

Historical Aspects of ‘Golan’ Heights in the Middle East Region

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Abstract- The Golan Heights were part of Syria until 1967, when Israel captured most of the area in the Six Day War, occupying it and annexing it in 1981. That unilateral annexation was not recognized internationally, and Syria demands the return of the territory. Syria tried to regain the Heights in the 1973 Middle East war, but was thwarted. Israel and Syria signed an armistice in 1974 and the Golan had been relatively quiet since. In 2000, Israel and Syria held their highest-level talks over a possible return of the Golan and a peace agreement. But the negotiations collapsed and subsequent talks also failed. Extending 25 km beyond the “Area of Separation” on both sides is an “Area of Limitation” in which there are restrictions on the number of troops and number and kinds of weapons that both sides can have there. The security dimension has been heightened by the civil war in Syria, which has seen Iran and its Lebanese Shiite ally Hezbollah entrench themselves on Israel's doorstep through their support of the Assad regime. Israel says Iran and Hezbollah pose a threat and the Golan provides a security barrier. When powerful states flout the rules of international law, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the United Nations Security Council last May, “it sends the message that others can break those rules with impunity”. Since coming into office in January of last year, President Joe Biden and his top aides have avoided publicly endorsing Trump’s recognition of “Israeli sovereignty” over the Golan Heights, but they have quietly kept the policy in place.

Indexed Terms- About four key words or phrases in alphabetical order, separated by commas. Keywords are used to retrieve documents in an information system such as an online journal or a search engine. (Mention 4-5 keywords)

I. INTRODUCTION

Middle East, the land around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, North Africa, and beyond. The central part of this general area was formerly called the ‘Near East’, a name given to it by some of

the first modern Western geographers and historians, who tended to divide what they called the Orient into three regions. Near East applied to the region nearest Europe, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf; Middle East, from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia; and Far East, those regions facing the Pacific Ocean. The change in usage began to evolve prior to World War II and tended to be confirmed during that war, when the term Middle East was given to the British military command in Egypt. By the mid-20th century a common definition of the Middle East encompassed the states or territories of Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and the various states and territories of Arabia proper (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Trucial States, or Trucial Oman [now United Arab Emirates]). Subsequent events have tended, in loose usage, to enlarge the number of lands included in the definition. The three North African countries of Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco are closely connected in sentiment and foreign policy with the Arab states. “In addition, geographic factors often require statesmen and others to take account of Afghanistan and Pakistan in connection with the affairs of the Middle East.”

“In 1894, the French-Jewish banker Baron Edmond de Rothschild bought a large tract of land for Jewish settlement in the Golan; he was followed by other groups in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Jewish colonization was attempted but was frustrated by the hostility of the Arab population and by the Ottoman land laws, which virtually forbade settlement by nonnatives.” After World War I the Golan became part of the French mandate of Syria and in 1941 passed to independent Syria. After the Arab-Israeli War of 1948–49, Syria fortified the western crest of the Golan Heights, which commands the Hula Valley, the Sea of Galilee, and the upper Jordan River valley, all in Israel

now. In these sections many Israeli civilians were killed by Syrian artillery and sniper fire; agriculture and fishing were rendered difficult, and at times impossible. The de facto Israel-Syria border runs through the Golan Heights along an area known as the Purple Line. This line is patrolled by a United Nations peacekeeping force. No one is allowed to cross the border without special permission, and the border crossing is under the control of Israel and Syria. “The Golan Heights mostly consists of a flat plateau made out of volcanic basalt. Near the Israel-Syria line of control (on the Israeli side) is a chain of extinct volcanoes which protrude above the plateau.” A number of streams cut through the plateau, forming deep valleys and occasional waterfalls, and eventually end up in the Jordan River or the Sea of Galilee. With the countless Eucalyptus trees growing here and due to the wide plains, it reminds one of New South Wales, Australia. Due to the flatness of the plateau (unlike Israel's mostly hilly or coastal landscapes), the dark basalt and fertile volcanic soil, and the year-round streams, the Golan Heights looks and feels different from the rest of Israel, so it is a popular destination for Israeli tourists. The Hermon mountain differs from the rest of the Golan, as well as from any other place in Israel. The highest point in the Israeli-controlled part of the Hermon is 2,236 m above sea level, nearly twice as high as the next-highest place in Israel (Mount Meron in the Upper Galilee). As a result, the Hermon gets far more snowfall than anywhere else in Israel, and it is the site of Israel's only ski resort (in the winter months). The most popular season to visit the Golan is the spring. For a brief period in spring, the entire Golan landscape is covered by a bed of flowers. Also, at this time the streams and waterfalls are at their most powerful due to the winter rains.

