

THE RISKS OF FOREIGN PEACEKEEPING FORCES IN THE WEST BANK

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Israel's Experience with International Peacekeepers

During the 1967 Six-Day War, I was a soldier serving in Battalion 202 of the Paratroopers Brigade of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). We entered the Gaza Strip from south of Gaza City and on the first day of fighting, in the early afternoon, we were told not to open fire on a group that was due to arrive in an orderly fashion along the railway line. After about an hour a group of Indian soldiers with large Sikh turbans on their heads approached. They marched between the railway lines in neat groups of four, rifles slung across their shoulders with the barrels pointing downward, a clear sign that they did not intend to use them. This was UNEF, the United Nations Emergency Force, which had retreated from the area just before hostilities broke out.

UNEF had been installed at the end of the 1956 Sinai Campaign as a buffer force between Egypt and Israel after the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. However, at the moment of truth, just when the force was most needed to avert war, it evacuated in response to the request of the president of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to UN Secretary-General U Thant. The UNEF

withdrawal from Sinai was one of the main developments that precipitated the outbreak of the Six-Day War. The history of UNEF's betrayal of Israel, no matter how it might have been legally justified by the UN, served as a formative event in shaping how Israelis look today at proposals for them to rely on international forces for their security.

UNIFIL in Lebanon

Later, as an intelligence officer in the IDF Northern Command, along the front with Lebanon and Syria, I noticed that UNIFIL, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, was completely ineffective. UNIFIL was established in 1978 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425 in the aftermath of Operation Litani, an Israeli ground incursion into Lebanon in response to repeated terrorist attacks into northern Israel by the PLO. UNIFIL's mandate was to confirm Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and help restore the authority of the Lebanese government in the area.

But southern Lebanon quickly reverted to being a terrorist stronghold from which hostile forces fired upon Israel. UNIFIL did not

The United Nations flag
next to the Hizbullah flag
in southern Lebanon near
the border with Israel.



prevent this from happening. What UNIFIL did do was interfere with IDF operations. The UNIFIL deployment did not prevent the deterioration of the situation and the outbreak of the 1982 Lebanon War. Even after the war, the same problems with UNIFIL remained, when the threat to Israel by the PLO was replaced by the Iranian-backed Hizbullah. In the years that followed, the IDF acted correctly. It would enter Lebanon when necessary as a regular army, with a flag and a uniform. It coordinated its entry in advance in an effort to avoid injuring UN personnel.

UNIFIL in southern Lebanon is more prone to intervene against Israeli self-defense operations than against acts of aggression by Hizbullah.

Hizbullah, by contrast, was an armed force of irregulars that attacked from, and disappeared into, the civilian population of Lebanon. They informed no one when they were going in or pulling out of an area. The UN never caught any Hizbullah terrorists and took no action against them – even after Hizbullah opened fire. When Hizbullah moved its artillery positions to within 50 meters of a UN position and then fired on Israeli targets, UNIFIL did nothing. But if Israel employed counter-fire against the very same Hizbullah artillery, then the UN Division for Peacekeeping Operations would issue a formal diplomatic complaint. As a result, the UN was more prone to intervene against Israeli self-defense operations than against acts of aggression by Hizbullah.

UNIFIL has been a constant reminder to the Israeli public of the fecklessness of international forces in preventing an Islamist insurgent force like Hizbullah from carrying out terrorist warfare against Israel. Following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000, Hizbullah undertook a massive weapons buildup, accumulating some 20,000 rockets, more than 4,000 of which it launched at Israeli towns and cities in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Moreover, in a major Hizbullah operation in October 2000, its forces crossed into Israeli territory from an area of Lebanon supposedly controlled by the UN and

abducted three Israeli soldiers, while killing others. All this transpired under the nose of a UNIFIL position, from which the incident could easily be observed. No UNIFIL roadblocks were set up to intercept the Hizbullah vehicles carrying the Israeli captives.

Since the 2006 war, and despite the introduction of more than 10,000 additional UNIFIL troops into southern Lebanon under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, Hizbullah has rearmed at a torrid pace. The group has accumulated more than 50,000 rockets despite the fact that UNIFIL was supposed to have upgraded its peacekeeping mandate. True, the increased UN and Lebanese Army presence in southern Lebanon has made Hizbullah activity more difficult south of the Litani River and has forced the group to move the bulk of its operations north of that line. However, Hizbullah continues to operate openly, in contravention to UN Resolutions 425 and 1701, and has never adhered to UNIFIL requirements.

