

## SWISS MULTI-STATE SOLUTION FOR PALESTINE-ISRAEL

The conflict between Israel and its neighbours is at an impasse. A prerequisite for peace is to recognise Palestinians as equal human beings. Two ways forward are discussed but neither can be realised. The “two-state solution,” which politicians around the world insist on, is leadership blather; Israel will not permit it. Nor will Israel consider a one-state solution out of fear of Arabs outnumbering Jews.

So Israel’s plan is to continue to hold Palestinians in subjection; this is not stable, as outbreaks of conflict have repeatedly shown.

There *is* a solution: a multi-state modelled on Switzerland. Its main features are a federal structure and the absence of leaders. Other than ethnic cleansing, it is the only solution.

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## SWITZERLAND, A MULTI-STATE MODEL

The first step toward peace in the Middle East would be to recognise (a) the two-state solution is not viable, (b) the one-state solution is not viable, (c) dependence on leaders is not viable. Some other way forward must be found. There is a tried and tested solution: the Swiss multi-state federation.

Switzerland and Palestine-Israel have the same fundamental political problem: deep identity division and long-standing antagonisms. One society is an outstanding success and the other an outstanding failure. The Swiss political system is thus a model for Israel-Palestine.

Switzerland is a small, blood-soaked patch in the middle of a blood-soaked continent; it has poor soil, no natural resources, and multiple cultures with a history of conflict.

The Swiss political structure solves the universal problems of bad leaders and incompatible identities. It deals with leaders by eliminating them; it deals with identity differences by separation into federal states.

Political leadership is prevented by having all laws—acts of parliament, foreign treaties, constitutional amendments—approved by the people. The primary mechanism is the referendum; the people rule, not the politicians. The different cultural identities are at peace because they are in 26 separate states: here French Protestants, there French Catholics, there Italian Catholics, here rural Germans, there urban Germans...

The world's other established democracies manage to cope with intermittent bad political leadership though not without conflict and overcorrection. In Switzerland there is no lurching of policy. Switzerland is the world's most stable democracy and it is because the people, not the politicians, are in charge.

In the Levant, for a century or more, political leadership has failed disastrously. What chance leaders will arise in Palestine or Israel (or the USA) who can solve the problem? Ordinary people—Muslims and Jews—live peacefully if they are left alone. They have done so for many centuries. It is leadership which causes strife. Ergo, there should be no leaders.

The "two-state" proposal has been discussed since the 1930s. The dominant theory of international relations, so-called "realism," says that it is normal for separate states to war with each other. To expect that two separate states, Palestine and Israel, can be at peace is irrational. It is a measure of their incompetence that leaders continue to talk about it. It will never happen. One-state—so-called "bi-national"—solutions are unacceptable to Israel because a Muslim majority would evolve. It, too, will never happen. Neither two-state nor one-state proposals are viable. Ergo, a multi-state solution is needed.

Little, land-locked Switzerland, population eight million, shows what can be achieved by a multi-state without political leaders:

- Its foreign relations are the world's most successful, not having lost a soldier to war since the modern founding in 1848.
- its eight million inhabitants have the highest per capita income of all the democracies. Its Gini index of inequality is on par with the other European democracies and lower than the US, UK and Israel.
- Government debt is the lowest of any democracy. The inflation rate is also the lowest. Switzerland weathered the 2008 financial crisis far better than the rest of Europe.
- Switzerland combines the social services of the Scandinavian countries with tax levels lower than the Anglo democracies (far lower than the rest of Europe). Switzerland has the world's highest life expectancy.
- "For the 10th year running, Switzerland has topped a 64-strong list of economies spread over eight regions, in the IMD World Talent Ranking," says International Institute for Management Development.
- Switzerland has for the last six years been No 1 in the Global Innovation Index.<sup>1</sup>

This article reviews common objections to popular rule, outlines the leaderless, multistate, Swiss system, contrasts it with other democracies, and ponders its implementation in Palestine-Israel.

## OBJECTIONS

If the Swiss system is so effective, why hasn't Israel-Palestine adopted it already? Why don't all countries adopt it?

The biggest problem is the same as the cause of the present chaos—leaders. No one relinquishes power gladly; democracy always struggles against human nature. Leaders might argue that rule by the people is not suited to Israelis and Palestinians because, for example, they lack Switzerland's tradition of popular sovereignty. There was such a tradition but only in three cantons; the others were standard European monarchies.

Another reason would be ignorance; it is not widely appreciated that the world's most stable country is one of the most divided, and it is also not understood that the absence of leaders is the core reason for its effectiveness.

Another reason is fear. Some view with horror the idea that the people should have a veto on acts of parliament, and that all foreign treaties should go to referendum. How could the ignorant masses be trusted to decide such

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global\\_Innovation\\_Index](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Innovation_Index)

weighty matters? Pure prejudice. The Swiss evidence is unequivocal: the masses are wiser than leaders. They have created the world's most successful country.

Some worry direct democracy is fertile soil for populism but there is no evidence. Populism depends on the reverse of democracy: a demagogue. Evidence from around the world is that honest referendums support neither demagoguery nor minority oppression.

Some object that referendums can be manipulated. Manipulation is standard in autocracies. In democracies, government-initiated referendums are inevitably held with an eye to serving leadership interests and of outwitting political opponents but that is not manipulation and quite often the outcome is not what the government wanted. Sectional interests can spend on biased advertising but buying the public is much harder than buying leaders.

