

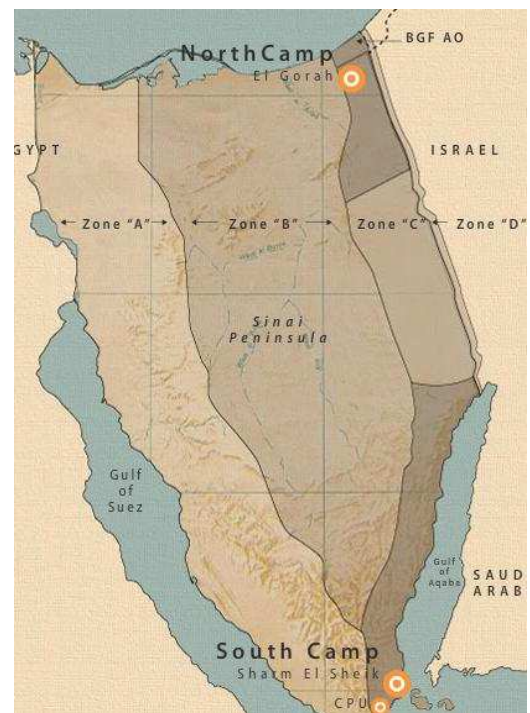


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**Steadfast Vision, Flexible Implementation:  
The Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai  
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On April 25, 1982, the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) began its mission in the Sinai Peninsula to implement the supervisory functions stipulated in the security annex of the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt. In the decades since, and especially over the past five years, the operating environment of the MFO has transformed dramatically, and contributing countries and units have changed. Nonetheless, the Multinational Force continues to fill a critical role in implementing the security regime agreed upon by the leaders of Egypt, Israel, and the US, and does so effectively. The secret of the MFO's success lies in its steadfast adherence to its strategic vision and to its defined purpose, as well as in the flexibility that it has adopted in implementation of the Treaty mission. Both its flexibility and its stability rely on the continued commitment of the parties – as the Force's "owners" – to the agreement, and on their consistent support for the continuation of its mission under new and changing conditions.

The security annex to the Peace Treaty provided for the existence of a strategic demilitarized buffer between Egypt and Israel in the Sinai Peninsula, as an alternative to the presence of the IDF in the area. This arrangement created depth and an early warning zone to minimize the risk of a military clash between Israel and Egypt, and to prevent the recurrence of war between them. To this end, the Sinai region was divided into four geographical strips (Zone A in the west of Sinai, Zone B in the center, Zone C to the west of the Egypt-Israel border, and Zone D to its east) and the military presence permitted in each zone was defined explicitly: up to a mechanized division in Zone A, up to 2 border guard battalions in Zone B, Egyptian civilian police in Zone C, and up to 4



IDF infantry battalions in Zone D. In addition, warplanes and reconnaissance aircraft were prohibited from operating over Sinai Zones B and C.

The Multinational Force and Observers was established as a joint project of Egypt, Israel, and the US to interpose between the parties and to supervise the restrictions in the security annex. Its headquarters and North Camp were located at el-Gorah, its South Camp at Sharm el-Sheikh, and its civilian headquarters in Rome. The Force has observation posts in Zone C, manned by infantry soldiers; operates a Civilian Observer Unit (COU), which carries out periodic inspections throughout the peninsula; has an aviation unit for transport and inspections from the air; and has a Coastal Patrol Unit for supervising the Straits of Tiran area. All of the units are intended to separate the two sides and monitor military activity in the restricted and demilitarized areas, and the headquarters of the Force reports violations to the parties. In order to deal with specific security needs, the parties have agreed from time to time on temporary adjustments in activities and presence of military personnel and equipment, as part of the “Agreed Activities Mechanism,” whereby the parties agree that there shall not be violations determined by the MFO for what otherwise would be military presence or activities prohibited by the limitations set in the Peace Treaty, without prejudice to or change in their acceptance and adherence to the restrictions in the agreement.

This operational routine continued until 2005, when Israel and Egypt signed the Agreed Arrangements for the Rafah area, in preparation for Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip. This Border Guard Force Agreement approved the replacement of an Egyptian police (Central Security Police – CSP) battalion with a Border Guard Forces (BGF) battalion (otherwise prohibited by the security annex to the Treaty), and specified its approved armament, as well as MFO monitoring of the arrangements that were adapted to the new situation resulting from the agreement. During these years, various parties proposed expanding the MFO's mission to include “monitoring” smuggling activity conducted through tunnels from Gaza, arguing that this would aid the fight against terrorism, but the parties to the Treaty and the leadership of the MFO wisely chose to avoid this, keeping the MFO focused on its original mission.