In fact, in July and October 2009, large weapons caches exploded in UN-controlled territory and the UN had known nothing of the existence of either cache. There are tens of such arms caches scattered across southern Lebanon and hundreds of Hizbullah operatives training there. Have any been arrested? No. In short, the presence of UN forces in Lebanon has not been a helpful factor, even when the Lebanese government has wanted the UN to curb Hizbullah.

International Forces and Palestinians

What will happen if UN forces are sent to a sovereign Palestinian state whose government *does not want* an international force to neutralize or disrupt the activities of organizations like Hizbullah or Hamas. If international forces are deployed in order to ensure that the Palestinians fulfill the security clauses in their agreement with Israel, yet the Palestinian government retains strong reservations about certain security restrictions – like demilitarization – which it believes to be an infringement on Palestinian sovereignty, then that government will show



little interest in the continued presence of these international forces.

In Gaza, European monitors had been stationed along the Egyptian border in accordance with the 2005 Rafah border crossing agreement brokered by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. But the Europeans fled their positions when internecine fighting between Hamas and Fatah heated up after the Hamas victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. The monitors also fell victim to kidnappings by local Palestinians, which contributed to their decision to quit their post.

At the Jericho prison in PA-controlled territory in the West Bank, in 2006 British and U.S. prison guards proved unable to enforce prison sentences on Palestinian terrorists, as agreed under international understandings. In the end, the IDF was compelled to act, entering the prison to take Palestinian terrorist prisoners to Israeli prisons, including Ahmed Saadat, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who was responsible for the murder of Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam Ze'evi in 2001.

The presence of international forces is supposed to provide the Israeli public with a solution to the security problems resulting from a territorial withdrawal. However, from Israel's experience, the only successful security forces that can be relied upon are its own. Therefore, the presence of a UN force, as it has been in the past, will merely create an obstacle to Israel's ability to defend itself. This is why Israel must retain the exclusive right to act against armed terror groups – thereby ruling out the option of an international force.

Israel Seeks to Defend Itself By Itself

Israel's need to "defend itself by itself" is not a new idea. It is based on Israel's national ethos since its War of Independence. It is also rooted in Israel's internationally-sanctioned right to "secure and recognized boundaries" or "defensible borders" that was enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 242 that followed the 1967 war and has governed all Arab-Israeli diplomacy ever since. President George W. Bush used this language in the

Two members of the European Union's border monitor mission look at a scanner screen operated by a Palestinian border police officer at the Rafah border crossing, November 25, 2005. European monitors fled their posts shortly after Palestinian internecine violence broke out between Fatah and Hamas, after Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian elections.

presidential guarantee he provided to former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a *quid pro quo* for withdrawing from Gaza in 2005, stating, “The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel’s security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel’s capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.”

Generally, international forces can only work when *both* parties exhibit the required political will to observe bilateral agreements. In such cases, an international force can assist in supervising treaty implementation, as in the case of the Egypt-Israel Treaty of Peace in the Sinai Peninsula. Since August 3, 1981, when the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) was agreed to and funded by Israel, Egypt, and the United States, the security clauses of the peace treaty have been upheld by both parties. It is important to note that both Egyptians and Israelis have maintained a bilateral interest in upholding its terms. But even in this scenario, should either party ever choose to breach the agreement, the MFO would be unable to prevent it.

The Track Record of NATO/Western Peacekeepers

Because of the poor track record of UN forces, sometimes the suggestion is made to send NATO forces instead, with the assumption that they are more robust and will be better able to handle the mission. Whereas UN forces can come from many non-Western states, from Fiji to Nigeria, whose soldiers may be poorly trained and underequipped, a NATO force is presumably more reliable. While for the most part UN forces serve as peacekeeping troops – observing that the terms of an agreement are upheld – a NATO deployment may include more ambitious goals of peace enforcement: imposing on warring parties a cessation of hostilities to which they have not agreed. But even NATO has many limitations that must be noted.

For example, in the case of Bosnia, NATO forces were deployed to uphold the 1995 Dayton Agreement and were effective once Yugoslavia surrendered unconditionally. However, the Israeli-Palestinian case does

not include any form of Palestinian or Hamas surrender, nor is surrender a status sought by either the Palestinians or Israel. Subsequently, the Yugoslav army retreated from Kosovo to Yugoslavia, creating a physical reality in which there was no longer contact between the warring factions. Such conditions have yet to be achieved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are not likely to be achieved in the foreseeable future.

