

SAFEGUARDING THE GOLAN HEIGHTS, ISRAEL, AND JORDAN FROM IRAN

David A. Jones & Izabela Zhiznevska

Professor, University of Warsaw, Poland

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ABSTRACT

What is called the Golan Heights is a plateau above Israel on which the Islamic Republic of Iran has been planning to establish a forward command post that would threaten both the Jewish State and the bordering Suni Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, each a strong and loyal United States Ally. In the past, Syrian artillery units shelled northern Israel, and the Palestinian Fatah organization launched cross-border raids against Israelis, each from the Golan Heights, a highland area. Israel captured two-thirds of the Golan Heights in its 1967 war against Syria, then annexed Golan in 1981 by right of conquest amidst global outcry, although Israel has returned over 80 percent of the overall territory it captured in 1967, largely in the West Bank. American recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Golan merely removes that strategically valuable territory from Iran's influence directly or through Hezbollah, thereby diminishing Iran's value to the Russian Federation. This paper will praise President Donald J. Trump's foresight in preventing an Iranian strategy of encircling Israel from the Russian naval base at Tartus, air base near Latakia, Syria, that country's two largest port cities, coupled with Iran's plan for its own naval base at Latakia. When Syrian, Golan covered less than one percent of Syria's territory. Currently, fewer than one percent of Israel's population resides there: half Jewish, half Druze, the latter considered Syrian. Each of the 28 European Union member states rejected recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights. This paper will present arguments why the EU is mistaken, by evidencing the right of the Jewish People to possess the Golan from Biblical times into eternity. It argues also that the United States has not "gone overboard" in its relations with Israel as has been argued, and that the failure of a "two-state" solution is a good outcome because it has yet to be designed well.

KEYWORDS: *Golan Heights, Iran, Israel, Syria*

INTRODUCTION

On a rocky plateau in the Northeastern edge of Israel or the Southwestern edge of what has been known in the second half of the 20th century as the Syrian Arab Republic ("Syria") is the "Golan Heights" territory. It takes its name from a statement by Moses, the Servant of the Lord, in the Book d'varim (Deuteronomy) in *Tenakh* or the Oral Torah [*Holy Bible*]:

[41 Then Moses separated three cities beyond the Jordan toward the sun-rising;

42 that the manslayer might flee thither, that slayeth his neighbor unawares, and hated him not in time past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live];

43 Bezer in the wilderness, in the table-land, for the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and

Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites

[44 And this is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel; ...] (Book Four: 43, emphasis added).

This is corroborated in the Book of Yeroshua (Joshua), in *Tenakh* or the Oral Torah [*Holy Bible*]:

27 And unto the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, out of the other half tribe of Manasseh **they gave Golan in Bashan with her suburbs**, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Beeshterah with her suburbs; two cities (Book 21:27, emphasis added).

Over the ensuing centuries, the sovereignty of the Golan changed hands many times, frequently as a consequence of conquest in battle: Jewish tribes populated it abundantly as settlers, gentile tribes passed through occasionally, largely as nomads. Prevailing standards favor permanent settlements as conditions-precedent to sovereignty. Golan is Jewish historically. Morality is on the side of recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.



Figure 1: Map of the Golan Heights Plateau, 2019

Source: Inbar, Efraim. 2019. "Israel's Presence on the Golan Heights:

A Strategic Necessity," *Jerusalem Institute for Strategy & Security*.

