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To cite this article: Maria J. Stephan PhD (2004) The case for peacekeeping in the occupied palestinian territories, International Peacekeeping, 11:2, 248-270, DOI: 10.1080/1353331042000237265

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1353331042000237265

Published online: 11 Aug 2006.

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The Case for Peacekeeping in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

MARIA J. STEPHAN

The failure of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations to achieve a viable political settlement can be explained, in large part, by the lack of oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with past UN resolutions and peace plans. The 2003 ‘road map’ calling for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by 2005, like its predecessors, will be a rhetorical flourish unless it is accompanied by an institutionalized oversight mechanism. This article investigates the potential for deployment of an international peacekeeping mission to the Occupied Palestinian Territories that would consist of three parts: a basic security component led by NATO, a civilian peace building mission led by the UN, and a special monitoring presence around the holy sites in Jerusalem. This tri-partite peacekeeping mission might be deployed with the consent of the parties and given a Chapter VII mandate to be able to respond to special contingencies. The UN-authorized peacekeeping mission could be within the overall framework for ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and establishing an independent Palestinian state.

The ‘road map’ for a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by 2005 offered renewed hope for Middle East peace. The peace plan, drafted in 2003 by the international Quartet (United States, European Union, United Nations and Russian Federation) in coordination with Jordan and Egypt, called on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to undertake reciprocal steps, in phases and according to established timelines in the political, security, economic, humanitarian and institutional-building fields. US President George Bush formally submitted it to the Israelis and Palestinians on 30 April 2003. The creation of an independent Palestinian state by 2005 and the conclusion of a permanent status agreement was contingent upon both sides taking concrete steps to reduce the level of violence, dismantle the institutions of occupation and replace them with functioning Palestinian institutions. Although the road map, with its specified timelines, benchmarks, and
target dates was an improvement on past Middle East peace plans that focused on temporary and interim arrangements without making the end game specific, the Quartet plan is deficient in the most crucial area – enforcement.

According to the road map: ‘progress will require and depend upon the good-faith efforts of the parties, and their compliance with each of the obligations’. On the Palestinian side these obligations include halting violent attacks against Israeli civilians and consolidating control over the security apparatus. Israel agreed to withdraw its occupying forces from all Palestinian areas occupied from September 2000, to relax the restrictions on freedom of movement in the Palestinian Territories, dismantle settlements and refrain from any other activities that undermine trust such as home demolitions, land confiscation and attacks on civilians. Israel’s construction of a ‘separation wall’ around the West Bank cities of Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Jenin, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with some parts of the wall cutting kilometres into the Palestinian side of the 1967 border, would also need to cease for Israel to be in compliance with the road map. The road map only states that all reforms will be taken under the auspices of the Quartet and that the establishment of a formal monitoring mechanism will follow from informal consultations with the two parties. Similar to past peace plans, the road map makes difficult demands on both sides without specifying an institutionalized mechanism for overseeing the implementation of the plan and for holding the two sides accountable.

Neither informal high-level meetings nor relying on the good faith of the parties is enough to ensure compliance with the provisions. Given the intensity of the violence since the eruption of the second, Al-Aqsa intifada on 28 September 2000 and the complete lack of trust that exists between the two sides, it is unrealistic to expect that good faith alone is enough to keep the peace process on track. Instead, what is needed is an institutionalized supervisory mechanism consisting of international peacekeepers whose job it is to promote transparency and accountability, apply sustained pressure on the two sides and prevent spoilers from hijacking the peace process. In order to help restore trust and facilitate a phased implementation, a strong international presence deployed with the consent of the parties and as part of the overall peace settlement is required. The road map needs an injection of realism – peacekeeping in the Holy Land is a timely proposal.

The article begins with a brief history of the various peacekeeping missions associated with the Arab–Israeli conflict and deployed to the region since 1947. It will discuss the traditional and nontraditional tasks of these
missions and their current activities. Next, the article examines the necessary political conditions for the successful deployment of an international ground presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, presenting arguments for and against such a deployment. A tripartite peacekeeping mission is proposed, with three components: basic security, civilian peacebuilding, and a special monitoring mechanism for the holy sites in Jerusalem. The mission would be UN-authorized, consent-based and configured in a way to pressure both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to maintain a ceasefire and to implement specific reforms called for in the road map and in past UN resolutions. The peacekeepers would be deployed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, indicating a peace enforcement mission, in order to allow the peacekeepers to deal with contingencies that may arise in which greater force is necessary. Peacekeepers from NATO would have primary responsibility for overseeing the security dimension of the road map, including the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the consolidation of Palestinian security organizations under effective government control. As the supervisory organ of the peacebuilding mission the UN would be responsible for implementing the recommendations of the International Task Force on Palestinian Reforms, a body created by the road map, and for facilitating cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian government and nongovernmental organizations. A separate monitoring mission consisting of unarmed civilian officials would maintain a presence at the holy sites in Jerusalem in cooperation with religious and political leaders.

**Peacekeeping in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Hearty Soup of International Actors**

The UN has been intimately involved in the Arab–Israeli conflict longer and in a more operational sense than in any other regional conflict. Its long and often troubled relationship with the area has no parallel. UN peacekeeping experienced a breach birth with the onset of the conflict and has been engaged with it ever since. Since 1948 there have been five wars directly connected with the Arab-Israeli conflict, resulting in five different UN peacekeeping operations. The unresolved territorial conflict has been a thorn in the UN’s side since the announcement of the Partition Plan in 1947 and the declaration of the state of Israel, both resisted by the surrounding Arab states. The UN has tried to play the role of peacemaker, passing countless resolutions calling on the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Occupied Territories and supporting the
creation of a Palestinian state. The long-held vision of ‘land for peace’ and a two-state solution encapsulated in Res. 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and 1397 (2001) has largely remained a vision.

