

# International Forces in an Israeli-Palestinian Agreement

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**A**lready in the first stages of the violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict that erupted in September 2000, the Israeli defense establishment concluded that the violence was a premeditated strategic move by the Palestinian leadership with the aim of forcing Israel to surrender what it had been unwilling to concede within the framework of political negotiations.

According to this reading, even though the Palestinians are weaker than Israel from a military point of view, they have two principal objectives in using violence to manipulate the course of events to their advantage. The first relies on their perception of Israel's "softness," that is, on the Israeli public's inability to withstand significant losses (the model of the war in southern Lebanon). The second intends to force the "internationalization" of the conflict, that is, the creation of a situation requiring the international community to intervene and impose a solution (the Balkan model). Leaving aside the question – open to debate – whether the outburst and continuation of Palestinian violence was in fact based on calculated, strategic thinking, it is now possible to state that after almost two and a half

years of the Intifada, these two scenarios have not proceeded

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according to plan. The Israeli public has displayed steady endurance, and there has been no internationalization along the lines of what the Palestinians envisioned would bring them closer to their goals. Until now international intervention has been limited, engaged mainly in mediating between the two sides to end the violence and renew the political process.

The combined failure of the two objectives, along with the heavy price paid by the Palestinians, has brought the majority of the Palestinian leadership to the realization that the violent confrontation should be halted

and the political process resumed. This understanding has coincided with pressure for internal reforms in the Palestinian administrative system and generated discussion among factions involved in violence about restraining their activity. However, the Palestinian leadership under Arafat's authority lacks real ability to translate this awareness into a situation change. The chances for genuine reform are extremely slim, largely because conditions in the Palestinian territories are semi-anarchical, as various armed Islamic groups and the Fatah's Tanzim operate according to their individual sets of priorities, and not necessarily in agreement with one another. Arafat himself acts independently of the rest of the Palestinian leadership, refuses to confront the armed groups within his camp and in rival camps, and apparently still clings to the belief that the ongoing violence will advance his national objectives.

Furthermore, since Israel does not believe that inter-factional Palestinian dialogue will produce a ceasefire, it is unwilling to consider internal Palestinian dynamics and adjust its policy in ways that could assist Palestinians working to end the

violence. According to the Israeli assessment, an accommodation of that sort would render the Jewish public vulnerable to more attacks, and therefore it is unreasonable to incur such a substantive risk for a process whose end is a foregone conclusion. As a result, despite a genuine interest among many on both sides to terminate the violence and resume political dialogue, Israelis and Palestinians are locked in a vicious cycle of action and reaction, amidst an atmosphere of increasing mutual distrust.

In light of the ongoing impasse with the Palestinians, the repeated call by many for international intervention in the form of mediating forces takes on potential new importance. Israel has substantial experience with international forces, beginning with the military observers of UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) who were stationed in Israel from 1948 until 1967. The UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force) was established in 1956 to monitor the ceasefire following the Sinai Campaign. Agreements reached in the seventies between Israel and Egypt and Syria mandated international monitoring to ensure the separation of forces: UNEF II in the Sinai desert, UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) on the Golan Heights, and the MFO (Multinational Force and Observers) as part of the peace agreement with Egypt. Since 1978, UNIFIL has been deployed in southern Lebanon, and small contingents were involved in

agreements with the Palestinians, such as TIPH (Temporary International Presence in Hebron).

The success of these various international forces was mixed. Overall, international forces stationed as part of peace agreements were effective and added to the stability created by the agreements. Forces stationed under different circumstances have generally been more problematic, and the public debate in

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Israel regarding international monitoring forces has focused on these more problematic occasions. Among these were the unilateral decision by UN Secretary-General U Thant to withdraw UN forces from the Sinai, which contributed to the outbreak of the Six Day War, and the primarily negative experience with UNIFIL in southern Lebanon, a force with a controversial mandate decided unilaterally without consulting Israel and stationed according to a UN Security Council resolution. As a result, there is a general tendency in Israel to oppose the stationing of international forces and to emphasize

the potential risks they embody: restrictions on IDF activity; predisposed bias against Israel; diplomatic complications between Israel and countries represented in the international force.

Yet precisely because of the deadlock with the Palestinians, and following the alleviation of fear, at least for now, over the dangers of international intervention in an imposed agreement, Israel should consider whether the involvement of international forces would serve Israeli interests. Specifically, the use of international forces as they have been deployed elsewhere over the past decade, as a means of reducing conflict violence, renewing negotiations, and at a later date supervising the implementation of a peace agreement, must be evaluated as a tool that might benefit Israel. This assessment should analyze the experience accrued in the actual deployment of international forces as "peacekeeping" and "peacemaking" missions in the Middle East and other regions, and then consider how the experience applies to the special circumstances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **A Changed Environment for International Forces**

Over the last decade changes occurred both in the scope of the deployment of United Nations forces and multinational troops on peacekeeping and peacemaking assignments and in the nature of their operations. These changes reflect the convergence of several factors:

■ The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disbanding of the Soviet bloc resulted in an upsurge of national and ethnic conflicts, especially within and between former Warsaw Pact and FSU countries. Hence the growing demand to dispatch multinational forces to the focal points of various disputes.