10 Apr. and the *Middle East Forum*. 10 Apr.

Numerous additional factors buttress Israel's need to exercise sovereignty over Golan: several sources of Israel's water are from the Golan, the Heights provide high ground suitable for Israel's enemies to construct artillery batteries from which to shell Israeli cities below, the area is attractive to adversaries such as Iran and Syria to wreak mischief on Israel ranging from diverting the natural flow of riparian waterways to constructing aircraft landing strips for hostile military aircraft. Numerous factors serve as the pretext for the unanimous European Union (EU) opposition to Golan annexation: United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 497, for instance, plus what is called the "Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the Golan Heights" (Lazaroff&Mahmias, 2019). However, these are mere *pretexts*, as Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu noticed in his explanation of the real reason for the push to have the United Kingdom apologize for the 1917 Balfour Declaration that announced the Allied support of a Jewish State: this is not about

land or Palestinian statehood at all, it is *antisemitism* pure and simple (Netanyahu, 2016). So also is the true explanation of why Europe opposes Golan annexation by Israel so vehemently. Of course, the opposite is true as well: United States of America recognizes Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights because the administration of President Donald J. Trump is *not* anti-Semitic.

Tensions in the Middle East have been rising progressively over recent months, escalating geometrically once President Trump withdrew the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known colloquially as the “Iran Nuclear Deal”, because such an agreement The President felt was not in the interests of the United States of America or its Allies, including especially Israel. Iran strongly protested American withdrawal, leading some to ponder what reasons Iran possessed for advancing such strong rhetoric. European Allies disagreed, although European Community powers acknowledged that the “deal” contains deficiencies that render it something less than of optimum value to the West (Lazaroff&Nahmias, 2019). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the deal foul from the start, felt the administration of former President Barrack H. Obama had been duped into agreeing thereto (Beck, 2018).

Motives of Israel’s Neighbors

Golan Heights reposes at the juncture of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel, constitutes less than one percent of Syria’s territory (only 690 square miles/1,787 square kilometers), yet it is a strategic zone both geographically and politically. It remains the bone of contention between Israel and Syria. The motives for Israel’s staying in the Golan are pretty transparent: it is a strategic military plateau and prime geopolitical feature of this region. It includes three sources of the Jordan River: the Dan, the Banias, and the Hasbani. Additional vital water sources of the region include the Litani River and Mount Hermon mountain streams (Kaufman, 2013). There constitute some of the main water sources on which Israel depends, supplemented by fresh water from Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) catchment that supplies thirty percent of Israel’s water requirements. Before 1967 Syrians controlled Israel’s main tap and could close it at any point (Goodman, 2011). They even tried to divert the sources of fresh water by cutting off Israel’s sources of water before Israel Defense Forces (IDF) tanks and armor [צה"ל-חילהשריון](#) stopped them by recapturing the Golan Heights on 10 June 1967, the last day of the Six Day War. Victory by Israel became assured from the greater training the IDF had received compared to their Arab counterparts, together with the much greater devotion to duty and obedience to the chain of command by the Israelis (Reston, 1967).

Golan is also a very fertile land used for agriculture, and it holds the only ski resort in Israel, so it has a commercial value such as for tourism, sporting competition. Its importance includes some of its geopolitical features. *Ramat ha-Golan* [Hebrew. [רמתהגולן](#)] gives Israel a strong defensive and offensive position and the central point for monitoring of military movements across the border. It also constitutes the best line of defense from the East, owing to its mountainous topography that includes the peak of Mount Hermon, providing Israel with an early-warning signal capacity. What is more, the civil war in Syria caused Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah to approach the border with Israel alarmingly through the support offered to Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Thus, control over the Golan Heights is of pivotal importance not only to Israel but to the stability of the greater Middle East. Israeli control over the Golan is instrumental to Israel’s rising economic and political power in the region and globally, just as it is adumbrative of Syria’s failing economy and stature both in the region and worldwide.

