

## A Brokered Peace

**Israelis and Palestinians seem to realize that a strong international presence will be critical to any deal.**

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Israelis have traditionally scorned the idea of international peacekeepers intruding in their region. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion once famously dismissed the U.N.—pronounced "Oom" in Hebrew—as "Oom, schmoom." Arab leaders have also shown disdain: on the eve of the 1967 Six Day War, for example, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser peremptorily expelled 1,300 blue helmets from Sinai before rolling through. And Palestinians have feared that allowing an armed international force into their territory would infringe on the sovereignty of their incipient state.

It's therefore striking that a recent proposal to deploy NATO forces in the West Bank as part of any Obama-era peace deal is quickly gaining advocates in both Washington and the Levant. Former U.S. national-security advisers Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski both recently endorsed the idea. The president-elect's nominee to head the National Security Council, Gen. James Jones—a former NATO supreme commander—is also said to favor such a force. Israelis and Palestinians have raised tepid protests, but even they seem to be realizing increasingly that a strong international presence will be critical if any deal is to be struck—and if it's to stick. "A principle that appeared to be out of bounds I think is now in bounds," says Tony Blair, the Mideast envoy of the Quartet (made up of the United States, the EU, the U.N. and Russia).

Negotiators have long struggled with a frustrating Catch-22: how to secure Palestinian areas under any future peace plan. Israelis argue that they can't make a deal until Palestinian troops become competent enough to control militants. Palestinians, on the other hand, complain that they can't do so until the Israelis withdraw. A robust international force, in principle, could solve that conundrum. A NATO contingent—and it would likely have to be NATO, since Israelis are skeptical of the United Nations—would reassure Israelis on security while freeing the Palestinians from their hated occupiers.

Given the idea's allure, it's no surprise that it's actually been floated before. The deal President Bill Clinton proposed at Camp David in 2000 called for "an international presence that can only be withdrawn by mutual consent." But Aaron David Miller, a U.S. negotiator during the talks, says that Israelis insisted that this military presence be American, not European or other. Clinton's plan would have allowed Israeli forces to remain in the Jordan Valley for up to three years "under the authority of the international force." The NATO mission being proposed today would have a wider mandate and might even preclude Israeli troops in areas it would patrol. "People are increasingly going for the maximalist version," says Daniel Levy, a senior fellow at Washington's New America Foundation.

What changed? To start, Israel has begun to recognize that it is ill equipped to defeat its asymmetrical enemies. "We're realizing that we don't have the means to deal with these [irregular guerrilla armies]," says Yossi Alpher, a former Mossad official. So despite what he calls Israel's prior "allergy" to foreign forces, "we're increasingly willing to rely on the international community," he says. Palestinians, too, have begun to come around—if only

because nothing else has managed to secure statehood. They now realize, Brzezinski argues, that the alternative to an international force is continued Israeli occupation.

Of course, there are still plenty of obstacles. International peacekeepers are currently stationed in the Golan Heights and the Sinai and have been quite successful. But they patrol largely empty demilitarized zones. Operating in the cramped and densely populated hills around Jerusalem would be infinitely more difficult. Working in Gaza—one of the world's most crowded areas—would be a nightmare. And with Hamas in control of the coastal strip, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas hopelessly weak, and Israel's hawkish Benjamin Netanyahu poised for a comeback, perhaps the biggest challenge will be getting any peace deal at all. Alpher says that NATO peacekeepers would be little more than the "icing on the cake" of a peace agreement. But he warns that, "I don't know how anyone arrives at the assumption that there's going to *be* a cake."

Even if there were, it's not guaranteed that NATO countries would agree to provide the icing. Americans and Europeans have grown more comfortable in recent years deploying forces to combat zones outside Europe. And the benefits of a Mideast peace deal could be huge. Yet tough questions abound. What would happen if rejectionist groups like Islamic Jihad started picking off peacekeepers? Would NATO respond with the same kinds of preventive raids carried out by the Israelis today? Scowcroft says he hopes not. But then it's not clear how NATO could prevent the Israelis from taking matters into their own hands. And should all-out fighting resume—this is, remember, one of the world's most intractable conflicts—NATO could be drawn into the middle. At the end of the 2006 Lebanon War, one senior Israeli security official, speaking anonymously, said that NATO troops being deployed there would "put the whole conflict in a different context," drawing Americans and Europeans into "a clash of civilizations." The same would be true in the West Bank: a sobering thought that any Western politician, including the new U.S. president, would do well to consider.

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#### **A note from Bro Stef:**

As we know from scripture, Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19, God will gather the nations of the world into Israel where He will once and for all deal with those that have divided His land (Joel 3:1-2), fought against Him and persecuted His people. The article above serves as notice to us from the Lord that the mechanism in which the world will be drawn into Israel is being put in place and being made ready in this generation! It truly is time to shout from the roof tops, Yeshua is coming!