Whether an international force is deployed under a NATO or a UN mandate, all peacekeeping forces will seek to maintain a good working relationship with the militias and terrorist groups that engage in violence.

In earlier phases of the Bosnian War, there was a largely Western military presence that had been deployed under a UN mandate, known as the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). NATO was already involved at this early stage, supporting UNPROFOR. Even though it was a well-equipped Western army, UNPROFOR failed to stop horrible massacres in that conflict. Most notably, the Dutch UN contingent abandoned the Muslims of Srebrenica as they were attacked by the Bosnian Serb Army, leading to the mass murder of over 8,000 civilians in 1995. NATO was only to intervene if it had UN approval; there was a “dual-key” mechanism which required the agreement of both organizations to activate NATO’s power.

Regardless of whether an international force is deployed under a NATO or a UN mandate, as long as the forces are deployed into the midst of hostilities, they will face the same fundamental problem that all such peacekeeping forces face: their need to maintain a good working relationship even with the militias and terrorist groups that engage in violence and aggression against them. In Bosnia, UNPROFOR did not want to alienate the Bosnian Serb Army, which was known at times to threaten UN troops and take them as hostages. In Lebanon, UNIFIL did not want to anger Hizbullah, for similar reasons.



Rescue workers search for bodies in the rubble of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut following a Hizbullah suicide bomb attack on April 18, 1983, that killed over 60 people. On October 23, 1983, two truck bombs struck buildings housing U.S. and French military forces in Beirut, killing 241 American and 58 French servicemen.

For peacekeeping forces in particular, assuming a posture of strict neutrality between the side that seeks to undermine peace and security and the side that they are supposed to defend emanates, above all, from considerations of survival. This need for neutrality is one of the major factors guaranteeing that peacekeeping forces will be ineffective and unreliable when they are most needed.

Their need for neutrality, and the danger that peacekeepers face when they try to do their jobs, is not just a theoretical concept. The force that was dispatched to Lebanon in August 1982 was closer to a fully-armed NATO force than to a UN Observer Mission. It was

made up of units from Britain, France, Italy, and the U.S. In October 1983, both the French paratrooper barracks and the U.S. Marine headquarters were attacked by Shiite suicide bombers, on orders from Tehran, causing the deaths of nearly three hundred servicemen. Within a year, both forces withdrew from Lebanon, demonstrating not just the dangers that peacekeepers face, but the reality that they will quickly leave the theater when attacked. This fact gives the peacekeeping forces an additional bureaucratic incentive to ingratiate themselves to the terrorist or insurgent side of a conflict, because a confrontation with such forces will lead to the failure of the peacekeeping mission. This fact of life for peacekeepers has been borne

out again and again by UNIFIL, whose officials have repeatedly denied and downplayed, despite abundant and obvious evidence to the contrary, that Hizbullah was violating Resolution 1701.

There are those who believe that providing a Western force like NATO, with UN backing, can help offset the risks derived from western deployments in the Middle East. In the past, a UN Security Council mandate was supposed to provide a peacekeeping force with added legitimacy, which would offer some protection to peacekeeping forces. But when the threat to international forces comes from militant Islamist groups, a UN mandate does not necessarily make the force any more acceptable. In August 2003, Al-Qaeda directly attacked the Baghdad headquarters of the UN Special Representative in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, killing him and 16 others with a truck bomb. How is the UN supposed to retaliate or punish a terrorist group?

When facing increasing fatalities, international forces often lose the original political support they had from the states that contributed them for any peacekeeping mission. In the Iraq War, the U.S.-led coalition lost national contingents from countries concerned with their security. After Madrid was attacked by Al-Qaeda, Spain elected a new government that withdrew all Spanish troops from Iraq. The continued deployment of Dutch troops in Afghanistan, under NATO, became politically controversial in the Netherlands during 2010, leading to their withdrawal.

Whether they engage in peacekeeping or peace enforcement, there is always the question of what are the precise rules of engagement of international forces, including a NATO force. For example, are international forces only permitted to open fire in self-defense when they come under attack? Or alternatively, can international forces use their firepower to prevent an act of aggression? As UN peacekeepers, the Belgian forces in Rwanda in 1994 were denied permission to take action against the Hutu militia that initiated the genocide against the Tutsi tribe.

