

# The Case for Sending a Multinational Force to Gaza

**Nir Arielli, Jacob Stoil and Mary Elizabeth Walters<sup>1\*2‡</sup>**

**November 2023**

## **Executive Summary**

While the current Israeli military operation seeks to degrade the military capabilities of Hamas, the Israeli government has not put forward a coherent plan for what should happen to the Gaza Strip once the operation is over. The United States, the European Union and other key allies of Israel have stated their objection to an Israeli re-occupation of the Gaza Strip. Instead, the US administration and several other key actors have indicated their preference for the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza. However, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmud Abbas, and other prominent Palestinian figures have made it clear that they do not wish to take over the running of Gaza immediately after Israel's military operation with no political horizon in sight. In the longer run, they expect to see the Gaza Strip incorporated into an independent Palestinian state. Importantly, the Palestinian Authority currently does not have the capacity to take over and govern the Gaza Strip.

**An interim solution that could assist in the governance of the Gaza Strip, while providing security and preventing further attacks on Israel, is deploying a large multinational peacekeeping force with a clear mandate and robust rules of engagement.** In terms of its mission, size, mandate, and rules of engagement, such a multinational force would need to resemble KFOR in Kosovo and INTERFET in East Timor much more than the ineffective UNFIL mission in southern Lebanon, which proved incapable of keeping Hezbollah forces away from Israel's border.

An effective peacekeeping mission in Gaza would have to fulfil three interlinked tasks.

**Security:** It is still unclear how the present military operation in the Gaza Strip will end. If Israeli forces withdraw while there are still militant groups with the capacity for

---

\* Nir Arielli is Associate Professor of International History at the University of Leeds. Jacob Stoil is Chair of Applied History at the Modern War Institute, Senior Fellow of the 40th Infantry Urban Warfare Center, and Trustee of the US Commission on Military History. Mary Elizabeth Walters is Director of Military Theory and Assistant Professor of Military and Security Studies at the Air Command and Staff College, and Trustee for the Society for Military History. The views expressed in this paper represent the personal views of the authors and are not necessarily the views of the US Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Department of the Army, Army University, US Military Academy, or the US Air University.

‡ This document is part of a series of policy papers which is a product of a joint project by the Mitvim Institute and the Berl Katzenelson Foundation to reflect on the post-war era with the support of the new Israel Fund.

violence within Gaza, the multinational force may have to engage in **peace enforcement**. Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, peacekeepers can be authorised to target particular actors, demobilize warring parties and decommission their weapons, and to support the transfer of territorial control from illegitimate non-state armed groups to legitimate authorities. The multinational force could assume gradual responsibility over parts of the Gaza Strip as part of a phased Israeli withdrawal. Careful coordination between the IDF and the peacekeeping mission will be crucial.

**Governance:** The multinational force must prevent a vacuum in governance in Gaza. Part of its mission should be to ensure that basic civil authorities and essential services return to work and continue to function, and that internally displaced refugees can be temporarily accommodated and eventually return to their homes. An internationally-appointed High Representative should lead the mission's civilian efforts, paving the way for a phased handover to Palestinian control.

**Reconstruction:** The Gaza Strip is currently experiencing unprecedented levels of destruction. The multinational force can play a key role in initial reconstruction efforts, ensuring the supply of electricity and water returns quickly, and minimizing any hazard caused by unexploded ordnance, Hamas tunnels, and sewage spillages.

Deploying multinational forces in Gaza will send a very clear message to Palestinians, Israelis and the rest of the region that there **will not be a return to the status quo ante** of “managing the conflict”. A peacekeeping mission in Gaza will be an **interim phase** and must be part of a broader diplomatic settlement that will include Israelis, Palestinians, key regional actors, and the international community.

## **Premise:**

- The current Israeli military operation aims to destroy the military capabilities of Hamas in Gaza.
- A permanent or even long-term Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip is against Israel's interests and will be rejected by the international community and by Israel's key allies. Such an occupation would leave Israel responsible for 2.2 million Palestinians.
- Past and present Palestinian Authority officials have made it clear that they have neither the capacity nor the will to take over the running of Gaza immediately after Israel's military operation.
- An interim solution that could assist in the **governance** of the Gaza Strip, while providing **security** and preventing further attacks on Israel is deploying a large multi-national peacekeeping force with a **clear mandate and robust rules of engagement**.
- In terms of its mission, size, mandate and rules of engagement, such a multinational force would need to resemble **KFOR in Kosovo** and **INTERFET in East Timor** much more than the ineffective UNIFIL mission in southern

Lebanon, which proved incapable of keeping Hezbollah forces away from Israel's border.

