POLICY PAPERS

NUMBER 34

PEACE WITH SECURITY:
ISRAEL'S MINIMAL SECURITY REQUIREMENTS
IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH SYRIA

ZE'EV SCHIFF

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Cover design by Jill Indyk
Maps by Joseph Bermudez Jr. except where otherwise indicated.

THE AUTHOR

Ze'ev Schiff is the veteran military editor of the Israeli daily, *Ha'aretz*, one of Israel's leading defense commentators and the author of many books and articles on the Israel Defense Forces and the Arab-Israeli conflict, including *A History of the IDF, Israel's War in Lebanon,* and *Intifada* (the latter two co-written with Ehud Yaari). This Policy Paper, written during his stay as the 1992 Blinken Fellow at The Washington Institute, is a companion study to his 1989 Washington Institute Policy Paper, *Security for Peace: Israel's Minimal Requirements in Negotiations with the Palestinians.*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREFACE

The peace process that was initiated at Madrid in October 1991, and that is still unfolding in dramatic and unexpected ways, involves more than diplomatic maneuver and negotiation. It also requires a soul-searching reassessment of long-held beliefs—and a rethinking of long-standing positions—in light of a rapidly changing world. For the peace process to succeed, what is needed is not only a change in understanding, but a change in deeply felt attitudes. Passion must be replaced by objective analysis, reflexive assumptions by careful thought, informed by both knowledge and experience.

This is true on all the negotiating fronts, but nowhere more so than in Israel's negotiations with Syria. Until the Camp David Accords, Syria was second only to Egypt in the military and political challenge it posed to the State of Israel's existence. For nearly twenty years, from its entrenched gun emplacements on the Golan Heights, Syria regularly shelled Israeli farms and settlements below, until Israel, in response to the urgent request of its long-harassed civilians, took the Heights in the last days of the 1967 war. In 1973, Syria, acting in concert with Egypt, launched the formidable offensive that inaugurated the costly Yom Kippur War. Once the Camp David Accords were signed between Egypt and Israel, Syria led the rejectionist front that attempted to isolate Egypt from the rest of the Arab world.

Since that time the world has changed dramatically, and with it Syria's posture of intractable opposition to the existence of the State of Israel. As the demise of the Soviet Union

deprived Damascus of its patron, the Gulf War demonstrated America's global preeminence and technological superiority in an age of smart weapons and a computerized battlefield. While continuing to build his country's offensive military capacity, Syria's President Assad has concluded that he needs to build a new relationship with the United States—and that the road to Washington passes through Jerusalem. Therefore he is participating in the peace process in order to accomplish several goals: to forge ties with the community of nations, to advance Syria's aspirations, perhaps chief among them its long-cherished recovery of the Golan Heights. Time will tell whether the concept of peace between Syria and Israel, newly articulated by President Assad, will achieve support and acceptance within Syria to become a durable reality.

This situation, fraught with peril yet filled with promise, demands thorough, dispassionate analysis. The Washington Institute is proud to present this seminal work by Ze'ev Schiff, Israel's preeminent defense analyst, widely respected across the political and ideological spectrum for his erudition and keen insight. The present volume is a companion to an earlier Washington Institute Policy Paper in which he analyzed Israel's minimum security requirements in negotiations with the Palestinians. In *Peace with Security: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with Syria,* he undertakes a similar task, analyzing the strategic relationship between Israel and Syria in all its aspects, and offers a series of valuable and timely prescriptions for the achievement of peace between these two neighbors which have been in a state of war since Israel was first established nearly half a century ago.

<div align="right">

Barbi Weinberg
President
April 1993

</div>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Peace with Syria is a strategic goal toward which Israel must work, a goal that necessarily entails withdrawal from at least a large part of the Golan Heights. Israel must be wary of partial arrangements which will not end, and indeed may indefinitely prolong, its conflict with Syria. At the same time, Israel must insist that its final agreement with Syria be accompanied by full peace, i.e., a peace treaty establishing open borders, trade, tourism and embassies in both capitals. Another critical condition for peace is appropriate security arrangements.

Peace with Syria will fundamentally alter the Arab-Israeli conflict by diminishing both the military threat facing Israel and the hostility of the Arab world. Peace with Syria and Jordan would also create a buffer against threats to Israel from the east, and especially from Iraq and Iran.

Peace with Syria must be part of a larger settlement with Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinians. There is no possibility of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace that does not include Syria; nor will it be possible to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict without the Palestinians. An agreement with Syria will facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Yet, should Syrian President Hafez al-Assad condition peace with Israel on progress on all the other negotiating fronts, he will make progress on one front hostage to extremists on others.

Peace between Israel and Syria is possible. The two have concluded agreements in the past, and some were scrupulously observed. The first Israel-Syria agreement was the Armistice Agreement of 1949. In 1974, following the Yom

Kippur War, the Separation of Forces Agreement on the Golan Heights was reached with the United States acting as an intermediary. A third agreement, in 1976, also reached through American mediation, was a tacit understanding between Damascus and Jerusalem, the so-called "Red Lines" agreement, in which Israel and Syria recognized each other's security interests in Lebanon. Israel accepted a Syrian military presence in parts of Lebanon, with limitations on surface-to-air missiles, while Syria accepted Israel's security interests in southern Lebanon.

In the past, Syria was satisfied with the status quo and saw little need to establish peaceful relations with Israel. With the collapse of Damascus' Soviet patron and the dramatic events of the Gulf War, this changed. Today, Syria is simultaneously pursuing the diplomatic track of the peace process while arming itself. Whether Assad's motives in joining the peace process were tactical or strategic is ultimately beside the point. There can be no doubt that Syrian policy has moved in a new direction, one which could be turned towards establishing peace in the course of negotiations.

The Golan holds great geo-strategic importance for both Israel and Syria. Before 1967, Syria regularly harassed Israeli civilians in the Huleh Valley and disrupted Israeli development projects. Syria, technically acting through a pan-Arab framework, tried to divert the sources of the Jordan River over which they had control. The Six Day War brought about a complete reversal of fortune; Israel's capture of the Golan Heights has left the Syrians feeling threatened. Their capital, Damascus, is just fifty or sixty kilometers from Israeli lines and would be easily within artillery range with just a slight forward movement of Israeli forces. This mutual feeling of vulnerability is likely to deepen in the future as increasingly sophisticated weapons systems make it easier to strike at specific targets in Damascus and inside Israeli territory. If Israel were to withdraw from the Golan without having obtained broad security arrangements better than those in the Sinai, it will feel even more threatened than it did before 1967.

The Golan is also significant for Israel because of the water sources that flow from it towards the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret). Indeed, the Syrian attempt to divert water was one of the events that set in motion the Six Day War. If the Golan's military significance for Israel is primarily

operational, specifically the defense of the Galilee, the need to defend the water sources is absolutely strategic and indeed existential. As long as a state of war exists between Israel and Syria, and as long as the sources of the Jordan cannot be secured, Israel cannot withdraw from the Golan Heights.

In theory, the Golan Heights could serve as a buffer zone for the settlements of the Huleh Valley; indeed, its capture was above all a response to attacks on those settlements over many years. Today, however, its use as a buffer zone has been diminished as a result of the establishment of thirty-two settlements. The settlements, deliberately built in forward lines to facilitate land cultivation near the border, have no military significance themselves; the inhabitants even had to be evacuated during the 1973 War. Moreover, their small size would make them a burden in time of war.

No Israeli-Syrian agreement can ignore the situation in Lebanon, especially southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. No understanding can be reached on Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights in the absence of broad security arrangements that include southern Lebanon and the Bekaa and address Syria's military presence in those areas. For military purposes, the Golan and Lebanon are one bloc, and security arrangements must, as a result, encompass areas falling under three different sovereignties—Syria, Israel and Lebanon.

Lebanon must be included in any agreement and enjoy security arrangements from its two stronger neighbors. It, in turn, must commit itself not to divert the Hasbani River, an important source of the Jordan. Within the framework of this agreement, Lebanon must disarm Hezbollah and prevent potentially disruptive outside forces, e.g., the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, from operating against Israel from its territory. Israel, for its part, would withdraw from its security zone in southern Lebanon.

As noted above, there is a certain symmetry between the respective feelings of vulnerability of Israel and Syria; both fear not only a surprise attack but also an attack through Lebanese territory. Israel's fears are much greater than those of Syria, however, given that it sees in a Syrian attack a threat to its very existence, and that its army is structured around reserve units. As a result, security arrangements between Israel and Syria must alleviate the fears that both sides feel from threats aimed

at them. The arrangements must reduce perceived dangers and not inadvertently heighten feelings of insecurity. Finally, the agreement must be such that future generations will not be moved to violate it on the grounds that it is dangerous and/or unworkable.

An Israeli-Syrian agreement must therefore seek to end the conflict between the two countries. It must take the form of a contractual peace, establishing an entire range of peaceful relations, such as the establishment of embassies, open borders, trade relations and tourism. The agreement may proceed in stages to the extent that both sides agree on each stage. Israel must commit itself to refrain from creating new facts on the ground while the stages are being carried out, so as not to hinder progress toward a full peace treaty. Syria, for its part, must commit itself to not join any war against Israel should the latter be attacked by another Arab state or states. Syria must also undertake to fulfill its pledges, even if the Palestinians or another Arab party violate their own agreements with Israel.

• There are two areas in which Israel must insist that its requests be met even at the cost of forgoing an agreement: the security of its water sources and the demilitarization of the Golan Heights. Among the water sources to be protected is the Sea of Galilee, Israel's sole large reservoir, which is inside Israeli territory proper. The international border runs ten meters from the lake's northeastern shore. The border must be corrected so as to prevent disputes in the future.

• Israel should seek border corrections in two other places on the rim of the Golan escarpment overlooking the Huleh Valley. The salient of the town of al-Hama, seized by Syria in 1948, was part of Mandatory Palestine and must be returned to Israel.

• Israel should evacuate settlements in areas from which it will withdraw, and Damascus should allow Israeli Golan settlers to remain in place, under Syrian sovereignty. Few, if any, Israelis would, however, want to exercise that option, in light of the fact that many of the Golan's former Syrian residents, who fled in 1967, will likely want to return to the area and settle on land currently occupied by Israelis.

• Security arrangements in the Golan Heights must reinforce both sides' sense of security, not weaken it. In order to ensure that neither side has the capability to surprise the other in war, the arrangements must facilitate early detection

xiv

of treaty violations. Security arrangements will enable both sides to observe the peace treaty. For Israel, this means, *inter alia*, that its deterrent capability will be based less on territory and geographic depth, as in the Sinai. Yet because the Golan is much smaller than the Sinai, the security arrangements with Syria must be fuller than those between Israel and Egypt.

•   The military agreement should have two central elements: military presence and demilitarization. Both sides will agree on the length of time that the Israeli military can remain on the Golan before withdrawal. Israel must demand a lengthy military presence, of roughly twenty-five years. From the outset, this presence will not be of an offensive nature, but rather a series of defensive deployments which will be divided into several stages of progressively diminishing Israeli military presence. In this framework, Israel will continue to maintain its early warning stations on Mount Hermon and the Golan.

•   After withdrawal, demilitarization will continue as long as either one of the parties wants it. The middle section of the Golan will serve as a buffer zone, twenty kilometers wide at the most, manned by an international force. Civilians may be allowed to live there, and the Syrian armed presence will be restricted to police.

•   The borders of the demilitarized area will encompass a greater area of the Golan than that currently held by Israel. It will reach the Syrian military camps at Katana, but not Damascus. The Syrians have every right to defend their capital, but armored forces must not be allowed south of Damascus. The demilitarized zone can extend west into Israel's territory, but, as in the agreement with Egypt, only a symbolic portion of Israeli territory will be demilitarized.

•   In the demilitarized zone, no armor or combat engineers will be allowed. Only light, short-range artillery will be allowed. The amount of military units permitted will be subject to agreement by the two sides. No flights of combat helicopters or deployment of surface-to-air or surface-to-surface missiles will be allowed and no long-range weapon systems will be deployed. The main existing fortifications will be razed; the two sides, however, may maintain minefields to the extent they are necessary for defensive purposes. No military exercises are to be conducted in the zone above battalion strength.

- Israel will continue to maintain its warning station on Mount Hermon. Eventually, when the IDF withdraws from the area, Israel will be allowed to establish warning stations on the hills of Bental and Avital, or on Tel Faris in the south of the Heights. At some future point, Syria will be able to establish its own warning station on Mount Hermon.

- Beyond establishing demilitarized zones, the two sides' military establishments will work toward restructuring their forces. The Syrian army and the IDF would cut back on the number of divisions. Taking other security needs into account, it is reasonable that the Syrian army field no more than eight divisions, with a third to half consisting of reserve units. The two sides will agree on the number of surface-to-surface missile launchers and on the area of deployment. The two armies will make efforts to shift their military doctrines from an offensive to a defensive emphasis. Each side would be notified in advance of any exercises at division strength or more, and foreign observers will be asked to participate.

- The agreement will be monitored by an international force and by observers, headquartered in the buffer zone, from countries that maintain diplomatic relations with both Israel and Syria. Israel would most likely prefer not to include American units in the international force. America's contribution to the agreement would take the form of providing aerial and satellite reconnaissance, early warning and other high-technology materiel, and endorsing the overall agreement. It is important that Israel and Syria conduct joint inspections on both sides of the border.
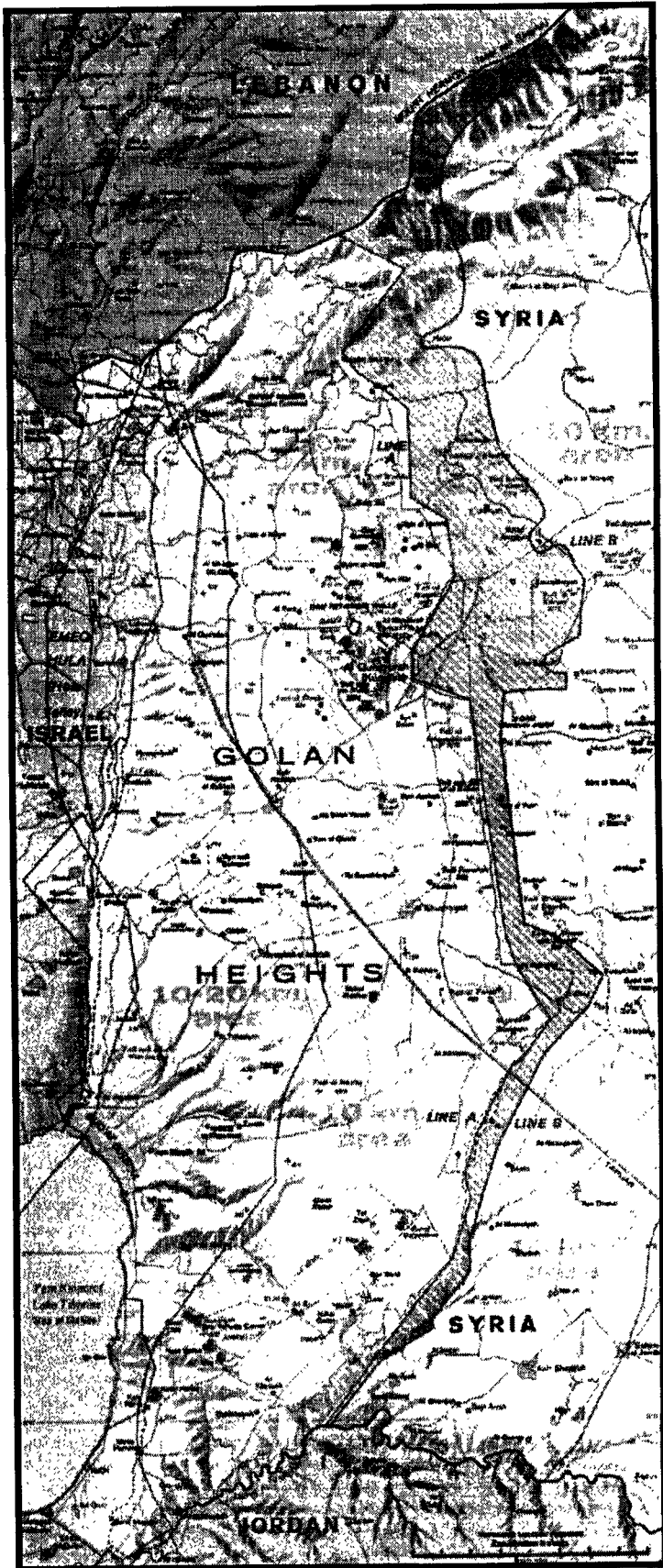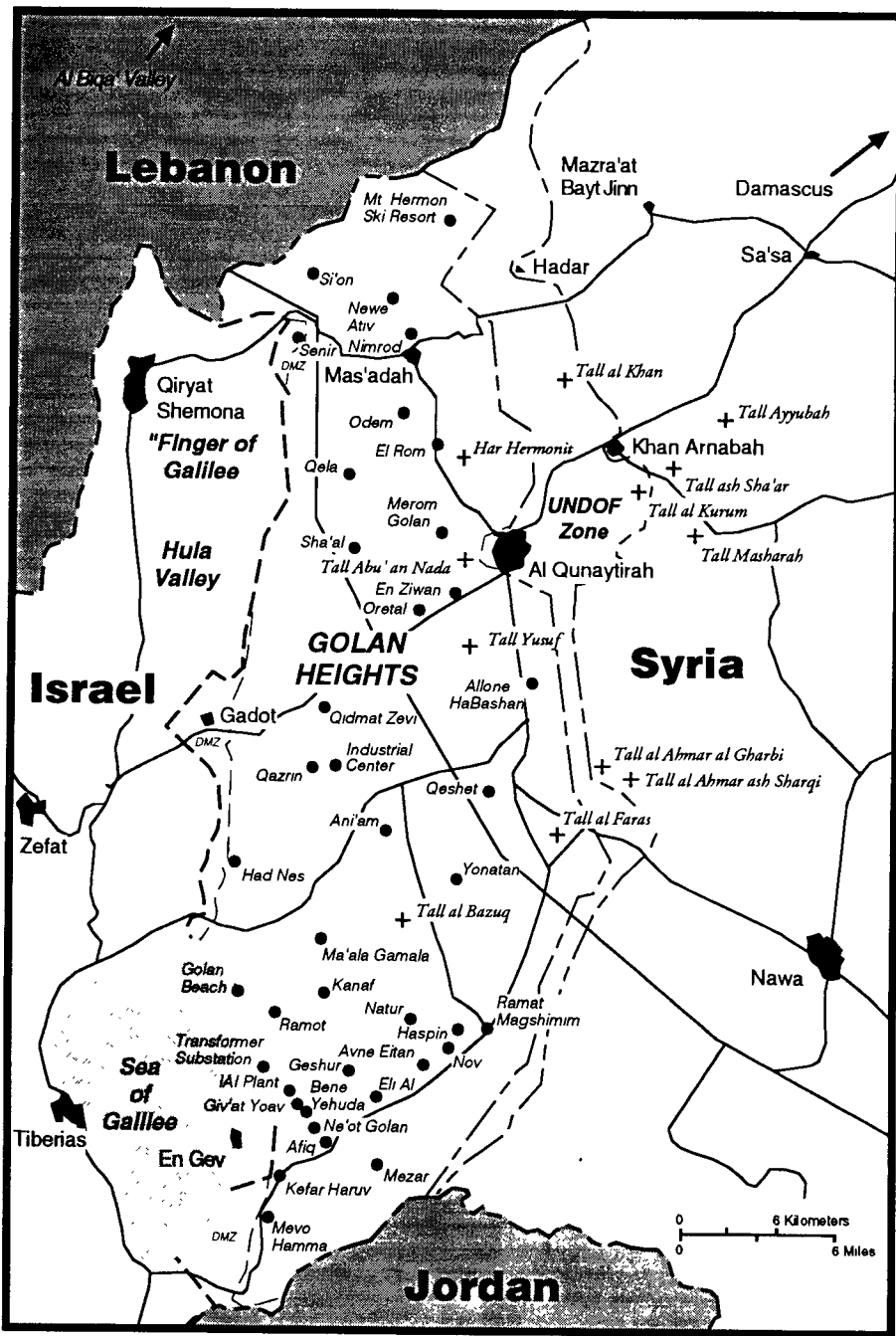
INTRODUCTION[1]

It is by now a truism that the momentous events of the past several years—the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-led coalition's victory in the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union—have dramatically altered the Middle East landscape by opening the region up to developments and opportunities that hitherto were relegated only to the distant future. The peace process initiated at Madrid in October 1991 has taken many unexpected twists and turns; the greatest is the surprising opportunity for movement on the negotiating front that had previously been thought of as the least promising, that between Israel and its most formidable Arab foe, Syria.

It is extremely important for both Israel and Syria to reach a settlement ending their long-standing conflict. Although the uncertain status of the Palestinians lies at the heart of the Arab-Israel conflict, without Syria there simply can be no progress in the peace process. Syria not only exercises a veto over the other parties' ability to enter into agreements, it also has the ability to actively persuade and pressure the Palestinians to heed its desires.

Although a window of opportunity presently exists, time is short, and on no one's side. Both Israel and Syria face real dangers in the future—most prominently, a regional arms

---

[1] A number of the issues discussed in this introduction are explored at greater length in the author's companion volume to this study, *Security for Peace: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations With the Palestinians*, Policy Paper No. 15 (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989), pp. 13-51.

race, the spread of destabilizing fundamentalism and Iran's increasingly assertive posture—that lend great urgency to the time factor and make an agreement all the more imperative.

THE PRESENT MOMENT

The possibility which currently exists of meaningful progress in negotiations with Syria is the result of underlying factors and the product of specific decisions. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has wisely concluded that to compensate for the loss of his Soviet patron, to overcome continuing economic crisis and to truly cut the costs of his military ambitions, he must establish better relations with the West in general and Washington in particular.

For Israel's part, two crucial decisions by the Rabin government breathed life into these negotiations: the concession that UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for withdrawal coupled with secure and recognized boundaries, is applicable to the Golan Heights, and the decision to use the draft declaration of principles presented by Syria in the sixth round of peace talks as a basis for negotiation. Syrian need and Israeli flexibility have combined to create what Prime Minister Rabin has characterized as a "window of opportunity" in the negotiations with Syria that few would have anticipated.

Peace with Syria is a strategic goal for the Jewish state for several reasons. Politically, Syria is a commanding state in the Arab world and for many years led the rejectionist front that attempted isolate Egypt after it signed a peace treaty with Israel. As stated above, Syria holds the key to the successful participation of other Arab parties in the peace process, especially the Palestinians. Militarily, Syria is Israel's most formidable adversary. To be sure, due to both the demise of the USSR and the crushing defeat of Iraq, Israel enjoys a better position in the short term. That margin of security, however, will not last forever, and indeed may be undermined by several developments on the horizon.

TRENDS IN MILITARY TECHNOLOGY AND THE USES OF TERRITORY

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, sophisticated military technology has flooded the Middle East in search of buyers. While much is made of arms sales from former Soviet bloc nations, the truly destabilizing arms sales involve high-technology systems developed by the West. The most alarming trend is the spread of unconventional weaponry; indeed, the scope of Iraq's nuclear programs uncovered since the war (likely to be resumed once the UN inspection regime lapses) is striking both for the advanced state of its development and for the ease with which Iraq eluded international safeguards. Nuclear weapons pose a unique existential threat to Israel, and their spread makes it doubly important for Israel to reach peace with its neighbors before the regional arms race has slipped beyond control. The regional proliferation of ballistic missile technologies only heightens these dangers. Other unconventional weapons are also worrisome to Israel, especially chemical weapons, which terrorize the population, hinder mobilization of the reserve units that comprise the main body of Israel's forces, and contaminate weapons, further delaying mobilization.

