Chronic Failure Without Accountability: International Peacekeeping and Security Forces in the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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1 | Introduction

The U.S. and other international actors have become increasingly insistent on having a governance plan for "the day after" the Gaza War. Washington seems to be pushing for a United Nations or some other multinational security force after Israel defeats Hamas, as a "transitional" step to turning over the territory to the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party.

However, an examination of past UN and multinational missions and structures reveals that they have consistently lacked the will and means to provide security or ensure peace. In the Middle East, these missions have proven to be futile, and in the rare cases where they were effective, they served the aggressor rather than regional or international peace. It can therefore be concluded that such a UN or multi-lateral mission cannot be trusted to provide security for Israel or to prevent the threat of terror from Gaza.

2 | United Nations peacekeeping missions in the Arab-Israeli conflict

The Arab-Israeli conflict has seen more extensive use of U.N. and other multinational security missions than any other, with the world's second oldest peacekeeping mission; the only General Assembly-authorized mission; the only mission with naval forces, and so forth. The history of failed UN security missions dates from before the creation of the state of Israel and extends to today. In every single case, the UN forces have failed to fulfil their mission, were coopted and used by Israel's enemies, and have taken anti-Israel positions on any disputes that arose, while limiting Israel's freedom of action.

United Nations missions are particularly problematic because of the organization's deep institutional bias , which has been on full display even in the current conflict, with the U.N. Secretary General making excuses for Hamas's genocidal attack. Moreover, U.N. institutions in the Palestinian territories have been coopted or actually taken over by terrorists, with agencies like UNRWA actively collaborating with, or under

the influence of Hamas. This is inevitable in their structure, as they recruit personnel from the area they operate in, and their international members often arrive with typical institutional bias against Israel, or at best will not risk their lives to defy terrorist groups.

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1) The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) was established by the United Nations Security Council to assist in maintaining the first truce in Israel's War of Independence in 1948. It already proved itself then to be an inefficient and toothless body. After the signing of the Armistice Agreements between Israel and the Arab states at the end of that war, UNTSO peacekeepers were tasked with supervising those agreements along all the combat fronts.[2] Unlike other peacekeeping missions, UNTSO does not have to be periodically reauthorized by the Security Council, and thus has no meaningful supervision of its operations.

Between 1949 and 1956, there was a persistent influx of Palestinian border infiltrators into Israel, both from Judea and Samaria (which were under Jordanian control), and from the Gaza Strip (under Egyptian control). UNTSO forces not only failed to prevent these infiltrations and protect Israeli civilians, but they also refrained from assigning blame and demanding accountability when Israeli civilians were murdered by infiltrators. In sum, they were no more than useless decoration. Even a staunch defender of the UN, Under-Secretary Brian Urquhart, defined UNTSO as "pitifully inadequate."[3]

In March 1954, terrorists infiltrated Israeli territory and, in an attack on a tourist bus en route to Beersheba from Eilat, killed eleven people. Israel filed a formal complaint with UNTSO against Jordan, but the complaint was dismissed on the grounds that there was no clear evidence for blame to be assigned. The UNTSO representative chose to abstain from the vote.

Although UNTSO's mandate was to assist in maintaining the Armistice Agreements, major Arab violations of the agreements went unaddressed. In violation of the agreements, Jordan denied Jewish access to the holy places in Jerusalem. The agreements forbade crossing of the armistice demarcation line, but Egyptian-sponsored armed Palestinian raiders (Fedayeen) crossed into Israel from Gaza and the Sinai and committed murder and sabotage. These infiltrations were one of the causes for the outbreak of the 1956 Suez Campaign[4].

1 Israel demands UN chief resign after he says Hamas attacks 'did not occur in vacuum'. https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-livid-after-un-chief-says-hamas-attacks-did-not-occur-in-vacuum/

2 Theobald, A. (2014). Meetings on the frontier: The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, the Israel-Jordan conflict, and the Local Commanders' Agreements, 1949-1956. *The Journal of Modern Hellenism*, *30*, 25-40.

3 Ibid.

4 Theobald, A. (2015). The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In J. A. Koops, N. Macqueen, T. Tardy, & P. D. Williams (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of United Nations peacekeeping operations* (pp. 121-132). Oxford University Press.

Eleven years later, on the morning of June 5th, 1967, when the Six-Day War broke out, the UNTSO headquarters in Jerusalem came under attack by Jordanian forces, who ignored the neutrality of the compound. Israeli forces had to evacuate the UNTSO team to a hotel in West Jerusalem for the duration of the war.[5] Not only was the UN team useless in preventing the outbreak of the war, Israel had to yet allocate resources during wartime to save their lives.

