

# BISON

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# Third Party Involvement in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Role for Canada

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## Executive Summary

While Canadian troops are fighting and dying in severe battle conditions in Kandahar, Afghanistan, there are emerging 'peacekeeping' opportunities for Canadian forces in the event of an established border between Israel and the Palestinian territories, and between Israel and Lebanon. Indeed, the conditions may be ripe for movement in this direction on both fronts. Historically, the Palestinians have long called for third party intervention as a means to legitimize itself as a state and to provide security from Israeli intervention. Israel has long opposed intervention for obvious reasons relative to Palestinian interests, and perceptions of the likely pro-Palestinian bias of any force, especially under any form of United Nations leadership.

Today, however, with the outbreak of hostilities along its northern border and campaign to disarm *Hezbollah* in southern Lebanon, Israel has begun to accept possibilities of third party intervention. For Israel, the deployment of peacekeepers in Palestinian areas and southern Lebanon is increasingly perceived as a positive tool for enhancing national security. The enlistment of external forces can facilitate state-building within the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the extension of Lebanese sovereignty in southern Lebanon.

Thus, the conditions may be ripe for a third party initiative that would marry Palestinian interests for a traditional peacekeeping force and Israeli interests in a state-building

peace force. As such, Canada has much to contribute to conflict resolution efforts between Israel and a newly established Palestinian state.

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## Then and Now

Canada has long held a coveted position in third party involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since the occasion of Lester B. Pearson's Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic efforts towards resolving the Suez Crisis in 1956, Canadian expertise and knowledge have been integrated into all peacekeeping missions in the region. Known for their impartiality and professionalism, Canadian peacekeepers have been recognized by all parties to the conflict as a positive force in the monitoring, observing, and stabilizing of borders as well as the agreements that govern them. As a result, Canada has contributed, and will continue to contribute, invaluable expertise in the ongoing mobilization and deployment of international missions to the Middle Eastern conflict theatre. Canadian initiatives have also been central to behind-the-scenes work supporting the resumption of bilateral and multilateral negotiations, and a transition to the peace building model of conflict management that focuses on governance, institution building, civic education, political rights and development aid.

### The focus on third party peace building in Israeli-Palestinian relations has resulted from a key transition in the political dynamics of the Middle East.

With Israel's signing of formal peace accords with Egypt in 1979, and Jordan in 1994, the Arab-Israeli context no longer bears the prospect of escalation into all out inter-state war, that is a war between Israel and the leading Arab states. As a result, attention has shifted from border controls between nation-states to

Israeli security barrier at the village of Abu-Dis  
(Author's Photo)



mitigating the unresolved, complicated and arguably more protracted arena of the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict; a conflict that takes place simultaneously at multiple levels.

Israel's relations with its neighboring states (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt) have stabilized to a great degree over the years, notwithstanding continued tensions with Syria and the recent clash with *Hezbollah* in Lebanon. However, the strategic and security relationship between Israel and the Palestinians has deteriorated drastically with the failure of the Oslo Peace Process of the 1990s, and the ongoing cycle of Palestinian suicide bomb attacks and Israeli reprisals since the onset of the second Palestinian Uprising, the *al-Aqsa Intifada* since September 2000. Israeli-Palestinian relations have

been plagued by disillusionment due to the absence of a peace dividend from the Oslo years, and lack of progress through the Quartet-sponsored Road Map. Both Israeli security and the political-economic situation in the Palestinian areas have not improved as was expected from the Road Map's performance-based agenda.

The breakdown of formal peace negotiations has been accompanied by a growing unilateralism on the Israeli side in response to public demands for increased security. Israeli unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 merely increased the capacity for *Hezbollah* to arm and recruit followers. The ineffectiveness of unilateral policies has been further exposed on account of the recent clashes in Gaza and Lebanon. This has been evidenced by the construction since 2002 of Israel's security barrier, as well as a series of bypass roads, enclaves, checkpoints and other security measures, which by extension, problematize Palestinian land claims and movement towards national self-determination.

**The Palestinian side has undergone a process of radicalization with the growth of a complex network of militant groups under the umbrella of**



Israel's old security area in Lebanon, which roughly corresponds to the current area of UN peacekeeping deployment in the country  
(www.factsofisrael.com Photo)

## **Hamas that has since taken over the Palestinian Authority (PA).**

This has been accompanied by continued incitement against Israel in Palestinian primary and secondary educational systems, cultural fora, and the media.

