

MFO: Peacekeeping in the Middle East



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US Army personnel participate as part of a multinational peacekeeping force now operating in the Sinai. This article provides a look at that organization, its role in the region and the contribution made by the United States.

SINCE 25 April 1982, for the third time in history, an international peacekeeping force has been operational in the Sinai Peninsula. Unlike the earlier United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) I and UNEF II,¹ the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) supervises implementation of a peace treaty instead of an armistice line and, moreover, does not operate under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Another peculiarity is that, for the first time, the United States is participating in a peacekeeping operation.²

Background

Indirectly, the history of the MFO goes back to the 1973 Middle East War when Egypt, in a surprise move, crossed the Suez Canal and inflicted severe losses on the Israeli Defense Forces. Partly, thanks to the United States, the Israelis were able to retake the initiative. However, their self-confidence was badly shaken, and, after this war, they were more inclined to talk about a peace settlement. At the same time, the West had become more willing to accommodate Arab views. The Arab states reduced oil production and began an oil boycott against the United States and the Netherlands.

In January 1974, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger successfully negotiated a troop disengagement agreement. The Israelis withdrew a considerable distance into the Sinai. A peacekeeping force of the United Nations (UNEF II) was stationed between the Israeli and Egyptian troops to supervise the agreement.

Although other agreements followed, a real peace treaty appeared to be elusive. President Anwar Sadat forced a

breakthrough in 1977 with his visit to Jerusalem. In an address to the Knesset, Sadat offered a peace treaty under the condition that Israel withdraw from the Sinai. Through President Jimmy Carter's efforts in autumn 1978, the so-called Camp David Agreements were concluded. A foundation was established for a peace treaty that was negotiated between Egypt and Israel, witnessed by the United States and signed on 26 March 1979.

The treaty provided for the complete withdrawal of all Israeli armed forces and civilians from the Sinai within three years. To provide maximum security for both parties, two security measures were established: military restrictions in the Sinai and the border area of Israel, and the stationing of a UN peacekeeping force and observers in the area.

The approval of all permanent members of the UN Security Council was required to establish such a peacekeeping force. The USSR, which had opposed the Camp David Agreements, also opposed the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. This became obvious when the USSR did not support continuation of UNEF II's mandate. UNEF II ceased operations in June 1979.

The USSR's objections remained, and, on 18 May 1981, the president of the Security Council indicated that the council was unable to reach the necessary agreement on the proposal to establish a UN peacekeeping force and observers. In a letter attached to the peace treaty, from Carter to Prime Minister Menahem Begin and Sadat, a provision was made for this eventuality:

If the Security Council fails to establish and maintain the arrangements called for in the Treaty the President will be prepared to take those steps necessary to ensure the establishment and mainte-

nance of an acceptable multinational force.

Acting with full respect for the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, a protocol was negotiated between Egypt and Israel, witnessed by the United States and signed on 3 August 1981. This protocol established the MFO as an alternative to the UN peacekeeping force and observers. On 25 April 1982, after 15 years of Israeli rule, the remaining part of the Sinai was returned to Egypt, and the MFO began operation.

Organization

In the framework of international law, the MFO is an international organization, established by the protocol to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. The director general, who was appointed by both parties for a term of four years, is responsible for the direction of the MFO in the fulfillment of its functions and is authorized to act on behalf of the MFO.

The role of the director general could be likened to that of the secretary-general of the United Nations. The protocol directs that the post of director general will be held by a US national. The current director general is Leamon Hunt, a former State Department officer whose last assignment was as head of the Sinai Field Mission. His staff is mainly US nationals; his headquarters is in Rome, Italy.

Subject to approval by both parties, the director general appoints, for a term of three years, the force commander who is responsible for the daily command of the MFO. The force commander reports to the director general and the appointed representatives of Israel and Egypt. He exercises command of all forces and civilians assigned to the area of opera-

tions. The force commander, who is a non-US national with the rank of general, is Lieutenant General Frederik V. Bull-Hansen whose last assignment was as commander, Allied Forces, North Norway. The force commander's headquarters is located in El Gorah in north-eastern Sinai. It consists of a US chief of staff and 70 staff officers drawn from all participating countries (Figure 1).

