

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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SINAI PEACEKEEPING: HOW MUCH LONGER?

BY

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ABSTRACT

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In 1982, the United States committed soldiers to peacekeeping duty as part of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai, Egypt. The duration of the commitment was open-ended and there was no exit strategy or periodic comprehensive review process established. Now, almost two decades later, the commitment remains open-ended. There is still no exit strategy, and the risk to U.S. forces stationed anywhere in the Middle East continues to grow. How did the United States allow this to happen and what are the alternatives?

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INTRODUCTION

— Such a commitment of U.S. armed military personnel for an indefinite time period to serve a peacekeeping function in the absence of a security pact is unprecedented in American history. Congress should authorize such a momentous and unprecedented undertaking only after serious consideration and with the understanding that there are significant responsibilities and potential risks involved for the United States. Moreover, I regret that the Committee had to authorize U.S. participation in the MFO in the absence of widespread public discussion of this step.

— Honorable Paul Findley

After almost two decades of committing United States' forces to the Multinational Force and Observer peacekeeping mission in the Sinai, Egypt, the United States still does not an exit strategy. Furthermore, there is no apparent end to U.S. support of Sinai peacekeeping. Not only is there no end to the mission or an exit strategy, there is no comprehensive, periodic and viable review process to address whether or not Sinai peacekeeping remains a important interest of the United States. What is happening in this area of the world since the United States first deployed forces to the Sinai in 1982?

Has the MFO mission changed in almost twenty years? How did the United States get involved with Sinai peacekeeping and what resources does the U.S. commit to this mission? Are forces participating in Sinai peacekeeping duties, especially U.S. forces, at increased risk in a region prone to acts of terrorism? Does Egypt and Israel really need the assistance of a

multinational force to preserve the peace? What would the American people say if U.S. soldiers were killed in support of "peacekeeping" in Egypt?

Some of the preceding questions are difficult to answer. But the most troublesome question is what happens when American soldiers are killed in the Sinai? The degree of difficulty in providing answers to mothers, fathers, husbands and wives will increase far beyond the well of available answers!

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN ESTABLISHING THE PEACE

The origins of U.S. involvement in the MFO are a direct result of years of war between Egypt and Israel. After almost thirty years of continuous conflict, both nations realized the social and economic costs of waging war exceeded their nation's resources. In 1978, the U.S. was able to successfully broker the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. The accords established a framework for a treaty between the two warring countries.

In March 1979, President Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Begin of Israel signed the Treaty of Peace. The U.S. was not a party to the treaty, although the United States was directly involved with the treaty process. With or without worldwide support, the treaty process yielded specific peace preserving commitments by the U.S. Even before the treaty was signed, there were indications the United Nations would not support the use of a UN force.

The U.S. correctly predicted a problem with UN support and took steps to insure a viable peacekeeping force would be available to support the treaty. In separate identical letters dated March 26th, 1979 from President Carter to Sadat and Begin, our President stated the following:

If the Security Council (UN) 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 **maintenance** of an acceptable alternative force.¹

In May 1981, the United Nations announced it was unable to agree on sending UN peacekeepers to the Sinai. Because the United States in 1979 was able to predict the lack of United Nations' support, Egypt and Israel signed an already prepared Protocol to the Treaty of Peace establishing the MFO in August 1981. The protocol supplemented the treaty, and established the Multinational Force and Observers. The Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, in separate identical letters to the Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamal Hassan Ali, and the Israeli Foreign Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, dated August 3rd, 1981, summarized the key protocol issues and in paragraph D highlighted the following: "The United States remains prepared to take those steps necessary to ensure the maintenance of an acceptable MFO".² Haig's letter also specified the level of U.S. military force commitment in the Sinai, monetary contributions to the start-up and maintenance of the MFO and establishment of the MFO Director-General (DG) position occupied by a U.S. citizen and recommended by the United States.