Israel will, in the course of the current peace process, be forced to pay a very steep price in exchange for the promises and elegant phrases of the other parties. That exchange will, hopefully, yield peace at the end of the day. But because Israel is undertaking great risks, it must ascertain the precise nature of the threats it faces in the future, and formulate its minimal conditions and the needs it must address as it searches for peace.

Territory plays an ambiguous role in this constellation. The acquisition of strategic depth by Israel in 1967 did not prevent future wars, as was vividly demonstrated in 1973. (The main reason Israel's leadership rejected Israel Defense Force proposals to launch a pre-emptive strike in 1973 was its belief that Israel's strategic depth enabled it to absorb a first strike.) Additional territory did not enhance Israel's deterrence. To the contrary, Arab states had a stronger motivation to fight in 1973 that in 1967, insofar as they were fighting to recover their own

land, rather than vindicate the cause of the always-mistrusted Palestinians.

Territory is, and always will be, a vital component of any country's security architecture; Israel is certainly no exception. But the exact place that territory plays in a given security architecture is by no means self-evident. Specifically, the precise role of the Golan Heights in enhancing Israel's security is not defined solely by the presence or absence of Israeli military forces throughout its length and breadth, but rather by a range of factors. This paper will examine the history and present configuration of the Golan Heights, as well as its role in Israeli and Syrian security thinking, in order to arrive at an understanding of how that territory may best serve the interests of peace.

I   HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LESSONS

Syria was the only Arab state to emerge from the 1948 War, Israel's War of Independence, with the feeling that, unlike the other Arab states whose armies had invaded Israel, it had not been defeated on the battlefield. This perception in turn influenced its behavior towards Israel in the periodic border disputes between the two prior to the Six Day War in 1967. While Damascus did not achieve its main military objective in the 1948 War—preventing the establishment of the state of Israel and seizing large portions of the Galilee—the Syrian army, unlike its Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts, was not humiliated on the battlefield. It did not retreat under the pressure of battle and Israeli counterattacks, and its losses in the war were not heavy. Even though up until the establishment of the State of Israel, Syria had operated through an army of volunteers, the so-called "Salvation Army," regular units of the Syrian army invaded the land of Israel. In the course of the war the Syrian army was stopped at the gates of Kibbutz Degania, but it overran three other Israeli settlements—Masada, Sha'ar HaGolan, and Mishmar HaYarden. When the war ended in 1949, the Syrian army held areas seized within the borders of the British Mandate that had been intended for the Jewish state.

The Egyptian army, by contrast, was beaten soundly by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). In the last stage of the 1948 War the Israeli army invaded the Sinai and encircled the Gaza Strip from the south as well. When it withdrew, it did so only under American pressure and after a British ultimatum. The Jordanian army, or the Arab Legion as it was then called, did

not exit the 1948 War wreathed with laurels, though it did enjoy some local successes. When the fighting was over, Jordan retained the West Bank and East Jerusalem, not as a spoil of war, but because of a tacit understanding reached after the war between King Abdullah and Israel, that Israel would not prevent Jordanian takeover of the area evacuated by the Iraqi army on the West Bank. Had the Israeli government taken up Ben-Gurion's proposal at the end of the war to undertake a major campaign to liberate the entire West Bank, the Jordanian army would not have been able to stop it. On the Lebanese border the war ended even more drastically: the IDF was inside the border of Lebanon, where it held fourteen Lebanese villages; as part of the cease-fire agreements with Lebanon, it withdrew.

Syria, preceded by Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, was the last of Israel's Arab neighbors to join the 1948 cease-fire talks. Then as now, Syria did not hasten to the negotiating table. The other Arab states joined the cease-fire talks from a position of military weakness; not so Damascus. Even though the Arab military coalition had effectively disintegrated, Syria felt secure as it stood alone against Israel. Damascus' representatives came to the meeting with their Israeli counterparts feeling that they held all the cards, and that they could dictate the course and the outcome of the talks. In fact, Syria was able to dictate the conditions for its withdrawal from the areas it had occupied inside the Mandatory territory of Palestine.

Syria's main condition was to declare the captured areas a demilitarized zone. Israel for its part said that no matter what, it would not agree to sign a cease-fire agreement if Syria did not withdraw. It should be borne in mind that, at the time, these agreements were seen as temporary agreements to be supplemented by future political agreements and finally by comprehensive peace. Once it became clear that the "temporary" agreement was to be permanent, tensions arose. Both sides remained in a state of war, and it showed in every area. The Syrians and the Israelis stuck to the letter of their agreements regarding the demilitarized areas, and clung to their respective interpretations of the spirit as both vied for position. Thus the demilitarized zone became a focus for tension and conflicts which persisted until the Six Day War, nearly twenty years later. This conflict expanded as Israel

undertook major development projects along its border with Syria. The UN tried to mediate and reach a compromise, but these attempts failed.
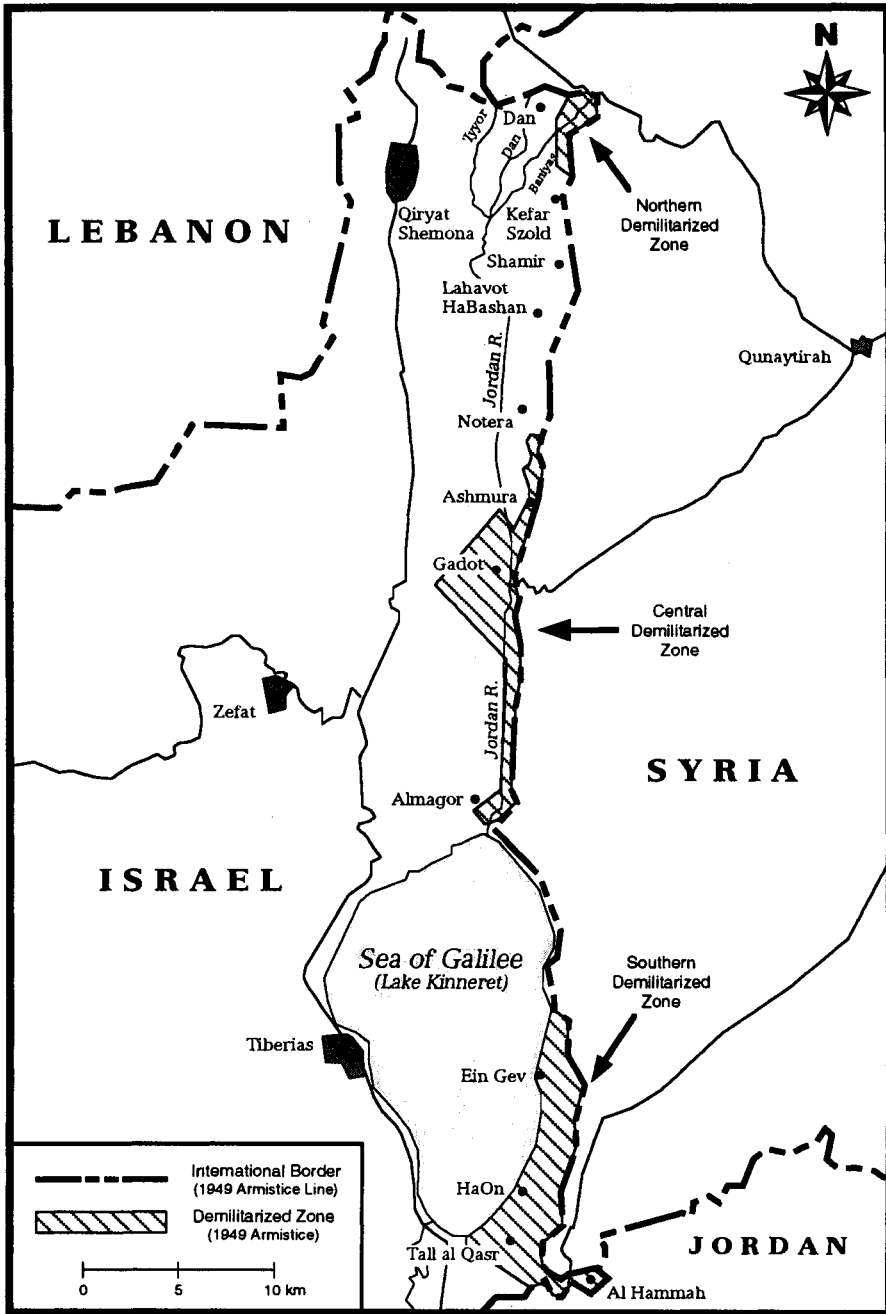
This historical episode is significant for the light it sheds not only on the tense relations between Israel and Syria, but on their positions concerning several fundamental issues. Repeated incidents over twenty years in which Israeli communities were attacked and many people were killed, both soldiers and civilians, served to emphasize the dramatic geographic and topographic advantage that control of the Golan Heights, which look down on Israeli communities in the valley below, provided Syria.

PRE-1967 DEMILITARIZED ZONES

The cease-fire agreement between Israel and Syria, signed some seven months after the end of Israel's War of Independence on July 20, 1949, defined three demilitarized zones along the borders, in which the presence of armed forces of either side was forbidden. The northern demilitarized zone, located in the northeastern corner of the border near the Israeli communities of Dan and Shear Yashuv, was the least problematic as well as the smallest. The central demilitarized zone ran from the Jordan River to the east, in a section of some sixteen kilometers between the Huleh Lake and the point where the Jordan empties into the Sea of Galilee. In addition to this narrow strip, varying in width between 500 to 800 meters, the central demilitarized zone included two triangular protrusions west of the Jordan, one to the south of the Huleh and the other to the north of the Sea of Galilee. Israel accorded great military and economic significance to this section of the Jordan, where the river flows into the Sea of Galilee at high speed, with altitude differences reaching 282 meters, allowing for the generation of electric power if Israel was able to control both banks of the river.

The southern demilitarized zone reached the southeastern part of the Sea of Galilee about halfway into the lake. It was in this area, near the kibbutzim of Tel Katzir and Ha'on, that most of the incidents took place, as the kibbutz members exercised their right to cultivate the land. In addition to the area near the Sea of Galilee, the southern demilitarized zone extended a long finger eastward to, and included, the town of al-Hama, known

N

LEBANON

'Iyyon

Dan •

Dan

Baniyas

Qiryat
Shemona

Kefar
Szold

Northern
Demilitarized
Zone

Shamir •

Lahavot
HaBashan •

Jordan R.

Qunaytirah

Notera •

Ashmura

Gadot

Central
Demilitarized
Zone

Jordan R.

Zefat

SYRIA

Almagor •

ISRAEL

Sea of Galilee
(Lake Kinneret)

Southern
Demilitarized
Zone

Tiberias

Ein Gev •

HaOn •

International Border
(1949 Armistice Line)

Demilitarized Zone
(1949 Armistice)

Tall al Qasr

JORDAN

0   5   10 km

Al Hammah

for its baths. Al-Hama had been part of Mandatory Palestine, but was captured during the war by the Jordanians who later transferred it to the Syrian army.

The total area of the three demilitarized zones was not great; but neither their size nor even, at times, their military importance accounted for the intensity of the antagonism they engendered. A number of incidents occurred as a result of Israel's insistence on cultivating the land up to the border. The difficulty stemmed from the fact that in several places along the demilitarized zone there were plots of land belonging to both Jews and Arabs who had moved to the Syrian side of the border, all mixed together. In these areas, incidents regularly took place during plowing, sowing, and harvest time. At one point UN observers tried to bring farmers from both sides together and coordinate their activities, but this attempt failed, as both governments preferred not to compromise. Another UN proposal, to designate an uncultivated narrow no-man's-land area inside the demilitarized zone, also failed.

Israel was especially sensitive to the UN's role in these incidents, and to the presence of any other military power in the areas under its sovereignty. Thus, when, in response to Syrian attacks on Israeli fishermen on the Sea of Galilee in the 1950s and early 1960s, UN observers suggested that their boats regularly patrol the lake, Israel rejected the proposal outright. It also objected to the UN conducting any patrols in its territory without an Israeli escort, arguing that the UN had no right to police the territory of a sovereign state. A fundamental concern was that any UN presence in the area would become permanent and that the behavior of its personnel would in the end be dictated by the world powers, while Israel preferred direct and unmediated contact with its neighbors. This was true on the Syrian border as well as on the borders with the other Arab states.

The Syrians, for their part, argued that their withdrawal from the areas they had captured did not constitute a transfer to Israel of the demilitarized zones, whose political status should remain open. Neither side, according to the Syrians, exercised sovereignty over the demilitarized zones, and thus Syria should have a say in what took place in the demilitarized zones, even if they were on the other side of the border. Clearly Syria enjoyed a special status because it legitimately represented the ownership rights of former Arab residents of

the demilitarized zones who had either escaped or were expelled to the Syrian side. Any change in the status of the demilitarized zones, therefore, also depended on Damascus' agreement. In reality, the Syrians insisted not only that Israel build no new settlements in the demilitarized zones, but that it freeze and suspend development activities, so that the status quo ante 1948 would be maintained. This last demand produced severe difficulties.

Israel's interpretation of the cease-fire agreement was entirely different. It argued that Israel was the sole legitimate heir to the British Mandate, and was thus sovereign over the demilitarized zones. While the rights of the Arab residents in those areas remained intact, they could not transfer those rights to another country, namely, Syria. The agreement establishing the demilitarized zones, in other words, was not political but military; it dealt with removing military forces, but did not prevent development and civilian life. The demilitarized zone was not to be a no-man's-land, but was to be cultivated for civilian purposes. Needless to say, the UN did not always support Israel's interpretation. When Israel's position regarding the status and the authority of the Mixed Armistice Commission in the demilitarized zones was not accepted, it decided to stop attending the meetings of the committee. This aggravated the situation, since the mediators found it even more difficult than before to do their job.

The struggle over the demilitarized zones polarized relations between Syria and Israel and resulted in several violent military clashes between the two, including bloody reprisals and expulsions of local Arabs. Some of those clashes, in which Syria did rather well, stand out in the annals of the conflict between the two states. During one of the most difficult years, 1951, Israel evacuated most of the Arab residents who lived in the demilitarized zones, and relocated them, to the Syrian villages on the other side of the border. On April 4, 1951, an Israeli police patrol (in effect soldiers wearing police uniform, since the presence of the military in the demilitarized zone was forbidden) traveling inside the southern demilitarized zone on its way to the town of al-Hama, was attacked and seven members were killed. In response, Israel, for the first time since the 1948 War, engaged its air

force in a reprisal operation.[1] After this incident Syria took control of al-Hama and the salient leading to it, while Israel did not return to al-Hama until the Six Day War.

About a month after the al-Hama battle, another major incident took place at Tel Mutilla, north of the Sea of Galilee. This battle lasted for five days, and is remembered in the annals of the IDF as the first fiasco after the War of Independence. Forty-three IDF soldiers fell in this battle, which was fought in the only place along the Israeli border where Israel had a certain topographic advantage.[2] The Syrian forces tried to take control of the area, all of which was inside Israeli territory. It took a fierce battle to eject the Syrian force. Afterwards the Arab residents were expelled from this area as well.

Many of the incidents resulted from Syria's desire to stop Israeli development activities in the demilitarized zone, particularly projects aimed at developing local water sources which Israel considered a top national priority. At first Syria attempted to undermine the Israeli plan to dredge the Huleh Lake and the swamps north of the Sea of Galilee, which would have rendered 60,000 dunams of land suitable for agriculture. Although the entire lake is under Israeli sovereignty, Syria argued that drying up the lake would change the military situation in the area. In this instance, the UN sided with the Israeli position. In response, Syria initiated incidents in March 1951, which continued intermittently during almost the entire six years of the Huleh project. Once again, Israel evacuated hundreds of Arab residents who lived east of the lake, and ended up relocating them towards Syria.

On September 2, 1953, a new conflict arose, as Syria sought to prevent Israel from diverting some of the water of the Jordan near the Bnot Yaakov Bridge. This time, the Syrians were successful. Israel intended to start its National Waterline from this spot, where the Jordan is seventy-two meters above sea

---

[1] This was truly a mark of the seriousness with which Israel regarded this Syrian action since aircraft were not used again to attack ground objectives during border incidents until 1964 as part of Israel's action against the Syrian attempt to divert the sources of the Jordan River.

[2] This was the Tel Mutilla area over the Butayha valley north of the Sea of Galilee at 280 meters above sea level.

level, run water to Beit Netufa Valley in the Galilee, and thence to the Negev. Another portion of the river would continue to flow from the Jordan to the Sea of Galilee where it would activate a power station as it fell into the lake. The Syrians resorted to artillery in an attempt to stop the work at the Bnot Yaakov Bridge. After the UN observers supported Syria, arguing that the Israeli works would change the situation in the demilitarized zone, both sides started to mass troops. What stopped the work in the end, and effectively ended the Israeli development plan altogether, was Washington's threat to withdraw its economic aid to Israel, followed by steps to implement that threat. On October 28, 1953, nine days after America announced it was halting aid, the development work near the Bnot Yaakov Bridge was halted. Instead, Israel started planning a project to pump water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev. This plan was also distasteful to the Syrians and to the Arab states in general, and they tried to foil it.

Prior to the Six Day War, there was hardly a quiet year along the Syrian-Israeli border. Incidents would often climax in heavy Syrian shelling or in Israeli reprisal raids, both of which generally resulted in many casualties for both sides. On December 12, 1955, for example, Israel used large forces to destroy the Syrian positions overlooking the Sea of Galilee from which the Syrians had regularly harassed Israeli fishermen. The Syrians argued that Israel was not allowed to fish on the northeastern shore of the lake, since, at the time, the border ran some ten meters from the shore of the lake at that sector. The year 1958 was notable for heavy Syrian shelling of several communities in the Huleh Valley. Serious damage was sustained by those communities (especially by Gadot and Hulata), which were hit by thousands of shells.

One Israeli reprisal raid in particular stands out because of Egypt's indirect involvement: the operation at Kfar Tewfiq on February 1, 1960. Though it was not a large-scale operation and the Syrians did not sustain too many losses, the Egyptians responded by massing large forces in the Sinai Peninsula, which was, at the time, semi-demilitarized not by agreement between Israel and Egypt, but rather by the great power dictates that followed the Suez Crisis of 1956. Israel was surprised by the Egyptian troop movement, learning too late that an Egyptian armored division had crossed the Suez Canal and was poised near the Israeli-Egyptian border. The IDF went on alert, and

the tension extended from the Syrian to the Egyptian border. It took several months before Nasser ordered the evacuation of the force from the Sinai. It was a maneuver the Egyptians tried to repeat in 1967, but that time it resulted in all-out war.

SYRIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ARAB DEFEAT IN 1967

Syria bears great responsibility for dragging the Arab states into the Six Day War of 1967, which ended in decisive Arab defeat and major losses of territory. The slide towards war began long before the Egyptians massed their forces in the Sinai in May 1967. Nasser, to be sure, caused the situation to deteriorate in the prelude to the war when he closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli navigation and ejected the UN force from the Sinai while concentrating his own forces there. But it is Syria that must take the historical credit for spurring the overall escalation that led to war. Egypt followed Syria without great enthusiasm, while King Hussein of Jordan was, for his part, practically forced into the war. Only the Syrians actually looked for a fight from the very start.

The chief landmark on the road to war was Syria's attempt to divert the sources of the Jordan on their territory. At the same time, Syria supported terrorist operations against Israel initiated by the fledgling Fatah organization. The decision to divert the waters of the Jordan had been taken at an Arab summit meeting in Cairo in January 1964, where it was also decided to establish a joint Arab command. Nasser reckoned at that time that the Arabs were not strong enough to go to war against Israel and hoped to avoid operations that required crossing the border. Indeed, only the Syrians actively pursued the diversion project, while Nasser expected the purported diversion of the sources of the Jordan to fizzle out in due time. The decision to divert the sources of the Jordan also affected the Lebanese, since the Hasbani River runs through their land. The Jordanians, for their part, were expected to build the Muheiba Dam at the point where the diverted water was to accumulate after being channeled to the Yarmuq and to the dam. Neither Lebanon nor Jordan intended to implement the decision, and so they kept stalling, knowing that Israel could not ignore such a move, which it would view as a *casus belli*. In July 1965, Lebanon completely ceased its participation in the diversion plan.

The Syrians, on the other hand, went to work immediately. In late November 1964, they started digging a channel for diverting the water of the Banias. The commander of the Syrian Armed Forces, General 'Abd el-Karim Zahr-al-Din, outlined Syria's objectives in the Syrian army organ *al-Jundi*:

> The existence of Israel depends on implementing its irrigation plans. Arab Syria, who puts at the top of its national agenda the liquidation of Israel and the recovery of the stolen land, will never permit the achievement of Israel's water plans. It will not allow Israel to carry out plans which will make it live longer and will endow it with power and vitality. To us the conflict in the demilitarized zone symbolizes the Palestine problem which is yet to find its just solution.

Israel's reaction was both inevitable and decisive. For the first time since 1951, the Israeli Air Force attacked Syrian objectives. Yet Israel stopped short of sending forces across the border, using instead artillery and tanks from its side of the border to shell the engineering equipment used for the diversion effort. Most Arab countries, including Egypt, immediately recommended postponing the rechanneling work for the time being. But the Syrians would not relent; at the Arab summit meeting in Casablanca in September 1964, Syria presented a proposal to speed up the work that was in effect rejected by the other Arabs. Even Egypt's President Nasser urged deferral, saying: "If we cannot do this work now, let's postpone it until we can defend it."

Though Israeli firepower eventually forced the Syrians to stop the work, it did not end the tension. Throughout 1966, shooting incidents from across the Syrian border abounded, and many Israeli civilians were killed and wounded. There were many incidents of road mining along the border. Furthermore, the concept of popular war against Israel was actively pursued by Syria in the form of Syrian-supported Palestinian infiltration into Israel for acts of terrorism and sabotage that caused damage and claimed civilian casualties. Israel's reaction steadily escalated from month to month, and included air combat in which some Syrian aircraft were downed and others were chased as far as Damascus. Israel's approach, voiced by then Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, was that while reprisal raids in Jordan were to be carried out in such a way so as not to endanger King Hussein's regime, no holds were to be barred in the fight against Syria, which actively

called for war against Israel. The situation was explosive; on the one hand, the Israelis tended to overreact to events, while on the other hand, the Syrians believed there was a general plot against them. With the added ingredient of Soviet encouragement of the Syrians, deepening confrontation was almost inevitable.

Nasser thought that concentrating forces in the Sinai would suffice to extricate the Syrians from Israeli pressure. Today it is clear that he knew, and the Syrians certainly knew, that Israel did not mass forces along the Syrian border in order to attack Syria. Though well aware that he was being led astray by the Syrians, and despite his efforts to stave off war, in the end Nasser was drawn into an unwanted war by Syrian pressure. The Syrians, who acted according to a different timetable, had taken the initiative and Nasser lost control of the situation. As a result, the Arabs, including the Syrians, were implicated in a war for which they were militarily unprepared.

Although the Syrians did all they could to encourage war, they did not carry their assigned weight in the Arab military plan. The original Arab plan had assigned them two major moves: to break through with one armored column south of the Sea of Galilee towards Tiberias and with a second column from the Bnot Yaakov Bridge towards the Upper Galilee. As the Syrians saw the collapse of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies during the first days of the war, they tried to get themselves off the hook by carrying out two small ground attacks, one in the direction of Kibbutz Dan in the Dan River area and the second in the direction of Kibbutz Ashmora east of the Huleh. Both attacks were easily repulsed. At the same time, the Syrians heavily shelled the Huleh Valley communities.

