

Two sides to every question

By Naomi Hyamson

NO TRUMPETS, NO DRUMS. Sari Nusseibeh and Mark A. Heller
I.B.Tauris, £12.95



Sari Nusseibeh at a press conference in Jerusalem in 1989 after meeting representatives of the US State Department

The publication of this book was timed to coincide with the first direct Israeli-Palestinian talks in Madrid and is itself a valuable contribution to the peace process.

Mark Heller, an Israeli, and Sari

Nusseibeh, a Palestinian, advocate a stage-by-stage, two-state solution. Both men have pioneered the concept in their own communities; indeed, Heller wrote a book in 1982 on the idea of a Palestinian state.

The present work is the fruit of months of debate between the two and, Nusseibeh suggests, "less a jointly-written text than a negotiated product." He sees their progress from a certain discomfort with each other to a good working relationship and an "esteemed friendship" as a model for Israeli-Palestinian relations in general.

The authors do not agree on every point. Heller distances himself from Nusseibeh's "sanguine prognosis" for a Palestinian liberal democracy. But they have come up with a practical programme which, for all its hard-headedness, is occasionally inspirational.

The book opens with personal statements, in which each man is as conscious of his home audience as of the other side. Heller, a Zionist, argues that the proposed political settlement would make Israel "stronger, more secure and more prosperous" than a continuing stalemate. He is acute, even scathing, about the positions of Israel's "sentimental left" and its "even more naive" right.

Nusseibeh, a professor of philosophy at Bir Zeit University on the West Bank, sets out Palestinian attitudes to a possible compromise with

a perceived injustice, demonstrating how compromise has, nonetheless, gained Palestinian support. For him, the "bottom line" is Palestinian sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but with reasonable, realistic restrictions (he suggests, for example, that the Palestinian state would have minimal armed forces).

National self-interest and mutual recognition are, the authors believe, the keys to peace, free from rhetoric and political posturing — "no trumpets, no drums."

They offer detailed proposals for security arrangements, including the stationing of Israeli military facilities in a Palestinian state, at least temporarily, and tackle crucial issues such as the future of Palestinian refugees outside the occupied territories, and of Jewish settlers inside them. They emphasise the need for a comprehensive regional settlement, and for a peaceful Jerusalem based on equal political representation.

If only all the parties to the Israeli-Arab conflict demonstrated such rationality.

"Dr Jack: Calcutta's Pavement Doctor" by Jeremy Josephs, which was reviewed on December 6, is published by Bloomsbury at £15.99