

**Reinventing the "Two State" Solution as a Consequence of the
"Swords of Iron" War**

**An Adoption of the 'Nordic Balance System' as a Security Regime
in the Middle East**

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Abstract

Believing that two decades of experience in Vietnam would ensure victory, American generals requested that Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara would authorize additional troops for the campaign. However, McNamara countered that, far from accumulating twenty years of experience, the US had repeated one year's worth of mistakes over a period of twenty years. Likewise, those who look with equal parts of optimism and frustration at nearly fifty years of failed peace initiatives between Israel and the Palestinians ignore the fact that each "new" plan has been nothing more than a repetition of past unsuccessful efforts.

The prospect of renewed Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on a two-state solution might seem highly distant. Yet the trauma of October 7, 2023, and the pain engendered by the ongoing crisis may create the kind of willingness on both sides lacking in the past decades. Good faith negotiations would require new leadership in Jerusalem and Ramallah, which enjoy broad public support. That might be possible in Israel even with the current parliamentary makeup (provided Prime Minister Netanyahu steps down and a new coalition is formed). In Palestine, where elections for the Palestinian Authority have not taken place since 2006 and are unlikely to take place anytime soon, the legitimacy would need to be achieved through internal organizational reforms as well as through major economic reconstruction and assistance by way of a Marshall-like Plan, namely, external support. Meanwhile, the demilitarization of the Gaza Strip and the consolidation of a Palestinian polity would suggest the removal of one of the main obstacles to such negotiations since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007. An external model, such as the Scandinavian Model, may be of assistance.

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For a suggested solution to the Palestinian situation to be viable, it must meet the security needs of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians concurrently. To achieve this, we must alter our point of view and widen our perspective so that the entire Middle East will be included.

The "Nordic Balance" model is a way of thinking that contributed to the security of Northern Europe throughout the Cold War and can be reproduced in the M.E. In the North European framework, the USSR was on one side, NATO-member Scandinavian countries were on the other, and neutral Finland and Sweden were in the middle, serving as buffer states. Thus, they became a regional power that served as a stabilizing factor in the subsystem.

For reasons made evident in this paper, in the Middle East, Israel can technically assume the role that the USSR held in Northern Europe on the one hand, while Iraq and Iran can play the part of Denmark and Norway on the other. Jordan and Palestine can serve as buffer states, assuming the role similar to that of Sweden and Finland, thus becoming the hearth of the model.

Sweden and Finland constituted a kind of international strategic vacuum in the grey zone between the two blocks. This state of affairs turned these two states into mutually dependent "Siamese twins," where any change in the political status of one would immediately result in a change in the geopolitical situation of the other. **The interdependence** arising from such a situation, the fact that each country safeguards the neutrality of the other, **warrants stability.**

Keywords:

International Relations, Regional Stability, Balance of Power, Middle East, War, Scandinavia

Background

The past decades have seen the greatest geopolitical change in the Middle East in an entire century. Iraq, Yemen, and Syria are no longer territorially coherent functioning states, with the civil war in the latter being a stain on humanity. Egypt underwent a revolution, democracy, theocracy, and a coup. At the same time, the West's nearly 40-year-long cold war with Iran has begun to thaw somewhat, just as the whole region is engulfed in a quadrupole proxy war of Sunni, Shi'ite Saudi, and Iranian actors.

Yet the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—the hinge on which the rest of the region used to swing—has been strangely sluggish until recently. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leads a coalition with no genuine interest in pursuing a two-state solution. At the same time, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority oversees a fractured and corrupt construction with no natural or practical ability to deliver a deal.

Just as history is being written and rewritten all around them, Israelis and Palestinians remained submerged in a decades-long status quo of creeping settlement growth and sporadic violence.

Nevertheless, it is essential to understand that of all the strategic and other problems facing Israel and the Arab and Muslim world, the most critical is the Palestinian problem. While it is unclear whether a lasting solution can be found, the absence of one will make attempts to solve other strategic issues more complex for the parties involved.