Mission

The MFO is to supervise the implementation of the annex to the peace treaty and to employ its best efforts to prevent any violations. To provide maximum security for both parties, the peace treaty provides four limited-force zones in Egyptian and Israeli territory (Figure 2). The military restrictions within each zone allow:

- Zone A—An Egyptian armed force of one mechanized infantry division with up to 22,000 personnel, its military installations and field fortifications.
- Zone B—Egyptian border units of four battalions with up to 4,000 men equipped with light weapons and wheeled vehicles.
- Zone C—Only MFO and Egyptian civil police.
- Zone D—Four Israeli infantry battalions with up to 4,000 personnel, their military installations and field fortifications.³

In addition, the peace treaty provides some restrictions concerning the aerial military regime, the naval regime and early warning systems in these zones. The Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba are considered international waterways, open to all nations for unimpeded and non-suspending freedom of navigation and overflight.

MFO Headquarters Staff by Nationality and Rank

	Officers	Other Ranks	Total
Australia	12	1	13
Colombia	2	1	3
United Kingdom	9	29	38
Fiji	3	5	8
France	3	—	3
Italy	3	—	3
Netherlands	4	2	6
New Zealand	6	1	7
Norway	4	—	4
Uruguay	4	—	4
United States	<u>20</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>35</u>
	70	54	124

MFO—Multinational Force and Observers

Figure 1

The MFO's principal responsibilities are to survey and observe activities in the area of operations, to verify and report findings, and to observe and report that confirmed treaty violations are rectified. It is the parties' responsibility to rectify violations confirmed by the MFO within 48 hours of such confirmation, and it should be stressed that it is not a duty of the MFO to enforce rectification of violations. Rather, the MFO is present at the request of both parties, and both parties have indicated in the treaty their desire to rectify such violations as are reported. The task of the MFO is to continue to report such violations until they are rectified.

Execution

To accomplish its mission, the MFO fulfills the following tasks:

- Operates checkpoints, reconnaissance patrols and observation posts along the international boundary and within Zone C.

- Performs periodic verification of the implementation of the provisions of Annex I to the peace treaty (not less than twice a month unless otherwise agreed by the parties).

- Performs additional verifications within 48 hours after receipt of a request from either party.

- Ensures the freedom of navigation through the Strait of Tiran in accordance with Article V of the peace treaty.

To meet these requirements, the MFO has at its disposal civilian and military units (Figure 3).

The 34-man civilian observer unit is composed of US nationals, many of whom served in the former Sinai Field Mission.⁴ Half of the observers are officers from one of the foreign affairs agencies of the US government. The remaining half are

Limited-Force Zones Provided by Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty

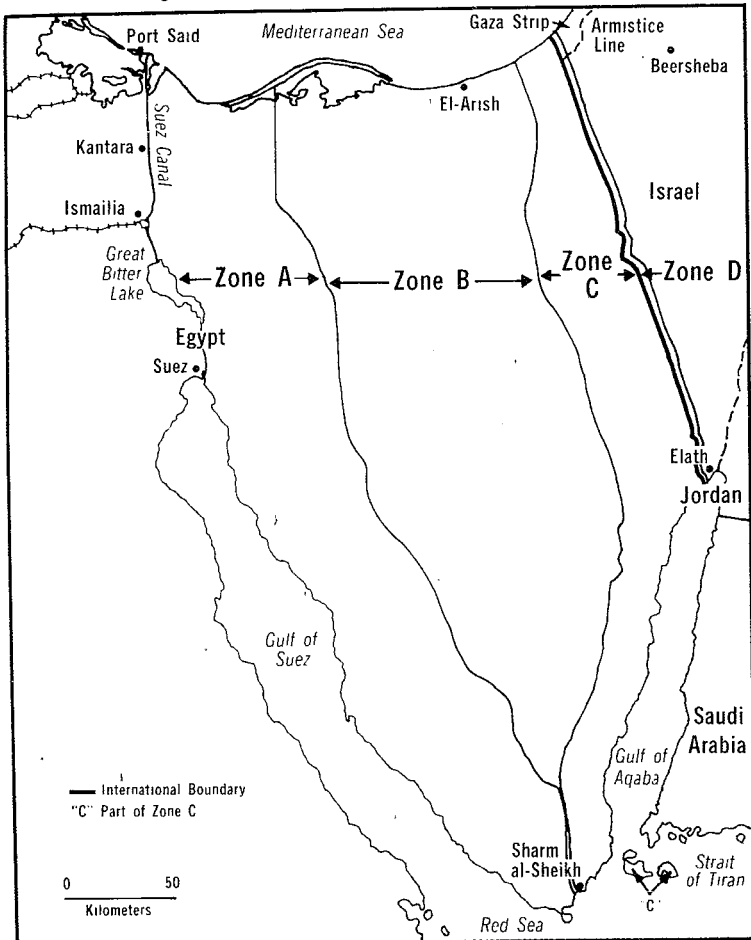


Figure 2

Organization of Multinational Force and Observers

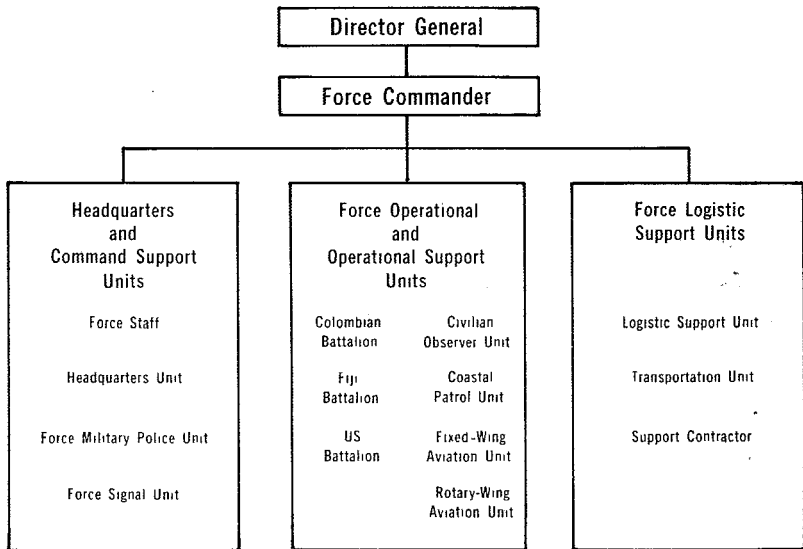


Figure 3

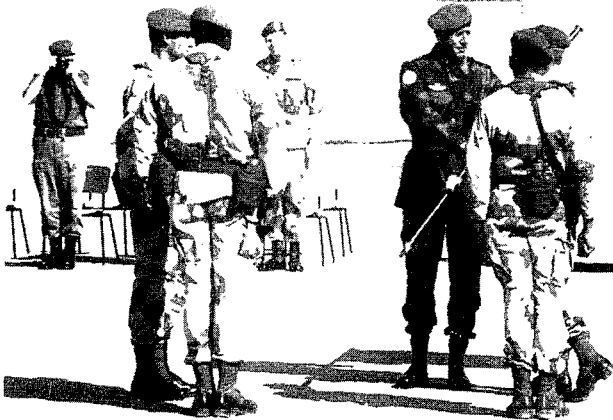
former members of the Armed Forces with considerable service experience. They carry out verifications by air and vehicle in all four zones, on a regular and random basis as prescribed by the force commander. A report of their findings is forwarded by the force commander to the parties and the director general within 24 hours of the completion of a mission.