In November 1947, the General Assembly endorsed a plan for the partition of the Territory under British mandate, providing for the creation of an Arab State and a Jewish State, with Jerusalem to be placed under international status. Palestinian Arabs and Arab States rejected the two-state plan, fearing a Jewish-Zionist take-over of traditional Palestine. On 14 May 1948, the UK, struggling to hold onto its empire after the Second World War, abandoned its Mandate over Palestine and the first Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion proclaimed the State of Israel. The next day, Palestinian Arabs with the help of Arab States opened hostilities against Israel. On 29 May 1948 the Security Council adopted Resolution 50, calling for a cessation of hostilities in Palestine. The Council decided that the UN Mediator should supervise the truce, with the assistance of a group of military observers. This resolution formed the basis of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). The first UNTSO observers were deployed to the West Bank and Gaza and to surrounding Arab states in June 1948. Since that time UNTSO has played a supervision and observation role, and has also acted as a go-between for hostile parties in the region.

UNTSO now assists and provides observers to other UN peacekeeping missions in the region, including the UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights where Israeli troops are still present, and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of Lebanon. Neither UNIFIL nor UNDOF has been able to completely fulfil its mandate, mainly because there has been inadequate international pressure on the parties involved to resolve the remaining territorial disputes associated with these peacekeeping missions. In May 2000 UNIFIL confirmed that Israel had fulfilled its obligations and withdrawn its troops completely from Southern Lebanon. Since then northern Israel has experienced a period of unprecedented peace. Despite the harsh criticism of the then Prime Minister Ehud Barak by influential military officials for his decision to withdraw, the relative calm between Hezbollah and the Israeli military since that time has led many of the same critics to praise Barak’s decision today.

UN peacekeepers deployed to the region have also been called upon to oversee an armistice. The earliest authentic UN peacekeeping force was the UN Emergency Force (UNEF I). This force was deployed after the 1956 Suez War to monitor the ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal, then to patrol the Sinai and Gaza border areas in order to supervise the restored armistice. This expanded UNEF mandate became a prototype for later
peacekeeping missions, including UNIFIL. In 1973 UNEF I was replaced by UNEF II to observe a ceasefire following the Yom Kippur war. Subsequently, and as part of their 1979 peace treaty, Egypt and Israel established an independent international peacekeeping and verification organization (the Multinational Force and Observers or MFO) to monitor the security arrangements. The cost of the MFO is shared evenly by Israel, Egypt, and the US, and the bulk of the force is comprised of American troops.

Other international peacekeepers stationed in the Occupied Territories but not formally under the umbrella of the UN were deployed under bilateral agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) is an unarmed civilian observer mission in the mostly Muslim West Bank city of Hebron consisting of members from Denmark, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. The TIPH mandate is the result of negotiations conducted by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel between 1995 and 1997. These European observers maintain a constant presence in the streets of Hebron and act as monitors, reporting on any real or potential sources of conflict between Palestinians, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), and Israeli settlers. They are not mandated to intervene directly in conflicts and the mission has no military or police functions. The tasks include providing a feeling of security to the Palestinians of Hebron, helping to promote stability and an environment conducive to economic development, helping to implement economic projects, and coordinating with Israeli and Palestinian officials. The TIPH coordinates with Palestinian and Israeli security forces in Hebron through its observers and via a ‘Joint Hebron Committee’.

However, this civilian force has experienced severe challenges and its coordinating functions have been undermined by a lack of cooperation from the Israeli side. At a September 2002 workshop on international intervention, the Head of Mission, Arnstein Øverkil, insisted that it was not its mandate that limited TIPH, but rather the security situation and the lack of dialogue with and between the parties. The Joint Hebron Committee was supposed to meet every two weeks, but as of mid-2003 had not met since May 2001, the IDF being unwilling to coordinate with TIPH. A member of TIPH described the monitors as ‘band-aids’ with no real ability to effect the situation on the ground. Their monitoring ability has been undermined by Israeli-imposed closures and curfews and they are targets of verbal and physical abuse by both sides. Palestinians living in Hebron often complain that TIPH is not doing enough to stop IDF and settler violence and to ease the burdens of the occupation, tasks which fall outside of its mandate. TIPH has
provided the participating governments with over 9,500 reports detailing events on the ground, without there being any mechanisms for follow-up or investigation.

However, in July 2003, a US mission went to the Occupied Territories. This small coordination and monitoring mission of about eight persons was led by Ambassador John Wolf. It had no independent monitoring capacity on the ground, while it de facto replaced the road map concept of a Quartet monitoring mission. Its mandate was never specified. The Palestinian side asked Wolf for an implementation plan with timetables but as of October 2003 there had been no US response. The absence of a Quartet monitoring mechanism and an effective US presence on the ground led to the creation of the Palestinian Monitoring Group (PMG) in August 2003. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat authorized the exercise in early August 2003, and both Israelis and Palestinians were deployed. It was an inter-agency process, drawing on the information-gathering capabilities across the PA civilian ministries and security agencies. It monitors the situation and, unlike the TIPH, whose mandate specifies confidentiality, prepares reports and trend analyses for the US, the Quartet, and wider diplomatic community.