Golan Heights, also called Golan Plateau, Arabic Al-Jawlān, Hebrew Ramat Ha-Golan or Ha-Golan, hilly area overlooking the upper Jordan River valley on the west. The area was part of extreme southwestern Syria until 1967, when it came under Israeli military occupation, and in December 1981 Israel unilaterally annexed the part of the Golan it held. The area's name is from the Biblical city of refuge Golan in Bashan. Prior to the start of the war, attacks conducted against Israel by fledgling Palestinian guerrilla groups based in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan had increased, leading to costly Israeli reprisals. In November 1966 an Israeli

strike on the village of Al-Samū' in the Jordanian West Bank left 18 dead and 54 wounded, and, during an air battle with Syria in April 1967, the Israeli Air Force shot down six Syrian MiG fighter jets. In addition, Soviet intelligence reports in May indicated that Israel was planning a campaign against Syria, and, although inaccurate, the information further heightened tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The Arab countries' losses in the conflict of 1967 were disastrous. Egypt's casualties numbered more than 11,000, with 6,000 for Jordan and 1,000 for Syria, compared with only 700 for Israel. The Arab armies also suffered crippling losses of weaponry and equipment. The lopsidedness of the defeat demoralized both the Arab public and the political elite. Nasser announced his resignation on June 9 but quickly yielded to mass demonstrations calling for him to remain in office. In Israel, which had proved beyond question that it was the region's preeminent military power, there was euphoria. The Six-Day War also marked the start of a new phase in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, since the conflict created hundreds of thousands of refugees and brought more than one million Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli rule. Months after the war, in November, the United Nations passed UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it had captured in the war in exchange for lasting peace. “That resolution became the basis for diplomatic efforts between Israel and its neighbours, including the Camp David Accords with Egypt and the push for a two-state solution with the Palestinians.”

Like the Herodians before them, the Ghassanids ruled as clients of Rome – this time, the Christianized Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantium; the Ghassanids were able to hold on to the Golan until the Sassanid invasion of 614. Following a brief restoration under the Emperor Heraclius, the Golan again fell, this time to the invading Arabs after the Battle of Yarmouk in 636. During the same period, several synagogues were built in the Golan Heights. Currently, there are 25 locations where ancient synagogues or their remnants have been discovered. These are all located in the Golan's center. They were built from basalt stones, which are abundant in the Golan Heights, and were influenced by the synagogues of the Galilee but had its own distinctive characteristics. The extravagant synagogues were possibly the result of years of

producing and selling olive oil. Data from surveys and excavations combined show that the bulk of sites in the Golan were abandoned between the late sixth and early seventh century as a result of military incursions, the breakdown of law and order, and the economy brought on by the weakening of the Byzantine rule. Some settlements lasted till the end of the Umayyad era.

The plateau that Israel controls is part of a larger area of volcanic basalt fields stretching north and east that were created in the series of volcanic eruptions that began recently in geological terms, almost 4 million years ago. The rock forming the mountainous area in the northern Golan Heights, descending from Mount Hermon, differs geologically from the volcanic rocks of the plateau and has a different physiography. The mountains are characterised by lighter-colored, Jurassic-age limestone of sedimentary origin. Locally, the limestone is broken by faults and solution channels to form a karst-like topography in which springs are common. Geologically, the Golan plateau and the Hauran plain to the east constitute a Holocene volcanic field that also extends northeast almost to Damascus. Much of the area is scattered with dormant volcanoes, as well as cinder cones, such as Majdal Shams. The plateau also contains a crater lake, called Birkat Ram ("Ram Pool"), which is fed by both surface runoff and underground springs. These volcanic areas are characterised by basalt bedrock and dark soils derived from its weathering. The basalt flows overlie older, distinctly lighter-colored limestones and marls, exposed along the Yarmouk River in the south. The Golan Heights is a rocky plateau at the southern end of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, and straddles the borders of Syria and Israel. Israel holds about two-thirds of the territory, which it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War and Syria holds the remaining one-third. The Golan is mostly known among Israelis for its beautiful landscapes and hiking trails, and for the Hermon ski site. Following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel returned another 5% of the land to Syria. Israel began building settlements in the area, and granted the Syrian Druze inhabitants permanent residency status. In 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights. Hebrew is spoken among the Jewish inhabitants in the towns and kibbutzim. Arabic is also spoken in the region mainly by the Arabs and Druze living there, although many of them can also speak

Hebrew or/and English. "Unlike the West Bank, the part of the Golan Heights controlled by Israel is considered part of the country by most Israelis and by the Israeli government itself. In Israel, it is generally understood that the Golan Heights will not be returned to Syria." The Israeli viewpoint is that this would not be feasible due to economical and political reasons, and for reasons of security which they believe have only strengthened since the Syrian civil war started. There are no negotiations between Israel and Syria and this is not likely to change any time soon.