The area of operation of the military units in the MFO is restricted to Zone C. The force operational units consist of three infantry battalions and a coastal patrol unit which are deployed as follows:

a battalion from Fiji in the north, a Colombian battalion in the center and a US battalion⁹ in the south.

The headquarters of the Fiji and Colombian battalions are located at the North Base Camp in El Gorah, and the headquarters of the US battalion is located at the South Base Camp near Sharm al-Sheikh. The Italian coastal patrol unit is also stationed at Sharm al-Sheikh.

The infantry battalions have established observation posts within Zone C as well as checkpoints and observation posts at designated international boundary



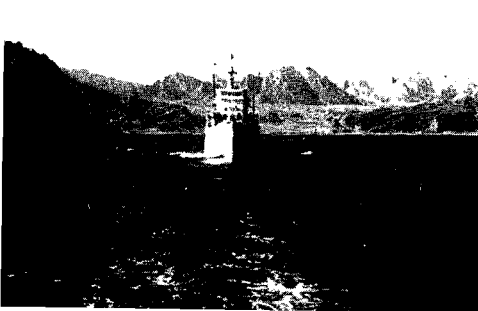
Change of command of the US battalion in February 1983

crossing sites and along routes of significance. The coastal patrol unit maintains observation over the Strait of Tiran and its approaches.

The battalions and the coastal patrol unit are assigned individual areas of responsibility. The battalion commanders command through sector control centers (equivalent to a company command post)

to the observation posts, checkpoints and patrols. The soldiers deploy to the various sites, usually in squad strength, for 20 to 30-day periods. In addition, the battalions conduct random patrols by air, by wheeled vehicle and on foot. The coastal patrol unit consists of three Italian patrol ships which patrol the Strait of Tiran and its approaches.

A ship of the coastal patrol unit patrolling in the Strait of Tiran



A UH1 helicopter of the US battalion leaving the Isle of Tiran



The civilian observer unit and force operational units are supported by several force support units: the force military police unit (the Netherlands); the fixed-wing aviation unit (France); the headquarters unit (United Kingdom); the logistic support unit (United States); the rotary-wing aviation unit (Australia and New Zealand); the force signal unit (the Netherlands); and the transportation unit (Uruguay).

Since Norway is represented by the force commander and some staff members, 11 countries contribute to the MFO. The personnel strengths of these contributions are shown in Figure 4.

Although technically not part of the force, the support contractor is a US firm called E Systems, based in Greenville, Texas. It performs some of the logistical functions for the force.

Personnel Strengths of the MFO

Australia	109
Colombia	502
United Kingdom	36
Fiji	500
France	35
Italy	88
Netherlands	102
New Zealand	35
Norway	4
Uruguay	75
United States	1,110
	<u>2,596</u>

Figure 4

Logistics

The logistical mission of the MFO is to provide life support and to ensure the mission effectiveness of the force. Some 2,600 military members of the MFO and varying numbers of civilian employees must be housed, fed and supplied. More than 500 major vehicles and trailers, 23 helicopters and three fixed-wing aircraft are assigned to the force, all of which require maintenance and fuel.

Logistical operations are conducted in an austere environment, and the area of operations is quite large for a force of this size. The distance and driving time factors are very great and are seldom encountered in a typical brigade-size operation. Mountain ranges, the rugged desert and a very poor road network hamper lines of supply. In some cases, the only method of supply is by air. The main sup-

ply route is 450 kilometers long, about half of which is marginal dirt road. The climate and road conditions place a heavy toll on vehicles, and maintenance requires continuous effort.

A large portion of the MFO's supplies come from the United States through both the Department of Defense supply system and civilian procurement by the MFO. Items from the United States average more than 90 days en route. About 15 percent of the supplies are obtained from Egypt and Israel. When one considers all of these physical factors and operations in a politically sensitive region, the logistic support function becomes a very special operation, presenting problems and solutions that do not always follow standard logistic doctrine.