UNITED STATES' INTERESTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACEKEEPING

In March 1982, the United States along with ten other nations sent forces to the Sinai. Since this time, the U.S. provides approximately one third of the annual budget as well as one half of the soldiers that comprise the multinational force. The U.S. provides one infantry battalion, one support battalion and a number of officers assigned to the Force Commander's Staff; U.S. personnel contributions total approximately 985 soldiers.³

Although from a military standpoint, there are valid arguments concerning the impact of peacekeeping operations to the U.S. Army operational tempo, the overall benefits to the U.S. remaining in the Sinai outweigh readiness considerations. The "warfighting" component of the MFO, one light infantry battalion, rotates to the Sinai once every six months. The U.S. Army commits a brigade every year to the MFO; one battalion in the Sinai, one battalion training for the Sinai and one battalion re-training after completion of the Sinai mission. In any event, the total cost in dollars is relatively minimal, and an inexpensive means to influence events in this part of the world.

In accordance with the treaty, the U.S. contributes approximately fifteen million dollars annually to maintaining the MFO. Additionally, DOD costs including salary, predeployment training and troop transportation equals forty-five million dollars.

The biggest cost is soldier salary. However, soldiers receive pay regardless of their location. When pay is factored-out, the overall U.S. incremental cost to maintain the MFO is approximately nineteen million dollars.⁴

The United States' infantry battalion and a small part of the U.S. support battalion is based in the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula near the town of Sharm El Sheikh. Sharm also sits adjacent to the strategically important Strait of Tiran. The headquarters and the remainder of the U.S. support battalion and the Force Commander's headquarters is located at El Gorah airfield in the northern part of the Sinai.

The MFO mission is to observe, report, and verify any violations of the Treaty of Peace. The mission has not changed since the inception of the treaty. The U.S. infantry battalion as well as other MFO forces occupy checkpoints, observation posts and conduct patrols located on key terrain throughout the eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Red Sea in the south. U.S. presence in this area of the world is vital to current and future national interests.

The unrestricted flow of oil, regional stability, and preservation of the Israeli nation-state are the primary U.S. interests in the Middle East. The MFO is in a direct position to

influence these interests. Although a U.S. citizen heads the MFO, the United States Government does not control the MFO. However, because the U.S. is a major MFO resource contributor, the MFO does provide another means of influencing Israel and Egypt.

The MFO political apparatus headed by a U.S. citizen, the Director General of the MFO, assists in shaping this part of the globe via a continuing dialog with Egypt and Israel. The Director General position provides a direct and continuous communications conduit between Egypt and Israel as well as between the other nations who support the MFO. The U.S. State Department is the executive agent and provides the official communications link between the MFO and the U.S. Government. If the U.S. withdrew from the Sinai, the MFO would most likely cease to exist or at the minimum, the U.S. would no longer provide the civilian MFO leadership. In essence, the United States would lose a unique Middle East connection and a valuable means of protecting and promoting U.S. interests in the region.

The MFO as a peacekeeping force gains its legitimacy by remaining completely neutral and militarily inconsequential. The MFO is effective in accomplishing the mission because it is multinational and does not present a military threat to either Egypt or Israel. This fact enables the MFO to draw power and

support from both countries. As long as the status quo is maintained, Egypt and Israel will allow the Force to execute their responsibilities as outlined in the treaty. The direct involvement of MFO officials enhances communications between Egypt and Israel and strengthens relationships between Egypt and Israel.

The DG of the MFO acts as a perpetual arbiter and facilitates continuous dialog between the two countries regarding potential treaty violations. When there is a potential violation the MFO conducts an investigation, and reports the results to both countries within forty-eight hours of the incident.⁵ In effect, the MFO is a vent where both countries can void pressure: small problems are solved preventing larger problems from growing into a major treaty-threatening incident.

EXIT STRATEGY, HOW DO YOU BEGIN?

The United States' future in Sinai peacekeeping is undefined because there is no exit strategy or a series of conditions leading to mission termination. Neither the treaty nor the protocol to the treaty outline conditions for the withdrawal of the forces. The United States' critical role leading to the treaty and President Carter's personal commitment to "insure the establishment and maintenance of an acceptable alternative multinational force" provided no initiative for eventual U.S. withdrawal.⁶ In essence, the U.S. committed indefinitely to MFO Peacekeeping.