Another unorthodox international ground presence in the Occupied Territories comprises a group of local and international volunteers known as the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). Formed in 2000, ISM is a Palestinian-led group of international activists who use non-violent, direct-action methods of resistance to challenge the Israeli occupation. Volunteers from more than 130 countries around the world (including members of the Jewish diaspora) have joined Palestinians in protesting against closures and curfews, challenging Israeli military personnel at checkpoints, and helping to provide space for nonviolent action. They have engaged in acts of protective accompaniment for Palestinians during Israeli military incursions and have broken curfews to assist humanitarian and medical workers in delivering aid to Palestinians living under occupation. ISM has also joined other groups in raising international awareness about the Israeli-built wall that will contain the Palestinians and cut them off from the rest of the West Bank. ISM has formally called for the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to help protect Palestinians and to assist Israeli withdrawal from the territories. The Israeli government has accused ISM of aiding and abetting terrorism. In May 2003 the IDF raided the main ISM office in Beit Sahour, confiscating computers and arresting two activists. Three international ISM volunteers, including Rachel Corrie, the 23-year-old American peace activist who was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer in
the Gaza Strip in March 2003, have been killed by Israeli forces during protest actions.

Other third-party, civilian-led, non-violent initiatives include the Christian Peacemakers Team (CPT) based in Hebron and the General International Presence in Palestine (GIPP). The former is a grassroots movement that grew out of the peace churches in North America during the mid-1980s and has been present in Hebron since 1995, following a formal request from Hebron’s mayor. CPT maintains a full-time presence of a dozen or so unarmed civilians trained in documentation, observation, and nonviolent intervention. Unlike the TIPH, the CPT intervenes directly to help defuse crises involving Jewish settlers, the IDF and Palestinian residents of Hebron. CPT members openly denounce violence by both Israelis and Palestinians and work to bring together Israeli, Palestinian, and international peace and human rights activists.15

The presence of such a diverse array of peacekeepers, international observers and NGO activists is an indicator of the highly complex and intractable nature of the conflict. All of the UN missions were deployed relatively quickly and have had varying degrees of success according to the degree of political will behind their efforts. In cases where peacekeepers have helped to delineate and defend troop withdrawal lines, such as the ‘Blue Line’ in Southern Lebanon and the Israeli withdrawal line in the Sinai, they have played an important role in facilitating troop redeployment and the transfer of authority from Israel to the host governments. In Southern Lebanon the UN took on a substantial humanitarian and nation-building function as part of its evolving multidimensional character that includes land-mine removal, infrastructure development and the provision of humanitarian aid. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, however, peacekeeping has been limited to the non-interventionist monitoring work of TIPH and to the nonviolent intervention of international volunteers and grassroots activists. The rhetorical commitment of the international community to resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has clearly not been matched by commensurate political commitment to implement and enforce the resolutions on the ground.

Arguments and Preconditions for an International Force

Sending international peacekeepers to Palestine as part of a comprehensive peace settlement is a high-risk measure that the international community had contemplated for years without moving beyond the
conceptual phase. There is broad international agreement that a constructive, practical international effort is needed to stop the spiral of violence and counter-violence that jeopardizes the chance of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Strong advocates of a foreign imposed presence argue that this is the only way to stop Israeli incursions (that Israel justifies on security grounds), to reduce the threat of Palestinian-led suicide bombings and to initiate a process of political, social and economic revitalization. Members of this camp range from Arab leaders, to *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, to NGOs, including the American Jewish NGO *Tikkun*. They argue that international ground forces are needed not to create peace but to create the political space in which a peaceful solution to the conflict can be developed. A ground presence would help restore the most fragile institution of peace – trust.

As early as 1988 the Palestinian National Authority called for the deployment of international observers to monitor the withdrawal of Israeli troops, to provide basic security for Palestinians and to help implement the two-state solution. As the level of violence between the two sides escalated, particularly with the second intifada, Palestinian leaders have called for an inter-positional force dividing the two sides. Advocates contend that a multinational force could help defuse tensions, provide safety, restore confidence between two sides and create political space for diplomatic initiatives. According to Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Egyptian Ambassador to the UN, forces are needed ‘to create an environment that is conducive for both parties to engage in negotiations. It would also provide protection for Palestinians and it would help the Palestinian Authority to regain its powers and to exercise its powers on the territory and to allow itself time to act. It would disallow Israelis to have further incursions in the occupied territories’.  

The UN Security Council has taken up the question several times, but failed to pass a resolution authorize any deployment. The actual and threatened use of the veto by the United States has ensured that the peacekeeping option has gained little momentum in the UN. On 18 December 2000, just over two months after the eruption of the second intifada, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) put a draft resolution before the Security Council calling for the deployment of an international force to protect Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The proposal followed the adoption of Resolution 1322 (2000), which condemned Israeli violence, including the excessive use of force, against Palestinians. While an earlier NAM draft had proposed an international ‘protective force’, this version called for a ‘monitoring force’ to be deployed as a confidence-building measure with the goal of preventing further deaths and injuries.
During the Security Council debate, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, Yehuda Lancy, argued that international intervention was ‘wholly unnecessary’ and that the presence of an international force could escalate the level of violence and instability. At the same time, he insisted that Israel was not opposed in principle to the deployment of peacekeepers: ‘Our position on the question of an international presence has been made clear. We are not opposed to some form of international presence provided it is established within the context of a comprehensive bilateral agreement. This has always been the accepted sequence. An international presence is not something we intrinsically reject, but it must be used to cement an agreement, not as an alternative to one.’