2) The First United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF I) was established by the United Nations in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez War to serve as a buffer force between the Egyptian and Israeli forces and monitor the ceasefire. Deployment was conditioned on the consent of the Egyptian host government, so when Egypt began massing troops in the Sinai in May 1967 in the prelude to the Six-Day War, it demanded that UNEF troops be withdrawn. The United Nations peacekeeping force complied and simply left the area.[6] Israel was left without any alternative force in place, leaving it in a precarious and volatile position.

In response to the hurried departure of UNEF troops, Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, told a Security Council meeting on June 6th 1967 that "people in our country and in many countries ask: What is the use of a United Nations presence if it is in effect an umbrella which is taken away as soon as it begins to rain?"[7]

3) The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was created after the Yom Kippur war to keep the Syrian front quiet. As long as Syria refrained from launching attacks on Israel from the Golan Heights, the border remained calm. However, after the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, Islamist militias moved into the demilitarized zone between Israel and Syria, attacked the UN peacekeeping forces and took some of them hostage. In response, many contributing nations decided to pull their troops out. A few UN positions had to relocate from the Syrian side of the border to the Israeli side[8]. The same pattern revealed itself once again: the international forces were useless at best, and a burden at worst.

4) The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created in 1978 to monitor an Israeli withdrawal after a skirmish with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Its mandate was also to "ensure the peaceful character" of South Lebanon[9]. However, UNIFIL failed miserably, and PLO terrorists continued to use the area for committing hostilities against Israel. The terrorists' activities have taken place in daylight without fear of interruption or retribution. In the few cases where members of the PLO were caught, the most common result has been their release[10].

After Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, UNIFIL's mission was to help the Lebanese government restore its authority in the south of the country and to ensure that the area between the Israeli border and the Litani River remain free of unauthorized armed forces. Once again, this proved a complete failure, as Hezbollah took control of the entire area, leading eventually to the outbreak of the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

5 "Something of a nightmare": Observing the Six Day War. https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/keith-howard-six-day-war

6 Diehl, P. F. (2015). First United Emergency Force (UNEF I). In J. A. Koops, N. Macqueen, T. Tardy, & P. D. Williams (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of United Nations peacekeeping operations* (pp. 144-152). Oxford University Press.

7 Statement to the Security Council by Foreign Minister Eban (June 6, 1967). https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/six-day-war-statement-to-the-security-council-by-foreign-minister-eban

8 UN pulling out peacekeepers from Syrian side of Golan Heights. https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/report-un-pulling-out-peacekeepers-from-syrian-side-of-golan-heights-375401

9 Novosseloff, A. (2015). United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL I). In J. A. Koops, N. Macqueen, T. Tardy, & P. D. Williams (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of United Nations peacekeeping operations* (pp. 248-258). Oxford University Press.

10 Bar, Y. (1986). The effectiveness of multinational forces in the Middle East. In *International Essays 1* (pp. 51-104). National Defense University Press.

When that war ended, UNIFIL's mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1701, called once more for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, including Hezbollah in the country's south, with the exception of the Lebanese armed forces.[11] Despite that, Hezbollah's arsenal of rockets and missiles has grown more than tenfold since then, and is currently being rained down on Israeli homes. Indeed, the United States is reportedly currently pressuring Israel to concede additional territory to Lebanon in exchange for UNIFIL merely enforcing the terms of its mandate.

3 | Non-UN peacekeeping missions in the Arab-Israeli conflict

To give the UN any post-war role is absurd, but security missions operating outside U.N. auspices do not have any better record. Indeed, we have seen this story in Gaza itself.

1) The European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) & the Philadelphi Accord - When Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, it was aware of the potential for arms being smuggled in. It agreed on a European Union force - EUBAM – to monitor the border crossings. But when Hamas took power, the EU evacuated, unable to do their jobs – although the organization does continue to formally exist with its staff and offices idling in Israel, the perfect example of how such entities continue to exist long after their objective total failure.[12]

Similarly, Israel insisted it must continue to patrol the Egyptian border, known as the Philadelphi Corridor, to prevent rockets and other improved weapon systems from being smuggled in. "No other party, it was argued, can effectively substitute Israel's motivation and capability in curbing smuggling," wrote Michael Herzog at the time.[13] Nonetheless, in a dynamic similar to that seen today, Israel was pressured into giving this role to Egypt, in what was known as the Philadelphi Accord – which allowed Gaza to be turned into the arsenal against Israeli cities that it is today.[14]

2) The US-UK Jericho Jail Guards – in 2001, after the assassination of an Israeli government minister, the U.S. persuaded the PA to arrest and imprison the guilty terrorists. Israel was concerned the imprisonment would be a sham, so the U.S. and Britain agreed to place their police officials as supervisors of the prison. Five years later, Hamas threatened to forcibly break the prisoners out of jail. Instead of resisting the move, the U.S. and U.K. promptly removed their personnel to keep them out of harm's way.[15]