Israel decided to attack the Golan Heights only after much hesitation. The Egyptian front was considered the most threatening; Israel wished to avoid attacking Jordan and a breakthrough operation on the Golan Heights was sure to be difficult. An additional Israeli concern was that if it attacked on the Golan Heights, Damascus' Soviet patrons might react strongly. For these reasons, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan prevented the army from moving on the Golan Heights until five days into the war, when some of the forces assigned to the West Bank and the Sinai were done with their missions. In the meantime, the Israeli residents of the Galilee and the Huleh Valley were increasingly vocal in their calls to prevent

the Syrians from escaping punishment. A strong lobby was hastily organized to persuade the government not to end the war without removing the Syrian threat from the Golan Heights. It was one of those rare occasions in Israel's history when the civilian public demanded that a war be expanded, as it did not want to end the war before additional strategic objectives were reached. This had an enormous effect on the government's decision.

On the morning of Friday, June 9, Israel's forces were ordered to start moving. It was clear that the operation against the Syrians had to be swift and focus on the Golan, not on Damascus. The breakthrough battle was fierce and, thanks to Israel's control of the air, moved at great speed. The next day at noon the Syrian front completely collapsed and the town of Kuneitra was taken without a fight. From there the road to Mount Hermon was open.

One salient aspect of this period was the way in which the Syrians tripped up everyone—the other Arab states, Israel, and, especially, themselves—as they set in motion the train of events that led to the disastrous Arab defeat of June 1967. The new status quo established in the aftermath of June 10 marked the start of a new chapter in the history of the region.

THE LESSONS OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

Events between the Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 underscored Syria's military weakness given the new geographic reality. More than once the Syrians found themselves humiliated before an IDF which allowed itself to operate almost without hindrance in the depth of Syrian territory. Despite regular official pronouncements on the need for a military solution to the conflict with Israel, Damascus understood that the cherished Arab image of a tremulous Jewish state that could be easily put out of existence had been a costly illusion. A grinding war of attrition was taking place along the Egyptian border at the same time that the Palestinians were trying their hand at guerrilla warfare against Israel. The Syrians for their part tried to instigate incidents from time to time. But this front of the war of attrition was considered secondary by Israel's leaders, well aware that the Syrians had to be doubly careful given Israel's new proximity to Damascus and other population centers.

A pattern was nonetheless established whereby Israel reacted sharply to Syrian provocations, especially when Israeli communities were attacked. Afterwards tensions would generally abate for a few months until the next provocation. For the most part, retaliation was limited to border areas; between September 1972 and January 1973, however, the Israeli Air Force was used against military objectives inside Syria. Israeli planes flew sorties far into Syrian territory, reaching as far as the Syrian-Turkish border. The Syrians had to restrain themselves when the Israeli army operated against the various Palestinian organizations which had set up bases on the Lebanese side of the slopes of Mount Hermon, in the area which became known as Fatahland after Fatah's expulsion from Jordan following the 1970 civil war.

In their weakness, the Syrians pressured the Arab states to organize an eastern front against Israel. This front, which was to include the Iraqis, Lebanese and Jordanians in addition to the Syrians, was officially launched in September 1968, and an Iraqi general was appointed as supreme commander. But various disagreements kept the front from ever getting off the drawing board. After two years, it was clear they had failed to form a serious military organization that could challenge Israel. As a result, Syria came to view Egypt as a more likely partner in future military confrontations. In the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 the two made common cause against Israel.

Much has been written about the battles of the Yom Kippur War. For our purposes the following points are especially pertinent:

• *Syria went to war against Israel despite clear military weakness, especially in the air.* Various cumulative factors propelled it towards war notwithstanding its military inferiority and the likelihood that it would pay a heavy price. The necessary condition for a Syrian offensive, that it not have to face Israel alone, was met by Egypt's participation.

• *In the 1973 War Israeli deterrence failed.* Then, once the war broke out, Israel learned that despite its maneuverability and skill on the battlefield there was a limit to its strategic decision power.

- *The additional territory held by Israel is neither a constant nor an automatic deterrent against war.* The depth enjoyed by Israel because of the Golan Heights may remove the battlefield from Israel's vital areas, but this depth cannot, in and of itself, prevent the outbreak of war, especially one dictated by Syria's national interest. At the same time, the occupation of this territory can itself become a stimulant for war.

- *Geographic advantage is very important, but it cannot guarantee against military surprise.* Even the best electronic equipment cannot ensure timely warning. Israel was surprised by the Syrian offensive in the Yom Kippur War despite its electronic installations on Mount Hermon. To be sure, had Israel been surprised within the pre-1967 borders, its military situation would have been much more difficult, but, once surprise takes place, the defender's geographical advantage does not guarantee better maneuverability at the initial stage of the fighting. This is indeed what happened in the Yom Kippur War. It is doubtful that a pre-emptive strike would have changed the starting position in the 1973 War. Given the stage to which Syrian preparedness had progressed, airstrikes at the eleventh hour would have been unable to accomplish anything more than to hinder operations. Since Israel was unable to mobilize at full strength, airpower alone would not have sufficed.

- *The Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights may have been an impediment, not an aid, to Israel's ability to defend itself;* they played no role in the war, either in defending the Golan or even themselves. Rather, when Israel sensed that war was imminent, valuable time and energy had to be spent on evacuating those settlements. If these settlements had been large towns, they might have been an obstacle against an advancing enemy, but in the case of the Golan settlements it became clear they could have been a military liability.

- *Broader involvement at both the regional and the great power level combined to limit Israel's moves,* even after it had turned the tables on the battlefield. As Israel began to recover on the battlefield from the surprise attack and regain some of its offensive capability, it realized that various Arab states were quickly joining Syria. Arab expeditionary forces (Iraqi and

Jordanian) were arriving on the battlefield. While those forces did not change the general outcome of the war, they prevented Israel from advancing farther at the most critical moment of the war, when the Israeli threat against Damascus loomed, and with it the danger of a superpower conflict, as America went on nuclear alert.

Certainly the Syrians also drew some lessons from this war:

• *Israel's ability to recover on the battlefield was greater and faster than Syria had anticipated,* even after the initial surprise and shock of the Syrian attack. Syria's success in breaking through the front (to a depth of fifteen kilometers on the Golan) was a short-lived gain. In the Israeli counterattack which started a few days later, the IDF recovered the area lost on the Golan as well as an additional 600 square kilometers, including another section of Mount Hermon. At the war's end, Damascus itself was well within range of Israeli guns.

• *The present balance of forces makes it fundamentally difficult to defeat Israel on the battlefield.* If the joint armies of Egypt and Syria, which between them fielded a huge force, were not able to do it even under surprise conditions, it is doubtful they could do it in the future. Had Israel been pushed further from a military standpoint, it might have had recourse to use nuclear weapons to prevent defeat. The United States would then have had to come to Israel's rescue, if only to prevent such escalation. After the Yom Kippur War, Syria decided to nearly double the size of its army and add many costly weapon systems. As a result, Syria's economy was burdened by major defense expenditures and a growing dependency on arms suppliers, mainly the Soviet Union and its satellites.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1974 SEPARATION AGREEMENTS

The cease-fire following the Yom Kippur War went into effect on October 24, 1973, but this was not the end of the war on the Syrian front. Hoping to match what the Egyptians had achieved at the Suez Canal, i.e. canceling Israel's military gains in the war, Syria instigated many incidents. This proved to be a risky strategy: not only was Damascus within range of

IDF artillery, but much of Syria's heavy equipment had been lost during the October battles. The Syrians also had to take into consideration that the Egyptians had already achieved their objective in the war and it was doubtful they would come to Syria's aid if the latter became involved in new fighting with Israel. Nevertheless, the Syrians took the risk and for several months conducted a debilitating war of attrition. Especially heavy fighting took place around the section of Mount Hermon seized by the IDF during the Yom Kippur War. It was during that period, when the Syrians fought alone against Israel, that the theory of an independent Syrian military balance against Israel (or "strategic parity" as it later came to be called) began to take shape. During this war of attrition the Syrians did not register any military gains, but they did demonstrate an impressive endurance, which resulted in some political gains during the negotiations that followed.

On May 31, 1974, Israel and Syria signed a disengagement agreement in Geneva. The difficulty of those negotiations offers valuable lessons in Assad's negotiating style and basic tactics. Although he was defeated in the war, he began by demanding that Israel withdraw from the entire area of the Golan Heights. Later he demanded that the Golan be declared a buffer zone and that Israel withdraw in full. He even made demands in return for providing a list of Israeli prisoners of war.

Syria's gains in the negotiations were impressive, in spite of its lack of success on the battlefield. Although the Syrians had been repulsed from the entire area they had occupied on the Golan during the first stage of the war, and Israel captured new territory (the 600 kilometer salient and additional summits on Mount Hermon), Assad cut an impressive deal. He gained the return of all Syrian territory captured by Israel in the Yom Kippur War, along with the Syrian town of Kuneitra won by Israel in the Six Day War, and an important crossroads, Rafid. Israel's sole condition was that the additional positions it had captured on Mount Hermon be transferred to the UN rather than to the Syrian army. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who mediated between the parties, operated on the assumption that this package represented a worthwhile Israeli concession, since it might in turn lead to more comprehensive agreements. This logic did indeed take hold between Israel and Egypt, but not between Israel and Syria.

Syria saw to it that the agreement was not called a cease-fire but a "separation of forces," under which both sides agreed to refrain from any military action against each other. Syria insisted that the details of the military agreement not be handled by a separate Israeli-Syrian working group, but by the Israeli-Egyptian working group. Syria further insisted that monitoring and control be carried out by UN personnel. Assad was able, to a large extent because of Kissinger's indulgence, to successfully play another card: Israeli prisoners of war captured by the Syrian army. Exploiting the sensitivity of the Israeli public in this area, and without asking for any information about its own prisoners, Damascus insisted until the last moment that the prisoners of war held by the two sides be returned only after the military working group finished its task.

The Separation of Forces Agreement in the Golan Heights must be seen as of-a-piece with the two other agreements reached after the Yom Kippur War on the Egyptian front. According to the first Sinai agreement, signed on January 19, 1974, the IDF had to withdraw from the area it captured west of the Suez Canal. After the withdrawal the Egyptian army took control of the entire Suez Canal. This in effect meant that Israel put its imprimatur on an Egyptian military achievement despite the fact that the war had ended with the encirclement of Egypt's Third Army in the Sinai and with Israel's occupation of a large salient west of Suez. After the Separation of Forces Agreement was signed, a third post-Yom Kippur War agreement known as the Interim Agreement or Sinai II, the second with Egypt, was signed on September 1, 1975. Sinai II established a buffer zone between Egyptian and Israeli forces, defined areas where only reduced forces were to be deployed, and gave UN forces an enhanced peacekeeping role.

The uniqueness of this set of three agreements lies, first of all, in the fact that they were arrived at through the vigorous mediation and involvement of the United States, under Secretary of State Kissinger's able management. From this point on, Washington became increasingly involved in the Arab-Israeli peace process. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was pushed out of the diplomatic process. Thus, a new dynamic was initiated among some of the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as the road to the Camp David Accords was opened. The direct involvement of the United States in

preparing those agreements offered Israel a safety valve against Egyptian violations. The territorial factor in the conflict remained as important as before, and took on a new dimension with the creation of a buffer zone between the opposing forces.

Syria, for its part, improved its relations with the United States. About two weeks after it signed the separation agreements with Israel, on June 16, 1974, President Nixon visited Damascus, and, after a seven-year hiatus, diplomatic relations between the United States and Syria were renewed.

Ostensibly there is no connection between the Separation of Forces Agreements in the Sinai and the Golan Heights. But in secret letters exchanged at the time between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and American President Gerald Ford, Rabin saw to it that an indirect connection was established, one of some relevance to the current negotiations. Rabin raised the question of whether a new outbreak of war between Israel and Syria might not cause Egypt to break its agreement with Israel. President Sadat's answer, which was given to Kissinger, was that Egypt would not break its agreement if Israel was attacked by Syria, clearly implying that this would not be the case if Israel were to initiate an attack against Syria. In Rabin's eyes, this was sufficient reason to make a commitment, in a letter to Washington, that Israel would not attack Syria.

This was an achievement for both Egypt and Israel. Israel had obtained an Egyptian promise not to support a Syrian offensive, while Egypt was given an Israeli promise not to exploit the Sinai agreements to settle scores with Syria. Rabin did not stop at that, and sought American support in case Egypt broke the agreement. While it was clear that Washington would not endorse Israeli military action against Egypt, it was made equally clear that if Egypt committed a comprehensive violation of the agreement, Israel would have the right to defend itself. Another indirect connection to the Golan Heights was made apparent when Rabin sought an American promise that the Interim Agreement in the Sinai not become a precedent, or a model to be copied in an agreement with the Syrians on the Golan Heights.

It should be recalled that while Assad considered the Separation of Forces Agreement in the Golan an achievement, the Syrians were quite suspicious of the Interim Agreement between Egypt and Israel in the Sinai, which to Assad was tantamount to a separate peace. He further suspected that there

was a connection between the agreement in the Sinai and the sudden flare-up of fighting between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon, and that a plot was brewing to encircle and isolate Syria.

The larger strategic significance of the buffer/ demilitarized zone concept was that it meant that one need not be present on the ground throughout a given territory in order to secure it against an adversary, thus freeing valuable military resources. The Separation of Forces Agreement instituted a unique feature of solutions on the ground. Previous agreements had resulted in partial demilitarizing of various areas on both sides of the cease-fire lines. This time, however, the two sides agreed to establish buffer zones where no national forces were to be posted, only UN forces and observers. In other words, the old concept of holding on to the entire area at all cost, even if through reduced forces, was abandoned.

On the Golan Heights, it was decided that the buffer zone would be up to ten kilometers wide. Only Syrian civilians and police would be allowed there. For the first time in the history of the Golan, a UN force was introduced to the area, consisting of 1,280 soldiers with units from Austria and Finland (the latter having replaced Iran) and logistical units from Canada and Poland, aided by several dozen UN observers. Every six months, the Security Council is required to reaffirm the mandate of the separation force.

Two areas where only limited forces would be permitted were established on either side of the separation zone. In the first strip, ten kilometers wide, each side would maintain no more than seventy-five tanks, thirty-six short-range guns, and 6,000 troops. In the second strip, ten to twenty kilometers wide, there would be no artillery of a range longer than twenty kilometers. A limited number of tanks and guns (450 tanks of all kinds and 162 short-range guns) were allowed. It was further agreed that surface-to-air missile batteries would not be deployed within twenty-five kilometers of the lines where UN forces were stationed.

Both sides have adhered to the Separation of Forces Agreement since it was first reached, and violations have been negligible. The few times Palestinians crossed Syrian lines to commit acts of terror, the Syrians made sure such incidents were not repeated. Although Damascus did not alter its

fundamental stance of hostility towards Israel over the years, it did keep its agreement.

Syria has encouraged terrorist activities against Israel, and was even directly involved in some incidents, but not on the Golan Heights. Though Assad refused to include a commitment to refrain from terrorism in the agreement, he gave a tacit verbal promise to American mediators that he would act to prevent terror. Assad presented the Separation of Forces Agreement (but not his verbal promise to the Americans) to the Arab public as a Syrian achievement, arguing that Syria remained true to its principles by not signing a peace agreement. For Israel, the Golan, more than any other front, including the Sinai, has remained calm for nearly twenty years.

"RED LINES" IN LEBANON

In 1976, two years after the Separation of Forces Agreement, Damascus reached an additional meeting of the minds with Israel, the so-called "Red Lines" agreement, enabling both sides to coexist with their respective interests in Lebanon. This was not a written agreement but rather a tacit understanding. Still, it is important for relations between the two countries, as it addresses significant military interests of the two sides in Lebanon. This understanding, like its predecessor, was also reached through the mediation of the United States, without which it is doubtful it could have been concluded.

Assad did not enter into the "Red Lines" understanding with Israel of his own free will; from his standpoint, it was unavoidable, given his fear that the civil war in Lebanon might result in the collapse of the delicate multi-confessional balance of the government system, bring about massive Israeli military intervention, and harm Syria's vital interests in that country. He was gravely disturbed by the idea that the Muslim left in Lebanon, aided by the Palestinians, might push the Christians to operate independently of Damascus. This, as he. saw it, would be more dangerous than Israel and would also be a blow to the concept of Arab unity which was so vital to his Ba'athist ideology. He was also concerned that sectarian tension and the mounting civil war in Lebanon would spill over into Syria. Therefore, he envisioned a military

intervention that would stop the leftist/Palestinian pressure on the Christians and insulate Syria itself from the civil war.

Assad, seeing no alternative to military intervention in Lebanon, hoped to be able to do so without eliciting an Israeli military reaction. The memory of Syria's invasion of Jordan in September 1970, when Israel massed forces as a threat against Syria, was still fresh. Moscow was against Syrian military intervention in Lebanon, and was equally opposed to Syrian military activity against the PLO in Lebanon. Hoping to pressure Damascus, Iraq sent military forces to its border with Syria. But the most dangerous actor from Syria's standpoint was Israel, and the only way to prevent Israel from exploiting Syria's action in Lebanon was through the United States. In other words, Syria accepted America's commanding role when it meant removing an Israeli threat.

Washington gave tacit approval to the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in 1976 and became the emissary between Damascus and Jerusalem. (When, on June 1, Damascus moved its forces toward Lebanon, American diplomats saw to it that the Syrian chief of staff, Hikmat Shihabi, received Israel's warnings and objections.) The problem facing Washington was not only how to reach an understanding in this matter between Damascus and Jerusalem, but how to do so without appearing to foster an agreement between the two on the de facto division of Lebanon. In the end, it was deemed sufficient to have the Lebanese president invite the Syrians to his country.

The "Red Lines" understanding meant that Israel and Syria effectively recognized each other's security interests in Lebanon. Israel acquiesced to the Syrian military presence in certain areas in Lebanon, limiting those forces in the use of surface-to-air missiles. Syria, on the other hand, recognized Israel's security interests in southern Lebanon.

Israel's consent to the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon was given after a difficult internal debate. Until 1976, Israel was strongly opposed to any Arab military forces entering another Arab country with a common border with Israel, especially Jordan and Lebanon. Israel's mobilization in 1970 demonstrated that Israel interpreted the presence of another Arab army in Jordan as a *casus belli*. When in 1976, the question of Syrian forces entering Lebanon came up, the commanding general of the Northern Command at that time, Rafael Eitan, argued that the advance of Syrian forces to the

Lebanese-Israeli border should be seen as a serious danger to the many communities and vital military objectives in northern Israel. In contrast, the chief of staff, Mordechai Gur, and the head of military intelligence, Shlomo Gazit, argued that it was better for Israel to have the Syrian army deployed on two fronts—the Golan Heights and Lebanon—and thus stretched thin. They felt certain that once the Syrians became immersed in the complicated problems of Lebanon, the Golan Heights would become a lower priority. Prime Minister Rabin supported this view.

Rabin's decision was made easier by the willingness of the United States to support Syrian intervention in Lebanon. The news that the Syrians would prevent the slaughter of Christians also helped. When Washington endorsed Israel's demands for "Red Lines" in Lebanon, the Syrians were effectively given the green light to move. There is still some debate about the details of this unwritten agreement. But a conversation with Rabin at that time yielded three key elements:

• The Syrian army would not enter southern Lebanon and would not cross a line starting south of Sidon, on the coast, and running east to Ayisiya and from there towards the Syrian border;

• The Syrian army in Lebanon would not be equipped with surface-to-air missile batteries;

• The Syrian army would not use its air force against the Christians in Lebanon.

Washington tried to expand the understanding to include southern Lebanon, but this was not publicized at that time. The assumption was that if the Syrians were allowed to seize certain vital points in southern Lebanon (such as the bridges on the Litani River and the town of Nabatia), they could prevent the PLO from operating in southern Lebanon, and thus relieve Israel of the need to resort to military operations. Syria was willing to accept this arrangement, but Israel balked. Immediately after the Litani Campaign of March 1978, in which Israel entered southern Lebanon in response to the killing of thirty-seven Israelis in terrorist attack, Chief of Staff

Gur and military intelligence head Gazit raised a similar proposal with Rabin's successor, Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Though the proposal was accepted by Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and supported by Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, Begin rejected it outright.

The "Red Lines" understanding lasted for five years, until it was broken in April 1981 when Israel downed two Syrian transport helicopters it mistakenly thought were gunships attacking Christians, over northern Lebanon. In retaliation the Syrians introduced surface-to-air batteries into the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, which remained in place until they were destroyed by Israel during the Lebanon War of 1982. After that war, Syria and Israel returned to the old understanding regarding the "Red Lines." In one instance, Iraq sought to supply Christian forces with surface-to-surface FROG missiles. This in turn prompted Israel to overlook Syria's introduction of weapon systems, particularly light surface-to-air missiles, into northern Lebanon which were not part of the understanding with Israel. This was not publicized and these systems were withdrawn from Lebanon shortly thereafter.

LESSONS FROM THE 1982 WAR

The Lebanon War in 1982 once again highlighted Lebanon's centrality in the security policy of both Syria and Israel. While Lebanon plays a central role for Israel in all that relates to defending the northern border, for Syria it constitutes an area from which Syria's capital can be threatened and its vital interests put in jeopardy. In this respect, Lebanon, for better or worse, is a link connecting Syria and Israel.

In the course of the 1982 War, the Israeli debate over accepting a massive Syrian military presence in Lebanon was renewed. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon sought in effect to annul the 1976 "Red Lines" agreement, advocating total removal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. His assumption was that Israel had no chance of inducing Lebanon to sign a peace agreement with Israel as long as Syrian forces were stationed there. Thus he did not shy from making threatening moves against the Syrian force, and in the end caused a military conflict with them in Lebanon. Sharon succeeded in preventing the fighting from spilling over to the Golan Heights, but failed in his plan to remove the Syrians from

Lebanon. Begin did not wish to clash with the Syrians in Lebanon, but his government was pulled into it step by step.

The massive concentration of Israeli forces on the Golan Heights persuaded Damascus to avoid a serious entanglement with Israel in Lebanon. Syria simply could not open a second front without risking Damascus. Israel concluded that keeping the Golan Heights was indeed important to Israel's security as long as there was a state of war between itself and Syria.

Damascus learned once again that, at the moment of truth in a military contest with Israel, Syria will likely stand alone. This was demonstrated quite clearly in the 1982 War. Although Syria found itself in a very difficult situation during the war (among other things, its surface-to-air missile batteries in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon were destroyed, and a Syrian brigade was caught in the siege laid on Beirut by the IDF), it did not receive any help from the Arab states. The establishment of peace between Israel and Egypt, the largest Arab state, had changed the strategic picture between Israel and the Arab world. Syria's Soviet patron largely ignored the events in Lebanon. Israel's attack on the Syrian forces in Lebanon did not provide a sufficient reason for the Soviets to threaten Israel. It was thought that if Israel would have also moved on the Golan front and threatened Damascus, there would have been a more decisive Soviet intervention. Yet, when the IDF encircled another Arab capital, Beirut, and captured some parts of it, the Soviet position did not change. Moscow seemed more concerned about damage to the prestige of Soviet weapons, especially after Israel's massive attack on the Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles in Syria's possession, than with the military fortunes of its Syrian client. No wonder Damascus felt alone.

The 1982 War demonstrated Israel's clear technological advantage. Not only was its air force superior, but so were its command, control and intelligence, as well as its electronic warfare and its ability to deal with the Syrian surface-to-air missiles. One may recall that the Yom Kippur War had ended with the Syrian impression that the Soviet-made surface-to-air missiles had caused great damage to the aircraft of Israel's Air Force, which was American-made.