Syrians took hold of the Golan as a result of the Sykes-Picot agreement during World War I, which divided the Ottoman Empire into the zones of British and French influence. Borders were drawn and states created without much regard to historic, tribal or ethnic aspects (Rotem, 2019) and as Syria claimed independence through a Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence signed in 1936 and was recognized as a sovereign state and became de facto independent from French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon in 1946, the Golan Heights fell within its borders. Since then, the Syrian army used this strategic position periodically to shell Israeli civilian settlements along the border and Palestinian Fatah organized regular cross-border raids (Brodsky, 2017). In other words, Syria's claim to the Golan derives from a sordid Franco-British colonial experience. This is rather ironic because most colonial claims are rejected by the 21st-century international community, although much of Europe clings onto this example. Over nearly two decades between Israel's independence in 1948 and the Six Days War in 1967, Syria directly or by proxy wreaked havoc on Israel from the Golan Heights. Mortars were fired onto the Huleh Valley below, disrupting families residing there within recognised Israeli territory. Land mines were deployed indiscriminately on roads within the Golan, causing at least one young boy to be blown apart, many others to incur severe injuries ("Golan Heights", N.d.). When Israel protested such as in 1966 to the Fatah terror attacks before the United Nations, Israel's complaint fell on deaf ears, the Syrian ambassador retorted: "It is not our duty to stop them, but to encourage and strengthen them", and even a mild Security Council apology was vetoed by the Soviet Union (Ibid.). If Israel were to survive, it was compelled to take decisive action.

In 1967, as a result of deployment of troops in the Sinai, demand for the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), constant shelling of Jewish kibbutzim mainly within the Huleh Valley communities, infiltration of Arab militants into Israeli territory and closing of the Straits of Tiran by Egypt, finally Israel took action against Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Thus, on 05 June 1967 Israel launched an attack on Jordan, then on 09 June expanded that to an attack on Syrian forces in the Golan Heights. There was no master plan for that conflict, it was a response to aggression and the territorial aims developed during the war, making Israeli war machines stop along natural frontiers such as the Jordan River and the Isthmus of Suez. It was not an expansionist or offensive conflict, only a defensive one by Israel. Jewish leaders believed the security of the state or even its survival was threatened (Shlaim, 2012). Also, international law recognizes that if a country has been a victim of aggression, undeniably the case here, then defeats its aggressor, it possesses the right to exercise sovereignty over the conquered territory (Inbar, 2019).

On 22 November 1967, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242 calling on the Arab states to make peace with Israel and on Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied during the conflict (Louis & Shlaim, 2012). Whereas Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt agreed to consultations with the United Nations through its Special Representative, Syria denounced the resolution. In 1973 Syrian forces launched a futile attempt to regain the territory alongside Egypt's attempt to regain control of the Sinai, but that conflict, called the "Yom Kippur War", ended with the absolute victory of Israeli forces. Despite various attempts to reach an agreement with Syria on a "land for peace" basis, none reached success, and soon it proved crucial for Israel to be determined to remain in the Golan Heights. It was not about a "land grab" as such, the fact is that Israel returned about 80% of the land it gained in the 1967 war at this point. On the contrary, Syria had become a radical and politically aggressive state by that time. It sheltered Palestinian guerillas (Bowen, 2003) and became the center of the Middle East's axis of evil as a conduit to antigovernment forces in Iraq and a base for fundamentalist Islamic nationalism such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, supplying Hezbollah with weapons, training, money, and support (Goodman, 2011). The only incentive for Israel to conclude a peace agreement with Syria would be to pull it back from the

influence of Iran, Hezbollah and the like, but is it really possible at this point? Syria is still entangled in a civil war, with the regime of Bashar al-Assad strongly supported by Iran and Hezbollah, trying to establish military outposts along the Syrian border with Israel. If Israel yielded to Syrian territorial demands, Iran or Hezbollah or ISIS would be already at their door, lurking from the Golan region. Golan territories are buffers that not only separate Israel from its adversaries but also constitute a guarantee that in the future military clashes will take place outside of Israel proper (Gelvin, 2014). The Golan is to Israel what Ukraine was to the Soviet Union in the time of Marshal Josef V. Stalin: a buffer zone or marchland. And Iran constitutes a destabilizing factor in the region, threatening not only the security of Israel but also the stability of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which could become its corridor to the Palestinian Authority territory inside of greater Israel. As a pro-American country, Jordan detaches Israel from pro-Iranian states, so Jordan's security and stability is crucial for Israel as well. Further away from the Golan, even Egypt is at risk if Iran or its proxies establish a foothold on the Golan Heights.