There are no criteria for withdrawal of MFO forces between Egypt, Israel and the U.S. or any of the other nations supporting the MFO.⁷ In other words, there are no previously agreed upon conditions between Egypt and Israel that would cause the reduction or elimination of MFO peacekeeping forces. Egypt and Israel, however, did agree to only allow supporting forces from other nations to withdraw via mutual consent by the treaty parties. Any unilateral move to reduce the level of U.S. commitment could have significant negative impact between Israel and Egypt, the U.S., MFO supporting countries, and other nations throughout the region.

Even the unofficial contemplation of the reduction or total

withdrawal of U.S. support to the MFO would send a negative signal not only to Egypt and Israel but also to other countries in the region. The MFO remains a visible U.S. commitment to peace between Egypt and Israel. The Force also acts as a symbol of Middle East stability and United States' desires for total regional peace. A move to change or eliminate the MFO, considering recent problems between Israel and the Palestinians, could signal a lack of U.S. resolve to Middle East peace as well as luke-warm support to Israel. The loss of perceived or real U.S. support could be misinterpreted as a "green light" for hostilities by other Arab countries against Israel.

At this moment, it is not prudent to ask either Egypt or Israel for their thoughts about an MFO reduction or withdrawal. Following the Gulf War and until about eighteen months ago, there may have been a window of opportunity to raise the issue of withdrawal and potentially avoid creating the perception of the lack of U.S. resolve. In theory, Israel and Egypt could hold each other, the U.S., and the other participating MFO countries "hostage" indefinitely in the Sinai. As an example, if Israel's unstated criteria for MFO withdrawal was a binding peace with all her Arab neighbors, the MFO could be in the Sinai for the majority of the next century or longer!

The relationship between Israel and Egypt remains strong as clearly demonstrated by nearly a three-decade peace between the

two countries. The change to a more right wing Israeli administration and the increasingly hostile relationship between Israel and the Palestinians provide strong support for the U.S. to remain in the Sinai. Egypt feels secure knowing that even any inadvertent spillover of hostilities from Israel into Egypt will involve MFO forces stationed along the border between the two countries. Israel continues to gain visible support by U.S. willingness to remain so close to such a volatile area. As an example, in the summer of 1996 U.S. forces under MFO control were in Israel during open hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians.⁸ Using the example above, personal risk to MFO soldiers periodically increases relative to the inherent risk normally associated with peacekeeping operations. The message conveyed to the world is the overall benefits of maintaining the status quo in the MFO outweighs the risk to participating forces. Given this sentiment, it becomes harder for the United States to eliminate or reduce MFO support and avoid the perception of decreasing support to Israel. Had the U.S. installed an exit strategy before beginning the Sinai mission, it would have been far easier to eliminate or reduce MFO support. How and why did the U.S. become involved in an open-ended mission and what is the impact?

EXECUTIVE DECISION AND CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

Defining the implications of not having a strategy for the Multinational Force and Observer mission was not fully considered. Presidents' Carter, Reagan and the U.S. Congress did not adequately ponder the implications of an open-ended commitment of U.S. resources in keeping peace in the Middle East. In March 1979, President Carter completely committed U.S. unilateral support to peacekeeping in the Sinai. This agreement was a result of the United Nation's failed attempt to support the MFO. In March 1982, three years later and after months of congressional debate, U.S. Forces deployed to the Sinai.

Also in March 1982, President Reagan sent a memorandum to the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The memorandum highlighted the rationale for sending troops to the Sinai. More importantly, the memorandum accurately summarized the administration's attitude and reflected the lack of long range vision regarding indefinite support to the MFO. President Reagan wrote the following:

The duration of this involvement of U.S. forces in the Sinai will depend, of course, on the strengthening of mutual confidence between Egypt and Israel. The U.S. contribution to the MFO is not limited to any specific period; however, each country that contributes military forces to the MFO retains a right of withdrawal upon adequate prior notification to the MFO Director-General. U.S. participation in future years will, of course, be subject to the Congressional authorization and appropriations process.⁹

The Executive Branch committed the United States to open-ended support, and at the same time the President saddled Congress with the highly charged political decision to terminate the agreement sometime in the future.