In spite of all this, the Lebanon War did not end as a strategic defeat for Syria. Syria could pride itself on the fact that, despite its inferior forces, its soldiers fought well in

Lebanon. Its army suffered losses, but it prevented the Israeli army from achieving all its objectives. The Syrians could not help those caught inside Beirut, but on the other hand the IDF did not reach vital points on the main Beirut-Damascus highway and did not drive the Syrian army from all of Lebanon. Instead, it had to make do with removing the Syrian army from the Bekaa Valley south of the Beirut-Damascus highway and forcing the Syrians to withdraw from Beirut. More significantly, perhaps, the peace agreement Israel signed with Lebanon in May 1983 did not come to fruition because of Damascus' objection, and the Christians, Israel's allies during the war, were further weakened. Israel delayed the withdrawal of its forces from Lebanon in the hope that the Syrians might also withdraw, but this did not come to pass. Israel confined itself to a narrow security strip it had created inside Lebanon along its northern border, while Syria remained in Lebanon.

When a new government came to power in Israel in 1984 with Yitzhak Rabin as defense minister, Israel returned to the "Red Lines" understanding. In effect it recognized the massive Syrian presence in Lebanon, while insisting on its own vital security interests in southern Lebanon, secured through the self-declared security zone. This is a temporary Israeli military presence which is not based on any Israeli territorial claims or demands regarding Lebanese water sources, as has been mistakenly argued more than once by various Arab parties. It represents, rather, the division of Lebanon into spheres of influence.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Four chief themes emerge from this historical overview of the face-off between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights:

• With each successive confrontation, the conflict widened and the strength, both numerical and physical, of the forces involved became more massive;

• The objects of Israeli-Syrian contention grew steadily in size and significance from minor grievances, such as agrarian rights, to broad strategic issues, such as withdrawal from occupied territory;

• Throughout the forty-five years since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrian military has consistently performed relatively better than any of Israel's other Arab antagonists;

• Israel and Syria, their long antagonism notwithstanding, do have a genuine history of shared agreements and quiet, mutual understandings.

II GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTRAINTS

   The area of the Golan Heights held by Israel, including Mount Hermon, covers 1,650 square kilometers. This is only part of the Heights, which cover a larger area that cannot be measured with precision. Despite its relatively small size, the Golan has been a geo-politically important region since antiquity, largely because of the critical land routes running through it. The ancient route from Damascus crossed the Heights to the Valley of Jezreel, then proceeded directly to the Mediterranean Coast and continued south to Egypt. This is the famed *Via Maris*, or "sea route," used by many armies throughout antiquity. To the east, another major route runs from Damascus through the Heights and along the Jordan River south to Eilat, on the shore of the Red Sea. Farther east were well-traveled routes to Iraq and to the Persian Gulf. In more recent times, oil pipelines from the Persian Gulf have been built on the Golan. In 1947, a pipe was laid from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in the direction of the Haifa harbor, but the 1948 War put a stop to its construction. Today, some fifty of the 1,750 kilometers of this pipe, known as the T.A.P. Line, run through Israeli territory, crossing the Golan Heights towards Sidon in Lebanon. Interestingly, Israel's indirect involvement in the transfer of oil from Saudi Arabia has not proved disagreeable to any side.
   It is no small wonder, then, that in the course of history, both regional states and outside powers often looked for a foothold in the Golan. The Golan has more than once been the scene of strife between kingdoms ruling in Syria and those in Palestine. Syrian rulers needed the Heights, which overlook

Palestine's valleys, for both defensive and offensive purposes. Those, on the other hand, who sought to prevent invasions from the direction of Syria, or themselves entertained designs on Damascus, considered the Heights a vital area. It was also strategically significant if one sought to attack the routes from Syria to Jordan, to separate the two countries, or to defend Jordan.

The area of the Golan Heights held by Israel is bounded on the west by the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee; in the north by Mount Hermon (known to the Syrians as Jabal al-Shaykh), which rises on the Israeli side to 2,224 meters (it is called Mount Dov on its western side); in the southeast by the deep bed of the Wadi Ruqad and the Yarmuq River; and in the east by the cease-fire lines of the 1973 War and the separation of forces lines established by the 1974 understanding. This line is marked by several volcanic hills (including Tel Faris, Yosifon, Avital, and Bental, which is 1,204 meters high) which, along with Mount Hermon, provide the Israeli force holding them with observation and fire-control posts covering large areas. The length of the cease-fire line, which is in effect the border between Israel and Syria, is eighty kilometers.

At its widest point, the width of the area between these borders is twenty-nine kilometers, in the southern part of the Golan; at its narrowest point, the width is sixteen kilometers. The Golan, in other words, does not offer substantial strategic depth. It is a relatively small operational area over which long-range guns can fire from end to end. By comparison, the Sinai Peninsula (currently demilitarized) provides Israel with a depth of 200 kilometers, and the West Bank is fifty to sixty kilometers wide. A further, and for Israel quite serious, difference between a demilitarized Sinai and a demilitarized Golan is that if the Egyptians should ever break the military agreement in the Sinai, it would be relatively easy for Israel to launch its forces into the flat desert area and deploy them in the center of the peninsula. By contrast, if Israel withdraws its forces from the Golan, it will be very hard for the IDF to scale the mountainous area rapidly in response to a treaty violation. A Syrian thrust through the demilitarized zone may readily beat Israel to it and seize the line overlooking the Huleh Valley.

The Golan Heights can be defended with relative ease. The area is defined by terrain which is difficult to cross, especially

the Yarmuq River, the Wadi Ruqad, and Mount Hermon. Since the Golan Heights area as a whole is hard to flank, it can be considered a buffer zone despite its small size. In an effort to make it difficult for anyone to move quickly through this area, the Israelis have constructed many military obstacles. If the Golan had been left uninhabited, it could be considered a classic buffer zone in which the Israeli army could freely maneuver. However, the growth of civilian settlements, offering many vulnerable civilian targets, has drained the Golan of much of its importance as a buffer zone.

ISRAEL'S PRIMARY INTEREST: SECURITY

Until the Six Day War, the Syrian border was Israel's most problematic because of the clear topographic advantage enjoyed by the Syrians on the Golan, providing virtual control over Israeli territory along almost all its seventy-seven kilometer length. The most difficult situation was on the southern end of the border, where steep slopes produced the most pronounced difference in height. For example, the Syrians harassed Kibbutz Tel Katzir, located 100 meters below sea level and near the Sea of Galilee, from a position near Kfar Tewfiq, 300 meters above sea level. More troublesome to Israeli security was the potential that Syria might, in an attempt to gain control over a significant portion of Israel's water supply, use this height advantage to attack the pumping station which draws water from the Galilee into the National Waterline supplying the Negev desert. In the central section of the Golan, the difference in height was less critical. Thus, for example, Kibbutz Hulata is seventy-five meters high, while the Syrian village Jalbina and its military posts were 275 meters high. In the north the height difference was greater, though it was gradual rather than steep as in the south. Israel enjoyed a local topographical advantage in only one spot, the Kurazim-Almagor area, where the Israeli side was 130 meters high, while the Syrian side in the Butayha Valley north of the Sea of Galilee was 130 meters below sea level.

This grim picture changed radically after the Six Day War. Today there is no longer any real threat against Israel's water sources in the north. The tables were turned against the Syrians, who totally lost their topographic advantage, which Israel, by controlling the Golan Heights, now enjoys, albeit

differently than did the Syrians. Israel's topographic advantage stems mainly from the control of Mount Hermon, a vantage point from which Israel can enjoy excellent long-range observation and make good use of electronic monitoring equipment. The posts on the western slopes also enable Israel to prevent terrorist infiltration from Lebanon. It is quite clear that a withdrawal from these territories will reduce Israel's warning space, shorten the time it will have to mobilize its reserves in case of surprise attack, and likely sharpen the perennial threat against its water sources.

Ultimately, it is the geography of the Golan Heights that renders it most decisive for Israel as well as for Syria. A comparison of the security value of the West Bank and the Golan is both helpful and instructive. The West Bank is of prime geo-military importance from Israel's standpoint, more so in fact than the Golan Heights, due to its proximity to most of Israel's vital targets and main population centers. Unlike the West Bank, the Golan Heights is sparsely populated. Most of the local residents were Syrian citizens who fled during the fighting in 1967, even before the IDF reached the Heights. Thus, the demographic constraint, which weighs heavily on Israel in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank, is absent on the Golan. Similarly, the danger of a serious uprising against Israeli rule by the civilian population along the lines of the *intifada* in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank does not exist. Should one occur, Israeli forces would have no difficulty in suppressing it.

Other constraints which exist on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip are missing entirely from the Golan Heights or are just barely present. A cluster of ideological, religious, and historical considerations are attached to the West Bank, but there are virtually no such attachments to the Golan. Although some ancient synagogues and other important remains of Jewish life in antiquity are scattered through the area, the argument that the region is part of the Biblical Land of Israel and is linked to it historically or religiously has not gained wide-spread support in Israel. It is true that before the international border separating Syria from Mandatory Palestine was finally determined in 1923, many in the Zionist leadership and British officialdom argued that it was more logical from a military standpoint to draw the border farther east and include parts of the Golan Heights in the British

Mandate. These demands were in fact taken into consideration, but rejected in the end by the British and the French. When the present border was set, it was recognized by the international community without any objection. Thus, when Israel was born, it was presented with an established border between itself and Syria, as was also the case regarding its borders with Egypt and Lebanon. Israel never questioned its border with Syria nor did it demand that it be changed. On the contrary, up to the Six Day War, Israel argued that it was Syria that generally tried to deviate from the international border and infringe on Israel's territory.

Thus, Israel's primary interests on the Golan Heights relate to security. The Golan Heights is mainly perceived by Israel's strategists as a buffer zone both for defensive purposes and, in the event of hostilities outside Israeli territory, for the conduct of war. The experience of the Yom Kippur War, which took place on the Golan Heights and further east, reflects both dimensions and reinforces Israel's prime objective in the north, i.e. to prevent the Syrian army, and any other forces, from using the Golan as a springboard for an attack on Israel proper.

The geographical constraints imposed by ownership of the Golan do not fall solely on Israel. While Israel felt these constraints most intensely until the Six Day War, since then it has been the Syrians who have felt the geo-military pressure. The distance from the Golan Heights to Damascus is about sixty kilometers. This proximity was vividly demonstrated to the Syrians during the last two wars. In 1973, the IDF came within thirty-five kilometers of the Syrian capital, while Israeli artillery was able to shell the southern approaches of Damascus. In the 1982 War, IDF forces advanced in the Lebanon Valley and were deployed south of the Beirut-Damascus road, such that the IDF was positioned on the western flank of Damascus. From the heights of Mount Hermon, one can, with relative ease, observe the entire area between the mountain and Damascus. Clearly, no nation would feel comfortable with this state of affairs, particularly when it had already been forced off the area in question during the course of a war. Thus it seems reasonable to anticipate that as soon as Syria felt strong and sure of itself, it would take the opportunity to remove the threat to its capital and recover the land it has lost. Therefore, in other words, no

reasonable solution to the military threats facing the parties on the Golan Heights can overlook the geo-military constraints facing them both.

In response to the disturbing proximity of Israeli forces to Damascus, the Syrians have built an intricate network of fortifications in the area between the Golan Heights and their capital city, including many antitank ditches along the depth of the area, as well as huge minefields. Israel has done the same on its narrow strip of land in the Golan Heights, which is now heavily fortified with obstacles and millions of mines. Both sides know that an attempted frontal breakthrough across these obstacles would cost the attacking side many lives, and that the price of victory would be high. It is only natural for both to try and find ways to circumvent these obstacles in time of war, and so they both have looked to Lebanon or perhaps even Jordan as an alternate route.

THE PRE-1967 SITUATION

From Israel's perspective, the situation prior to 1967 was especially threatening for three reasons. First, from their position atop the Golan Heights, the Syrians easily controlled the Israeli valley below—Israeli towns and villages were laid out before them as if on the palms of their hands. These communities were easily observed, and fired upon, even with light weapons and mortars from relatively short ranges. Any military or civilian movement in the valleys below was readily detected by the Syrian observation posts. From the cliffs of the Golan, the Syrians were easily able to paralyze daily life in the Israeli communities along the border, stop work in the fields and water pumping, and interrupt the work of the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, all of which they did numerous times. Psychologically, the local population often felt it was held hostage by the Syrians deployed over their heads.

The bitter memories of the not-so-distant past carried by these citizens have direct consequences for the current peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. Understandably, under no condition are these Israelis willing to return to the former situation, and they will do everything they can to influence Israeli public opinion and the Knesset members not to withdraw to the pre-1967 lines.

In addition to the Syrian mastery over the communities of the Huleh Valley and large portions of the Upper Galilee, pre-1967 Israel faced a second danger stemming from the geographical shape of the region. The Huleh Valley is a narrow strip only ten kilometers wide that resembles a long finger. From the east, it is controlled from the Golan Heights, while from the west and north, it is controlled by Lebanon. A Syrian army pouring down the Golan slopes could easily cut off this area from the rest of Israel by simply crossing the narrow valley with an armored column.

The third, and greatest, strategic headache for Israel, was Syrian control over some of the water sources of the Jordan, and its close proximity to other important water sources such as the Sea of Galilee. Of the three rivers that provide most of the water to the Jordan River, one originates in Syria (Banias) and another in Lebanon (Hasbani). Beyond that, a huge volume of water, about 300 million cubic meters per year, flows from streams and wadis in the Golan to the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, including Daliyot, Zaki, Yahudia, and Nahal Mashushim. Israeli water experts estimate that the Sea of Galilee basin provides some 30 percent of Israel's water consumption (about 610 cubic meters). Israeli sensitivity about the control of this critical resource is enormous.

Syria's past attempt at diverting—as part of a joint Arab plan—the water sources of the Jordan, has greatly heightened this sensitivity down to the present day. As discussed earlier, it was one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the Six Day War; earlier, in the 1950s, the Syrians interfered with Israeli development work related to the water sources, specifically the dredging project on the Israeli side of the Huleh Lake, designed to exploit the water of the Jordan to produce electric power, and irrigate the Negev in the south. The fact that the Syrians controlled the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was also considered a grave threat to Israel's water sources, as that body of water is Israel's only lake and only large reservoir. In short, Syria's control of Israeli water sources posed a serious strategic threat. Although people living in countries that enjoy the luxury of abundant water resources may find Israel's sensitivity to this problem difficult to understand, the scarcity of water in the region, in Israeli eyes, can readily threaten the state's very existence.

III POPULATION AND SETTLEMENTS

   The three major constraints outlined in the last chapter all
stemmed from the geo-military reality. The concerns they
elicited on Israel's part seemed perfectly logical to it and to
many of its friends. It would have made perfect sense, after
1967, for Israel to have the Golan serve as a buffer zone for the
valley below, which had so frequently been subject to Syrian
attack. But the strength of Israel's arguments was weakened
after it moved to establish new settlements on the Golan
Heights, which in turn created new military problems of their
own. The occupation of the Golan Heights did indeed remove
the Syrian threat from the communities of the Huleh Valley,
but the establishment of new settlements in the occupied area
brought Israeli civilian targets within range of Syrian guns.
   The Golan settlement program was undertaken almost
reflexively, following the time-honored Zionist tenet that
settlement and agriculture determine borders. This had long
been a key element of the Zionist ethos; however, though both
suitable and well-advised during the years before the birth of
the State of Israel, it was ill-suited to the present-day border
disputes between Israel and the Arab states. Moreover, the role
of settlements in Israel's security thinking was itself changing.
The geo-security factor, which had been so crucial in Israel's
decision to establish communities in the Huleh Valley prior to
1967, was no longer the chief motivation for establishing new
settlements on the Golan Heights, close to Syrian lines. Even
the late General (Reserve) Moshe Bar-Kokhba, a man of
hawkish views who argued against removing Golan
settlements in exchange for peace with the Syrians, admitted

that from a military standpoint it was a mistake to build settlements on the most advanced frontline on the Golan. According to him, settlements should have been built farther behind, while the frontline should have been left as a security zone, allowing the army to conduct flexible defense. There is no disputing the fact that as the settlements in the Golan have increased, the IDF has found it increasingly difficult to conduct maneuvers and train with live fire.

THE HISTORY OF GOLAN SETTLEMENT

The first group of Israelis to settle the Golan Heights was organized in July 1967, roughly a month after the Heights were captured by Israel. The initiative came from a number of kibbutzim in the Galilee, and the idea was to create facts on the ground that would prevent the return of the Syrians. That month Yigal Allon (one of the architects of Israeli strategy), then serving as minister of labor, brought a proposal before the Knesset to establish work camps on the Golan Heights. Settlements were not mentioned and the settlers were first housed in an abandoned camp of the Syrian army, with the implication that their presence was temporary, and that they would farm. Not all the ministers were happy with this decision, nor with the government's stated intention to assign to the Golan two groups, settlement nuclei, whose members had served in NAHAL units.[1] A month later, when the government held further discussions which included the question of settling in the Sinai, Police Minister Eliyahu Sasson of the Labor Party said: "How can we establish posts out there, spend money and settle people, and then we may have to evacuate?" This was not idle speculation: on July 19, 1967, the Israeli government had decided it was prepared to withdraw to the international border on both the Golan Heights and Sinai if the Syrian and Egyptian governments were prepared to sign a peace treaty. The Israeli proposal, transmitted to Damascus and Cairo by the United States, was immediately rejected. Nevertheless, many of the ministers did not despair of the possibility that the defeated Arabs might reconsider the generous Israeli proposal. In the meantime, there was no

---

[1]NAHAL is a branch of the IDF, assigned to border areas, that combines routine border patrols with some settlement activity.

tendency in the Israeli government to establish facts on the ground.

The members of the aforementioned group began the first settlement, Kibbutz Merom Golan, near the abandoned Syrian town of Kuneitra in the north of the Heights. Additional Israeli settlements followed, one by one. After the Yom Kippur War, a new wave of Israeli settlement swept the Golan, apparently because the war reinforced the notion that there was no chance of ever reaching a peace agreement with the Syrians. By the time the Israeli and Arab delegations met at the Madrid peace conference of October 1991, there were thirty-two Israeli settlements in the Golan. Shortly before Madrid, the Israeli government spoke of a plan to double the amount of settlements on the Golan. In the summer of 1991, the Israeli settlement of Kanaf was established, and another was scheduled shortly thereafter. Generally the government paid 80 percent of the cost of establishing these settlements. At the time of the Madrid conference, the government had plans to pave new roads, including a new road to Mount Hermon, and replace several bridges on the Jordan.

Unlike the settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Golan settlements generated little or no fear that they might prevent a resolution of the conflict when the time for it came. It would be no exaggeration to say that, in the case of the Golan Heights, there was a national consensus in favor of Israeli settlement.

There is no better proof of this than the participation of the Kibbutz Artzi-Shomer Ha'Tzair movement in the enterprise of settling the Golan Heights. Kibbutz Artzi is the settlement arm of the leftist Mapam party, which has always supported a far-reaching compromise with the Palestinians, has long been willing to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state, and has always opposed the establishment of settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Yet, in the Golan Heights, Mapam's approach was totally different. Two of the Golan settlements, the kibbutzim of Geshur and Natur, both in the south of the area, belong to the Kibbutz Artzi. A third kibbutz of the Kibbutz Artzi, Snir, was built on land once occupied by the Syrian army in the demilitarized zone on a grade rising from the Huleh Valley to the northern Golan Heights. The members of Kibbutz Artzi and Mapam well understood the seeming contradiction between their ideological opposition to

any Israeli settlement beyond the Green Line and their decision to take part in the settling of the Golan Heights. They dealt with this inconsistency by saying that Israel, which had been attacked from the Golan Heights, had a right to seize the land and that while whey were prepared to settle the Golan, should a new reality develop that would prove those settlements an obstacle to peace, they would prefer peace. This compromise position demonstrates just how remote they thought the chance of reaching a peace agreement with the Syrians to be. Today, as a result of the peace talks between Israel and the Syrians, the issue has been joined, and for the first time a heated debate has flared up regarding the fate of the Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights; many members of Kibbutz Artzi argue that after so many years there is no reason to force those settlers to leave their homes and destroy their communities.

All the pioneering movements affiliated with Israel's parties have taken part in the establishment of settlements on the Golan Heights, except for Gush Emunim. The latter has concentrated on settling the West Bank, and helped settle the Gaza Strip, but the Golan Heights remained outside its direct scope of interest. The Herut movement, which invested great effort in settling the West Bank, did not pay much attention to the Golan Heights until 1976, when it established its one settlement, a moshav called Shaal, in the northern Golan. By contrast, the activist wing of the National Religious Party, HaPoel Ha'Mizrahi, was active in the Golan, where it established many settlements.

The Golan exhibits all the forms of settlement—kibbutzim, moshavim, semi-collective moshavim, communal settlements, and even one town, Katzrin.[1] The settlements are spread throughout the region, in the north, center and south, and have been carefully planned.

The number of Jewish settlers on the Golan presently stands at roughly 12,500, of whom 3,500 live in the town of Katzrin. In contrast to the West Bank, there has never been a major influx of Israeli settlers into the Golan Heights. Many visit the area, and some make use of the Hermon's ski slopes in the wintertime. Over the years the settlers made the region,

---

[1]A moshav is a cooperative farm; a kibbutz is a socialist collective.

which consists largely of volcanic rock, blossom and now export many of its products to various cour.tries, including prize-winning wines. In addition, light industry was established in the area, including high-tech firms.

The Syrians perceive this settlement activity as a concrete manifestation of Israeli expansionism, one that subverts the argument made by the Israelis that their continued presence on the Golan Heights is to protect the valley communities below. Assad has wryly commented that, by this reasoning, Israel should occupy another area in order to create a buffer zone for the settlements on the Golan Heights, and so on *ad infinitum*. Rhetoric aside, what greatly complicates matters is the fact that the new settlements genuinely burden Israel's ability to maneuver in negotiations with Syria. The presence of settlements on the Golan makes it difficult to reach even an interim agreement between Israel and Syria. Since most of the settlements were deliberately established near the frontline, the dilemmas involved in removing settlements from territory which is to be either demilitarized or returned to Syria threaten to enter the process at even early interim stages. The settlements, in other words, have transformed any potential negotiations between Israel and Syria from a discussion of the military uses of territory into a negotiation over the extremely sensitive matter of the removal and destruction of settlements. This, in turn, is sure to make the negotiations a most difficult psychological process and an explosive domestic political issue for Israel.

This problem is likely to greatly complicate Israel's ratification of the results of negotiations. Ever since the traumatic dismantling of Israeli settlements in the Sinai as required by the Camp David Accords, there has been great reluctance in Israel to countenance such action another time. The collective agony experienced by the entire political spectrum in Israel at the time could be much greater if such an evacuation is repeated. Many Israelis have by now lived on the Golan Heights for over twenty-five years—an entire generation has come of age on the Heights. Golan Heights settlers argue that, unlike the West Bank settlers of Gush Emunim, they did not go there because of mystical religious reasons, but were sent there by the Israeli government and through broad national support. Moreover, while the merits of retaining the West Bank have been the subject of public debate

for some time, there has, until the current peace process, been a solid national consensus behind retaining the Golan. The removal of these settlements may be the price of peace, yet there are many in the Knesset and in the general public who consider this price too high. Many Israelis believe that peace should not result in shock and refugees, but should open doors for hope.

This development was not anticipated by the Israeli government in its Golan settlement programs. Although the Labor government was sensitive enough to avoid settling populated areas on the West Bank (the Likud government, by contrast, purposely built settlements in populated areas in order make territorial compromise even more difficult), that was not the case on the Golan Heights. The reason for this can be found in the fact that Israel has always thought of Syria only in military terms, and believed its conflict with that country would go on forever. Frankly, Israel has had good reason to think this way. Syria was an extremist state, one which not only supported terrorism but through its leadership of the rejectionist front that attempted to isolate Egypt after it signed the Camp David Accords, sought to prevent Arab attempts to reach comprehensive political agreements with Israel. Damascus always spoke of the need to solve the conflict with Israel, which it saw as a continuation of the Crusades, through the force of arms.