What is "Syria"?

To cut to the core rapidly, "Syria" is an amalgamation of ethnic peoples that, if ever it was a "state" it is no longer, as Figure 2 below reflects. Much of Syria is sparsely populated, and over the past several years much more of what was under Syrian control has become ravaged by ISIS, turned into no man's land. On the "Fragile State Index, 2018" Syria ranks fourth from the top on "high alert, trailing only Yemen, Sudan, then South Somalia (Fund for Peace, 2018). More than being merely "fragile", Syria has deteriorated into a failed state that could easily catalyze the deterioration of its neighbors if its condition were allowed to metastasize. As Figure 2 below reflects, Syria is not naturally a nation-state, but an artificial collection of rather scattered ethnicities, most of whom are Sunni Arab or Sunni Kurd, pockets of whom are Druze Arab or Christian, one sliver along Syria's Western border is Alawite Arab that includes Assad's forces at Damascus.

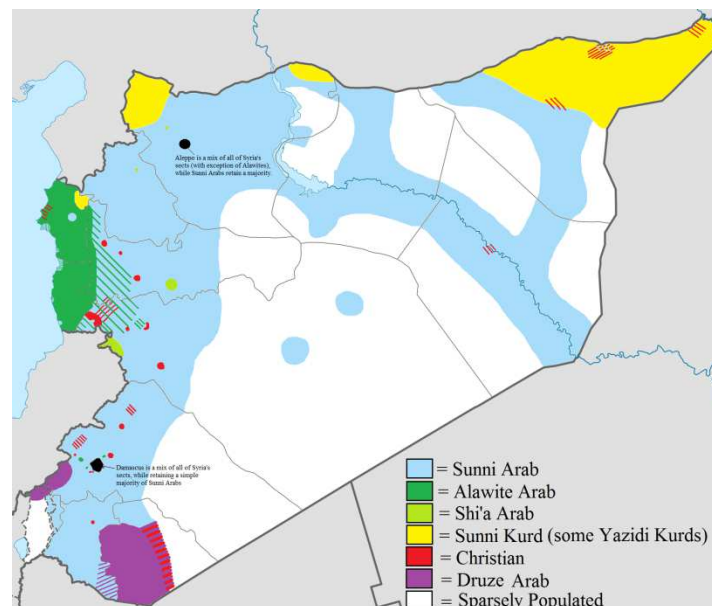


Figure 2: Scattered Ethnicities of Syri

Bohl, Ryan. 2016. "As Syria's Ceasefire Fails, It's Time to Break Some Stereotypes," *Atlantic Sentinel*. 22 Sep.

<https://atlanticsentinel.com/2016/09/as-syrias-ceasefire-fails-its-time-to-break-some-stereotypes/>

Iran does not recognise Israel it wants to destroy it, but also to control the Middle East, by creating a land bridge to the Mediterranean Sea, among other strategies, that would enable it to move people and supplies between Iran and the Mediterranean Sea at any time (Dunetz, 2019). Israel has no impending disputes with Iran, except for Israel's right to exist that Iran denies, no common borders, no contested resources. Israeli and Iranian armed forces never have clashed openly. Israel is just a perfect scapegoat for the current Iranian regime to gain hegemony in the region ahead of its Sunni Arab competitors, namely Saudi Arabia, but less visibly Turkey.