The positions of both parties changed significantly following the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 and Syria for the first time was willing to accept UN Resolution 242 as the basis for peace. In exposing Israel's military vulnerabilities and by inflicting heavy casualties, the Arab countries were able to come to terms with Israel and began to re-examine the notion of the Jewish state being a temporary implant. Does Syria accept Resolution 242? Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Ghani Rafei remarked in June 1975: "When we say that we accept Resolution 338, based on Resolution 242, it means that we accept it with all its provisions." The Separation of Forces Agreement signed on May 31, 1974, enabled Syria to reclaim a small portion of the Golan. The war that began on Yom Kippur Day gradually hardened the Israeli position and Prime Minister Rabin was not willing to proceed with a Golan-II agreement with Syria. Following the 1977 surprising victory of Menachem Begin, the focus shifted to Egypt and the Golan became a non-issue. The third phase began in 1981 and unexpectedly decided to "apply" Israeli law to the Golan Heights, thereby raising doubts about Israeli commitments about the application of Resolution 242 to the Syrian front. The move, though endorsed by a large majority in the Knesset, was primarily aimed at placating Begin's critics on the right, who disapproved of the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the dismantling of the Jewish settlement at Yamit. The law does not explicitly address the question of sovereignty but as Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir admitted, it precludes territorial compromise because, "Golan is part of the State of Israel just as Jerusalem is part of Israel." Shamir's going to the Madrid Conference based on the "land-for-peace" formula marked an indirect shift in Israel's policy. The Golan became an important political agenda in the peace process.

A United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is stationed in camps and observation posts along the Golan, supported by military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Between the Israeli and Syrian armies is a 400-square-km (155-square-mile) “Area of Separation” - often called a demilitarized zone - in which the two countries’ military forces are not permitted under the ceasefire arrangement. The Separation of Forces Agreement of May 31, 1974 created an Alpha Line to the west of the area of separation, behind which Israeli military forces must remain, and a Bravo Line to the east behind which Syrian military forces must remain. Extending 25 km beyond the “Area of Separation” on both sides is an “Area of Limitation” in which there are restrictions on the number of troops and number and kinds of weapons that both sides can have there. There is one crossing point between the Israeli and Syrian sides, which until the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011 was used mainly by United Nations forces, a limited number of Druze civilians and for the transportation of agricultural produce.

In Biblical times, the Golan Heights was referred to as “Bashan;” the word “Golan” apparently derives from the biblical city of “Golan in Bashan.” The area was assigned to the tribe of Manasseh. In early First Temple times (953-586 BCE), the area was contested between the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel and the Aramean kingdom based in Damascus. King Ahab of Israel (reigned c. 874-852 BCE) defeated Ben-Hadad I of Damascus near the site of Kibbutz Afik in the southern Golan (I Kings 20:26-30), and the prophet Elisha prophesied that King Jehoash of Israel (reigned c. 801-785 BCE) would defeat Ben-Hadad III of Damascus, also near Kibbutz Afik. In the late 6th and 5th centuries BCE, the region was settled by returning Jewish exiles from Babylonia (modern Iraq). In the mid-2nd century BCE, Judah Maccabee and his brothers came to the aid of the local Jewish communities when the latter came under attack from their non-Jewish neighbors. Judah Maccabee’s grandnephew, the Hasmonean King Alexander Jannai (reigned 103-76 BCE) later added the Heights to his kingdom. The Greeks referred to the area as “Gaulanitis,” a term also adopted by the Romans, which led to the current application of the word “Golan” for the entire area.

Gamla became the Golan’s chief city and was the area’s last Jewish stronghold to resist the Romans during the Great Revolt, falling in the year 67 CE. Despite the failure of the revolt, Jewish communities on the Heights continued, and even flourished; the remains of no less than 25 synagogues from the period between the revolt and the Islamic conquest in 636 CE have been excavated. (Several Byzantine monasteries from this period have also been excavated on the Heights.) The decisive battle in which the Arabs under Caliph Omar, crushed the Byzantines and established Islamic control over what is now Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, was fought in the Yarmouk Valley, on the southern edge of the Heights, in August 636 CE. Organized Jewish settlement on the Golan came to an end at this time. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Druze began to settle in the northern Golan and on the slopes of Mt. Hermon. During the brief period of Egyptian rule (1831-1840) and in the ensuing decades, Sudanese, Algerians, Turkomans and Samarian Arabs settled on the Heights. The Turks brought in Circassians in the 1880’s to fight against Bedouin brigands. The Jewish presence on the Golan was renewed in 1886, when the ‘B’nei Yehuda society’ of Safed purchased a plot of land four kilometers north of the present-day religious moshav of Keshet, but the community – named Ramataniya – failed one year later. In 1887, the society purchased lands between the modern-day B’nei Yehuda and Kibbutz Ein Gev. This community survived until 1920, when two of its last members were murdered in the anti-Jewish riots which erupted in the spring of that year. In 1891, Baron Rothschild purchased approximately 18,000 acres of land about 15 km. east of Ramat Hamagshimim, in what is now Syria. First Aliyah (1881-1903) immigrants established five small communities on this land, but were forced to leave by the Turks in 1898. The lands were farmed until 1947 by the Palestine Colonization Association and the Israel Colonization Association, when they were seized by the Syrian army. Most of the Golan Heights were included within Mandatory Palestine when the mandate was formally granted in 1922, but Britain ceded the area to France in the Franco-British Agreement of March 7, 1923. The Heights became part of Syria upon the termination of the French mandate in 1944. Zionists attempted to buy land in the area, but the French would not allow them to do so because of their concern that the British would then

