



A CUFI Primer: The Golan Heights

In Brief

The Golan Heights is a plateau controlled by Israel that borders Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The area is of great strategic importance as it is effectively the high ground in the area.

The Golan Heights overlooks Israeli towns and agricultural centers, and its topography – specifically to where Israel's line of control extends - would significantly hamper the ability of modern conventional armed forces to invade Israel. In addition, the territory overlooks the Sea of Galilee, a significant water source for Israel.

Perhaps most importantly, Israel's control of the Golan Heights denies the Jewish state's enemies the ability – as they had for years – to shell Israeli civilians living and working beneath the territory inside Israel proper.

CUFI supports American recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights.



Israel's War of Independence

At the rebirth of Israel in 1948 the Golan Heights were controlled by Syria. In the aftermath of Israel's war of independence, the Golan Heights were partly demilitarized by the Israel-Syria Armistice Agreement.

In the period after the 1948 war, with Syria controlling the strategic plateau, the higher ground this was used to shell Israeli farmers in the areas below. In the period between the Israel's War of Independence and the 1967 Six-Day War, the Syrians constantly harassed Israeli border communities by firing artillery shells from their dominant positions on the Golan Heights. In October 1966 Israel brought the matter up before the United Nations. Five nations sponsored a resolution criticizing Syria for its actions but it failed to pass due to a Soviet veto.

In addition to numerous border skirmishes that took place between Israeli and Syrian forces, in early 1965 with the support of the Syrian regime, Palestinian terrorists began conducting raids into Israel from the Golan Heights.

Six-Day War

At the outbreak of the Six-Day War, Syrian shelling intensified against Israeli civilian targets. To protect its citizens in the Hula Valley and repel the Syrian attack, Israeli forces captured the Golan. The fighting was challenging and Israel lost 115 soldiers, with another 305 wounded in the effort to capture the territory. The area that came under Israeli control as a result of the war consists of two geologically distinct areas: the Golan Heights proper, with a surface of 410 square miles, and the slopes of the Mt. Hermon range, with a surface of 39 square miles.



Yom Kippur War

In 1973 when Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a coordinated surprise attack on Yom Kippur, the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar, Syrian forces were able to overrun most of the southern Golan Heights. They would eventually be pushed back by an Israeli counterattack with Israel regaining the territory it had lost at the initial outbreak of the war. Israel and Syria signed a ceasefire agreement in 1974 that left almost all of the Heights in Israeli hands.

Syrian Civil War

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the eastern Golan Heights, still under Syria's control, was turned in to a battlefield with frequent clashes between the Syrian Army and Al-Nusra, ISIS and its related factions as well as a plethora of other terror groups fighting for control in Syria. In previous years, fighting between the Syrian Army and forces opposed to Syrian President Bashar Al Assad has sometimes spilled over the border with errant fire landing in the Israeli controlled Golan Heights.



With the Iranian involvement in Syria's civil war to boost Assad's forces, Israel is now presented with a situation where Iranian and Iranian-backed forces sit near Israel's border on the Golan Heights. With the war reaching its conclusion, and Assad all but certainly staying in power, the Iranian presence in Syria remains a serious threat to Israel's security.

Conclusion

Already faced with Hamas in Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel must now contend with an Iranian regime, that has been patron to both terrorist groups, increasing its direct presence in Syria.

Iran's presence has created supply lines allowing the regime to supply Hezbollah with more sophisticated and deadly weapons, intended for one purpose: the murder of Israelis. While the situational assessment is disconcerting, Israel still controls the higher ground of the Golan Heights, including Mount Hermon.

In addition, while Russia has discussed the status of Iranian forces near the Golan with the Israeli government, the Kremlin has shown that it has neither the will nor ability to push back Iranian forces from this strategic location. As such, recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights sends not only an important message to Tehran but to Moscow as well.

Fundamentally, any scenario where Israel is not in control of this territory would be untenable. Hostile forces bent on Israel's wholesale destruction would be looking down into Israel with the strategic high ground enabling them to target innocent Israelis just as they did prior to the 1967 Six Day War.



Coupling this conventional threat with the fact that Syria's dictator has had no qualms with using chemical weapons on his own people, it is simply inconceivable that Israel could ever relinquish control of the Golan Heights.

What You Need To Know

- The Golan Heights are a strategically vital plateau that borders Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.
- Prior to 1967, when Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria, the territory was used to shell innocent Israelis below and Palestinian terrorists used it as a staging ground for attacks.
- The brutality of Syrian Pres. Bashar Assad, including the use of chemical weapons against his own people, and the Iranian presence in Syria, make clear that transferring the Golan Heights to the likes of Assad would enable a mass murderer to reign terror down on innocent Israelis.