

A Federative Israel–Palestine Union: Religious Legitimacy, Identity, Pluralism, and a Post-Colonial Middle East

This paper argues that both Jewish Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are post-colonial movements shaped by trauma and spiritual longing but trapped in opposition by the legacy of history and empire. We propose a federative Israel–Palestine Union as the foundation for a broader Middle Eastern regional framework, not as a utopian vision, but as a religiously and legally grounded response to this stalemate. Drawing from both *halacha* and *fiqh* (Jewish and Islamic legal frameworks), and from historical precedents of religious coexistence, we outline a shared architecture that offers both dignity and sovereignty to Jews and Palestinians alike and a new model for the Middle East, one beyond colonial paradigms.

Introduction: Historical Recognition and Religious Identity

In the past, I have discussed the question of identity and how it is imperative that both the Jewish and Palestinian people [recognize the historical connection](#) of one another to the land. This realization underscores that the only viable path forward is one of coexistence and mutual recognition. However, beyond questions of national identity and historical connection, another major factor shaping the conflict is the role of religious belief and identity. While religion is often treated as secondary to political and territorial disputes, it remains a deeply embedded force that influences attitudes, allegiances, and aspirations on both sides.

Religious Practice in Decline, Symbolic Identity on the Rise

While the majority of Palestinians do not define themselves as “religious” in the sense of adhering to strict personal observance, a large portion of the population identifies as what we might call “traditional,” maintaining cultural and familial ties to religion without necessarily engaging in daily practice. Among these traditional sectors, religious narratives still shape collective identity and political perspectives, particularly concerning nationalism and the conflict. For instance, polling conducted by Khalil Shikaki in 2023 ¹ found that only around 20% of Palestinians aged 18 to 29 in the West Bank identified as ‘Religious’, compared to approximately 34% of the overall West Bank population ² who identify this way. The same survey found that 62% of West Bank residents identify as ‘Somewhat Religious’ and 4% as ‘Not Religious’. Together, this suggests that younger Palestinians are becoming increasingly culturally traditional, but not deeply religious. This indicates a generational shift away from religious observance, even as religious frameworks continue to inform political worldviews.

A similar pattern exists within Israeli society. At the same time, a sizable minority of Israelis identify as religious, either as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) or Dati (national religious), the majority of Jewish Israelis identify as either “secular” (*hiloni*) or “traditional” (*masorti*). According to the 2016 Pew survey on religion in Israel, approximately 29% of Jewish Israelis identified as *masorti*, meaning they observe selected religious customs while not adhering to full religious law, whereas 22% of Israeli Jews identify as religiously observant (orthodox or ultra-orthodox) ³. This traditional sector plays a pivotal role in Israeli identity politics: although not strictly observant, many *Masorti* Jews maintain strong connections to religious heritage and are often influenced by religious narratives about land, peoplehood, and national destiny. As with Palestinians, this blend of cultural religiosity and national identity can shape political attitudes, even among those who do not consider themselves religious in the conventional sense.

Although religiosity in the traditional sense is declining among many younger Palestinians as polling and cultural trends suggest, a different phenomenon has gained traction: the rise of political ideologies that adopt religious language while being rooted more in nationalism and post-colonial resistance than in theology. Jihadism, often misunderstood as purely a manifestation of religious extremism, can in many cases be better understood as a political response to historical trauma, occupation, and perceived Western and Zionist domination. In this sense, it functions similarly to post-colonial liberation ideologies, framing resistance as a sacred duty and drawing upon religious imagery not necessarily out of deep piety, but to evoke legitimacy, identity, and emotional resonance. Among some segments of youth, particularly in Gaza or in refugee camps, this synthesis of traditional identity, nationalism, and religiously framed resistance has proven compelling not because of strict religious observance, but because it offers meaning, structure, and a sense of empowerment in the face of marginalization.

Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism: Post-Colonial Mirror Movements

Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, despite their current antagonism, both originated as post-colonial liberation movements. The modern return to Zion echoes the Second Temple period's return under Cyrus the Great, with the revival of Jewish law, culture, and sovereignty. Even the structure of Israel's Knesset, its 120 members, mirrors the ancient Anshei Knesset HaGedolah, reflecting this historic self-perception. Zionism began as a revolution of dignity, reclaiming Jewish sovereignty after centuries of exile, persecution, and marginalization.

It is no coincidence that the Zionist movement first took root among Jews of the West, particularly Ashkenazi communities, but also among Sephardi and North African Jews who were a significant part of the pre-Zionist Old Yishuv. The Hebrew spoken today in Israel carries significant influence from the Hebrew of North African Jewry, shaping its pronunciation and vocabulary. These Western Jews were the descendants of those who answered Ezra's call after the decree of Cyrus to return to the Land of Israel; descendants of those who fought the Greeks to free themselves from colonial religious persecution, who waged wars of liberation against the Roman Empire, and who, though ultimately exiled by them, vowed to return.

Zionism emerged during a wave of nationalist awakenings in the latter half of the 19th century, shaped by the rise of European nationalism following the Enlightenment and the breakdown of multi-ethnic empires bound by religion. As religious observance waned and hereditary monarchy came to seem arbitrary, people began to anchor identity in language, culture, and historical memory.

To the east of Europe, these changes came more slowly. In an attempt to preserve their fading empires, Russia and the Ottomans sought to "nationalize" imperial identity. In the Russian Empire, "Russification" imposed a common Russian identity through measures such as extended military conscription and pressure to adopt Christianity, often accompanied by brutal repression. For the Jewish population, this meant targeted attempts at conversion and restriction. Facing such repression, most Eastern European Jews, especially in the Russian Empire, emigrated primarily to the United States. Yet a small, committed group believed their true home was Zion (Jerusalem) and that only there could they fully express their national identity.