- The establishment of the mission in Gaza could be **phased**, with multi-national forces taking over control of one geographic sector at a time.
- Deploying multi-national forces in Gaza will send a very clear message to Palestinians, Israelis and the rest of the region that there **will not be a return to the status quo ante** of “managing the conflict”.
- Sending a multi-national force to Gaza requires **international legitimacy** and support. This could come either from the UN Security Council or from an international coalition of relevant states and actors.
- Deploying a multi-national force to Gaza will be a **transitional phase** and must be part of a broader diplomatic settlement that will include Israelis, Palestinians, key regional actors, and the international community.

## **Why is a multi-national peace-keeping force necessary?**

The current IDF military operation in the Gaza Strip seeks to degrade the military capabilities of Hamas and to create conditions whereby the organization no longer controls the territory. To what extent this goal will be achieved remains to be seen. Whatever the outcome, there is an urgent question that the Israeli government has yet to answer: what will happen to the Gaza Strip once the operation is over? While the more extremist elements in the Israeli government yearn for a reconquest of Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu only stated that he does not wish to see Jewish settlements, abandoned in 2005, re-established. On the other hand, he declared that Israel would seek to retain control of security in the Gaza Strip.

A permanent or long-term Israeli re-occupation of the territory would leave Israel responsible for a hostile population of more than two million Palestinians, many of whom have lost their homes in the war and will require accommodation. Local resistance to Israeli occupation is likely to be severe and widespread. Moreover, the United States, the European Union and other key allies of Israel have already made clear their objection to an Israeli re-occupation of the Gaza Strip.

Instead, the Biden administration and several other key actors have indicated their preference for the Palestinian Authority (PA) to govern Gaza, essentially a return to the status quo prior to the 2007 Battle of Gaza in which Hamas ousted Fatah loyalists. However, the US, the European Union and some of the Gulf States expect the PA to be reformed and “revitalized” before it can take on this responsibility. Furthermore, the President of the PA, Mahmud Abbas, and other prominent Palestinian officials have made it clear that they do not wish to take over the running of Gaza immediately after Israel's military operation. In the longer run, they expect to see the Gaza Strip incorporated into an independent Palestinian state. Importantly, the PA and its security organizations currently do not have the capacity to take over and govern the Gaza Strip.

**An interim solution that could assist in the governance of the Gaza Strip, while providing security and preventing further attacks on Israel, is deploying a large multi-national peacekeeping force with a clear mandate and robust rules of engagement.**

Among Israeli political and security circles there is an aversion towards relying on international peacekeepers. These apprehensions are based on unsuccessful missions in the past. For instance, the European Union Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah Crossing Point, established after Israel had pulled its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, hastily withdrew after Hamas took control of the territory in 2007. Since then, the mission has been unable to resume its original task of monitoring the border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Similarly, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), even though it was augmented following the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, has patently failed to keep Hezbollah forces north of the Litani River and away from Israel's border, as stipulated by UN Resolution 1701.

However, Israel may soon find itself under intense international pressure to withdraw its forces from Gaza. Should that happen, it would be preferable to have a multi-national force assume temporary control over the territory. **Furthermore, deploying multi-national forces in Gaza will send a very clear message to Palestinians, Israelis and the rest of the region that there will not be a return to the status quo ante of “managing the conflict”.**

## **Lessons from the History of Peacekeeping**

Despite Israeli skepticism, important lessons emerge from the peacekeeping missions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that can guide the creation of a robust and effective peacekeeping force to help stabilize Gaza.

