

The Golan

Ending Occupation, Establishing Peace



Marriage across the occupation line

The past, present and future of the occupied Syrian Golan with in-depth analysis by renowned academic experts on the occasion of the London International Conference on the Golan

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As a report of the conference held in London in June 2007, the opinions expressed herein are attributable solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of any official body

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Reference Facts and Figures

Map of the Golan



In 1949, the population of the Golan was 62,293.

By 1967, the population had grown to 153,000.

The war of 1967 resulted in the displacement of 130,000 people.

7,000 remained in the part of the Golan that Israel occupied.

16,000 remained in the area that was not occupied.

This map (left) shows the extent of the Israeli settlements in occupied Syrian land.

Map of Syria

Between the years 1967 and 2006, the population of the entire Golan governorate grew to 442,000.

20,000 of these live in the occupied area.

76,000 live in the area that is not occupied.

There are currently 346,000 Displaced Persons.



A Conference on the Golan

June 2007 marked the 40th anniversary of the war that led to Israel's occupation of Arab land. Much attention was of course being paid to the Palestinian Territories and the issues arising from the continuing suffering of their inhabitants. However, the occupation of the Syrian Golan was in danger of being sidelined - of being treated as a secondary issue to that of the Palestinians - whereas it is of crucial significance for any attempt to resolve the conflicts of the Middle East.

Syria constantly finds itself at the hub of regional developments and, as global powers are realising, without its involvement the conflicts of the Middle East cannot be resolved. Syria has long called for negotiations between parties to find a lasting and comprehensive peace for all in the region who so richly deserve the stability and security they require in order to flourish. Unless the issue of the Golan is addressed as part of a broad-ranging agreement to end occupation in the region, the process will remain piecemeal and the solution incomplete. Only a comprehensive settlement can achieve true and lasting peace.

Hence the Syrian Media Centre, which operated in London until the summer of 2007, decided to hold a high-profile, international conference bringing together politicians, academic experts, lawyers, refugees from the Golan and others to give a comprehensive account of all aspects of the ongoing occupation of Syrian land by Israel. Held at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on Saturday 16 June 2007, the event was used as a backdrop by Shaun Ley in the introduction to his interview with the Syrian Ambassador Dr. Sami Khiyami for his BBC Radio 4 programme the following morning.

The lack of attention to the Golan issue was addressed by Sharif Nashashibi, chairman of Arab Media Watch, in a roundtable discussion of the status of the Golan issue in the British media which

brought the conference to a close. Nashashibi, whose organisation monitors the British media's handling of Arab and Muslim affairs, commented that, "The issue of the media coverage of the Golan Heights is that there really isn't much of it. A prime example is that just last week there was the anniversary of the 1967 war and we had a whole week's coverage - very intensive coverage - of the legacy and the effects of the war, but very little said about the Golan itself. Most of it focussed on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. And I think that this is a real problem because there are lots of facets of the Golan issue."

The Golan marks the crossroads of the four states forming Bilad Al-Sham (Greater Syria): Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, and is the only area in the Middle East with access to each of these states. It is therefore ideally placed to become, in times of peace, the transportation, telecommunications and, ultimately, the technological and financial hub of the region. With highly fertile land due to its water resources, the Golan certainly represents Syria's most precious asset.

Sophie Bradford
Editor



The Golan: The Key to Peace or a Cause of War?

Forty years have now elapsed since the Israeli army invaded the Syrian Golan. An occupation which was intended to last until the signing of a new truce agreement has now lasted for decades, with a unilateral decision taken to annex the Golan which was considered null and void by the United Nations and the International Community.

Forty years have elapsed since 90% of Golanis were forced to flee their homes and escape with their lives to be scattered across the Syrian homeland. Almost 350,000 Golanis are today living in very difficult economic conditions on the outskirts of Damascus and throughout the country.

The Israeli aggression on Lebanon in July 2006 aroused a sense of national pride and feeling of confidence among young Syrians, and Arabs in general, when they realised that a handful of Hizbullah fighters were able to defy and defeat an overrated and seemingly arrogant Israeli army - the sixth most powerful army in the world.

Young Syrians and, in particular, young Golanis are pressing their government to reintroduce the culture of legitimate resistance to occupation. Such a serious decision would inevitably lead to the total eruption of the Middle East, as millions of young Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese would gradually introduce a level of violence to the region without precedence in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Only a Rabin-like political attitude on Israel's part, abiding by UN resolutions and responding favourably to the Arab 'land for peace' Initiative of 2002, can save the region from such a fate.

Syria, while totally committed to the recovery of the Golan and to the Israeli withdrawal to the 4th June

1967 borders, is committed to the quest for peace through negotiations as a preferred option. Therefore, Syria will spare no effort in continuing the unfinished job of negotiating a settlement to bring the Golan back and set the guidelines for a comprehensive and just solution to the whole Middle East problem.

Arriving at a settlement will require an honest broker given the tremendous climate of suspicion

that has prevailed over the past 60 years between Arabs (Syrians and Palestinians in particular) and the Israelis. Yet, rather than take action to ease such mistrust and fundamental hostility, the

American administration under George W. Bush has done everything possible to foment further antagonism.

Even with the decline of the 'Neo-Con' and ultranationalist components within the administration, the men and women still in charge remain under the influence of the Israeli lobby, as described by Mearsheimer and Walt, on one hand and are still dominated by the ardent desire introduced by the American ultranationalists to maintain American predominance over world affairs on the other.

Peace is essential. The peoples of the Middle East are inhabiting a land that witnessed the dawn of human civilisation. They deserve to be a part of the new world order.

'Our land, the Golan Heights, is occupied and has to be returned. That is the only way to achieve peace.'

*Syrian President Bashar Al Assad,
BBC interview, 1 October 2007*

HE Dr. Sami Khiyami
Syrian Ambassador to the UK



The Road to '67

One of the most deep-rooted and iconic of myths of the Middle East conflict concerns the course of events on the Golan front in the years prior to the Israeli invasion and occupation of June 1967. A fantasy was created and repeatedly amplified stating that the Syrians used their position on the heights overlooking Israel's peaceful settlements on the plain of Galilee to rain indiscriminate fire on those settlements at whim and without provocation. The well-orchestrated message droned on that Israel was acting in pure self-defence in storming and occupying the Golan and putting an end to the long years of 'Syrian aggression.'

That 'message' sunk in and was swallowed whole by many; even by those innocent of any partisanship in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Yet the truth is far removed from this picture painted by a well-oiled media machine which has served Israel so effectively. Research into the history of the period 1949-1967 and close examination of the events along the lines of confrontation between Syria and Israel reveal a completely different image.

Indeed, it has been Israeli historians, in particular Professor Avi Shlaim, who have helped shed light on these distortions. In his book *The Iron Wall*, Shlaim uses the sub-heading, 'The Myth of the Golan Heights.' He begins by writing:

"The seeds of the Six-Day War were sown on the Syrian front. This is universally accepted. It is also more or less taken for granted that the Syrians sowed those seeds. The Golan Heights appear to sum up, in a peculiarly stark and affecting way, the image of David versus Goliath. But it would be nearer the truth to say that the Golan Heights represent one of the most successful of Zionist myths."

The author goes on to describe how, over the years, Israel encroached deeper and deeper into the land separating the Israeli and Syrian border lines as demarcated by the

Armistice Agreements of 1949. The agreement signed by Syria and Israel under United Nations auspices defined a strip of territory as no-man's-land where neither side should introduce military forces. But, as the author states:

"They (the Israelis) began by staking an illegal claim to sovereignty over the (demilitarised) zone and then proceeded, as opportunity offered, to encroach on all the specific provisions against introducing armed forces and fortifications. They repeatedly obstructed the operations of the UN observers, on one occasion even threatening to kill them They expelled, or otherwise forced out, Arab inhabitants and razed their villages to the ground."

"Over the years, Israel encroached deeper and deeper into the land separating the Israeli and Syrian border lines as demarcated by the Armistice Agreement of 1949"

Shlaim then relays the view of the Commander of the UN Truce Observation Force, General von Horn:

"It is unlikely, in his opinion, that those Syrian guns on the Golan Heights would ever have gone into action but for Israeli provocations."

Even more startling is the following quote from Moshe Dayan, Israel's Minister of Defence at the time. Speaking to an Israeli journalist in 1976 he said:

"I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there (on the Golan front) started. In my opinion, more than 80 percent, but let's talk about 80 percent. It went this way: we would send a tractor to plough someplace where it wasn't possible to do anything, in the demilitarised area and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until in the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that's how it was...."

Dayan went on to make further confessions:

"There was really no pressing reason to go to war with Syria [on the 4th day of the war] ... The kibbutz residents who pressed the government to take the Golan Heights did

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so less for security than for the farmland.”