Initially, Zionists sought cooperation with the powers controlling their historic homeland, then known colloquially as Palestine. They engaged with the Ottoman Sultan and later his German allies, without success. They tried to ally with Arab leader King Faisal, but this too failed. By the end of World War I, it was clear that Britain would dominate Palestine, and the Zionists aligned with the most powerful empire

of the era. Yet in forging this alliance, they became entangled with the machinery of Western colonialism, leading many Arabs in the region to see Zionism not as a liberation movement but as its opposite.

At the same time, the Arab world was undergoing its own awakening. In the Ottoman Empire, “Turkification” promoted the Turkish language, Hanafi Sunni Islam (as opposed to the Shafi’i or Hanbali schools of Islam, which predominate in the Levant), and cultural conformity, alongside extended military service, in an attempt to unify and preserve the empire. Arabs, heirs to the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid Caliphates and the language of the *Qur’an*, resisted being told how to be Muslim or how to define their identity.

However, instead of a natural regional renaissance after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British and French carved up the Arab lands through the Sykes–Picot Agreement, delaying authentic self-determination. For many Palestinians and Arabs, Israel’s emergence with Western backing became a symbol of the Arab revolution’s failure and the persistence of colonial injustice. Anti-colonial sentiment remains a core cultural marker, and political grievances are often framed through a historical lens of foreign interference. In this view, Zionism represents proof that colonialism’s legacy endures, and that many of the Arab world’s troubles can be traced back to Western and Zionist machinations.

In this climate, radical currents found fertile ground. Jihadist movements often speak in absolutes, drawing on religious language, not always from deep faith, but as a political tool to exclude perceived enemies. In some ways, this mirrors strands of Messianic Zionism. Both draw from deep theological and historical traditions, both can function as post-colonial ideologies of resistance and dominance, and both respond to trauma: dispossession, humiliation, and the loss of sovereignty. Jihadism offers a sacred narrative of redemption through struggle; some forms of Zionism invoke messianic destiny tied to land and redemption. Beneath both lies a common yearning to reclaim dignity and rootedness in a world shaped by foreign empires.

If this is so, then a shared and inclusive vision, one that speaks the language of religion, tradition, and belonging without reducing identity to exclusion, can offer a more compelling post-colonial alternative. A political union of Israel and Palestine, embedded in a broader Middle Eastern framework, could serve not only as a pragmatic solution to the conflict but as a civilizational model rooted in reality, conscious of history, and expressed in cultural and spiritual terms that still resonate. This is not a call for utopia, nor for erasing difference, but for recognizing that shared sovereignty and narrative coexistence may be the only path beyond both occupation and isolation.

From Enemies to Co-Revolutionaries

But this story is not fixed. Both peoples have been colonized, exiled, and divided. Both have fought and continue to fight for dignity and a sense of belonging. The iconic image of the Palestinian child throwing a stone at a tank evokes the eternal cry of the powerless demanding dignity. It mirrors, whether consciously or not, the image of David versus Goliath. But Israel, too, has long seen itself as David, a small, besieged nation facing existential threat.

Instead of arguing over who is David and who is Goliath, let us recognize that both peoples see themselves as David, and both are in search of a future worthy of their respective traumas and dreams. Rather than remain locked in opposing redemptive myths, we can become co-revolutionaries not in opposition to each other, but in a shared revolution of repair. Together, Jews and Palestinians can build

a just Middle Eastern order, no longer trapped in imperial legacies or religious absolutes, but united in a covenant of dignity, equality, and shared sovereignty.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been defined not only by territorial disputes but by deep-seated religious and cultural mistrust. Among many Jews, there exists a persistent belief that the Muslim world will never fully accept a sovereign Jewish presence as an integral part of the region. Among many Muslims, there is an equally powerful perception that the Jewish national project has been, and continues to be, inseparable from Palestinian displacement, inequality, and exclusion. These mutual suspicions have produced a zero-sum framework in which both sides often assume that only force will be respected and that coexistence implies surrender.

Despite the depth of these fears, a viable alternative exists, one that draws directly from the ethical and spiritual resources within both Jewish and Islamic traditions, while responding to the political and demographic constraints of the present. We offer a model of shared sovereignty, centered on a federative Israel–Palestine Union, which would serve as the foundation for a broader Middle Eastern regional alliance. In this framework, Jerusalem would become a dual-national and regional capital, and a sacred city for all Abrahamic faiths. This vision also includes the construction of a Jewish sanctuary in the southern section of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, alongside full protection of the existing Muslim holy sites and rights. Our claim is not that this model is ideal in the abstract, but that it represents the most coherent and mutually respectful way to fulfill the religious, cultural, and political aspirations of both peoples in light of current realities.

Darkness Precedes Light

As I began writing this, Israel and Iran were engaged in open warfare. For decades, hostility between the two states simmered through proxies and rhetoric; it had now erupted into direct military confrontation. This moment is not peripheral to our vision; it is central. The region is again on the edge of catastrophe. Among many Jews, the war confirms the belief that Islamic regimes will never accept a Jewish presence in the region unless it is submissive. Among many Muslims, it reinforces the conviction that the Israeli state seeks hegemony, not coexistence. Each side views the other as an existential threat. Trust is rapidly vanishing.

Yet within this darkness, the religious traditions themselves speak differently. Jewish thought often reminds us that - *Chashcha kodem le'or*, “darkness precedes light” (*Midrash Tehillim* 22:28), and the prophets foretold redemption arising from the depths of crisis. The *Qur'an*, too, affirms that - *inna ma'a al-'usr yusra*, “with hardship comes ease” (*Qur'an* 94:6). Neither faith teaches that war is the final word.

This proposal emerges from that spiritual tension. It insists that the spiritual and political response to this war cannot be more destruction. Instead, we must prepare a post-war architecture that addresses the theological fears and national aspirations of both peoples. The Iranian regime's absolutist rejection of Jewish sovereignty does not represent all of Islam. In fact, by building a just federal framework between Jews and Palestinians rooted in dignity and mutual legitimacy, the region can offer an alternative model: one based not on domination, but on covenant.

Just as Europe built the European Union from the ruins of World War II, so too can the Middle East prepare a framework that transforms this crisis into a turning point. It will not be imposed from outside.

It must be forged by the region's own peoples, drawing on the spiritual legacies of Jerusalem, the ethical mandates of both *Torah* and *Qur'an*, and a realism born from too many graves.

Why Federalism: A Framework for Evolving Identities

To understand why federalism offers the most coherent framework for the future, we must first recognize the complex and evolving nature of identity among both Jews and Arabs in the land. Federalism offers a political framework that reflects the evolving social reality on the ground. Both modern Israeli and Palestinian identities are still in the process of being formed, not as fixed entities, but as generational projects shaped by history, struggle, and cultural synthesis.

While some outside observers continue to describe Palestinians as deeply religious or tribal, what I observe among my generation and younger is something different: a largely traditional but nationalist identity, forged in urban spaces, educational institutions, and shared experiences of marginalization and resistance. This mirrors the development of Israeli identity, which has likewise emerged as a melting pot of diverse Jewish communities, *Ashkenazi*, *Mizrahi*, Russian, and Ethiopian, alongside evolving strands of secular Zionism and religious belief.

Israeli and Palestinian societies are not monolithic; both contain multiple identity groups negotiating their place within rapidly shifting political, cultural, and geographic landscapes. Within Israel, four major identity centers shape public life: Zionist Jews, *Haredim*, Arab citizens of Israel, and those Arab citizens who identify mainly as Palestinians (both as a statement of shared heritage with Palestinians as well as a statement of solidarity with Palestinians still living under occupation). Each group has its internal dynamics, yet all are bound together by shared geography, economics, and history.

Political identity in Israel is also deeply regional. *Mizrahi* Jews, who tend to identify as religiously traditional (*Misrati*), often live in peripheral northern and southern towns, tend to support conservative right-wing parties. The predominantly secular *Ashkenazi* Jews in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area tend to lean more liberal and left-wing. Unlike in many countries, these left-right divisions are defined less by economics than by attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Haredim, concentrated in the urban areas of Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Bet Shemesh, Modi'in Ilit, and Beitar Ilit, were once more integrated into Israeli society and even served in the IDF. Since the late 1970s, however, they have allied with the political right, securing draft exemptions for *yeshiva* students. Over time, this created a cycle of dependency with many Haredi men remaining in long-term religious study, avoiding both military service and economic integration, generating tension with mainstream Israelis who bear the security burden.

Arab citizens of Israel are concentrated in three regions: (1) the central Galilee in the north, home to a diverse population of Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Bedouin communities who largely remained after 1948; (2) the "Triangle" villages along the West Bank seam line, who are predominantly Muslim; and (3) the eastern Negev, where Bedouin communities, that are culturally distinct from other Palestinians, are increasingly integrated, with many serving in the IDF.

Within Palestinian society, regional distinctions also remain. Palestinians in Jerusalem often hold residency rather than citizenship, giving them access to Israeli services and greater exposure to Hebrew. In contrast, many West Bank Palestinians encounter Israelis only as soldiers, deepening a sense of separation.

The West Bank is also divided up into enclaves, sometimes separated by checkpoints, and is divided into different cultural regions, such as more secular Fatah strongholds like Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Jericho, to more socially conservative regions like Hebron and Jenin. Then you have Gaza, which, since 2007, when Hamas ousted the Fatah-controlled PA, has been essentially isolated. Palestinians now living outside of Gaza who have relatives there have likely not seen them for 18 years. This mosaic of experiences has reinforced regionalism as a crucial component of Palestinian identity.

Federalism provides a vessel for managing this identity pluralism without erasing it. It allows for cultural autonomy, political recognition, and gradual integration without forcing premature homogenization. It respects each group's integrity while building cooperation, coexistence, and eventually unity, not by imposition, but through shared interests and institutional design.

Our vision imagines **two states in a union** ⁴, each state with its own regional governments elected through a regional-based system. Jerusalem would function as a shared region with boroughs, half Israeli, half Palestinian, and a jointly administered Holy Basin. A common Union government would begin as a technocratic authority managing joint security, economic coordination, and reconciliation programs, and would evolve into a true federal government with elected representatives from both states. Thus, the Union would begin as a type of loose Confederation and over time develop into a more deeply unified Federation.

The Union would, as a whole, have an even number of Jewish and Arab majority Districts between the two states, while ensuring political balance and granting local autonomy to minorities, including districts for Israel's Arab citizens and a district for the future Jewish minority in the State of Palestine. This approach provides a realistic, structured solution to the challenge of Israeli settlements deep within the West Bank, while preserving the cultural and political space for all communities.

This vision would also allow both peoples **full access to the entire land**, granting the right to live in either state under agreed legal frameworks. For Jews, it offers an ethical and sustainable path to realizing the aspiration of a greater Israel, not through domination or displacement, but through mutual recognition and lawful presence. For Palestinians, it embodies a return to a historic Palestine in which all its regions are open and accessible, not fragmented by checkpoints and barriers. In both the Jewish and Islamic traditions, the land is entrusted to its people as a sacred trust, a divine *amanah* or *pikadon*, and its blessings are to be shared in justice. By structuring coexistence within a federative framework, the proposal transforms the contested map into a shared homeland, reframing historic claims in a post-colonial manner rooted in dignity, reciprocity, and the healing of past wrongs.

While the Israel–Palestine Union addresses the immediate realities between the two peoples, its design also opens the door to a wider transformation. By creating stable, balanced governance and fostering habits of cooperation, the Union can serve as the nucleus for a **broader Middle Eastern framework**, one that extends beyond bilateral peace to tackle shared regional challenges. In this way, the Union is not only a solution to the conflict but the foundation for a new regional order built on interdependence, mutual recognition, and collective security.

The Jerusalem Union: 23 Districts

Israeli Federation: 13 Districts

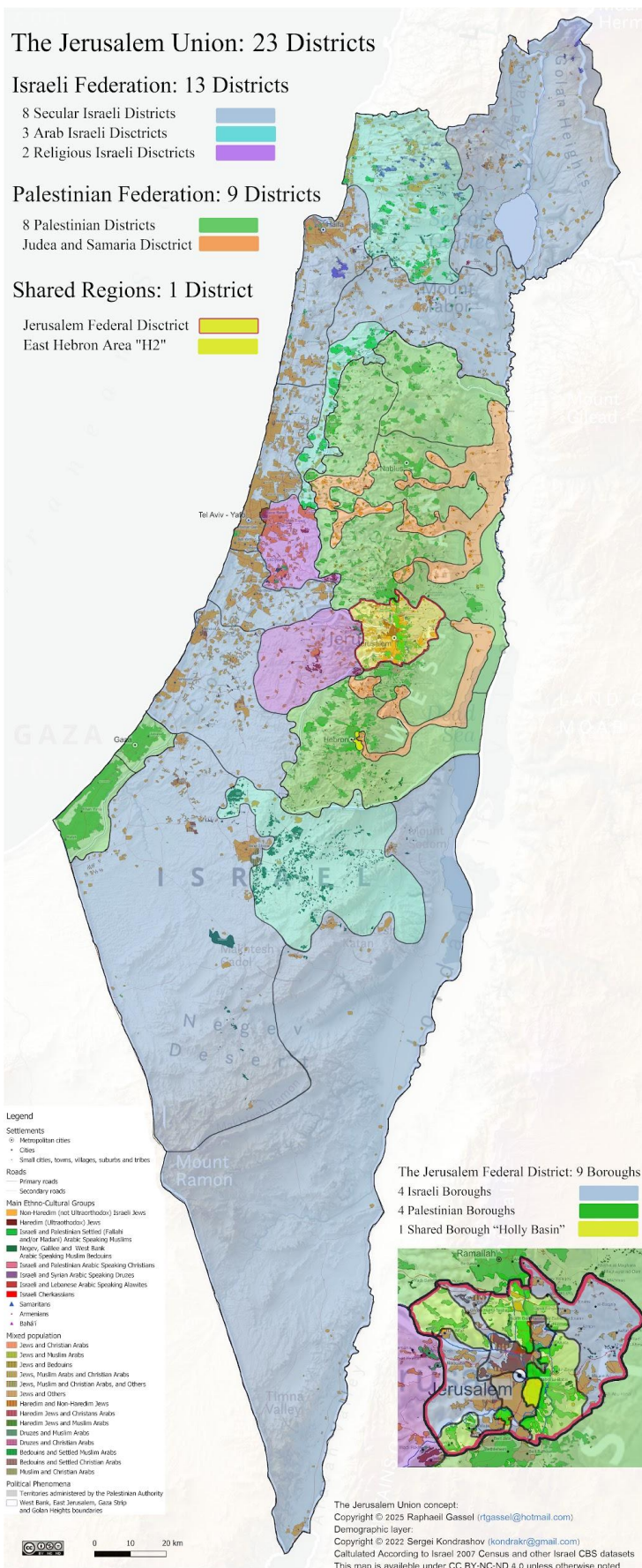
- 8 Secular Israeli Districts
- 3 Arab Israeli Districts
- 2 Religious Israeli Districts

Palestinian Federation: 9 Districts

- 8 Palestinian Districts
- Judea and Samaria District

Shared Regions: 1 District

- Jerusalem Federal District
- East Hebron Area "H2"



The Jerusalem Union Federal Model, with its 23 Districts

Political Concepts map by Rafi Gassel, modified over the base map by, [Sergey Kondrashov](#), CC BY-SA 4.0, [Ethno-cultural groups of Israeli population by settlements' built-up areas](#), Link to detailed map ([click here](#))

The Israel–Palestine Union as a Regional Anchor

The Israel–Palestine Union envisioned in this proposal is not merely a mechanism for ending a bilateral conflict; it is designed as a cornerstone for a broader **Middle Eastern Union**, inspired in part by the European Union model. This regional vision responds to the shared economic, environmental, and security challenges facing the region, while honoring the deep cultural and religious ties among its peoples.

A Middle Eastern Union would provide a structured framework for cooperation between Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and, over time, the Gulf states. It would build on the foundations laid by agreements such as the Abraham Accords, while going beyond mere diplomatic normalization to foster **cultural recognition, economic interdependence, and religious inclusion**. Joint initiatives could range from collaborative water management and renewable energy grids to regional technology transfer, climate adaptation, and coordinated migration policy.

This vision draws on **shared revolutionary legacies**, the Jewish return to sovereignty, the Arab struggle for post-colonial dignity, and a mutual rejection of being defined solely by imperial borders or sectarian divides. Rather than erasing national identities, it would weave them into a framework of structured partnership.

Spiritually, rooting this regional union in Jerusalem carries profound symbolic resonance. It aligns with prophetic visions in both Jewish and Islamic traditions of a city that unites nations in justice and peace. It also echoes historical precedents such as the early Islamic *ummah*, which governed diverse communities through shared principles and localized autonomy.

By reimagining Jerusalem as a **dual capital**, the seat of both a united Israel and Palestine, and the capital of a greater Middle Eastern Union, this proposal transforms a contested space into a model of regional coexistence. Just as Brussels bridges the linguistic and cultural divide of Wallonia and Flanders while serving as the political heart of the European Union, Jerusalem can embody a future where religious identity and regional cooperation are not in tension but mutually reinforcing, grounded in dignity, justice, and shared stewardship.

Jerusalem as a Dual-National and Regional Capital

Jerusalem is the spiritual heart of both peoples, a city revered in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions alike. Yet its contested status has also made it one of the most volatile flashpoints in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In the framework proposed here, Jerusalem would serve as a **shared capital**, both of the Israel–Palestine Union and of a future Middle Eastern Union, anchoring the political partnership in a place that symbolizes shared heritage and moral responsibility.

This model draws inspiration from the *corpus separatum* concept envisioned in 1947⁵, but without international trusteeship. Instead, it proposes a co-sovereign administration in which each community governs its own neighborhoods and religious sites, while cooperating on municipal services, security, and planning for the city as a whole.

Under this arrangement, **all holy sites would be fully protected and accessible**. The Western Wall and Jewish Quarter would remain under Jewish custodianship; Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the

Rock would remain under exclusive Muslim stewardship. In addition, the plan envisions a **new Jewish sanctuary**, built in the southern section of the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, avoiding theologically and politically sensitive areas while fulfilling Jewish aspirations for a restored *Mikdash*. This southern positioning, supported by some halachic authorities and historical research, allows sacred expression without displacing or altering existing Muslim structures.

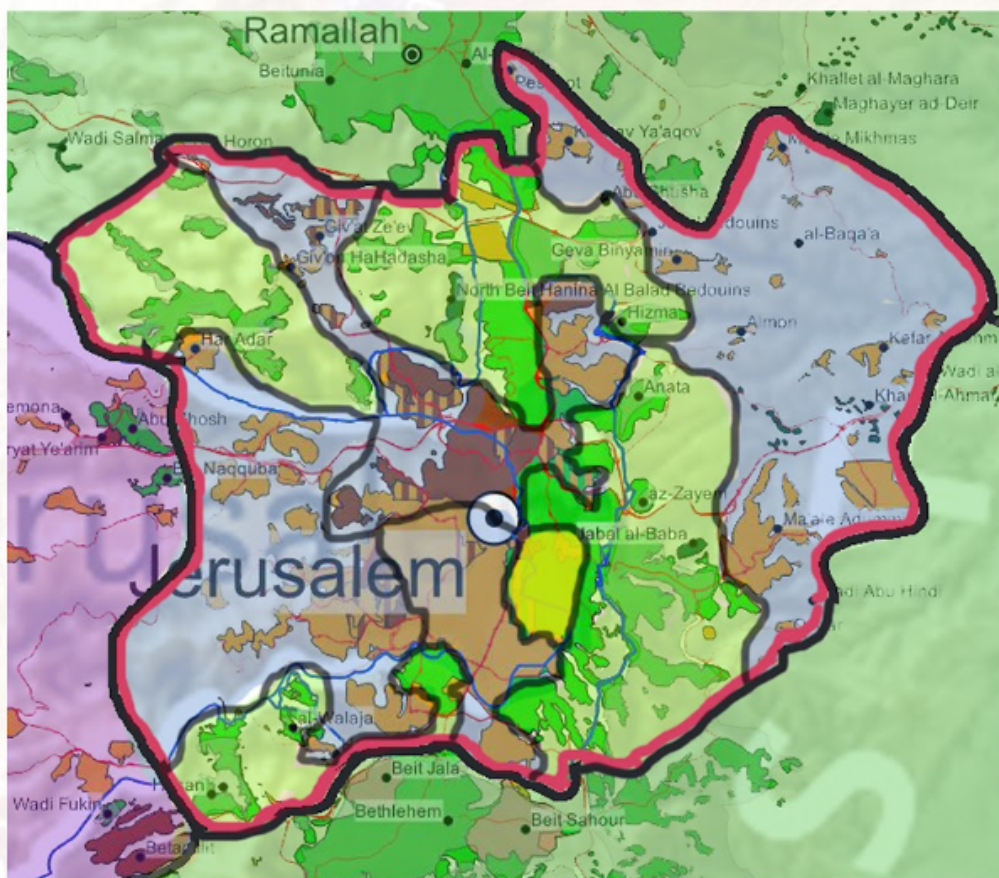
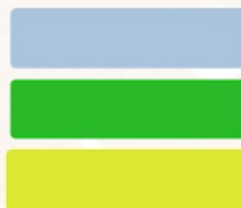
By embedding shared sovereignty in Jerusalem's governance, this model transforms the city from a symbol of zero-sum contest into a working example of coexistence, one that could inspire similar solutions across the region.

The Jerusalem Federal District: 9 Boroughs

4 Israeli Boroughs

4 Palestinian Boroughs

1 Shared Borough "Holly Basin"



Jerusalem Capital District with its 9 Boroughs, as thought of in the Federal Model

Political Concepts map by Rafi Gassel, modified over the base map by, [Sergey Kondrashov](#), CC BY-SA 4.0, [Ethno-cultural groups of Israeli population by settlements' built-up areas](#), Link to detailed map ([click here](#))

The Southern Sanctuary: A Symbol of Sacred Compromise

The [Southern Sanctuary](#) proposal offers a reconciliatory path that honors Jewish aspirations for the rebuilding of the Temple while sidestepping the political and theological conflicts surrounding the traditional northern site beneath the Dome of the Rock. Research by figures such as Tuvia Sagiv and others suggests that the First and Second Temples may have stood further south, near the Al-Aqsa Mosque ⁶. While this view is debated, it has gained enough scholarly and rabbinic attention to merit serious consideration.

From a halachic perspective, this location minimizes the risk of inadvertently entering the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies), a grave prohibition when in a state of ritual impurity. It also avoids altering or removing existing Muslim structures, thereby upholding the principle of *darkei shalom* (the ways of peace) and preventing *chillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name through unjust action).

Architecturally, the Southern Sanctuary could be conceived as a **modest yet dignified sacred space**, emphasizing spiritual continuity rather than political dominance. Its design could recall the historical memory of the Temple while projecting the ethical vision it was meant to embody, a place of divine presence, justice, and humility. Symbolically, its southern placement aligns with the kabbalistic association of the south with *chesed* (loving-kindness), underscoring a message of reconciliation over conquest.

By choosing a site that does not compete with existing Muslim sanctities, and framing the project as a gesture of humility rather than supremacy, the Southern Sanctuary could stand as a **shared symbol of faith, restraint, and coexistence**, an architectural bridge between two peoples and their sacred histories.