Logistical support includes both base camp support and field logistics. Support is provided in all areas of supply, maintenance, services and facilities engineering. The center of support operations is in the North Base Camp where the

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force headquarters, logistic support unit and support contractor are located. Similar support is provided at the South Base Camp although at a reduced level.

The force mission requires a network of checkpoints and observation posts in Zone C. There are 24 observation posts, 14 checkpoints and five sector control centers located throughout the zone. Each comprises sleeping and living quarters, communications rooms and, in some cases, communications shelters. There are electrical generators to supply power. Fuel and water are stored at each location. The locations are supported through sector support sites located with selected observation posts. The sector support sites provide additional fuel and water and are situated along the main supply route where they can be resupplied by the logistic support unit. Logistical operations are carried out by individual contingents, the logistic support unit and a support contractor.

The logistic support unit is the principal operator of the logistic system. It is a US combat service support organization of 340 personnel drawn from various support units throughout the United States. It has subordinate supply and maintenance, medical, transport and headquarters units which perform the following logistical services:

- Line haul cargo from ports.
- Operate depots for all classes of supply.
- Provide fuel points at both base camps.
- Line haul fuel and water to sector support sites.
- Operate a movement control center.
- Provide maintenance.
- Provide explosive ordnance disposal.
- Operate medical dispensaries at both base camps.
- Operate Army post office and

finance (for US personnel).

The support contractor provides the MFO a 300-man multinational labor force. The force is divided between the two base camps with approximately 180 people in the north and 120 in the south. These workers are augmented, as available, by Egyptian personnel.

The support contractor performs the following logistical functions:

- Operates the multinational dining facility at El Gorah.
- Provides second and third-level vehicle maintenance.
- Provides the maintenance of the commercial radio equipment and telephone system.
- Provides custodial services.
- Operates power generators for the base camps.
- Operates the laundry, barber, tailor and force exchange.
- Provides fire service.
- Provides the commercial procurement of supplies.

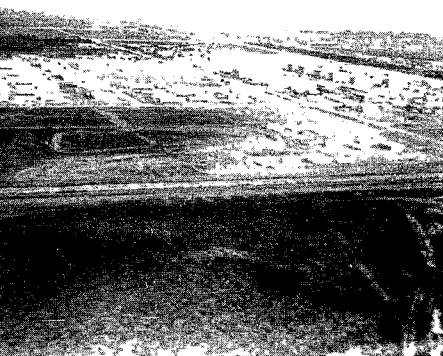
Communications

The success of the MFO mission depends largely on a reliable communications network. To this end, a comprehensive communications system exists to link the battalion commanders with the force headquarters and the force commander.

The force communications system is composed of a commercial multichannel telephone system and various radio nets. It is a nonsecure system, and no attempt is made to encrypt any traffic. At each observation post or checkpoint, there are two VHF radios. One radio is located in the operations building, and the other is vehicle-mounted. Mobile patrols normally have a VHF and/or HF radio.

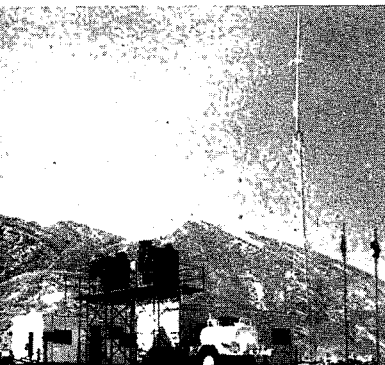


Sector control center in the Fiji sector



North Base Camp in El Gorah

Observation post in the Colombian sector



Photos courtesy of author

Soldier of the US battalion patrolling on the Isle of Tiran

The local inhabitants of Zone C: Bedouin women with goats



The observation posts, checkpoints, patrols and aircraft report to a sector control center which has fixed station and mobile VHF and HF radios. Each sector control center normally reports to the battalion via the microwave multichannel telephone system and, as a backup, an HF radio reporting net. The sector control centers also have a radio-wire integration capability that can link directly to the force commander when necessary.