Another Israeli *mea culpa* was offered by a former Head of Intelligence, Netanyahu Peled. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper Davar, published on 18 September 1992, he said:

“If we wanted to be honest and speak the truth we need to admit that all incidents of clashes on the Syrian-Israeli front were initiated by Israel.”

One can delve even further into history and recall the fact that the Golan featured as part of the original Zionist design for the Jewish Homeland. Writing to the British Prime Minister Lloyd George in 1919 on the eve of the San Remo Conference, the Zionist leader and first President of Israel, Chaim Weizman, stated:

“Zionists do not accept under any circumstances the Sykes-Picot agreement because not only does it divide historical Palestine but also deprives the Jewish National Home of some of the most fertile lands for settlement in the Golan and Hauran on which depends the future of the Zionist project.”

In pursuit of Zionism’s territorial claims on the Golan, several attempts were made, from as early as 1891, to purchase and lay claim to land on the Golan and Hauran. Each attempt to gain a foothold in those areas was thwarted, however, through resolute communal, judicial and political resistance by their local communities.

A historical debunking of the Israeli narrative concerning the nature, origins and culpabilities associated with the conflict over the Golan is reinforced by numerous denunciations of Israeli actions issued by UN monitors on the ground as well as a long list of resolutions adopted by the United Nations, including the following by the Security Council:

UNSC Resolution 93 (May 1951) deciding that Israel should permit forthwith the return of Arabs expelled from the Demilitarised Zone.
UNSC Resolution 100 (Oct 1953) demanding that Israel suspend drainage work in the DMZ.
UNSC Resolution 111 (Jan 1956) condemning the Israeli attack on Syrian territory launched on 11 December 1955
UNSC Resolution 171 (Apr 1962) condemning the attack by Israeli forces on Syrian positions as a flagrant violation of the Armistice Agreement


From these resolutions and the Israeli sources cited above, including those such as Moshe Dayan who were at the heart of the Israeli decision-making establishment, it becomes abundantly clear that, official propaganda notwithstanding, the years of recurrent tension on the Syrian-Israeli front were overwhelmingly the

“The years of recurrent tension on the Syrian-Israeli front were overwhelmingly the consequence of deliberate Israeli action”

consequence of deliberate Israeli action. It is also evident that the war of June 1967, often depicted as having been brought about by decisions

taken in May 1967 by the late Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, was in reality a natural and probably inevitable result of a concerted campaign of provocation, planned and implemented over several years by an Israeli leadership that had long dreamed of breaking out of the restrictive frontiers of 1949. The Golan front represented to Israel the best opportunity to fan the flames of rising tensions in order to carry out its expansionist strategic blueprint.

Ghayth N. Armanazi
Former Director,
Syrian Media Centre



The Golan since 1967

Israel captured the Golan in the June War of 1967 along with the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. The UN (which always refers to the area as “the Syrian Golan Heights”) condemned these territorial gains and issued Security Council resolution 242 which emphasised the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and stipulated that a just and lasting peace requires the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”

In 1973, Syria liberated a part of the Golan from Israel. This included the Golan’s capital, Quneitra. However, the Syrian troops found it to have been completely demolished just before they arrived there - homes, shops, the hospital and the church had all been reduced to rubble (see photos p.30.) An armistice agreement was signed in 1974 and since then a UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) has been in place on the ceasefire line. The occupied Golan was illegally annexed by Israel through the passing by the Knesset (parliament) of the Golan Heights Law on 14 December 1981, thus applying Israeli laws, jurisdiction and administration to anyone living in the territory, irrespective of origin. In response, the UN Security Council issued resolution 497, declaring the move “null and void and without international legal effect” and demanding that Israel “rescind forthwith its decision.” The UN General Assembly has repeatedly passed resolutions condemning Israel’s occupation and annexation of the Golan, which has never been recognised by the UN or accepted by the territory’s indigenous population.

The human rights situation in the Golan is described in UN reports as one of “persistent” and “significant deterioration.” A 2002 UN Special Committee report described the effects of the occupation on the Golan and its population as, “extensive, affecting all aspects of life and families, villages and communities,” adding that “there were also widespread economic consequences of the occupation.” It went on, “The economic situation of Syrians in the occupied Golan is compounded by the lack of job opportunities. Many qualified Arabs from the occupied Golan are employed in menial jobs and are sometimes dismissed arbitrarily by their Israeli employers. Many workers are never paid or are not

paid in full. Settlers compete with Syrians in economic terms in the area of agriculture, the principal activity of the Arab population of the occupied Golan. The competition is rendered more uneven by the restricted access of the Syrian inhabitants to water compared with the settlers.” Furthermore, “Deterioration of the environment caused by the Israeli authorities has resulted from the uprooting of trees, burning of forests, and the release of chemical residue from Israeli factories and waste from settlements.”

However, “One of the principal negative impacts of the occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan has been the separation of families who live on either side of the valley constituting the demarcation line. Syrian students returning to their families in the occupied Syrian Golan reportedly face, upon arrival, several hours of questioning, and the presents they bring with them are confiscated. Others are held in arbitrary detention for many days, facing torture and humiliation.” The UN is not the only organisation to be concerned by the human rights situation. A 1998 Human Rights Watch report on the Golan Heights and other occupied Arab territories said that “Israel seriously misrepresents the degree of its fulfilment of its treaty obligations” in regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signed by Israel in January 1992.

Prior to 1967, the Syrian population of the Golan Heights was roughly 140,000, living in two cities (Quneitra and Afiq), 164 villages and 146 agricultural farms. Almost all of them were uprooted and expelled during and after the war, forced to relocate to refugee camps around Damascus and whose numbers today are approaching half a million. Following Israel’s conquest, the two cities, 130 villages and 112 agricultural farms were destroyed. Six villages with a total population of 7,000 remained. In 1971, the Israelis destroyed the village of Sukhatah, deported its residents to the adjacent village of Masadah and turned Sukhatah into a military base. Today, the Golan’s communities are concentrated in five villages: Majdal Shams, Masadah, Buqatah and Ain Kinya to the north and east of the heights and Ghajar in the northwest. The number of Syrians living in the Golan totals around 20,000.

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At the time of the Golan Heights Law, the Arab population was obliged to change its citizenship from Syrian to Israeli, which was met with complete opposition and resulted in a six-month general strike and other non-violent actions. Identity cards handed out by the Israeli authorities were publicly burned and eventually the authorities relented and allowed the Arab residents to retain their Syrian citizenship.

A UN report of 2004 described how: “In the area of education, Israeli authorities continued their attempt to impose the Hebrew language on Syrian pupils during the early stages of education, to focus attention on Jewish history and Hebrew literature, and to provide their own interpretation of the recent history of the occupied Golan, using unqualified teachers. . . These practices were aimed at eliminating the national identity of the new generation and at severing ties with their history, heritage, culture, nation and homeland.”

Israel began to settle the Golan almost immediately after its capture. There are currently 33 settlements housing around 20,000 people. Built on occupied territory, these are illegal under international law. Several UN Security Council resolutions describe Israel's settlement activity as a “flagrant violation” of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and a “serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.” Nevertheless, on 6 December 2006, Interior Minister Roni Bar-On said Israelis should “come and live in the Golan Heights.” Less than two weeks later, on 19 December, he said he intended to accelerate housing projects on settlements there.

An issue raised in the UN's 37th report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (2005) was that of Israel's nuclear waste: “Israeli authorities continued to bury their nuclear waste in a tract of land located about 100m from the summit of Jabal al-Sheikh [Mount Hebron], close to the Syrian border. Digging of a tunnel or trench in which to dump this waste was under way.” It is feared that the waste, sealed in glass containers or reinforced cement chambers,

would be affected by climatic conditions and start leaking depleted uranium in 30-50 years' time, with a catastrophic ecological impact.

The pro-Israel lobby continues to insist the Golan is of military importance due to its topography and plateaux overlooking southern Syria and northern Israel. It is also claimed that Israel captured the territory because it was used by Syria to menace its southern neighbour. However, while the strategic value of territory provides no moral or legal justification for its conquest by a foreign force, any previous military value the Golan had has long since vanished due to major advances in missile and aerial technology. In August 2004, Israel's then Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon told the Israeli daily Yediot Aharonot there was no military reason why Israel could not withdraw to its pre-1967 border with Syria: “If you ask me . . . from a military standpoint it is possible to reach an agreement by giving up the Golan Heights. The army is able to defend any border.”

Yet Israel remains resolute in its defiance. Although under Ehud Barak Israeli negotiators “stated to the Syrians that Israel accepts the principle of withdrawal on the Golan Heights,” Ariel Sharon then vehemently and consistently opposed relinquishing the territory and Ehud Olmert is quoted as saying, “As long as I serve as prime minister the Golan Heights will remain in our hands because it is an integral part of the State of Israel.” Syria's repeated calls for talks have fallen on deaf ears. And on 7 December 2006, Olmert rejected the recommendation of the US Iraq Study Group to talk to Syria, saying he had a “different view.” This notwithstanding, an unnamed senior Israeli military official told Maariv newspaper in the same month, “With respect to Syria, we've reached an impasse. Now is the right time to set a process in motion. The current situation with Syria is not good. It is important to do something different and there are conditions to do so.”