■ The end of the superpower confrontation also alleviated complexities of decision making in international forums regarding international involvement in conflicts. This has been reflected in the relative ease with which organizations like the UN Security Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were able to make operative decisions.

■ The concept of "sovereignty" is much less sacred than it had been. Issues that may have been considered a state's internal affairs, such as human rights and the treatment of minorities, have become matters of international concern, whereby gross violation of the accepted norms in these areas is deemed ample justification for international intervention.

■ Multinational forces have assumed more ambitious assignments. While in the past they were deployed primarily on peacekeeping missions whose objective was to stabilize an agreement between rival states (such as the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that brought multinational forces to Sinai), in the last decade multinational forces have been engaged in "peacemaking" or "peace-imposing"

assignments, and in the even more ambitious task of "state building."

■ In the past, international forces were primarily UN troops under the control of the UN Secretary-General. In recent years, however, there have been increasing instances of multinational forces that are not UN troops. These forces may be divided into two categories: those without any connection to the UN, such as the multinational force in Sinai or OSCE



units presently active in East Europe; and forces deployed under a UN mandate, following a Security Council decision, that function as a sub-contractor for the UN - for example, the coalition that fought against Iraq in 1991 or the international force under Australian command that operated in East Timor. The growth of this trend has been due to the general awareness of the clumsiness and inefficiency of UN forces, and the availability of other organizations, such as NATO, to take on these missions following the disintegration of the Soviet bloc.

■ Many countries are more willing to participate in missions of this type for two reasons: one, the traditional

threats that their military forces were designed to deal with have disappeared; and two, these countries have come to the conclusion that channeling international forces to regional and local trouble spots extinguishes conflagrations that otherwise could spread and threaten their own security. For example, it is clear to West European countries that instability in East Europe and North Africa would result in an influx of illegal immigration, an intrusion that is perceived as a major security threat.

■ Various countries and international organizations have merged doctrines for troop deployment on peacekeeping and peacemaking missions based on detailed analyses and accumulated experience of such assignments and their many failures.

## The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

An examination of the potential contribution of various forms of involvement by multinational forces in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis requires a study of the three main deployment patterns:

■ Peacekeeping forces that oversee the implementation and stabilization of existing agreements, be they written and signed, or less formal understandings. These forces are generally stationed in a buffer zone between the opposing sides and are involved in monitoring and verification assignments.

■ Peacemaking forces that try to alter the prevailing state of affairs between two countries or within one country.



These forces impose a ceasefire on the two sides and are responsible for ensuring the security in the area.

■ International forces that are engaged in state building. In addition to enforcing a ceasefire and supervising a dismantling of illegal militias, these forces help create and advance essential state institutions such as: a constitution, legal and executive branches, a judiciary system, a police department, free elections, financial institutions, and other key civic institutions.

Most of the history of international forces lies with the first type of force, which is also the most clearly defined and the easiest to implement. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it would apply to the period following a signed agreement, for it is already clear that if Israeli-Palestinian agreements are reached, whether permanent or interim, international parties will play an important role in their implementation. The past two years have reinforced the hostile antagonism between the two sides, with each party suspicious of the other's intentions and ability to abide by mutual agreements. Therefore, it will be necessary for a multinational force to fulfill four main assignments:

■ Monitoring the agreement, especially its security aspects.

■ Assuming responsibility for particularly problematic areas – for example, those that Israel would be unwilling to transfer to Palestinian hands due to deep mistrust, yet if left in Israel's hands would infringe upon Palestinian sovereignty and thus

create an untenable situation for the Palestinians. A prominent example of this is the supervision of border crossings into Jordan and Egypt. For the Palestinians, supervision by Israeli hands is tantamount to continued Israeli occupation. For Israel, Palestinian supervision at the crossings implies a glaring opportunity for arms smuggling and terrorist infiltration into the

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Palestinian areas, in violation of the agreement signed by both sides.

■ Guaranteeing the security of the Palestinian state that is almost certain to be established with the signing of an agreement and that will be demilitarized according to Israel's demands.

■ Acting as a deterrent against the penetration of foreign elements seeking to destabilize the Palestinian state and operate against Israel.