Israeli security doctrine since 1967, therefore, has been based on the assumption that since control of the Golan Heights was vital, they could not be given up. Thus, over the years, the possibility that the Golan could become a bargaining chip for a peace settlement with Syria was rejected out of hand. Just as Israel worked hard to project this understanding to the Israeli public, Syria produced much propaganda to convince its public that peace cannot be made with Israel. This approach continued after peace was established between Israel and Egypt, even though the Egyptian example proved that there are no eternal enemies, that things do change, and that what was true yesterday will not necessarily be true tomorrow.

THE NON-JEWISH POPULATION

Besides the Israeli settlements, the Golan is home to four Druze communities with some 12,000 inhabitants. The Druze

did not flee during the war, and some of the villagers collaborated with Israel prior to the Six Day War. Some were captured by the Syrian security forces, jailed for many years, and even executed. Over the years the Druze have split between those who support Israel and those who support Syria; as the chance for a peace settlement has grown, and with it the likelihood that either a part or the entire area may return to Syria, the voice of those who claim to be Syrian Druze has grown louder. Some, with Israel's approval, send their sons to study in Syrian universities. In the meantime they maintain extensive economic ties with Israel. It should be mentioned that there is a large Druze community in Israel, whose sons serve, and sometimes fall, in the IDF.

Another village, Ghajar, should be included among the non-Israeli settlements on the Golan Heights. Though according to the maps this village is located in Lebanon, on the Syrian-Lebanese border, it was effectively under Syrian control even before 1967. Its residents are Alawite Muslims, the religious sect to which Syria's President Assad belongs and Ghajar is the only Alawite village under Israeli control. Its importance stems from its location, on the east bank of the Hasbani River, and near one of the important waterheads, 'Ayn al-Wazani, which is a water source of the Jordan River.

Any discussion of the population of the Golan Heights is incomplete without mention of those who lived there before the Israeli occupation and those who may wish to return to the Golan someday. Some of the previous Golan population settled there in the nineteenth century, including Circassians who escaped from their land and were settled on the Golan by the Turks. The Circassians established twelve settlements and constituted the majority of the town of Kuneitra. In addition, Turkomans and Mughrabs who originated in Algeria also settled in the Golan, along with Alawites and some Christians.

Until the 1948 War, the area was economically underdeveloped. The residents lived, according to Syrian sources, in 135 locations, many of them small villages. There were farms in the region engaged in agriculture and raising sheep, and some small industries. Though the Golan Heights was declared by the Syrians to be a military zone, civic and economic activity in the area grew. One of the Syrian settlements was the town of al-Hama located in the valley between the Golan Heights and the Jordan River. This Arab

town, at the point where the borders of Israel, Syria and Jordan meet, was included until 1948 in Mandatory Palestine. After the 1948 War it became part of the demilitarized zone, and was controlled by the Syrians until recaptured by the IDF in 1967.

When the battles of the Six Day War broke out, the Syrian residents of the Golan began to flee northward from their villages. As the armored columns of the IDF began to scale the mountain and break through the Syrian lines, their flight became a stampede. Nearly all the residents fled, except for the Druze in their four villages in the northern Golan. The refugees headed north to the Damascus area and scattered throughout Syria. During and after the war (though mostly after the war), the many empty villages were completely destroyed. Some of the vestiges of those villages can be seen by travelers on the Golan roads.

According to Syrian sources there were 153,000 residents before the war, 27,000 in Kuneitra alone. According to those sources, the number of former residents of the Golan Heights now reaches 200,000. There is no doubt that most of them will choose to return to their homes if and when the Golan Heights are returned to the Syrians, or even if Syrian sovereignty over the region is reestablished and civilian life is normalized. To resettle them, it will be necessary to build new homes on the Golan. It is quite doubtful that Jewish settlement activity will be able to continue alongside the Syrian villages which will be reestablished on the Golan since some of the settlements cultivated land belonging to the former residents. Even if they were permitted to do so, it is doubtful that the Israeli settlers will wish to remain in Syrian territory. As one of the Jewish settlers has put it: "I did not come to live in Israel to find myself living in Syria under Syrian rule."

IV   MILITARY IMPORTANCE

Since the day of the Golan's capture by Israel in the Six Day War, there has been no public debate in Israel, or even any publicly expressed differences of opinion, with respect to its military importance. The prevailing view throughout Israel has been that, militarily, the Golan is an utterly vital area and must not be relinquished. Indeed, it has been relatively easy to convince almost any foreign visitor of this by taking him or her to the area to see the steep height for themselves and thus understand how the Golan controls Israeli territory. Even those who are now willing to give up the Golan Heights in return for a peace treaty with Syria and true peaceful relations do not discount its military importance.

The Golan is undoubtedly important to Israel from a military standpoint. But this importance must be precisely understood and ultimately assessed by the public.

The military dimension of the long-standing Israel-Syria impasse is not limited to the Golan itself, but must be seen in broader territorial terms, especially with regard to security arrangements. Just as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for security purposes, the overall area of Israel, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must be seen as one military bloc, so too in the Israeli-Syrian conflict, there is a greater military bloc than the specific area under dispute. This bloc includes the Golan, the Upper Galilee within Israel, the Bekaa Valley, and southern Lebanon. Any prospective war between Israel and Syria would likely spread rapidly to all these areas and not remain localized on the Golan Heights. Moreover, because of the major military obstacles erected by the Israelis and the

Syrians on the Golan (especially minefields and fortifications), it is only natural for both sides to plan on circumventing those obstacles with flanking movements through Lebanon or even northern Jordan. Israel sees the Bekaa Valley as one of the routes a Syrian army might use to approach the Israeli border, just as Syria correctly sees an Israeli advance in the Bekaa Valley north to the flank of Damascus, as happened in 1982, as a real threat. It is thus inconceivable, for example, that the IDF would withdraw from the Golan while Syrian forces remain in the Bekaa Valley, or as long as various militias continue to operate in southern Lebanon, aided by Syria and Iran, attacking Israeli targets. The areas to be considered for demilitarization in any peace agreement between the two countries will encompass Syrian, Israeli and Lebanese territory. The security arrangements, in other words, will have to span areas falling under the sovereignty of all three states, and not just the section of the Golan Heights currently occupied by Israel.

The Golan's chief significance to Israel resides in its offensive potential. That is to say, it provides Israel with an excellent springboard into Syrian territory and to the gates of Damascus should Israel find itself under attack. Should Israel choose to mount a counterattack against a 1973-style Syrian attack, it would be preferable by far to launch it from the Golan Heights. Considering the firepower which the Syrian army currently possesses, there is no guarantee that the IDF would be able to repeat its feats of 1967; scaling the mountain, even if possible, would inflict enormous costs.

From the heights of Mount Hermon, Israeli intelligence can observe the Syrian capital and see Syrian military deployments over a large area. Holding the Golan assures Israel better battlefield management and containment of attacking forces in wartime. Moreover, holding the Golan insures that should Syria attack Israel, the ensuing war would be conducted not on Israeli but on Syrian territory. The Syrians know this, and thus the Golan serves as an important Israeli deterrent against Syrian aggression.

The Golan is also important for the defense of Israel, especially the Galilee. It affords greater territory, facilitates the defense of the Huleh and allows greater time for the mobilization of reserves. One should not, however, rush to conclude that Israel's very existence depends on the defensive

Jordan Valley and Golan Heights
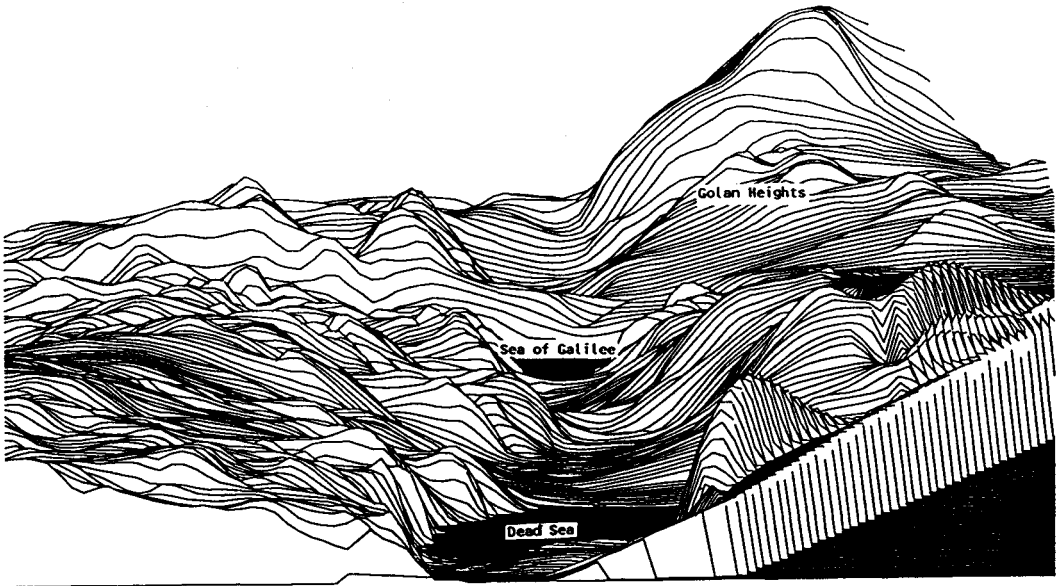
© Map reprinted with permission of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Control of the Middle East Arms Race,* by Geoffrey Kemp with the assistance of Shelley A. Stahl, 1991.

capabilities of the Golan.[1] Holding the Golan is important for the defense of the Galilee in case of war; beyond its defensive, territorial uses, it also ensures protection of water sources. While the importance of the Golan as a territorial defensive strip for the Galilee does not go beyond operational importance, the water issue has strategic and existential importance for Israel. A withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the 1967 borders would leave Syria sitting on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, as the former international border was, by its terms, only ten meters from the lake at its northeastern end. Since the border was defined as being ten meters from the shore, if the water level in the Sea of Galilee should go down, as has happened in recent years, the border will move westward, leading to Syrian encroachment and domination of Israel's only major water reservoir.

The military conclusion to be drawn from the above observations is that, as long as there is no stable peace between Israel and Syria, Israel cannot afford to descend from the Golan Heights. As long as there is a chance that war may break out, Israel must not give up its hold on the Golan.

Yet this weighty military conclusion bears a heavy military and political price tag, inasmuch as the chance of Israel ever signing a peace treaty with Syria as long as the Golan Heights are in Israeli hands is rather slim. And some day Israel may confront a new generation of Syrian leadership that will not accept this status quo and will not be afraid of entering into war with Israel, even if Israel still retains control of the Golan Heights.

---

[1] The West Bank, for instance, abuts many more vital targets in Israel (such as mobilization centers, industrial zones and population centers) than does the Golan.

V   ISRAEL'S SECURITY CONCEPT

What are Israel's deepest concerns regarding Syria? How does Israel assess the threats it faces from Syria? How does Israel propose to deal with these threats? An answer to these questions will help clarify both the degree of risk Israel is willing to take in negotiating a peace settlement with Damascus, which will almost certainly include withdrawal, and what Israel will insist on in security arrangements with its neighbor to the north.

Israel's chief concerns on the northern border include the following:

• *The possibility of a Syrian surprise attack and the need to foil it with as few casualties and as little damage as possible.* This has generally been Israel's main concern *vis-à-vis* Syria. Of special concern is the possibility of a surprise attack against Israel taking place simultaneously on two fronts and the subsequent entry into battle of Arab expeditionary forces, as happened in the Yom Kippur War. In light of these concerns, Israel has always sought to prevent the coalescence of an eastern front in which Syria might play a central role.

• *Syria's acquisition of chemical weapons and development of biological weapons.* Syria has recently begun to assemble and produce its own surface-to-surface missiles and arm them with chemical warheads. This negative development may force Israel to react decisively and perhaps eventually take the extreme measure of resorting to the use of unconventional weapons.

• *Defending Israel's northern water sources, which originate mostly in Syrian or Lebanese territory.* Defending the water sources

includes removing any threat to the Sea of Galilee, which is entirely within Israel yet close to the border. It cannot be stressed often enough that this lake is Israel's only major water reservoir. The defense of the water sources is a strategic objective of supreme importance.

 • *Removing any and all military threats from the Lebanese border.* This threat can translate into the massing of Syrian forces in southern Lebanon or in the Bekaa Valley or through terrorist deployment in southern Lebanon, by Palestinian, Lebanese, or other groups. To the extent to which these terrorist groups may be aided by outside sponsors, such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the case of Hezbollah, the risk they pose increases accordingly.

 • *An overall concern that Syria might play a negative role in the region.* This would take the form of preventing other Arab parties from making progress towards mutual understanding and peace arrangements with Israel (as it did by leading the rejectionist front which isolated Egypt for a decade after making peace with Israel) or by serving as a corridor for Iran and Iranian-sponsored organizations to penetrate the Middle East and engage in hostile activities against Israel.

Israel has sought to address these concerns in different ways, mostly in the military sphere. Until the 1973 War, Israel saw its conflict with Syria in zero-sum terms, with any Syrian gain resulting in an automatic loss for Israel. The first clear indication of change in this approach was the tacit understanding between Syria and Israel regarding the "Red Lines" in Lebanon.

Before 1973, the contest on the ground often focused on seemingly small matters, which yet were deemed to entail basic issues which might determine Israel's fate. Israel thought its insistence on planting and cultivating every last inch next to the border seemed to be the best way to convince Syria of its resolve. Reprisal for any Syrian attack against Israel was thought to be the best way to deter Syria from further attempts. The working assumption throughout was that any concession might be misconstrued as weakness and would invite further and more severe provocations from the Syrian side. Israel repeatedly reminded the Syrians that the distance to their capital city was shorter than the distance from the border to Israel's capital. The thinking always was that war with Syria was almost inevitable, and everything was based upon this

assumption. The civilian communities in the north along the border (and even away from the border) were organized as part of a regional defense network. There was no doubt that such a war would break out, and that, after the first round, there would be a second one, and so on. The Syrians for their part unremittingly spoke in terms of military solutions, the need to eliminate the "Zionist entity," and so forth. Over the years, Syria was thus considered to be Israel's most extreme and vicious enemy, with whom there was no chance of ever reaching a peace settlement.

More than once, the question arose as to whether it would be well-advised for Israel to initiate a preventive war against Syria to arrest its military growth before it became strong enough to attack Israel, but these discussions never moved beyond theoretical debate. In 1956, Israel, after much tension, initiated a preventive war against Egypt, which it considered its major and most dangerous Arab enemy. Similarly, Israel took the initiative in attacking Syria only after the Syrian threat against Israel became most palpable and was directed against strategic Israeli objectives, i.e. when Syria sought to divert the sources of the Jordan River.

The Six Day War is not perceived by Israel as having been a preventive war à la 1956, but rather as a pre-emptive attack meant to defeat an immediate threat. This emerges more clearly in light of the Syrian shelling of the Israeli border settlements during the first days of the war, which preceded the order to the IDF to move on the Heights. It is possible that the situation would have changed radically had Syria, following the Iraqi example, tried to develop nuclear weapons. Israel might then have thought in terms of a direct attack or even a preventive war.

At different times in the course of the conflict with Syria, the relative emphases in Israel's overall security concerns in the north have shifted. From the 1950s to the Six Day War, the chief desideratum was the defense of the communities of the Huleh Valley, along with defending the country's water sources. In the 1970s and 1980s, security efforts focused on preventing terrorist activity and infiltration into Israel from Lebanon, through hundreds of military actions and literally thousands of sorties by aircraft. Among other things, this course of action caused a bloody war in Lebanon in 1982. Earlier, in 1978, Israel, in response to a terrorist attack,

launched a major military campaign (Operation Litani), which in turn brought thousands of UN soldiers to southern Lebanon.

The focus on preventing terrorism and stopping Palestinian and other groups from crossing the Israeli border did not, however, eclipse other dangers. Israel was surprised by Syria in the 1973 War and paid dearly for it. While Israel has controlled the sources of the Jordan since the Six Day War, the need to defend them in time of war, or even after a peace settlement, is never far from the thoughts of Israeli defense planners.

Israel well remembers the surprise of the Yom Kippur War, and it is no hyperbole to say that it will continue to haunt the IDF forever. On the eve of the Yom Kippur War, Israeli intelligence thought it had a clear idea of what was taking place in Syria. Though Israel knew a great deal, it neither understood Syrian intentions nor President Assad's decision to join Egypt in war against Israel.

For our purposes, the lesson of this episode is that a military surprise is possible in the future even if Israel continues to control the Golan and keep the warning posts on Mount Hermon. Even the best intelligence can misread the offensive picture taking shape across the border. Although Israel does arguably enjoy good coverage over Syria, it must attempt to take into account what it cannot see, and that which will continue to evade its probing eyes.

Surprise is all the more possible in the Golan because of the close proximity of Syrian and Israeli forces to each other. The Syrian army does not need much preparation to effect a swift military thrust that would seize parts of the Golan. The short distance that Syrian armor would need to cross in order to reach the lines allows for fast movement, directly from their bases. It is also easier for the Syrians to achieve surprise on the Golan because of the structure of their army, which consists mainly of regular forces, in marked contrast to the IDF which maintains only a relatively small standing force and relies mainly on reserves. Should military surprise be coordinated with other Arab states, as happened in 1973, the blow could be even harsher than the opening phases of that war, and recovering from it would require many more sacrifices. Finally, the attacking side will also have a greater chance to establish new facts on the ground.

Military surprise would not necessarily be limited to a Syrian attempt to capture the Golan Heights or even just parts of it in the first stage of the war. Because Syria has armed itself in recent years with surface-to-surface missiles, the surprise may initially take the form of missile launches (either launched separately or in tandem with the movement of ground forces) against both military and civilian targets inside Israel. The effort that Syria has expended in acquiring new and better missiles, including building its own production line of ballistic missiles, manifests an intent to use them. Syrian missiles can now reach all of Israel's territory. Aided by foreign experts, the Syrians have also been able to build chemical warheads to bolster their missile arsenal.

Indeed, Israel assumes that in the event of a Syrian surprise attack, missiles will play a significant role in the Syrian strategy. Such an attack could include the use of chemical weapons against military objectives, such as Israeli airfields and command and communications centers, as well as emergency supply centers where Israeli reserve forces are equipped for war. Since much of Israel is densely populated, with military bases located near civilian population centers, Israeli civilians would be at risk even if the Syrians intentionally tried to limit their attacks to military targets as was the case in 1973 when Syria launched FROG missiles against an Israeli Air Force base in the north which missed their targets and hit a nearby community. This attack in turn prompted Israel to launch strategic air bombing inside Syria, including attacks on various objectives inside Damascus, thereby escalating the hostilities.

Concern over a Syrian surprise attack has led Israeli planners to attach great significance to keeping the Golan Heights, plain and simple. The territorial factor is central in overall Israeli defense thinking. Moreover, especially with regard to the Syrians, it also provides the most comfortable answer to another Israeli concern, namely the water sources, as holding the Golan keeps the Syrians away from the sources of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. The many innovations in military technology, such as ballistic missiles, have not changed this approach; on the contrary, in the minds of many Israeli military leaders, these innovations have made the territorial factor even more important. Deputy Defense Minister and former Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur has said in

this regard that "as the importance of military technology grows, the importance of the commanding areas, such as the Golan, for Israel's defense also grows. In a war with Syria without having control of the Golan, Israel may face a very difficult situation." Many senior military officers, both on active duty and in the reserves, share this view. Even those who are willing to give up the Golan as part of a land-for-peace deal, such as Major General (Res.) Avigdor Ben-Gal, do not deny that the Golan is vital for Israel in case of war.

An English-language information booklet issued by the IDF in January 1992 included a passage taken from a study done in 1967 for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, which was not made public until 1983. Regarding the Golan Heights, the study stated, *inter alia*:

> Israel must hold the commanding terrain east of the boundary of June 4, 1967 which overlooks the Galilee area. To provide a defense in depth, Israel would need a strip about fifteen miles wide extending from the border of Lebanon to the border of Jordan. The presently occupied territory, the high ground running generally north-south on a line with Kuneitra about fifteen miles inside the Syrian border, would give Israel control of the terrain which Syria has used effectively in harassing the border area.

This has been the Israeli security concept since 1967, and it has not changed significantly with Damascus' participation in the current peace process and its direct negotiations with Israel. Yet time does not stand still, and new realities may demand new thinking. Long-standing fears, however well-grounded do not obviate the necessity of dealing with the complex question of whether Syria has a military option *vis-à-vis* Israel today.[1]

The Soviet-Syrian strategic partnership collapsed with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, making it increasingly difficult for Damascus to procure the best equipment for its forces. Syria enjoys only limited access to advanced Western weapon markets, while Israel not only has great access to Western (especially American) arms, but it also has an extensive ability to produce advanced weaponry on its own. No country continues to provide Syria with large quantities of

---

[1]Moreover, the old concerns have been joined in recent years with new ones, in the form of unconventional weapons such as chemical-armed warheads.

equipment, spare parts and weapons as soon as they are needed. The ability to reequip after a war is especially important given the enormous loss of materials experienced in wartime. Arab experts such as Ahmed Khalidi and Hussein Agha argue that Israel also enjoys one-sided technological superiority in conducting operations and training, and in the quality of weapons, while Syria's forces lag far behind the latest military technology. They thus conclude that in the future the qualitative gap will continue to increase in Israel's favor, and that if there is no change, Syria's deterrent capability will decline. The Syrians are particularly worried that Israel may—with the help of the United States—develop a capability for handling the threats posed by ballistic missiles.

Additionally, since Syria has no Arab partner for a serious military adventure against Israel, it does not, at present, have the option of initiating a prolonged and comprehensive war against Israel. More precisely, an independent Syrian military option against Israel does exist, but only partially. The Syrian army would find it very difficult to carry out a full-scale offensive against Israel, and can only hope to achieve limited military objectives. Syria can undoubtedly cause damage and inflict losses upon Israel. If its forces manage to surprise the IDF, it can seize parts of the Golan Heights, at a high price. But it can only take that risk if it can be sure the international system will save it from defeat in the inevitable second stage of the war, when Israel's qualitative edge may tilt the balance in the fighting, and if it feels that, as a result of the conflict, post-war political moves can provide Syria with what it has been unable to achieve in any other way.

Despite all this, Syria's military might should not be underestimated. To be sure, Syria, despite its best efforts, has not been able to achieve its long-sought strategic parity with Israel, a concept discussed in the next chapter. It has, however, developed a military capability it did not have in the past, namely, the ability to launch missiles that can hit Israeli population centers and other objectives behind the Israeli lines. In other words, for the first time Syria enjoys a deterrent capability against Israel. This is not strategic balance, to be sure, but a new mutual deterrence between Israel and Syria. In this equation the Israeli deterrent may be greater than the Syrian, but the latter suffices to make Israel think twice before it undertakes military action deep inside Syria as it did, for

instance, in early 1973 when it sent its air force to attack various objectives. This is a new element which must be factored into Israel's conception of security.

Israel's main answer to possible threats from Syria has always been to cultivate strong and credible deterrence. Israel has always made a point of stressing that it would not allow a limited war according to Syrian rules of the game, and that, should Syria make any attempt to force Israel out of the Golan, the battlefield would not be limited to the Golan, and heavy damages would be inflicted all over Syria. The credible Israeli threat against Damascus plays a major role in this deterrence regime, and the presence of Israeli forces in the Golan has made the high price that Syria would pay for an attack on Israel dramatically clear. When the Syrians acquired surface-to-surface missiles, care was taken to deter the Syrians from attacking the civilian population. The Israeli message to Damascus, as conveyed through public statements of Yitzhak Rabin, in his capacity as defense minister, and later by Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur in September 1992, was that hitting civilian targets would result in similar and much greater retaliation.