Temple Mount – AI-generated image of the Temple Mount with the Dome of the Rock, the Al Aqsa Mosque, and the Proposed Southern Sanctuary

A Framework Rooted in Shared Sacred Values

Jewish and Muslim communities each carry profound theological narratives, shaped by centuries of exile, suffering, resistance, and survival. In today's political climate, these sacred stories often harden into claims that feel mutually exclusive. For many Jews, the Land of Israel is not merely a homeland; it is a redemptive space promised by covenant. Yet to many Muslims, this covenantal claim, especially when expressed through Zionist political language, can be heard as a declaration of exclusion and supremacy.

Conversely, for Muslims, Palestine, including Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif, is inseparable from religious identity and historical memory. Any suggestion of Jewish return to the Temple Mount is often perceived not as a spiritual yearning, but as a threat to Islamic sovereignty and sanctity. Decades of conflict, occupation, and failed diplomacy have deepened these suspicions, entrenching a mindset in which affirming one people's legitimacy is seen as denying the other's.

Yet beneath this history of antagonism lies a surprising truth: Jewish and Islamic traditions share a moral foundation. Both uphold justice (*tzedek, adl*), peace (*shalom, şulh*), and the sanctity of human life (*pikuach nefesh, ħurmat al-nafs*). These are not abstract ideals; they are binding religious obligations. The vision of a federative Israel–Palestine Union aims to embody these principles in a political framework that safeguards national and religious identities while facilitating cooperation and joint stewardship of shared spaces, particularly Jerusalem.

Federalism, drawing lessons from models such as the European Union, offers a flexible balance between autonomy and unity. In such a system, Israelis and Palestinians could maintain national self-expression while participating in a shared legal and institutional structure that guarantees equality, mutual recognition, and common responsibility.

For such a framework to be viable, it must take seriously the religious legal traditions that guide the faithful. In Jewish law, this includes *halachot Eretz Yisrael* (laws of the Land of Israel), the prohibition of *lo techanem* (not granting permanent control of the land to others), and the principle of *dina d'malchuta dina* (the law of the land is binding). In Islamic law, it includes rulings on *awlāya* (alliances with non-Muslims) and the status of *waqf* (endowed religious land). Addressing these principles openly is not a concession to religious politics; it is the only way to root a lasting peace in the moral languages both peoples hold sacred.

Halachic Considerations

Jewish halacha does not prohibit political arrangements involving shared sovereignty when *pikuach nefesh* (saving life) is at stake. Rabbinic authorities such as Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ⁷ and Rav Yehuda Amital ⁸ have ruled that territorial compromise for the sake of peace may not only be permissible but morally obligatory. The proposed Southern Sanctuary avoids many of the strictest purity prohibitions, as it is situated outside the area traditionally associated with the Holy of Holies.

Additionally, the halachic principle of *dina d'malchuta dina* (the law of the land is law) can support participation in a federative structure, provided Jewish religious life is protected. The proposal also

aligns with prophetic visions of peace and justice emanating from Jerusalem, fulfilling *Torat Yisrael* not through domination but through ethical leadership.

Jewish law assigns profound sanctity to the Land of Israel, particularly to areas associated with biblical inheritance and commandments tied to the land (*mitzvot hatluyot ba'aretz*). Many rabbinic authorities, including Ramban (Nachmanides) in his commentary on the Torah (Numbers 33:53), affirm that *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, the act of settling and holding the land, is a *mitzvah* (religious commandment).

Yet, the question of whether full sovereignty is required, or whether *shared governance* is halachically acceptable, is nuanced. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Rabbi Elazar Shach, and others have ruled that *pikuach nefesh* (saving lives) overrides even the *mitzvah* of full sovereignty over land. As Rambam teaches:

"There is nothing that stands in the way of saving a life except idolatry, incest, and bloodshed." (*Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 5:1*)

Thus, a political arrangement that ensures Jewish safety, even if it involves shared rule or partnership, may not only be permitted, but it may be required.

Lo Techanem and Partnership with Non-Jews

Deuteronomy 7:2 commands: "*You shall not show them favor*" (*lo techanem*), interpreted by some authorities as a ban on giving non-Jews land in Eretz Yisrael. However, this verse is traditionally applied to idolaters in the context of biblical conquest, not modern democratic coexistence ⁹.

Many halachic scholars, including Rabbi Yehuda Amital, interpret this commandment as non-applicable to peaceful Gentiles living under mutual respect ¹⁰. The Talmud (*Avodah Zarah 20a*) limits its application to cases that endanger Jewish religious life.

Dina D'malkhuta Dina and Constitutional Agreements

The Talmudic principle *dina d'malkhuta dina* ("the law of the land is the law") has long permitted Jews to operate within non-Jewish legal systems, so long as halachic life is protected. This principle undergirds centuries of Jewish participation in diaspora governments and supports modern participation in pluralistic governance.

In a federal or confederal structure where Jewish autonomy over education, religion, and community institutions is preserved, the halachic principle of *dina d'malkhuta dina*, "the law of the land is the law," can extend to shared federal institutions, provided Jews are full and equal participants. From a halachic standpoint, both confederation and federalism can be justified, though they offer different balances.

Confederation is often easier to defend symbolically, as it preserves the image of full Jewish sovereignty while allowing for practical cooperation. Religious autonomy in such an arrangement remains high, and there is little risk of violating *lo techanem* if Jewish control over sacred obligations and institutions is maintained.

Federalism, by contrast, involves a greater sharing of sovereignty but offers more stability and security over time. While it requires careful design to protect religious jurisdiction and autonomy, it does not necessarily compromise *kedushat ha'aretz* (the sanctity of the Land) if Jewish life and *mitzvot* (religious commandments) tied to the land remain intact. In many ways, from a religious perspective, it parallels the Jewish experience of thriving within constitutional monarchies or diaspora democracies, where religious life flourished under just governance.