Sharif Hikmat Nashashibi
Chairman, Arab Media Watch



Strategic Economic Significance of the Golan from Border to Centre

The Golan is a region of unique geographical features. A plateau with a total area of 1,860km² lying at the crossroads of four countries, its elevation ranges from 209m below sea level to 2,814 above sea level. The Golan experiences diverse climatic conditions and receives some 750mm of rain per year compared to just 212mm in Damascus, only 50km away. 10% of this water is absorbed into the ground, while 90% flows away.

Natural Resources

The geographical position of the Golan has provided it with water sources that feed rivers, lakes and waterfalls, as well as a thriving agricultural life producing fruits, flowers and wine. There are many historical monuments and its mountains are home to a ski resort. These significant natural resources mean the Golan is a popular tourist destination and a potential boon for the Syrian economy. However, the strategic economic significance of the Golan reaches beyond these economic resources: it is in what ending the occupation would mean for Syria and the broader Middle East.

In terms of agriculture, the occupied Golan is one of the richest areas in the entire region. It boasts some of the earliest known plant species - a unique asset for botanical genetics - and is the origin of most temperate grains, including wheat, barley, lentils and chickpeas. There are some 80km² of cultivation producing a variety of crops, including vineyards and orchards, olives, figs, almonds, tropical fruits including bananas and dates, as well as a variety of forest trees and shrubs. The land owes its fertility to volcanic soil. There are currently 20,000 cattle and 5,000 sheep (less than half the number there were in the mid 1950s.) Golani dairy cattle produce approximately 60 million litres of milk and 35,000 tons of flowers are grown annually.

Tourism

The Golan's potential for cultural and leisure tourism attracts many visitors. Israel is currently taking advantage of this to bring some 2.1 million tourists per year. The principle draw is the natural diversity. 31 miles from the warm shores of Lake Tiberias stands the snow-capped Mount Hermon, meaning that with just an hour's drive, a visitor can go from skiing on water to skiing on snow, from the hot mineral springs of Hamat to a snowball fight on a volcanic crater.

The natural landscape of the Golan comprises wide, open spaces, woodlands and water-filled canyons,

hot springs and ski slopes, the numerous deciduous trees lending the terrain a European feel in the winter. The plateau is also a unique and important world heritage site with several ancient monuments, including signs of prehistoric man. Its wildlife includes rock rabbits, gazelles, wolves and leopards, as well as vultures and eagles.

Human Resources

By 1967 the population of the Golan had reached 140,000, the bulk of whom (63%) worked in agriculture, with 14% employed in industry and 10% in trade. These inhabitants lived in two cities, 164 villages and 146 farms. Almost all of them were uprooted and expelled during or after the war and were forced to relocate to refugee camps around Damascus.

Direct Costs of Occupation

The 'direct' costs of the occupation have principally been the vast military expenditure incurred by the need to counteract the occupying force. This figure stands at \$4-6 billion per year diverted from Syria's national economy. As well as the 'displacement' costs

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caused by the large number of refugees from the Golan, an estimated \$3 billion-worth of damage to the infrastructure of the area has been wrought by the Israeli military.

The Golan - Economic Boon for Syria

The occupation of the Golan has constituted a lost economic opportunity for Syria. Reaping the financial benefits of an area as fertile and abundant as the Golan would have a significant impact on the Syrian economy.

Thus, the liberation of the Golan will see it transformed from a border area to an economic centre for neighbouring countries. Indeed, the importance of relations with neighbouring countries means that once the occupation ends, there will be a positive influence on the economic development of the entire region.

The strategic economic significance of ending the occupation must therefore be understood in terms of the history of this key area of land - land which has not witnessed peace for decades, the Arab-Israeli conflict commencing as it did just two years after Syria earned its independence. The valuable

resources of the Golan have been underused due to years of conflict and occupation. For the Syrian economy, therefore, regaining the Golan would mean a considerable jump in the Gross Domestic Product of more than 10-15%, an increase in the area of irrigated agricultural land in the southern region with crops and herds, increased water resources for the capital and southern region, significant growth in Arab and foreign cultural tourism, the return of the majority of some 350,000 original inhabitants and the enhancement of economic relations with neighbouring countries.

Syria would be able to refocus its resources on transforming from a developing to an emerging market economy, thereby opening up to the political feasibility of reform and integration into the global economy.. In the interests of all the neighbouring countries, environmental protection would be

ensured for the precious sources of water supplying the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers and the development of the ravaged watershed surrounding Mount

Hermon. Benefits reaped from such sources as agriculture and tourism could be redirected into investment in the infrastructure of those local communities who have suffered from occupation whether through oppression, displacement, separation, or a combination of these. For these key reasons, it is becoming of increasingly vital importance that Syria regains such a profitable patch of its territory, in line with international law.

“Reaping the financial benefits of an area as fertile and abundant as the Golan would have a significant impact on the Syrian economy”

Abdulkader Husrieh
Syrian economist and member of
the British-Syrian Society



International Law and the Israeli Claim to the Golan

Syria has been a sovereign State since it became independent after World War II. It is a member of the United Nations, as is Israel. All members of the UN are required to observe the UN Charter. This provides at Article 2(4) that all States must refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other State. Israel must therefore respect the territorial integrity of Syria. There is no doubt that Syria's sovereign territory on independence extended to the borders of the former French Mandate with the former British Mandate of Palestine, leaving the Golan clearly on the Syrian side. When States become independent they inherit frontiers which are intangible, i.e. inviolable. As a Chamber of the International Court of Justice said in a case concerning two former French colonies in Africa, Burkina Faso and Mali, the frontier existing at the moment of independence is frozen. It is like a snapshot taken at the precise moment of independence.

Against this, Israel has no good faith legal arguments. Israel and each of its neighbours are required to negotiate 'secure and recognised boundaries' by UN Security Council Resolution 242; however, it is not possible to negotiate in good faith without accepting each party's legal rights and entitlements at the outset. Israel, therefore, must accept that all territory on the Syrian side of the former boundary between the French and British mandates is Syrian sovereign territory in order for negotiations to be able to start. Once this has been accepted, there is no reason why the parties should not decide to adjust that border if they wish. However, this can only be done by a freely reached agreement entered into without fear or threat of force, and not influenced in any way by the duress inherent in Israel's occupation of Syrian territory. Customary international law is quite clear that the acquisition of territory by war is inadmissible – a provision that was also inserted into Resolution 242. Israel's creation of 'facts on the ground' is just one in a number of reasons why its occupation of the Golan is illegal.

One hears arguments to the contrary, however, which can be rebutted by certain principles. Firstly, claims to territory may not be brought on the basis of 'religious belief.' To attempt to overturn this principle would be to encourage the likes of Bin Laden to claim sovereignty over southern Spain on behalf of some spurious and self-appointed Islamic caliphate. Secondly, a claim by 'historic title' is a kind of secular version of the religious argument and is equally fallacious. A state that claims historic title must show that it has remained the lawful sovereign throughout. Since it only came into existence in 1948, to allow a claim of 'historic title,' Israel would have to show it had a right to bring this claim based on

an occurrence since then. Israel had never claimed the Golan before it occupied it in 1967, so there can be no

claim to 'historic title' arising from before 1967. As pointed out above, Israel is obliged to respect Syria's territorial integrity because it is a member of the UN. One cannot resurrect a claim by an ancient state that ceased to exist two thousand years ago as its successor. A continuous claim over all the intervening years must be shown. This is something Israel certainly cannot do, just as Bin Laden cannot create a caliphate and bring a claim to parts of Spain.

One final canard: Israel sometimes claims Resolution 242 expressly did not require Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied in 1967. This is because the Resolution provides that Israel must 'withdraw from territories' occupied in the conflict. The chosen wording was not 'withdraw from all territories'. This is not a sustainable argument to justify Israel annexing the Golan or any other part of the Occupied Territories. It is common in English to use a noun or noun-phrase like 'territories occupied in the recent conflict' to indicate a category to which a principle (in this case the principle of withdrawal) must be applied. Consider the expression 'a cessation of hostilities'. Nobody would dispute that this means a cessation of all hostilities. In the same way, 'withdrawal from territories occupied in the recent conflict' means a withdrawal from all such

“Israel must respect the territorial integrity of Syria”

territories. In any event, the principle of customary international law mentioned above prohibits the acquisition of territory by war. The provision in the Resolution concerning 'withdrawal' deals with ending military occupation, not territorial sovereignty. Israel has deliberately confused the two principles.