Israel takes great pains to ensure that its deterrence is perceived as real by the Arabs, and particularly by the Syrians, and to clarify that certain attacks will not be overlooked. All of Israel's governments, whether left or right, have pursued a rigorous policy of retaliation, while keeping a probing eye on the response of Arab capitals, especially that of Damascus, even when the reprisal raids took place in some other Arab country.

When, during the Gulf War, Israel did not retaliate against Iraqi Scud attacks on its cities, the Israeli general staff was concerned that Damascus not draw the wrong conclusions, i.e. that launching missiles against Israel, including its population centers, would not necessarily result in a sharp Israeli reaction. After the Gulf War, therefore, Israel made it clear that an attack by Syrian missiles would lead to a crushing blow against Damascus. Estimates by Israeli military experts were published, stating that Israel can now inflict damage on Syria similar to the damage inflicted on Iraq by the United States.[1] It

---

[1] While it is true that the distances between Israeli bases and Syria make it easy to engage in such air action, the analogy falters on the fact that

is important for Israel to have Damascus and other Arab capitals understand that it will retaliate at the time and place of its choosing, and that there is a limit to America's ability to restrain Israel.

Israel knows that absolute deterrence does not exist when it comes to conventional weapons, especially if the attacking side is willing to take risks to attain specific objectives. The precise meaning of deterrence became more urgent when the Syrians began to produce chemical warheads for their missiles. Clearly, the use of chemical weapons against Israel, particularly against civilians, may cause Israel to react with unconventional weapons. Syria has argued that the Arabs need chemical weapons to balance the nuclear weapons in Israel's possession—an essentially mistaken notion. Chemical weapons, particularly the kind that Syria and other Arab states possess, cannot be an answer to nuclear weapons. There is simply no comparison between the damage caused by nuclear arms and that from chemical weapons. Moreover, the special psychological implications of chemical weapons for a population which includes many Holocaust survivors may impel Israel to react to their use with nuclear weapons. Thus, chemical weapons will not deter a nuclear strike, but rather make one more likely.

Aside from its close adherence to a policy of retaliation, Israel makes every effort to ensure its deterrence *vis-à-vis* the Syrians through a qualitative military gap in almost every area. Special emphasis is put on air power, command and control systems, electronic warfare, and the means to enable the IDF to create a surprise on the battlefield. Great resources are spent on developing a penetrating intelligence and early warning system, as every additional minute in early warning can be of supreme importance.

An important element of the deterrence equation is strategic cooperation with the United States and the U.S. role in the growth of Israeli capabilities. Enormous effort is devoted to making sure Washington maintains its commitment to preserve the qualitative edge in Israel's favor and to ensuring that Israel is compensated if the United States sells advanced weapon systems to Arab states. It is important to Israel that this cooperation be highly visible. The inclusion of Israel in the

---

when the Americans operated in Iraq, there was no American civilian population within Iraqi range. This is not the case with Israel.

Strategic Defense Initiative program and the cooperation
between Israel and the United States in developing the Arrow
missile defense system clearly illustrate the ways in which an
element of deterrence can be neatly integrated in a practical
plan to strengthen Israel in a sensitive dimension of the
regional military balance.

Another important component in Israel's security concept
is its determination to work towards removing the Syrians
from the Israeli-Lebanese border, to prevent undue proximity of
Syrian artillery to Israel's northern communities, and to keep
the bay of Haifa, one of Israel's most important industrial areas,
well out of range. There is genuine consensus on this issue;
even those who thought before 1982 that the Syrian army could
best control the Palestinians in southern Lebanon and should
thus be left to act freely there opposed the deployment of Syrian
armor and artillery near the Israeli-Lebanese border. The
internal Israeli debate as to whether it is better for Israel to have
the Syrian army focused entirely on the Golan Heights or split
between Syria and Lebanon was effectively decided when
Israel acquiesced in 1976 to Syria's military deployment in
Lebanon. The assumption was that maintaining forces in
Lebanon would put a strain on Syrian resources and would
implicate Damascus in the murderous *cul-de-sac* of Lebanese
politics. From a military standpoint, the Syrians partially
solved their problem by increasing the size of their army so
that it could hold on to two fronts, while the Israelis made sure
the Syrians did not reach southern Lebanon. In any case,
Israel also insists on maintaining reconnaissance flights over
Lebanon.

Similarly, Israel has pressured Jordan not to cooperate with
Syria in establishing an eastern front. It is clear that, had the
eastern front been organized under a joint command with the
Iraqis held in strategic reserve, it would have posed a
considerable threat to Israel. While the eastern front has never
actually materialized, Israel must make sure this danger does
not reappear some day.

Israel has sought to prevent its eastern front from expanding
into an additional sector, Lebanon. The threat to Israel from
Lebanese territory usually comes from paramilitary
organizations, either Palestinian groups or Lebanese groups
like Hezbollah. These groups do not generally operate by
themselves, but are aided by outside actors, such as Iran. It is

clear that Syria has long had a hand, either directly or indirectly, in the activities of these organizations against Israel. Israel, for its part, trains and sponsors the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which operates in the security zone set up inside Lebanon. The net result is that both sides operate in Lebanon through their proxies—Syria to exert influence throughout the country, and Israel to defend its northern border. The danger is that these proxies, who at times have their own agenda and goals, may implicate their patrons and sponsors to the point of losing control in the area.

Since 1985, former Defense Minister Ariel Sharon has argued that the removal of all foreign forces from all of Lebanon is a major Israeli desideratum and that, by the same token, the very introduction of foreign forces into Lebanon ought to be regarded by Israel as a *casus belli*. Israel, of course, has a genuine interest in developments in Lebanon, but Sharon's position overreaches and is contrary to long-standing Israeli strategic doctrine, whether of Labor or Likud. The presence or absence of foreign forces in Beirut, or on Lebanon's northern borders, is not in itself a *casus belli*, nor is the regular rise and fall of Lebanese governments.

Even so, to prevent the activities of paramilitary organizations and to stop incursions into Israel for the purpose of committing acts of terror, Israel has chosen to maintain its security strip inside Lebanon and its support for the South Lebanon Army. This may have to continue until the Lebanese government is effectively able to stop acts of terrorism launched against Israel from its territory by disarming the hostile Lebanese militias, such as Hezbollah, and, of course, removing hostile foreign forces, such as Iran's Revolutionary Guards. It is doubtful that this can be achieved unless Syria withdraws its support for these organizations which has been provided through direct aid and/or freedom of transit through Syrian territory. An Israeli agreement to withdraw from its security zone in Lebanon probably cannot be achieved without Syrian cooperation in helping to stop terrorist activities. Israel has no territorial claims in Lebanon; maintaining a security zone is only temporary and for security reasons that can be addressed. At the same time, Lebanon's government has to commit itself to not allowing a situation that would harm (or divert) the sources of the Jordan River originating in its territory.

VI   SYRIA'S SECURITY CONCEPT

   Syria has largely failed to fulfill its national ambitions *vis-à-vis* each of its neighbors. Damascus has not settled its conflict with Turkey over the separation of Alexandretta (Hatay) from Syria, while Syria's dependence on waters flowing from Turkey to the Euphrates River compels it to act cautiously toward its large and powerful neighbor. An additional thorn in Syrian-Turkish relations is Damascus' decision to grant permission to Turkey's rebel Kurdish underground, the Kurdish Worker's Party or PKK, to take up residence in the Bekaa Valley. Syria's tension with its neighbor to the east, Iraq, is even greater, stemming from conflict over water rights, the transfer of Iraqi oil through Syrian territory, inter-Arab jockeying for power, and personal conflict between the two Ba'ath leaders and their parties. Syria's relations with Lebanon are most complicated, as Syria has always viewed Lebanon as a land stolen out of its midst by the forces of Western imperialism. Today, for all intents and purposes, Syria controls Lebanon. Despite the fact that there is no Syrian ambassador in Beirut, Syria has stationed a large part of its army in Lebanon. As part of its long and unfulfilled dream of Greater Syria, Damascus entertains designs for control of Jordan as well; Damascus is thus especially sensitive to events in northern Jordan, and relations between the two states are marked by regular ups and downs.
   Israel, of course, occupies a special place of honor in this frustrating Syrian constellation. But the conflict between these two states is not limited to their bilateral confrontation. The

state of war between Syria and Israel is a dynamic factor in the Syrian conflict system as a whole. Syria has used its army more than once against its other neighbors, including Lebanon and the Palestinians[1], as well as in its 1970 invasion of Jordan during Black September, although at that time, Syria's mounting designs were checked by Israeli mobilization. Syria has massed troops several times as a threatening move on the Jordanian and Iraqi borders, and it participated in military action against Iraq, as a member of the U.S.-led coalition, during the Gulf War.

Ultimately, the severity of Syria's conflict with Israel stems from the fact that the Israeli threat to Syrian interests is perceived as being more serious than the others; the loss of the Golan Heights accounts for only part of Syria's hostility toward Israel. Syria views its struggle with Israel as a comprehensive struggle—cultural, political, and economic—for the future of the Middle East and Syria's place in it. It is part of a larger contest for regional hegemony that will determine the leadership of the Arab world, in which Syria sees itself as the standard-bearer. For this reason, Syria tends not to give in to Israel even on seemingly trivial matters.

Syria's specific concerns regarding Israel focus on the following areas:

• *Fear of an Israeli surprise attack*, designed to destroy Syria's chief war-making capabilities (especially its surface-to-surface missiles and chemical weapons), and retard, if not reverse, Syria's military development, leaving Israel with continued military superiority in the future against the Arabs in general and against Syria in particular.

• *The need to recover the Golan*, captured by Israel in 1967, and the fear that Israel might succeed in maneuvering to keep the status quo, i.e. the Golan would stay in Israeli hands and the facts on the ground that Israel is creating (such as settlements) will multiply.[2] Should that happen, Syria would have no alternative but to carry out a comprehensive war some day if it wishes to recover the Golan.

---

[1] At the time of Yasser Arafat's expulsion from Tripoli in 1982.

[2] Assad himself, as a member of the Alawite minority, is very sensitive to accusations that he is neglecting the cause of the Golan.

- *The direct threat posed by Israel to Damascus, Syria's capital.* With little military effort, Israel's army can reach artillery range outside Damascus. The fact that Israeli forces are structured, trained and operated according to an offensive doctrine increases this fear.
- *Israeli use of Lebanese territory,* especially the Bekaa Valley, as a route for flanking moves against Damascus and the industrialized zone in Homs to the north. Israel can also use this roundabout route to pose a threat from the sea to Syria's coastal Latakia region, home to Assad's Alawite kinsmen.
- *Fear of Israeli activity detrimental to Syria's status and interests in Lebanon.* Syria fears that Israel may act among the various groups (especially the Christians) in Lebanon to implicate Syria still further in the Lebanese quagmire, put a strain on its resources, and divert attention from the Arab-Israeli conflict. The larger danger in this scenario is that any undermining of Syria's position in Lebanon may bear on internal stability in Syria itself.
- *Fear that Israel might be able to isolate and encircle Syria,* by reaching separate agreements with various Arab states (as it has already done with Sadat's Egypt and with the Palestinians).
- *Fear that Israel might use its military muscle,* especially its nuclear capability, to extract concessions from Arab states and dictate the results of negotiations.

Although Syria perceives Israel as a serious potential threat, Damascus is in no hurry to change the present status of affairs. In the past, Syrian leaders did not see peace with Israel as a goal in and of itself, and certainly not as an objective to be achieved quickly. Rather, the feeling always was that time worked in Syria's, and the Arabs', favor, and that correspondingly there was no urgency to change strategic objectives *vis-à-vis* Israel.[1] Unlike Egypt, Syria did not see peace as facilitating the solution of domestic problems. Its approach, therefore, was one of patience, to wait for a time when Israel will inevitably weaken. This was the Syrian leadership's thinking in the past, and it may not have changed by much to this day, notwithstanding their overall uncertainty about the time factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

---

[1] The oft-stated comparison of Israel to the Crusaders of the Middle Ages has reinforced this perception.

By this reasoning, it was imperative that Syria develop and maintain considerable military strength and that it not allow other Arabs to lose their patience and abandon the struggle. The Assad Doctrine, if you will, argued that Damascus must be prepared to use force to prevent other Arab states from reaching separate peace agreements with Israel.

For violating this doctrine, the Lebanese president-elect, Bashir Gemayel, paid with his life on September 14, 1982. All available evidence points to the involvement of Syrian intelligence in Gemayel's assassination. Later, the Lebanese agreement with Israel of May 17, 1983, brokered by the United States, was canceled as a result of Syrian pressure and the withdrawal of U.S. Marines following the bombing of their barracks in Beirut on October 23, 1983. Several Palestinian attempts to make progress with Israel over the years have been foiled by Syria. Thus, Syria's shock and feelings of betrayal at the Camp David treaty between Egypt and Israel were most severe. Damascus understood that the balance of forces between Israel and the Arabs had changed, but it did not alter its policy of steadfast opposition to separate peace agreements with Israel.

This picture has been complicated by the current peace process initiated by the United States after the Gulf War. On the eve of the Madrid peace conference, Damascus tactically softened its approach. It said that it was willing to allow other Arab states and the Palestinians to make progress in their respective negotiations with Israel, on the condition that the final settlement be predicated on a comprehensive settlement between Israel and all the Arabs, Syria most definitely included. Damascus does not, at this time, try to dictate to the Palestinians the details of their settlement with Israel, but one may assume it will insist that they not sign a separate agreement which would leave Damascus on the sidelines, as did Sadat. It is safe to assume that Syria may use force and/or subversion to prevent this scenario from ever coming into being.

In this spirit, Damascus continues to maintain, and even help cultivate, contacts with various Palestinian rejectionist organizations. These organizations oppose the peace process, and are actively working in Damascus with the government's support to thwart it. Damascus keeps contact with the Shi'ite, Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah organization, which is dedicated

to attacking Israeli targets in its security zone in Lebanon as well as inside Israel proper. Both Hezbollah and their Iranian patrons oppose the peace process with Israel. It is clear that Damascus wishes to keep the rejectionist option available, not only because of its power struggle *vis-à-vis* the PLO for the leadership of the Palestinian cause, but also as a means to keep pressure on Israel in the negotiations. These proxies may also be able to foil the peace process, if Damascus so chooses.

Damascus is now marching along two parallel tracks— diplomatic and military. It conducts a contradictory foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Israel as it does *vis-à-vis* the moderates of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Just as Syria is developing its ties to Iran, accused by the Egyptians and Saudis of subversion, it supports and encourages the Palestinian rejectionist groups headquartered in Damascus, while engaging in negotiations with Israel.

SYRIAN SECURITY THINKING

It should be noted that the Syrian security concept has suffered from the outset from military weakness. While the course of armed struggle was for many years the only one Damascus followed, it did not have sufficient power to fulfill its objectives against Israel. Thus it chose different approaches, including support, in the mid-1960s, of the idea of a popular war against Israel, aided by the Palestinians. Advocates of this approach argued that the strategic effects of Israel's nuclear advantage could be neutralized if it found itself facing a popular struggle like those successfully waged in Algeria and Vietnam. It was only natural for Syria to speak at that time in terms of liberating occupied land, by which it meant, all of pre-1967 Israel.

In pursuing this militant approach, Syria had to rely on support from Egypt as well as other Arab states, since it did not have sufficient military power to confront Israel on its own. Damascus exerted great effort to achieve Arab solidarity that would marshal as many resources as possible for the struggle against Israel. These included Egyptian standing divisions, Iraqi military reserves, and Jordanian permission to operate across its border, the longest border any Arab state shares with Israel. After the debacle of the Six Day War, Syria decided to increase the size of its forces and to upgrade them with new

weapon systems; this, by the way, was the same conclusion reached after every previous war. But even these efforts were not enough to secure the military option it so urgently desired. Hence, as we have seen, Damascus moved beyond merely strengthening its own force and sought to organize an eastern front against Israel that stretched from Aqaba on the Red Sea in Jordan to Naqura on the Mediterranean in Lebanon (the so-called "banana front"). Jordan's participation was especially key, not only because it would enhance Syria's offensive capabilities against sensitive Israeli objectives along Israel's long border with Jordan, but for defensive reasons as well. Damascus' fears of an Israeli flanking action deep into its territory encompass not just the Golan but Jordan as well. As a result, it was considered vital to integrate Jordan into Syria's defensive architecture *vis-à-vis* Israel.

The drive to establish an eastern front ran into a number of difficulties, and, in effect, never materialized.[1] In 1973, Damascus had to make do with a lone partnership with Egypt in the attack on Israel. While that war did further some political goals, Syria and Egypt achieved only limited battlefield objectives. When Egypt abandoned the military partnership, the Syrian security concept underwent a substantive change. A new approach, born of having to face Israel on the battlefield alone, was conceived in 1975, the idea that is referred to as "strategic parity" or "military balance." Little has been published in Syria about Damascus' understanding of its sought-after military balance with Israel. It clearly aims to counter Israel's architecture of defense and deterrence, by acquiring military capabilities to deter Israel and to overcome Israel's defenses on the Golan. Going further, Syrian analysts also argue that "strategic parity" entails the ability to liberate the Golan and, later on, to defeat Israel decisively on the battlefield.

This goal of "strategic parity" impelled Syria to sign, in October 1980, a friendship and cooperation agreement with the Soviet Union. Damascus hoped in this way to secure immediate and direct help from Moscow, in case of war, and a steady supply of quality weapons that would help it face Israel. Moscow and Damascus held regular discussions on the

---

[1] Jordan balked at full integration under a Syrian or Iraqi command.

meaning of "strategic parity" and the extent, if any, to which it meant developing offensive capabilities that would allow Damascus to initiate a war against Israel. Moscow neither supported nor trusted Syria's ability to achieve this goal. The Soviet Union was also concerned that becoming so militarily implicated in the region would elicit a negative response from the United States. Even so, Moscow did not renege on its commitment to help Syria achieve a substantial self-defense capability. For Israel's purposes, this meant that if restraint was not exercised, the Syrians could inflict significant losses in a confrontation.

The Syrian security concept was not limited to force of arms. Its military build-up was also aimed at better enabling Syria to face Israel during negotiations, to compel necessary concessions from Israel (e.g. evacuating all of Lebanon, as Syria insisted on after the 1982 War), and generally to develop enough power to advance its national objectives from a position of strength. In this light, the 1982 War was not, from Syria's perspective, a strategic fiasco. In Damascus' view, Syria stood alone in an inferior military position, especially on the ground, fought on difficult terrain without fortifications, yet still prevented the Israeli army from achieving all of its objectives. Though beaten in the air war, the Syrians felt they had learned what they needed to learn. They concluded that they had been able to limit Israeli freedom of action, and to prevent Israel from forcing peace on an Arab state (Lebanon) against Syrian wishes. Following the 1982 War, Syria's security concept expanded to set a goal of being able to fight simultaneously on two fronts—the Golan and Lebanon.

The Lebanese arena occupies a major place in Syrian strategic thinking. This grows out of the belief that Lebanon is a historical part of Syria. Militarily, Lebanon is vital for Syrian interests, not only as a territory where a potential Israeli attack needs to be stopped, but also as an area through which one can attack vital Israeli objectives. Diverting some Syrian forces to Lebanon does not, in this view, split and weaken the Syrian army, but merely directs it to another vital objective; Israel's forces, however, would be split and weakened, as the front lengthened and Syrian forces would be brought in closer proximity both to initial Israeli targets and to points from which Israel itself can be split in two.

To control Lebanon, Damascus had first to put a stop to the civil war. To this end, Damascus was prepared to use force against the Palestinians, and even to drive Arafat from Tripoli. Assad was not reluctant to confront the PLO, which, as he saw it, had destabilized the situation in Lebanon to Israel's advantage, as demonstrated by the latter's cooperation with the Christians and by Israel's newly-gained proximity to Damascus. Although Damascus committed itself in the Taif Agreement of 1989 to evacuate all its forces from Lebanon, at the moment of truth, it did not. Instead Damascus found a way, through another agreement, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation agreement signed with Lebanon in May 1991, to neutralize its commitment to withdraw.

Syria's security concept has also dictated the structure of its army. The chief question facing the Syrians has been how to neutralize Israeli air superiority, and thus, over the years, a great deal of Soviet aid was devoted to building an air defense system. The number of Syrian surface-to-air missile batteries exceeds 175, and some of those systems, such as the SA-5, are intended for long range (about 500 kilometers). In addition, Syria has equipped itself with highly accurate surface-to-surface missiles, such as the SS-21, which it can use to hit airfields, radar and air early warning stations in northern Israel. Syria also has some 600 new combat aircraft and bombers, as well as electronic warfare equipment.

Having always found it difficult to penetrate Israeli air space, the Syrians instead have chosen to maintain surface-to-surface missiles, their longest and most effective arm. In addition to Syria's celebrated arsenal of Scud missiles, with a range of 300 kilometers, it possesses mobile launchers, SS-21 missiles (with a range of 120 kilometers), and FROG rockets. The Syrians have made many efforts to conclude a deal with China for the purchase of M9 missiles, though the fate of this venture is yet unclear. They are already in the process of acquiring North Korean Scud-Cs, longer range missiles, more accurate than the regular Scuds, and able to carry a heavier warhead. Not content to make do with missiles purchased from abroad alone, Syria bought a missile production line from North Korea to begin building missiles domestically. This intensive buildup of surface-to-surface missiles must be interpreted as a Syrian response to the Gulf War, aiming to double its inventory of ballistic missiles. Any assessment of

Syria's long-range missile capability must also take into account its SA-5 anti-aircraft missiles and the sea-to-sea Sepal missiles, with a range of 300 kilometers, which protect the Syrian coast.

Syria's long-range missile capabilities should be seen as, *inter alia*, a means to achieve deterrence against Israel. For the first time, the Syrians can threaten the Israeli rear and its civilian population centers, while Israel does not have a sufficient answer to this problem. In the area of warheads, the Syrians have made some real progress. While attention has been riveted on the chemical weapons developed by Saddam Hussein, it has been little-noted that by the early 1980s, well before Iraq, Syria had already developed chemical missile warheads.

The Syrian security concept also mandates keeping well ahead of Israel's ability to mobilize its reserves in case of war in the Golan Heights, which in turn means doing everything possible to achieve surprise. To this aim, it has built an army capable of faster mobility: mechanized and armored forces, commando forces, and a relatively large number of helicopters capable of going into action quickly. Of the Syrian army's eleven divisions, eight are armored, three are mechanized; these are supplemented by special forces, paratroopers and commandos at division strength, with several independent brigades. Though opinions differ about the quality of these divisions, there can be no doubt of their high fire power. The Syrian army also has a large artillery force, including self-propelled guns, and has a large number and wide variety of antitank systems at its disposal.

The Syrian command well understands the high levels of attrition in modern-day war and has therefore acquired a larger number of tanks than is strictly needed. In addition to the recent addition of one brigade to every armored division, the Syrian arsenal now has a large number of reserve tanks. Altogether Syria has some 4,200 tanks, a larger number than Israel, and it has more artillery as well. When Syria's standing army is compared with Israel's, the difference is even more pronounced, with a ratio of more than three to one in Syria's favor. But one cannot deduce from all of this that in the overall balance, Syria feels it can defeat Israel on the battlefield. The IDF has many advantages of its own—notably air superiority, real time Command/ Control/

Communications/ Intelligence, technological superiority and greater maneuverability on the battlefield. Damascus does not enjoy a military position that enables it to dictate the solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict; rather the most it can do is foil it.

