General Assembly 4

The occupied Syrian Golan

Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2021

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Forum: *General Assembly 4*

Issue: *The occupied Syrian Golan*

Position: *Chair*

Introduction

The Golan Heights is a region in the southwestern part of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) covering 1,860 square kilometres, equal to one per cent of Syria's overall area. For half a century now, turmoil has been circling the region with the belligerents being heavily interested in the high altitude of the Heights. On June 5th 1967, Israeli forces occupied the western two-thirds of the Golan as the end result of the Six-Day War between Israel and an alliance of Syrian, Jordan, and UAR Egypt troops. The occupation by Israeli forces came 21 years after the official addition of the Golan to the then newly-independent SAR.

At the time of the event, 140,000 Syrians were displaced, with the number of inhabitants 54 years later reaching 500,000. Twenty thousand of the Syrian population decided to remain in their villages even under the control of Israel, which have maintained control in two-thirds of the Heights, with the other third remaining under the control of Syria.

Following the end of the war, Syria decided to follow an unusual principle through totally dismissing Israel, or in the Khartoum Resolution's words:

"no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it"

This led to Israel taking several actions despite global condemnation, building 40 illegal settlements in the area and taking down ancient Syrian ruins and villages with the purpose of eliminating Syria's history from the region.

In the following years, Syria attempted to liberate its territories on numerous occasions, with most of them turning out fruitless. In October 1973 however, in their first attempt during the October War, Syria managed to isolate and re-occupy part of its territory that included the capital of Golan through negotiation agreements. Despite the joy of the citizens at first, depression struck when they came to find every building of the city completely destroyed.

After the de-facto annexation of the Occupied Syrian Golan to Israel on December 14th 1981, the international community along with the United Nations responded with the 497th Resolution of the Security Council, which discouraged the actions of Israel and denied legitimization of the move. Since that year, the UN General Assembly has annually addressed the issue.

In the years that passed, negotiations between Syria and Israel over the finding of peace were frequently held without reaching an ultimate agreement. Since the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2012, the eastern third of the Golan has attracted more attention from the international community given the continuous attacks and battles. This did not stop turmoil in the Israeli occupied territories, with the US and Iran getting involved in airstrikes and negotiations.

The latest update in the region comes with the announcement of then US President Donald Trump on the 25th of March 2019, stating that the US is the first country to recognize Israeli sovereignty in the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The EU did not support this claim, as all 28 members declared that they do not recognize Israeli sovereignty.

Definition of Key Terms

Military Occupation

Control and possession of a hostile area that allows a nation to establish military rule against the nation that previously held the territory..[1]

Annexation

The addition of an area/region/territory to a country, state, etc.

Buffer Zone

A neutral area separating two or more conflicting forces[2]

Sovereignty

The power of a country to control its own government; freedom from external control; autonomy[3]

De Facto

De facto refers to something that is true in practice but is not explicitly stated in formally recognized legislation.

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[1] "Military Occupation." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/military%20occupation.

[2] "Buffer Zone." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/buffer%20zone.

[3] "Sovereignty." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty.

In this regard, Israel is the de facto administrator of the Golan Heights region, as it oversees public services and determines and defends the rights and duties of the territory's people, and it typically exerts authority over the region.

Khartoum Resolution 1967

After the end of the Six-Day War in 1967, eight heads of state from the Arab States met in Khartoum for a conference, reviewing the war and its results. After four-day long discussions, the summit came to the decision that the participating countries would block any peace negotiations with Israel, also discrediting the existence of the nation and continuing the battle against it.[4]

Green Line

The Green Line is a phrase used to describe the dividing line that existed between Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria from the time of Israel's victory in 1948 until the 1967 Six-Day War. It is said to be named after the green pen used by officials negotiating the ceasefire in 1949 to draw the nations' borders. In today's era, it is considered to be the most commonly proposed territorial change between Israel and Palestine for their peace negotiations.[5]

Military attache
Military/defence attaches serve as the principal representatives of a certain nation's military in the country to which they are posted. Their duty also includes observing events in the host country and reporting them to the political and military officials in their home country

General Overview

Historical Background

The origin of the current status of the Golan Heights dates back to 1948 and the outbreak of the First Arab-Israeli War in the former British Mandate of Palestine. As a result of the 1947 Palestinian civil war, neighbouring countries from the Arab League took the side of the Palestinian Arabs in the fight against the Jews. On the 15th of May, 1948, the civil war turned into a two-way conflict between Israel and the participating Arab States, starting a conflict that would still be considered ongoing today, 73 years later.