In keeping with the President's constitutional authority to conduct foreign relations, it would be reasonable to expect the President to address the termination of MFO support. Since this was an unprecedented decision it was even more important that the President establish a framework for potential withdrawal. In this particular case, delegating responsibility to Congress to terminate the mission using the authorization and appropriations process abrogates presidential authority for the conduct of foreign relations. U.S. vital interests in the Middle East were significantly jeopardized during the war between Israel and Egypt. Stabilization of the region is precisely why President Carter unconditionally committed the U.S. to Sinai peacekeeping; at the time, this appeared to be the only alternative for peace. What could be more potentially destabilizing than to allow Congress to determine, using a fiscal methodology, to terminate or continue MFO support?

During Carter's negotiations with Israel and Egypt, there were some good arguments as to why the President did not initially attach any conditions to U.S. support for Sinai

peacekeeping. That aside, the President could have at the very least, established a periodic review of the Sinai peacekeeping commitment.

In March 1979 when President Carter pledged U.S. support, with or without UN participation, long term considerations became academic. Carter effectively used his constitutional authority with respect to the conduct of foreign relations and as Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Armed Forces. Carter's promise also placed the Congress in a position where they had to approve U.S. participation or otherwise jeopardize the peace between Israel and Egypt. In essence, the President "leveraged" Congress to the point that there was only one right answer. Since congressional approval was nearly a foregone conclusion, this most probably suppressed any real debate concerning the long-term risks of an open-ended commitment.

Congress acknowledged the long-term implications of an open-ended commitment of U.S. Forces to peacekeeping in the Sinai. However, there is no evidence the President or Congress fully considered the impact of indefinite U.S. support to peacekeeping in the Middle East. Paragraph 1, of the Protocol to the Treaty, specifies Egypt and Israel must mutually agree to any changes to the MFO. This includes reductions, additions or a complete withdrawal of all or part of the peacekeeping force. Between

July and October 1981, the ninety-seventh Congress, Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs, debated the creation of the Multinational Force for the Sinai.

Without U.S. support, peace between Israel and Egypt would not have been possible. On 21 July 1981 during the House of Representatives debate on the creation of the MFO, Honorable Toby Roth stated:

I feel very strongly that the United States not only should approve this agreement, but it has an obligation to do so. That is without commenting on all the details involved, and there may be some areas where we should seek some modification, but after all, we played a leading role in Camp David. It was our achievement. We boasted a lot about it, and now this is part of the process which has come around, and we simply can't back away from the responsibility.¹⁰

The Treaty of Peace was a momentous accomplishment. The President of the United States could not afford to jeopardize that peace by failing to provide peacekeeping forces. The immediate crisis was how the United States would unilaterally support peacekeeping in the Sinai! The administration became so consumed with this task there was little regard or concern as to the future impact of an open-ended commitment of U.S. forces in the Sinai.

On 2 November 1981 as part of a report of the Congressional Resolution for U.S. support of the MFO, the Honorable Paul Findley wrote:

I am supporting this resolution because it strengthens the peace between Egypt and Israel. Such a commitment of U.S. armed military personnel for an indefinite time period to serve a peacekeeping function in the absence of a security pact is unprecedented in American history. Congress should authorize such a momentous and unprecedented undertaking only after serious consideration and with the understanding that there are significant responsibilities and potential risks involved for the United States. Moreover, I regret that the Committee had to authorize U.S. participation in the MFO in the absence of widespread public discussion of this step.¹¹

Findley's "had to authorize" verbiage completely supports the notion that Congress felt they had no other option but to sanction the MFO mission.

MFO MISSION CHANGE, OR CHANGING CONDITIONS IN THE SINAI?