On Israel's insistence, the US, French and Italian forces that were deployed in **Lebanon in 1982-1984** were not sent by the UN. They fulfilled their initial role, overseeing the departure of PLO leadership and forces from Beirut. Shortly after leaving, the forces were recalled to Lebanon following the assassination of Lebanese President Bachir Gemayal and the subsequent massacre at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. Veterans of the mission reported that their mandate, rules of engagement and chain of command were unclear and cumbersome. Hezbollah suicide attacks on the US Marines barracks and on French troops in 1983 led to the force's withdrawal. Two important lessons from this case are that the force's mission needs to be defined clearly, and that a situation where the local population sees the multi-national force as an extension of its enemy should be avoided.

The 60,000-strong IFOR that was deployed in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** in late 1995 benefitted from a clearer mandate and rules of engagement as well as from being a

reputable military force. However, IFOR's narrow focus on implementing the military elements of the Dayton Accords led IFOR to stand by even as Bosnian Serbs set minority neighbourhoods on fire. NATO's follow on SFOR retained IFOR's rules of engagement, but had an expanded mandate that allowed SFOR to support freedom of movement, refugee return, and election security. IFOR and SFOR demonstrate that a robust peacekeeping force with permissive rules of engagement can hold well armed and trained paramilitary forces at bay. Even so, security on its own does not provide lasting stability.

KFOR deployed to **Kosovo** in 1999, in the wake of NATO's coercive bombing campaign, Operation Allied Force. Like IFOR and SFOR, KFOR was authorized by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Numbering 50,000, KFOR's mandate was to ensure the withdrawal of Serbian forces, disarm and demilitarize the Kosovo Liberation Army, provide security and public safety, support humanitarian assistance and refugee return, and coordinate with the UN's governance mission, UNMIK. Even more than SFOR in Bosnia, KFOR's success was achieved in tandem with the governance mission of UNMIK.

Just months after KFOR, the UN Security Council authorized INTERFET under Chapter VII to use "all necessary means" to restore order and support the UNAMET observation mission in **East Timor**. In a similar manner to NATO in the Balkans, Australia led the mission and provided the majority of forces, making INTERFET a robust force capable of matching guerrilla bands and Indonesian forces. After decades of intermittent fighting, INTERFET was able to step into an almost complete collapse of state services and fill the void until the UN established an interim administration, after which INTERFET continued to provide security and logistical support. Robust peacekeeping forces like INTERFET and KFOR deploy with the capability to not only handle threats, but also to begin repairing and rebuilding damaged infrastructure to restore basic services to civilians.

## Tasks

In the context of Gaza, a successful multinational mission will need to fulfil three interdependent and therefore coordinated tasks.

### 1. Security

Security concerns are likely to be the top priority for Israel. It is still unclear how the present military operation in the Gaza Strip will end. If Israeli forces withdraw while there are still militant groups with the capacity for violence within Gaza, the multinational force may have to engage in **peace enforcement** rather than **peacekeeping**. Operating under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, peacekeepers will need to be authorised to target particular actors, demobilize warring parties and decommission their weapons, as well as support the transfer of territorial control from illegitimate non-state armed groups to legitimate authorities, in this case ultimately the Palestinian Authority.

Even if no peace enforcement is required, Israel is likely to insist on the deployment of a robust and reputable military force with permissive rules of engagement. In many ways, the success or failure of the mission will likely hinge on its ability to deliver and guarantee security. If this cannot be achieved, then the mission will not succeed. The multinational force could assume gradual responsibility over parts of the Gaza Strip as part of a phased Israeli withdrawal. Careful coordination between the IDF and the peacekeeping mission will be crucial.

## **2. Governance**

The multinational force must prevent a vacuum in governance in Gaza. Part of its mission should be to ensure that basic civil authorities and essential services return to work and continue to function, and that internally displaced refugees can be temporarily accommodated and eventually return to their homes. The Office of the High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, put in place by the Dayton Agreement, may serve as a useful model. The High Representative would temporarily act as the top civil authority in the Gaza Strip. In Bosnia, the High Representative had the authority to veto legislative decisions and dismiss officials. Though the position of the High Representative in Sarajevo has not been without problems, a similar position in Gaza could avoid a wholesale dismissal of all current serving officials, a move that proved very harmful in Iraq in 2003. In Gaza, a High Representative should retain select officials on a case-by-case basis and oversee governance decisions with veto authority. The High Representative would need to be a prominent figure who will be respected by both Palestinians and Israelis. To prevent an indefinite deployment, the governance mission should include conditions for a **phased handover to Palestinian control**.

