

BOOKS

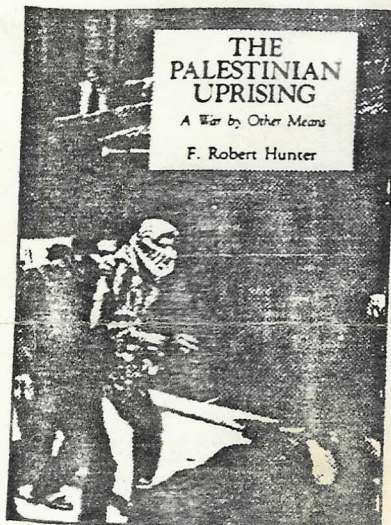
Provocative looks at Arab-Israeli conflict

by David Thompson

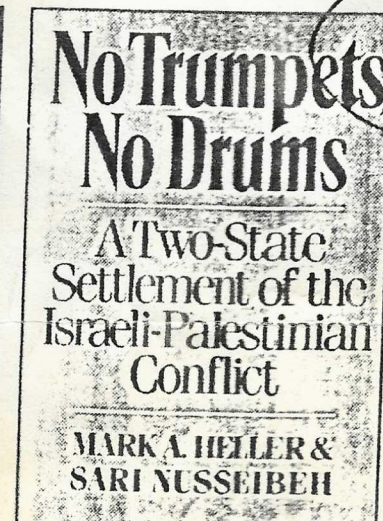
If the eyes of the world are currently focused on the Middle East peace conference in Madrid, then its ears also are listening to Sari Nusseibeh, the most outspoken — and by the same token, respected — of the Palestinian observers at the talks.

It seems fitting, therefore, that Nusseibeh, an Oxford- and Harvard-trained philosophy professor, contributes the most significant remark in either of two new books about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Originally voiced by one of Nusseibeh's students, it lies at the heart of the Mideast dilemma: "Israel dominates the present, but Palestinians dominate the future. What is required ... is an exchange."

The outcome of the Madrid conference notwithstanding, both



of these new books agree that such an exchange should be made. They



disagree, however, on who will initiate it.

In "The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means" (University of California Press, \$24.95), F. Robert Hunter places the ball firmly in the Israeli court. Though his work provides a useful and accurate chronology of the Intifadah, it also exhibits so pronounced a Palestinian bias that even Hunter feels an occasional need to justify himself — usually with reminders that while the Israelis are armed to the teeth, their adversaries simply throw stones.

Hunter, a Middle East scholar at Tulane University, also has a tendency to romanticize, even mythologize, his subject, particularly when documenting the Palestinians' willingness to place state over self and to accept crippling reductions in their standard of living when the Intifadah intensified.

There is more than rudimentary truth to these images, but the absence of any dissenting voices — Hunter's sources are almost exclusively Palestinian — leaves him walking a precarious line between propaganda and naiveté, not always with success.

A more balanced view of the struggle, one that acknowledges — and unlike Hunter, accepts — that both sides are more or less equally at fault, is provided in Nusseibeh and Jewish-Canadian scholar Mark A. Heller's "No Trumpets,

No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" (Hill and Wang, \$19.95).

The pro-Israeli Heller and the Palestinian nationalist Nusseibeh set themselves the goal of formulating a workable proposal upon which an independent Palestinian nation could be built. In a sense, their professional cooperation in this project provides a small-scale model for the parties at the Madrid conference itself.

Both scholars admit that theirs was an unlikely, potentially explosive, union. And hardly surprisingly, they recall their initial meeting as strained and distrustful.

Yet they overcame their differences by listening to, wrestling with, and finally assimilating one another's point of view. They then applied the process in the book itself.

Heller and Nusseibeh's dream essentially is built upon compromise, and upon the notion similarly, if less stringently, applied to Israel itself in its formative days — that Palestine should be grateful for whatever it is offered, no matter how paltry. They ultimately envision an independent Palestine carved from the West Bank and Gaza Strip (joined by a railway line), but limited militarily to a domestic security force.

The proposal also is built upon the belief that the gulf between Arab and Jew can be bridged. While many of their ideas are practicable only between governments and people who already have reconciled, still it is a starting point not only for negotiation, but also, perhaps, for settlement too.

Whatever other difficulties have stood in the way of such negotiations in the past, one obstacle has always been the absence of faith in a nonconfrontational solution. "No Trumpets, No Drums" restores that faith, placing into a workable context the past, present and future of Palestine. That, alone, is a remarkable, if not unique, accomplishment.

Seen in this light, Hunter's work can be described as the first, angry, chapter of a book still to be written, while Heller and Nusseibeh's is the last. Perhaps the Madrid conference will begin writing the chapters in between.

David Thompson is a Seattle writer and freelance critic.

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