Israel's constant goals of preventing future violence, maintaining her special relationship with the United States even post the Biden era, and – according to the Arab initiative of 2002 –even concluding peace agreements with the entire Muslim world all depend on finding a viable solution to the Palestinian problem. From the regional point of view, if a solution is not found, sooner or later, the Arabs might unite to fight Israel again; the peace process will thus be destroyed, but the Palestinian problem will live on. All parties involved in the peace process must, therefore, accord top priority to finding a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem; otherwise, having paid dearly in blood, they may find themselves in the same continuous situation.

Looking, we notice that all the possibilities and options advanced in recent years for a solution to the Palestinian problem have been deficient; no available formula is acceptable to all sides and, hence, could be implemented. For a suggested solution to the Palestinian problem to be viable, it must meet the objective as well as the subjective individual security

needs of Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians simultaneously. To achieve this, we must alter our point of view and widen our perspective to include the entire Middle East. The solution will have to rest on a model of balance of power, where the countries involved (including Palestine) will be members of dynamic coalitions that balance out one another, thus preventing one nation from monopolizing others and, in so doing, laying the groundwork for future attacks.

The term **balance of power** refers to the general concept of one or more states' power being used to balance that of another state or group of states. According to this way of thinking, in the anarchy of the international system, the most reliable brake on the power of one state, is the power of the other states. Balance of power can refer to any ratio of power capabilities between states or alliances, or it can mean only a relatively equal ratio. Alternatively, balance of power can refer to the process by which counterbalancing coalitions have repeatedly formed in history to prevent one state from conquering an entire region. (Goldstein& Prevehouse; 2010)

The theory of balance of power argues that such counterbalancing occurs regularly and maintains the stability of the international system. The system is stable in that its rules and principles stay the same: state sovereignty does not collapse into a universal empire. It is important to emphasize however, that this stability does not imply peace. It is rather a stability maintained by means of recurring wars that adjust power relations.

When thinking about Scandinavia, or the Middle East, as this paper does, one should in addition to keep in mind also the lessons of history regarding **small states**. History teaches that small states cannot take their survival for granted. For example Athens decreed that Melos should be wiped out, despite the islands efforts to stay out of the Peloponnesian War. Other small states, in more recent history, such as Estonia, Czechoslovakia and Kuwait suffered at the hands of large, threatening neighbors, sometimes to the point of loss of territory or independence or even destruction (Feldman; 2023).

The small state will try, in these circumstances, to encourage its rivals to adopt international norms, rules and laws, join institutions and embed patterns of democratic values in its rival's society and regime to advance mutual dependence. In other words, the small state will ascribe a central role to soft power in its security strategy and rely less on military strength and will try in this manner to moderate the aggressiveness of its neighbor

peacefully (Koehane & Nye, 1977; Miller, 2010; Neumann & Gstohl, 2006; Nye, 2002; Rosenrance, 1986; Russel,2020).

A New Perspective

The "Nordic Balance model" could be an apposite model for implementation in the Middle east. It contributed to the security of Northern Europe throughout the Cold War, and it can be reproduced in the Middle East. In this framework the Soviet Union was on one side, the NATO-member Scandinavian countries were on the other and neutral Finland and Sweden were in the middle, serving as buffer states, **thus becoming regional powers**, who serve as a **stabilizing factor** in the sub-system. In the Middle East, for reasons that will be made clear in the course of this paper, Israel can assume the role of the Soviet Union on the one pole, Iraq and Iran can play the part of Denmark and Norway on the other, and Jordan and Palestine can serve as buffer states, assuming a role similar to that of Finland and Sweden. They will become the model's core as neutral states between the belligerent countries.