Ultimately, the halachic question is not whether one model is inherently permissible, but whether it safeguards Jewish presence, sanctity, and security while honoring the dignity of others. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt”l taught, the Jewish vision is not only about holding land, but about building a society rooted in *tzedek u’mishpat* ¹¹, justice and righteousness, echoing the prophetic ideals of Isaiah and Micah.

Islamic Legal Foundations for Partnership

The Qur’an itself affirms both justice and mutual recognition. It acknowledges the historical connection of the Children of Israel to the Holy Land: “O my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah has assigned to you” (*Qur’an - Surat Al-Ma’idah 5:21*). At the same time, it commands Muslims to deal justly with those who do not seek their harm: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion... from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them” (*Qur’an - Surat Al-Mumtahanah 60:8*). These verses open the door not to domination, but to a just partnership grounded in recognition, dignity, and coexistence.

Awlāya and Partnership with Non-Muslims

The concept of *awlāya*, *loyalty or alliance*, is often cited to oppose political alliances with non-Muslims. However, classical and contemporary scholars distinguish between alliances that undermine the Muslim community and those that are based on justice and mutual benefit. In a context where Muslims retain custodianship over their holy sites, maintain religious freedom, and achieve national self-determination, such alliances can be framed within the Islamic legal principles of *maslaha* (public interest) and *sulh* (reconciliation).

The concept of *awlāya* in the Islamic sense draws on the Qur’anic verse:

“O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as awliya (protectors, allies); they are allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you then indeed, he is [one] of them.” (*Qur’an - Surat Al-Ma’idah 5:51*)

This verse has often been interpreted to prohibit Muslim alliances with non-Muslim powers. However, classical and modern scholars emphasize that this verse refers to alliances that compromise Muslim independence or betray the Muslim community, not to all forms of cooperation or treaties.

Prominent Islamic scholars such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Imam al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari interpret the verse in its historical context, relating it to times when Jewish or Christian factions were conspiring against the early Muslim ummah. They did not intend it to restrict legitimate cooperation in peaceful and just societies. Modern thinkers such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi ¹² and Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah make further distinctions:

- Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah has articulated that “*awāliya*” in the Qur’an refers to exclusive loyalty in a hostile or dependent context, in contrast with cooperation grounded in justice ¹³.
- The Amman Message (2004), signed by hundreds of Islamic scholars, affirms pluralism and the legitimacy of cooperation with non-Muslims for the common good ¹⁴.
- *Maslaha* (public interest) and *darura* (necessity) are established principles in Islamic jurisprudence, allowing flexible responses to contemporary needs.

If a political partnership ensures Muslim dignity, protects religious freedom, and serves justice, it is not only permissible but desirable. This is supported by historical precedents, such as the Constitution of Medina, crafted by the Prophet Muhammad, which recognized Jews as part of his Islamic polity and united with them in mutual protection.

Thus, a federative or confederative structure in which Muslims retain autonomy, control over waqf institutions, and secure access to sacred sites can be framed as legitimate, even commendable, within Islamic jurisprudence.

Waqf, Palestine as a religious endowment

The question of Palestine as waqf land is one of the strongest theological arguments against partition or political compromise among traditional scholars. The idea that the land was consecrated as a religious trust (*waqf*), first established in the time of Caliph ‘Umar and later reaffirmed and formally codified under Saladin and the Ayyubid rulers, underpins the view that it cannot be ceded.

However, Islamic jurisprudence includes flexibility even in this regard:

- Imam al-Nawawi, a major Shafi'i jurist, as well as Ibn Taymiyyah, a Hanbali jurist who is also often regarded as one of the intellectual forefathers of Salafism, affirmed that waqf land can be restructured if doing so serves a “greater good” (*maslaha*)^{15 16}.
- *Sulh* (reconciliation agreements) are binding in Islamic law when both parties benefit and justice is preserved¹⁷.
- Historical treaties between Muslim powers and non-Muslim entities have allowed for practical sharing of territory under these principles, such as in the *Pact of Umar ibn al-Khattab*¹⁸.

In a federal or confederal union, the land would not be ceded to non-Muslims but reorganized into a shared political framework. Muslims would retain religious jurisdiction over Islamic institutions and holy sites, while political sovereignty is exercised jointly. This arrangement preserves the intent of the *waqf* by safeguarding Muslim religious life in Palestine and ensuring peace and security for all its inhabitants.

In keeping with Islamic jurisprudence, the sanctity and continuity of *waqf* land would be maintained, all existing Islamic sites would remain intact, and the proposed new Jewish sanctuary would be located in an area not currently used for prayer or *waqf* functions, thereby avoiding encroachment. Such an approach aligns with historical precedents in Islamic governance, notably the *Constitution of Medina*, which allowed for multi-faith arrangements under conditions of mutual respect. These traditions provide a strong foundation for a co-sovereign model in which the sanctity of holy places is upheld through shared stewardship.

From an Islamic legal perspective, both confederation and federalism have precedents and potential legitimacy, though they offer different advantages. Confederation may be more appealing to many jurists at the outset, as it allows separate states to cooperate while preserving the symbolism of full Muslim sovereignty over *waqf* land. Religious autonomy remains high, and the arrangement can be likened to historical *sulh* (treaties) between Muslim and non-Muslim powers, where Muslim custodianship of sacred trusts remained intact.

Federalism, by contrast, involves a single legal-political entity in which sovereignty is shared. While this can raise concerns about diluting Muslim ownership, such fears can be addressed through clear constitutional guarantees protecting waqf integrity, religious freedom, and Muslim authority over holy sites. Far from being without precedent, federalism recalls the multi-faith governance of the *Constitution*

of Medina or the *Convivencia of Andalusia*, where different religious communities retained autonomy within a larger political order.

