[Muhammad Farooq](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/muhammad-farooq)

June 24, 2021

**Middle East: a way forward**

The first prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, confessed (as mentioned in the book ‘The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy’): “If I were an Arab leader, I would never make terms with Israel. That is natural: we have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it’s true, but two thousand years ago, and what is that to them? There has been Anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They see but one thing: we have come here and stolen their country. Why should they accept that?”

Why did Ben Gurion say this? He knew that when the land was taken over by the Babylonians long ago, it remained no longer that of the Jews. The Muslims had no role, whatsoever, in that occupation since the Babylonian captivity occurred around a thousand years before the emergence of Islam, implying that Muslims did not besiege this land from the Jews. In other words, when Jews were living there, it was their national homeland and when Muslims became the dominant force there, it turned out to be their national homeland.

This piece of land has remained sacred to both Jews (as Ben Gurion said, above) and Muslims. It is the place that has the first Qibla of Muslims and is associated with the Prophet Muhammad’s (pbuh) journey to the Heavens. For Jews, it contains the Temple of Solomon. Thus, both historically and religiously, Muslims have equal rights on this land.

Following the unjust Balfour declaration, two prominent solutions have been proposed: one state of two nations (Muslims and Jews) or two states of two nations.

The one-state two-nation solution refers to a unitary state which includes the whole of the territory of Israel, West Bank and Gaza Strip. The federating units can be autonomous for the better functioning of this one state of two nations. The state would be shared and owned as equals by Jews and Muslims alike. Culturally, it would remain a salad bowl – the two peoples would retain their distinct cultural identities yet live together. If better sense prevails, the coexistence of Muslims and Jews would enable them to utilize each other’s potential and pursue their common interests – peace and stability.

In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) set a guiding principle for the mutual co-existence of two nations (Muslims and non-Muslims) in the charter of Medina. This charter was democratically agreed by the leaders of all local tribes in such a way that all the parties to the agreement committed to defend the Medina state from any external aggressor.

One example to illustrate the level of commitment is noteworthy. A prominent Jewish scholar, Makhreeq, took part in the battle of Uhud and fought alongside Muslims against the Mushriqin of Mecca. He was killed in the battle performing the commitment made under the Medina charter. He even made sure that if he was killed, his family must donate all his wealth to the state treasury for the protection of the homeland.

The Medina charter valued religious differences by not making one religion superior to others. One of its clauses was that Muslims would abide by their religious laws and Jews by theirs. They were not to lose their religious identities but live together as politically equals while maintaining the religious differences.

The one-state solution can end the hostilities between the two peoples. A multicultural nation can be inclusive for all, and be a state to be recognized by other states. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 outlined the notions of a national home for the Jewish people without infringing the religious as well as civil rights of the non-Jewish people. However, it contained a fundamental flaw. It provided Jews national rights but did not give the Palestinians the same status.

On similar lines, Yousef Munnayer, a Palestinian-American writer and the former executive director of the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, proposed a one-state formula, which provides equal rights to all the citizens in every essence of the word. He wrote in the Foreign Affairs magazine, “The question, then, is not whether there will be a single state but what kind of state it should be. Will it be one that cements de facto apartheid in which Palestinians are denied basic rights? Or will it be a state that recognizes Israelis and Palestinians as equals under the law?”

If we analyze the latter state in light of the Medina charter, it would be feasible and acceptable for two nations to exist as political equals. While protecting and preserving the religious identities of both nations, a one-state solution must provide equality to them in the political realm.

If the one-state solution is not possible, then the alternative could be the two-state solution, which means that the Gaza Strip and West Bank would unitedly become Palestinian territory and the remaining part would remain Israel. This is something on whose basis Pakistan also supports the Palestinian cause and backs a pre-1967 border solution. In such a scenario, Palestine would resemble Pakistan before the fall of Dhaka – Gaza and West Bank separated by Israel in between, just like East and West Pakistan separated by India before 1971.

The aggression by Israel every now and then must end. Human security should become the focus. A binational secular state accepting the religious differences and considering all the people as equals can work to the benefit of all. A peaceful settlement to the Palestine issue is the only thing that is beneficial to all stakeholders, especially the Palestinians.

The writer is a scholar of Islamic history and author of multiple books.

Email: farooq.m2015@gmail.com