The fundamental reasons as viewed by Israel and Egypt for U.S. involvement in the Sinai peacekeeping mission are potentially changing. Israel maintained control of the Sinai following the '67 war. Because of The Treaty of Peace, Israel agreed to release control of the Sinai back to Egypt. In 1982, when the MFO began its mission in the Sinai, Egypt must have been still concerned about retaining the Sinai Peninsula. Despite the treaty, Egypt obviously did not trust Israel. As far as Egypt was concerned, the very presence of the MFO acted as a deterrent against Israeli aggression and any future notion of taking control of the Sinai. Israel on the other hand, and for similar reasons as Egypt, also wanted U.S. presence in the Sinai.

U.S. troops were positioned at a critical location in the Sinai on what can be considered as "key terrain" as viewed by Israel. Since the U.S. already comprised the bulk of MFO forces, the positioning of U.S. forces adjacent to the Strait of Tiran was not an accident. Israel only has two major ports. The only route to the Port of Eliat is through the strategically important Strait of Tiran. During treaty negotiations, Israel insisted the MFO mission be modified to include ensuring free navigation through the Strait of Tiran in accordance with Article 5 of the

Peace treaty.¹² It is apparent Israel's concern was not to maintain control of the Sinai but to insure access to 50% of Israeli ports. In essence, Israel declared U.S. forces the "main effort" of the multinational force. As far as Israel is concerned, U.S. presence in the area of the Red Sea is not the only benefit of United States involvement in the MFO.

Again, as viewed by Israel, the indefinite stationing of United States Army soldiers on Egyptian soil has a measure of deterrence throughout the Arab World. U.S. presence as part of the MFO is another symbol of resolve to Middle East peace. As long as Egypt continues to "sponsor" the MFO and America's soldiers, Egypt also provides quiet influence over other potential Arab aggressors who may threaten Israel.

Even considering all the good reasons for maintaining the MFO status quo, the United States is overdue in reanalyzing our involvement with peacekeeping in the Sinai. President Carter's original intent for U.S. involvement in building the MFO was honorable, although, as time moves on, the reasons for disengagement continues to grow. Despite the fact the MFO mission has not changed in over fifteen years, conditions in the Sinai have changed. There is no evidence that the MFO or the United States have responded to these changes. Explosive economic growth in the Sinai, especially in the area where the

majority of U.S. troops are stationed, add to force protection concerns and most certainly impact Egyptian rational for maintaining MFO support.

Because we lack an exit strategy and a bona-fide review process, the United States remains trapped in supporting a two-decade-old promise. The Middle East remains so volatile nobody wants to risk raising the exit strategy issue for fear of potentially upsetting Egyptian and Israel sensibilities.

ECONOMICS AND THE MFO MISSION

The United States infantry battalion and part of the support battalion is located in the middle of an incredible building boom. Both of these units are living in what is known as South Camp, located on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula outside the town of Sharm El Sheikh. The majority of the growth has occurred in this particular area over the last few years.

In August 1980, a report from the United States Sinai Field Mission, a precursor of the MFO, described the Sinai as a desert wilderness. Throughout most of its 23,500 square mile area there was no settled indigenous population. A few settlements are found along its coasts and near the contiguous populated areas of Egypt west of the Suez Canal.¹³ Sharm El Sheikh is now the center of a major tourist industry.

Hotels surround South Camp and the ground adjacent to the camp is an extension of downtown Sharm El Sheikh. At least forty thousand tourists a month, mainly from Europe, vacation in the Sharm area.¹⁴ Scuba diving in the Red Sea is a major tourist attraction. There are scores of scuba diving shops supporting some of the best underwater recreation in the world. The area continues to expand and there are major ongoing infrastructure improvements to support the rapidly growing area. Egyptian President Mubarak promised the Sharm mayor Nile River water

within the next few years.¹⁵ Fresh water is essential to the continued expansion of the area. Based upon President Mubarak's comment concerning fresh water, it is clear as to what the future holds for the Sharm area and the Sinai Peninsula.

Many of the MFO check and observation points in the U.S. sector are also becoming surrounded by civilization. One of the more famous observation points is OP 3-9. It is located in the center of a minefield, just to the north of the Sharm El Sheikh Airport overlooking the strategically important Strait of Tiran. The Egyptians during previous conflict with Israel laid mines along the beach.