3) TIPH (Temporary International Presence in Hebron) This was a special international force that patrolled the Jewish sections of Hebron from 1997 to 2019 with the one-sided mission of creating "a feeling of security" for Palestinians in the city[16]. It was not affiliated with the UN, but was specially made as an international

11 S/RES/1701 (2006). https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL-LB_060814_SCR1701.pdf

12 Europe's failed (and forgotten) Gaza monitors. https://www.jpost.com/opinion/europes-failed-and-forgotten-gaza-monitors-opinion-639383

13 A New Reality on the Egypt-Gaza Border (Part II): Analysis of the New Israel-Egypt Agreement. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-reality-egypt-gaza-border-part-ii-analysis-new-israel-egypt-agreement

14 Egypt's Role in Gaza Arms Smuggling. https://www.aei.org/articles/egypts-role-in-gaza-arms-smuggling/

15 Riot in Jericho prison preceded monitors' exodus. https://www.jpost.com/israel/riot-in-jericho-prison-preceded-monitors-exodus

16 Agreement on Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron, 21 January 1997. https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IL%20PS_970121_Agreement%20on%20Temporary%20International%20Presence%20in%20the%20City%20of%20Hebron%20%28II%29.pdf

force designed for Hebron, with representatives from Norway, Sweden, Turkey, Italy and Switzerland. Israel was originally pressured to accept it after the Baruch Goldstein massacre in 1994, and it was later part of the 1997 Hebron redeployment agreement. In practice, TIPH members have assaulted Jews in Hebron, and then been snuck out of the country by the organization's leadership17. They have made alliances with anti-Israel groups like Breaking the Silence. They have leaked their supposedly confidential reports to the press[18]. These reports were full of anti-Israel claims that went far outside the scope of TIPH's mandate. In effect, TIPH became a tool of anti-Israeli propaganda, disguised as an international "neutral" force. All this went against the TIPH agreement, but it took Israel more than 20 years to refrain from prolonging its mandate.

4 | Selected Other International and UN Security Forces

1. Arab States. Arab states have had some small involvement in organizing and operating peacekeeping missions, and the little experience they have had is profoundly discouraging. As the Lebanese civil war escalated in 1976, the Arab League created an intervention force, called the Arab Deterrent Force, with troops from six Arab countries: Libya, Saudi Arabia, South Yemen, Sudan, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. The objective of the force was to maintain stability and implement a ceasefire agreement. However, very quickly only Syrian forces remained in Lebanon, while the rest all departed.[19] The mission became a fiasco not only because of its failure to put an end to the war, but mostly because Syria's forces stayed in the country decades beyond Lebanon's request to terminate the operation. The peacekeeping force turned into a de facto occupation force.[20] It became the pretext for decades of Syrian dominion in Beirut. During the three-decade Syrian occupation of Lebanon, Syria was responsible for massacres that killed thousands of Lebanese civilians, for thousands of Lebanese prisoners dying in Syrian prisons under torture, and for innumerous assassinations and assassination attempts carried out against Lebanese political opponents of Syria.

2. Passivity in the face of Genocide: Rwanda & Bosnia. International peacekeepers and observers have time after time failed to guarantee security, not only in the Middle East. One of the most terrible examples occurred in Rwanda in 1994, where UN peacekeepers were already in place when the genocide occurred, having been originally sent to monitor local elections. The peacekeepers were repeatedly ordered not to intervene so as not to interfere in a domestic conflict and thus overstep the scope of their mission. As UN peacekeepers stood on the sidelines, more than eight hundred thousand Rwandans were killed in just three months. This staggering death toll prompted an extensive UN investigation, which concluded that member countries had ordered their peacekeepers to stand down out of fear for their safety after incurring casualties during previous missions[21].

17 Hebron observer recalled after slapping Jewish boy. https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Hebron-observer-recalled-after-slapping-Jewish-boy-562622; Will Hebron lose its international observers over Israeli election fever? https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Will-Hebron-lose-its-international-observers-over-Israeli-election-fever-572235

18 Leak of report into Hebron might mean end of international monitoring force. https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/191209-181218-leak-of-report-into-hebron-might-mean-end-of-international-monitoring-force

19 Youssef, H. (2014). Mediation and Conflict Resolution in the Arab World: The Role of the Arab League. In *OSCE Yearbook 2013* (pp. 299-312). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.