After the failure of the Arab League's strategy during the war, Israel came on top after just 9 months of the war with the 1949 Armistice Agreements, forming the Green Line. The territorial changes favoured Israel to a great extent, as it got

[4] *Mfa.gov.il*, www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/the%20khartoum%20resolutions.aspx.

[5] "The Green Line." *Anti-Defamation League*, www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/the-green-line.

awarded not only the entire Jewish area but also gained control of approximately 60% of the Arab area.

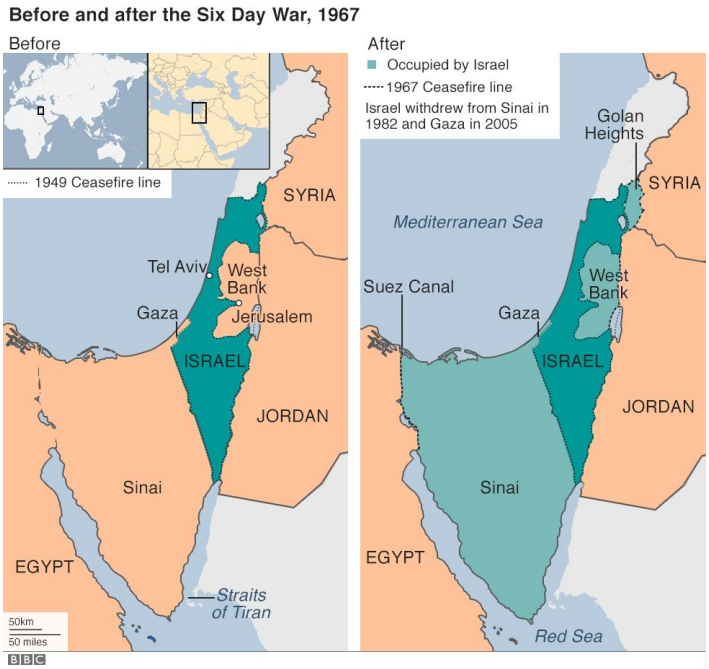
The outcome was different in the Second Arab-Israeli War that followed 8 years later, on October 29th, 1956. After the nationalisation of the Suez Canal from then Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the otherwise known Suez Crisis took place with Israeli troops attacking Egyptian territories towards the Suez Canal. Seeing the importance of the Canal as an incredibly valuable waterway for Europe's commerce, British and French forces were soon deployed to assist the Israeli government in their efforts.

While the attack was seen as successful, the conflict ran into a roadblock when the Soviet Union - that was expected to send arms in the area against the Israeli-French-British troops, eager to exploit trade routes - listened to the United States and decided not to participate in the conflict. Instead, the US threatened the three countries with economic sanctions, which ultimately led to the withdrawal of the troops within a year.

During the withdrawal of troops from the three belligerents, the first use of a UN peacekeeping force was recorded, with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) supervising the end of all hostilities in the region. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the conflict, despite Israel's loss, the country was again allowed to ship goods through the Straits of Tiran.

Six-Day War

While the conflict between Arabs and Israelis had started two decades before, it was the year 1967 when the Golan Heights were firstly involved in territorial fights and claims. The alternatively known Third Arab-Israeli War was expected to break out for years given the hatred between Israel and its Arab neighbours, and the international community was on the lookout for such events.



During the build-up to the war, Israeli troops had been recognized as the more prepared and powerful union. In a January 1967 report, the British defence attache had commented:

"In command, training, equipment and services the Israel army is more prepared for war than ever before. Well-trained, tough, self-reliant, the Israeli soldier has a strong fighting spirit and would willingly go to war in defence of his country."

Tensions started rising in November 1966, when two attacks took place, one for each side respectively. After a landmine attack inside Israel, the country responded with a large raid in the Jordan-occupied West Bank. This took place despite reports from Jordan king Hussein regarding the assurance from Israel that an attack would not take place.

After the incident, Jordan attempted to eliminate all casualties taking place in the borders, as it was reported that the attack inside Israel came from Palestinian guerillas. On the other end of the spectrum however, Syria, whose borders with Israel had become a battlefield, actively encouraged all such attempts. During April 1967 it became clear that the war would mainly take place in the borders of Syria and Israel, including the Golan Heights.

In a twist of events, Egypt decided to close down the Straits of Tiran for Israel in May 1967, a move that triggered Israeli attacks towards Egypt and eliminated its Air Forces and Army. After their victory against Egypt, Israel turned its attention to Jordan and Syria, resulting in vigorous territorial losses for the two Arab States. Troops from Israel seized control of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, only losing 800 people in the process and killing 20,000. A ceasefire was signed by all belligerents in the span of 3 days, declaring the end of the war on June 11th, 1967.