Another objection to rule by the people comes from those who seek harmony: if everyone argues over everything, it will be divisive. Ultimately, the opposite is the case: referendums settle contentious matters with finality and thus foster harmony. Catholic Italy settled the abortion question by referendum. Ireland settled same-sex marriage by referendum. Referendums resolve issues.

In 1847 the referendum to form a Swiss federation did precipitate a brief civil war but then it founded the harmony among the squabbling states which has obtained ever since. Today the different peoples complain about each other but there have been no more inter-cantonal wars. In other democracies, civil disturbance is common and is even considered part of democracy but the last time there was significant social unrest in Switzerland was prior to the introduction of proportional elections in 1919. While its neighbours slaughtered each other, Switzerland was concerned to adjust its electoral rules.

## THE SWISS POLITICAL SYSTEM

### ***Two houses, PR elections***

Of Switzerland's 26 states, called cantons, six are half-cantons. Each full canton has two representatives in the upper house and the six half-cantons have one—making 46 upper house members.

The lower house has 200 members. As is usual with elections by proportional representation, no party ever wins a majority. Currently one party has 28% of lower house seats, nearly a historical high. The two houses have equal powers.

Each house elects a president, who serves for one year and who may not be re-elected. Chairs of house committees may serve two years and cannot be re-elected.

Members of parliament are part-time, paid to attend sittings. People become politicians in order to influence policy, not to make a career. Politicians compete to promote their values rather than impose their will.

### ***Three kinds of referendum***

Switzerland has three kinds of national referendum: mandatory referendums to change the constitution, mandatory referendums to approve international treaties, and facultative referendums to approve new laws. About 10 national referendums are held each year.

In 670 national referendums, there has never been a debacle comparable with the UK Brexit referendum. Switzerland has no leader who can impose a referendum to shore up his political position. Mostly, a Swiss referendum makes law; it does not express a vague wish.

### ***The facultative referendum***

Every act of parliament, after it has passed both houses, sits idle for 100 days. If, in that time, 50,000 citizens sign a petition against it, it stays idle until a referendum is held.

The facultative referendum is the central driver of the Swiss political system. It is the device which enables the country to function so effectively without political leadership.

No monarch or president signs a parliamentary act into law and no politician chooses when the new law will come into effect. If no citizens' petition is submitted, the act automatically becomes law at the end of the 100 days.

50,000 signatures are not many and the efforts of cabinet and legislature are bent towards avoiding a referendum. Despite their best efforts, historically, decade for decade, seven per cent of new laws suffer a facultative referendum and half of them fail. Since 1874 when the facultative referendum was introduced, about 90 new laws have been discarded by the people.

Parliamentary decrees binding on the public are also liable to a facultative referendum. The annual budget is exempt; on it the parliament has the final say.

The people cannot initiate an ordinary law. A constitutional referendum to allow this was passed in 2003 but the legislature found it unworkable and a 2009 referendum reversed it. The facultative referendum is reactive, not proactive, being the rulers' (the people's) judgement on whether to accept their advisors' (the politicians') advice.

### ***To amend the constitution***

Switzerland's written constitution can only be amended by referendum. A pass requires a "double majority," which is an overall majority plus majorities in a majority of states. The referendum can be initiated by the government or by

citizens gathering 100,000 signatures. This was raised (by referendum) from 50,000 in 1997.

The people's proactive power to initiate constitutional change has created many laws which the politicians would not otherwise have created and, to date, 23 which the politicians explicitly opposed. The citizens' constitutional initiative is also the weapon the people have to counter politicians' attempts to circumvent the facultative and foreign treaty referendums.

Constitutional referendums are quite common. Of government-initiated constitutional referendums about three quarters are approved. About ten percent of citizen-initiated constitutional referendums pass. A citizen-initiated referendum only actually takes place if the government judges it will fail, others being avoided by the referendum proposers accepting the government's counter-offer of legislation. A referendum which fails is not necessarily a waste for it brings a problem to public attention, settles the question and locates areas of dissatisfaction.

### ***International relations***

Foreign treaties must be approved by national referendum. Switzerland's international relations record is unrivalled.

Since 1848, Germany has invaded France three times. The Swiss federation, 70% German, 20% French, stayed peaceful. Austria, with the same highland German culture, welcomed Hitler. Switzerland, surrounded by fascism, stayed free.

The Swiss are free in part because they are armed. The only Swiss everyone has heard of was famous for his marksmanship and shooting is a national pastime with a rifle range in nearly every town. National service is compulsory for men, and soldiers keep their automatic or semi-automatic rifle at home.

Professional armies are dangerous to democracy and referendums to create one have failed. During the cold war, there were nuclear shelters to house 114% of the population, providing refuge for everyone at home or at work. In other countries the leaders have shelters.

International agreements (such as the Abraham Accords) become straightforward if they must be endorsed by the people at referendum. The negotiators need no "tough bargaining skills" for their interlocutors know that they must find an agreement that will meet the citizens' approval at referendum, otherwise the whole discussion is in vain. Negotiators cannot be seduced by glitzy accommodations or extravagant ceremonies; and third party mediation, normal in the Middle East, is out of the question.