20 Gaub, F. (2016). *An Arab NATO in the making? Middle Eastern military cooperation since 2011.* U.S. Army War College. https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/300

21 The Rise and Fall of the Responsibility to Protect. https://world101.cfr.org/understanding-international-system/building-blocks/rise-and-fall-responsibility-protect

In 1995, just one year after the events in Rwanda, peacekeepers were involved in a civil war in the Balkans that pitted Bosnian Muslims against Bosnian Serbs following the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. UN peacekeepers were supposed to protect the Muslim town of Srebrenica, which had been designated a safe haven. However, when the Bosnian Serb army began advancing in their direction, Dutch UN peacekeepers were ordered to stand down and not fire. As a result, the Bosnian Serb army methodically executed some eight thousand Bosnian Muslim men and boys. An international tribunal later designated the massacre a genocide[22].

3. Special international regimes. Other historical attempts to create multi or international political structures give no more basis for optimism. The following was the fate of international cities or territories, meaning specific cities or areas with special international status, often administered by the League of Nations or other international bodies.

i) International Regime for Jerusalem (1947-49) -- An international regime protected by a UN presence was proposed for the city of Jerusalem and its environs by General Assembly Resolution 181. The Arab states ignored the resolution, attacking Israel upon its independence, besieging and dividing Jerusalem. Despite the U.N. failing to protect the Jews at all, it continued to insist on the internationalization of the city for decades, even passing a "statute" for the governance of the city in 1950[23]. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion denounced the failure of the UN to uphold its promises to provide for the security of Jews, especially in Jerusalem:

> *We are not setting ourselves up as judges of the United Nations, which did not lift a finger when other States, members of the United Nations, openly made war on the decision adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, and tried by armed force to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel, to blot out the Jews living in the Holy Land and to destroy Jerusalem, the Holy City[24].*

ii) The "Free City of Danzig" was created by the League of Nations as an international city after World War I. As a strategically important port city, its purpose was to provide Poland with access to the Baltic Sea. While the League of Nations oversaw the protection and administration of Danzig, the practical enforcement of security and protection relied on goodwill and cooperation between Poland and Germany. When this cooperation broke down with the rise of Nazism in Germany, no one in the international community was there to rescue Danzig. After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis conquered Danzig and abolished its former status as a "Free City." To this day, the failure of the international regime in Danzig remains a stark example of the impotence and reluctance of international actors to live up to their own promises.[25]

iii) The "Free territory of Trieste" was established in 1947 by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 16 in order to mitigate tensions and resolve competing claims by Italy and Yugoslavia over a strip of land at the tip of the Adriatic Sea. Trieste was meant to be a "permanent", neutral, independent territory under direct responsibility of the United Nations Security Council, but never functioned as a real independent

22 Ibid.

23 United Nations, Question of An International Regime for the Jerusalem Area and Protection of the Holy Places, Special Report of the Trusteeship Council, Official Records, General Assembly, Fifth Session, Supplement No. 9 (A/1286) (Lake Success, New York: United Nations, 1950). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/704653?ln=es

24 Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, 5.12.1949. https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/5-statement-to-the-knesset-by-prime-minister-ben-gurion

25 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia (2023, July 6). *Polish Corridor. Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/place/Polish-Corridor

state. It represented the high ideals of the architects of the post-WWII world order, aiming to transcend national rivalries, its multi-ethnic inhabitants even referred to as "international citizens." Security was to be provided by U.S. and British troops in one half of the territory, and Yugoslav troops in the other half. However, Cold War realities and patriotic sentiments among Italians, Slovenes and Croats led to the dissolution of the Trieste experiment in 1954, when the territory was annexed and partitioned between Italy and Yugoslavia.[26] The promise, enshrined in Security Council resolutions and international treaties, became a dead letter.

5 | Conclusion

History, and especially Israel's experience, shows that foreign troops or personnel, even with countries or institutions who have expertise in peacekeeping, cannot be trusted to provide security for Israel. This is true even in straightforward contexts like policing a demilitarized zone or guarding a jail, and would be all the more true for the daunting task of rebuilding Gaza without Iranian, Islamist, or other hostile influence. Some general conclusions can be drawn:

1. International and foreign forces will lack the determination to confront Palestinian armed factions. Countries lack the interest and incentive to sacrifice their personnel, and perhaps incur diplomatic costs, in order to protect others. Certainly no country has shown a willingness to make such sacrifices to protect the Jewish State.
2. Such international presences are inserted to solve a momentary diplomatic problem rather than as a meaningful, lasting security guarantee.
3. Foreign presences, when faced by pressure from Hamas or other armed groups, will find it much more convenient to accommodate those groups, or look the other way. Confrontation with Israel, after all, would likely only be diplomatic, whereas confrontation with terror groups is likely to be kinetic.
4. Any such presence is likely to flee when most needed, and yet persist bureaucratically and diplomatically long after they have failed.
5. Such institutions lack any meaningful accountability, especially to Israel.

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26 Coloni, M., & Clegg, P. (2022). Reflections on the status of the Free Territory of Trieste. *Small States & Territories, 5* (1), 179-194.