On both sides of the barrier, experience of third party intervention has been checkered at best. The Palestinians have consistently sought to internationalize the conflict in order to draw in extra-regional actors and publicize their plight. For example, in 2002 the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented and released reports about the Israeli military incursions into the Palestinian city of Jenin.<sup>1</sup>



A-Ram entry point between Jerusalem and Ramallah (Authors' Photo)

Israel, on the other hand, has generally rejected international involvement due to what many Israelis perceive as widespread anti-Israeli sentiment in the United Nations in particular and in international public opinion more generally, especially in Europe and Asia. Of direct concern to Israel is the polemical nature of many UN General Assembly Resolutions on the Middle East, the transformation of interna-

tional meetings such as the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa into an anti-Israel propaganda spectacle, and the singling out of Israel for reprimand by such international institutions as the International Court of Justice (as witnessed by the case against Israel's security barrier).

Israel has refused to accept any third party international force in its relations with the Palestinians, with the exception of the Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron (TIPH). Established on May 8, 1994 and staffed by personnel from Denmark, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey, TIPH was a civilian observer mission. Its role was to monitor and report misconduct, but it had neither the military nor police capacity to intervene directly in incidents. TIPH was in place for only two months.

After the inability of the PLA and Israel to agree on the extension of its mandate and the killing of two TIPH observers by a Palestinian gunman west of Jerusalem on August 8, 1994, the Presence was withdrawn.

An additional form of non-mediated peacekeeping was the Israeli-Palestinian exercise in joint patrols as stipulated by the Oslo Accords of 1993. While limited coordination developed between senior officers, the experience of joint patrolling ultimately

<sup>1</sup> "Jenin: IDF Military Operations", <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/israel3/> and "Jenin: Israel must answer questions," <http://news.amnesty.org/library/Index/EN/GMDE150712002?open&of=ENG-351>

failed on account of lack of trust and the eventual violent engagement of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian security forces during riots over the controversial opening of the Hasmonean Tunnel in the Muslim quarter of East Jerusalem in 1996.

Although limited, any third parties contemplating direct involvement must consider these past experiences in current planning and conceptualization. The potential for deterioration of even the best orchestrated collaborations due to political turbulence and the rapid turnover of political events is high.

## **Political Changes**

**Fundamental changes occurred in the Israeli-Palestinian context with two elections that altered dynamics in the region.**



The West Bank – Israel's existing and approved security barrier, and the Green Line (www.answers.com Photo)





The July-August Israel-Hezbollah war area  
(www.queenstribune.com Photo)

In Israel, the first major change was the disengagement from Gaza and a number of settlements and military installations in the northern West Bank on August 22 and 23, 2005 respectively. The disengagement resulted from an ongoing series of shifts in Israeli domestic party politics.

The *Kadima* (literally “Forward”) Party, a break-away faction led by then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, emerged on the basis of widespread disgruntlement with the ruling *Likud*’s intransigence on territorial

concessions. *Kadima*’s appearance on the political scene was followed almost immediately by Ariel Sharon’s massive stroke and the uncertainty given by Ehud Olmert’s replacement as acting Prime Minister since January 4 2006, and subsequent election to the Prime Ministership in the March 28 2006 elections to the 17<sup>th</sup> Israeli Parliament (*Knesset*).

**These changes in Israeli politics demonstrated an increased willingness by the Israeli majority to cede territory on a unilateral basis to the Palestinians in order to comply with the Road Map directives and strengthen the Israeli national security agenda.**

The Palestinians took a decidedly different direction in their domestic politics over the last year with the sweeping victory of *Hamas* (Islamic Resistance Movement) in the Palestinian elections to the Legislative Council on January 30 2006. Many Palestinians voted *Hamas* as a protest vote against the ruling *Fatah* party. However, many also used the ballot box to express their disappointment in continued Israeli occupation and its policy of

convergence rather than disengagement. The consolidation of Jewish settlement blocs destined to remain under Israeli control (convergence), particularly around Jerusalem, are an anathema to

the Palestinians. For many Palestinians, *Hamas* is regarded as the only means to continue the struggle against Israel.

The new reality of a *Hamas*-led government initially focused attention away from formal negotiations towards internal Palestinian issues related to corruption, cronyism, and poverty generated by the now-defunct *Fatah* government.

**Although chosen by the Palestinian people in the most democratic election in the Palestinian areas to date, *Hamas* is considered by most Western governments as a fanatic entity that feeds in to the broader international front of Islamic and ideological groups defined by US President George W. Bush as the “Axis of Evil.”**

*Hamas* refuses to recognize the State of Israel. It considers violence against Israel as a legitimate option, as witnessed by recent rocket attacks and the attack on Israeli soldiers, including the kidnapping of one, and repudiates agreements signed by its predecessor in the Palestinian Authority. On these terms, *Hamas* will be deprived of international legitimization lest it undergoes major changes to its policy platform and core objectives.

In Canada, the political landscape has also changed with the election of a Conservative minority government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. With the Conservatives in government, Canada was the first state to cut official relations with the *Hamas*-led Palestinian Authority.