### ***Stable multiparty cabinet***

After the general election every four years, the federal cabinet of seven ministers is elected by secret ballot of a combined sitting of the two houses. Mostly, the current ministers are re-elected; since 1848 just four ministers who stood were not re-elected.

At present, the cabinet consists of two members from the free market party, one from the traditionalist conservative party, two from the socialist party and two from the populist people's party. These parties have constituted the cabinet since 1943; the party representation in cabinet has varied by one seat on nine occasions since 1848. Such a seat change counts as a major political event.

Compare politicking in other democracies where one side wins and the other loses; leaders rise and leaders fall; a single by-election can topple a government. No Swiss government can "fall;" the system lets everyone win a little, gives everyone influence.

In parliamentary democracies it is thought that a "head of state" (monarch or figurehead president) is needed who "stands above the fray." In Switzerland there is no fray.

In other democracies if no party has a majority it causes a "hung parliament" and concern for "political paralysis." The Swiss parties are just as convinced they have The Truth as parties elsewhere but since no party can ever win, they must accept each other. It is hard to get legislation through the Swiss parliament but the result—the social and economic record—is the best in the world.

Why don't two or more parties combine to form a majority and so appoint all seven ministers to "form a government" as is done in all other parliamentary democracies? Such a government would never succeed in passing legislation. There is no struggle for power because there is no prize of power; cabinet and legislature can only *propose* a law. Because the people have a veto, a new law has to please everyone or it will provoke a facultative referendum. A big party enjoys little advantage so there is no incentive to form coalitions.

In most democracies, ministerial portfolios are awarded by patronage to pay off political debts and to placate quarrelsome factions; there are usually a couple of dozen of them. Switzerland has seven, allocated by open process, and the country runs like a Swiss watch.

### ***One year term limit***

The chair of the cabinet is the president of the republic. The president and vice-president are elected from the seven ministers at an annual combined parliamentary sitting. The new president is normally the previous year's vice-president. The outgoing president cannot be elected to either position.

In usual representative democracies, politicians strive for personal and party domination and, when they achieve it, they often use their power to distort the rules in their favour. In Switzerland, neither executive nor legislature can compel law so such distortion is ruled out; nevertheless, the Swiss take the further precaution against leadership lust by imposing a one-year term on the president.

In modern economies, rules try to prevent market domination; in Switzerland rules prevent political domination.

### ***Elections and campaigns***

In most of the democratic world, elections are a competition for political power and it is believed that transfer of power after an election—new leaders with new policies in control of the treasury—is an indicator of a well-functioning democracy. Switzerland is the world's most democratic country and almost nothing changes with an election.

Competing for power is not itself democratic; competing to become the leader is genetically programmed into social animals and the human leadership competition is particularly savage. Democracy—rule by the people—is a recent invention which tames it but in all democracies except Switzerland, the elected politicians are still the leaders; they make laws and enforce them. This system, so-called “representative democracy,” where the people elect professional rulers to rule for them, can eliminate the murder but, though the back-stabbing is metaphorical, the system is still driven by the ancient imperative of social dominance.

Most of the world's 190-odd countries have some form, or pretence, of representative democracy but only a couple of dozen are stable. Those countries work incomparably better than autocracies yet the power is still in the hands of a few leaders and the competition is all-pervading: no action, no plan, no statement is made by the political leadership without first weighing its effect on the next election. This self-interest is very often a greater influence on a policy decision than the policy's actual governance effects. Swiss politicians suffer no such distraction.

In the democracies where two parties vie for leadership, no opportunity is missed to insult or ridicule the other side and colleagues on the same side sometimes betray each other in their eagerness to lead. The quarrelling and personal attacks create a poisonous atmosphere, encourage extremism and ruthlessness, and make politics repugnant to the general population. This antagonism is intrinsically unstable and the vast majority of countries cannot keep it functioning. It would be deadly to a one-state Palestine-Israel. It has, indeed, been deadly in Palestine and in Israel. Because Swiss legislators are not



lawmakers but law proposers, the political contest is over policy, not power, so the division is manifold, not binary, and is stable.

In the other established democracies, the primary experience of politics is the drama of the leadership competition. Who is doing well in the polls? Who can form a government? Will there be political deadlock? One party wins and its supporters rejoice while the opposition grieves. The leadership contest is as exciting today as it has been for millions of years but it has nothing to do with good governance.

In the usual led democracies the people delegate lawmaking to elected representatives and everywhere the representatives impose laws the people do not want and decline to make laws the people do want. In those instances the people are not ruling but are being ruled. Neither defect afflicts Switzerland. If democracy means rule by the people, Switzerland is by far the world's most democratic country.

Swiss elections are vigorously contested but it is not the government that goes to the polls; it is the parliamentarians and the parties. No leader boasts of government achievements and foretells further blessings if re-elected. There are no specific promises, no accusations of broken promises, no "pork barrelling" (diversion of public funds to buy favour for one party), and no gerrymandering (manipulation of electoral boundaries to favour one party). Parliamentary party representation may change by a few seats but the government does not change.

In other democracies elections tame leaders by keeping politicians frightened for their jobs. A position as one of the seven Swiss ministers is as secure as any job and the part-time parliamentarians do not depend on their positions for their livelihood.

