Israeli officials close to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert are considering whether or not to deploy an international peace-keeping force in Judea and Samaria, ahead of any peace treaty being agreed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Advisors to Olmert believe that an international presence in the region could help to alleviate Israel's security concerns, while providing support for the Palestinian forces that would assume control of the territory. Yesterday the Palestinian Authority sent 300 police officers into Shechem , in what the Palestinians are calling the first stage of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Quote: *"Diplomats said that if Israel agreed, it would likely insist on combat-ready forces under U.S. command, with troops from Europe and regional powers like NATO member Turkey, a secular Muslim country that has strategic ties with the Jewish state. A three-star U.S. general, Keith Dayton, already serves as security coordinator between Israel and the Palestinians. It is unclear if the White House could contribute American troops given public opposition to the war in Iraq. Ahead of a U.S.-led conference on Palestinian statehood, Olmert has told his cabinet he would not implement any agreements until the Palestinians can fulfil their security obligations under a long-stalled "road map" peace plan. Given Israeli doubts Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's forces would be able to disarm militants, some diplomats and Israeli officials say a foreign force may be the only available option in the 14 months left in President George W. Bush's term.*

Quote: *"A European Union source said EU members have expressed interest in monitoring an Israeli-Palestinian accord, but discussions were at a preliminary stage.*

European Union leaders have been calling for an international peace-keeping force to be deployed in the region for some years now. Last year European Union MEPs voted in favour of sending an international peace-keeping force into Gaza, to help bring about an end to the cycle of violence. After the establishment of the Palestinian unity government, Javier Solana also called for a force to be sent to the region to monitor a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians. The EU has offered to send such a force into the region, but has up until now been rebuffed by the Egyptian government and Palestinian parties. Following the Hamas coup in Gaza, Olmert , Solana and Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema

once again called for an international peace-keeping force to be stationed in Gaza. But Hamas leader Ismael Haniyeh opposed the move, saying Hamas would treat any peace-keeping force as an occupying force. The Israeli government was also originally opposed to the intervention of a third party in the Middle East conflict, but Prime Minister Olmert now believes that if an international peace-keeping force were given sufficient powers to disarm terrorist organizations, Israel would consider it. Following the Second Lebanon War, Prime Minister Olmert gave the green light to the European Union to send its largest ever peace-keeping force into southern Lebanon, to help monitor the cease fire between Israel and Hizbullah. The European Union is also involved in monitoring Israel's southern border, and Israel recently called for the EU to be given more powers to prevent weapons smuggling at the Rafah border.

Someone emailed me of late, almost boasting that they believed that America was the beast risen up out of the sea in Revelation 13, and based this claim on the fact that America was populated largely by Europeans and that the US had the biggest army. But where is America in all of this? According to this article, it is unclear if the US will be able to commit troops to Judea and Samaria due to public opposition to the war in Iraq. I believe that the European Union is the fourth world empire mentioned in Daniel's prophecy. Yes, there have been other empires that have existed between the time of the Old Roman Empire and today's European Union. But Daniel's vision of the four beasts and Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue focus specifically on world empires that would occupy the land of Israel. From AD70 to 1947 Israel was not a nation. But in 1948 both the European Union (then the European Economic Community) and the Jewish state were formed, within three months of each other. Today the European Union is Israel's biggest trading partner, it's the biggest aid donor to the Palestinian Authority, it has been working for peace in the Middle East through the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy for over 15 years, it is the only regional power trusted by both the Israelis and Palestinians and it helps monitor Israel's northern and southern borders.

Now I'm not boasting about all of this. It's not a case of who's got the better army, as my friend that emailed me had thought. I may be a European citizen, but I am Christian first and foremost and I believe that according to Scripture, all these things must shortly come to pass. The Bible states that during the tribulation period, the Antichrist, whom I believe will be a European leader according to Daniel 9:26, will send a peace-keeping force into the Middle East to strengthen a peace agreement in the region. As we can see, Europe is already heavily involved in the region, and today's news shows us just how close we may be to the fulfilment of these prophecies.

Daniel 11:38-39
But in his (Antichrist's) estate shall he honour the God of forces (armies): and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. Thus shall he do in the most strong holds with a strange god, whom he shall acknowledge and increase with glory: and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land (of Israel) for (his own) gain.

Source Reuters