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PEACEKEEPING IN PALESTINE

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The Middle East has seen numerous peacekeeping operations over the past fifty years. Several continue to this day. For over three decades, a U.S.-led force in the Sinai has helped separate Israeli and Egyptian forces and maintain peace between these two states. On Israel's northern border, a UN force in Lebanon seeks to prevent renewed fighting between Hezbollah militants and Israel. Helpful as these missions have been, they have done nothing to advance resolution of the core dispute between Israel and its Arab neighbors. They have not resolved the fate of the Palestinian population displaced when Israel was created in 1948 or determined the final status of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967 but never incorporated into it.

Something more than inter-positional peacekeeping will be needed as part of any accord designed to resolve these core issues. Simply separating the Israeli and Palestinian populations will not be enough, because it is difficult to imagine a Palestinian state that could, immediately upon the signature of a peace agreement, proceed to effectively control its side of the divide and reliably guarantee faithful execution of that accord. The absence of such a state presents a classic chicken versus egg dilemma. There can be no Middle East peace without a Palestinian party capable of effectively controlling the territory under its control, yet no such Palestinian party can be created without a peace agreement. Experience has shown the challenges of establishing these two conditions sequentially. Israel will not end the occupation until it has a reliable negotiating partner, one capable of fulfilling whatever obligations it accepts, but such a Palestinian partner cannot be created under Israeli occupation. These two prerequisites for peace must be put in place more or less concurrently. Doing so will probably require some third party to help the emerging Palestinian state establish itself and at the same time assure Israelis that the peace accord will be faithfully implemented.

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Though the nature of a hypothetical peacekeeping force in a new Palestinian state is fraught with uncertainty, it is possible to make well informed predictions about what circumstances would be likely to result in its creation. It seems unlikely that the United States or the rest of the international community would be willing to deploy troops into the Palestinian territories in order to garrison an Israeli occupation or to substitute for it. So a precondition for the deployment of such a force would be an end to that occupation. On the other hand, Israel appears unlikely to agree to a full transfer of sovereignty to a Palestinian state – particularly for functions potentially affecting the safety of the Israeli population, such as security and border control. Thus, an international mission designed to help keep an Israeli-Palestinian peace would need to combine both inter-positional and state-building functions. Certainly one of its responsibilities would be to help prevent incursions and other attacks by Palestinian extremists into Israel, thereby also forestalling Israeli military incursions into the Palestinian state. But the mission would also have to help that state develop the capacity to secure and effectively govern its own territory.

Many non-military elements of an international state-building mission are already in place. U.S., European and UN personnel have been working for some time to improve the quality of Palestinian governance. But these efforts are taking place in the midst of an ongoing military occupation run by an Israeli government that is unsure about whether it truly wants the emergence of a competent Palestinian state – particularly one capable of securing its own territory and population. The international community's state-building programs are also being conducted in the midst of an ongoing conflict among the Palestinians themselves regarding the nature of their state and control over its institutions. External efforts to build more effective

Palestinian institutions are unlikely to make adequate progress until both these impediments – Israeli ambivalence and Palestinian infighting – are removed or at least mitigated in a manner conducive to success.

Palestinian authorities will not want to trade an Israeli occupation for an international one, so international authority would need to be carefully delineated and substantially less sweeping than the current Israeli writ. External assistance in the field of state-building, on the other hand, is likely to be considerably more extensive than what is currently provided – both because the conditions will be more favorable and because with their troops on the ground and at risk, contributing nations will have a strong incentive to improve Palestinian institutional capacity to serve the Palestinian population and control its own territory.

Considerable buy-in would be necessary from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides before the United States or any other government would likely be willing to support such a mission. There is no strong constituency in the United States for coercing Israel to make peace. Nor is there likely to be any stomach among potential troop-contributing nations to force the Palestinians to do so. Thus, if such a mission is to take place, it is more likely to resemble recent UN-led post-conflict missions, which have had the assent of both sides, than the more robust NATO-led peace enforcement efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo – not to speak of the even more intense counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The UN is not a plausible candidate to lead this particular mission, however. Most UN members regard the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to be, at best, unduly prolonged, and, at worst, illegitimate. Israel, by the same token, does not regard the United Nations as sufficiently

impartial to undertake a mission so central to Israeli security. To garner the support of both of the key parties, therefore, it is more likely that the military component of any such international mission would need to be organized as a U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" or, perhaps more likely, by the NATO Alliance.

A plausible construct would thus be a NATO-led military component with a civilian-led parallel organization to handle political, governance and development matters. Both components would require the explicit consent of all the parties to the conflict, and their mandates would likely be embedded in the peace settlement. The governments involved would also likely seek and receive a parallel UN Security Council mandate. The international civilian leader would be appointed by a select group of interested countries, to include those contributing significantly to the NATO-led military force as well as those prepared to provide substantial economic assistance. These governments would also need to provide funding to allow the civilian leader to assemble a staff and to conduct a variety of advisory and assistance activities. This civilian leader would probably need some extraordinary powers deriving from the peace agreement and the accompanying Security Council resolution. Enforcement would largely depend upon voluntary compliance but would have to be backed by a willingness to employ NATO military force, or alternatively the threat to withdraw that force and risk an Israeli reoccupation.

Any peace settlement would fall apart if Israel were to be exposed to continued attacks from Palestinian territory, and these will occur unless the overwhelming majority of Palestinians support the settlement. Achieving peace among Palestinians will thus be essential to sustaining peace between Arabs and Israelis. Certainly there will be few international volunteers to man a peacekeeping mission in a Palestinian state at war with itself. Thus such a deployment will probably require agreement, not just between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but also between the two major contenders for power in the new Palestinian state, Fatah and Hamas.

Summary

In sum, a peacekeeping force in Palestine is no substitute for agreement among the main Palestinian factions, and between them and Israel, but is a likely and perhaps essential component of such an accord. Although the United Nations is unlikely to be chosen to lead such a force, its experience in overseeing the implementation of a dozen or more similar such peace agreements over the past couple of decades, as well as NATO's endeavors in Bosnia and Kosovo suggest that this is a feasible, if by no means a certain or easy endeavor.

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