### ***To pass a law...***

In other democracies leaders typically claim to have consulted widely; in Switzerland consultation is needed to get laws passed. To maximise the chance of success of a proposed law, the cabinet's first move is the *Vernehmlassung*, an investigation which asks possible stakeholders for their views. The resulting report is submitted to one of the houses along with the draft law. The bill goes to the relevant standing committee which, after considering it, may present it to the house.

The bill has to pass two houses where no party has a majority. If the houses can't agree, the bill dies (but the cabinet does not suffer the loss of prestige it does in other democracies). In representative democracies, laws are backroom compromises, shaped to satisfy the factions and their (financial) supporters. Bills are then forced through the legislature by the government majority. In Switzerland it is out in the open and the record shows that unless a bill passes

with a high level of legislative support, it is likely to prompt a facultative referendum and then the whole exercise may be in vain.

World wide, career civil servants roll their eyes at the ephemerality of their political masters, perceived amateurs who strut for an electoral cycle and are then replaced by another lot with different, even opposite, policies. In Switzerland, no change of the executive occurs at election time; no program or policy begun by a previous government is abandoned by the next; no leaders claim credit for a particular project. Cabinet, bureaucrats, and legislature work to make law the people will accept.

Because the federal government has no power to impose a law, small states and the minorities do not fear victimisation. Some say Switzerland does not have a government, only an administration. It is the world's the best administered country.

### ***Urgency law***

The requirement for a new law to sit idle for 100 days causes delay, and a petition of 50,000 signatures causes further delay (at least). So the constitution provides for an "urgency law" which comes into effect immediately after it is passed by both houses. Perhaps predictably, the politicians overused the urgency provision and in 1949 the people changed the constitution to restrict it. It is now rare.

### ***The court is subject to law***

Judges of the federal court are elected by a combined sitting of the two houses for six-year terms. Given the multiparty make-up of the parliament, "stacking" the court is impossible; it would anyway serve little purpose for the court cannot criticise federal laws.

In many democracies a law can be challenged on grounds of contravening the constitution and the court's power to overrule is considered a safeguard against oppressive law. However, such a court veto power undermines democracy for it makes laws by the elected representatives provisional, which can make legislating tentative, careful not to offend the unelected judges. It also reduces a referendum to an opinion poll staking a claim. Swiss citizens voting at a referendum know they are making the final decision.

With both politicians and judges prevented from actually ruling, death threats and attacks, common in other democracies, are pointless.

### ***Federalism***

Civil harmony is facilitated if people who dislike each other can live apart. A federation separates cultures. In a multi-state Palestine-Israel, different states would reflect the several religious and secular adherences. A citizen may live anywhere but most will live with their familiar language and religion.

Federalism means the states rule themselves except for specified matters (external affairs, defence, immigration, communications, currency...) which are the responsibility of the federal government. The more limited the federal authority, the greater the states' self-rule. The Swiss constitution is guided by the principle of subsidiarity: rule should be exercised at the lowest level possible. The federal and canton governments are required to cooperate; federal taxes are collected by the cantons and federal law is mostly enforced by the cantons. Cantonal powers are also minimal vis-à-vis the municipalities.

In federations, the centre has a tendency to expand at the expense of the periphery, so states need recourse against an overweening federal government. In many federations, a state may challenge the federal government in court. In Switzerland, where the court has no relevant power, the people decide: eight canton governments can call a national referendum to reject a federal law. Such referendums are very rare.

Relations between Germany and France have been, for hundreds of years (or millennia), appalling. Peace between these two countries was the motivation for creating the European Union's forerunner, the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. Unprecedented peace and prosperity followed. The EU, an incipient federation, has succeeded.

Determining the boundaries of the states of Israel-Palestine will be a monumental negotiation, just as it was in Switzerland in 1815. After Napoleon's ouster, the great powers wanted a neutral, republican Switzerland and pressured the fractious, independent cantons, some of which were monarchies, into settling their border disputes and agreeing to a confederal treaty. This was achieved largely due to dogged shuttle diplomacy by Ioannis Kapodistrias, a Greek diplomat in the service of the Russian czar. Two centuries on, the task of a Middle East Kapodistrias will be at least as tough. Still, finding the borders of two dozen states in Israel-Palestine should be easier than for two states.

The principle would be that those who want to rule themselves should do so. Mistakes may occur but state borders can be adjusted, especially if there are no leaders to stand in the way. In Switzerland, a new canton, Jura, was created by national referendum in 1978. In 1996 another federal referendum agreed for a municipality to leave Bern and join Jura.

State size is not important. Swiss canton populations vary between 16,000 for Appenzell Innerrhoden and 1.5 million for Zurich. They vary in area from 37 square km for Basel-Stadt and 7,105 square km for Grisons. Switzerland has no capital city.

The states comprising Israel-Palestine would compete economically. For a couple of generations they would show large disparities in wealth and it would be the federal government's task to mitigate this.

### **Taxation**

Swiss tax structure and maximum tax rates are set out in the constitution. Canton taxes, too, are subject to popular determination. As a percentage of GDP, Swiss tax revenue is, with the US, the lowest of the developed economies.

The common view is that if the people were in control they would wreck the economy by taxing the rich to buy bread and circuses. It is true that Swiss taxes are biased to favour the poor. Income tax varies from zero to 60 per cent. The value added tax (VAT) is 8.1 per cent with many lower exceptions. In the rest of Europe it is between 20 and 27 percent. (The EU requires a minimum of 15 percent.) There are no circuses but the health care, education, and transport systems are first-rate.

