



Israel's Future in Multinational Coalitions

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 2,176, January 30, 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Washington will likely call upon Israel to participate in future multinational coalitions, which will entail IDF forces deploying to foreign countries as part of US-led operations. Israel has not participated in past coalitions due to regional threats and Washington's desire to avoid complications with allied majority Muslim states. These two concerns were significantly diminished by the Abraham Accords, increasing the likelihood that Washington will seek Israel's direct support in future campaigns.

There is an expectation in Washington that America's closest allies will participate in US-led expeditionary military campaigns. So far, Israel has not sought nor been asked to participate in these multinational coalitions, but this will likely change.

The US does not go to war alone; it leads coalitions. Since World War II, security for much of the world has rested upon a collective system, the Western Alliance, which links most of the world's democracies and a few additional states together with the US as *primus inter pares*. America's economic and military strength sustains the alliance. However, even with these advantages, when Washington commits itself to act in foreign conflicts, it seeks military participation from its allies.

In the Korean War, the US provided the high command under UN auspices and led a coalition of 16 nations. In the 1990-91 Gulf War, the US led a coalition of 35 countries. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan involved a coalition of six nations, and the 2003 Iraq invasion and post-war stabilization involved 38 countries at its largest point.

It is unlikely that Israel would be expected by the US to deploy the Golani Brigade or any other major army unit. Instead, Washington will likely solicit areas of IDF niche expertise. These include missile defense and special forces, two areas in which Israel is a world leader. The IDF has capabilities that it can share by providing trainers and observers. Naval and air support would also be expected as these assets are inherently deployable. Israel can also provide allies in foreign wars with intelligence and cyber warfare support, much of which can be accomplished without the physical deployment of troops.

In addition, Israel is a global leader in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), and the IDF has a long history of humanitarian missions. From its first humanitarian operation in 1953, a response to an earthquake in Kefalonia, Greece, the IDF has been a reliable responder. Jerusalem's partners will, before long, ask Israel to deploy combat-capable HADR units and Combat Support Hospitals (popularly known by their previous name, Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals or MASH units) to support coalition operations.

Jerusalem's previous reasons for abstention from coalitions were legitimate. Since its independence, Israel has faced existential threats. Conventional Arab armies sought to eliminate the nascent state in 1948-49, 1967, and again in 1973. This danger remained ever-present until the 1978 signing of the Camp David Accords, which established peace between Egypt and Israel.

Post-Camp David, the threats to Israel remain serious but are no longer existential. If Iran were to become a nuclear power, this would pose a new existential threat. Until then, Israel is relatively well secured.

Heretofore, Washington has avoided soliciting Israel's participation in US coalitions. US partner states with majority Muslim populations demanded that Israel be excluded from coalitions in which they were to participate. The Gulf War and the invasion of Afghanistan included Arab and other Muslim states that would have left the coalition had Israel been a participant. In addition to losing these states' force contribution, the US-led coalition would have lost the use of their bases, which would have been a crippling blow. However, with the advent of the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, more and more Middle East states will not only allow Israeli participation in coalitions but would welcome it.

The Abraham Accords prompted normalization efforts by other states as well. Sudan and Morocco soon made their own agreements with Israel, and other states are likely to follow. These agreements significantly enhance Israel's security.

Notably, under a change initiated in January 2021 to the US United Command Plan (UCP), Israel was transferred from the US European Command (USEUCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) to US Central Command (USCENTCOM). This move recognizes Israel's future as a critical partner in Middle East regional security and the willingness of US Arab allies to work with Israel.

Israel is designated as a US Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA). It receives significant benefits from this relationship, such as access to the latest military technology, stores of war reserve stocks, priority in purchasing military surplus, reciprocal training, and intelligence sharing. Collective security is sometimes the cost of membership.

Military theorists have suggested that participating in foreign conflicts that are not unequivocally essential for national defense is a luxury of wealthy nations with volunteer militaries. It is argued that conscripted forces are solely for national defense; to use them in foreign wars is to abuse them. However, this is not the case in practice. There are around 85 countries worldwide that have some form of full conscription or obligatory military training. They include South Korea; NATO states Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, and Turkey; and prospective NATO members Sweden and Finland. All of these countries have participated in at least one US or NATO-led expeditionary deployment.

Israel has been participating in multinational exercises for many years. IDF paratroopers joined nine other countries in the EUCOM-sponsored SWIFT RESPONSE exercise. Israel took part in the biennial fighter aircraft exercise BLUE FLAG, last held in 2021, which included participants from France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, the UK, and the US. Israel is also testing the waters in the truest sense. Starting in 2019, Israel has committed to participate in a future US-led coalition to protect maritime interests in the Persian Gulf. In 2021, for the first time, Israel participated in CENTCOM's International Maritime Exercise (IMX), hosted in Bahrain, featuring ships and personnel from 60 nations.

Israel's participation in these exercises demonstrates two important elements. First, the exercises show that Israel is competent at conducting multinational combined operations. Second, they represent "dress rehearsals" of scenarios for which militaries need to be prepared. Participation in such exercises signals, to friend and foe alike, a possible Israeli military contribution in a future conflict.

It is likely that Israel has already engaged in at least one limited foreign deployment. A recent *Jerusalem Post* article, "Israel's military cooperation with UAE is 'revolutionary'," stated that satellite images indicate that two Israeli Barak 8 Surface-to-Air (SAM) missile defense systems have been deployed to the UAE.

This is a radical transition from the past. This cooperation represents the IDF's first deployment to a foreign country as part of a mutual defense agreement.

As a regional security partner, Israel can expect requests for assistance. Demand for missile defense systems like Barak 8 and Iron Dome is likely. Participation in maritime patrols, air force strikes, special forces operations, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) missions, and cyber warfare are all possibilities. Traditional army tasks reserved for infantry or armor are less likely to be requested by regional partners, given the tyranny of geography and Israel's shortage of heavy airlift aircraft or sealift vessels.

Global deployments (i.e., out of the region) are also a real possibility for the IDF. Jerusalem could be asked to provide military capabilities like those needed in the region to help in non-regional conflicts. Logistical support would come from coalition partners, while the required heavy lift capabilities to deploy the units can be provided by Washington or other allies.

There have already been calls for the IDF to deploy in support of a non-regional crisis. NATO and non-NATO US allies have chosen to support Ukraine's defense, and Kyiv has asked Israel for assistance. Specifically, President Zelensky has requested that Israel provide Ukraine with the Iron Dome missile defense system. Iran has chosen to directly support Russia with armed UAVs and surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, a development that has renewed pressure on Jerusalem to join the Western response.

Israel's former justifications for its absence from US-led coalitions are diminishing in number, and it is facing fewer existential and territorial threats. Jerusalem's new Arab allies would welcome its aid. Western capitals, especially Washington, should be expected to pursue Israel's military assistance, and Jerusalem will have little choice but to acquiesce to the expeditionary expectation.

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