COMMUNICATIONS

TO THE EDITOR:

I am afraid I am among those who have in recent years found the APSR to become depressingly unreadable, as arcane notations replace expository English and political insight yields to statistically demonstrated trivia. But I am delighted to discover that APSR has after all a saving sense of humor. I refer to your selection of perhaps the nation’s most unregenerate right-wing political scientist to review my book In Search of American Foreign Policy: The Humane Use of Power (Vol. 71, December 1977).

That a broad reevaluation of foreign affairs liberalism should be entrusted to a dedicated opponent of liberalism in any form was a deliriously witty act, ensuring as it did that the entire effort would be ridiculed rather than critiqued, and that it would be tested entirely in terms of its deviations from true orthodoxy regarding the Soviet Union as revealed by Professor Possony.

I can envisage a regular humor section in the “Book Reviews,” in which, to give only a few obvious examples (to which I am by no means comparing myself), books by Carter are reviewed by Reagan, Woodward-Bernstein by Nixon, Gandhi by Nietzsche, Rathjens by Wohlstetter, Tizard by Lindemann, Galileo by Torquemada, etc., etc. Prizes might be offered for the funniest mismatchings, thus converting to a delightful game the otherwise heavy weather of serious and informative book reviewing.

Of course, since the review in question appeared four years after publication, it (like all APSR reviews) is essentially useless to the profession, and the matter is really moot. For that reason I will restrict myself to observing that the far Right’s resort to contempt and ridicule when confronted with anti-Sovietism that is insufficiently dogmatic, bears an uncanny resemblance to the outrage on the part of true Stalinists in the face of familial heresies such as democratic socialism and Eurocommunism.

Keep up the good work. Pretty soon the profession will become totally invisible—all clothes, as it were, but no emperor.

LINCOLN P. BLOOMFIELD
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

TO THE EDITOR:

I was dismayed to read Leonard Binder's harsh review of Itamar Rabinovich’s fine book Syria Under the Ba’th, 1963–66 (American Political Science Review, March 1976, 254–55). I believe he has missed the point.

Binder starts out his review announcing his own opinion that “the central question of Syrian politics is how to explain the evidently stable position of the Ba’th regime...” and then castigates Rabinovich for his failure to provide such an explanation. “The author knows what it is he should be explaining,” he states, “but he apparently believed that a recounting of how one event led to another was a sufficient explanation. ... To show the linkages between conspiratorial stroke and counter-stroke is a work neither of scholarship nor of analysis.”

But there is no reason to imagine that Mr. Rabinovich shares Binder’s view of what his job should be. Any why should he? As a historian, he has tried to show what actually happened; and if anything, he demonstrates that what Binder took to be stability in Syria in the 1960s was nothing of the kind, for the regime was a shifting coalition of factions. Rabinovich explains painstakingly how Syria drifted toward the coup d’etat of 1966 and the rule of a leftist, Alawite, military-dominated regime, not as a mindless exercise in “hyperfactualism” but in order to reconstruct the inner workings of the political process and provide clues as to why people belonging to the same organizations and professing similar beliefs fell so readily into internecine conflict; or, conversely, that alleged ideological struggles may have concealed much more personal differences.

As even the bare facts of recent Syrian political history are the object of so much ignorance among us, it is perhaps a little early for anyone to be reaching for grand theory, in the guise of an “explanatory hypothesis,” in discussing that country. It is precisely the interconnections of events, conspiratorial and otherwise, that we need to learn more about first. Surely any careful reader of Rabinovich’s book should be able to understand that making sense of the nonsense in Syria in the 1960s was no simple task, but was an exacting job of scholarship and analysis. Perhaps Binder is able to function as a specialist in Middle East