seek to take control of the Heights as part of the Palestine mandate.

The Golan Heights Today: Druze sector- There are approximately 26,500 Arabs, including at least 24,000 Druze and 2,000 Alawites, living in the Golan Heights today. In contrast to 1948-1967, when civilian infrastructure and services were almost completely neglected by successive Syrian governments, Israel has invested substantial sums in either installing or upgrading electric and water systems, in agricultural improvements and job training, and in building health clinics, where none had existed previously. The inhabitants also enjoy the benefits of Israel's welfare and social security programs. Israel has built or refurbished schools and classrooms, extended compulsory education from seven years to ten, and made secondary education available to girls for the first time. The Golan's Druze residents enjoy complete freedom of worship; the Israeli authorities have made financial contributions and tax and customs rebates to the local religious establishments. Jewish sector- Today, there are approximately 27,000 Jewish residents in 33 communities (27 kibbutzim and moshavim, 5 communal settlements and the town of Katzrin) on the Golan Heights and the slopes of Mt. Hermon. (Katzrin has its own mayor and local council; the other 32 communities form the Golan Heights Regional Council.) There are also parts of the Golan Heights that are uninhabitable because of minefields planted prior to the Six-Day War.

Since Israel's independence, the Golan occupied an important place in Israel's strategic-political calculation to the point that the actual course of events was often overshadowed by more popular nationalistic perceptions. The "creeping annexation" of the Demilitarised Zone by Israel in the earlier years was rarely discussed. In private conversations, Moshe Dayan who was the defence minister during the 1967 War, admitted that when Israel opened the northern front, "the Syrians, on the fourth day of the war, were not a threat to us." In popular perceptions, however, the capture of the Golan Heights during the June 1967 War was portrayed as "crucial" because "the Syrian army had harassed Northern Israel for many years." In the words of Meir Amit, Mossad, chief at that time, the capture of the Golan was essential and was delayed "only because Dayan, as Minister of Defence, from the

tactical or operational point of view wanted to do it that way." Successive Israeli governments projected the Golan as indispensable to their country's national security. Presenting the government after the 1969 election, Prime Minister Golda Meir outlined the policies of the new government vis-à-vis the occupied territories: "Agreed, secured and recognised borders will be laid down in the peace treaties...Without a peace treaty, Israel will continue to maintain, in full, the situation as established by the cease-fire and will consolidate its position in accordance with the vital requirements of its security and development." The Galilee document that outlined the Labour-alignment's policy towards the occupied territories in mid-August 1973, suggested establishing new settlements on the Golan.

At regular intervals, Israeli leaders have vehemently rejected the idea of withdrawing to the pre-1967 borders and this is one of the few issues that enjoys consensus among Israel's Jewish population. The issue was more emotional than territorial. On June 15, 1967, speaking in the Cabinet meeting to discuss the fate of the newly captured territory, the minister without portfolio, Begin, remarked: "Israel will remain on the Golan Heights until Syria signs a peace treaty, and when Syria agrees, even then (Israel) will not return the area before Syria agrees to the terms of the Golan Heights' demilitarisation." In June 1974, Prime Minister Rabin ruled out withdrawing to the June 4, 1967, lines "even within the context of a peace treaty." While ruling out a complete withdrawal, various Israeli governments have expressed a willingness to "negotiate" the borders. For instance, in August 1977, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan suggested that Israel was ready "to negotiate the line in the Golan Heights with Syria in order to satisfy the parties with the peace line." Elsewhere, he claimed that he was "one of those involved, perhaps even the initiator after the Six-Day War, in our proposing to return ... the Golan Heights, with certain adjustments and safeguards for our security interests, within the framework of peace agreements." Any Israeli endorsement of the June 1967 borders vis-à-vis the Golan, has serious implications for Israeli policies vis-à-vis the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the most sensitive issue of Jerusalem. It is, therefore, not surprising that even the Oslo Accords do not commit Israel to a return to the pre-1967 positions. Syria wants