Yet at present, the chances of any kind of a bilateral agreement appear extremely low. The situation, therefore, calls for a serious examination of how to proceed from focusing on what kind of agreement

will be reached to fostering a process that will yield an agreement. Thus, it is imperative to evaluate the ambitious options of deploying multinational forces on "peace imposing" or perhaps even "state building" missions. While currently these solutions seem fictive only, continuing loss of control by the Palestinian leadership could lead to a condition of total anarchy that would force Israel to decide between two options: complete reoccupation of the territories and a return to the military administration of all Palestinian areas, or the transfer of control of at least some of these territories to an international party that would restore law and order and assist in the construction of basic state institutions such as the police force, judicial system, and other components of a governmental system. The goal of the multinational force would be to create the conditions for an agreement to be signed, enabling the State of Israel and a Palestinian state to coexist peacefully.

The possibility of realizing this scenario calls for a close look at the international community's experience in the deployment of multinational forces in the last decade. Two examples are of special interest in the Israeli-Palestinian context: Kosovo and East Timor. In each case the country ruling the area in dispute surrendered its control out of either external pressure (Serbia in Kosovo) or internal pressure (Indonesia in East Timor). In both instances, the decision was made to dispatch a multinational force after the situation on the ground



Deployment of UN Forces along Israel's Borders

Source: www.un.org

had deteriorated into total anarchy, rendering self-rule impossible by the local population. Multinational forces were thus dispatched to enforce law and order, and later, as part of the greater project of state building, to begin establishing national institutions. Until this project is completed, these territories remain in effect UN protectorates.

A similar idea has already been broached by the former American

ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk, who today heads the Saban Center at the Brookings Institute. Assuming that the Palestinians prove incapable of implementing the administrative reforms contained in President Bush's "roadmap," Indyk has suggested that the roadmap include the transfer of the territory designated for the future "provisional" Palestinian state to a "trusteeship" of an international group led by the United States. This

international group would bear the responsibility for maintaining law and order and would engage in erecting democratic institutions, so that the Palestinians could reach a permanent agreement with Israel according to the roadmap's three year timetable. Under the present circumstances, the integration of this idea into the current roadmap and its timetable seems highly unlikely, and before the parties involved will be willing to consider these ideas seriously, a far greater degree of anarchy and crisis must be suffered. Nevertheless, the fact that discussion on the subject has been initiated in the international discourse on solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict indicates that the idea has assumed potential legitimacy.

The deployment of a multinational force in the Israeli-Palestinian arena requires addressing a list of problems that did not figure in the examples of Kosovo and East Timor:

■ In Kosovo and East Timor the population that came under international protection was not a threat to the security of the state from which it seceded (Serbia and Indonesia, respectively). In the Palestinian case it is doubtful whether all of the groups presently involved in terrorism will cease their activity after their land comes under international administration. Israel too would not trust an international force for effectively thwarting Palestinian terrorist attacks.

■ In Kosovo and Indonesia no debate ensued over territory. The UN received the entire areas of Kosovo



and East Timor as protectorates. In the Israeli case debate rages over the territory that would constitute a Palestinian state and over the future of the Jewish settlements located there. Indyk resolved this quandary by proposing that trusteeship could commence on territory already handed over to the Palestinians within the framework of the Oslo Agreements (Areas A and B include 42% of the West Bank's land).

■ The sides involved in Kosovo and East Timor more or less trusted the UN. Israel distrusts the UN and would not agree to territories being handed over to UN protection and control.

## Assessment

The first conclusion that may be drawn, then, is that the modus operandi of multinational deployment would be applicable only after Israel has taken the necessary steps for improving its capability to deal with Palestinian terror, beginning with an operative, physical obstacle separating Israel from the Palestinians. Clearly, the effectiveness of the separation zone will increase as the number of Israelis remaining on the Palestinian side decreases. In this case Israel could allow itself to accept restrictions on its activity inside the Palestinian areas made by the international presence. An obvious corollary is that should

Israel adopt a policy of unilateral separation, it might easily be coordinated with the presence of an international force.

Second, there must be an understanding, at the very least between Israel and the international party, regarding the delineation of the area that will lie within international jurisdiction. The arrangement would be more auspicious if some represen-

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tatives of the Palestinian leadership are also partners to this understanding.

Deployment of an international peace force confirms the end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. This is an important development for moderate Arab states, as an easing of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis lies in their strategic interest. Overall, Arab support for an international force would be particularly helpful.

The UN cannot serve as the international authority, since this would be unacceptable to Israel. However, a group of states trusted by both Israel and the Palestinians could be organized for this task, preferably under United States leadership, as Indyk proposes.

In addition to the deployment of the multinational force for guaranteeing security and civil order, international involvement needs to assume responsibility for building a democratic Palestinian state. As such, a large portion of the international force's activity will consist of construction of civic institutions. The project of democratizing a Palestinian state should influence the international body's preparations, composition, and duties prior to taking control of the area.

The deployment of multinational forces is a complex issue, encompassing many options for international involvement and demanding much more extensive assessment. Although at present for Israel the risks of such a force seem greater than the chances of success, it is important that the potential applications of a solution of this sort be considered seriously. To this end, Israel must overcome its natural antipathy to placing – oft perceived as abandoning – its vital interests in the hands of an international body.