This statement represented a significant shift since the late 1980s, when a ‘red line’ in the Israeli negotiation position precluded the presence of an international ground force anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. Within the UN renewed calls for the deployment of a peacekeeping force to the region came in the wake of the Israeli military’s reinvasion and reoccupation of the Occupied Territories on 29 March 2002, following a series of deadly Palestinian suicide bombings. The Security Council adopted Resolution 1402 (2002) calling for an immediate cessation of violence and Israeli troop withdrawal from Palestinian cities, including Ramallah. It called on member states to help implement the Tenet work plan and Mitchell report recommendations, with the aim of resuming negotiations leading to a permanent settlement.

On 12 April 2002, shortly after Resolution 1402 was adopted, Kofi Annan told the Security Council that he favoured a robust, multinational stabilization force operating under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to ‘halt the tragic and terrifying descent into bloodletting’. Describing the killing on both sides as ‘an affront to the conscience of mankind,’ and urging Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to withdraw from the West Bank, he warned that ‘the situation is so dangerous and the humanitarian and human rights situation so appalling, the proposition that such a force be deployed . . . can no longer be deferred.’ His Middle East envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen, was visiting the battered town of Jenin and describing the scene ‘horrific beyond belief.’ Annan emphasized the need to create a stable environment and to build trust between the two parties at a time when the level of violence was unprecedented. He insisted that there was no such thing as a ‘risk-free mission,’ but that the Security Council had to be willing to take more proactive measures. Without specifying the national composition of the force, Annan compared a possible future ground presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operating in Kabul, and
rather than a UN force, proposed a coalition of the willing authorized by the Security Council to take decisive action.\textsuperscript{23}

Reactions to Annan’s appeal varied. While many governments expressed support for the deployment of peace enforcers, officials from Denmark, Canada and Australia, among others, were explicit that a ceasefire and the consent of the parties were necessary before they would be willing to commit national forces.\textsuperscript{24} The European Parliament voted on 13 April for an international peacekeeping force to be sent to the region under a UN mandate and called for an arms embargo against both Israel and Palestine.\textsuperscript{25} The European Union indicated that it would be willing to send monitors to oversee any ceasefire. The United States had already announced that it would be willing to send monitors for any Middle East ceasefire if invited, but would not support an ‘inter-positional force’.\textsuperscript{26}

The rationale behind the Secretary-General’s appeal was probably to move the UN beyond rhetoric to actually enforcing resolutions and stopping the tragic loss of life. Annan and other international leaders have been quick to point out that both sides stand to benefit from the presence of international forces on the ground. Annan’s position has consistently been that the deployment of a multinational force would not be targeted at any single party, a situation that Israel has always doubted. Rather, a credible international presence, according to Annan, could help the parties implement the recommendations of the Mitchell report, Tenet plan, and Quartet Plan, all of which called for the improvement of security measures and phased Israeli withdrawal from the territories.\textsuperscript{27} Javier Solana, EU Foreign Policy High Representative lent support to a multinational force to promote Israeli security and ensure that there would be people on the Palestinian side with whom to negotiate: ‘A demilitarized Palestine would actually increase Israel’s security by putting an end to the present situation which allows extremist groups to hold the peace process hostage.’\textsuperscript{28}

Neither the United States nor Israel has indicated that it would accept the deployment of peacekeepers if the goal were to create an inter-positional buffer zone between the two parties, but both have said that they would support the deployment of observers. An observer force that could supervise a ceasefire agreement and verify the phased withdrawal of Israeli troops, as called for in the road map, would likely be acceptable to both the United States and Israel. A line of withdrawal would need to be clearly demarcated and a timetable for Israeli troop redeployment established. Both tasks could be achieved with the assistance of military and civilian observers and international technicians, with the necessary cooperation of representatives from the two parties. This is an important
precondition for the effectiveness of any peacekeeping mission. The process would be similar to the establishment of the ‘Blue Line’ in Southern Lebanon in May 2000, which helped facilitate Israeli troop withdrawal. Israel has accepted the idea of third-party American monitors to supervise the implementation of the Tenet and Mitchell plans and has expressed itself ‘willing to favourably consider an international presence in the context of a comprehensive settlement.’ Both the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators agreed to the deployment of a US-led monitoring force at the time of the 1993 Oslo peace accords, and this could be the basis of an institutionalized implementation force today.

Another argument in favour of deploying international peacekeepers is that they could help stop suicide bombings and other forms of violence against Israelis. According to Khalil Shikaki, an expert on Palestinian public opinion:

> International monitors would make it difficult for the young guard to attack Israeli targets without openly defying and embarrassing Arafat, which they might be loath to do. The deployment of monitors would thus increase the cost of cease-fire violations and increase the odds that the armistice would be self-policied. Monitoring would also help reassure each side about the intentions of the other while providing an independent trigger for the implementation of different phases of the agreement, thus creating incentives for both sides to comply fully.

The possibility of violence directed at international peacekeepers exists in any peacekeeping operation. However, if the presence of peacekeepers helps to promote greater freedom of movement in the Occupied Territories, leads to improvements in the daily living conditions, and assists in Israeli troop withdrawal, this would challenge any opposition from Palestinian militant groups. It is unlikely that peacekeepers or any third party generally could deter suicide bombings. But the presence of international peacekeepers could defuse spoiler activities by supporting a political process, liaising with the different groups, and keeping the parties on track. They would do this by monitoring the situation on the ground and confronting the parties with specific violations. These violations include not only violations of the ceasefire (an agreement reached on 30 June 2003 between Israel and the Palestinian factions) but also the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. The latter are as much violations of the road map and impediments to peace as the former.