to secure the return of the Golan Heights as part of any peace deal. In late 2003, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said he was ready to revive peace talks with Israel. In Israel, the principle of returning the territory in return for peace is already established. During US-brokered peace talks in 1999-2000, then Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak had offered to return most of the Golan to Syria. But the main sticking point during the 1999 talks was also likely to bedevil any future discussions. Syria wants a full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border. This would give Damascus control of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee - Israel's main source of fresh water. "Syria strongly condemns the dangerous and unprecedented escalation from the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and its persistence in settlement policies and grave and methodological violations that rise to the level of war crimes," a Syrian foreign ministry statement.

Is the Golan important to Syria? At regular intervals, some political and military leaders have questioned its importance for Syria. For instance, underscoring its strategic importance for Israel, Defence Minister Arens wondered that "it is difficult to see why the Golan Heights, which are for Syria a small fraction of Syrian territory, an almost insignificant fraction of Syrian territory, should become the major dimension of future relations between Israel and Syria." In the words of another security analyst, the Golan Heights "is a tiny area" in comparison to all of Syria and is not as important to Syria as Sinai was important to Egypt. In his view, Syria is primarily concerned about Israeli presence on the Heights and is uncomfortable about the Israeli Army being relatively close to Damascus. Other than ideological concerns and prestige, the area does "not appear to be of pressing interest to Syria." Assad's willingness to go to Madrid without an Israeli commitment for a full withdrawal is viewed as a sign of possible "Syrian recognition of at least some of Israel's claims to the Golan Heights." The Golan is "a purely offensive asset" for Syria in implementing its strategic objectives vis-à-vis Israel. If Syria is willing to accept Israel's existence, "it would also be ready to cede the Golan Heights" and, hence, the government should be advised to postpone all negotiations, until Syria "is ready to end the conflict without recovering the Golan." Israel, according to this view, could enter

into negotiations with Syria without reaching a peace agreement.

Unfortunately for Israel, Syria never renounced its claims over the Golan. It is rather unrealistic to expect any Syrian government to relinquish its claims and thereby "betray" the trust of the people. Political coercion, military pressures or financial inducements from outside would be insufficient to influence the basic Syrian position vis-à-vis the Golan Heights. Furthermore, much to the consternation and displeasure of his domestic critics, Foreign Minister Peres admitted that Israel recognises Syria's sovereignty over the Golan. The international community, including the US, has refused to accept or recognise the Israeli occupation of the Golan. Though it prevented the Security Council from imposing punitive sanctions against Israel, the US voted for the Council resolution condemning the Israeli actions concerning the Heights. In spite of various arguments and explanations, the Golan is primarily a security issue and a strategic asset for Israel. There are suggestions that territorial concessions on the Golan, while diminishing important military advantages, would not expose Israel to a life-threatening surprise Syrian attack. In the words of Dan Horowitz, concessions on the Golan "will mean a risk in the narrow military-operative context, but not in the strategic context of a threat to Israel's survival." However, even in the era of non-conventional weapons and delivery systems, the territorial component has not lost its utility. The Golan is not just another landmass: about 62 km in length and 25 km in its greatest width, and about 300 metres higher than the remaining Israeli territory in the north, it is undoubtedly a strategic asset for anyone occupying the Heights. At its widest point, only 23 km separate Israel and Syria. Mount Hermon and Mount Avital provide two important natural monitoring posts and they play a pivotal role in the Israeli monitoring of troop movements in and around Damascus and along the Damascus-Beirut Highway. Over the years, Israel has established a series of monitoring posts and electronic listening devices on the Golan that are too vital to be compromised. From a purely military-strategic point of view, Israeli control and domination of high grounds on the Golan, are considered essential for the defence of Galilee Panhandle along the Israeli-