A-Ram Checkpoint (Author’s Photo)

Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Mackay announced “there will be no contact and no funds, period” (although Canada will continue to provide humanitarian assistance directly to the Palestinian people through routes other than the Palestinian Authority).<sup>2</sup> Barring any fundamental shifts in the policies of the Israeli, Palestinian and Canadian authorities, the upcoming period will prove a challenging one in which to prompt a return to the negotiating table and promote meaningful conflict resolution efforts.

### Canadian Peacekeeping Potential

Canadian foreign policy has been consistently committed to the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This goal involves the creation of a sovereign, independent, viable, democratic and territorially contiguous Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Canada condemns all acts of terrorism as well as any effort by the parties to pursue unilateral measures that would prejudice the negotiating process. Final status issues such as Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, borders and water, according to Canada, should be resolved within the context of a comprehensive and negotiated settlement based on the obligations of both parties as set out by the Quartet’s Road Map and previous efforts towards peace such

as the negotiations in Sharm al-Sheikh in 1999 and Taba in 2000.<sup>3</sup>

**The challenge to Canadians is to support conflict resolution efforts that simultaneously advance Canadian foreign policy priorities in the region and mitigate the security needs dictated by the dynamic context of concrete developments on the ground.**

The failure of past attempts to introduce third party or non-mediated peacekeeping in the area and the deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations, as well as the new Israeli-Hezbollah war, serve as a challenge to peaceful conflict resolution efforts in the region.

**Any possible model of third party involvement revolves around the prerequisites of an international force and its compatibility to conditions on the ground.**



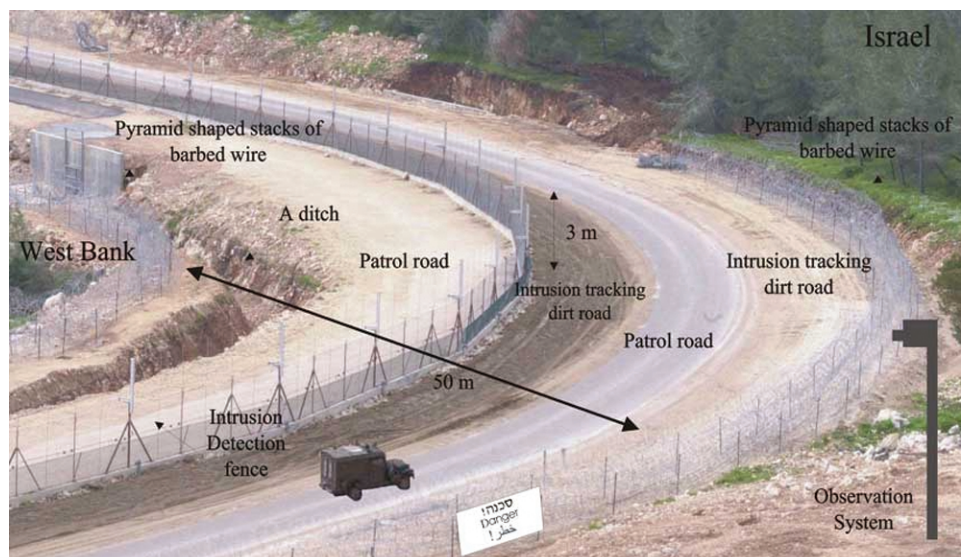
Peacekeepers arriving in Lebanon (AP Photo)

Such a force requires political will and authority, public support both locally and internationally, appropriate composition and training, a cohesive mandate with suitable rules of engagement and force protection, proper equipment, and positive relations with groups and resources on the ground.

It is well understood that all international missions must have a clear exit strategy. The key issue is whether an international force needs to be in-place before or after a final agreement has been negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. Proposals for a mission in the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement would differ fundamentally from those in which peace is negotiated beforehand. Indeed, in the absence of an agreement or even

<sup>2</sup> Canada Cuts Hamas Relations, *The Conservative Voice*, March 30, 2006, <<http://www.theconservativevoice.com/article/13482.html>>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian policy on key issues in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, *Department of Foreign Affairs website*, <[http://dfait-maeci.gc.ca/middle\\_east/can\\_policy-en.asp#11](http://dfait-maeci.gc.ca/middle_east/can_policy-en.asp#11)>



Israeli security barrier ((Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Photo)





United Nations peacekeepers from France next to the headquarters of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, or UNIFIL, Saturday August 19, 2006 (AP Photo)

dialogue towards an agreement, it will be difficult to obtain consensus around the appearance of any third party.

Israel has been consistently reluctant to negotiate “under fire” while the Palestinians claim they cannot negotiate from the position of an occupied nation constricted by barriers, checkpoints and other conditions of weakness. Palestinians continue to perceive their struggle against Israel as a necessary component of the state building process.