The economy is not wrecked. On the contrary, Switzerland is the most prosperous of all the industrialised countries.

### **Corruption**

In other democracies, it is normal for big business and other sectional interests to donate to political parties with a view to receiving favours. The Swiss parties have no favours to dispense. Sectional interests lobby during the *Vernehmlassung* consultation—which is its purpose. There are no restrictions to spending on referendum campaigns.

In other democracies, environmentalists oppose geological exploration though it is useful scientific research. They know that if valuable resources are discovered, the enormous sums involved will influence the political leadership, possibly covertly, and it will be in a context lacking comparable financial support for the environment. But where the people have the final say, bribing politicians (or assassinating them) is pointless. Special interests can spend money to try to influence a popular vote but that is expensive and known to the voters.

### **Populism**

The Swiss version of Haider/le Pen/Wilders/Trump is Christoph Blocher. His populist activism built up the old People's Party to be the largest, currently 28% of lower house seats. As elsewhere, the increase was at the cost of traditionalist conservatives. Other democracies fear populist parties; mainstream parties typically swear never to have any dealings with them and take measures, such as changing the rules and forming strategic alliances, to exclude the populists from taking power—which tends to prove the populists' point.

Polities which have leaders are democratic to the extent everyone gets a fair chance of leading. This can be by taking turns or by sharing. It is undemocratic if

the system systematically excludes a significant group. In Switzerland, where no one leads, the populism was simply incorporated in the government: the conservatives lost a seat in cabinet and the People's Party gained a second one. Society's lowest socio-economic strata thus gained representation commensurate with their votes. Twenty years on, the country continues to thrive; no one is concerned that populism will take over.

Blocher himself served a single term (2004-7) in cabinet as justice minister; he was a nuisance and is one of those four (since 1848) not re-elected by the parliament.

Populism is generally associated with anti-immigrant agitation and some of the anti-Islam publicity in Switzerland achieved world-wide notoriety. Yet the immigrant population (foreign-born and their offspring) is around 30 per cent, which is double the level of the rest of Europe.

### ***Minority oppression***

In 670 Swiss federal referendums, two have been widely construed as imposing on a minority. In 1893, a popular initiative altered the constitution to forbid the bleeding of a slaughtered animal without anaesthetic, and in 2009 another forbade the building of minarets. In both cases, opponents claimed the new laws constituted minority oppression.

Objection to the minaret ban was from middle-class and leadership circles, and the objection was not only to the ban, but to the referendum process itself. People who would claim to support democracy, citizens who were life-long beneficiaries of democracy, turned against democracy when the result displeased them. There are always complaints from those disappointed by a referendum result but in this case they attempted to reverse it by petitioning an international court. It illustrates a dismal political universal: however loud the verbal endorsement of democracy, those with power are not democrats at heart. The European Court of Human Rights (Switzerland is a signatory) dismissed the application because the applicants did not plan to build minarets.

Across Europe, political leaders released statements objecting to the ban yet polls indicated that their citizens would have voted with the Swiss. Democracy and leadership are fundamentally incompatible.

As oppressions, the slaughtering and minaret restrictions might be compared with the outrages committed since 1848 in and by the democracies which have leaders.

In federal Switzerland the minority French and Italians do not fear the large German majority. The three snipe at each other yet form the world's most successful country—more successful, by every measure, than Germany or France or Italy. A Muslim majority in multi-state Israel-Palestine will be of no

political consequence as long as there are no leaders. This is achieved if the constitution provides that the executive government only propose laws which the people can veto, and if a change to the constitution requires a majority of states as well as a majority of votes.

### ***Minimising identity politics***

The purpose of politics is to cope with culture and where the politics is effective, the salience of emotional attachments and identities gives way to rational values. On the whole, the established democracies succeed in this and values everywhere settle in as left and right. In leaderless Switzerland, values are expressed through not two but four rational positions: free market right, traditionalist conservative right, left, and populist right. Parties representing these four perspectives dominate the legislature; they have constituted the cabinet since 1943.

These four ideologies are present in all democracies but the struggle for power causes binary polarisation because the free marketeers and the conservatives need to combine in order to counter the left. The result, where it works, is intermittent left-right transfer of power. This can be stable, however if the two sides spend more energy manoeuvring for electoral advantage than on running the country, populism will rear its head.

## **LEADERSHIP**

In an interview with the New York Times, Nimrod Novik, former adviser to Shimon Peres said, "I don't believe that the problem is the public, nor do I believe that the core issues of security, settlements, Jerusalem, borders, refugees are insurmountable. I think the problem is leadership."

All the world's political problems are caused by leadership. Leaders have made a hash of the Jew-Arab relations since the late nineteenth century. To solve the conflict at any time since then would have been easier than it is now; through the whole period the bouts of terrorism and reprisal became more and more extreme. The leaders today persist with the policies that, for a century, steadily made things worse: Israel continues to take Palestinian land and Palestinians continue to attack Israelis. Indications are that the present leaders of both sides are content for it to go on forever. To insist, as many do, that resolution lies with leadership defies reason.

