



A Federation of Two States

A friend of mine, who wishes to remain anonymous, recently proposed a bold solution to the seemingly eternal Middle East conflict. He prefers to remain anonymous simply because his proposal is a personal, theoretical idea, and he is not interested in spending time on long debates about it. For the purpose of this column, however, I will refer to him as Zaki. To his credit, I feel compelled to say that Zaki is one of the smartest people I have ever met.

Though he realizes fully that the devil is in the detail, Zaki's proposal is based on the solution of the Balkan problem or the Bosnian civil war that erupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, after the breakup of former Yugoslavia; a solution that has been tried and has actually worked for a conflict in which horrifying atrocities were committed and which took the lives of an estimated 100,000 people, mostly Bosniaks. When the United Nations was unable to stop the bloodshed, foreign powers forcibly intervened and effectively divided the country, compelling the Serbs to return parts of the territory they had gained by force. A federal state of two united republics was formed, and the two communities were obliged to coexist. It was a shotgun sort of marriage but fortunately one that has drifted into peaceful coexistence today. No killing of each other now, and the Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs of Bosnia and Herzegovina are peacefully carrying on with their lives, even though their history is much more violent and full of hatred than that of the peoples in Mandate Palestine today!

The suggested solution is a federation of two states, along the 1949 armistice lines (known today as the pre-1967 borders), with Jerusalem as the federal capital. Just like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, neither party gets all it wants, Zaki says, but both populations will get what they need: peace and tranquility. Much to the dismay of Palestinians, Israel will exist with safe borders, and equally, much to the dismay of Israelis, an independent Palestine will exist with safe and free borders and will finally gain true international recognition. As Zaki notes, the proposal is, in effect, another shotgun marriage that would bring both parties to their senses. At this stage, determining who is right or wrong is not the priority; that should be left to the academics and think tanks, not to the residents of *Musrara* and *Mahane Yehuda*! Zaki believes that this solution is better than the alternative "two-state solution," which depends on the mutual acceptance of both communities. Unless both parties are led by an outsider, an enforcer, the parties are not likely to reach common ground.

Although a million questions come to mind, Zaki has identified one, given that Israel will automatically have a large Palestinian minority (1948 Palestinians): Will the new Palestinian State contain a Jewish minority?

The devil is in the detail indeed. Someone commented: "How about if they do a referendum on *Irsaexit*?" Food for thought, no doubt.

NB: Zaki has granted permission for me to use his proposal as a basis for this column.

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Publisher