The Egyptians are now in the middle of a major effort to clear mines from priceless beachfront property. Influential Egyptians, to include property where observation point 3-9 is located, own Sinai property. There is a plan to build a major resort facility at OP 3-9.¹⁶ The OP must be either moved or eliminated to accommodate future development. In accordance with the treaty, MFO installations, check and observation points can not be moved or eliminated without mutual consent from Egypt and Israel. Whether the plan comes to fruition is a major issue and subject to negotiations between the two countries. Egypt clearly recognizes the growth potential of the area and intends to continue to exploit tourist dollars.

Tourism is on the rise in Egypt and the Sinai is at the center of a major source of income for the Egyptian economy. Over the last few years, and just in the U.S. alone, feature articles advertising Sinai vacations have appeared in the NY Times, The Washington Post, LA Times and the Chicago Tribune.¹⁷ Although figures are not yet available for 1997, in fiscal years 1995 and 1996, tourism rose 30 percent accounting for 3 billion U.S. dollars in revenue. During 1996 the number of visitors increased by 24 percent or 3.9 million people.¹⁸ Much of Egypt's future depends upon increasing tourist dollars. Given the importance of maintaining the flow of cash, Egypt will do everything within their power to insure the region remains safe!

How has the rapid and continuous economic changes in the Sinai Peninsula affected the mission of the multinational force and observers? In short, the MFO mission has not changed. Observe, report, and verify potential violations of the treaty is the same today as it was in 1982. What have changed are the potential reasons why Egypt and Israel want the MFO, specifically the United States, to remain in the Sinai. Secondly, economic growth and prosperity are directly proportional to the growing risk related to force protection of U.S. soldiers. The good news is as time continues to pass; it is less likely, there will be hostilities between Egypt and Israel.

After decades of continuous peace and constant dialog between the two countries, some if not all of Egypt and Israel's distrust for one another is softened. The Sinai remains under Egyptian control and there has been no hostility between the two countries for nearly thirty years: but the MFO continues to observe, report, and verify potential treaty violations. There are few treaty violations. As an example, between July 1996 and January 1997 there were less than ten. None of these "violations" were a military threat and categorized as accidental encroachment of air or sea space.¹⁹ Imaginary lines in the air and water are vague. Any other two countries in the world that share adjacent borders are prone to deal with the same type accidental violations of sovereignty.

Using the frequency of potential treaty violations to continue to legitimize the MFO mission can be misleading and probably is not a valid rationale for continued U.S. support. It would be hard to believe that either Egypt or Israel felt threatened by one another during occasional and accidental violations of air or sea space. This same statement in 1982, shortly after Israel departed the Sinai, certainly would not have been true. Given almost thirty years of constant hostility between the two countries, any treaty violations during the early stages of the MFO mission were certainly much more serious and carried a very real threat. Today, the incentives for peace

continue to grow and in case of war, both countries have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

Economically Egypt must continue to develop the Sinai and capitalize on the growing tourist dollar. Any hostility in the area jeopardizes an enormous source of revenue. Multinational Forces, particularly U.S. Forces, act as an insurance policy to protect tourism. Soldiers displaying the U.S. flag in a traditionally volatile area act as a calming influence for tourists and provide some degree of security for visitors simply by being there. The threat to MFO soldiers is not an Israeli or Egyptian threat, but the ambiguous threat of Middle East terrorism or open hostility elsewhere in the Middle East. In accordance with the treaty, both countries must mutually agree to MFO withdrawal. What would motivate Egypt to give-up their MFO protection?

Egypt pays one third of the annual MFO costs, approximately fifteen million dollars. Fifteen million dollars is a relatively inexpensive insurance policy in return for tens of millions of tourist dollars. As the Sinai continues to grow and Egypt becomes more dependent on tourist cash, it becomes more and more difficult to convince Egypt to agree to terminate peacekeeping operations in the Sinai. A dilemma for the United States is the longer we remain in the Sinai, the more difficult it will be to

protect peacekeepers from terrorism.