Surprise Arab Attacks

Following the end of the Six-Day War, Israel was seen as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to their land and airpower, which particularly intrigued the United States. Showing overconfidence in their abilities, however, Israel did not respond well when, in 1973, reports came out regarding a Syrian and Egyptian surprise attack on the country. Israeli forces struggled heavily, with the loss of the battles seeming like a real possibility. Despite all chaos inside Israel's military camp, all hope was revived when large amounts of equipment was delivered to the nation by US forces in Europe, and the country fully capitalized on the opportunity and overcame their opponents in just three weeks.

The last battle of the war took place on 6th October 1973 and received the name "Yom Kippur War", due to the exact day's name in the Jewish calendar. In a synchronized attack, both Egypt and Syria attacked their previously lost territories Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights respectively. While Egypt succeeded to some extent, Syria's attempts turned out fruitless with Israeli troops maintaining control in the occupied area. A ceasefire agreement was brought into place 19 days later.

Regarding our point of interest, the Golan Heights, it was reported that this last battle between the two belligerents proved to be disastrous for Syria. Not only did it assist Israel in seizing more territorial claims in the area, but it also worsened the relationship between Syria and its ally, Egypt.

Israel's De Facto Annexation

From that point on, the conflict between Israel and Syria got limited to only minor attacks. No major battle took place in the western part of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel. Political tension rose again in September of 1981, when on the

14th day of that month Israel passed the "Golan Heights Law". The result of this law was to extend the nation's control over the region, or as the legislation stated:

"the Law, jurisdiction and administration of the state shall apply to the Golan Heights"

While the law passed did annex the western part of the Golan Heights to Israel, it was not considered as an authorized annexation of the land. At the time, no other country recognized the annexation, with the Security Council taking immediate action and characterizing it as "null and void with no international legal effect" in its 497th Resolution. They demanded Israel to recall its decision, and they later rejected all Israel claims, recognizing the territory as sovereign under the country of Syria.

Peace Negotiations and Syrian Civil War

Peace negotiations between Israel and Syria began in the 1990s. The fundamental concept behind any conceivable settlement was the withdrawal of Israelis in exchange for peace among the two nations, recognition from both sides, and restoration of ties. While substantial progress was made, peace talks halted in 2000 when the two countries disagreed on the location of the new boundaries.

Given that the two were disputed in the 2006 Lebanon War and the 2008 Gaza War, there was no progress in peace discussions between the two parties over the following decade. While Turkey attempted to establish peace talks before the events in Gaza, conversations rapidly broke down as the war broke out.

Combats emerged between the Syrian Arab Army and opposition forces, with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), an Iraqi terrorist organization, gaining control of sections of the Syrian side of the Golan from 2016 to 2018.

Watching all the drama unfold, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu requested US President Obama's recognition of the occupied territory. The White House quickly responded negatively, stating that President Barack Obama and US officials were supportive of the UN Resolutions in favor of the withdrawal of Israel from the area. This decision however was twisted four years later, when in 2019 then-US President Donald Trump recognized the Golan Heights as Israeli territories. In return, the Israeli government honoured the US President by naming a city in the region "Trump Heights".

Golan's Resource Value

The occupied Syrian Golan is an area of importance for many of the reasons and events stated above. However, another element of the narrative concerns the area's resource worth. The Israel National Oil Company (INOC) was granted permission to investigate oil exports in the area in the early 1990s. The search yielded around $24 million worth of oil at the time. Since then, the firm has taken advantage of the permissions granted, exploring again oil-drilling in 1996 and 2012.

Aside from its oil resources, the Golan Heights provide a significant source of water for the State of Israel. The region supplies the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, both of which are important water sources for Israel.

Recent Developments and Iran’s Intervention

Over the last few years, talks targeting the area of the Golan Heights have risen with the addition of Iranian forces in the area, as an ally of Syria. Fearing the consequences of Iran's involvement in the Golan Heights conflict, Israel has launched more than 100 attacks against convoys and depots, restricting the opposition army's supplies. While the Syrian army has done a good job in fighting against these strikes, the effects are being felt.

Since late 2017, Israel has also undertaken an increasing number of strikes against alleged Iranian assets in Syria, ostensibly to hinder the development of Iranian military facilities.