Lebanese border and the Israeli shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Unlike the West Bank and Gaza, the Golan occupies a marginal role in the ideological debate in Israel. The issue of the Golan Heights being a part of Eretz-Israel, the Biblical Land of Israel, rarely evokes a unanimous stand. Though the historical link is rather weak, the presence of a large Jewish community in the Golan around the 13th century BC and its participation in the revolt against the Romans during 68-70 AD evoke and establish certain historical connections to the Golan. For long, the Labour Party sought and presented the Golan through its military-security importance, and for the left, the Golan was not a “sanctified area” but rather a “strategic asset”, and Foreign Minister Dayan admitted that the Golan “is not part of our ancestors’ land.” However, the political right considers the Golan an integral part of the Land of Israel and hence an indivisible part of Israel. In short, you do not annex what belongs to you. What about the peace that Israel achieved in exchange for territory? Shamir who opposed the Camp David Accords was categorical: Sinai was not part of the Land of Israel, while the Golan is. In the process, the right is presenting the Golan Heights as historically significant to the Jewish people as Jerusalem, Hebron or other places and thereby manages to consolidate the opposition to a territorial compromise. Being the last player in the Arab-Israeli conflict to seek peace with Israel, Syria’s leverages are limited. Being the first Arab leader to recognise the Jewish state, Sadat’s gestures carried enormous political significance and benefits. The Syrian position is exactly the opposite. Out of the five major players in the Middle East conflict, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians have made separate peace with Israel. Except for Lebanon, which remains under its control and domination, Syria remains the only party whose negotiations with Israel are conducted through the Americans. Moreover, since the Oslo Accord, a number of Arab countries have established consular missions in Israel and allowed Israeli missions in their countries, thereby, signalling the cessation of Israel’s political isolation in the Arab and Islamic world.

On the other side, whether a complete Israeli withdrawal would be sufficient for a peaceful relationship between Israel and Syria is difficult to

predict. It is, however, essential to remember that without a complete Israeli withdrawal, Israeli-Syrian peace is unlikely. While it might not ensure it, withdrawal is a precondition for peace. Significant segments of the Israeli population consider “peace-with-Golan” an unrealistic if not dangerous slogan. Unlike the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan is a much smaller area but contains more serious problems for any Israeli government. “Prolonged emphasis of the Heights has only made the problem more difficult to solve.” Any Israeli government would have to overcome a host of domestic difficulties based on security, political, economic and psychological considerations in deciding the fate of the Golan. Even an Israeli government most committed to peace with Syria has no easy solutions to these contentious issues. For a long, Israeli leaders had argued that Israeli control over Sharm al-Sheikh was preferable to peace without Sharm al-Sheikh. At the same time, when the appropriate time came, peace prevailed over Sharm al-Sheikh. “The fate of the Golan Heights might not be different; but being the last Arab power to negotiate with the Jewish state, Syria’s political leverage remains limited and circumspect.”

The economy of the Golan Heights is based on both agriculture and industry, including tourism. 8,100 hectares of land are under cultivation, producing a wide variety of crops, including wine grapes. A further 46,575 hectares are dedicated to natural pasturage, supporting 15,000 head of cattle and 5,000 sheep, for both meat and dairy production. The Golan’s dairy cattle produce approximately 60 million liters of milk per year. There are approximately 30 industrial enterprises on the Golan, mostly based in the Katzrin Industrial Zone. There is a substantial tourist infrastructure on the Golan, including the Mt. Hermon ski slopes, archaeological sites, hotels, restaurants, bed-and-breakfast/guest room facilities in many communities, and three Society for the Protection of Nature Field schools. There are also facilities for jeep and bicycle tours, as well as horseback riding. Israel has established 13 nature reserves – totaling 24,908 hectares – on the Heights. The Golan Archaeological Museum is located in Katzrin. In the early 1990s, the Israel National Oil Company (INOC) was granted shaft-sinking permits in the Golan Heights. It estimated a recovery potential of two million barrels of oil, equivalent at the time to \$24 million. During the

Yitzhak Rabin administration (1992–1995), the permits were suspended as efforts were undertaken to restart peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. In 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu granted preliminary approval to INOC to proceed with oil exploration drilling in the Golan. INOC began undergoing a process of privatization in 1997, overseen by then-Director of the Government Companies Authority (GCA), Tzipi Livni. During that time, it was decided that INOC's drilling permits would be returned to the state. In 2012, National Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau approved exploratory drilling for oil and natural gas in the Golan. The following year, the Petroleum Council of Israel's Ministry of Energy and Water Resources secretly awarded a drilling license covering half the area of the Golan Heights to a local subsidiary of New Jersey-based Genie Energy Ltd. headed by Effi Eitam. Human rights groups have said that the drilling violates international law, as the Golan Heights are an occupied territory.

Some of the tourist attractions of the Golan Heights are, 1. Nimrod Fortress National Park: An ancient fortress in the northern Golan Heights, built in the 13th century by Muslim rulers to defend against a possible Crusader attack. It is located on a steep mountain ridge, with deep forested ravines on either side, and has a stupendous view of its surroundings. A trail leads from the fortress's west edge downhill several kilometres to Banias, another important historical and nature site in the area. 2. Mount Bental: A mountain in the eastern Golan Heights with an Israeli stronghold (formerly a Syrian stronghold) on top and views of Syria to the east and the Golan Heights to the west. On some days, you might hear or even see a bomb going off in the distance, part of the Syrian Civil War. From this distance, it sounds like thunder. You can explore the Syrian army bunkers here from before 1967. 3. Golani Observation Point or Tel Faher: A Syrian military post between 1948-1967. In that period the Syrian army would shell Israeli agricultural settlements in the valley below as part of border disputes. The post was conquered by Israel in a bloody battle in 1967. It is now the site of a memorial, and you can explore the Syrian bunkers, which have a great view down to the fields of the kibbutzim. 4. Observation to Quneitra: Quneitra is a ghost town, which was abandoned by the Syrians during the 1967 war and left in the no-man's-land ever since.

