

18.67x23.48	1/2	8 עמוד	the jerusalem report	19/02/2014	41188370-2
המרכז הבינתחומי הרצלייה - 84260					



Commentary Tommy Steiner

Could Jimmy replace Moshe?

Mahmoud Abbas's proposal to revive the NATO option, if Israel withdraws from the West Bank, looks to be a non-starter

IN A late January New York Times interview, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas resuscitated an old idea – a NATO force would replace the IDF after a final Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

In the past, Abbas had suggested that the NATO force would defend the Palestinian state from Israel. His more recent version, however, goes further by suggesting that the NATO force be deployed indefinitely across the entire Palestinian state, including East Jerusalem and at all crossing points, and tasked with providing security for both Israel and Palestine.

Curiously, the most vehement opposition to Abbas's NATO proposal came from within the Palestinian camp. Many of his own supporters condemned the idea of replacing Israeli occupation with what they argued would be a de facto occupation by NATO. Bassam Salehi, a member of the Fatah Executive Committee, put it in a nutshell, "We do not want to replace a Moshe with a Jimmy," he declared on Palestinian TV.

The idea of deploying an international force in the West Bank is traceable to the Clinton Parameters of December 2000. Former US president Bill Clinton observed, "My parameters rely on an international presence in Palestine to provide border security along the Jordan Valley and to monitor implementation of the final agreement." Since then the option of deploying a NATO-led force to the Palestinian territories has surfaced repeatedly.

The New York Times's Tom Friedman raised the most ambitious version during the

second intifada. In a series of op-eds from 2001 to 2003, Friedman suggested inviting NATO "to occupy the West Bank and Gaza and set up a NATO-run Palestinian state, à la Kosovo and Bosnia." General Jim Jones, in his capacity as US special envoy for Middle East security in the Bush administration, reportedly drew up a detailed plan for deploying a NATO-led force, which was never

If the odds for adoption of Abbas's new NATO proposal are so slim, why did he raise it?

made public. Like Friedman, Jones was apparently considering a "Kosovo-type intervention" in discussions he held with NATO officials and in the Middle East.

Encouraged by NATO's successful S-FOR and I-FOR missions in Bosnia and the ongoing K-FOR mission in Kosovo, NATO leaders themselves have also alluded to a potential role for the alliance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As recently as June last year, NATO foreign ministers, including US Secretary of State John Kerry, discussed the idea informally during a periodic meeting at NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen adopted his predecessor's conditions for NATO involvement, known in NATO parlance as the "three IFs." Address-

ing the 2011 Herzliya Conference, Rasmussen elaborated, "If a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians was reached; if both parties requested that NATO should help them with the implementation of that agreement; and if the United Nations endorsed NATO's possible involvement."

Reflecting NATO's involvement in former Yugoslavia, these conditions seem less suited to any plausible Israeli-Palestinian scenario. This formula envisages that the parties first conclude a final status agreement and then hand over its implementation to NATO, acting under the terms of a UN Security Council mandate. However, even if both parties agree to involve a third-party military force – in itself a big "IF" – it is inconceivable that they would surrender the authority to determine its scope, powers and rules of engagement to NATO and to the UN Security Council. Rather, the parties would want to hammer out these details themselves in the final status agreement.

Significantly, the deployment of NATO in the West Bank following a peace agreement would be an unprecedented peace support operation for the alliance. In former Yugoslavia, the international community compelled the rival parties to reach an agreement and the initial deployments of NATO forces were largely crisis-driven and time-constrained. This would not be the case in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

Furthermore, the deployment of any international force in the West Bank will face considerable internal opposition among

19.12x22.4	2/2	9 עמוד	the jerusalem report	19/02/2014	41188375-7
המרכז הבינתחומי הרצליה - 84260					



OMAR SCOBHANI / REUTERS

both Israelis and Palestinians. As noted above, Abbas's proposal generated considerable opposition within his own political base. Moreover, the Islamist organizations – Hamas and Islamic Jihad – would not welcome a Western military force policing all of Palestine, to put it mildly. It does not require vivid imagination to envision Islamists decrying the NATO deployment – in East Jerusalem of all places – as a new Crusader-style conquest of the Holy Land, more than 900 years after the Christian siege of Jerusalem.

FOR ITS part, Israel is traditionally averse to relying on international forces for security. It has had several bad experiences to back up this a priori aversion. On the eve of the Six Day War, then foreign minister Abba Eban likened the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping force in Sinai to “an umbrella which is taken away as soon as it begins to rain.” Moreover, the dismal performance of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL – prior to and following the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 and the Second Lebanese War in 2006 – raises serious misgivings as to the reliability of international forces.

True, the international forces Israel has dealt with throughout its short history were limited to mere monitoring and had no authority to provide security. A close reading of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 that followed the 2006 war in Lebanon reveals that even the “upgraded” version of UNIFIL it authorized had a se-

verely limited mandate.

However, even if the proposed NATO force is authorized to use force in providing security, Israel will likely reject it for two main reasons. First, Israelis suspect that Abbas's underlying motive in suggesting a US-led NATO deployment across all of Palestinian territory stems from an assessment that such a force would not only provide security, but would also deter Israel from taking military action if violence were to erupt. In other words, Abbas is seeking to constrain Israel's right to self-defense. From an Israeli perspective, this is a non-starter. Furthermore, as a NATO partner and ally of the US, Israeli soldiers would be placed in the bizarre situation of providing border security with US and European soldiers stationed on the other side of the fence. That could complicate Israel's relations with its Western friends against the backdrop of a potentially unstable security environment.

Nevertheless, there is some merit in considering the more modest idea outlined in the Clinton Parameters, that is, stationing a NATO-led mission along the Jordan River in a way that also satisfies Israel's demand for a military presence. NATO missions over the past decade or so have always incorporated “contributions” of assets and “boots on the ground” from partner countries like Israel. If it ever comes to it, a NATO deployment along the Jordan River would probably benefit from contributions from NATO partners in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Within that framework, Israel too could contribute infantry units and take an active

part in securing the eastern border of a future Palestinian state.

A NATO mission along the Jordan River, however, would require careful consideration of its mandate, force structure, stationing and rules of engagement. It should not be a toothless monitoring mission. It is important to note, however, that in the past, Abbas has rejected Israeli participation in a NATO deployment. He probably hasn't changed his mind.

If the odds for adoption of Abbas's new NATO proposal are so slim, why did he raise it? His goal appears to be to thwart the security plan at the heart of Kerry's proposed “framework” for future negotiations. According to various media reports, Kerry intends to offer a long-term Israeli military presence along the Jordan River without an international force. Abbas is trying to preempt this by offering instead an open-ended US-led NATO peace enforcement mission. Kerry and his team, however, do not seem particularly interested. All that Kerry had to say of Abbas's proposal was that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had made it very clear to him that he did not want a NATO force. Tellingly, Netanyahu studiously refrained from public comment on the NATO option.

However, this is not to say that it might not resurface in a different form yet again. It probably will. ■

Tommy Steiner is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya