**A rational solution the way forward**

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My doctor had asked me to stay away from both electronic and social media for the last month and a half due to my ill health. In a way that turned out to be a blessing since I could not see the horrific atrocities being committed by the illegitimate state of Israel against the Palestinians. Israeli forces, backed by most Western powers, have used brutal force against Palestinians with impunity. The siege and destruction of Gaza and the dead and dying bodies of children, women, the elderly are heartbreaking and unbearable.

Some people are of the opinion that Hamas took the October 7 step at the behest of Iran, to sabotage the normalization process between Israel and Arab countries – especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Irrespective of any hidden motive of Hamas, the people of Palestine have the right to liberate their own land and get freedom from the brutal oppressor state of Israel. It is a glaring reality that Israel is an illegitimate state created by illegitimate means in the land of Palestine. Despite being weak, Hamas surprised the world and broke the myth of Israeli invincibility when it launched its surprise attack on October 7.

In a disproportionate and brutal response, Israel has killed nearly 9000 people in Gaza, the majority of whom are women and children. According to some estimates, over 3000 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli airstrikes. Unicef has called the situation in the Gaza Strip as “a growing stain on our collective conscience”.

But it seems that this collective conscience is dead. The US and other Western powers have allowed the Israeli forces to besiege Gaza, bomb houses, target hospitals and kill innocent people. They do not ask Israel for a ceasefire and have not even ensured humanitarian pauses and opening of aid corridors to allow safe deliveries of food, water, and medicine to the 2.3 million civilians in the besieged Gaza Strip. But why should we complain about the Western powers when our own Muslim brothers, sharing the same race and religion, have ignored the suffering of the children of Gaza. One example is Egypt.

The severity of the pain of the unfolding tragedy of Palestine is not only because of Israeli brutality and suppression of the Palestinians, but also because as Muslims, it is a sacred land for us in many aspects. Bayt al-Maqdis is the first Qibla of Muslims, the station of Al-Isra and Al-Mi’raj and the second mosque which was built on the direction of God.

History tells that this place was chosen by Prophet Ibrahim (a.s) for Bayt al-Maqdis and its construction was started by Prophet Dawud (a.s), which was completed by Prophet Sulaiman (a.s). Just as the land of Hijaz was handed over to Bani Ismail under the divine scheme, similarly, the land of Palestine was handed over to Bani Israel. Moreover, this land is also sacred for the Christians who assert their right on account of this being the birthplace of the Prophet Isa (a.s). In addition, Jews claim the region as their promised homeland as well.

However, the right of the Muslim Palestinian is important in the sense that Bayt al-Maqdis is not only the first Qibla of the Muslims but they also have deep respect for all the prophets who have ties with this holy land. But unfortunately, today’s Muslim rulers have left this issue only to the helpless and besieged Palestinians.

The question is: what should be done now? Whenever, there is a question of what to do, the most rational approach is to think realistically and evaluate the ground realities instead of using a more idealistic approach.

Realistically thinking, today’s Israel is a powerful regional power with sophisticated weapons and complete control on the occupied Palestine territories. In addition, the Western powers are strongly supporting the state of Israel. The very foundation of Israel was illegitimately laid by the 20th century world powers, especially Great Britain and the United States.

Historically, Palestine has been the abode of prophets and under the control of Muslims. For a short time in 1099, it was conquered by the crusaders. However, it was reclaimed and freed from the occupation of the crusaders by Salahudin Ayubi in the 12th century. It remained under the Ottoman Empire, which unfortunately weakened over time.

After the First World War, the victorious countries formed the League of Nations, which was later on replaced by the United Nations in 1945. The League of Nations was established not on the basis of the principles of justice and equality, but as a tool for peace and to bring about some balance between the then great powers. This is evident by the fact that such international organizations give veto power to some states only.

Unfortunately, the League of Nations placed Palestine under the British mandate by giving the British the discretionary power to divide and rule the region at will. The British government, with the support of the US and others, laid the foundation of Israel as “a home for Jewish in Palestine” through the notorious Balfour Declaration of 1917. The establishment of the State of Israel was declared on May 14 1948, the day before the expiration of the British Mandate. This illegitimate establishment of the state of Israel and the subsequent 1948 Arab-Israeli war led to the expulsion of some 0.7 million Palestinians from their homeland. The UN recognized and granted membership to Israel on May 11, 1949.

The Western powers remained united for the establishment and support of Israel while the Muslims world remained divided, scattered and weak, and became more so over time. Meanwhile, Israel and Western countries continued to gain wealth, technology and advanced weapons.

In terms of technology and weapons, Israel gained tremendous superiority over the Arab countries in the last seventy years. The Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) and then the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran weakened the Palestinians’ cause and strengthened Israel. This also helped Israel expand its occupation and acquire additional territories in all its wars with the Arab countries in 1956, 1967 and 1973. Besides the Palestinians territories, Israel also became a threat to countries like Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

Keeping this context in mind, it would be an illusion to think that the US, Britain, France or other Western countries would give up their support to Israel or leave it alone in its war on Palestinians and neighbouring countries. Because they have established the state of Israel, they will defend it. US President Joe Biden categorically stated on October 10, 2023 that “[W]e will make sure the Jewish and democratic state of Israel can defend itself today, tomorrow, as we always have. It’s as simple as that”.

Without the support of Western countries and strong backing by the Muslim world, Palestinians will continue to create a new history of sacrifice, but nothing will come to them. Instead, in every war, Israel will expand its territory and will keep killing and suppressing Palestinians.

That’s why, keeping emotions aside, all Muslims and the Palestinian leadership should act rationally and realistically. The first efforts of the Muslim world should be to ensure an immediate ceasefire. Then through diplomatic efforts, a solution should be explored by implementing the late Saudi King Abdullah’s formula which he summarized in his speech to the Beirut Summit of Arab league in 2002 as “normal relations and security for Israel in exchange for full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, recognition of an independent Palestinian state with al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, and the return of refugees”.

Although at this time it would be difficult to expect Israel and its Western patrons to agree on King Abdullah’s formula, if the Palestinian leadership gets a peace break and Muslim countries make united diplomatic efforts, then this formula can be implemented.

It is repeated that as far as rights, fairness, justice and emotions are concerned, I firmly believe and wish, like all Muslims, for an independent Palestinian state with full control on the land of their ancestors. But rationally thinking, this will not be possible due to the current ground realities. So instead of pursuing idealistic dreams, it is better to think realistically and pursue what is possible instead of what is right so that the suffering of the innocent Palestinians may end.

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