Finland and Sweden together constituted a kind of international strategic vacuum in the grey zone between the two blocs, and, as in nature, so too in international politics; a vacuum is a condition that tends to be filled. This state of affairs turned Finland and Sweden into mutually dependent political "Siamese twins," where any change in the geopolitical status of one would immediately result in a change in the geopolitical situation of the other. Possible scenarios could have been, for example, a Soviet invasion of Finland resulting from Sweden's increasing ties with NATO or Sweden joining NATO in reaction to Finland coming closer to the Eastern bloc, or one of the two becoming an isolated buffer state, an impossible situation on the long run. **The mutual dependence** arising from such a situation, the fact that each country safeguards the neutrality of the other, **ensures stability**.

In the Middle East, as in Scandinavia, one can find a geostrategic reality that prefers a situation in which two neighboring states are linked as neutral states between two blocs. In both cases, one can identify the factor that makes this bonding possible: the shared historical experience and the virtually identical worldview and cultural-social structure of both countries. Each condition is necessary; both together are sufficient in this case.

Israel, with its military and technological might, is, in fact, the regional power in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Fertile Crescent constitutes the opposing pole to Israel's power within the subsystem. This system includes, first and foremost, Iraq, as we knew her before 2003, and Iran. Between these two Middle Eastern blocs, we find Jordan fulfilling, almost traditionally, her national function of a buffer state. Since the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan, Jordan has, in its various metamorphoses, served as a buffer state. At one time, she stood between the Saudi Wahabis and the French in Syria; today, she separates between Israel and the Arab world and between the radical north and the more conservative south. In her role as a buffer state, Jordan helps to preserve stability in the region, as was seen in the Gulf War (1990-91), when she stood between Iraq and Israel. This takes place utilizing a complex game of deterring each side through tactical reconciliation with the other side. In return, Jordan received support from countries concerned with maintaining regional stability, such as the United States and Europe. This consideration results in the Israeli government's traditional support of Jordan's continuing existence as a buffer state.

Israel is suited to play a role similar to that of the Soviet Union in the Middle East for several reasons: First, as in the case of the Soviet Union at one time, Israel (for the time being) is the only country in the region considered (though not confirmed) to be a nuclear power. Second, in both cases, we see the need for, and even the willingness of other subsystem members, to recognize the special security interests of both countries. This has been reflective of the attitude of the Arab states toward Israel since the mid-seventies. The Arab initiative of 2002 is yet another example of that. One may add a cultural parallel to this strategic-political consideration: both the Soviet Union in northern Europe and Israel in the Middle East are culturally foreign to the subsystem of which they are a significant part.

Today, Iraq and especially Iran, can suitably fulfill the role of Denmark and Norway in the proposed equation since, as in Scandinavia, we are referring in the Middle East as a pair of nations which, though powerful, are not yet nuclear powers in the accepted sense of the term. In the Nordic case, the power stemmed from membership in a pact and, in the Middle East, from a strong army equipped with non-conventional weapons (and in the case of Iran – with nuclear aspirations). In both cases, these are pairs of nations with similar socio-economic, political, and religious outlooks, their different emphases notwithstanding.

If the intention is to adopt the Nordic Balance model, the significant political change that must take place in the Middle East will be characterized by the turning of Jordan and the future Palestinian state into neutral status. Neutrality is perceived as an attractive policy for small nations, which, because of their strategic location or symbolic political value, stand or may stand in the focus of a struggle for influence or control by regional or global rivals. The neutral state is a country whose political independence and territorial integrity enjoy the permanent recognition of the superpowers, provided that the neutral country does not use weapons against another country except for self-defense and does not enter into contractual obligations with any party that might endanger its status.

The object of neutrality is to preserve international order, to reduce tensions in the system, and to bring international disputes to a solution based on agreed norms and institutions. From the neutral state's point of view, neutrality's objective is to defend its military security and preserve its political and territorial integrity. From the standpoint of the nations bordering the neutral state, the object of neutrality is to preserve the balance of power.

