

Israel is here claimed to have a big advantage by virtue of the quality of its human resources at all levels: national strategic decision-making, operational and tactical military planning, and the individual combatant. Meanwhile, the earlier expectations by some analysts that the new "hi-tech" military systems could be operated by poorer quality manpower, i.e., uneducated troops, are said not to have panned out. Indeed, the military gap between Israel and Syria is thought to be widening at the dawning of the age of "hi-tech" warfare, exacerbated by declined Soviet support for Syria to the extent not compensated for by Western Europe.

Despite the excellence and comprehensiveness of the book, the authors might have done just a little more. Specifically, they might have added a summary chapter to integrate the material on new weapons developments with the early-on material regarding Israel's strategic dilemma, rooted as it is in demographics and the military geography of the Golan-Damascus axis. No doubt the advent of the "hi-tech" battlefield anticipated by the authors would greatly advantage Israel in a fast-moving, mobile war in the much larger amphitheatre of the Sinai Desert. But on the Golan Heights and the plateau toward Damascus, would they allow for an Israeli breakthrough? Or, cause the Syrian forces such attrition as to force a ceasefire?

Otherwise, the economics of the new weapons also needed some more attention, i.e., how much of what might either Israel or Syria afford and thus reasonably be able to deploy? Fielding large numbers of all or most of these systems would presumably be an expensive proposition. If oil revenues were to climb again and if Syria were given extensive aid by Arab OPEC states, might it then have an advantage in a competitive race for acquisition of these systems? These are hard-to-answer questions, but they go to the heart of any analysis of the evolving Middle Eastern military balance.

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Hart, Alan. *Arafat: A Political Biography*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

This is the first American edition of a work first published by Alan Hart in London in 1984. On the dust-jacket of the first British edition, the publishers prominently advertized the fact that the book had been, "Written in cooperation with Yasser Arafat and the top leadership of the PLO." The US publishers have removed that piece of promotional 'blurb'. Nevertheless, the close cooperation Hart received from his subject is evident in every paragraph of the book.

It should be said at the outset that the fact that Hart enjoyed such full access to the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization gives this

book both tremendous strengths and tremendous weaknesses. On the plus side of the ledger, there are numerous small details of fact concerning the PLO's history on which Hart has been the first to provide information of seeming authority to other researchers. However, I would argue that — equally as valuable as this, or probably more so — Hart's closeness to Arafat enables the reader almost to enter with him into the mindset of his subject on a range of important issues. Of which, more anon.

On the negative side, Hart's closeness to Arafat seemed to preclude his being able to gain the necessary conceptual distance from which his subject's actions could gain anything like an objective appraisal. This need not have been so. Either Hart could have chosen to do more of the ordinary research legwork which could have given him a stronger objective yardstick against which to measure Arafat. (The measurement obtained through, for example, presentation of some of the documentary evidence would have buttressed the case he sought to make, that Arafat has struggled mightily to turn the PLO toward a political strategy; on other subjects the measurement might have been less flattering). Or Arafat could have chosen as his favored biographer someone capable of interacting more intelligently with him. That neither biographer nor subject made such choices says something significant about both.

So what, crucially, is the mindset this book reveals? First is an intense Palestine-centeredness. This should come as no surprise: a struggle as difficult as that waged by the Palestinians for their national rights has never been won by inattention to the main focus. However, it comes across as fairly ludicrous when a development such as President Nixon's resignation over Watergate is posited as "a conspiracy" waged against Nixon by the Government of Israel and "the Jewish lobby in America," in order to counter American pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Hart's reaction to the comments voiced to this effect by Arafat and some long-time colleagues? They "have grounds for their suspicions." (p. 405)

Second, the book reveals a disturbing lack of evidence of any capacity on behalf of its subject not only for public self-criticism, which perhaps would be too much to ask, but also for self-evaluation well short of self-criticism, as well as for any deep analytical reflection at all. Nowhere in the book do we hear Arafat say, "These were our weaknesses in those years, and these were our strengths . . . We learned thus and such from our experiences and were able to correct our weaknesses." Nowhere do we hear him reflect on the deepseated changes that have come to the Arab political environment in the decades in which it has been the sea in which he swam. How were his people affected by the rise and then the ebb of pan-Arabist feelings? How did the spread of pro-western consumerism and then Muslim fundamentalism affect them? These questions are important. Yet they are never discussed in this text. Arafat and his colleagues are portrayed instead like heroes of some schoolboy drama: always right, always subject to attacks from allcomers, always able to overcome them, always a-historical.

The question of the role of the individual in history is one that rightly concerns historians. It is undeniable that this individual, Yasser Arafat, has had an enormous impact on Palestinian nationalism. Hart is almost right when he says that, in these terms, "the point is not that Arafat has *so far* failed to liberate even one square metre of territory. The point is that he has inspired and directed the regeneration of Palestinian nationalism." (p. 548) Given the scattered, demoralized status of the Palestinians in 1948, this is no mean achievement. (As late as 1969, Israeli Premier Golda Meir thought she could argue convincingly that, "There are no such people as Palestinians.") However, Hart is off the mark when he says that this regeneration could not have happened without Yasser Arafat. (p. 550)

Hart's problem is that he presents the PLO as a one-man show (and he is even explicit about this) — in which the relationship between Arafat and his colleagues is, at best, that between an emperor and his courtiers.

What would have happened if one of the many attempts to kill him had succeeded? There would have been a leadership crisis and, probably, a bloody power struggle . . . The cause of Palestinian nationalism could have suffered a death blow. (p. 551)

I prefer the view once suggested by a Palestinian colleague, who likened the relationship to that between a Pope and his cardinals. When the Pope dies, the cardinals meet to elect the successor: in this case, the Central Committee of Arafat's Fateh grouping would be the College of Cardinals; and the true church would continue.

Hart's book makes no contribution to understanding the crucial new dynamic that the uprising in the occupied territories has brought to the relationship between the Palestinian activists still resident in the homeland, and the PLO leadership in its long-time exile. "The countdown to the uprising . . . started in 1983 when Arafat ordered a 'General Exercise' in and around Nablus," Hart writes. (p. 517) As though the whole business were programmed by the PLO leader through four years of preparation and at 2,000 kilometres of distance! With bluff arrogance, the biographer makes no mention of such important pre-uprising turning-points as the "National Unity" session of the Palestine National Council in April 1987. Does he assume, with Lord Berkeley, that because he was not there it did not happen? Whatever happened to research legwork?

Read this book, then, for the information nuggets but especially for the mindset. And perhaps you should discount some of the criticisms of your reviewer, who admits she would have loved to have had Hart's access.

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