TWO DIFFERENT ROUTES OF SYRIAN POLICY

In 1987, a dramatic change took place in Syria's security posture. After a meeting between Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and President Assad, Assad recognized that changes in the Soviet Union would affect its strategic relations with Syria. Assad understood that Moscow would be much more cautious in supplying new weapons to Syria and would insist on payment in full for future arms purchases. Additionally, Moscow asked Damascus to pay past debts for earlier arms deals. The steady improvement in relations between the two superpowers also affected Moscow's stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Assad rightly estimated that the change was very profound, and the collapse of the Soviet Union was crushing proof of his thesis.

Syria's plans for military buildup ran into further difficulties. The Syrian army had long suffered from the lack of a suitable technological support system to facilitate absorption of new weapons. Now it faced a new problem—finding willing sellers of new, sophisticated weapons. After the Gulf War, Syria received generous financial aid (estimated to be between $1.6 billion to $2 billion) from Saudi Arabia. It sought to use much of this money to buy weapons in several places, but found it more difficult than in the past to acquire state-of-the-art equipment. Syrian fire-power remained intact, but it became clear that if markets for new weapons remained closed in the future, the military balance between Syria and Israel would continue to change in Israel's favor. Damascus is seeking alternatives, as demonstrated by its purchase of missiles from North Korea and its burgeoning military cooperation with Iran.[1] It is clear, however, that this is neither a

---

[1] Syrian-Iranian cooperation began during the Iran-Iraq War. It has taken the form of military cooperation and consultation, joint missile purchases from North Korea, and, significantly, allowing Iran to transport arms and equipment through Syrian lines to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

sufficient nor an adequate substitute for the superpower umbrella of the Soviet Union which the Syrians had enjoyed from the early 1960s until the Soviet Union's ultimate dissolution.

Syria must decide whether to return to the 1974 model of preparing itself to stand alone against Israel or to take the Egyptian (and Saudi) path of seeking a diplomatic solution. These changes have forced Assad to follow a more pragmatic line. Unlike Saddam Hussein, Assad drew sober conclusions from the end of the Cold War. Saddam mistakenly thought that the lower probability of conflict between the superpowers provided Iraq with an opportunity to embark on an adventurous policy that would include the conquest of Kuwait and the general ability to dictate a new reality in the Middle East. Assad reached the opposite conclusion, judging it necessary to avoid confrontation with the only remaining superpower. This led him, *inter alia,* to join the international coalition against Iraq, in spite of internal opposition to such a move. Thus, Assad proved he could dictate difficult decisions to his people and his army. This particular decision was especially difficult because it meant that Syria, along with other Arab states, was allied with the United States and the West in destroying Iraq's military might, the Arab world's largest and strongest military power. (Despite long-standing rivalries between Baghdad and Damascus, Iraq was always seen by the Syrians as an important military reserve and potential ally in a broad Arab war against Israel.)

This change does not mean that Assad has chosen to follow only one route, the political route leading to peace agreements with Israel, but rather that Assad has decided to go along two different routes at the same time—political and military. This tactic is what perplexes Israel the most.

In tandem with its new willingness to negotiate with Israel, Syria continues to build its own military strength and to cooperate with Iran. One may conclude that Damascus has not yet given up on the possibility that the negotiations with Israel may end in stalemate and thus leave the conflict to be determined in more familiar and lethal ways. In other words, Damascus is seeking to be militarily prepared for the possibility of another escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict should the peace talks fail to produce an adequate solution.

VII THE NATURE OF PEACE

Since the Madrid conference of October 1991, a lively discussion has been taking place inside Israel's intelligence community over Assad's intentions in negotiations with Israel, and specifically whether Assad's very willingness to negotiate face to face with Israel represents a strategic change. Simply put: Are the Syrians truly interested in peace and compromise with Israel, or does Syria's presence at the negotiating table represent only a tactical change and perhaps a ruse? While intelligence analysts must try to answer this question as part of their job, it obviously troubles not only them, but the government, the political parties, and Israeli public opinion as well. The answer to this question, if indeed it can be found, will seriously affect Israel's willingness to make concessions on the Golan Heights and greatly influence the debate that is sure to ensue once Israel is asked to make painful concessions and to dismantle settlements on the Golan. Israeli public opinion will play an important role in this matter, especially since the Rabin government has only a slim majority in the Knesset, and even in Rabin's own Labor party some will argue against giving up the Golan for contractual peace.

The head of military intelligence, Major-General Uri Saguy, has argued for some time that recent changes, especially those since the Gulf War, indicate a willingness on the part of Assad and the Syrian leadership to reach peace with Israel, although, of course, on Syria's terms. Months before the Madrid conference, when the prevalent opinion in the Israeli government was that Damascus would reject the offer to participate in a peace conference with Israel, Saguy told then

Prime Minister Shamir that the Syrians would come to Madrid and that Israel had better be prepared for a substantive change in Damascus' position. Saguy does not argue that Israel has made Assad change his mind, or that the pursuit of peace in and of itself is the Syrian leader's new guiding star. Nonetheless, he argues, the change in the Syrian position is substantive and strategic; in other words, although Syria may not have embarked on its recent course of action with a strategic change in mind, it is clear that, in time, it will come to have strategic significance. This is not to say, according to Saguy, that achieving peace with Assad will be easy; one can expect serious crises along the way. Assad may even use force and clash with Israel, and he certainly does not want to forgo his current program of military expansion, which is growing steadily apace. In the end, however, according to this line of reasoning, Assad has reached the point of no return on the road to peace.

This is by no means a consensus view within Israel's intelligence community. The countervailing view is that the old ideological stand *vis-à-vis* Israel and its place in the Middle East is still well in place, and that changes in Syrian policy, such as they are, have resulted from a perceived need by the Syrian leadership to be more open to the West; because Syria will not be able to stabilize its economy during the post-Cold War era without some liberalization of its economy and society and some show of moderation, it is necessary to change tactics in the matter of the Arab-Israeli conflict as well, but not to alter Syria's overall strategy in the conflict. By this interpretation, Assad thought that the Shamir government had no intention of reaching peace with Syria and the Palestinians and that by joining the peace process, Syria could expose Israel's true intentions, weaken its strategic position and cause grave damage to its relations with the United States. Even with the ascendancy of the Rabin government, these analysts say, the Syrians will not offer any settlement that would lead to a peace treaty between the two countries. Some even suggest that Syria's entire participation in the peace process is an elaborate ruse.

In the final analysis, at this point, one cannot yet conclude that Assad has reached a point of no return in the peace process, such that he would under no condition resume the military option in his relations with Israel. The Syrians

themselves regularly say that if the peace process fails, the
region will eventually be catapulted into war. Should that
happen, the Syrians will have no choice but to resort to force to
retake the Golan the moment they feel confident of their
military strength and the international climate.

This internal intelligence debate has, of course, reached the
Israeli public and has inevitably elicited strong and sometimes
emotional responses. The position of the Likud is embodied in
the law passed by the Begin government in the Knesset on
December 14, 1981, applying the jurisdiction and
administration of the State of Israel to the Golan (the Labor
Party and its allies put up no real opposition at the time). This
amounted to an annexation of the Golan, a step which,
significantly, the Likud governments over the years never took
with respect to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At the time,
in his statements to the Knesset, Prime Minister Menachem
Begin said that Syria had rejected Israel's peace overtures
many times, including an invitation to Assad to come to
Jerusalem for peace talks, and that Israel was not willing to
wait any longer. Begin had been prompted to quickly
introduce the annexation law by an interview with President
Assad that appeared in a Kuwaiti newspaper, published the day
before the Knesset deliberations, in which, as Begin recounted
it, "Assad said he would not recognize Israel even if the
Palestinians did."

Yet despite all this, the Likud left the door open a crack.
Moshe Arens, then chairman of the Knesset's Foreign
Relations and Defense Committee and later defense minister,
said:

> There are those who will argue that applying Israeli law,
> jurisdiction and administration to the Golan Heights closes
> options for negotiations, and that there is no one to talk to in
> today's Syria (but that) someday there may be someone to talk to,
> and this step may exclude such an option. There is no basis for
> this argument. There are more than a few instances in history
> when negotiations were conducted and territory passed from one
> sovereignty to another, and the fact that the territory was not
> administered by a military government but by civilian
> authorities did not impede negotiations. If someday there will be
> someone to talk to in Syria, I am sure that this step will not
> prevent negotiations with the government in charge at that
> point.

When Syria came to the Madrid conference in 1991, the reality that came into being in 1981 when the Golan Law was passed suddenly changed. The Likud government, headed by Yitzhak Shamir, was convinced that Damascus would reject the offer to join the peace process. Both Jerusalem and Damascus thought that the other side was not interested in peace and was purposely dragging its feet. In truth, the mission of the first Israeli delegation to the bilateral talks with Syria, appointed by the Likud government, was to prove above all that Damascus had not changed its old ideological attitude towards Israel and had no intention of recognizing Israel's existence. That is why the first stage of the negotiations, during the Likud's tenure, centered on the desire to recall Syria's past sins rather than focus on future prospects.

The Labor party, while still in opposition, argued that the Likud government erred in inviting the Syrians to join the peace process, as it had thereby led Israel into a trap that would end in giving up the entire Golan. Initially, Rabin's position was that Israel should not leave the Golan Heights. Later on he amended this to the effect that Israel would be willing to give up large parts of the Golan as part of a territorial compromise that would result in a peace treaty with the Syrians, in keeping with Israel's interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242. When Rabin was elected prime minister in June 1992, it was clear he preferred to leave negotiations with Syria for the final stages of the peace process and focus in the near term on the negotiations with the Palestinians. Rabin, at first, found it difficult to digest the notion of negotiating simultaneously on four different fronts—with the Palestinians, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. He was similarly doubtful that the Israeli body politic was capable of making far-reaching concessions on all four fronts at once. Once it became clear, however, that Syria would likely interpret leaving it for the end as an attempt to isolate it, as Rabin had done in his talks with Egypt on interim agreements during the mid-1970s, Rabin shifted Israel's focus to the negotiations with Syria, a development made easier by Palestinian foot-dragging in their own negotiations with Israel.

For domestic political reasons, Rabin hopes to attain an agreement with the Syrians on terms more favorable to Israel than those achieved by Begin at Camp David, and thus vanquish the oft-heard claim that only a right-wing party can achieve peace with the Arabs. This is why Rabin regularly

says that Begin's commitment to return the entire Sinai and remove all the settlements there established a very negative precedent.[1]

The Labor government has a special relationship with the Golan and its settlers. As discussed earlier, the project of settling the Golan had received the blessing of the Labor party and many of the settlements there are affiliated with Labor. When the Labor party convened in 1991 to prepare a new platform, a special section was included on the Golan Heights. As expected, it was rather nebulous, aiming to appease both the settlers as well as those wary of putting obstacles in the way of the diplomatic process. The relevant section of the Labor platform stated that: "Israel considers the Golan vital to Israeli security even in time of peace, therefore the IDF's presence on the Golan is vital to Israeli security even in time of peace. The IDF will hence maintain forces and exercise readiness, including regional defense of the Golan settlements as mandated by the security needs."

The view from Syria is oddly and interestingly similar. Assad, like Rabin, seeks a better agreement than the one struck at Camp David; he hopes to obtain the same result, namely, total withdrawal from the entire Golan and Lebanon, but to pay less, and not make a separate peace that cuts him out of the Palestinian negotiations. As for the price Assad is willing to pay, it is hard for the Israelis to put their finger on what exactly it is he means by "peace," which he has described as "the peace of the brave, the peace of the knights, the genuine peace, the peace that would survive and guarantee the rights of all."

Rabin's position will undoubtedly become more difficult once he proposes major concession on the Golan. The Golan settlers have managed to form a strong lobby in a short time, and they have won over many Israelis not generally identified with the Right. The likely public debate over the Golan is not just with Likud's argument that "peace for peace" and not "land for peace" ought to be Israel's goal, but also with those who argue in all sincerity that it would be a serious security mistake to allow the Syrians to return to their pre-1967 outposts, regardless of any security arrangements. This argument is bolstered to the extent that the Syrians actually

---

[1] Even among his own advisers there are those who say that canceling the Golan Law will inevitably affect the Jerusalem Annexation law.

promise only non-belligerence in return for withdrawal. Inasmuch as there is already a state of non-belligerence in the area (or "no peace, no war," as the argument goes), why should Israel withdraw, and in the process undergo the traumatic dismantling of settlements?

The question becomes more difficult for the Rabin government when, during the course of negotiations, the communities of the Galilee are shelled by Hezbollah in Lebanon. If it so chooses, Damascus could easily neutralize Hezbollah, most of whose heavy arms and equipment are transported from Iran through Syrian territory. For the Israelis who live in the Huleh Valley and in the Galilee, Hezbollah's attacks are a bitter reminder of the pre-1967 era, when the Syrians controlled the Golan Heights and regularly bombarded the Israelis below. The problem of the Rabin government, which only has a small majority in the Knesset, is how to mobilize public opinion under such conditions when the time comes to discuss concession on the Golan.

Rabin's answer to the Golan settlers and the Israeli public is simply that peace cannot be attained without withdrawal. Rabin is not afraid of public debate, but prefers to hold off on it until it is clear that Assad and Syria are serious about full peace.

To be sure, Israel may find itself in a dangerous situation if it turns out after the withdrawal that the peace Assad had offered was not for real. This, indeed, is the risk, but it is no less of a risk than that which Israel would take by missing the opportunity to make peace with Syria.

WHAT KIND OF PEACE?

The critical question remains: What kind of peace is Assad referring to? What model do the Syrians have in mind as they negotiate with Israel? They are in no rush to specify their position as to the nature of this peace. There is no internal public debate about the subject, as Syria is a closed society where the press is under total government control. It is certainly difficult to know whether there are conflicting opinions among the leadership as to the wisdom of the government's current course and the question of peace with Israel. There are some internal discussions: It is known that, in one instance, Assad did order some sort of a poll among his

senior military officers as to the possibility of peace with Israel. While the results are not known, the very fact that he found it necessary to canvas opinions on this subject shows the importance which he attaches to it. Despite the difficulties, one must, and indeed can, try to piece together details as to how peace appears in the eyes of Syria's top leadership, whether Syria's current positions at the negotiations are starting positions, and to what extent they may change in the course of negotiations, as did those of Anwar Sadat.

One set of indices is provided by various Syrian publications, statements by Syrian leaders, and positions taken by their representatives during the negotiations with Israel. When Damascus was first invited to the Madrid conference, it refused to agree to the statement that the objective of the conference was achieving peace between the parties. President Assad stated that what was needed later on was "the peace of the brave." He spoke about Syria's desire for peace and some Syrian representatives speak of a "compromise" with Israel. But the more one delves into the meaning of all this, the clearer it becomes that they are not talking about a territorial compromise on the Golan. Rather, according to the Syrian view, Israel must return the entire Golan Heights, and the "compromise" is Syria's willingness to grant Israel peace in return.

At least for now, the Syrians do not speak in terms of a peace treaty, but rather an agreement to a state of non-belligerence in return for full withdrawal, to the last inch, by Israel from the Golan. This is also the Syrian interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242, which they refused to accept until 1974, seven years after the resolution's adoption. According to the Syrians, this resolution does not predicate Israeli withdrawal on a peace agreement. Rather, withdrawal stands on its own: Israel must first withdraw from the Golan Heights and from all the territories occupied during the Six Day War, including East Jerusalem, and will only afterwards be eligible for a peace agreement, as part of a settlement with all the Arab states and the Palestinians. This is what the Syrians mean by "total peace." Indeed, when asked about a peace treaty, Syrian representatives have responded that, in their opinion, there will be no problem attaining it after full Israeli withdrawal on all fronts.

To the Syrians, "withdrawal" from the Golan also means dismantling all of Israel's Golan settlements. The former Syrian residents of the Golan, most of whom had fled from their villages during the war in 1967, would return to the area evacuated by Israel.

To the extent that Syria seems prepared to acknowledge that Israel has security concerns, it is only by emphasizing that both sides have them and not only Israel, and that any arrangements must be reciprocal.

The Syrians oppose an interim agreement on the Golan. They would be prepared to accept an Israeli withdrawal in stages, which they refer to as "phased withdrawal." But, they insist, Israel must first commit herself to "full withdrawal." The Syrians are willing to accept security arrangements in the areas evacuated by Israel, but only if such arrangements are based on reciprocity. When, in the negotiations, Israel raised the possibility of a withdrawal in which Israel would retain parts of the Golan vital for its defense, the Syrian representatives replied that Syria has had and still has international borders to which Israel must withdraw. "Will you be willing to recognize Israel's borders?" the Syrians were asked in the early stages of the negotiations. They declined to answer. Meanwhile, until Israel makes a commitment to a full withdrawal, the Syrians are not prepared to discuss confidence-building measures, whether political or military. They refuse to join the various working groups of the multilateral negotiations and have also tried to persuade other Arab groups not to join the multilaterals. (Only Lebanon, controlled by Syria, has similarly refrained from participating.)

A special effort was made to persuade the Syrians to at least join the discussions of the arms control working group; this also failed. The Syrian refusal in this case does not stem only from the principle of Israeli total withdrawal as a first step, but from another of President Assad's convictions, i.e. that arms control proposals are intended to grant Israel, whose ability to manufacture weapon systems is impressive, a military advantage over its Arab neighbors. As to unconventional weapons, Assad is prepared to accept international inspections if Israel agrees to obey them and to include its nuclear arsenal in those arrangements. This is the sum total of the Syrian positions that were expressed in one way or another during the

first year of the negotiations, and for our purposes they are not terribly enlightening.

READING SYRIA'S INTENTIONS

There is no doubt that Assad is speaking more clearly than ever before about the need for peace. This is particularly important if such statements are first directed at the Syrian people, and not only at the foreign press. But, another indicator of Syria's position on peace is the degree of Syrian support for groups opposing the peace process. Some ten Palestinian rejectionist groups are headquartered in Damascus. The permission given these groups to demonstrate against the peace process and operate from Syria goes beyond long-standing Syrian rivalries with and activities against the leadership of the PLO. The Syrians enable fundamentalist Hezbollah, which opposes the peace process and, indeed, even Israel's very existence, to engage in military operations against Israel from Lebanon. (This is one of the reasons Syria is still on the U.S. government's terrorism list.) This Syrian behavior stands in sharp contrast to the position taken by Syria regarding various Kurdish groups: The Syrians responded with alacrity to Turkish demands to expel support groups of the Kurdish underground affiliated with the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) from the Bekaa Valley. Damascus has also denied Kurdish representatives living in Syria permission to meet with Iraqi opposition groups. Thus, Syria's willingness to allow the rejectionist groups and Hezbollah to operate against Israel feeds the impression in Israel that Syria is playing a double game as it conducts negotiations with Israel over peace arrangements.

Syria's refusal to implement the Taif Agreement, which obligates it to redeploy in Lebanon, is also taken in Israel as a bad omen, not only because of Syrian insistence on maintaining control over Lebanon by force of arms, but also in that it casts doubt on Syria's willingness to abide by signed agreements. If Damascus is unwilling to keep an agreement in which the other party happens to be weak and dependent on its mercy, it is argued, it seems unlikely that it will keep others.

Another important indicator is Syria's turn to the West and its moves, such as they are, towards democratization and liberalization. This by itself does not suffice to demonstrate a will to make peace. But past experience shows that pursuit of

military options does not comport well with liberalization and democratization. Changes do seem to be taking place in Syrian public opinion, but they are not sufficiently clear. There is a growing demand to raise the standard of living and divert resources from defense to economic investment, and it is difficult to do such things while there is a state of war with Israel and the cost of a constant arms race.

This writer's overall impression is that Syria's position regarding peace with Israel and the nature of such peace has not yet taken shape. There is an ongoing debate on this subject within leadership circles, well out of the Syrian public's view. On the one hand, leaders such as army chief Hikmat Shihabi argue that it is necessary to test Israel's true intentions regarding peace. On the other hand, there are those like George Sadikni, a Ba'ath party leader and historian close to Assad, who argue that it is not possible now to realize the comprehensive solution that has been Syria's historical aim, but that efforts should be focused on what can be achieved today, so long as that does not prevent Syria from achieving its broader aims in the future. "I am convinced that the day will come," he says, "when a new generation will turn Palestine into part of Arab unity and Zionism will vanish. Jews as Jews will be part of the Arab nation, like the Kurds, the Circassians, and others."

Assad sees no contradiction between the diplomatic/political process and Syria's feverish efforts to continue its military build-up. It is possible that Assad fears Israel's response to a failure of the peace process, and it is clear at any rate that he does not wish to find himself in a position of military inferiority should war break out.

Syria today is marching on two parallel courses, political and military. On the political level, it is trying to obtain its goals *vis-à-vis* Israel without the use of force, but rather, as did Egypt, through political means. In this vein the Syrians will also try to weaken Washington's support of Israel and the strategic cooperation between the two countries. On the military level there are several manifestations of continued build-up, as Syria procures as much weaponry as possible and pursues closer military cooperation with Iran, which is fervently opposed to the peace process. The military build-up does not come cheaply, since it entails shifting badly-needed funds from the Syrian economy to greater arms purchases.

From the intersection of these two sets of policies—negotiations and military build-up—Syria can move in any direction. This was made dramatically clear on August 13, 1992, when Syria conducted a test of the Scud-C missiles it had recently purchased from North Korea. Damascus, it seems, was sending a signal to Israel and at the same time assuring its own military commanders that the peace process in which Syria currently is engaged will not come at the expense of developing its military capabilities.

Israel sees the peace process rather differently. First, Israel thinks in terms of a peace treaty, full diplomatic relations, open borders, trade relations, tourism flowing in both directions, and open embassies in both capitals. The fact that this has not yet appeared on the horizon does not mean that Israel ought not participate in the peace process. It does mean that it must do so more cautiously than it otherwise might, and that it must strive to keep a wider margin of security.

Therefore, there is a readiness in Israel to accept long-term arrangements and broad security regimes in and through which Syrian intentions can be investigated. There is a willingness to accept interim arrangements accompanied by partial withdrawals, including the evacuation of settlements. All of this, to be sure, proceeds with the understanding that an interim arrangement cannot stand on its own and must be a stage in a comprehensive settlement.

The many question marks surrounding Syria's present course of action do not cloud the recognition in Israel that important changes have taken place. First, Syria is conducting direct negotiations with Israel concerning peace arrangements. The conclusion reached by Egyptian President Sadat in 1977, that direct talks with Israel were necessary, has now been reached by Syrian President Assad fourteen years later. Like Sadat, Assad has reached his conclusions out of hard *realpolitik* considerations, and not altruism. There is nothing wrong with this. Assad well understands that he must shift gears in response to the changes ushered in by the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War. The loss of the strategic partnership, and in effect the military umbrella, offered by the Soviet Union was undoubtedly the main reason for the change. But even before the USSR ceased to exist, Assad understood that Moscow wanted a political solution to the Arab-

Israeli conflict and would not support further military adventures in the Middle East.

Iraq's resounding defeat in the Gulf War made it even clearer to Assad that there was not much hope for the military option against Israel, as that war demonstrated the harsh meaning and dangers of meeting Israel on the present-day, technologically advanced battlefield. Moreover, changes have taken place in the Arab world, and there is a greater readiness to accept Israel and make compromises. Assad recognizes that to survive in this new environment, and in order to improve his economic condition and not depend on the charity of the Gulf states, he clearly has to improve his relations with the world's only remaining superpower, the United States. To do this he has had to pay with the currency of negotiating with Israel and has made several other gestures besides, such as allowing some Syrian Jews to leave the country.