Residency Issues of the Occupied Syrian Golan

Another long-standing concern in the Occupied Syrian Golan has been Israel's push on Syrians to apply for Israeli citizenship. During the 1967 Six-Day War, between 80.000 and 130.000 Syrians left the region and were forced deeper into Syria, becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Approximately 7.000 Syrians chose to remain in the region and were divided into six villages. Travel restrictions were enforced in the region, and those IDPs who had relatives left behind lost contact with their family and friends.

Following Israel's acquisition of the Golan Heights in 1981, the country's government chose to grant all non-Israeli nationals Israeli citizenship, granting them full regional and travel rights. This choice, however, proved ineffectual at first, since by the twenty-first century, fewer than one-tenth had taken advantage of the option for citizenship.

Druze, the region's largest Syrian ethnic community, dramatically boosted their citizenship applications in 2012, following the outbreak of Syria's civil war, and managed to total 20.000 with recognized citizenship. Druze, who aided Israel's goal, has gained social and economic advantages against pro-Syrian people. The pro-Syrian counterargument stems from anxiety, given the ongoing peace talks between the two nations and the prospect of the land being returned to their home country.

Major Parties Involved

Israel

When Israel conquered and occupied the western half of the Golan Heights in 1967, the conflict between Israel, Egypt, and Syria were at a critical juncture. After being in a state of hostility and conflict for roughly 20 years before the events, high-ranking officials of the Western Asian State decided on a helpful approach to be placed on paper during the war, motivated by two goals:

a. to extend its boundaries and

b. to establish a buffer zone against Syria.

To elaborate further, we must recall that Israel declared independence from the British Empire immediately before the First Arab-Israeli War in 1948. The country had not yet been able to grow without fear of assault from its neighbours and had been on the edge of war with Syria since its declaration of independence. The Golan Heights was a vital area for the State of Israel because it provided an observation zone whose view stretched far into Syrian territory. As understood by Israel's subsequent movements, their aim was to seize the Syrian Golan and then restore it through peace talks.

However, peace talks have not been completed 54 years later, and Israel continues to dominate the territory. The country's administration has given several explanations for this. According to the country, the major reason for their belief is a lack of security outside the territory and the risk of being exposed to its neighbours. Not only does Israel believe that the recent Syrian Civil War necessitates the establishment of a buffer zone, but it is also concerned that Syria's current partner, Iran, intends to begin assaults against Israeli territory.

Syria

While dealing with the fallout from the recent civil war, which ended three years ago, Syria's government continues to press Israel to leave the occupied zone. Syria is eager to reach an agreement to restore the boundaries to their pre-1967 state, restoring the sovereignty of the whole Golan Heights. It remains Syria's primary goal in its foreign policy to this day.

Syria's position on the issue has significantly improved over time. From the “no peace, no recognition, no negotiations” stance of 1967 through the various peace discussions that took place several years later, the government has remained steadfast in its attitude despite the progress of talks. Syria, eager to reclaim control of the region, has actively participated in peace talks with its neighbour but has been unable to achieve a deal owing to disputes over the boundary line.

The argument for Syria to make policy concessions is not compelling. Except for the United States, the Syrian government has held its position for more than a half-century and has had the backing of the United Nations and its member states. Syria is anticipated to continue pushing Israel for control.

USA

Throughout the guide, it has been made clear that the United States recognizes the area of the Occupied Syrian Golan as belonging to Israel, not Syria. However, things were not going well until 2016, when then-President Donald Trump was elected.

During Obama's administration, Israel sought acknowledgement of Israeli sovereignty in the area. The US President promptly declined the proposal, citing the outcomes of previous UN Security Council decisions on the subject. Things soon altered when Trump was elected. The first hint of events to come came in December 2017, when Donald Trump declared Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the US embassy there, despite the fact that the rest of the world believed East Jerusalem was under military occupation by the nation.

One and a half years later, on March 25, 2019, President Trump issued a presidential proclamation officially recognizing the Golan Heights as Israeli territory. It was the first government to make such a declaration about the region, as the Heights were largely regarded as Syrian territory under Israeli military control. The decree was issued two weeks before the Israeli elections, and it is thought that Trump acted in this manner to aid Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign.

The current President of the United States, Joe Biden, has declared that the country's stance regarding the Golan Heights has not changed and that claims to the contrary are incorrect. This declaration followed allegations that President Biden intended to reverse the situation in the area.

Egypt

Egypt's history is inextricably intertwined with the Arab-Israeli Wars. For many years, Egypt was a close ally of Syria, and it regularly participated in conflicts against Israel. While not directly connected to the Golan Heights, Egypt has aided Syria in regaining control of the territory, with parallel strikes staged over the years.

