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U.S. troops would enforce peace under Army study

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By

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An elite U.S. Army study center has devised a plan for enforcing a major Israeli-Palestinian peace accord that would require about 20,000 well-armed troops stationed throughout Israel and a newly created Palestinian state.

There are no plans by the Bush administration to put American soldiers into the Middle East to police an agreement forged by the longtime warring parties. In fact, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld is searching for ways to reduce U.S. peacekeeping efforts abroad, rather than increasing such missions.

But a 68-page paper by the Army School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) does provide a look at the daunting task any international peacekeeping force would face if the United Nations authorized it, and Israel and the Palestinians ever reached a peace agreement.

Located at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., the School for Advanced Military Studies is both a training ground and a think tank for some of the Army's brightest officers. Officials say the Army chief of staff, and sometimes the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ask SAMS to develop contingency plans for future military operations. During the 1991 Persian Gulf war, SAMS personnel helped plan the coalition ground attack that avoided a strike up the middle of Iraqi positions and instead executed a "left hook" that routed the enemy in 100 hours.

The cover page for the recent SAMS project said it was done for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But Maj. Chris Garver, a Fort Leavenworth spokesman, said the study was not requested by Washington.

"This was just an academic exercise," said Maj. Garver. "They were trying to take a current situation and get some training out of it."

The exercise was done by 60 officers dubbed "Jedi Knights," as all second-year SAMS students are nicknamed.

The SAMS paper attempts to predict events in the first year of a peace-enforcement operation, and sees possible dangers for U.S. troops from both sides.

It calls Israel's armed forces a "500-pound gorilla in Israel. Well armed and trained. Operates in both Gaza . Known to disregard international law to accomplish mission. Very unlikely to fire on American forces. Fratricide a concern especially in air space management."

Of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, the SAMS officers say: "Wildcard. Ruthless and cunning. Has capability to target U.S. forces and make it look like a Palestinian/Arab act."

On the Palestinian side, the paper describes their youth as "loose cannons; under no control, sometimes violent." The study lists five Arab terrorist groups that could target American troops for assassination and hostage-taking.

The study recommends "neutrality in word and deed" as one way to protect U.S. soldiers from any attack. It also says Syria, Egypt and Jordan must be warned "we will act decisively in response to external attack." It is unlikely either of the three would mount an attack. Of Syria's military, the report says: "Syrian army quantitatively larger than Israeli Defense Forces, but largely seen as qualitatively inferior. More likely, however, Syrians would provide financial and political support to the Palestinians, as well as increase covert support to terrorism acts through Lebanon."

Of Egypt's military, the paper says, "Egyptians also maintain a large army but have little to gain by attacking Israel."

The plan does not specify a full order of battle. An Army source who reviewed the SAMS work said each of a

possible three brigades would require about 100 Bradley fighting vehicles, 25 tanks, 12 self-propelled howitzers, Apache attack helicopters, Kiowa Warrior reconnaissance helicopters and Predator spy drones. The report predicts that nonlethal weapons would be used to quell unrest.

U.S. European Command, which is headed by NATO's supreme allied commander, would oversee the peacekeeping operation. Commanders would maintain areas of operation, or AOs, around Nablus, Jerusalem, Hebron and the Gaza strip.

The study sets out a list of goals for U.S. troops to accomplish in the first 30 days. They include: "create conditions for development of Palestinian State and security of"; ensure "equal distribution of contract value or equivalent aid" that would help legitimize the peacekeeping force and stimulate economic growth; "promote U.S. investment in Palestine"; "encourage reconciliation between entities based on acceptance of new national identities"; and "build lasting relationship based on new legal borders and not religious-territorial claims."

Maj. Garver said the officers who completed the exercise will hold major planning jobs once they graduate. "There is an application process" for students, he said. "They screen their records, and there are several tests they go through before they are accepted by the program. The bright planners of the future come out of this program."

James Phillips, a Middle East analyst at the Heritage Foundation, said it would be a mistake to put peacekeepers in Israel, given the "poor record of previous monitors."

"In general, the Bush administration policy is to discourage a large American presence," he said. "But it has been rumored that one of the possibilities might be an expanded CIA role."

"It would be a very different environment than Bosnia," said Mr. Phillips, referring to America's six-year peacekeeping role in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "The Palestinian Authority is pushing for this as part of its strategy to internationalize the conflict. Bring in the Europeans and Russia and China. But such monitors or peacekeeping forces are not going to be able to bring peace. Only a decision by the Palestinians to stop the violence and restart talks could possibly do that."