Two prominent members of the US Senate have advocated the deployment of NATO military personnel to help implement the road map.
Senator John Warner wrote to President George Bush in March 2003 proposing a multinational, NATO peacekeeping force modeled on the force deployed to the Balkans for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Richard Lugar, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, proposed sending US troops, alone or as part of an international force, to help stabilize the situation and, if necessary, help the PA crack down on radical organizations like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Presumably the international force would be authorized to respond to extremist activities from the Israeli side as well, although US advocates of such a deployment were not articulate on this point.

Arguments Against Deployment

Notwithstanding these arguments there has never been sufficient will in the Security Council to deploy peacekeepers to the Occupied Territories. The United States has rejected any international protective force under Chapter VII with a mandate to protect Palestinians. US and Israeli representatives at the UN have traditionally argued that the deployment of peacekeepers could create a more dangerous security situation, with peacekeepers being either targeted or used as shields by extremist groups. Other key states, including Canada, will not agree to deploy peacekeepers without a clearly defined mandate supported by both sides. At least 10,000 troops may be required to provide robustness and this also inhibits the enthusiasm of potential troop-contributing states, notably the United States.

National sovereignty issues and the difficult relationship between Israel and the UN pose further obstacles. Israel’s mistrust dates from its foundation in 1948 when officials spoke of an inordinate assertion of UN authority in the region and questioned the impartiality and effectiveness of UN peacekeepers along the armistice lines with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The early chill was reinforced by the frequent condemnations in the General Assembly (where by the end of the 1950s the Arab-dominated NAM had gained prominence) of Israeli retaliatory strikes and non-cooperation with UN peacekeeping forces, including UNTSO. Israel’s desire to ‘manage without the UN,’ writes Nathan Pelcovits, became an early tenet of Israeli foreign policy. This sentiment, reinforced by three wars with its Arab neighbours, has largely endured to the present. Israel continues to vehemently oppose relinquishing control over its security to any third party, especially one backed by the EU or the UN, both of which the Israeli government accuses of anti-Israel bias.
Israel has argued that a multinational force would be biased in favour of Palestinians and would be used politically to target Israel. The Israeli government views Arab states as being unsympathetic to Israel’s ‘struggle against terrorism’ and is therefore highly suspicious of any proposal advanced by them. The UN, for its part, has done a poor job of selling to Israel the idea of peacekeepers in the Occupied Territories, failing to show in a convincing manner how the deployment of these forces could advance Israel’s security interests. As Philip Gordon has argued: ‘There has to be a better way [than focusing purely on Palestinian interests] of explaining how the introduction of a third party multinational force in the Middle East would protect Israeli interests and make them more secure.’

One response to Gordon’s challenge is that peacekeepers would be deployed to protect Israeli and Palestinian lives. Peacekeepers would be authorized to put pressure on both sides to meet the obligations that they have already accepted under the road map. Any potential spoiler who used violence against the peacekeepers would be dealt with in a similar manner.

Furthermore, by agreeing to the presence of a UN authorized force Israel would be strengthening its case internationally that Arab states must do more to stop attacks against Israel by militant groups. Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami stated in June 2003 that an armed force deployed to the Occupied Territories would take away the need for Israel to act as an occupier. He insisted that forces should be sent only once a peace agreement had been negotiated, and be tasked with confronting Palestinian militants. However, international peacekeepers should not be mandated to forcefully disarm any militant faction, including the highly-armed Israeli settlers and Palestinian militant groups, unless a decision about it was reached between the two parties. If peacekeepers are seen as defusing tensions, helping to ease the restrictions in the West Bank and Gaza, and facilitating the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces it is improbable that they would be targeted for attacks by the main Islamic militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The official policy of these groups has never involved targeting internationals, and it seems unlikely that they would risk losing popular support by killing peacekeepers. On the other hand, presupposing a casualty-free peacekeeping mission in this complex situation would be unrealistic. The religious fundamentalist Israeli settlers on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip would likely feel threatened by the presence of international forces, particularly if one of their tasks was to monitor the dismantling of illegal settlements and settlement outposts. In view of this probability a compensation and resettlement plan for the settlers would need to be in place if peacekeepers were to be effective in these areas. A peacekeeping
mission detached from the larger political context would be seriously compromised. So too, would a mission that intentionally blocked the participation of local Israeli and Palestinians leaders, including militant leaders, whose informal consent and help with the logistical part of troop deployment would improve the chances of success. Speaking before a closed session of the Security Council on 18 April 2003, Kofi Annan insisted that any peacekeeping force ‘must be impartial and capable of taking decisive action.’[37]

The US government is reluctant to send American troops on a mission in which they would be intentionally targeted. Officials have not forgotten the deaths of 240 servicemen in the 1983 US Marine barracks truck bomb attack in Beirut by the Syrian-backed Hezbollah, and it is cited by those opposed to a West Bank mission as a likely eventuality.38 However, if members of Palestinian militant groups were involved in the final status agreement with Israel, this could reduce the risk of the intentional targeting of peacekeepers. A US opinion poll in May 2002 revealed that popular support for sending American peacekeepers to the Palestinian Territories is conditional on the timing and type of mission. An overwhelming 77 per cent would support US participation in a peacekeeping operation if Israel and the Palestinian Authority were to reach a peace agreement and if other countries participated in a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force to monitor and enforce the agreement. 39

The criticisms have been addressed, at least in part, by the release of the road map that calls for the cessation of hostilities, ceasefire, and the phased withdrawal of Israeli troops from the areas occupied since 28 September 2000. The opposition to intervention by both Israel and the United States, based in large part on the strong military cooperation between these two countries and their mutual desire to minimize the involvement of both the UN and other third parties in the region, may be less politically palatable since the Bush administration committed itself to the road map. Albeit with a number of substantive gaps relating to borders, refugees, and Jerusalem, it offers a political framework for implementing past UN resolutions demanding Israel’s withdrawal and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

There is always a risk that Islamic and Jewish fundamentalists opposed to the peace process would attack the international forces. Obtaining the consent of the leaders of these groups may not be possible, and concluding special agreements with their leaders (the case with Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon) may be politically very difficult. There are spoilers in every peace process and the problem of uncertain consent has plagued nearly all UN operations, even ‘traditional’ peacekeeping missions. The difficulty of uncertain consent, however, does
not preclude the possible effectiveness of international forces in helping to reduce the level of violence and preventing possible spoilers from holding the peace process hostage.