In this case, a distinction that is particularly apposite is the division of neutrality into positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect of the policy of neutrality denotes the complexity of the policy of neutrality. It denotes the complex attempts by neutral states to make their neutrality as attractive as possible to the contesting sides. This aspect incorporates a series of political measures carried out simultaneously on two levels: the first is measures intended to reduce fears of the contending sides regarding possible damage that might be caused to them by the neutrality of the small country; the second is steps intended to strengthen their interest in continuing to preserve neutrality.

The negative aspect of the neutralist policy refers to deterring the contending sides from violating neutrality by convincing them that the price they would have to pay for such a step will be high. Such deterrence is based on military power (Karsh, 1988).

Since this division is hypothetical, it would be more correct to distinguish between "negative-positive" neutrality, which puts the emphasis first on military deterrence and only then on political reliability, and "positive-negative" neutrality, which first underlines reliability and deterrence. This is precisely the distinction between the neutrality of Sweden and Finland,

respectively. The same distinction would apply to Jordan and Palestine, also respectively.

Contrary to Scandinavia, where neutrality can be defined as "traditional neutrality," an attribute of which is the freedom of choice, the more appropriate term for the neutrality applicable to the Middle East would be neutralization, in the context of which neutrality would be imposed on the state engaging international agreements. The outstanding characteristic of such a nation is that it is not neutral out of choice and, accordingly, cannot change its status according to its wishes. Though filled with suspicions, this would somehow contribute to stability in the Middle East.

It should be noted that the question of Israel's (or Jordan's) preferences regarding the future of the Palestinian Authority as a sovereign state or as something less within the context of a federation or confederation with Jordan is irrelevant. An examination of recent processes in the international context, especially in Europe in the post-cold war era, shows that the question of "nationalism" or "supra-nationalism" is a function of political development. In the modern era, the future seems to lie in the system of blocs, provided that these are freely entered (otherwise, we're talking about colonialism). To achieve political unity of either kind, as in Western Europe, for example, or as the Palestinian-Jordanian confederation proposes, a relatively homogeneous group of sovereign states with many years of sovereignty is required. Assets, including sovereignty, cannot be relinquished unless they exist. Thus, the movement toward Palestinian independence does not contradict the unifying tendencies within the Arab world; instead, it constitutes a continuity: initially, Palestinian sovereignty in the framework of an independent state and later, relinquishing some of the rights of statehood to be integrated into a confederation with Jordan. The cases of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia show what can be expected when an attempt is made to curtail these developmental processes by skipping the initial stage of sovereignty. Introducing such a Trojan horse into our backyard would be unwise, primarily due to the unstable factor that the "Arab Spring" had contributed to the region, as mentioned. **In other words – any idea for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is not based on the "Two States" solution is not realistic.**

Speculation about a neutral Palestinian state is not new. Still, it seems that contrary to conventional thinking, which denies this possibility, because Palestine will be a purely Arab nation (neutrality does not necessarily mean ideological neutrality), in this case, the problem lies in the fact that it would

be an isolated buffer state, a situation which history has proved to be untenable in the long run. The solution proposed here corrects this deficiency as not all of Palestine's borders would be belligerent since not all of Palestine's borders would be confrontational borders, as they would be encircled by two buffer states (along with Jordan). **This is what combines them as a regionally stabilizing power.** The buffer state thus becomes an edge country, with all the latter's advantages to a small and neutral country. One can apply this lesson from the "Nordic Balance Model."

Let's examine previous proposals for solving the Palestinian problem. We see that what is expected demand of Jordan and Palestine is, in fact, neutrality, even if it is not explicitly designated. For example, Jordan is called upon not to take part in any military alliance, not to allow foreign troops to be stationed on its soil, nor to enable such forces to use Jordanian territory as a corridor. Regarding Palestine, emphasis should be placed on limitations concerning membership in military or political pacts. The fact that all these are characteristics of neutrality cannot be ignored.

As mentioned before, in connection with the different shades of neutrality, the Nordic case can also serve as a model for what can be implemented in the Middle East. In addition, the Soviet-Finnish border corrections and restrictions regarding the size and quality of the Finnish army determined in bilateral Soviet-Finnish agreements can serve as precedents.

