

Book Review

Sari Nusseibeh & Mark A. Heller — *No Trumpets, No Drums, A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, London • New York: L. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 183 pp., index, ISBN 1-85043-365-8, price: £12.95 (hardback) (published: November 1991).

This is an important book. A Palestinian and an Israeli were brought together by a Washington based organisation to work out a possible scenario for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the beginning, both wondered whether they ought to accept, and both turned up in Washington with great reservations. Against all odds and, certainly at the beginning, frequently at the brink of calling off the whole business they managed to hammer out what to them was a solution they would be able to live with — to be more precise, a solution which they believed Israelis and Palestinians would be able to live with. *No Trumpets, No Drums* is an important book because it demonstrates what can be achieved if there is a political will to find a solution and because it explains what the conditions and difficulties are under which this political will can be maintained even in the face of seemingly unsurmountable difficulties.

This book can be read at many levels. It is an account of the personal difficulties encountered in working out a two-state solution. It presents in abridged form discussions of the major issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and proposes possible solutions for them. It allows the two opposing sides to gain a deeper understanding of each other's fears and prejudices and how these fears and prejudices have to be approached. It demonstrates that even if it is not always possible to find a mutually acceptable solution, a *modus vivendi* can still be found which will be an improvement over the status quo. In brief, the book is an illustration of the power of, and the limits to dialogue.

The primary purpose of *No Trumpets, No Drums* is to help educate the interested public in the Middle East and elsewhere about the possibilities and complexities of the two-state solution. It does not pretend to be a blueprint for a negotiated settlement of the conflict. It deals in turn with the necessary security arrangements in their national, regional and international ramifications; with the problem of the definition and organisation of borders; with the problems posed by the refugees and the implications of the right to return; with the obstacles imposed by the settlements in the Occupied Territories; with the vital issue of the use and distribution of the scarcest of all resources — water; and with the most difficult of all the contentious issues because it is also the most emotive one on all sides — the future status of Jerusalem. The argument is rounded off by a detailed discussion of possible ways of implementing an agreement between Palestinians and Israelis.

This is as far as the authors could go together. But the book contains more than that. It starts with two personal statements by the authors which together provide an admirable introduction into the obstacles to dialogue and the realistic basis on which dialogue has to start. The book ends with a discussion of the building blocks of a Palestinian state.

To do full justice to the book, one has to have specialist knowledge in many subjects. However, the technicalities of the solutions to individual problems are perhaps of less interest to the wider public — but certainly not of less importance because without these technical arrangements the conflict cannot be settled — than the foundations on which they can be constructed. These foundations are best discerned in the authors' personal statements.

Mark Heller presents, from a conservative Israeli position which recognises Israel's claim to the occupied territories as just, a carefully reasoned argument for a two-state solution based on an evaluation of the risks involved. According to Heller, "Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live with each other, one way or another. The choice is between the ways: continued stalemate or two-state settlement. For what it's worth, my own readiness to make territorial concessions in order to permit the creation of the Palestinian state stems not from a sense of moral obligation ... but from an assessment of the constellation of local, regional and international circumstances — that is, from an understanding that it is the wise and prudent thing to do. Israelis do have to understand that satisfying the Palestinian aspiration to run their own lives in a state of their own, at least to the extent that it does not pose an unacceptable danger, provides the only chance for a stable peace."

Heller's is an argument from strength, military strength, but with a clear vision of the writing on the wall. Though some may argue that the brush of the Intifada has painted letters so large and bright that one has to be completely blind to be able not to see them.

Sari Nusseibeh's presents the other side of the equation. He argues from a position of absolute military weakness but with the conviction of the hand that holds the brush. In his view, the motivating force for any negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians is summarised in a quote from one of his former students who was deported after the outbreak of the Intifada: "Israel dominates the present, but Palestinians dominate the future. What is required, therefore, is an exchange. Something of the future which the Palestinians hold in exchange for something of the present which the Israelis hold."

