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Solana says EU would consider military role in Gaza if asked

By Associated Press

The European Union would consider participating in an international force in Gaza if asked by the major players in the region, the EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana said Wednesday.

"If we are asked, of course, we will consider the possibility," Solana told reporters.

He spoke in response to a suggestion by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that international forces could be stationed along the Gaza Strip's volatile border with Egypt to prevent arms from reaching Palestinian militants.

The EU, which has police officers already helping to monitor the Gaza-Egypt border, has long said it would examine a possible peacekeeping role in the region if there is an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Solana stressed that as yet there had been no decision among players in the region to seek EU help.

"We are far from a decision," he said. "We'll see how things go, and what is the decision to be taken by the important players, that have to take a decision, which are ... the Israelis, the Palestinians and the Egyptians."

Solana said he'd been in touch overnight with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian leaders in an effort to calm the situation in the Gaza Strip between Abbas' Fatah forces and the rival Hamas faction.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he supports the deployment of a [multinational force](#) along the Philadelphia Route in Rafah on the Gaza-Egypt border.

The presence of an international force could help curb the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and halt the ongoing strengthening of the militant groups in the Gaza Strip.

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