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Middle East

By L. Carl Brown

The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World.

Mohammed Ayoub. : University of Michigan Press, 2007, 232 \$65.00

How refreshing it is to have a book on this subject that gets around to discussing al Qaeda only in the last pages of the penultimate chapter. In the early pages of this accessible short study, Ayoub lays to rest the "myth of the Islamic monolith" and restores Islam and politics to history -- which means, as with other world religions, a complexity of continuity and change. He then presents Islam's "many faces" today in separate short chapters, neatly comparing and contrasting binary examples -- Saudi Arabia and Iran ("self-proclaimed Islamic states"), Pakistan and Egypt (states caught "between ideology and pragmatism"), Turkey and Indonesia (Muslim democracies), and Hezbollah and Hamas (Islamist national resistance movements). Only thereafter does he take on "transnational Islam," but even here he gives almost as much space to the Islamist movements Tablighi Jamaat and Hizb ut-Tahrir as to al Qaeda. The concluding chapter offers a succinct, and severe, appraisal of the U.S. role in the ongoing history of these several national and transnational Islamist movements.