Indeed, Israel has been more than a little reticent about its 'claim' to the Golan. It did not formally annex it: it only 'extended its laws' to the Golan and produces maps suggesting the Heights are part of Israel. Nevertheless,

the Israeli government is aware of the weakness of their claim. When Israeli politicians make statements that imply the Golan is part of Israel, it is important to be aware that they are not doing this in good faith.

John McHugo
Solicitor, international lawyer and
board member of the Council for
Arab-British Understanding



The Occupation in International Law

Perhaps one of the reasons why it often seems to us that less attention has been paid to the Golan than to the occupied territories at large is because the legal issues are so simple and so straightforward. International law (1) prohibits the acquisition of territory by the use of force; (2) prohibits the Occupying Power from changing the status of territory under occupation, either directly through annexation or indirectly through colonisation; (3) requires the Occupying Power to recognise and protect the rights of in the indigenous population of the Golan, Syrian citizens; and (4) requires all States to refrain from recognising the illegal situation on the ground.

"Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law show how an occupying force has a responsibility for that population - for example, not to colonise the area - meaning that such action could lead to criminal responsibility"

As the occupation is illegal, efforts to extend, for example, Israeli law into the area are condemned by International Law as they have been condemned by the United Nations and other bodies.

The legal issues which will have relevance for a future settlement are the applicability of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, the relevance of that body of law to the present and to the future and the potential uses of these legal points and legal arguments. The first point is the essential principle of state responsibility. The fact, for example, that Israel exercises, at present, effective control and jurisdiction over the occupied Syrian territory

means that it is, as a matter of International Law, responsible for what happens and for what does not happen.

Israel's efforts to change the character of the Golan through its attempt at annexation has elicited a resolute response from international bodies such as the UN Security Council, General Assembly and Economic and Social Councils: It is illegal, they say; null, they say; void, they say. It is the duty of all states not to recognise these attempts at annexation.

With respect to those inhabitants of the Golan who were dispossessed in 1967, this entails, or arguably implies, an obligation on the part of the displacing power to

compensate and to provide restitution to those who have so been injured. Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law show how an occupying force has a responsibility for that population - for example, not to colonise the area - meaning that such action could lead to criminal responsibility. And compensation to Syria for the economic loss incurred by the occupation of the Golan, this could also conceivably be factored into a final settlement.

Dr. Guy S. Goodwin-Gill
Barrister, Senior Research Fellow, All Souls
College, Oxford University, Professor of
International Refugee Law and formerly
legal adviser in the Office of the United
Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

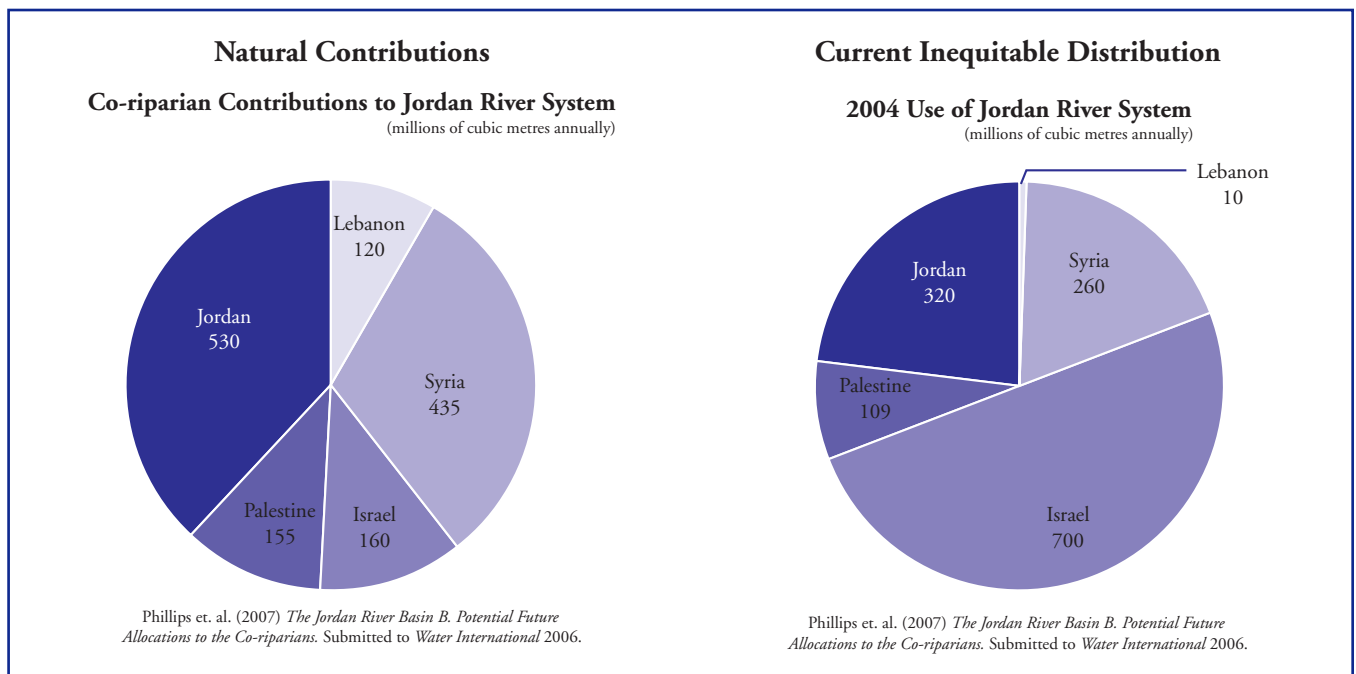


Water and the Golan: Hydropolitics, Negotiations

The strategic importance of water can be understood in terms of domestic (drinking and washing) use, industrial use and agricultural use. Thanks primarily to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Syria is endowed with a relatively high per-capita share of water. Though Syria may have more than enough water to meet drinking water demands, its agricultural sector is massive - indeed it is one of the economic engines of the country accounting for 30% of the national Gross Domestic Product. It is thus clear to see how access to water is key for Syria.

Lebanon a meagre 10 million - just over 8% of Lebanon's 'natural' contribution.

Given Syria's reliance on agriculture, it becomes clear the extent to which such an inequitable sharing of the Jordan's waters could affect it. The agricultural sector accounts for 91% of Syria's overall water consumption (some 13,000 million cubic metres per year), while domestic use accounts for just 7.5% and the industrial sector a mere 1.5%. Israel has a more even distribution between agricultural use



Rainfall contributions from Syria to the Jordan River system do not match with how much it extracts, mainly because of Israel's control of the resource. In terms of these contributions - where the sources of water are within national boundaries (in Syria's case in the Golan) - Jordan stands at 530 million cubic metres annually with Syria contributing 435 million, then Israel with 160 million, followed by Palestine at 155 million and Lebanon at 120 million. However, the current distribution of these resources is in no way proportional. Israel takes 700 million cubic metres each year, while Jordan extracts just 320 million, Syria 260 million, Palestine 109 million and

(58%, or 1,100 million cubic metres) and domestic use (37%, or 700 million cubic metres per year.)

Technology is perhaps the most important development in terms of current water use issues in the Middle East. This is nonetheless subject to political realities when it comes to the sharing of expertise and resources. Two key developments in this field are 'waste water reuse' (reusing sewage water from cities for agriculture) and desalination (removing the salt from seawater).

The new technology has the potential to change the whole hydropolitical picture. Political power is key

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when it comes to accessing and exploiting such technologies. As the dominant power in the Jordan basin, Israel has embraced these developments. In June 2005, it brought online a desalination plant just north of Gaza which produces 100 million cubic metres of unsalted water per year - a third of the amount the whole of Palestine consumes and therefore of considerable capacity.

It is helpful to consider the potential negotiating position of Syria and Israel vis-à-vis the waters of the Jordan River system and the interests and ability (power) of each to meet its interests. Both Israel's interest in the waters and its degree of hard power is 'very high' and these measures can be judged as stable (neither increasing nor decreasing).

The relatively lower Syrian level of interest and power, by contrast, is increasing. The real difference is in bargaining power - the power you get from political alliances and being a key player in the game. Syria is the key to stability in the region and therefore Syria's bargaining power is increasing all the time, whereas Israel's is probably decreasing, so the ground is shifting.

In conclusion, the current distribution of water resources in the region is highly inequitable and unreasonable (and, as such, in contravention of International Water Law.) However, the shifting power and interests balance provides opportunities for improvement. Israel's current 'hydro-hegemony' (almost total control of water dynamics in the region) has been achieved through bilateral agreements that it signed with Jordan and Palestine. These agreements were skewed because the clauses relating to water sharing were not considered properly by the politicians who were negotiating them. It would therefore be a mistake for Syria to underplay the importance of water in any future



negotiations. It would be a mistake to say 'it's only 3% of our GDP, we don't need it.' The farmers on the Golan must be considered. And acquiescence to Israeli hydro-hegemony should not be encouraged by another bilateral agreement with a skewed water component.