Even in a robust NATO deployment in Afghanistan, which is not a peacekeeping mission, European states have insisted

on “caveats” for the employment of their forces, restricting their use for only the safest missions. There were national caveats banning nighttime operations and restricting the geographic deployment of forces to specific areas which were known to be more secure. Some caveats required consultations between commanders in the field and national capitals in Europe before tactical decisions could be taken. Most importantly, there were national caveats that excluded the use of certain forces that were part of the NATO alliance in counterterrorism operations.¹ General John Craddock, the former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, admitted in 2009 that NATO forces were burdened with 83 national caveats, which were reduced to about 70.²

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NATO remains a cumbersome organization, especially when it comes to decision-making and processing urgent operational requirements from commanders. In counterterrorism operations, it is precisely the ability to act quickly and decisively that keeps the peace and prevents attacks. Given the track record of NATO in Afghanistan, it is difficult to imagine the efficacy of similar forces in the West Bank.

International Forces Constrain Israeli Self-Defense

Israel needs to be prepared for the possibility that even after agreements are signed and a demilitarized Palestinian state is established, groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, or even U.S.-trained PA security forces themselves, may act in contravention of the agreements. Israel should take into account that in such situations international forces would likely not take action. In fact, the rocket assault against Israel by Hamas following Israel's withdrawal from Gaza suggests that a similar scenario could unfold in the West



Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser with UN Secretary General U Thant, May 24, 1967, two weeks before the outbreak of the Six-Day War. Thant agreed to Nasser's request to withdraw UN Emergency Forces that had been stationed in Sinai as a buffer since the 1956 war. Nasser replaced the UNEF with Egyptian military divisions ready to attack Israel, precipitating the outbreak of hostilities.

Bank, placing Israel's coastal plain under rocket attack.

In such a scenario, as long as a UN force is present on Palestinian territory, the IDF's operational freedom of action will be limited. The Israeli army cannot open fire against the enemy as it deems appropriate without first verifying the location of the UN personnel. Israel faces the risk of being placed in a bind in which nobody will be able to act against terrorists: the international forces will simultaneously fail to prevent terrorist attacks on Israel but succeed in preventing Israel from defending itself.

Prime Minister Rabin said in his last speech to the Knesset in September 1995 that the IDF must control the Jordan Valley "in the broadest meaning of that term."³ Israel must isolate the territory along the Jordan River to prevent the smuggling of arms, personnel, and know-how. Inside the territory there must be a Palestinian police force to deal with internal problems whose principal power is limited to machine guns that are unable to penetrate IDF armored vehicles. It must be agreed in advance that in the event of an act of terror or a revolving-door policy of arresting and then freeing terrorists, as in the past, the IDF will be able to enter the area in order to detain suspects and prevent further attacks.

Who Will Guarantee Demilitarization?

The prospective establishment of a Palestinian state poses substantial security challenges for Israel. Even with a fully and verifiably demilitarized Palestinian sovereign entity, without security control over the West Bank, Israel will be confronted with enormous uncertainties over how to assure its future security.

Will a future Palestinian sovereign entity become a state with a strong commitment to the rule of law? Without the assistance of the IDF, which has assumed the bulk of the responsibility for combating terrorism, will PA security forces be able to establish full control and completely dismantle terror groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades?

During the implementation of the Oslo Agreements, Yasser Arafat created a separate military force outside of the Palestinian Authority, known as the Tanzim, which was under the control of Fatah and was not constrained by bilateral agreements. It was employed during a period of escalation against Israel, like the Second Intifada. What is to prevent such paramilitary groups from arising

again? What will the Middle East look like in the coming years in view of Iranian-backed regional subversion and Al-Qaeda activity that is moving closer to Israel's borders?

Meanwhile, Palestinian control of an independent territory might reenergize Palestinian confidence to attempt to deal a fatal blow by launching major strategic attacks against Israel. Such a scenario could become more likely in view of the short distance – a mere 8 to 12 miles – between the Mediterranean Sea and the Palestinian state. In practical terms, this means that any sustained Palestinian rocket assault or combined military offensive from the West Bank, if successful in its initial stage, will pose a serious threat to Israel's interior. Israel will live under a far greater threat and will be forced to prepare ways to neutralize an initial Palestinian offensive.