## **3. Reconstruction**

Although the Gaza Strip saw military operations in 2008-9, 2012, 2014 and 2021, it is currently experiencing unprecedented levels of destruction. Gaza's infrastructure and large parts of its urban landscape will be in urgent need of reconstruction once the war ends. While the broader international development community will be central to long-term rebuilding, the peacekeeping force can play a key role in initial reconstruction efforts. Ensuring the supply of electricity and water returns quickly, and minimizing any hazard caused by unexploded ordnance, Hamas tunnels, and sewage spillages, may help to increase the legitimacy of the multinational force while saving civilian lives. A failure or significant delay in delivering the population's basic needs will likely reflect poorly on the mission.

## **Supporting Diplomatic Architecture**

The deployment of a multi-national force in Gaza must be temporary and form part of a broader effort to re-commence negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders about a long-term settlement. At the same time, it must be able to succeed even should those negotiations fail.

For maximum international legitimacy, a future peacekeeping force in Gaza should receive its mandate or an endorsement from the United Nations Security Council, preferably under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. However, the present tension between the US on the one hand and Russia and China on the other is likely to prevent the adoption of any US-led initiative. Should the motion be put forward by another current member of the UNSC such as the United Arab Emirates, its chances of passing would be slightly improved. One way to bypass the diplomatic deadlock would be for the Palestinian Authority to request the peacekeeping mission, with Israel's consent. However, it is difficult to see the present right-wing government in Israel supporting an initiative that involves collaborating in this way with the Palestinian Authority and working constructively within the UN.

If a UNSC resolution cannot be reached, other non-UN models, such as that of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai, might be appropriate for this situation. A multi-national force for Gaza could receive its mandate from a coalition of relevant states and actors. These should include Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the United States, the EU, the UK, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. Countries that take part in the coalition but do not wish to send troops to Gaza should commit to sponsoring the mission. Importantly, *the mission cannot succeed without the inclusion of adequate combat power from the donor states paired with robust rules of engagement.*

It is vital to include the Palestinian Authority in such a coalition as their association with it would confer vital legitimacy on the multinational force, making the participation of Arab states much easier. An endorsement by the Palestinian Authority would also send a clear signal to Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza that a new path has been taken and that there will not be a return to the conditions prevailing before 7<sup>th</sup> October. Without Palestinian involvement in this interim phase, the multi-national force will be seen by many Gazans as just another foreign occupier.

The Office of the [US Security Coordinator](#) for Israel and the Palestinian Authority is a US three-star headquarters that has had its multinational force headquarters in Jerusalem since 2005. Tasked with synchronizing international support efforts and fostering an enduring partnership between Israel and the Palestinian Authority as well as building Palestinian security capacity, this Office offers a structure and headquarters on which the mission for Gaza could be built.

Putting together a multinational force that will be capable to carry out the complex mission of providing security for Israel, restoring governance in Gaza and overseeing the reconstruction of the territory will be incredibly challenging. All of the major NATO-aligned powers other than the US are currently near the limits of their military capacity providing support to NATO and Pacific missions. Without the collapse of Hamas rule in Gaza, regional actors in the Middle East are likely to remain reluctant to commit themselves to deploying their forces in the area. The current Israeli government, in its actions and statements, make international cooperation around

resolving the crisis very difficult. Netanyahu and his ministers have not put forward a long-term vision for the future of Gaza, while statements by prominent Israeli politicians about relocating the Palestinian population or reestablishing Jewish settlements in the area have elicited strong international condemnation.

However, a multinational mission likely remains the only viable interim solution should Israel withdraw from the Gaza Strip at the end of its military operation. The mission could prevent repeated rounds of violence every few of years, and could lead to the removal of the blockade on Gaza, in place with varying degrees of severity for more than 15 years. It could also assist in the stabilization of the territory, allowing aid to pour in while ensuring such aid is not repurposed by Hamas. **The mission need not establish itself across all of the Gaza Strip at once. Rather, it can deploy as part of a phased Israeli withdrawal which will allow for confidence building and a gradual increase in capacity and responsibility.** Recent polls by [Mitvim](#) and aChord Center show that handing Gaza to a multinational force at the end of the war is the most favored option among Israelis.