In this context, Syria's growing influence in the region means that it can push not just for a good agreement with Israel on water, but for a 'basin-wide' agreement for Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine,

who could very much use the assistance in their relations with Israel from their larger brother, Syria.

"The current distribution of water resources in the region is highly inequitable and unreasonable"

Dr. Mark Zeitoun
Palestinian-Canadian researcher at
the London School of Economics



The Military Balance

The perception the Israelis have that the Golan is essential to their security is something like an article of faith in Israel, even if that is technically untrue. Because the fact of the matter is that the Golan, as a front, has been one of the more secure areas where attacks on Israeli territory are generally unusual. Even during attacks on the occupied territories, they are fairly rare in comparison with other places like the Lebanese border. The Israelis, of course, would say it is because of the occupation that that is the case but I think if we look historically beyond that, it has actually more or less always been the case.

In terms of a military balance, Syria, with a Gross National Product of around \$78bn spends 5.9% of that on defence, which equates to around \$4.6bn. The Israelis, with an economy of some \$170bn, spend around 7.9% on defence, which equates to about \$12bn, meaning around three times as much as Syria spends on defence. It is interesting, however, to compare that to armies around the world. Locally it is large-scale, but actually what we are talking in terms of world spending is reasonably middle-of-the-road if not modest. In short, significant intervention by the world's powers, especially the US, could radically change the tenor of any conflict.

The nature of the military balance on the Golan is such that it was conquered during the Six Day War by armour. And during the 1973 war, the Syrian forces made significant advances on the Golan, once more with armour, before these were reversed by Israeli units - mainly reservist units - coming in, once again, with armoured vehicles. So the story one can see is very much that armour is, that heavy metal tanks are, the thing which can make a difference, it would appear, historically, on the Golan.

But an interesting aspect came along during the summer of 2006 with the attack on southern Lebanon by the Israeli forces, because what was significant about that particular circumstance was that they suffered significant

reverses at the hands of Hizbullah fighters and missiles. The missiles were recovered and identified by the Israeli media, and indeed boxes were produced stamped 'Department of Defence of Syria' (whether that was the case or not.) What is significant is that missiles which were fired destroyed Merkava tanks - armour which once conquered the Golan. The net effect is that this boils down to the fact that there is the potential for a military offensive to happen which would not necessarily have the same result as previous encounters. The Israelis know this too.

The exploded myth of Israeli invulnerability, if anything, actually increases the potential for war. Europe, the US and particularly those in the region should take note and

be working hard to find a negotiated solution to this. Syria has proven to be effective in protecting its borders and for that reason, if there was a negotiated settlement, and if the Syrian

army was able to take its position back on the Golan, as a quid pro quo it could very easily and demonstrably provide the very security which the Israelis require. And that in itself would be a balance that would allow the Israelis both to use their GDP for other, more peaceful things, but also to address other perceived threats they have in the region - a win-win situation!

Regarding the outcome of a war for the restitution of the Golan, it has been historically shown, as we have seen, that Israeli air power has been able to inflict serious damage, particularly last summer in civilian areas of Beirut. What is different about other conflicts, and would be different about a seizure of the Golan, first of all, is that it is restoring what is rightfully Syria's, but it would be perceived in Israel as a direct threat to its security and so potential for escalation is significant. I think we would see a more focussed response from Israel's military than in 2006.

What was missing for the Israelis last summer, why they were less successful than they have been in the past, and this is a lesson for us all, was they had no clear war

"If there was a negotiated settlement, and if the Syrian army was able to take its position back on the Golan, as a quid pro quo it could very easily and demonstrably provide the very security which the Israelis require"

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objective when they set out on that ill-fated expedition. In many respects they shared a mission with the British Army in Afghanistan and Iraq, i.e. no mission. They had been told to 'go and do military stuff out there' and the Generals had not had the courage to ask 'what military stuff would you like us to do?' And in all those three cases, particularly in southern Lebanon, we had had a situation where, on this ill-fated expedition, they had set off to 'do military stuff' and suffered for that. And their reaction, as always, was to strike at civilian targets in Beirut, alleging them to be legitimate military targets. It is likely, also, in the circumstance that there was an aggression against them in the Golan that they would lash out at other places, many civilian, with paper-thin 'military justification.'

In the eyes of the international community, the Golan has never stopped for a second being Syrian; it belongs to Syria. Without advocating war, one could say that what would make the difference from the invasion of Iraq of 2003, the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, or indeed the invasion of southern Lebanon in 2006, is that this particular act would have a clear aim - that of restoring legitimate sovereign territory - and would be limited to that. Therefore no one could cast it as anything other than a country taking back that which is legally theirs. And with a limited war aim of restoring its sovereign territory, the Israelis could have no justification for escalating the conflict beyond that. That is not to say they would not. I remind you that the holding of the Golan as a guarantee of Israeli security is an article of faith in Israel. However, once the land had been liberated, although impossible to say it could not happen, it would be very difficult for the US to stand by and allow for further aggressions, but with the significant Israeli lobby in the US, that might be difficult to guarantee.

Any attempt to retrieve the Golan by military means would be a dangerous calculation and great damage would certainly be suffered - by both sides and on many levels. Nonetheless, feeling itself wronged, Syria would be asking

itself whether it was prepared to suffer short-term repercussions in order to solve a long-term wound and have that healed by recovering its territory or whether it would wish that the current position carries on - for how long and to what effect?

For long-term peace one of the things that we learned in northern Ireland over a 35-year war was that there is sometimes no military solution to these situations and the real solution is through negotiation; the real solution is through perceived justice. It may well be that a changing military balance which takes away old certainties, when these certainties of military power perpetuate the situation, is enough to start moving us towards a situation where the US realises, because of its misadventure in Iraq, and increasingly in Afghanistan, that it can no longer sustain

these instabilities overseas. It may feel that it has to approach the Israelis to start looking towards more diplomacy.

There has indeed been a significant shift in the military balance in the region following the outcome of the July 2006 conflict between Hizbullah and Israel and it rests on two key points. Firstly, Israel was shown not to be militarily invincible, having failed in its stated aim of defeating Hizbullah. Secondly, for the first time the Israeli public loudly questioned the justice of the action and the behaviour of the military. That is a significant shift and should be an absolute driving imperative for any government in Israel to seek a just solution to this clear and internationally recognised wrong.

"We learned in northern Ireland that there is sometimes no military solution to these situations - the real solution is through negotiation; the real solution is through perceived justice"

Colonel Tim Collins OBE
former Commanding Officer of
the British Army in Iraq



Lessons from Past Negotiations

In order to understand the current stalemate on the issue of the Golan, it is necessary to analyse the history of negotiations between Israel and Syria. Given the speculation in mid-2007 over the possible resumption of bilateral peace talks, the question is raised as to why negotiation procedures should be restarted at this time. Answers can be found by analysing current strategic realities.

The Assad-Clinton meeting of 2000 failed to provide a successful conclusion to the pre-existing rounds of talks that were held from 1993 to 2000. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon later took advantage of George Bush's 'War on Terror' after the events of 9/11 to erase the impact of peace negotiations, and this included the lasting break-up of the Syrian track. Sharon managed to construe his issues with the Syrians and Palestinians in the terminology of 'international terrorism' and convince Bush that they indeed fitted into this rubric rather than existing as specific political-strategic cases in their own right. The US thus condoned the Israeli freezing of an Israeli-Syrian peace track.

However, once the Iraq invasion of 2003 and subsequent occupation proved to be a quagmire of violence that the Americans would struggle to cope with, a strategic shift took place which saw the US broadening its diplomatic perspective in order to try and find a way out of the untenable situation. Syria's position took on a new hue once it became clear it could play a role in resolving the violence in Iraq. Thus, the relative bargaining positions of the two states are such that current conditions are more conducive to equitable negotiations than had previously been the case. Syria finds itself structurally more prepared in terms of its military capability, as well as holding political capital as a diplomatic bridge between the asymmetrical relations of Iran on one hand and Hizbullah and Hamas on the other, both of which are key factors for Israel. Syria also has time on its side; whereas Israel, with its 'missed opportunity' of 2005 and the major threat of Iran's potential nuclear power, has less patience, which influences its power position.

As has been said, following the previous phase of negotiations from 1993 to 2000, there was a freezing of the process. If a new phase is to commence in earnest, it will be necessary to reconcile the differences between the two states over the

premise of the talks - whether they will be conditional or not. Israel has so far indicated it will only negotiate if Syria meets certain conditions, while Syria has expressed its refusal to commit without certain guarantees.

The kind of agreement that Syria would seek would include full sovereignty over the Golan, the return of Syrian refugees, full access to land and water while envisaging a Joint Bilateral Commission to oversee the quantity and quality of water resources as discussed during the Shepherdstown bilateral talks of January 2000, a warning station on the Golan under international control and a realisation of the Land for Peace maxim (normalisation of diplomatic relations in exchange for the full return of the Golan, in accordance with international law)

But a sincere will to make peace is essential. Syria has doubts over Israel's intentions: Israel could be seeking peace with Syria as a means to neutralise Iran and replace the 'Palestinian track.' However, potential turning points could emerge from a new US Administration post-Bush, a new Israeli government post-Olmert, US domestic pressure over Iraq and the development of the Iranian factor.