Thoroughly wrecked not only in 1967 but in the subsequent 1973 conflict as well, from the Israeli side, the area can only be viewed from designated viewpoints set up along the border road, as it's just across the de facto line of control. 5. Rujm el-Hiri (Gilgal Refaim) (A 4 km walk east on the Golan Trail from Daliyot junction (the road junction closest to Gamla): A large megalithic monument dating to around 3000 BCE. It consists of concentric stone circles, and is sometimes called the "Stonehenge of the Levant", without the big upstanding rocks but with a small cave inside. It is hypothesized to be an astronomical and/or ritual site. It looks very impressive from the air, but is difficult to appreciate from ground level. 6. Rujm el-Hiri: an abandoned bunker can be found and explored. 7. Kursi. An archaeological site on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and north of Ein Gev. 8. Deir Aziz synagogue: A Byzantine-era synagogue, partly reconstructed, with impressive pillars. 9. Umm el Kanatir. A Byzantine-era Jewish town including a synagogue. The synagogue is being excavated and reconstructed (until May 2018).

Israel occupied the Golan Heights, West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Six-Day War. An armistice line was established and the region came under Israeli military control. Syria tried to retake the Golan Heights during the 1973 Middle East war. Syria was defeated in its attempt. Both countries signed an armistice in 1974 and a UN observer force has been in place on the ceasefire line since 1974. In 1981, Israel permanently acquired the territory of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem in moves never recognized by most countries. The international community regards as disputed territory occupied by Israel whose status should be determined by negotiations between Israel and Syria. Attempts by the international community to bring Israel and Syria for negotiations have failed. International Recognition of Golan Heights The European Union said its position on the status of the Golan Heights was unchanged and it did not recognize Israeli sovereignty over the area. The Arab League, which suspended Syria in 2011 after the start of its civil war has said the move is "completely beyond international law". Egypt, which made peace with Israel in 1979, said it still considers the Golan as occupied Syrian territory. India has also not recognized Golan heights as Israel territory and

has called for the return of Golan Heights to Syria. The Syrian government said the Golan was an “indivisible” part of Syrian territory and recovering it “via all means guaranteed by international law is still a priority”. Russia, Iran, and Turkey have condemned the US statement as illegal and unacceptable and said that the decisions will lead to a crisis in the region. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has moved to try and get a new settlement in the Golan Heights named after US President Donald Trump to thank him for recognising the Jewish state's sovereignty over the disputed territory. "All Israelis were deeply moved when President Trump made his historic decision to recognise Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights," Netanyahu said during a visit to the area.

The Israeli government hopes to settle some 250,000 Israelis in the occupied Syrian Golan heights over the next 30 years, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) reported on Monday. The report comes one week after the U.S. President Donald Trump signed a presidential proclamation recognizing the Golan Heights as “Israeli territory” According to the IBA, the Israeli plan also includes construction of two new Jewish-only settlements in the Golan, along with thousands of new settlement units and a raft of planned transport and tourism projects in the region. The population of the Golan Heights currently stands at some 50,000, including 22,000 Israeli settlers, according to Israeli figures. Israel had long pushed Washington to recognize its claim over the strategic plateau, which it seized from Syria during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, but previous U.S. administrations had refrained from doing so. On March 21, 2019, President Donald Trump announced in a tweet: “After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel’s Sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!” He made it official on March 25 following a meeting with Netanyahu. Trump’s announcement was welcomed by Israelis across the political spectrum and the Wall Street Journal noted, “Recognizing the Golan sends a message to Russia, Syria’s patron, that the U.S. recognizes that the civil war has changed Syrian reality. There is no returning to a nonexistent status quo ante.” Some Arabists and commentators are predicting a cataclysm, just as they did following Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital

and relocation of the embassy. Rather than rise up in anger, however, the Arab and Muslim world reacted mostly with resignation, given that the city has been Israel’s capital since 1948. Similarly, the response to the Golan announcement was a collective shrug. Syria and its Iranian and Russian defenders condemned the decision. The head of the Arab League made a perfunctory statement criticizing the United States and the European Union, predictably, said it would not change its position.