The Israeli government has cited UNIFIL as a warning exemplar against accepting an international presence. Israel has long complained that UNIFIL failed to halt Hezbollah attacks and there is no reason to believe that the situation would be any different if UN forces were sent to Palestinian territories. However, the acknowledgement by military officials noted above that withdrawal from Southern Lebanon was strategically sound may weaken this argument somewhat. Israel has said that it will not put its faith in a ‘robust international presence, which could not be effective in the face of a continuing strategy of Palestinian terrorism’.40 Monitoring an inter-communal boundary line that runs hundreds of kilometres poses logistical problems for preventing the infiltration of suicide bombers into Israel. But not even the highly sophisticated IDF and Israeli intelligence have been able to prevent attacks across the boundary. Defending against sniper attacks from Israeli settlers in the Occupied Territories, many of whom are just as opposed to the concept of ‘land for peace’ as some militant Islamic fundamentalists, would be another serious challenge for an international force.

Obviously, it is also relevant to consider the type of force that might be deployed. Various schemes have been advanced. New York Times journalist Thomas Friedman suggested that NATO forces should separate Israelis and Palestinians as a key part of an overall peace settlement. The peacekeeping force, argued Friedman, should be imposed on both groups.41 Such a proposal resembles the subcontracted missions of SFOR/IFOR in Bosnia and ISAF in Afghanistan that are based on contributions by NATO members. This is covered by Article 53 of the UN Charter, which gives the Security Council the authority to grant peace enforcement powers to regional organizations. With NATO participating in out-of-area operations as part of its new post-Cold War mandate, a Middle East operation is not a far-fetched proposition. NATO has already taken Israeli and Palestinian security officials to Kosovo to show them how the force there operates on the ground. Former NATO commander, Gen. Wesley Clark, has suggested that NATO deployment in the Middle East is not an unrealistic proposition and that NATO might be willing to engage in such a mission.42 Although NATO insiders insist that the issue of peacekeepers has never been formerly discussed within the Alliance, one NATO official said that would not be an impossible outcome ‘provided an agreement is reached and if the two parties require it’. The same official suggested that ‘under a UN mandate
NATO would be the ideal institution to do the job, given the presence of both the US and the Europeans.43

Lessons from Previous UN Operations

The UN has learned that it cannot stand idly by in the face of tragedy. The past half-century of peacekeeping has also taught the UN that peacekeepers must be part of the solution and not part of the problem. Peacekeepers cannot be replacements for political will nor should they be pawns to be manipulated by groups seeking different political objectives. A major lesson from past peacekeeping missions is that without a comprehensive peace settlement, and when borders remain in dispute, peacekeepers should be prepared to encounter a high level of violent resistance. UNIFIL in the disputed Shebaa Farms region of Israeli-occupied southern Syria provides testimony. This area, which Syria claims belongs to Lebanon and therefore should be free of Israeli troops, has frequently been the target of Hezbollah rocket attacks fired from Southern Lebanon. Until this territorial dispute is settled, possibly as part of the final phase of the road map, UNIFIL peacekeepers there will continue to be a stopgap measure at best.

UN peacekeeping has worked most effectively in the past when the goal was to separate two state-directed armies and where there was a line to patrol. Israel’s consent to the creation of a ‘Blue Line’ along the internationally recognized borders of Lebanon, by UN technicians in consultation with all government and military parties in the area, was a turning point for UNIFIL. Only after the creation of this line in May 2000 could the peacekeepers assist Israel in its withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and help with the deployment of Lebanese forces to positions formerly occupied by the IDF. The UN played a key role in transforming abstract withdrawal lines into technically well-defined and legally meaningful boundaries. Just as the Israeli withdrawal helped consolidate Lebanese government control of the security forces and advanced the process of institution-building in Lebanon, the same process could follow from the withdrawal of Israeli troops to the pre-1967 border.

Peace enforcement troops must enter the theatre of operations prepared for a broad spectrum of violent scenarios. The 2000 Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (Brahimi Report) states that the UN Secretariat ‘must not apply best-case planning assumptions to situations where local actors have historically exhibited worst-case behaviour. It means that mandates should specify an operation’s authority to use force’.44 Enforcement troops, in cooperation with security officials from the Israeli and Palestinian sides, would be authorized under
Chapter VII of the UN Charter to use force in cases where members from either side were using or threatening to use violence, such as illegal settlers organizing armed resistance to their removal.

Another important lesson of the 1990s peacekeeping has been that enforcement operations can only succeed if they are led by large military powers. The ability of an operation to act as a deterrent is positively related to force size and structure, as determined by the political will of troop-contributors. The Brahimi Report highlighted this lesson: ‘As the United Nations has bitterly and repeatedly discovered over the last decade, no amount of good intentions can substitute for the fundamental ability to project credible force if complex peacekeeping, in particular, is to succeed.’