Leaders exploit social cleavages to keep their positions. The Gaza war is in Netanyahu's interest, not Israel's. Hamas leaders, too, prefer the fight to continue. The US has little real interest in Israel but the US leadership fears the Israel lobby's power. Middle East peace is thwarted by leaders' distorted incentives.

The Swiss understand the menace of political leadership. The president of the republic is limited to a one year term, the presidents of the two houses are limited to one year and the presidents of parliamentary committees are limited to two years. The Swiss system stops aggrandisement before it starts.

Novik: "I, having watched so many leaders close by and from a distance, we cannot predict until one is tested."

Occasionally, a leader passes the test. In 1847 the Swiss confederate General, Guillaume Henri Dufour, charged with bringing rebel Catholic cantons to heel, defied the hotheads and, with a strong army behind him, verbally persuaded the cantons, one by one, to surrender. The civil war lasted a month and caused about 100 deaths. Dufour's resolute and compassionate action was probably a key to the acceptance of federation.

In 2008, when Pakistani terrorists fell upon the Taj Hotel and other sites in Mumbai, murdering about 170 people, the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, declined to attack Pakistan in response, on the grounds that it would distract from the gravity of the original assault.

Had Israel responded to the October 7 attack by simply mending the fence and rectifying its defective watchkeeping, all Jews would be safer today and Israel could have negotiated hostage releases with the sympathy of the whole world. Hamas would have been universally discredited including by Gazans. Instead, Hamas is more supported than ever, Israel has sullied its reputation, and hostages are still held. It is not in the interest of the either leadership to release the hostages.

It could be that the leaders' long-standing program is now no longer viable. The devastation of Gaza has erased the goodwill Israel built since its founding. Western leadership, at present stubbornly supportive of Israel, will eventually respond to popular sentiment and Israel will be friendless. The attack on Gaza was almost certainly a strategic mistake.

Novik explaining Israel's disorganised response to the October 7 attack:

And suddenly people realized that when a prime minister appoints incompetent ministers just because of loyalty and legal problems, and those ministers appoint their own hacks to run their ministries, and they castrate the professionals, and when this goes on for year after year after year, then the professionals get tired of suggesting legitimate proposals, reforms, whatever.

This shambles is a direct consequence of relying on leaders. Israel's democratic structure is one which has proved viable in a couple of dozen countries but those countries are not surrounded by hatred or infested with fanatics. Conventional representative democracy does not suit Israel.

With the advent of the Swiss federation in 1848, the age of local heroes ended. Swiss reformers went on to mitigate the depredations of international leadership by creating the Red Cross, hosting the League of Nations and, after WW2, by hosting most United Nations agencies even though Switzerland was not a member of the UN.

In the 1930s, fronts arose advocating the “Führerprinzip” (leader principle) which had come to dominate in neighbouring countries. Though supported by the leadership of the Catholic cantons, they were comprehensively rejected by the voters.

To introduce a multi-state Palestine-Israel federation will require international support and pressure, just as the creation of confederate Switzerland did in 1815. A necessary first step would be public recognition of what everyone knows and leaders everywhere pretend not to know: neither two-state nor one-state models are practical. Given the relentless promotion of these non-solutions, merely acknowledging this reality would be an act of positive leadership.

Humans naturally look to leaders. Our parents lead us, and throughout our lives we require competent people to lead us. We like to lead and we like to be led; we’re made that way. We will always rely on leaders at work, for soldiering, for sport, and for faith, but in politics relying on leaders brings war and misery; October 7 is actually normal in historical perspective, as is the destruction of Gaza.

What makes political leaders great, is conquering and colonising. The advancements in science and arts which enable us to lead decent lives have been despite political leaders, who often ruthlessly retarded progress. The invention of representative democracy with its curbing of leaders delivered a huge improvement compared with non-democracy; the absence of political leaders in Switzerland delivers the world’s highest standard of living.

Middle East leadership has been poison and it will continue to inflame the conflict. Ordinary people get along with each other so the chance for peace is always there—if ordinary people rule.

New York Times journalist, Thomas Friedman: “Israelis and Palestinians are interdependent. ... Each community needs a leader whose actions are motivated by that fundamental truth. Right now, neither has one.” Neither ever will have one. Leadership is not the solution; leadership is the problem.

## ONE-STATE, TWO-STATE, MULTI-STATE

One-state solutions are out of fashion. In such discussion as there is, the expression “binational state” is interchangeable with “one-state.” This is asking for failure as the binary recognition reinforces the two identities and lays the



ground for further destructive irredentism. Moreover, since Christians, Hindus, Samaritans, Druze, and heathens are not actually to be excluded, the term is inaccurate. To think in “bi” terms sabotages discussion and any formal “bi” institutionalisation (as in Lebanon) would undermine the multi-state concept. Languages have to be officially recognised—Switzerland has four national languages—but not religions.

In other democracies there is an opposition party which will govern if the government should fall. This oppositional arrangement is important to the ongoing success of around two dozen of the most stable, decent, and prosperous societies humans have ever known. But such opposition could never work in a one-state Palestine-Israel. In multi-state Switzerland no government-in-waiting exists—and Switzerland is the most stable, decent and prosperous of all.