It is not difficult to see the relationship between economic growth and terrorism. Where there are people there is money, where there is money there is attention, and terrorists seek attention. In August 1995, the United States' General Accounting Office submitted a report to Congress concerning the assessment of U.S. participation in the Multinational Force and Observers. Here is what was written concerning force protection: "The operating area (Sinai, zone C) is large, stretching over 10,000 square miles, but is largely unpopulated. Consequently, according to DOD, any military or terrorists threat to MFO ground forces in the Sinai is minimal".²⁰ If the association between lack of growth and population, and risk of terrorist threat is correct, than U.S. forces in Sharm El Sheikh are at ever increasing risk. Because there is no comprehensive recurring review process regarding U.S. support to the MFO, Congress probably is not fully aware of forty thousand tourists a month, explosive growth in Sharm El Sheikh and the corresponding force protection issues.

NO EXIT STRATEGY MEANS NO MISSION SUCCESS

In peacekeeping, complete success cannot be achieved unless there is an exit strategy and a mechanism to periodically and comprehensively review progress of the mission. Part of the "significant responsibilities" mentioned by the Honorable Findley during Congressional debate, include periodic review of the Sinai mission, using the same or more rigor evident in the 1981 Congressional hearings. Otherwise, how can the United States continue to insure complete Sinai mission success?

Is the MFO mission successful? The analogy of the Dutch boy sticking his finger in the dike is appropriate for the U.S. support of the MFO. The United States helped patch a hole, the finger remains in the dike, and there isn't any more water behind the dam. The reasons for remaining in the Sinai have changed! Just because we started out without an exit strategy does not mean we should continue without one. Even if we did not have an exit strategy in 1981, there is no reason not to have one now!

The MFO mission remains the same but the conditions have changed. Egyptians and Israelis do not want to, and can not afford another war; their economies could not withstand another 1967 or 1973 type conflict. The Israelis do not want the Sinai; however, they do want to insure free navigation through the Strait of Tiran. Egypt wants to protect a multi-million dollar

tourist industry. Since we are no longer keeping two enemies apart, does the United States want to be "used" as insurance?

CONCLUSION

The Sinai is the only location in the world where a terrorist's act against U.S. forces could embarrass Egypt, Israel, and the United States. Death or injury of U.S. soldiers would create the desired media sensation sought by terrorists. The second and third order effects of such an act could lead to a massive destabilization in the region.

Families of injured or deceased soldiers would pressure Congress to reexamine the wisdom of an open-ended peacekeeping commitment. No withdrawal criteria, the lack of an exit strategy, and no recurring review process will be at the center of debate. Issues concerning oversight of the MFO command and control of U.S. Forces, and force protection initiatives would be scrutinized in unprecedented detail. It would not be long before the American people begin to question why U.S. soldiers remained in the middle of a tourist resort. Rightfully or not, someone will need to explain how Egyptian capitalism relates to the original mission of the MFO. In the end, unilateral withdrawal of U.S. forces from the MFO could be called for. U.S. leaders would be faced with an exceptionally difficult decision. Without U.S. support, the MFO would cease to exist; this would create regional instability. However, within the United States it could be political suicide for the administration to maintain the MFO status quo. One of the questions we should be asking ourselves

is how to change the status quo now to avoid a potential future disaster?

As politically dangerous and internationally risky as it may be, the United States must begin serious development of a MFO exit strategy. A "controlled" departure of U.S. soldiers is much better than being forced from the region because of an act of terrorism. The consequences of broaching this subject are clear and certainly risk further destabilization of an already volatile area. However, our obligation to protect U.S. soldiers and citizens should far outweigh any other considerations.

In 1981, there may not have been sufficient time, or it may have been diplomatically and politically incorrect, to create a viable exit strategy. The opportunity for lasting peace between Egypt and Israel was at hand. Any discussion of termination by the U.S. would have detrimental effects to the treaty. Talk of an exit strategy could have derailed plans for peacekeeping even before multinational forces were actually committed. However, there was sufficient time to create a plan establishing a non-fiscally oriented comprehensive periodic review process of our Sinai policy.