Iran's allies, Syria and Hezbollah, already threaten Israel's borders through Southern Lebanon. Before Israel's seizure of the Golan that was an underdeveloped region with only a few proper roads, villages not connected with electricity or running water supplies. Establishment of more than 30 settlements and more than 100 settlement businesses in the half-century since 1967 led to the development of infrastructure and an economy, with many Golanis finding employment within Israel (Bregman, 2014). Tourism within the Golan region has advanced with the ski resort at Mt. Hermon together with hot water springs at HarnatGader, among other enterprises. Curiously but entirely fortuitously, development of the Golan since 1967 has unearthed historical treasures that buttress Jewish claims to the Golan region. Excavations include ancient synagogues Northeast of Lake Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) including Kanaf and Umm el-Qanatir (1879-1886), ed-Dikkeh (1905), Qasrin and 'EnNashut (1972-1977)(Stern, 1993). Part of this activity on the Golan stemmed from the purchase of land by Baron Edmond James de Rothchild in 1892, consolidating the holdings of three separate earlier landowners (Fischbach, 2003, 161), leading to a strong Jewish re-presence in the Golan area through settlements of the B'nei Yehuda Society at the beginning of the Zionist movement (Hisin, 1976).

In 2000, alongside the Israeli withdrawal of its troops from southern Lebanon, Hezbollah demanded that Israel evacuate from Shebaa Farms, a strip constituting a part of the Golan Heights that had been governed by Syria since World War II, claiming that area to be properly part of Lebanon, subsequent to which Hezbollah spokesman Hassan Ezzedin admitted that was only a pretext to continue struggling with Israel (Muravchik, 2015). Also Syria, apart from its military reasons to claim the territory, supported the posture of it being Lebanese thus justifying Hezbollah attempts to liberate it, and in both cases, the aim was rather clear: this small, uninhabited area was just used as tactical leverage against Israel (Kaufman, 2013). That the real objective was to harm Israel can be buttressed with the example of Turkey's annexation of Syria's Alexandretta Province, considered unlawful by Syria although Syria dropped its claim to it. Alexandretta Province is five times larger than the Golan, and Syria continues to maintain diplomatic relations with Turkey. Naturally, as Syria continues to disintegrate from the ravages of its civil war, more of its territory can be expected to slip away. Just as much of the Syrian territory was taken from its neighbors during the League of Nations "Mandate" period, some of what became "Syria" during the period between the two world wars and at the end of World War II, some of that territory is likely to revert either to the neighbors from which it was taken, their successors, or states to be newly formed such as Kurdistan. This prospect also motivated Israel to annex the Golan before another state completed that objective because Golan lies at a cross-road.

Annexation and Recognition

United States recognition of Israeli annexation of the Golan came at a time when additional international relations variables came into play or showed signs of their coming into play soon. A proposal advanced by the United States through President Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner is one such variable termed a "Mideast Marshall Plan" by Alan Dershowitz, Felix Frankfurter Professor of Constitutional Law, *Emeritus*, at Harvard University (Dershowitz, 2019). It consists of a United States Dollar (USD) 50 Billion investment package for the region, half earmarked for the Palestinian communities of Gaza and West Bank, half for neighboring Arab countries, notably Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon (Chulov, 2019). Palestinians quickly rejected the plan, leading Professor Dershowitz to recall: "Israeli diplomat Abba Eban once quipped, the Palestinian leadership 'never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity'" (Dershowitz, 2019). Important to remember is that substantial economic investment into Jordan and elsewhere in the region cannot be allowed to be put at risk. Israeli annexation of the Gaza reduces that risk substantially. Of course, what the Palestinian leadership must fully realize but refuses to acknowledge is that these funds, if left unspent on Palestinians, will be spent on Arab neighbors as Iran understands very clearly. Kushner's plan is aimed at a "two-state solution" to end the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In all likelihood, the current version of this peace plan will not work, as United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo quietly told Jewish leaders recently (Hudson & Morris, 2019). If that does not materialize, so much the better, because it has yet to be considered carefully. Much as Israel does not need to have a state within a state, meaning a Palestinian "state" inside of Israel, really it does not require a Palestinian state side by side, either. Israel must expand Jewish settlements across its territory and beyond. The annexation of the Golan is a very good beginning because, with annexation coupled with formal American recognition, Biblical settlements can be reincarnated in the territory, establishing a chain of Jewish communities across time, further buttressing Israel in its claim to the legitimate entitlement of the Golan, of Israel proper, and of other appendages.