In practice, both models are far more consistent with Islamic legal tradition than the adversarial two-state model, which perpetuates fragmentation and conflict. Whether through a looser confederation or a more integrated federation, the central legal and moral question is whether the arrangement protects Muslim dignity, preserves the sanctity of *waqf*, and fosters justice, objectives that lie at the heart of the *Shari'a*.

Christian Perspectives

Although Christians constitute a small minority within both Israel and the Palestinian territories, their theological, cultural, and diplomatic significance in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict is substantial. Christian traditions carry enduring historical ties to the land, and both Palestinian Christian communities and international Christian groups play meaningful roles in the discourse surrounding peace, justice, and redemption.

Palestinian Christians, including Greek Orthodox, Latin (Catholic), and various Protestant communities, have developed theological responses to their situation under occupation and displacement. Many adopt what has been called a "*theology of sumud*" (steadfastness) ¹⁹, which emphasizes:

- A rootedness in the land and a sense of shared destiny with Palestinian Muslims.
- Emphasis on justice, human dignity, and nonviolent resistance, often framed in the context of the teachings of Jesus.
- Concern over both Israeli occupation and the rise of religious extremism on all sides.

The Kairos Palestine Document ²⁰, authored by a coalition of Palestinian Christian leaders, declared:

"Our presence in this land, as Christian and Muslim Palestinians, is not accidental but deeply rooted in history and faith." (*Kairos Palestine Document* - 2.3.2)

While critical of Israeli policy, many Palestinian Christians maintain relationships with Jewish and international Christian communities and could serve as important bridges in dialogue.

Many evangelical Christians, particularly in the United States, express strong support for the State of Israel, seeing its existence as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Christian Zionists generally:

- Affirm the return of Jews to the land as divinely ordained.
- Support Israeli security and sovereignty, often to the exclusion of Palestinian claims.
- Maintain a theology of dispensationalism, in which the Jewish people play a central role in eschatological events.

However, this approach is often viewed with suspicion or discomfort by both Israeli Jews (due to the theological motive of conversion or end-times) and by Palestinian Christians (due to perceived indifference to Palestinian suffering).

The Israel–Palestine Union model offers a compelling middle path that could:

- Appeal to Palestinian Christians who desire justice, coexistence, and international solidarity.
- Offer Christian Zionists a vision in which Jewish sovereignty is preserved but rooted in peace, not conflict.

- Provide a new theological framework of shared sacred space, resonating with Christian universalism and the idea of Jerusalem as a city of peace for all nations (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Christian communities could thus serve as intermediaries, helping translate the ethical imperatives of peace, humility, and reconciliation to broader audiences, while ensuring that their communities are not forgotten in future arrangements.

Conclusion: From Catastrophe to Covenant

The vision outlined in this proposal is not utopian. It is, rather, a realistic and morally grounded response to the paralysis and despair that have long defined the Israel–Palestine conflict and the wider Middle East. It acknowledges the religious attachments, political fears, and historical grievances of both peoples. But it also insists that the future need not be shaped by fear and force alone.

By grounding this proposal in both halachic and Islamic jurisprudence and by anchoring it in a model of federative governance and mutual respect, we believe that this vision fulfills not only the political aspirations of the present but the spiritual teachings of our respective traditions. It invites us to return to the foundational ethics of *Torah* and *Qur'an* of justice, compassion, dignity, and sanctity, and to apply them courageously to our shared future.

We call upon religious scholars, civic leaders, policy thinkers, and ordinary believers, Jews, Muslims, and others to engage this vision seriously. To scrutinize it, refine it, teach it, and bring it into the realm of possibility. For the sake of Jerusalem. For the dignity of all peoples in the land. And for the chance that this generation might yet be the one that transforms tragedy into redemption, and conflict into covenant.

In an age where fear threatens to eclipse faith, and where division too often masquerades as destiny, we are called back to the sacred sources that first inspired our peoples. The *Qur'an*, the *Torah*, and the *Gospel* each speak in their own voice of justice, mercy, and the sanctity of human life. At the heart of each tradition lies not a theology of endless war, but a vision of reconciliation grounded in divine dignity.

The prophets of Israel envisioned a time when “*swords would be beaten into plowshares, and nations would no longer learn war*” (Isaiah 2:4). The *Prophet Muhammad*, peace be upon him, forged alliances between tribes and religions based on shared responsibilities and mutual respect, as embodied in the *Constitution of Medina*. The *Qur'an* teaches: “*And if they incline to peace, then incline to it also, and trust in God*” (*Qur'an* - Surat al-Anfal 8:61). And *Jesus of Nazareth* taught his followers to “*love their neighbors*” and to “*bless the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*” (Matthew 5:9).

A New Covenant for Our Time

A new covenant is needed in our time, not to replace ancient truths, but to reawaken them. It must be a covenant not only of words, but of structures; not only of intention, but of binding law; not only of proximity, but of genuine partnership. The future of the Middle East will not be shaped by those who cling to domination, but by those courageous enough to choose covenant over conquest.

This paper has argued that such a covenant can take the form of a federative or confederative union, rooted in both *halachic* and *fiqhi* legitimacy, affirming each people's historical attachment to the land and their right to dignity, security, and self-expression. The *Southern Sanctuary* proposal, enabling

Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount while preserving Muslim sovereignty and stewardship, stands as a powerful symbol of this possibility. It is not a vision of erasure, but of shared sanctity.

Let those who seek redemption not only pray for peace, but build its foundations. Let rabbis and imams, scholars and elders, families and students commit themselves to study, dialogue, and practical initiatives that give this vision life.

To the political leaders of the region: have the courage not only to defend your people's past, but to shape their shared future.

To the religious leaders: teach not only what was, but what can yet be.

To the people of the land: know that you are not alone, and that your suffering has not been in vain. You are heirs not only to tragedy, but to enduring traditions of hope.

May Jerusalem once again become a city of peace, *Dar al-Salaam*, *Ir haShalom*, where nations meet, not clash; where the sacred is shared, not seized; and where the dreams of the prophets become the policies of our time.

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