Two-state solutions for Palestine have been proposed since 1937. It will never happen. The aim of a two-state solution is to separate the conflicting identities. Separation is important but official binary separation reinforces the antagonism. A crucial factor enabling Switzerland’s peacefulness is that the different groups are separated but not into separate countries; separate countries had not been peaceful; peace came with federation in 1848. The tension in Switzerland with Yugoslav and Muslim immigrants is partly because these identities are not separate; they don’t have their own cantons.

Borders between countries are very rigid but state borders can be changed by federal negotiation, especially where the change can be made by the people, without obstruction from leaders seeking to preserve privileges. The most recent Swiss adjustment was the splitting off of a new canton, Jura, from canton Basel in 1976.

In a federation separate living is a voluntary convenience; with separate countries it is a compulsory imposition, and to cross the border involves formalities. In a federation borders are invisible and the people themselves decide separations, collectively and individually. The Jew who chooses to live in a majority Muslim state or vice versa, would simply do so. In an Israel-Palestine federation, many would so choose.

Novik again: “It’s no brainer. If we don’t separate from the Palestinians, we are doomed. That’s 7 million Jews between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River and 7 million Arabs. Either they separate, or the Zionist dream is over.”

So far, the Zionist dream has depended on intermittent large-scale killing of Palestinians. On the West Bank Palestinians are being forcibly replaced by Jews and extreme Jewish elements hope to do the same in Gaza. Separation may be

a no brainer but it is not simple. In 2006, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon cleansed Gaza of Jews and separated it from Israel; we know how that turned out.

Gaza prior to October 7, was a de facto two-state (non-)solution. A federation would create the separation Novik seeks with not one, but several states for Jews. It would do it without forced relocations and, providing there are no leaders, both Jews and Palestinians would be far safer than they are now.

People think in terms of two sides but the sides are not monolithic. The Palestinians are split between Hamas and Fatah and Israel contains religious extremists and moderates. There are large numbers of secular citizens on both sides. Ordinary people want to live decent lives but as long as just two sides are recognised, their antagonistic relationship is reinforced as leaders of each side harp on grievances and point to the evil enemy to bolster internal cohesion and their own status.

The de facto two state separation of the last two decades, was imposed by, and symbolised by, high walls; it led to less and less interaction between Israelis and Palestinians, more and more resentment, and more and more leadership extremism. The outcome was Israeli government incompetence and the Hamas attack.

## MULTI-STATE CONSTITUTION

The principle has to be that the people rule. No arrangement is flawless and to install it will entail myriad compromises. Would-be leaders who try to exploit loopholes will be curbed if the people have the constitutional power to counteract them. Success depends on the integrity of the referendum system; if leaders can interfere with the rules, popular power will be undermined and the endeavour will fail.

The essential feature of a successful multi-state is citizen-rule but a new state has to start somewhere, presumably with some arrangement that a relatively disinterested steering commission introduces. Once established, the people can shape the polity but they will only get to do that if the start design is sufficiently armoured to repel attacks by would-be leaders. The following is an outline copying the Swiss constitution, the only model available.

**Constitutional amendments.** The constitution to be in writing, changed only by referendum with a double majority. A constitutional referendum can be called by parliamentary resolution or by 100,000 signatures gathered within 18 months. The states of the federation rule themselves to the maximum extent.

Signature requirements must be high enough to deter frivolous petitions but low enough to be realistic for ordinary citizens—and thus for the threat of a referendum to be taken seriously by politicians. Providing it starts low, the citizens can raise the signature requirement any time.

**Parliament.** Two houses with equal powers, the lower house of about 250 elected by proportional representation, the upper house comprising two representatives from each of perhaps three dozen states. Elections every four years. MPs paid to attend sittings four times a year for three weeks each time.

House presidents to serve a one year term and committee chairs to be elected for a maximum of two years, with no re-election permitted.

**Cabinet.** Seven-member cabinet elected by secret ballot at a combined sitting of the houses following four-yearly national elections. Cabinet chair and vice-chair elected annually by a combined sitting whereby the current chair cannot stand.

**Judges.** Supreme court judges elected for six years by a combined parliamentary sitting. The court can make no comment on federal laws.

**Facultative referendum.** New laws to come into effect 100 days after passing both houses, unless a petition of 50,000 signatures or eight state governments demand a facultative referendum. Decrees binding on the public are also liable to a facultative referendum.

**International relations.** Foreign treaties must be approved by referendum.

**Representation.** Until the people decide otherwise, there should be no formal rules dictating that certain offices are reserved for any identity. Where there is no power incentive to favour one group over another, politicians and officials will be free to try to create balanced representation. Since 1999 the Swiss constitution requires an equitable distribution of seats among the cantons and language groups but it does not specify quotas.

## WOULD IT WORK?

Old hatreds die hard and a transition is cowboy time. It is an intimidating project; there are statutes to be harmonised, school textbooks to be rewritten, memorials to current heroes to be archived. There may be issues to be managed provisionally to exclude opportunists and would-be leaders from subverting popular control.

Would a cabinet containing both Jews and Muslims work? It should, providing the ministers' tasks are administration, not seeking to increase their power. The people who stood for election to a multi-ethnic ministry would be those prepared to work with others. Plenty of such people presently cooperate across the Palestine-Israel identity divide; they just don't have political influence.

