in the empire and proved radically at odds with the secularist model of the liberal nation-state, a model that Arab nationalists sought to adopt in the decades following the collapse of Ottoman rule.

The development of stable Arab nation-states was also hamstrung by the mandate system, which replaced Ottoman government in the interwar period. At Versailles the victorious Allies appointed themselves custodians of Wilsonian democracy in the Ottoman provinces of Arab Asia. Britain and France were mandated to consult with local populations and oversee the orderly establishment of viable national institutions in their mandatories. In fact, they pressed de facto protectorates on their charges, pur-

sued their own economic and strategic interests, and drew boundaries that reflected imperial designs and improvisations far more than they did the wishes of the subject populations. Israel and Lebanon, together the axis of Middle Eastern instability and violence today, were both products of the woefully misconceived and mismanaged mandate system.

In the end, the Eastern Question and the mandate experience created a regional system characterized by extremely tenuous and "penetrable" nation-states. Every Arab

country in the fertile crescent has been, and remains, vulnerable to tribal or sectarian conflict within its own borders. Unpersuaded by the nationalist claims of their governments, fertile crescent Arabs have taken refuge in more universal, and less practical, ideologies—Pan Arabism and religious fundamentalism.

Subverted from within and buffeted from without, the nation-state in its classical, liberal formulation enjoys little legitimacy in the Middle East today. If anything, religion rather than nation has prevailed as the foundation of political community in the Middle

East. This was a stable and commodious arrangement in the early centuries of Ottoman rule, but in an age of armed and insecure regimes, political religion has taken on a volatile, almost apocalyptic, character. Secularist Arab politicians have long warned of the evils of armed religion, but few predicted the chaos and tragedy of the '80s—what some call the "triumph of the three ayatollahs": Ruhollah Khomeini, Bashir Jumayel, and Menachem Begin. To open today's newspaper is to share the cynicism and frustration so many Arabs live and breathe. **WV**

Correspondence

MISUSING MISS MANNERS

To the Editors: This week, along with the revelation of Soviet complicity in the attempted assassination of the pope and confirmation of the terrorist bombing of Commander Zero's Costa Rica news conference, *Worldview* arrived bringing Wilson Carey McWilliams ruminations on international etiquette ("Mr. Reagan and Miss Manners," Under Cover, May).

His citation of Little Miss Manners' dictum as a precept for international relations is ludicrous. It doesn't even govern conduct on Manhattan's civilized streets, where, as the weather warms, one's stroll is rudely spoiled by blaring boxes.

Throughout the world, unfortunately, most nations are ruled by nasty thugs who have no regard for their citizens' rights, much less any interest in polite conduct. The Sakharovs serve as a constant reminder of the sad plight suffered by most of these victims. Only in democracies are citizens protected by their governments from brutality. Elsewhere, the governments are often very rude. Even the Sandinistas are guilty of impolite conduct, including, but not limited to, their deliberate affront to the pope. They've been very rude to the Miskito Indians.

If Mr. McWilliams's prissy comments had not led you to print a wrong-headed conclusion in *Worldview*, they could have passed unnoticed as ramblings brought on by an overdose of Louis Farrakhan's epithets. To correct this error, I submit that lawless nations that combine great power with great skill command, like the Mafia chieftain, fear, but not respect.

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Wilson Carey McWilliams Responds:
Mr. Smith seems to be under the delusion

that civilized regimes and well-mannered people are inherently nonviolent and destined to be victimized. Civilized states know how to use force: It would be a rash mugger, after all, who tackled Mrs. Thatcher. In fact, civilized regimes understand that there is no halfway house between civility and thuggery. If the Nicaraguan regime is nothing but a bunch of assassins, it is not entitled to the protection of good form or law. But the United States has *chosen* to recognize Nicaragua, and that decision imposes certain obligations on us, not because the Nicaraguans are nice people, but because we hope to be. We have no duty to invite louts to dinner, but we cannot complain about their table manners if we do.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

To the Editors: I work for Lutheran World Relief, an overseas relief and development agency of the Lutheran Churches in the United States. Just before I read Stephen Fenichell's "U.N. Watch" column about the "Homeless in Africa" in the June issue of *Worldview*, I had read a lengthy report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on Women in Agriculture. I quote a few sentences of that report:

"In the developing world, where more than a third of the total population is rural and female, women produce most of the food for domestic consumption.... Women in rural areas grow at least 50 percent of the world's food. They work in all aspects of cultivation, including planting, thinning, weeding, applying fertilizer and harvesting. In some parts of Africa, women provide up to 90 percent of the rural food supply."

Surely Mr. Fenichell cannot mean what it sounds like he means when he closes his column with the question, "And among women, children and elderly men, who is

to be trained and rehabilitated?"

Many development agencies, including Lutheran World Relief, have come to understand that successful development *must* involve women as a key resource. How much more crucial is it now, when these women are providing what stability and family continuity is left for displaced people, that they be trained and involved totally, even primarily, in all aspects of programs shaping their future. We in the so-called developed world are desperately in need of developing our understanding of, and sensitivity to, other cultures if we are truly to be partners in positive change.

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Stephen Fenichell Responds:

Yes, women are the backbone of agriculture in underdeveloped countries, and women in refugee camps can be trained to farm. The question "who will be rehabilitated among women, children, and elderly men?" was not meant to disparage women but to indicate that such training is rarely even a remote possibility for millions of refugees.

Camps are usually placed in desolate areas. Whatever money is available from the High Commissioner's office or volunteer groups goes for food, medicine, tents. Repatriation is unlikely because people who flee from war, repression, and famine in the Third World are not welcome anywhere, unless they are young men of conscription age.

It would be good to see women refugees producing food while their children play and study in day care centers. On a very small scale, private organizations can accomplish such miracles. But such good works barely scratch the surface of the massive job facing the High Commissioner for Refugees.