Certain dilemmas could also prevent the two sides from cooperating. Firstly, they could choose a 'sub-optimal' outcome, i.e. no war but no peace, preferring instead the status quo. It is therefore important that a mechanism is identified to convince all the actors that there would be no danger of defection. This would need to involve external actors and mediators such as Europe, Saudi Arabia or the US. Another mechanism would need to be the establishment of solid and irreversible peace regimes, such as a water regime and mutual verification mechanisms. In other words, the good faith of any arrangements made in negotiations would need to be upheld through enforceability. Furthermore, in order for these features to amount to a settlement, mutual perceptions and securitisation trends would need to be overcome.

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Hautes Etudes Internationales
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CNRS, Paris)



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Refugees from the Golan: Personal Stories

Almost all the 153,000 residents of the Golan were uprooted at the time of the June 1967 war. Today, 95% of them remain displaced and dispossessed - a mass exodus. Only about 7,000 remained. These have now become some 20,000 living under occupation, their rights severely curtailed.



The following is a refugee's personal account of the experience.

"I come from a small village in the south-western corner of Syria, near the borders with Lebanon and Israel. Baniyas, or Caesarea Philippi as it was known in Roman times, is over 2,000 years old and encompasses ancient olive groves.

I was pursuing my studies at the University of Damascus when war broke out, so I immediately went back to my city to join my family. However, it was already under intense bombardment and all its citizens were forced to evacuate.

We reached a small village about 10-15km from Quneitra called Jebata Al Khashab where some of our relatives lived but were forced to flee once again, with them, after only a few days due to the continued and broadened Israeli bombing of roads and villages. As villages in the Golan are small and of limited resources, there were no hotels, restaurants

or other facilities for the hundreds of civilians forced to leave their homes.

I am not going to tell you how the war started or how destructive it was. I will not describe how the Israelis destroyed cities, towns and villages along with hospitals, schools, churches and mosques. I am sure that every one of you is familiar with the results of this and every other war. Instead I want to talk about the other kind of agony the war caused - the 'hidden' side of the war seen only by those who directly experienced it.

As we moved towards Damascus we witnessed the destruction of all kinds of services, including vital roads, water resources, escape routes, hospitals, farms and all means of life and prosperity - scenes which have devastating psychological effects on children.

Our family had left all our possessions behind - all our memories - childhood photos, toys, even birth certificates and any means of identifying ourselves. It must be hard to imagine how we felt not even to be able to prove which school year we had been in prior to the war. In Damascus, my whole family had to stay in the tiny flat I had been renting as a student there. Having left a large house in Baniyas, we suddenly found ourselves ten people crammed into a one-bedroom flat. From that point, we found ourselves without jobs, businesses or any means of income, having lost our house and all our possessions. A father could not even feed his children. Everything we had worked so hard to build had disappeared."

Dr. Ghassan Shannan
refugee from the Golan



Refugees from the Golan: Personal Stories

In a video message, Golan resident Ata Farhat told of his experiences living under occupation. We first see him standing on a sunny, tree-lined street:



“First I want to apologise for not being with you in person, but I decided to let my voice reach you. The reasons are many and the

majority are aware of them. I wish it were up to me to be unable or unwilling to come, rather than being subject to pressures and restrictions from others.

My name is Ata Farhat, from a Golan village called Buqatah. Mine is a simple story - the story of any man living in occupied territory. I want to sum it up with very simple things. With this road. This road begins with my school and ends with my house. I have had to cross this street as a child and as an adult. This street has witnessed many turning points in my life.

In my youth, I had great dreams. When asked about my future, I used to say, “I want to be an officer, a pilot, an ambassador, a minister.” As I grew older, I realised these were forbidden dreams because I was living under occupation.

I was ten years old when I learned the meaning of ‘identity war.’ I used to ask why we were occupied and what it meant to be Syrian or Israeli and what ‘homeland’ meant. We were forced to understand all these things as little kids. A painful story of a ten year old whose dreams changed all of a sudden.

The second phase took place in the middle of this road, on 8th March 1987, exactly twenty years ago.

My grandmother and I left together for a demonstration but I came back without her. The reason: occupation soldiers opened fire on her in the middle of the road. The soldiers were standing where we are now, while the demonstrators were fifty metres further down.

This was a difficult period in my life. I still wish it never happened and I had not experienced it. Martyrdom is part of living under occupation, but sometimes you are overwhelmed by emotions.

Days went on and I took this very same road to go to study in Damascus. I had to take this road on leaving and on returning. I left with tears of joy and came back with tears of joy. I left with tears of joy because I was going to Damascus. I returned with tears of joy because I was to meet my family after a long absence.

“In my youth I had great dreams ... As I grew older, I realised these were forbidden dreams because I was living under occupation”

- Ata Farhat

This road is part of my daily movement. Every day I go - I don't know how to describe this - this daily trip along this road is a daily reminder of my tragedy. My story is very painful. We are usually offered gifts upon graduation. My homeland honoured me with a diploma as a reward, while the occupation's gift was imprisonment. Before I reached this road where my family was waiting - my family was waiting for me here - I was arrested and detained.

This detention was a tough period of my life, not because I feared the prison or the jailer, but because I had waited so long for the day I would return and embrace my mother. It takes fifteen minutes from Quneitra to our house. It took me fourteen months until I could hug my mother. It was a tough period. I used to wish this had never happened, but today I am proud of this phase of my life.”

Refugees from the Golan: Personal Stories

We now see Ata sitting in his home, by the computer:

“I hope that all those who hear me strive for what I am striving for: to get our voices heard by the whole world - the voices of the children of the occupied Golan”

“Detention in all respects is difficult, restricting one’s freedom is a tough thing. The reasons for my arrest? A very simple thing: I am a man who loves his homeland and this love led to my detention. People might laugh on hearing this, but the love of my homeland led to my detention. “You love Syria.” This is a charge worthy of punishment in the country of democracy and law.

After my release from fourteen months in prison began the harder stage. In prison you know you are imprisoned by four walls. Your life comes to a halt at this point, during this phase. You try to create a person able to resist its surroundings. But after prison starts a new phase in your life; a phase where everything is shut before you.

You are a security risk, your record is tarnished. Wherever you go you are faced with obstacles, persecution and disapproval, because on checking your name, they find a black mark next to it.

I tried hard to find work even in the most strenuous of jobs: construction... but was rejected. I tried to work in Ramallah but to no avail, also for several reasons. I tried to set up a private newspaper but the idea was quelled and I was threatened with closure, so I gave up the idea.

I then moved on. It occurred to me that the history of the area should be archived. Things have to be said. My experience is a part of the experience of this nation, of these people. Therefore, I decided to be one body and one mind together with my closest friend, the computer, and produce something to

serve our society. Hence the idea of a website that took the name “Golan Times,” which has been up for roughly a year now and through which we try to

make ourselves heard - we, the oppressed people - to reveal the injustice, until our voice is heard and our rights returned.

As any normal person, we only dream of one thing: that is freedom. We demand one thing: freedom. I only ask for one thing: that children’s dreams can come true.



Mrs Asma Al Assad greeting students from the Golan studying in Damascus

Unlike my life and all my shattered dreams, I hope that my son can dream and be able to realise those dreams. That he can dream of holding a position as an MP, a minister, an ambassador, an officer, a pilot. I want this to be his natural right, but this natural right can only be in his homeland. And this means

freedom.

I hope that all those who hear me strive for what I am striving for: to get our voices heard by the whole world - the voices of the children of the occupied Golan. We have been an oppressed nation, a quelled nation, for forty years.

I was hoping to meet you, but not in London or any European capital. My wish is to meet you while celebrating freedom in my country, in my village and on the same road that I take daily. Goodbye.”

Following this conference, Ata Farhat was again arrested and put in prison.
www.golantimes.com (Arabic only)

The Syrian Golan in British Eyes

It was an unusual weekend in June 2007 that saw the British capital host, for the first time, a series of lectures devoted to informing the public about the occupied Syrian Golan.

Despite the quality of the speakers (journalists, writers, diplomats, economists, lawyers and academics) that made the day so special, the most noteworthy story of the conference was not about the numerous United Nations resolutions which remain unimplemented by Israel - it is renowned for acting in total defiance of International Law. Neither was it the recorded facts concerning the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations that led to a stalemate.

One must certainly commend the insight provided by experts such as Patrick Seale, an authority on Syrian affairs, and by Ian Black of the Guardian newspaper. And one can note the presence at the event of Jewish activists, belonging to the 'peace camp,' which believes in the right of the Palestinians to establish their own state and realises that a comprehensive peace requires the return of the Golan to Syrian sovereignty.