In essence, administration of police, hospitals, roads, and so on has nothing to do with ethnicity. Providing the executive cannot impose law, but only propose laws which the people can veto, there is no point in trying to favour one religion or one political ideology for it will be vetoed. In Switzerland, cabinet

solidarity obtains, just as it does in democracies where the ministers are competing for personal prestige. If international treaties are also subject to popular veto, politicians cannot build a power base by international grandstanding.

With the laws under popular control the usual provision for a parliamentary motion of no confidence in the executive is not needed.

A democratic Israel-Palestine would transform the region. Israel's enemies would evaporate upon the creation of a functioning Palestine-Israel. Hezbollah would disband its military and concentrate on Lebanese politics (or Levant politics if Lebanon joined the federation). As non-state militants lose their purpose and melt away, Iran's aversion to Israel would become incoherent; the theocracy in Iran would be isolated and the struggle of ordinary Iranians for a normal life might make gains.

Multi-state Israel-Palestine would have large states and small states but if each has two representatives in the "states' house" then, assuming both houses have equal powers, ethnic numbers don't matter. Canton Zurich has 1.6 million inhabitants and canton Uri has 37,300. The important thing is not size but that everyone gets their own state.

There would be perhaps three dozen states in federal Palestine-Israel. All citizens would be equal including their liability to military service.

The aim is for normal political divisions to evolve and this can only come from the people. If those who would incite identity division are excluded from political power at the national level, the people have a chance to separate their cultural identity from their political identity. World-wide, the normal political division is left versus right but in Switzerland, where party size is not of great advantage, the division is fourfold: free market liberal (FDP), Burkean conservative (CVP), left (SP), and populist (SVP). This may be the natural division of human ideologies. At any rate, the Swiss cabinet reflects these rational values and does not reflect the emotional ethnic and cultural identities which divide the people and the cantons.

## A DARK PROGNOSIS

The Israel project is failing. Israel was created to be a safe place for Jews but most Jews live outside Israel and they are much safer. Moreover, the flawed safety Israel does provide, requires the killing of thousands of non-Jews. Israel wins every military and diplomatic battle yet never wins the war. The Palestinian project is an even greater failure—yet they never lose the war.

We may expect world leaders to continue the two-state bluster, proposing fair elections with honourable leaders in a hypothetical Palestinian state and assuring Israel that the US and the Arab countries will guarantee its security. But

Israel doesn't believe it. Israel can't afford to believe it. The only security Israel can see is either ethnic cleansing or to surround the Palestinians with high fences and automated machine guns. Although this strategy failed terribly on October 7, and although it will generate further hatred and erode whatever sympathy the world still has for Israel, this is what Israel's leaders feel is necessary. And this is what they will do. For the near future, Israel will continue to occupy Gaza, sporadically killing groups of civilians, with no long term plan.

In short, the stupidity is set to continue for a second century. We can see no fundamental improvement in Israel's security and no Palestinian security, prosperity or dignity. All we see are a continuation of the tried and tested preconditions for yet another appalling blood-letting. Everyone can see it; no one can do anything about it, and however they may suffer, the Palestinians will survive. International leaders will come and go, holding their high level meetings, building their careers, and continuing to achieve less than nothing.

The only foreseeable change is that, though the Israel lobby will fight a comprehensive rear-guard action around the world, bit by bit national leaders, both democratic and autocratic, will respond to their peoples' unwillingness to support Israel. It is foreseeable that secular Israelis, seeking to raise families in safety, will emigrate, leaving Israel to the bloody-minded. Israel will turn more authoritarian and the Zionist dream will appear ever more extreme and ever more unreachable.

A multi-state Israel-Palestine federation could save the dream and offer Palestinians a dignified future. Implementing the Swiss multi-state system is a massive undertaking but it is the tried and tested way to deal with bad leaders and deep cultural antagonisms.

## CLOSING REMARKS

The first step toward peace in the Middle East, is to recognise (a) the two-state solution is not viable, (b) the one-state solution is not viable and, (c) dependence on leaders is not viable. The second step is to draw the logical consequences: a multi-state without leaders is needed.

Over the last 176 years, while millions died in Europe at the behest of leaders promoting this or that identity or ideology, Switzerland, divided and leaderless, knew peace. In the 79 years of peace in Europe since WW2, with the people in charge, Switzerland's stability and prosperity has exceeded that of all other democracies.

Get the institutions right, and it will not matter whether Arabs or Jews are in a majority. The right institutions are the ones which preclude any power advantage to a particular group and the only way that can be ensured is if the people can veto laws. In Switzerland the German majority enjoys no special

privileges and the French, Italian and Romansh do not live in fear. If there is no serious political advantage to being Jew or Muslim, plenty of people will consider themselves non-binary.

Switzerland calls itself a “nation of the will” meaning that there is no natural cultural binding cement. To realise Palestine-Israel will take even more will and if the multi-state solution ever gains traction, it will be through the will of the people, not their leaders. Leaders everywhere will fight it but if, somehow, the people can speak, it may have a chance.

Do Jews—the people, not their leaders—want peace? If yes, then Zion must be realised as independent states in a federation ruled by its citizens.

Do Palestinians—the people, not their leaders—want peace? If yes, then the right of return will have to be within a federation ruled by its citizens.

Do the peoples of the Mediterranean—the people, not their leaders—long for peace? A citizen-ruled Palestine-Israel would transform the Middle East.□

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