In the book entitled by M. Mason (2022) “The Untold story of the Golan Heights: occupation, Colonization and Jalwani Resistance”, is the first academic study in English of Arab politics and culture in the occupied Golan Heights. It focuses on an indigenous community, known as the Jawlanis, and their experience of everyday colonisation and resistance to settler colonisation. Chapters cover how governance is carried out in the Golan, from Israel's use of the education system and collective memory, to its development of large-scale wind turbines which are now a symbol of Israeli encroachment. To illustrate the ways in which the current regime of Israeli rule has been contested, there are chapters on the six-month strike of 1982, youth mobilisation in the occupied Golan, Palestinian solidarity movements, and the creation of Jawlani art and writing as an act of resistance. Rich in ethnographic detail and with chapters from diverse disciplines, the book is unique in bringing together Jawlani, Palestinian and UK researchers. The innovative format - with shorter 'reflections' from young Arab researchers, activists and lawyers that respond to more traditional academic chapters - establishes a bold new 'de-colonial' approach. Rich in ethnographic detail and with chapters from diverse disciplines, the book is unique in bringing together Jawlani, Palestinian and UK researchers. The innovative format - with shorter 'reflections' from young Arab researchers, activists and lawyers that respond to more traditional academic chapters - establishes a bold new 'de-colonial' approach.

The Golan settlement map was designed during a period of 25 years and was completed in 1992. Since then, the map has remained almost unchanged. At the same time, a political process between Syria and Israel, which up to that point had seemed impossible,

began to appear both feasible and attainable. This process renewed the question mark over the political future of the Golan and intensified uncertainty. It produced an atmosphere and created conditions which were also greatly different than those which had previously existed and the Golan settlements began perceive a real threat to their existence, even leading entire communities to seek alternative locations to continue their lives together if they were required to leave their homes. In the previous 25 years, Israeli settlement had developed and flourished with the accepted understanding that there would be no return to the situation which had existed between Israel and Syria up to June 1967. The settlement project had advanced without any evaluation of the significance of this understanding and without any demand for public discourse to deeply distinguish between the circumstances preceding the Six Day War, based on the absence of Syrian-Israeli peace treaty, and a possible reality which might develop on the basis of such a peace agreement. (Yigal Kipnis, 2013)

At the end of 2021, the government of Israel announced plans to double the population of the Golan Heights in the next decade and invest in its development. Approximately \$324 million was earmarked to build 7,300 apartments and houses for 23,000 new residents of the Golan Heights. In addition, two new villages (Asif and Matar) will be built with a total of 4,000 apartments. More than \$50 million will be spent on improving roads and public transport. Another \$53 million was allocated for regional development, including tourism, which was expected to generate about 2,000 jobs in the tourism industry, agriculture, hotels and the commercial sector. Additional funds are being invested to turn the Golan Heights into the technological capital of renewable energy in Israel.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, appearing alongside Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Thursday, hailed the move as "historic" and "bold." "Tonight, President Trump made the decision to recognize that that hard-fought real estate, that important place, is proper to be a sovereign part of the state of Israel. President Trump made a bold decision to recognize that, an important decision for the people of Israel. It will truly be historic, and the people of Israel should know that the battles they fought, the lives that they lost on that very

ground, were worthy and meaningful and important for all time," Pompeo said. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu affirmed his country's support for Syria's "territorial integrity." Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said "we cannot allow the legitimisation of the occupation of the Golan Heights". Iran, another key ally of the Assad regime, said the move was illegal. "This illegal and unacceptable recognition does not change the fact that it belongs to Syria," foreign ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi said. Russia, which has long been a key backer of Syria, condemned Trump's declaration as a violation of UN decisions. "Russia, as you know, takes a principled position on the issue of the Syrian Arab Republic's ownership of the Golan Heights... Our assessment of the unlawful nature of Israel's decision to extend its sovereignty to the Golan Heights remains unchanged," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

The new U.S. position has not received support from any other country, including its European allies. While Iran, Russia, Turkey, among others, have been critical, the Arab response has been assessed as insufficiently strident. This is no doubt a reflection of reduced influence in Washington, with greater U.S. leverage on oil supplies, divisions among Arab countries over Qatar, pressure on Saudi Arabia because of Yemen and the Jamal Khashoggi issue. Until Trump's decision to recognise the territory as Israel's, no other country in the world had accepted Israeli claims to the Golan Heights. After a media report claimed in June that the Biden administration was undoing Trump's decision, Washington explicitly said the US's position on the territory is still the same. "US policy regarding the Golan has not changed, and reports to the contrary are false," the Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs tweeted at that time. Weeks earlier, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, also had told a congressional panel the administration has not changed its position.

OBJECTIVES

- To record the tension between Israel, Syria and other Arab countries
- Israel's annexation of the region and its geo-political impact

- War casualties in the Golan heights and its economic repercussions
- Golan heights and its implications for international relations

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