

Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel. Vol. 3: Armistice Negotiations with the Arab States, December 1948-July 1949.



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The shaping of an Arab statesman: Abd al-Hamid Sharaf and the modern Arab world. Edited by Patrick Seale. London: Quartet. 1983. 237pp. £7.95.

THESE fifteen essays by well-known writers on Arab affairs are all impressive in their own way. Whether the result is wholly satisfactory as a memorial to a very unusual Arab is less certain. As a man singularly little concerned about acquiring personal credit, Sharaf himself would have applauded a memorial focussed much less on his own person than on the state of affairs surrounding him. Many readers, however, might have welcomed more personal light on the sadly short life of this man, whose qualities, achievements and rare cast of mind deserve to be much more widely known. In his foreword Patrick Seale gives an admirable biographical summary and assessment, but only much later in the collection does he again receive more than a passing mention.

Roger Owen, Umayya Tukan, Hazem Nuseibeh and Malcolm Kerr record, more or less briefly, aspects of Sharaf's development and thinking, the last two in the light of close personal friendship. But one misses, for instance, an inside assessment of the quarter of his life he spent in the United States, first as the Ambassador of Jordan and then as Permanent Representative to the United Nations, where he was regarded by colleagues from other countries as unquestionably the most impressive of all Arab representatives. And could not something from his own pen—perhaps one of the addresses he gave during his six months as Prime Minister—have been reproduced to illustrate just where the shaping of this Hashemite statesman had led him and his political thought-processes, from his time as an ardent, and evidently republican, Arab Nationalist in the American University of Beirut to his emergence as King Hussein's closest personal adviser?

The essays, divided into three sections, include seven on different aspects of Jordan, three on Palestine and four on current trends in Arab society. It is startling to learn from Rami Khouri that there are more Jordanians pursuing higher education in the Soviet Union and Romania than in the United States and humbling that Britain, despite its historical intimacy with Jordan, does not figure among the six principal host countries at all. Roger Owen gives measured credit to the efforts of Jordan's leaders to grapple with that awkwardly placed country's economic problems. Anything written by Edward Said is magisterial, and here he again forces upon our attention the way in which the Western world has treated the Palestinians as though they were incidental to the problem of Palestine, 'the better to absorb them mutely and anonymously in someone else's scheme' (p. 144). It is always good to hear a front-line figure like Prince Hassan pleading that, in approaching the Palestine question, 'we must understand the need to develop political middle-ground' (p. 154). The Western contributor with the closest long-term involvement in Arab thinking is doubtless Malcolm Kerr, whose recent murder in Beirut was an appalling blow to so much this book stands for. Many Westerners will find his percipient essay on Arab society and the West refreshing, particularly since he represented so strongly an unfashionable belief in 'the essential harmony of Western and Arab-Islamic culture'. So, surely, however clearly he recognized the discordances, did Sharaf; the more people that read this memorial to him, the better for us all.

GLEN BALFOUR-PAUL

Documents on the foreign policy of Israel. Vol. 3: armistice negotiations with the Arab states, December 1948–July 1949. Edited by Yemima Rosenthal. Jerusalem: Israel State Archives. 1983. 2 parts, 758, 229 pp. Index. \$69.50.

ISRAEL operates a British-type thirty-year rule to regulate the release of official papers while emulating the admirable American practice of publishing selections of recently declassified documents on foreign policy. In general format the series of *Documents on the foreign policy of Israel* is very similar to *The foreign relations of the United States* and in some ways even surpasses it. The series is edited by a small team of professional historians who have complete discretion with regard to the choice of documents to be published and editorial policy in general. Israel's Foreign Ministry was set up while the country was engaged in a prolonged and exhausting war against the invading Arab armies—a situation not conducive to the writing of reflective memoranda or to orderly filing. The editors have however coped very resourcefully with the manifold problems facing them and have maintained throughout their work the highest possible professional standards. The result is a series which throws a great deal of new light on the diplomacy of the fledgling state of Israel and is of immense value to students of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

This particular volume covers a single subject—the negotiations which led to the signing of armistice agreements between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in 1949. Chronologically, therefore, it overlaps with volumes 2 and 4. Its editor, Yemima Rosenthal, provides a clear and helpful introduction and useful editorial notes. Most of the documents published in this volume were selected from the Foreign Ministry files, complemented by some documents from the Israel Military and Defence Establishment Archives and some tantalizingly brief editorial references to Cabinet discussions and decisions. Apart from the exchanges between the Israeli delegations which conducted the negotiations on the one hand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Army General Staff in Tel Aviv on the other, the selection includes memoranda, records of discussions and working papers of the UN Acting Mediator, Dr Ralph Bunch.

Like other volumes in the series, this one is accompanied by an English companion volume which includes translations of the introductory material and of the entire annotation, as well as extensive English summaries of the Hebrew documents and an English index. As a matter of editorial policy, all documents are published in the original language but a surprisingly high proportion in the early volumes, about 80 per cent, are in English. Among the most prolific contributors to this volume is Dr Walter Eytan, the Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry who headed the Israeli delegation to the armistice talks with Egypt, directed others from his headquarters and participated in some of the crucial behind-the-scenes meetings with King Abdullah which led to the conclusion of the formal Israel–Jordan armistice agreement in Rhodes. A former Oxford don, Eytan was much more eloquent in English than in Hebrew and his detailed reports to Foreign Minister Sharett add a great deal by way of literary grace and lively personal commentary to the all-too-frequently turgid style of international diplomacy.

Eytan's reports are particularly interesting for the light they throw on the differences of opinion between the diplomats and the soldiers who represented Israel in the armistice talks with its Arab neighbours. Whereas the diplomats accorded the highest priority to the development of peaceful relations with the Arabs, the soldiers were preoccupied with Israel's immediate security requirements and were consequently reluctant to make even minor concessions. With Sharett's help, the diplomats usually succeeded in obtaining from the Cabinet sufficient flexibility to ensure the success of the talks, and the rivalry between the two incipient schools of thought was in any case nowhere as acute at this stage as it was to become only three or four years later. But it is one of the many merits of this volume that it spotlights themes which were to have a continuing significance in Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours. Scholars are considerably indebted to Mrs Rosenthal for this expertly produced volume and they will eagerly await future instalments in this valuable and promising series.

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AVI SHLAIM

Lebanon: the fractured country. By David Gilmour. Oxford: Martin Robinson. 1983. 209pp. Index. £9.95.

THE civil war in Lebanon began in 1975 and has continued, in one form or another, ever since. At the beginning, it was a war between the Palestinian commandos and those Maronite Catholic militias who saw themselves as the defenders of Lebanese sovereignty against a Palestinian 'state within a state'. Lebanese 'progressive' militias were soon drawn into the fighting, making the war one between the Lebanese nationalism of the 'rightists' and the wider Arab nationalism of the 'leftists' and their Palestinian allies. Closely bound up with this was a class conflict between the urban poor and the bourgeoisie, but this was often obscured by the confessional malevolence between Muslims and Christians. David Gilmour traces the social and political roots of these conflicts in the first part of his book, and then discusses the history of the major ideological disputes which fuelled the various rounds of fighting. In the third part of the book, he gives a blow-by-blow account of the war from 1975 to the Israeli invasion of 1982 and the massacres of Sabra and Chatila.

The book is well written and informative, showing how Lebanon's prewar liberal democracy, dominated by fragile coalitions of neo-feudal landlords and urban political bosses, was unable to deal with growing social tensions. Behind a façade of cosmopolitan tolerance and financial prosperity were the slums of Beirut and the corruption of a venal political establishment. When the issue of the Palestinian resistance provided the spark which ignited