The MFO's operating environment began to change rapidly and drastically following the fall of the Mubarak regime in January 2011, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in 2012, and the Egyptian defense establishment's return to power in 2013. During these years the security situation in Sinai deteriorated, especially since the July 2013 overthrow of then-President Morsi, with increasing terrorist attacks on the part of local and regional jihadist actors gradually developing into a broad campaign between the Sinai Province of the Islamic State and the Egyptian Army and security forces. This chain of developments led to progressive requests by Egypt to increase the military forces that it maintains and

operates in Sinai beyond what is permitted by the Treaty. The jihadist activities also resulted in an increased threat towards MFO bases and forces in the field: at first indirectly, due to the increased threats to transportation and supply routes to MFO bases and posts, and then direct attacks by the so-called Sinai Province.

These changes in the security environment have posed combined challenges to the MFO and to the parties to the Treaty: how the MFO mission should be carried out amidst rising risks and dramatic changes in the Force operating environment, how trust is to be maintained between the parties in such a dynamic environment and rapidly changing situation, and how the security of the Force and the lives of those serving in it should best be protected. Significantly, while the UN force in the Golan Heights, UNDOF, collapsed when subject to terrorist threat and largely lost operational relevance, the MFO, with the active support of the US, Egypt, and Israel, has managed to respond effectively to changed circumstances and adapt and improve methods of operation under new conditions. The security of the Force and means of protecting its personnel and facilities have been improved, high risk outposts were evacuated, the methods of monitoring the situation on the ground have been expanded and diversified, the channels of communication and contacts between the parties have been expanded, and the MFO has both maintained and enhanced the situation updates that it provides to the parties, preventing tensions, suspicions, and distrust.

The changes in MFO operations were based on the following main principles: preservation of the Peace Treaty as well as the restrictions on military presence and operations in the area; necessary exceptions to those restrictions for security purposes, made only by agreement and prior coordination between the parties through the “Agreed Activities” mechanism and under the effective supervision of the MFO; and agreement by the parties that any such exceptions to the Treaty restrictions do not constitute a permanent change in the Treaty, and such changes are temporary and reversible.

This combination has enabled the parties to improve their operational response to increasing threats while maintaining the Peace Treaty and the restrictions of its security annex, to deepen the trust between them, and to improve cooperation in dealing with common threats. Thus, while UN peacekeeping forces in the region have on more than one occasion served as a platform for diplomatic bashing between the sides, through their reporting mechanisms and discussions at the Security Council, the Treaty parties – Egypt and Israel, with the support of the US – have focused on fulfilling the MFO's mission with a practical attitude of joint problem solving. The MFO has a traditional and deliberate policy of very low media exposure, thus facilitating the discreet management of the strategic relations between the parties to the Treaty. For example, in the past the

MFO published its [annual report](#) as a public document, but stopped doing so in 2015 after the reports were used for political ends.

The Force's scale of operations and deployment has changed repeatedly over the years since 1982. The number of remote sites, which in 1982 was 44, dropped to 32 in 1989, and was lowered to 25 manned outposts and three unmanned communications sites in 2015. The outposts were closed mainly due to considerations of operational efficiency and relevance to the mission, and only in the past few years due to security considerations as well. The force numbered approximately 2700 soldiers in the early 1980s, and this number was gradually reduced to approximately 1700 soldiers in 2015.

The MFO's budget is funded primarily by Israel, Egypt, and the US, in equal amounts, and from supplementary donations by other countries. The budget, which in the first few years exceeded \$100 million dollars, was cut in half within a decade, in accordance with the reduction in the size of the force. Since 2009 the MFO has maintained a no-growth core budget, but costs have risen due to rising inflation; in the past five years the overall MFO budget increased significantly due to security and related costs, most of which have been generously covered by the US and donors.

Recently, the Multinational Force completed a comprehensive revision of its operational disposition, which included evacuation of many observation outposts in the north of Sinai, proposals to replace other manned outposts with technological means, and [the transfer](#) of the core of its headquarters and the majority of its forces from North Camp at el-Gorah to South Camp at Sharm el-Sheikh. In the spring of 2016, the Force withdrew from seven outposts in northern Sinai, and in June completed its withdrawal from three additional outposts in central and southern Sinai, while relocating Force headquarters to South Camp. There have been renewed calls in the US to reconsider the continued participation of American forces in the mission due to increasing risks, but the administration continues to express commitment to its part in the mission and to the architecture of peace between Israel and Egypt, which for their part are united in their support for the continued US role in the MFO.

The Multinational Force serves as an exceptional example of a successful peacekeeping force, which operates in the framework of an agreed-upon and well-founded security regime between Israel and its largest neighbor, with the US as strategic guarantor. The keys to the success of the Force thus far have been the continued commitment of the countries partnered in it; its stability and strategic adherence to its original mission and the refraining from expansion into other tasks; and most of all, the tactical flexibility and joint creativity in adapting mission implementation methods to a continuously changing environment, particularly the increasing risks. The test of the Force's success in the future will continue to depend on the ability and commitment of Egypt and Israel to providing

the MFO with a secure operating environment, to guaranteeing its safety, and continue to do all that they can to preserve this essential mechanism serving the architecture of the peace agreement between them.