If for Israel security is paramount, the Palestinians will not negotiate the principle of self-determination. "There is a bottom line beyond which no self-respecting human being can go. For Palestinians, I would submit that this bottom line is the establishment of an independent state, more or less along the Green Line, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This bottom line preserves the required equitability in principle, because it is predicated on mutuality." Yet he concedes that although the principle is not up for negotiation its realisation may well be. "It is only natural that the Palestinians accept

the need to negotiate over the degree to which they can exercise this sovereignty. In this, they would not be different from many other countries and nations which "willingly" learn to live with certain restrictions in their military or economic activities."

These are the boundaries within which an agreement can be reached. However, "so sensitive are the issues involved, so paranoid the actors, that even the first tentative steps toward addressing them must be absolutely right. In my view, the principle of mutual recognition, the recognition by each side of the other side's right to self-determination can guarantee not only an initial engagement in negotiations but also an inbuilt mutual confidence mechanism to support what is bound to turn out to be an arduous and lengthy process of negotiations."

In spite of his calm and reasoned argument Nusseibeh does not always manage to escape the pain inflicted by living at the sharp end of history. There is no justice in history. Throughout history, migrations and demographic shifts have caused untold pain to millions. The Palestinians, in the twentieth century, are taking the brunt of such a migration. It is up to us, witnesses and participants in this historic and demographic drama, to do our utmost to mitigate the pain wherever we find it. This is the wider historical context when the son of a Jerusalemite family who traces his roots back over twelve hundred years faces his Israeli co-author who is a Canadian immigrant.

This is also context in which Nusseibeh's description of Palestinian feelings have to be seen: "Bluntly put, Palestinians essentially believe that any bargaining with Israel over Palestinian territory is like bargaining over stolen property with the very thief who stole it by force. Essentially, the Palestinians regard themselves as the rightful indigenous inheritors of all the Arab communities that have settled in this region since time immemorial. Unlike the Jews, who were dispossessed of a territorial (and therefore objective) continuity and who perhaps therefore compensated for this through a highly developed sense of continuous collective self-consciousness, Palestinian Arab continuity has been objective rather than subjective. ... The very first entry of Jewish tribes into Palestine from the Iraq region is already regarded as a settlement wave into what is essentially a Palestinian Arab region."

At this point, the mind begins to boggle. We are here entering the discussion of legitimacy of historical, national and personal claims to a place. It is a topic which will be taken up in the next edition of the J·A·D·E Newsletter in a review of the book by Michael Harsgor and Maurice Stroun (*Le refus d'assumer son passé historique ou L'imbroglie israélo-palestinien*). Suffice it to say for now that throughout history even millennia of presence in a country do not necessarily guarantee, or even entail, entitlement to residence and property. The Jews of Spain, who arrived there after the destruction of the first temple, still had to leave two thousand years later in the wake of the Inquisition in spite of the proven fact that they could not possibly have been involved in the fate of Jesus. The argument about legitimacy of claims is important because it is painful for those who live at decisive historical moments. But it is highly doubtful whether it can contribute anything to the resolution of the conflict.

In view of all the possible obstacles, it is encouraging to see how far the authors of *No Trumpets, No Drums* have progressed in their discussion of possible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There was only one issue on which they were unable to agree on a common platform — the definition of borders between the two states. Here, they only discussed general principles taking the Green Line and UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as their starting points. By contrast, the discussion of the future of Jerusalem, possibly the most difficult issue because of its strong emotive resonance on all sides, did not pose the same problem for them.

Given the vast array of topics covered, *No Trumpets, No Drums* is a very short book — only 170 pages of easily readable text. The point of the book is not whether the authors succeeded in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The point is that a Palestinian and an Israeli, in spite of initial misgivings, sat down together and worked through the problems that needed to be solved. They succeeded in going beyond generalities into specific proposals for a number of key issues. Even if none of their proposals should be implemented in the final agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, the book is still a success because it demonstrates that dispassionate, reasonable argument can produce a solution when the political will is there and how the ground for such an attitude has to be prepared.

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Publications received

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Natasha Beschorner and St. John B. Gould (eds.) — *Altered States? Israel, Palestine and the Future*, Published by The Geopolitics and International Boundaries Research Centre, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1991, 145 pp., index, ISBN 1-874014-01-9.

Uri Davis — *The State of Palestine*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991, 85 pp., index, bibliography, ISBN 0-86372-151-6 (hbk.) £14.95, ISBN 0-86372-135-4 (pbk.) £8.95.