**These incongruent perspectives on the timing of negotiations should prompt Canada to support any and all efforts to entice the parties back to the negotiating table while at the same time promoting steps to ensure Israeli security as**

## **well as movement towards Palestinian self-determination on the ground.**

The issues related to the type of force that would be deployed (if and when circumstances warranted it) are also significant. Are professional soldiers best equipped to deal with protracted conditions of conflict? A more robust mission runs the risk of possible embroilment of third party participants in actual combat. What type of coalition would best serve the needs of the mission? Would the UN be the best framework for such a mission? If not, would NATO or some other configuration of actors function more effectively? Is the United States the most suitable candidate to lead the mission in terms of its reputation among the parties to the conflict and its positioning in world affairs? Or would some other, less involved party, constitute a better leader?

Canadians have consistently supported UN missions, although NATO operations have proven more successful in achieving their objectives, and have guided Canadian military interventions in post-Cold War years. Would the current Conservative government be more supportive of an American-led mission considering the apparent concurrence of Canadian-US foreign policy interests on the war on terror? Or does Canada envision an independent role for itself within a broader coalition of international actors?

What specific niche

could Canada occupy within the force’s overall structure? Canada’s most recent combat experience in Afghanistan has become increasingly dangerous with the move of Canadian operations from Kabul to Kandahar. It is unclear whether the experience of armed Canadian forces in Afghanistan provides an appropriate model for the Israeli-Palestinian context. The Israeli-Palestinian theatre of operations involves an asymmetrical relationship between an established nation state (Israel) that is in control of a non-state structure (the Palestinian Authority) undergoing conditions of crisis and occupation. Afghanistan, on the other hand, represents a state in conflict with an internal dissident movement that endangers the idea of Afghan sovereignty.

Also, with Canadian casualties in Afghanistan, Canadians may need active convincing that Canadian national interests and world order would be worth entertaining the risk of additional casualties in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

## **Canada seems best suited to an integrated model of peacekeeping in the Israeli-**



Israeli security barrier (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Photo)

## **Palestinian context that includes force projection, if necessary, along with emphasis on peace building activities.**

Both elements of such third party intervention accord with the Conservative government's commitment to international engagement and overseas development assistance. Keeping in mind the negative associations of peacekeeping with social engineering, i.e., the ethno-centric and Western-biased notion of creating a society in one's own image, Canadians can adapt their experience of multiculturalism to the complex exigencies of a peacekeeping and peace building mission designed to alleviate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East.

### **Policy Options for Canada**

**In the new environment of acceptance of third party intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Canada could play a significant role if a two stage approach of an international force in the Palestinian areas is adopted.**

The first or preparatory stage would involve intense dialogue with Israelis and Palestinians about the mandate for intervention. These discussions might result in the preparation of a draft mandate to be approved by Israel, the Palestinians, and the UN Security Council to provide international legitimacy and backing. The Canadian government could play the role of interlocutor between the parties to the conflict and open

channels of communication. In order to educate the Canadian public about this role, the government must make every effort to educate its citizens on the benefits of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as opposed to rejectionist and/or extremist views.

**On the ground, the first stage would involve support for Israel's continued withdrawal from all areas east of the separation barrier and possible changes to the barrier's route to facilitate contiguity in areas destined for a Palestinian state.**

These ideas accord with the policy of Israel's new coalition government to redraw Israel's borders by 2010 based on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's withdrawal plan, as well as Palestinian demands for freedom of movement and land claims. In the meantime, Canada can direct its funding sources to the Palestinian economy while simultaneously supporting a *Hamas* ceasefire to placate Israel's demands for peace and quiet.

**The second stage would involve a greater role for the work of civil society and aid organizations.**

Although both Israel and the PA have shown little interest in a role for civil society in their own policy processes, Canada can generate wider support for peace initiatives by promoting participation of regional actors, non-governmental organizations, donor states and civil society in the region. In this way, the international force would function in an

environment that promotes the democratic process and generates the political capital to reach all levels of society.

One of the most significant obstacles to peace is the absence on the Palestinian side of proper state institutions and processes. Considering the dire circumstances of the Palestinian economy and Canada's refusal to conduct relations with the *Hamas* government, it is essential that Canadian development assistance reach the people through relations with non-governmental organizations, both local and international. Appealing to the "stomachs" of the Palestinian people may prove conducive to the development of an alternative and moderate political camp that would gain resources and delegitimize the proliferation of renegade armed factions operating against peace and socio-economic stability, thereby mitigating Israel's security concerns.

In pursuing these policy options, representatives from Canada, Israel and the Palestinians can develop a working relationship to preclude the occurrence of future crises.

**There is every reason to believe that third party intervention can increase peace and stability in the region.**

A stable and thriving Middle Eastern region can only have positive effects for Canada now and in the future. For this reason, Canada has every interest in taking a more active role in conflict resolution between Israel and the Arabs.

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