Egypt's major goal in the Arab-Israeli conflict was to reclaim part of the land lost to Israel during the Six-Day War. During the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Syria and Egypt banded together once more to take on the Israeli forces and reclaim control of their respective regions. While Syria's attempts were unsuccessful, Egypt's attacks significantly aided their aim of retaking the eastern bank of the Suez Canal.

In 1981, the year Israel declared its annexation of the Golan region, Egypt supported the conclusions of UN Security Council Resolution 497, which rejected Israel's declaration. To this day, Egypt continues to believe that the area belongs to Syria.

Iran

Iran is another country having a close relationship with the Syrian regime. In recent years, Iranian officials have made it one of their foreign policy priorities to aid Syria in its attempts to free its territory. The Iranian leadership is concerned that if Syria loses this battle, Iran and its capital Tehran would be in serious jeopardy as a result of the US's future actions, a worry reinforced by the US in a declaration made by Secretary of State Pompeo in May 2018.

Iran has lately conducted a number of assaults and airstrikes in the occupied Syrian Golan. Israel has responded negatively to Iran's involvement and is presently refusing peace negotiations owing to the risk posed by Iran's recent threats of further assaults.

Turkey

Turkey is another country in favour of returning the Golan Heights area to Syria. Back in 2008, Turkey decided to host peace negotiations between the two countries in order to put an end to the conflicting events. Despite the will, however, no progress was made and the sides remained in conflicting relations.

Despite the recent failure, however, President Erdogan has continuously stated that the country is eager to end all conflict in the area, even communicating with the UN stating that its objective will be achieved. Turkey still states that it will never allow the occupation of Golan Heights to be legitimized, as it goes against one of the basic principles of international law.

Timeline of Events

1948-1949	**First Arab-Israeli War**
1949	**End of War, Armistice Agreements, the Green Line is established**
1956	**Second Arab-Israeli War**
June 6th-11th, 1967	**Six-Day War takes place, leads to the Golan Heights being occupied by Israel**
October 6th, 1973	**Yom Kippur War (Fourth Arab-Israeli**

	War)
September 14th, 1981	**The "Golan Heights Law is passed by Israel, declaring the annexation of the Occupied Golan Heights**
December 17th, 1981	**The United Nations Security Council releases Resolution 497, rejecting Israel's annexation**
1990s	**Beginning of peace negotiations between Israel and Syria**
2008	**Turkey attempts to host peace talks for the two nations, however, no agreement gets in place**
2012	**Start of the Syrian Civil War**
2015	**Israel requests recognition of their annexation from the United States, but President Obama rejects and states he supports UNSC Resolution 497**
2017	**Iran gets involved in the conflict, launching attacks against Israel**
2018	**End of Syrian Civil War**
March 25th, 2019	**US President Donald Trump releases a presidential proclamation declaring the recognition of the Occupied Syrian Golan as part of Israel**

Possible Solutions

The Golan Heights issue has been ongoing for more than a half-decade, and it is past time to put an end to it. While the blueprint for peace does not provide many alternatives, it does provide a clear framework of what should be done.

Unfortunately for Syria, they do not have much leverage. Syria, as the first Arab nation to recognize the State of Israel, has already made a few measures toward resolving the problem. Syria's sole goal is to reclaim its territory from Israel, and as previous peace talks have shown, Israel is willing to withdraw from the region. Despite this, there are a number of conditions that should be met.

As the Israeli government has repeatedly indicated, there are numerous reasons why Israel is not actively discussing a peace treaty with Syria. The major argument is a lack of security outside the area, since Iran continues to target Israel and the Syrian Civil War has made the state extremely cautious. To fix the situation, Syria must reach an agreement with Iran that would put a stop to Iranian assaults. Furthermore, in order to guarantee stability, the UNEF in the region may be given a more active role or bolstered with additional soldiers.

Over the years, Israel's problem has been a lack of desire in negotiating a peace agreement, continually finding and presenting reasons why nothing could be agreed upon. Israel has maintained complete control of the territory, especially now that the US has recognized it. Although recent developments in the eastern portion of the Syrian Golan are not promising, it is time for the conflict to stop and a deal to be implemented.

In the possibility that no agreement is reached, things could end up really badly, especially with the recent involvement of the US, Iran, and Turkey. Delegates will have to find and propose solutions to the problem before another war breaks out.

When it comes to the residency status and citizenship problems of Syrians in the Golan Heights, delegates could try and find ways the two governments could engage in negotiations over the travel restrictions on ethnic Syrians. Furthermore, a human rights investigation could be conducted under the supervision of a relevant UN institution, during which the rights of the Syrian people would be assessed and then safeguarded.

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