Palestine, initially under Jordanian rule (until 1967) and later under Israeli rule, resembles Finland in this inconsistency. Until its independence, Finland was under Swedish rule (until 1809) and later under the rule of Imperial Russia (until 1917). It thus seems that the slogan of Finnish nationalists in the early 20th century, "Swedes we are not, we'll not be Russians, so let us be Finns," can be applied to the Palestinians, *Mutatis Mutandis*.

Advantages

This proposal seems to be advantageous to all parties involved: Israel will gain peace safeguard its security interests in the east and enhance its regional and international recognition. Palestine will gain independence anchored in international agreements. Jordan will achieve international standing and a national role similar to Sweden during the Cold War; she will become an edge country instead of just a buffer state while protecting her interests in the face of Palestinian irredentism. The entire region will gain stability, even

without a straightforward solution to the Israeli-Iranian tension. (Thus also enabling a successful American withdrawal from Iraq and Syria within a broader regional settlement) This will be achieved thanks to a subsystem composed of nations which balance one another, with a dyad of two neutral countries in between, serving together as a regional buffer power; "Peace by balance," to quote Raymond Aaron.

This proposal constitutes a conceptual framework for a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. Many substantial issues, such as the final borders, the question of Jerusalem, the question of Jewish settlers on the one hand and Palestinian refugees on the other, the allocation of water, the involvement of the international community, and others, are omitted. The parties involved could discuss these issues after establishing the framework recommended here.

One of the known obstacles preventing a successful transition from hostility to peace is the necessity of replacing negative attitudes, beliefs, and values concerning the opposite side. Paradoxically, the best way to achieve this goal is to practice living in peace, but this will not be achieved without stability first. Later, the parties can turn to attitude changes through "Truth and reconciliation committees."

In addition, the framework suggested here offers two significant contributions to furthering the peace process which is not included in the existing peace proposals: **The first** – to quote President Reagan, when talking to the Soviet leader Gorbachev at their meeting in Reykjavik in 1986, "We are armed because we don't trust each other, and we don't trust each other because we are armed," it seems that the element of trust is the critical element necessary for breaking this vicious circle which is related to the "Security Dilemma." The framework suggested here solves this dilemma because establishing a Palestinian State will become a source of stability in the area rather than a source of instability as is feared.

The second –Author Amos Oz claimed, in his book, Actually There Are Two Wars Here (Hebrew), that Israel is going through two wars simultaneously: the first is against the Palestinians, for which there is a broad consensus even within Israel that the solution has to be based on the principle of "two states for two peoples." The second and more essential war is the war against Islamic fundamentalism. My claim is that **the fear of the second war prevents a successful solution to the first war!**

We are now facing a situation where Israel – for the first time in its history – is fighting a full-scale war against Islamic fundamentalism. **Should the "Swords of Iron" war in Gaza, which falls into that category, end by repulsing Hamas out of the Gaza Strip, leaving it demilitarized and repulsing the Hezbollah north of the Litany River in Lebanon (in accordance with the 2006 UNSC resolution 1701), it might bring an unprecedented opportunity: The vacuum that will be created in the place where Islamic fundamentalist organizations once stood, the detachment of these organizations from the immediate vicinity of Israel's borders might make place to a successful effort to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a more stable solution.** That means a **solution** to the first war through effective **management** of the second war.

There is no easy fast-forward track, but the urgency for regional and global diplomacy cannot be overstated. Failure to create an off-ramp from this war would mean not simply more of the same but a precipitous fall into the abyss.

Finally, this framework is missing in the successive implementation of the well-known Clinton parameters, the "Road Map" or the "Obama plan" for the broader Middle East. In other words, integrating these principles into the various peace proposals for the Middle East will ease the way for decision-makers on both sides to adopt and implement these ideas, both externally and internally. An implementation that, as mentioned, will sooner or later become imperative.

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