A previously established process would allow future administrations to review unforeseen issues not apparent at the

beginning of the Sinai commitment, and simultaneously provide a means to address an exit strategy. Establishing the review process twenty years ago could have made it much easier for successive administrations to tackle the tough issue of exiting the Sinai. Had this been the case, the onus of raising the issue of "exit" would not solely rest with the current administration and President of the United States. A previously established review process would be much more apolitical and avoid special and diverse interests of the powerful governmental and non-governmental agents of the time.

In the long term, the notion of reduced or total withdrawal from the Sinai is a two step process. In the future, it will be necessary to open a serious dialog with Israel and Egypt to begin to outline the criteria for an eventual withdrawal of MFO forces. Selecting the "right time" to open this dialog is a critical task and could mean the difference between success and failure. It will take a great deal of effort to reach mutual agreement concerning withdrawal criteria between Israel and Egypt. Once the criteria are in place, the United States can begin step two. Only then can the U.S. formulate our exit strategy and assist with setting the conditions leading to withdrawal criteria completion.

Perhaps the MFO mission in the Sinai will be recognized in

the future as the model for peacekeeping? The MFO will only be a "model" as long as no American blood is spilled in the Sinai. Unfortunately if American soldiers are killed, the U.S pays the ultimate price resulting from an open-ended agreement and a total lack of any other viable options. Death in the Sinai may be ultimately unavoidable and absolutely tragic. However, failure to thoroughly review U.S involvement in the Sinai now, and install a viable exit strategy, may be considered criminally negligent in the not too distant future!

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ENDNOTES

¹Mala Tabory, The Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 159.

²Ibid., 160.

³General Accounting Office, Peacekeeping: Report to Congressional Requesters (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, August 1995), 17.

⁴Ibid., 28.

⁵Fred L. Israel, Major Peace treaties of Modern History, 1967-1979 (New York, London: Chelsea House, 1980), 331.

⁶Tabory, 159.

⁷Ibid., 107.

⁸LTC Gregory J. Lynch <Co0227@schofield-emhl.army.mil>, "#13 MFO CDRS SITREP," electronic mail message to Col James E. Sikes <Co3dbde@schofield-emhl.army.mil>, 28 September 1996.

⁹Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Participation of the United States in the MFO Force deployed in the Sinai, communications from the President, 97th Cong., 2d sess., 1982, House Document No. 97-158.

¹⁰Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs, Creation of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) for the Sinai, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 21, 28 July and 27 October 1981, 12.

¹¹Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Multinational Force and Observers Participation Resolution, report prepared by Clement J. Zablocki, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981, Committee Report 97-310.

¹²Tabory, 31.

¹³United States, Department of State, United States Sinai Field Mission, Post report August, 1980 (Washington D.C.: 1980), 9.

¹⁴LTC Gregory J. Lynch <Co0227@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, "#7 MFO CDRS SITREP," electronic mail message to Col James E. Sikes <Co3dbde@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, 18 August 1996.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶LTC Gregory J. Lynch <Co0227@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, "#12 MFO CDRS SITREP," electronic mail message to Col James E. Sikes <Co3dbde@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, 20 September 1996.

¹⁷Chris Hedges, "3 Countries Lure Visitors to the Sinai," New York Times, 11 June 1995, sec. 5, p. 3. Eyal Warshavsky, "Bedouins Depending on Red Sea Tourism," Chicago Tribune, 27 September 1996, sec. Evening, p. 8. Christopher Reynolds, "Surprise of the New Sinai," Los Angeles Times, 21 January 1996, sec. L, p. 1. John Lancaster, "The Discreet Sharm of the Dunes' Red Sea," The Washington Post, 29 January 1995, sec. E, p. 1.

¹⁸Robert Lowry et al., Jane's Sentinel, North Africa Security Assessment (Coulsdon, Surrey, UK: Jane's Information Group Limited, 1997) 4.17.9.

¹⁹LTC Gregory J. Lynch <Co0227@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, "#1-27 MFO CDRS SITREPS," electronic mail message to Col James E. Sikes <Co3dbde@schofield-emh1.army.mil>, 15 July 1996 to 15 January 1997.

²⁰GAO Report, 34.

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