

Book Review

**"No Trumpets, No Drums ; A Two-State settlement  
of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" ,Sari Nusseibeh  
& Mark Heller ,I.B Tauris,London & New York, 1991**

**By Abbas Shibliak**

"No Trumpets No Drums" . No cause for jubilation or celebration for either side; the Palestinians or the Israelis. Both have to make difficult and agonising decisions . The two-state solution, based on mutual recognition and self-determination for both people, the authors assert , is not a question of ideological, biblical or personal choice . Rather, it depends on weighing risks as well as costs and benefits. It is the corner stone for any peaceful settlement. Their assessment stems , as they repeatedly point out, not from a sense of moral obligation - from the conviction that it is the right thing to do - but rather from an assessment of the constellation of local, regional and international circumstances. That is, from understanding that it is the wise or prudent thing to do .

This is indeed more solid and safer ground for a peaceful settlement than the two arguments until now more commonly expressed: mutual fear or brotherly love. This is the basis of Heller's criticism for what he calls "the Rightist" or the "sentimental left" in Israel who , as he puts it, tend to draw their political understanding primarily from personal encounters with 'nice' Palestinians - simple images of right and wrong - and anger at the obtuseness of their own governments . It was they who hastily rushed to change their views because of the Palestinian identification with Iraq during the Gulf crisis . Once the dust had died down, they realised that the Israeli-Palestinian problem had not disappeared. World-wide, neither support for Israel's territorial claims had broadened nor concern about the Palestinians and the threat that the unresolved conflict poses to Middle Eastern stability had become reduced, as some had naively believed . On the contrary ,Heller rightly sees that linkage of the Gulf crisis to Israeli control of occupied Arab territories was largely accepted .

in reaching this conclusion , Heller shows no affection for the Palestinians . He is critical of the Palestinian position during the Gulf war, while offering a good interpretation and understanding of the reasons behind it, placing it squarely in the context of Middle Eastern politics.

81 747 9781

420315

2 whs.

3711

He also has no high hopes on the nature of a Palestinian state, assuming with confidence that it would become another Third World dictatorship. A remark which is not only irrelevant, as he himself acknowledges, but also has a racist and arrogant flavour that can't pass unnoticed. The problem I find with Heller's analysis is that it is distasteful and sometimes incomplete though on the whole it remains difficult to dispute.

Nusseibeh shares with Heller an understanding of the political necessity of a compromise, though he tackles the issue from a different perspective. He describes how he felt when he first met Heller to work on the project. "I strongly sensed an asymmetry in the balance of justice". He does not in any sense mean to show disrespect or open any wound which Heller as a Jew might have. "Still", Nusseibeh explains; "I couldn't help observing that I, whose own family is rooted in Jerusalem for at least twelve hundred continuous years, was compelled to be making a deal with a Canadian immigrant".

Nusseibeh stresses the need for a wide and open debate in the Palestinian community because of the grave and fateful character of the decisions which need to be taken. The question for Nusseibeh, as for most Palestinians, is not one of pontification and historical or political theory. It is a cause of immediate hardship and pain, of fear and anticipation. These are issues which, he emphasises, can't be decided upon "behind people's backs".

Nusseibeh himself is one of the new breed of outspoken Palestinian intellectuals who have relentlessly tried to inject new, more realistic and more imaginative ideas, sometimes at a high personal cost, to the Palestinian political vision. As a result, a major shift was achieved once the issue of reconstructing the shattered national identity superseded that of territory as a number one priority. He emphasises the point of view which the majority of the Palestinians now share: that while they will not and can not regard the principle of their sovereignty as open to question, it is only natural that they accept the need to negotiate over the degree to which they can exercise this sovereignty.

However, Nusseibeh warns against any misconceptions or illusions in simple and clear terms: it is unrealistic to expect that a properly constructed peace settlement can be achieved without seeing the Palestinians (those in the West bank and Gaza and those in the Diaspora) as one People. Given this, it cannot be in Israel's interests to exclude the PLO from the peace negotiation. He offers a condensed and rare opportunity for those who seek to understand the Palestinian position beyond normal clichés.

After giving their personal statements Heller and Nusseibeh become involved in an intense and enlightened debate on issues on the peace agenda, each emphasising his own concerns while trying to accommodate the other, until mutually acceptable solutions to the major obstacles are worked out. The difficult issues of security arrangements, refugees and Jewish settlements, water, borders, the future relations of the two states and the status of Jerusalem are addressed.

These solutions are not necessarily acceptable to all Palestinians and Israelis, in the same way that Nusseibeh and Heller could not agree on every detail. I found, for instance, their proposed arrangements for the transitional period, and the nature and role of the third party, were vague, and felt the analysis lacked rigour. Nevertheless the authors demonstrate that a two-state settlement is both possible and necessary for peace in the Middle East.

The book couldn't have come at a better time. The opening session of the negotiations in Madrid was seen by many viewers as a new TV soap, without actually grasping the issues involved. These matters are generally left to the politicians to discuss behind the scenes or to the experts to comment upon and to read about in memoranda with limited distribution. Nusseibeh and Heller put these issues forward to a wider debate, for all those who are concerned with peace.

London, 28 Dec. 1991

No of words : 1028