Nonetheless the most significant aspect of the conference resided in its being the first of its kind to penetrate British political life and its social conscience: an activity focussed solely on the issue of the Golan and, most importantly, underlining the human suffering of the Golanis under occupation.

The star feature was Ata Farhat who, prevented by the Israelis from travelling to London to participate in the conference, managed nevertheless to convey his message through a recorded video presentation. When Farhat said: "Even dreaming is not allowed under occupation. I am always wondering why I can't be a judge or a doctor or an ambassador ... I was imprisoned for 14 months for the crime of loving my country Syria ... I wish for my children to enjoy the

opportunity to be free to dream as they like," the impact was electrifying. Indeed, Conservative MP Brooks Newmark, of Jewish background and born in the US, admitted that he was so moved by Farhat's appeal that he could not hold back his emotions. While believing in the right of Israel to live in peace and security, his recent visit to Damascus convinced him more than ever that justice is the cornerstone to achieving lasting peace in the region.

The issue of the Golan has certainly taken its share of legal defence over the past 40 years - the relevant UN resolutions bear witness to that. But it is now time to humanise the conflict with Israel by drawing attention to the true costs of the occupation and the daily suffering it produces in the lives of ordinary people.

Ata Farhat's video showed a human image of Syria and drew attention to the ugly face of the Israeli occupation. His message to the world was clear: even if you differ with Syria politically, the Israeli occupation of the Golan is a human issue whose resolution can no longer be postponed.

A diplomat can wait years to become an ambassador for his country, but in speaking with such sincerity and eloquence about his suffering, this young Golani became an ambassador for Syria in the truest sense of the word. He at last managed to achieve at least one of the dreams mentioned in his video.

Ata Farhat, trust me when I say that your dreams are those of every Syrian and be confident that every occupation is destined to end.

It is now time to humanise the conflict with Israel by drawing attention to the true costs of the occupation and the daily suffering it produces in the lives of ordinary people

Jihad Makdissi
Spokesman of the Syrian
Embassy, London



Comments on the Conference

Some of those who took part were interviewed and gave their views on the conference.

Member of Parliament for the Conservative Party, Brooks Newmark, who had given an address at the opening of the conference, was asked what he felt Syria could do to transmit its message to a western audience. He responded by saying that prior to his own trip to Syria, his preconceptions of the country had been formed from newspaper stories and Israel's public relations campaign. "It was only through making the effort of going to Syria, meeting the Syrian people, meeting some of the Syrian politicians, that I changed my mind. I was able to re-educate myself." But not all westerners would have that opportunity, therefore Syria needs a "concerted campaign" to reach this audience, he said.



**Brooks
Newmark MP**

Newmark pointed out that most westerners are not even aware that Syria's is a secular society. "If it can engage as constructively with Israel, then I believe a comprehensive resolution can be achieved but that mean accepting the fact that Israel must have peace and security on its borders and Israel recognising that Syria must get all of the territory of the Golan back, including access to water rights and those are the three things that I think need to be achieved: security, Syria regaining its territory and access to water." This would require Syrian "investment in a PR campaign to give its side of the story, because Syria has a good story to tell."

As for a British role in this process, Newmark - described as a "rising star" of the Conservative Party by his fellow MP, Labour's John Grogan, who also addressed the opening of the conference - commented that, in his capacity as a new back-bencher, he was doing his best to encourage his colleagues in parliament to learn more about Syria, "and that means visiting Syria, because only through first-hand experience does one recognise the warmth of hospitality and the generosity of the Syrian people."



Patrick Seale

When asked about the prospects for a settlement with Israel on the Golan issue, eminent expert on Syria Patrick Seale - who had travelled from his Paris home to attend the event and chair the session on 'Strategic Issues' - stated: "Frankly, I don't think the prospects are very good; partly because Israel's preconditions are very tough. They want Syria to sever its relations with Iran, sever its relations with Hizbullah, sever its relations with Hamas. They want Syria to be removed from the equation so that they can then deal with the Palestinians on their terms. Now, I think that is why Syria is of course asking for a comprehensive, global settlement, even though it is prepared to accept a sort of phased settlement, but nevertheless it has to be within the context and within the framework of a global settlement."

Shaza Shannan, who was involved in the conceiving and organising of the conference and whose father spoke as a refugee from the Golan, commented that, "The Golan issue is close to the hearts of all Syrians. We wanted the conference to provide a window for a UK audience to peep into its history, importance and the peace prospects for the Golan. The conference was also an opportunity to voice the real stories and hardships in the daily lives of those Syrians living under occupation."



Shaza Shannan



**Ghayth N.
Armanazi**

Ghayth Armanazi, former Director of the Syrian Media Centre, spoke of the unique importance of the event, highlighting as it did the often overlooked issue of the occupied Golan. He stressed the centrality of the issue in seeking to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and pointed out that the Syrians of the Golan - those under occupation and the hundreds of thousands who are displaced - are the ‘forgotten’ victims of the Israeli policy of expansion, occupation and depopulation. He also expressed the hope that the London Golan conference would act as a springboard for a series of focussed seminars and studies dealing more fully with the themes addressed here.

Dr. Fawaz Akhras, co-chairman of the British-Syrian Society, said he found the conference timely, marking as it did 40 years since the start of the occupation. He went on to comment that despite being no less important than the Palestinian cause, Lebanon’s occupied territory or any other Arab cause, there has been a long silence concerning the issue of the Golan. He explained that this conference was conceived partly to break that silence by putting the subject of the Golan on the table and introducing the issue from a Syrian point of view. Dr. Akhras said he felt it important to talk about the rich history of this ancient land, its antiquity and civilisation, its human and natural resources and the suffering of its people at the hands of the occupation.



**Dr. Fawaz
Akhras**

Dr. Akhras expressed the view that educating people in the west about the realities of the situation is the best way to get the issue addressed. The western public needs to become aware of the reality of Israeli occupation and the human suffering it causes, he said, “this education could take many forms ... but must be done in an organised and powerful way ... and this conference is an excellent place to start.”



Dr. Sami Khiyami

The Syrian Ambassador in London, Dr. Sami Khiyami, said he felt proud that such an event had been mounted, especially featuring as it did MPs, members of the media and prominent academic experts. Dr. Khiyami said that the day had been rich in information to the extent that even the experts had benefited from each other’s contributions. “This was an opportunity,” he stated, “to table the issue of the occupied Syrian Golan, the importance to Syria of reclaiming it and of the opportunity that Syria is presenting to achieve peace in the Middle East, starting with the Golan.”

The Golan

Ending Occupation, Establishing Peace

In Pictures: The Golan - A Minefield

The grave situation with landmines in the occupied Golan is still current. The Israeli army planted landmines not only on the ceasefire line in order, as they claimed, to protect their army, but also on the surrounding civilian and agricultural land. No responsibility has been taken and no information provided as to the types or location of mines, but it is not rare to find fenced-off landmine areas near schools or in residents' backyards. 4-year-old Amir Abu-Jabel was killed by a mine in 1989 while playing less than 10 metres from his house.

An occupied people has the right to protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the applicability of which to the Golan



is not questioned by the international community and has been reaffirmed by UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. However, the occupation forces have failed to fulfil this obligation. Since June 1967, most of the hilltops in the Golan, including those surrounding and within Arab villages, were controlled by the Israeli army and used as military bases. Some of these bases are located in civilian areas near to houses. The Israeli army has planted antipersonnel mines around these bases, most of which are inadequately fenced and marked, meaning children and animals can easily stray in.



Furthermore, during winter, heavy rain causes erosion of hillsides so that mines in these places slip down the hills and land in people's backyards. During the summer, on the other hand, temperatures of up to 40° Celsius often cause brush fires which trigger mines to explode as close as one metre to houses.



The Israeli army claims that the risk to soldiers in clearing mines outweighs the risk of injury to civilians. However,

Israeli provides mine clearance assistance to other countries.

Field research carried out by Al Haq, a Palestinian human rights NGO, found that there had been 66 Arab landmine victims since the 1967 occupation of the Golan, of whom 16 died and 50 were injured. Of these, 43 were under the age of 18. Half of those killed were under 18.

There are currently no governmental or local programmes or initiatives to teach school children in the Golan, or the residents in general, about the dangers of mines.



Furthermore, there is no landmine policy in place should Israel withdraw from the territory. Education in schools, lectures

to community leaders and the distribution of pamphlets is a minimum that could be done for the Golani people. In addition, mine awareness, clearance, rehabilitation and compensation should all be provided by Israel.

Thanks to Dr. Taiseer Maray,
Golan for Development Project,
Majdal Shams, Golan Heights,
for this section

In Pictures: The Golan's 'Shouting Valley'



“Shouting Valley” is where Syrians gather at the border of the occupied Golan to peer through binoculars and shout through loudhailers to contact their relatives and friends in the town of Majdal Shams in the occupied Golan.