The microwave system from the North Base Camp provides telephone trunks to the South Base Camp and access to the international telephone system. Additionally, at the force headquarters, there is teletype and facsimile service to the south. The force also maintains direct communications with Egypt, Israel and the director general.

Training

A former UN commander once remarked that peacekeeping is not a soldier's job, but only soldiers can do it. However, the MFO's role of peacekeeping calls for a different approach by the soldiers and changes in training emphasis.

Training for the Sinai concentrates on ensuring that each member of the MFO is fully aware of the provisions of the treaty, the protocol and the MFO standing operating procedures. Daily operations have demonstrated the importance of accurate and timely reports. The sensitive nature of the reports demands that soldiers be knowledgeable of equipment identification and treaty restrictions.

The use of patrols is key to the MFO's verification mission, and the need for skilled map readers at squad level is obvious. The entire zone has numerous

minefields, some of which are known and plotted on every patrol leader's map. Minefields have been used by one force or another for decades, and many are not accurately plotted or have shifted during floods. As a result, it is exceedingly easy for personnel to find themselves in a minefield. Knowledge of how to clear a minefield or how to recover personnel from a minefield is critical.

Soon after the MFO became operational, the importance of checkpoint operations and proper search techniques was recognized. The MFO searches its own personnel and vehicles at all crossings in and out of Zone C. This requires knowledgeable, professional soldiers who are firm and thorough.

The biggest threats to the MFO in the Sinai, other than military action, are the terrain and weather. High daytime temperatures, cold nights, high winds and sandstorms are common. The extremes in weather and terrain emphasize the need for preventive medicine training. This includes not only first aid but also proper hygiene practices, disease prevention, heat-injury prevention and maintenance of proper body fluid balances. Finally, especially important in some areas where resupply must be carried out by air is the need for personnel to be knowledgeable of helicopter operations such as marking landing zones, proper ground techniques, sling load operations, recovery of injured personnel and procedures.

Use of Force

Contrary to military operations, in peacekeeping operations, force is used only as the last course of action. Only when all other measures have failed is the use of force contemplated and then only the

minimum amount necessary to restore order.

In other words, the arms carried by the members of a peacekeeping operation are designated only for self-defense. Every military member is issued a Use of Force Instruction Card with this guidance:

Your principal duty as a member of the MFO is to observe and report. You are armed with your individual weapon for self protection. The firing of your weapon at another individual will be done only as a last resort and to protect your life or the life of another member of the MFO. Never use more force than necessary. Whenever possible request orders from your commander before you use force.

It should be kept in mind that, in peacekeeping operations, the political significance of the presence of the peacekeeping force can be considered as more important than its military effectiveness.

Evaluation

The MFO has been operational for more than a year. The most effective weapon of this force has been the collection of accurate and reliable information. Unlike many of the UN peacekeeping operations, the dissemination of this information is restricted to the parties of the treaty and the director general. This very critical procedure allows the parties to rectify violations and maintain open communication without the external pressures of media or other parties. Finally, it appears that, in the absence of unanimity in the UN Security Council, a peacekeeping force, which is established outside the UN framework but based on established principles of international law, can contribute positively to international peace and security.

NOTES

1 The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) I operated after the Suez crisis as a buffer between Egypt and Israel (1956-67). UNEF II supervised the armistice line between Egypt and Israel after the 1973 Middle East War (1974-79).

2 In accordance with the exchange of letters to the annex of the protocol of the Multinational Force and Observers, the United States contributes an infantry battalion, a military logistic support unit and a group of civilian observers.

3 Article II of Annex I: Protocol Concerning Israeli Withdrawal and Security Arrangements, to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

4 The US operated Sinai Field Mission manned surveillance stations in the strategically important Mitia and Gidi Passes from February 1976 until April 1982. It also verified the phased Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai.

5 The US battalion is provided by the 82d Airborne Division and the 101st Airmobile Division on a rotating half year basis.



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