At UNIFIL’s baptism, a light infantry battalion was instructed to defend an inter-positional buffer zone between Israeli troops and Islamic militant factions in Southern Lebanon. The lightly armed and numerically inferior peacekeepers were ill-equipped to defend such a long buffer zone, and were unable to stop incursions by militant Islamic factions and were brushed aside by the IDF on its way to Beirut in 1982. The exception to UNIFIL’s general ineffectiveness in its early stages was the Dutch contingent, which was relatively heavily armed and thereby able to ensure a decrease of belligerent incursions in its sector. It is unlikely, one can argue, that having the protection of anti-tank missiles or other heavy arms would be decisive in deterring suicide bombers or snipers. Robust intelligence capabilities, on the other hand, would be a far more important defensive tool. While the UN has very weak intelligence collection and analysis capabilities, NATO, in cooperation with Israeli and Palestinian security forces, would be in a better position to coordinate intelligence efforts. NATO personnel should be strategically positioned on both sides of the 1967 border, in order to facilitate its work as lead coordinator of security cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian (along with Jordanian and Egyptian) security officials.

In response to the harsh criticism that the possibility of ‘terrorist activity’ precludes any peace enforcement option, Annan contended that it would not be the first time that an international force has operated in violently divided communities: ‘We cannot offer 100 per cent security and grant it to both sides, and that is not the objective and the purpose of the international force.’ Securing the political support of Israel’s Arab neighbours, particularly Syria and Saudi Arabia, for an international deployment would be an important way to minimize the risk posed by armed resisters. Unlike in Iraq, Islamic militants in the Occupied Territories have never targeted international and UN workers.
Any international presence that is perceived by the Palestinian people and militant groups as an extension of the Israeli occupation will be discredited. If American troops alone were present, they would be viewed as extensions of the IDF and become primary targets for Palestinian militant groups. This is one of the reasons why multinational NATO forces would be in the best position to oversee the security component of any mission. The replacement of Israeli forces with NATO troops acting as a peace stabilization force would help facilitate the redeployment of the IDF and the insertion of Palestinian security forces along the provisional borders of the Palestinian state.

**Peacebuilding**

A civilian-led peacebuilding mission is the second component of the multi-dimensional operation being proposed here. The security and civilian peacebuilding missions should be viewed as two sides of the same coin. As the Brahimi report noted, peacekeepers and peacebuilders are ‘inseparable partners in complex operations: while the peacebuilders may not be able to function without the peacekeepers’ support, the peacekeepers have no exit without the peacebuilders’ work.’ Peacebuilding efforts would include the rebuilding of destroyed social, economic and political infrastructure, the training and restructuring of local Palestinian police, and the reintegration of former militants into civil society. The coordination of the civilian component should be directed by the office of the UN Special Envoy to the Middle East Peace Process. The current UN envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen, has worked closely with the World Bank, the United Nations Relief Works Administration (UNRWA), and the donor community to promote foreign investment to help repair damaged infrastructure and rebuild Palestinian institutions destroyed since the beginning of the second intifada. His office should be given the adequate resources and a mandate to help the Palestinian Ministry of Finance oversee the Single Treasury Account while acting as the liaison for economic reconstruction between the Palestinian government and the international community. The UN-led civilian mission should assist the new Palestinian government in implementing the recommendations put forward by the International Task Force on Palestinian Reform, a group designated in the road map as responsible for setting benchmarks for judicial, administrative and economic reforms within the Palestinian Territories. Larsen’s office would become the principle coordinating body of the non-security dimensions of the road map and final status settlement. Close cooperation between the NATO and the civilian mission would need to be institutionalized, as the Brahimi report suggests, for the overall mission to have a chance at success. The
institutionalized cooperation could take the form of civil-military coordination cells located in Israel and the Occupied Territories reporting to the North Atlantic Council and to the UN Security Council. The UN civilian mission could liaise with the PMG. The modalities for this type of cooperation would need to be worked out by the parties involved, and the PGM adapted accordingly.49

Jerusalem

The question of Jerusalem has been a sticking point in negotiations. Jerusalem is a microcosm of the conflict where the challenge of inter-ethnic and inter-religious coexistence is most pronounced and where religious symbols and places of worship have been politicized and used to divide the peoples. Proposals for resolving the issue include sharing the city, with West Jerusalem the capital of Israel and East Jerusalem the capital of the future Palestinian state. The road map states that a resolution of Jerusalem’s status should protect the religious interests of Jews, Christians and Muslims worldwide. This could be realized by giving a special international status to the city and by creating a civilian-led ground presence to monitor activity around the city, including the holy sites. The group could comprise observers from existing resources, including TIPH, UNTSO, UNIFIL and UNDOF. This unarmed observer group, which could also include religious dignitaries from both sides, should be given the task of helping to diffuse tensions and mediate disputes between the different groups with claims to the city, in coordination with Israeli, Palestinian, and NATO security forces.

The issue of Jerusalem is complex and it goes beyond the scope of this article to discuss all of the suggestions for dividing or sharing the city. The proposal made at the November 2000 post-Camp David talks at Taba, calling for the creation of two sovereignties in Jerusalem, joint administration of the city and free access to the holy sites is an appropriate starting point for discussion about the role of any international military force. Secular-based claims would be separated from religious-based claims and neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian governments would be allowed to make claims to religious sites. Peacekeepers could work alongside religious authorities from the three religious traditions to help facilitate access to the holy sites. Policing functions would be the responsibility of a joint international-local task force, which would report to the Israeli and Palestinian governments as well as to the UN Security Council.
A Possible Solution

The establishment of a credible international presence in the Palestinian territories as part of a comprehensive peace settlement is essential to stabilizing the situation and helping rebuild trust between the parties. This article has focused on the context in which international peacekeepers would be deployed to the Occupied Palestinian Territories to oversee the implementation of the road map and any final status agreement in the future. The proposal presented here has been for a UN-mandated force, sub-contracted to NATO, led by the United States, the only country that Israel trusts in the domain of security. This multinational force would not be under UN command and control, although the UN might control policing and other civilian duties. Peace enforcers would provide basic security as part of the road map’s comprehensive peace settlement. Tasks would include helping enforce the ceasefire and assisting Israel’s withdrawal. NATO troops would be sent not to fight a war, but rather to help keep the peace and prevent further escalations of violence between the two sides. The Israeli government would have ultimate leverage over the international presence while the precise location for the peacekeepers would be determined by NATO, Israeli and Palestinian security officials. Security officials may need to reevaluate the Israeli government’s continued construction of a separation wall in the West Bank, since the wall would pose a serious obstacle for a future peacekeeping mission. The strategic value of a physical barrier, as opposed to a human presence, separating Israel from the future Palestinian state is highly questionable. For the mission to be realistic the security situation would need continual monitoring and the peacekeepers removed if it appeared that escalation of conflict was beyond NATO’s control. The Chapter VII mandate would ensure that NATO troops had the authority to intervene using forceful means if such a contingency, involving spoilers on either or both sides, arose.

The civilian part of the mandate would help facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians, help train Palestinian security and policy forces, and help with the rebuilding of institutions and basic infrastructure in the territories. Activities would include the preparation and monitoring of elections in the Palestinian Territories as soon as possible and helping to build transparency in the new government. The office of the UN Envoy to the Middle East Peace Process would be the lead agency overseeing the peacebuilding mission, whose core task would be to assist the new Palestinian government’s transition to independent statehood.

The third component of this mission would be a special observer force to monitor the holy sites in Old Jerusalem. Jerusalem was initially placed
under international protection as part of the UN’s 1947 Partition Plan. As it is likely that Jerusalem will be the shared capital of Israel and Palestine, one way to ensure that Jerusalem is not the site of future bloodletting is to declare Jerusalem a ‘demilitarized zone’. It may be possible to model a monitoring element near the holy sites on the TIPH model whereby civilian monitors, including religious dignitaries, interact with Israeli and Palestinian police forces without being heavily armed themselves.

The exit strategy for the mission would be the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Occupied Territories and the restoration of Palestinian government authority, including the effective transfer of security and policing authority. Ultimately, political support for implementing a peace plan would be decisive. The creation of an institutionalized oversight mechanism to help implement the road map would be the most important sign that the international community, and particularly the United States, is truly committed to resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. While it would be unreasonable to expect international peacekeepers to be able to prevent all future violence involving Israeli, Palestinian, or international casualties, their presence could be a decisive factor in creating the space for the peace process to move forward. International intervention in the Holy Land is now desperately needed to fill the enforcement gap in the road map and transform it into a realistic plan for Middle East peace.

NOTES

3. For the history, mandate and mission of UNTSO, see: www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/untso/index.html
4. These included the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and the ceasefire agreement in the Suez Canal area and the Golan Heights following the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967.
5. UNDOF was established by Security Council resolution 350 (1974) to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria, to supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces, and to supervise the areas of separation and limitation, including refugee return. UNIFIL was established by UNSC Resolution 425 following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli troops, restore international peace and security, and assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.
Bank and the Gaza Strip, 28 Sept. 1995 (‘the Interim Agreement’), which deals with the redeployment of Israeli military forces in the City of Hebron.


11. Interviews with Norwegian and Turkish members of TIPH, Hebron, 12 July 2003.

12. It had two chief monitors, a Palestinian and Jarat Chopra of Brown University, United States, formerly of the UN mission in East Timor. Information supplied by Jarat Chopra.


14. For further information see the ISM website: www.palsolidarity.org


17. Ibid.


19. Ibid.

20. The CIA Director, George Tenet, advanced a ceasefire plan on 10 June 2001 (accessed at: www.mideastweb.org/tenet.htm). Key elements were: (1) An immediate cessation of hostilities, the arrest of ‘terrorists’ by the Palestinians and efforts to stop anti-Israel incitement in Palestinian media. (2) Israel eases travel restrictions and pull its troops back from Palestinian population centers, after the Palestinian steps against ‘terrorists’. (3) A cooling-off period before implementing peacemaking suggestions from the Mitchell Commission report. The Mitchell report, publicly released on 21 May 2001 was produced by an international fact-finding committee headed by former US Senator Mitchell. It recommended an immediate ceasefire, a halt to further settlement activity by the Israelis, and more effort by Palestinian leaders to suppress and denounce ‘terrorism’, accessed at: http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/nea/mitchell.htm.


26. ‘Canada will send troops’ (n.22 above).


29. UNSC/7367 (n.27 above).

33. Pelcovits (n.2 above), p.3.
34. Ibid.
39. The poll asked: ‘If Israel and the Palestinian Authority were to come to a peace agreement, would you support or oppose the U.S. participating, together with a number of other countries, in a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force to monitor and enforce the agreement?’ Only 16 per cent opposed. Program on International Policy Attitudes, Apr. 2002, www.americans-world.org/digest/regional/issues/Israel&Palestinians/Pkp participation.cfm.
42. Clarke emphasized this in a lecture on international peacekeeping at Tufts University, Medford MA, 26 Nov. 2002.
45. Ibid., viii.