Huge crowds gathered to mark the 25th anniversary of the annexation of the occupied Golan by Israel.



The Golan

Ending Occupation, Establishing Peace

In Pictures: Marriage Across the Occupation Line



This bride from the occupied Golan is marrying a man from Damascus that she last saw in Jordan and has been contacting by internet, telephone and across the Shouting Valley. She must wave goodbye to her family as she will not be allowed to re-enter the occupied zone once she has left.



In Pictures: The Destruction of Quneitra



Before handing the Golan's capital city of Quneitra back to the Syrians in 1974, the Israelis destroyed everything: the hospital, church, mosque, homes were all reduced to ruins. To this day, the city has been preserved in this state as a testament to its painful history.



The Golan

Ending Occupation, Establishing Peace

In Pictures: The Natural Beauty of the Golan



Conference Agenda

Opening Addresses

Syrian Ambassador to the UK, Dr. Sami Khiyami
Brooks Newmark MP (Con)
John Grogan MP (Lab)

1st Session - Historical Background

- Personal stories Dr. Ghassan Shannan, from the Golan, and Ata Farhat, Syria TV, from the Golan, formerly imprisoned by Israel
- The road to '67 Mr. Ghayth N. Armanazi, Syrian Media Centre
Chair: Dr. Fawaz Akhras, British-Syrian Society

2nd Session - Strategic Significance of the Golan

- Water resources Dr. Mark Zeitoun, London School of Economics
- The military balance Tim Collins OBE, former colonel, British Army
- Economic value of the Golan Abdelkader Husrieh, Economist, British-Syrian Society
Chair: Patrick Seale

3rd Session - Legal Perspectives

- International law and the Israeli claim to the Golan John McHugo, lawyer, CAABU board member
- Israel, the Golan Heights and International Humanitarian Law Dr. Guy Goodwin Gill, expert in International Refugee Law, former UK High Commission for Refugees
Chair: Michel Massih QC

4th Session - Prospects for Peace

- Lessons from past negotiations Dr. Marwa Daoudy, Hautes Etudes Internationales (Geneva) & CNRS (Paris)
- The Golan: the key to peace or a cause of war? Dr. Sami Khiyami, Syrian Ambassador to the UK
Chair: Charles Glass

Closing Session – Roundtable on the Golan and the Media

Ghayth Armanazi, Patrick Seale (Writer), Charles Glass (Writer), Ian Black (The Guardian), Tim Pendry, Sharif Nashashibi (Arab Media Watch)

Experts' Biographies

Ghayth N. Armanazi

With a BA in Economics and an MA in Area Studies (Political Science major), Ghayth Armanazi was Information Assistant at the League of Arab States in London between 1967 and 1970 and from 1971 to 1974 worked as Editor at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, Lebanon. He was then Information Counsellor at the London Embassy of the United Arab Emirates from 1974 to 1986 when he became General Manager at the Arab Bankers Association for five years, during which time he was also Editor-in-Chief of the Quarterly Review 'Arab Affairs.' From 1992 to 2000, he was Head of the London Mission of the League of Arab States, following which he became Executive Director of the British-Syrian Society in London from 2002. Director of the Syrian Media Centre from 2006-2007 and founder of the Arab International Media Forum, he is actively involved in promoting closer Arab-Western relations. He is also the author of many articles and studies on Syria and the Middle East and has published in several British and international newspapers and periodicals. He is a frequent contributor to television and radio broadcasts.

Colonel Tim Collins OBE

Tim Collins is a former colonel in the British Army and is best known for his role in the Iraq war and his inspirational eve-of-battle speech, a copy of which apparently hangs in the White House. He has served in Germany, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar, as well as two tours of duty in his native Northern Ireland, and passed selection into the SAS in 1988. He was appointed the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment in 2001 and in 2003 he was awarded an OBE. He resigned from the army in January 2004, citing bureaucracy, chronic under-funding and the MoD's lack of support over the allegations against him, and then in April was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to the British Army. He is an Honorary Patron of Trinity College Dublin's University Philosophical Society and has published 'Rules of Engagement: A Life of Conflict,' a memoir of a life lived on the

frontline.

Dr. Marwa Daoudy

With a PhD in Political Science from IUHEI, Geneva, Marwa Daoudy was a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania and a post-doctoral researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She is currently an affiliated researcher at the Centre for International Studies and Research in Paris (Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, CNRS). Her book, 'The Water Divide between Syria, Turkey and Iraq, Negotiation, Security and Power Asymmetry' (CNRS Editions, Paris, 2005) was awarded the *Prix Ernest Lémonon* 2005 by the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques of the Institut de France. Her study on Syria and the Peace Negotiations with Israel was published by Les Etudes du CERI (Sciences Po-CNRS, 2005). Her research interests are non-traditional security studies, water conflict, and negotiation analysis, with a special focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East peace negotiations. She has recently carried out consultancy work for the Expert Group on Development Issues of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and completed a book on 'Transboundary Water Cooperation as a Tool for Conflict Prevention and Broader Benefit-Sharing' (co-authored with Phillips, Mc Caffrey, Öjendal, & Turton, 2006).

Dr. Guy S. Goodwin-Gill

Goodwin-Gill is a Senior Research Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and Professor of International Refugee Law at University of Oxford. He was formerly Professor of Asylum Law at the University of Amsterdam and served as a Legal Adviser in the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in various countries from 1976-1988. Since 1997, he has been President of the Refugee Legal Centre (a UK nongovernmental organisation.) He is the Founding Editor of the *International Journal of Refugee Law* (Oxford University Press) and was Editor-in-Chief from 1989-2001. He is the author of *The Refugee in International Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press,

2nd edn., 1996; 3rd edn. (with Dr. Jane McAdam), March 2007 and has written extensively on refugees, migration, free and fair elections and child soldiers. Goodwin-Gill is a Barrister at Blackstone Chambers, London; he has represented the UNHCR on a number of occasions, including in the House of Lords in R (*European Roma Rights Centre and others*) v. *Immigration Officer at Prague Airport and another* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees intervening) [2005] 2 AC 1 [2004] UKHL 55; and in the Court of Appeal in R (*on the application of Al Rawi and others*) v. *Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and another* [2006] EWCA Civ. 1279.

Abdulkader Husrieh

Having studied at the American University of Beirut, the American Lebanese University and Damascus University, Abdulkader Husrieh is a Senior Manager at Ernst & Young (Middle East) and a partner in Ernst & Young Syria. He also lectures in Macroeconomics at the Arab European University and in the American Federal Tax System at the Becker & Devry Institute in the USA, as well as being a member of the Think Team of 'Syria 2025' – a project financed and supported by the UNDP. He was responsible for preparing the monetary and fiscal policy part of 'Syria 2025.' He has been a lecturer at the Arab Academy of Banking and Finance; and in 2005 was a member of the team engaged by UNDP to draft the Financial and Insurance Section of the tenth Five Year Plan. Husrieh speaks four languages and is a member of several professional associations, as well as of the British-Syrian Society.

Dr. Sami Khiyami

The Syrian Ambassador to the UK, Dr. Khiyami studied engineering at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon and his PhD at the University of Lyon, France. An electronics and computer expert by education and training, he has held a number of professional roles, including being a founder member of the Syrian Computer Society, a Professor and Director of Research at Damascus University, a senior

advisor to the Syrian banking industry and a member of the board of Syrian Arab Airlines. He has also designed and implemented many large scale software projects. He speaks Arabic, English, French and German

John McHugo

John McHugo is a solicitor and international lawyer whose has been dominated by legal issues involving Arab countries and has a particular interest inof title to territory in the region. From 1984 until early this year he was a partner in the City of London law firm Trowers & Hamllins, and remains a consultant to the firm. He was listed as one of the counsel for the State of Bahrain at the International Court of Justice in 1994 during the case concerning *Maritime Delimitation and Territorial Questions between Qatar and Bahrain*. His publications include an international law analysis of UN Security Council Resolution 242 in *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*. He is a member of the Executive of the Council for Arab British Understanding (CAABU), a director of the Arab British Chamber of Commerce, a former honorary visiting fellow at the Scottish Centre for International Law at Edinburgh University, a former member of the Egyptian-British Business Council and a past chairman of the Middle East Association. Before taking up law he studied Arabic and Islamic studies at Oxford University and the American University in Cairo.

Dr. Mark Zeitoun

Dr. Mark Zeitoun is a humanitarian aid water engineer who has worked in Congo, Chad, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. He regularly advises bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor and implementing organisations on water policy and water conflict negotiations. He currently leads the London Water Research Group at the London School of Economics, exploring 'hydro-hegemony' – or the role that power plays in transboundary water relations.

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Cherry liqueur from the Golan kindly provided by the SEBC

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