Israel will also need to develop defense plans without the critical topographical advantage of controlling the West Bank mountain ridge. From the dominant terrain facing west, any Palestinian with a Kassam rocket would be able to hit Israel's main airport and major cities that lie along the coastal plain – the country's "strategic center of gravity," as it is known in combat doctrine. This new reality will make it difficult to defend Israel – either against mobile forces or against rocket or other weapons fire – creating a new and constant preoccupation for Israeli military planners: figuring out how Israel, under such conditions, is to provide for its own defense.

There will be no way to neutralize this untenable situation entirely, but the danger can be greatly reduced by creating a situation that will prevent the Palestinian side from thinking in terms of building up its conventional military and clandestine terror capabilities in the West Bank. It will also mean that any security arrangements in the West Bank must preclude the reinforcement of the Palestinians by Arab or Iranian forces from the east. In short, this means *preventing the rise of any conventional military or terrorist threat in the entire territory between the "green line" and the Jordan Valley.*

Given these concerns, the following security conditions must be guaranteed:

1. No foreign army will enter the territory of a Palestinian authority or state.
2. No military organization of any kind will be established in the territory in question, whether or not it belongs to the state.
3. No weapons of any kind may be smuggled into the territory, whether from the east or from another direction.

If any of these scenarios take place, the IDF needs to be in a position to intervene and eliminate the threat.

These three conditions are derived from the Israeli requirement that any Palestinian entity be fully demilitarized. But it would be a serious mistake to believe that Israeli requirements for verifying complete Palestinian demilitarization could be guaranteed by international forces operating in the West Bank. International forces have never been successful anywhere in the world in a situation where one of the parties was ready to ignore the fulfillment of its responsibilities. There is no reason to expect that this case would be any different.

The killing of peacekeepers is one of the most effective means in the terrorist arsenal to weaken and break the political will of states who contribute forces to peacekeeping operations.

Conclusions

In the Middle East, as elsewhere in the world, international forces have been notoriously unreliable, especially when they have been challenged by one of the parties, as in the case of Nasser's Egypt in 1967 or Hizbullah today. The killing of peacekeepers is one of the most effective means in the terrorist arsenal to weaken and even break the political will of states who contribute forces to peacekeeping operations. In any event, international forces have historically shown a reluctance to militarily confront those challenging them, and even in the case of NATO, they are likely to operate under highly restrictive rules of engagement and confused chains of



UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with Hizballah leader Shiek Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, June 20, 2000. The meeting gave recognition to Hizballah's influence in Lebanon. Since its 2006 war with Israel, Hizballah's power has extended well beyond southern Lebanon to the central and northern parts of the country.

command which will limit their value in the scenarios that Israel will likely face.

Therefore, the requirement articulated by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that any Palestinian state must be demilitarized must necessarily preclude the presence of any armed third party or international forces on prospective Palestinian territory.

Above all, even if NATO solves its problems with national caveats and rules of engagement that limit the effectiveness of its troops, and the efficacy of UN peacekeeping forces vastly improves, there is still a fundamental principle in Israeli military doctrine for Israel to "defend itself by itself." Israel has taken great pride in the fact that it has never asked Western soldiers – including American troops – to risk their lives in its defense.

Israel's requirement of self-reliance is particularly important in view of possible and even probable threat scenarios following the signing of an agreement with the PA. Today, and for the foreseeable future, no PA force has the strength to dismantle Palestinian factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. And should Israel come under conventional attack in the future from the east, it would clearly

fall on Israel to block the attack in the Jordan Valley.

It is thus important to understand the limited utility of international forces in a future Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement. As one analyst of peacekeeping operations has warned: "Peacekeeping is a very useful tool of international politics, but an inherently limited tool. It can and must take on violent local challenges to peace implementation, but only at the margins of a peace process. Should the core of that process lose cohesion, a multinational operation will itself have insufficient cohesion – and likely insufficient military strength – to make the center hold."⁴ This inherent weakness of international forces makes Israel's doctrine of self-reliance all the more relevant, even after peace agreements are signed.

Notes

1. James Sperling and Mark Webber, "NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul," *International Affairs* 85:3 (2009):509.
2. Arnaud De Borchgrave, "'Caveats' Neuter NATO Allies," *Washington Times*, July 15, 2009.
3. http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/10/PM+Rabin+in+Knesset+Ratification+of+Interim+Agree.htm.
4. William J. Durch, with Madeline England, *The Purpose of Peace Operations* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 2009), p. 8.