Highly regarded analysts of the Middle East and of Israel's security therein have expressed skepticism concerning a Palestinian peace solution, whether "land for peace" or more recently "money for peace" anytime soon:

Sir John Jenkins, a former Middle East director for the [British] Foreign Office, said torpor across Palestinian politics had contributed to a loss of faith in the existing peace model. ...

He said Palestine's political structure had collapsed and there was "no Palestinian national narrative any more", pointing to the "bureaucratization and demoralization of Fatah", the "futilely belligerent" Hamas in charge of Gaza, and the fact that the Palestinian Authority that runs parts of the West Bank was "widely distrusted and despised as corrupt by many Palestinians".

[Jenkins continued]: "Add to this the failure of the Arab uprisings, the consequent discrediting of political Islamism, the collapse of Arab nationalism and the rise of securitized authoritarianism, and the old context within which the Palestinian national cause sat has also vanished. No one has replaced it with anything satisfactory. This is a failure of the political imagination" (Chulov, 2019).

What does this mean? It is very simple: Israel must remain strong, wield control over territory within its borders and abutting its borders. Nowhere is this situation more serious than it is on the border between Israel and Syria, with the latter striking up deals with the Russian Federation to build then operate nuclear naval bases along with Syrian territory (Nordland, 2017; Peck, 2017). It is incomprehensible why European countries thathold themselves out to be liberal

democracies in the same light that Israel does seem to have turned against Israel. Writers who contend with Ayoub&Southlea (2019) that “Israel’s Occupation of the Golan Heights is Illegal and Dangerous” simply are wrong: it is entirely lawful, the danger is if Israel were not to control the Golan territory, as Bardaji& Kemp argued in 2018. Some have compared Israel’s annexation of the Golan to the Russian Federation’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, contending Western interests assess the one as being good, the other bad (Borger, 2019) when the two are parallel. Russia’s Black Sea fleet headquarters is on the Crimean Peninsula, it is necessary to Russia’s national defense. Repeatedly, the senior author of this paper has argued the West should have gauged Russian interests sooner and more wisely, exchanged the Crimean Peninsula for the oblast at Königsberg (Kaliningrad), the latter being more of an annoyance to the West than is the former (Jones, 2015). Moreover, Königsberg is situated in relation to Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe much in the way the Golan Heights is situated in relation to Israel: Königsberg as well as the Golan Heights are strategic locations from which an adversary can torment a neighboring state to say the least, whereas the Crimean Peninsula functions primarily as a dock for warships that, in any event, have to traverse the Bosphorus Strait to reach the Mediterranean, with the Bosphorus being extremely narrow, congested with cargo shipping, and guarded by Turkey, still a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

CONCLUSIONS

As Cook (2019) stated: “The Golan Heights Should Stay Israeli Forever.” This is a key to peace and stability in the Middle East more so than any number of dollars even reaching to the Billions. In fact, if properly managed, the Golan Heights should be capable of generating Billions of dollars annually for Israel. Little wonder, then, that neither the Palestinian nor the Israeli leaders favored the conference at Bahrain with their presence in June 2019, it is unnecessary. Palestinians say they want “freedom”, something they lack entirely under their current leadership but would stand to gain from peace with Israel. Jordanians join with Israelis in desiring security, with Israeli annexation of the Golan being a step in the right direction, tiny as that step may be. Europe is being short-sighted by opposing recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Golan, with the Trump Administration in the United States accurately foreseeing this necessity as a means of avoiding further destabilization of the Middle East. When cut to the core, Israel is an economically thriving liberal democracy, Syria an economically retrograde dictatorship. What more needs to be said because this alone should justify Golan annexation in the best interests of the Golani citizenry. In the final analysis, however, more can be said. Once Syria fails completely, it will be partitioned among its neighbors, one neighbor being Israel. At that time, Israeli territory should be expanded further into what is Syria presently, to provide the economic sustenance together with the governance that has been lacking in Syria since its formation in the Mandate Period, long gone.

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