

Book Reviews

Violent Middle East

by John H. Sigler

Iraq and Iran: Roots of Conflict by Tareq Y. Ismael.
Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982, 226 pages,
\$US24 (cloth) and \$US12.95 (paper).
Iran-Iraq and the Gulf War edited by Robert Spencer.
Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for International
Studies, 1982, 98 pages, \$5.00.

The Middle East has not been a principal focus of attention for Canadian universities, and these two publications are noteworthy in showing the speed with which several Canadian academics who specialize in Middle East affairs responded to the new crisis in the Gulf with an effort to provide analysis of the background to the conflict. Tareq Ismael of the University of Calgary has published widely on Middle East affairs in the past and frequently with Syracuse University Press which specializes in Middle East material. The analysis takes up only the first forty pages of this book; the remainder is devoted to a presentation in English translation of nineteen key documents on the history of the conflict and current ideological issues between Khomeini's revolutionary Shi'ite Islamic doctrine and the secular Arab nationalism of the Iraqi Ba'ath regime. In his analysis, Professor Ismael traces the periodic outbreaks of open conflict on the border question to shifts in the balance of power. Given Iran's greater power based on population and military potential, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq must have seen the internal chaos in Iran and the break with the United States as a rare opportunity for the assertion of Iraqi claims. It was a drastic miscalculation which has cost up to 100,000 lives, and neither Professor Ismael nor the authors in the Spencer volume tell us anything about how such incredible errors in judgment occur.

Iran-Iraq and the Gulf War is a product of a conference on the Gulf war held at the University of Toronto in February 1981, although the papers published here are updated to the end of 1981. (Professor Ismael's cut-off is mid-1982.) Albertine Jwaideh (University of Toronto) covers much of the same ground as Professor Ismael in analyzing the historical background to the conflict, although she places an even greater emphasis on sustained Iranian territorial aggrandizement in the region. The chapter by Roger Savory (University of Toronto) takes up the same theme as Professor Ismael on the ideological foundations of the quarrel,

but he lays greater emphasis on the extremism of Khomeini's ideological fervor. David Quirin (University of Toronto) provides an informative chapter on how the international oil market adjusted to the loss of supply from Iran and Iraq in the early months of the war. Much of the credit goes to Saudi Arabia which rapidly stepped up production to make up for the losses from its often quarrelsome OPEC partners. We had been led to believe that any interruption in Gulf supply would cause a major disruption in the world economy and threaten great power intervention. We are probably not out of danger in the Gulf on that theme yet, but the Quirin analysis suggests that there are market alternatives to military intervention in assuring security of supply. My own article in the Spencer volume is on US policy and deals with the regional and international cross-pressures which have limited the US and Soviet roles in either taking advantage of the Iran-Iraq war for their own purposes or in being much help in ending it.

Whatever the weight of history, the shifting balance of power, and ideological differences, all of these authors are silent on the question of how Iraq's invasion of Iran can be reconciled with the United Nations Charter. So has the international community — testimony to the prevailing cynicism about war prevention. Many will feel that Iran, in gross violation of international law in its handling of the US Embassy hostages, deserved what it got. Yet, our preoccupation with justifying war, as in these volumes, will not tell us much about how to get out of a war, such as the Iran-Iraq misadventure, when it is clear to all that it has failed to resolve any of the underlying issues.

The Middle East and North Africa, 1982-83. 29th ed.
London: Europa Publications Limited, 1982, 1013
pages, \$US105.00.

Yearbooks are rarely the subject of book reviews, but in an area where a recently leaked US Air Force strategic planning document tells us a major war and superpower confrontation is inevitable by the year 2000, it is important to move behind the troubled headlines of the Middle East to seek some greater understanding of the major players, their hopes and fears, and the possibilities for reducing regional tensions. Where events are as fast-breaking as they have proven to be this past year in Lebanon, an up-to-date and reliable reference work can prove indispensable to news editors, foreign ministries, as well as the general student of international relations. Few can compete with