Israelis see a play of light and shadow in Syria's recent shifts. Some purposely emphasize the shadows while others prefer to see only the light, the possibility of a real chance for peace. Some ask if Hafez Assad is the man with whom to sign a peace agreement. Can one who for years advocated the destruction of Israel by force of arms, who saw himself as the one carrying the banner of Arab nationalism and led the rejectionist camp shed his skin and reach a peace agreement? Is it not a task for his successors, perhaps even his son Basil? The answer is that the opportunity exists today while Hafez Assad is the leader of Syria. Assad is prepared to change direction and indeed has come to the negotiating table. Assad has proved himself a strong leader, one capable of making hard decisions for his people and his military. Surely the peace process must start with Assad. In any event, this process will take years, and may be fully implemented only in a post-Assad, post-Rabin era, when there will be a new generation of leaders not only in Syria but in Israel as well.

VIII   THE MINIMAL CONDITIONS

Few if any Israelis doubt that peace with Syria must be regarded as a national and strategic objective. Removing Syria from the cycle of war against Israel would immediately change Israel's situation. Moreover, peace with Syria and a settlement with the Palestinians represent perhaps the only way to build a buffer against dangers which may arise from Iraq and Iran. It is the way in which the enmity of the Arab world against Israel can be reduced to a minimum.

Yet difficulty arises the moment Israelis raise the inevitable question of the price they have to pay in return for peace with Syria, or more precisely the extent of the risk Israel must assume. There are three basic approaches to this very challenging issue.

• The chief exponent of the first approach, former defense minister and air force commander, and newly-elected President, Ezer Weizman, says that in order to achieve peace with Syria, Israel should be prepared to give up the entire Golan Heights and dismantle all the settlements on the Golan. Weizman is not alone; among those supporting his view is, for example, Major-General (Ret.) Avigdor Ben-Gal, the former commander of the Northern Command.

• The second approach, the opposite of the first, is forcefully advocated by Lieutenant General Rafael Eitan, the IDF's chief of staff during the Lebanon War, also a former commander of the Northern Command, and presently leader of the Tsomet Party. He argues that Israel must not give up any territory on the Golan, that settlements are not to be dismantled

under any circumstances, and that Israel should offer Syria "peace for peace" and not "land for peace."

• The greatest champion of the third approach, partial withdrawal, is Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin says that peace with the Syrians simply cannot be obtained without withdrawal, but, for security reasons, he wants Israel to retain certain parts of the Golan. To this end, he is willing to dismantle Israeli settlements on the Golan.[1]

Rabin's offer of partial withdrawal and partial retention of the Golan is predicated above all on a favorable outcome for the negotiations between Israel and Syria, one producing security arrangements on which the parties can agree. Under these circumstances, Israel-Syria peace may be feasible. The view that advocates a continuation of the status quo, i.e. remaining on the Golan and trying to attain peace with Syria at the same time, has no chance of success. A continuation of the status quo is an almost certain formula for deepening the conflict, perhaps even setting the stage for another round of war. It must be borne in mind that, from a military standpoint, war will pose a greater threat in the future because of the development of new weapon systems for the high-tech battlefield. Highly accurate guided weapons with extended ranges will enable Israel, for example, to reach targets inside Damascus, and in time, enable Syria to reach deep into Israeli territory; military helicopters will facilitate surprise attacks against limited objectives. These are just some of the hard reasons underscoring the fact that if a peace settlement is not reached and no security arrangements are agreed upon, the parties will feel more threatened in the future. At the same time, the desire to be rid of such threats, even through military means, will grow.

It is quite doubtful that peace arrangements can be reached with the Palestinians and other Arab states if Syria is left out of the peace process. The only conceivable way of isolating Syria would be by agreeing to the establishment of a Palestinian state

---

[1] It bears remembering that immediately after the Six Day War, on June 19, 1967, the Israeli government agreed to withdraw from occupied areas (excluding Jerusalem) if the Arab states would signal their willingness to sign peace treaties with Israel. This offer was also conditioned on the creation of demilitarized zones and protection of Israel's water sources. The Arab states rejected this offer outright at the time.

under the auspices of the PLO. But this is not Israel's intention. The Palestinians would probably not be interested in, or capable of, concluding a separate peace with Israel, nor would Damascus allow it. Assad is right in saying that the Arab-Israeli conflict ultimately requires a comprehensive solution: partial solutions to difficult long-standing conflicts are more prone to mishap and may inevitably leave some of the basic reasons for the conflict unresolved. Where Damascus errs is in predicating a peace treaty on achieving peace between Israel and *all* the Arab sides (presently including Iraq). By so doing, possible gains in the negotiations are left hostage to the extremists, and the negotiations are thrust into a cycle of demands from which they can be extricated only with great difficulty, if at all. If the Arabs do not grant Israel peace and security unless and/or until Israel totally withdraws to the pre-1967 lines on all fronts, it is clear that Israel will not hasten to expose herself through major concessions.

KEY CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

Peace with Syria, then, is the necessary condition for Israel to make peace with the rest of the Arab world. It is not, however, sufficient and will not provide a basis for lasting peace unless the following two key conditions are met:
  • Within the framework of peace, Damascus must commit itself not to join a war against Israel if any other Arab state attacks it. Syria must also agree not to void its own agreement with Israel should the Palestinians, or any other Arab state, break theirs.
  • Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is unthinkable as long as the state of war between Israel and Syria persists. Thus, Israel simply cannot agree to withdraw from the Golan if it does not know at the same time that, in return, it will receive total contractual peace, with full relations, open borders and embassies. It is extremely doubtful that any Israeli prime minister, left or right, could get a majority of the Knesset to agree to withdraw from and dismantle settlements on the Golan unless it is beyond any doubt to the public that full peace is on offer.
  The security concerns of Israel and Syria parallel each other in several ways: both fear a surprise attack; both are concerned that Lebanese territory will be used as an attack

route against them; and both face difficult geographic constraints on the Golan. Thus, both parties have security problems which must be resolved. Israel used to face special difficulties when Syria controlled the Golan Heights. Now with Israel in control of the Golan and maintaining troops so close to Damascus, Syria feels the threat turned against it more keenly.

When Israel presents its minimal security requirements, it must ensure that they are formulated in a way that will not pose a potential threat to the other side. This is also true for Syria. The settlement to be reached must be such that neither side will have reason to disavow and do away with it. Both sides need to strive for possible arrangements that will improve, not undermine, their security.

The settlement in question must reduce the danger of a surprise attack, limit the ravages of war if the agreement were to fall apart for any reason, and facilitate avoiding mistakes rather than assigning blame after the fact. The Golan is too small an area to allow for the simple drawing of a territorial line that will ensure equal security for both parties. The arrangement, therefore, must be broader, and go beyond the territorial dimension alone.

It is clear that once Israel has achieved peace, its deterrence formula will change, relying less on the territorial component and more on mutually-agreed security arrangements, if indeed good security arrangements are achieved. There are fourteen points, explained below, that need to be addressed: Indispensable Conditions; Integrating Lebanon; Sovereignty and Leasing; Interim Settlement; Border Corrections; Settlements; Military Presence; Demilitarizing The Golan; Early Warning Stations; Force Structuring; Monitoring and Verification; International Involvement; U.S. Guarantees; and Building Mutual Trust.

INDISPENSABLE CONDITIONS

There are several military conditions which Israel considers to be non-negotiable. If they are not met, Israel would prefer to maintain the status quo, the attendant risks notwithstanding. Some of the conditions are as follows:

• *The defense of Israel's water sources is paramount.* There are two areas of concern here. The first is the Sea of Galilee, all of

which is currently within Israeli sovereignty. Under no circumstances can Israel agree to a Syrian presence on the bank of the Sea of Galilee; the border cannot ever be at the water's edge, as was the case prior to the Six Day War. It is not sufficient to ban Syrian military from the area; Syrian fishermen must be banned as well, lest the lake, Israel's only large water reservoir, become a bone of contention and source of trouble and threats. Simply put, this water is more precious to Israel than even its energy sources, and no threats to it can be contemplated at all.

The second key Israeli concern about its water supply is the sources of the Jordan River, one of which, the Banias River, originates in the Golan Heights. While a border correction in this part of the Golan would be well-advised, it will be very difficult to persuade the Syrians to give up this water source. Syria will have to make a commitment not to follow the same course of action as before the Six Day War, when it sought to divert the water of the Banias. Israel will have to insist that, as part of any peace agreement, a joint Israeli-Syrian committee be formed to determine the distribution of the water of the Banias. Syria must also commit itself to regional cooperation in exploiting the flood water feeding the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee.

• *A second, indispensable condition is the true demilitarization of the Golan*—the removal of all offensive forces for a very long time. This demilitarization will continue for as long as either one of the parties demands it; neither party should be able to terminate it unilaterally without the consent of the other.

INTEGRATING LEBANON

Israel and Syria cannot reach satisfactory arrangements without integrating Lebanon into the new security regime. Lebanon stands to benefit from a comprehensive settlement between its two strong neighbors, both of whose forces are stationed on Lebanese territory. Israel cannot agree to either a total or a partial withdrawal from the Golan as long as Syrian forces are stationed in the Bekaa Valley; to the contrary, the danger posed to Israel by the presence of these forces in Lebanon, especially those in the Bekaa, will increase if the IDF withdraws from the Golan.

Thus, Syria and Israel will, as part of their agreement on the Golan, have to make a commitment to withdraw their respective forces from Lebanon. As part of a final settlement, Israel and Syria must publicly renounce any and all territorial claims in Lebanon and support its territorial integrity. In addition, both must commit themselves not to use proxies, whether overt or covert, in Lebanon.

Within the framework of a peace settlement, Israel would withdraw from southern Lebanon, while the Lebanese government, for its part, would assume responsibility to keep Lebanon from becoming a base for any aggression against Israel. This would further entail disarming all the militias, especially those that actively seek to attack Israel, such as Hezbollah. Once the militias have been disarmed and the IDF has withdrawn from Lebanon, the Israeli-sponsored South Lebanon Army (SLA) would also be disbanded, and its officers integrated into the Lebanese army. Beyond disarming the militias, the Lebanese government must agree not to allow the forces of any entity in a declared state of war with Israel to be deployed toward Israel from its territory; particularly, the Lebanese government should take steps to expel the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

In addition, the Lebanese government would have to agree to secure the sources of the Jordan River originating in Lebanon, such as the Hasbani River. Under Syrian pressure, Lebanon has refrained, thus far, from joining the deliberation of the multilateral water talks established by the Madrid process. This is a matter of extreme importance and must be addressed.

SOVEREIGNTY AND LEASING

It has been suggested that perhaps formal sovereignty could be retained by Syria, while the area be leased to Israel. There are historical precedents for this type of arrangement, such as, for example, the agreement between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1947 regarding the thirty-year lease of the Hanko peninsula to the Soviet Union.

It is doubtful, however, that Syria would agree to this. Almost certainly, Damascus would seek, at the outset, an Israeli commitment to absolute withdrawal at a specific time, to not build new settlements during the leasing period or to create

new conditions that might hamper withdrawal at the final stage. Moreover, it would be difficult to implement this type of leasing arrangement, as the Syrian residents of the Golan will presumably wish to return to the area while Israel would rather not become entangled in a complicated lease arrangement involving the presence of non-Israelis for an indefinite period. There are so many doubts in regard to the leasing solution that it is unlikely to be achieved within Israeli requirements.

INTERIM SETTLEMENT

It is reasonable to assume that the possibility of an interim settlement on the Golan may be raised in the course of negotiations, especially if the parties find it difficult to reach a comprehensive agreement on full withdrawal in exchange for peace. While Damascus announced early on that it was against interim arrangements, it will gladly accept a phased Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, if it is full, comprehensive and agreed to by Israel at the outset. In other words, even if Damascus eventually agrees to an interim settlement, it will not respond immediately with full peace; and it is doubtful that Damascus will agree to non-belligerence in return for partial withdrawal unless it is a first stage in a phased, total withdrawal.[1]

Any advantage Israel might accrue from an interim settlement would at any rate be very limited. Israel need not test Syria's adherence to the disengagement agreement as there has never been any doubt of Syria's ability to keep its word. What Israel needs to find out is whether the peace to which Damascus is committing itself is real peace and whether it can implement it. That would not be put to the test in an interim agreement.

At the same time, an interim agreement with Syria would exact a heavy price from Israel's body politic. This is all the more true insofar as even a partial withdrawal from the Golan

---

[1] Conceivably, an interim settlement on the Golan might overlap with the period of Palestinian interim self-rule on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip currently under negotiation. The obvious drawback here is that a negative connection will be established between these two fronts, i.e. progress on one front will be held hostage to progress on the other.

as part of an interim agreement is bound to affect the settlements there. The possibility of giving up a certain area in the southern Golan without evacuating settlements is only a cosmetic adjustment to the cease-fire line which would not be enough for an interim agreement. There is some willingness on the part of the current Israeli government to yield a small number of settlements as part of an interim arrangement. But from the standpoint of Israeli public opinion that would mean paying far too much for far too little. Dividing the Golan as part of an interim agreement, with Israel continuing to hold the higher northern part, including Mount Hermon, would suffer from the same disadvantage, and involve evacuating an even greater number of settlements. Resistance within Israel to an agreement will remain strong so long as the reward is not total peace, and even then it will be a hard sell. If Israel is to undergo the trauma of evacuating settlements, it is better to do it all at once and receive total peace in return.

The only way to overcome the need to evacuate Israeli settlements as part of an interim settlement is by transferring Druze settlements in the northern Golan to the Syrians without transferring Israelis. This may be acceptable to Israel as long as it does not affect the retention of Mount Hermon by Israeli forces.

BORDER CORRECTIONS

To improve security conditions and prevent unwanted escalation of tensions, it will be necessary to make several corrections to the international border between Israel and Syria. These corrections would remedy the egregious defects of the pre-1967 borders. One of them, perhaps the most important, would be in the area of the Sea of Galilee, where the pre-1967 border came within ten meters of the bank of the lake on its northeastern end.[1] As noted above, because of Israel's sensitivity to its water resources and the great importance of this reservoir, any element that would put the whole at risk or even turn it into a matter of contention must be eliminated. To

---

[1] The lake itself has always been entirely within Israeli sovereignty.

this end, the border would be moved east beyond the cliffs of the Golan towering over the lake.

The second place where Israel should seek a border correction is the range of cliffs overlooking the Huleh Valley. Preferably the border would pass several hundred meters east of the cliffs. Corrections are in order in at least three other locations—near Kibbutz Gadot in the central Golan, near Kfar Szold in the north, and near Tel Katzir in the south.

The pre-1948 border should also be restored near the town of al-Hama. Formerly part of Mandatory Palestine, al-Hama was occupied by Jordanians in the 1948 War and was later transferred to Syria, which kept it and the strip leading to it until the Six Day War.

SETTLEMENTS

The liquidation and destruction of Israeli settlements and the evacuation of their residents would be profoundly traumatic not only to the evacuated families, but to the entire nation. Israel underwent deep shock during the 1982 evacuation of the settlements of the northern Sinai as part of the Camp David Accords, and nobody wishes to experience that again. A repeat of the earlier experience may be expected to produce a severe internal disruption in the body politic. A new generation, born after 1967, has grown up on the Golan Heights. Exemplary agriculture and local industry have been developed there. The thirty-two Israeli communities on the Heights include kibbutzim, agricultural moshavim and a town of several thousand. The evacuation of these settlements will undoubtedly cut deep into the flesh of the nation, and be particularly hard on the government of Yitzhak Rabin, since the initiative to establish settlements on the Golan came originally from the Labor Party and long enjoyed Labor support. Indeed, many Golan residents argue that they settled the Golan with the encouragement of their party in keeping with its historic commitment to settling the land. In an open, democratic society like Israel, it will not suffice for the government to issue an edict and dispatch troops to evacuate the residents by force. Nothing short of the achievement of full, genuine peace with Syria and an end to the long-standing conflict with that country would be able to secure the consent of the majority of the people and the Knesset to evacuate. Yet,

the evacuation of the settlements is a sacrifice that can be made by Israel in return for true and total peace with Syria.

Should Israel really be offered full peace with Syria and an end to the conflict, it will have no choice but to evacuate the settlements in those areas from which it agrees to withdraw. The evacuation of the settlements would begin once the IDF presence in the Golan ends, at which point Israel would not be able to add any new settlements. It is possible that towards the end of Israel's military presence in the Golan, if not sooner, the Syrian residents of the area would begin to return to the Golan. Israel is bound to insist that Damascus agree to let those Israeli residents who wish to remain under Syrian rule to be able to do so, but it is doubtful many would agree to stay even if Damascus were to grant such permission at all. It is also doubtful that Israelis and Syrians living side by side in the area formerly occupied by Israel could maintain good neighborly relations, while care must be taken that residential areas on the Golan not become sources of friction. Israel, at the same time, will have an interest in Syria's developing the Golan, since that, coupled with investment in enterprises such as the Upper Yarmuq works, will give the Syrians an interest in cultivating the peace and preserving their diplomatic gains.

MILITARY PRESENCE

The element of time in the Israeli-Syrian security arrangements is crucial, and a Syrian willingness to take this element into account may make it much easier for the Israeli government to submit a comprehensive peace and security plan to the Knesset and the Israeli public.

Israel should insist that the agreement allow an Israeli military presence in some parts of the Golan for a period of roughly twenty-five years. This presence would be phased out over time at prearranged stages, and, from the outset, would be defensive and warning-oriented. Thus, for example, if in the first stage there will be an IDF presence throughout the entire area, it would be reduced in the second stage to early warning stations on the Golan and some of the high hills in the area, and so forth. The demilitarization will remain in effect as long as either of the parties wants it.

DEMILITARIZING THE GOLAN

The entire Golan would be demilitarized, including Syrian areas east of the territory from which Israel would withdraw. On the Israeli side, there will be a demilitarization of all offensive capabilities. The rules of demilitarization will also apply to the Israeli forces which will remain on the Golan during the withdrawal period. Demilitarization is not meant to instill a feeling of insecurity in either side, but rather to prevent surprise attacks, make it difficult for either side to mass forces, and generally lower the temperature. It will provide an apparatus for early detection of violations while preventing friction and unintentional escalation.

The depth of the demilitarized area would be determined by the shape of the terrain and its topography, and would take the depth of the operational battlefield at various points into account. One must, of course, also take into account the various arsenals at the two sides' disposal and the weapons that are likely to be introduced in the next decade. Because of the shape of the terrain on the Golan and its proximity to vital areas inside both countries, it will be difficult to fully implement all the rules.

The eastern border of the demilitarized area need not include the approaches to Damascus. The Syrians must not be made to feel that they are being prevented from defending their capital city, a threat to which they are quite sensitive. At the same time, the forces defending Damascus in the direction of the Golan must be guard forces and not armored divisions. The eastern border of the demilitarized area should reach the army bases at Qatanah on the road to Damascus, and in the southeast near the town of Der'a. Syria will no doubt demand reciprocity from Israel in demilitarizing the Israeli side of the area. Yet, owing to the large differences in the size of the respective areas, Israel will be able to demilitarize only a small part of its territory. In the so-called "Finger of the Galilee," or Upper Galilee, one may envision an arrangement similar to that made between Egypt and Israel, whereby a narrow strip of Israeli territory proper in the Negev was demilitarized for similarly symbolic reasons.

Demilitarization, in the context of security arrangements between Israel and Syria, means primarily the removal of the patently offensive elements of weapon systems, i.e. armor,

large numbers of artillery, and the equipment used by assault engineers. It is also important to remove surface-to-air missile batteries, as well as precision guided munitions (PGMs), whose defensive uses cannot be separated from their offensive uses. There should also be a ban on the construction of landing platforms for helicopters inside the demilitarized area; only a limited number of transport helicopter flights should be allowed inside this zone.

The middle of the demilitarized area would be a buffer zone. A limited number of Syrian police armed only with light weapons will be allowed to operate inside the zone. An international force would be deployed inside this buffer zone to separate the forces and help monitor the security arrangements. Without such an international force, there is sure to be a dangerous vacuum that would invite violations. The buffer zone must be wider than the present one on the Golan, and no less than twenty kilometers wide, in keeping with the features of the terrain. Neither party will be allowed to maintain a military presence in the buffer zone, and any existing fortifications inside it will be destroyed.

On both sides of the buffer zone, there would be not only demilitarized areas but also areas of limited deployment, with only limited forces remaining for guard duty. They would be equipped with short-range artillery and no anti-aircraft missiles of any kind. No armored units will be stationed in the areas of limited deployment. The large fortifications and obstacles will be destroyed. However, the minefields can perhaps be kept to the extent that they further the purposes of demilitarization. The limited forces in the demilitarized zone will not be allowed to hold maneuvers at more than battalion strength, nor will they be allowed to transport troops by helicopter. Any maneuvers that were to take place will be reported to the other side at least one week in advance.

EARLY WARNING STATIONS

Most of the Golan area is more or less suited to the placement of early warning stations. It is largely a flat plateau, and the stations can be set up on the hills of Mount Hermon. One argument regularly made against the presence of Israeli warning stations is that their tasks can be accomplished by satellite. Yet, while satellites can provide important

information, their effectiveness can be greatly limited by inclement weather or other technical difficulties. There is no adequate substitute, in other words, for early warning stations on the ground. The use of observation balloons and aircraft may increase early warning capabilities.

Generally speaking, the importance to Israel of early warning stations using and generating real-time intelligence will greatly increase should it withdraw from the Golan Heights. Israel will have no choice but to exercise extreme care with regard to early warning.

As part of its long-term military presence on the Golan, Israel will continue to operate its warning station on Mount Hermon and on some of the volcanic mounds in the central and southern Golan. It will be possible in the second stage of a phased withdrawal to leave the area's early warning stations in place while other forces are thinned out further. In addition to Mount Hermon, warning stations can be located on the Bental and Avital or Yosifon mounds, and in the south on Tel Faris.

If the agreement is kept for several years, Israel will be able to agree to the presence of a Syrian early warning station, similar to the IDF's, on Mount Hermon. Both parties will then be able to observe each other's territory so as to guard against a surprise attack. Israel, frankly, has no offensive intentions, and so should not be perturbed by the presence of a Syrian early warning station next to its own on Mount Hermon.

FORCE STRUCTURING

The security arrangements must address the structure of Syrian and Israeli forces and the deployment of significant weapon systems. Should Syria and Israel embark on the path of peace, the forces of both sides may be limited bilaterally. Both sides, it is true, face genuine security problems in addition to those they have with each other. Nevertheless, an agreement on limiting and restructuring their forces is possible. On careful examination, it can be effected without significantly diminishing the ability of either side to defend itself. Israel will be able to react accordingly to a Syrian agreement to limit Syrian forces and change their structure. Force reduction will also help restrain the military budgets of both countries.

The purpose of force reduction is to minimize offensive elements without affecting defensive capability. Syria's forces today comprise eleven to twelve divisions along with some independent units. The goal should be to limit the Syrian forces to seven or eight divisions, five of which would be regular forces and the rest reserve forces, much like the force structure of the IDF. Both sides can reach an understanding on the gradual change in military doctrine, so that most of the maneuvers and exercises in the future are based more on defensive than offensive training.

Changes in force structure must also entail changes in the deployment of certain weapon systems outside the demilitarized areas, including fighter-bombers, surface-to-surface missiles and armored divisions. The negative effects on Israeli defense of transferring fighter-bombers to rear airfields may be offset by the provision of early warning stations.

The picture changes when it comes to surface-to-surface missiles. At present, Syria maintains four brigades of surface-to-surface missiles and rockets of various kinds intended, *inter alia*, to strike a balance with Israel's Air Force. These systems, and their Israeli counterparts, must be limited, not to derogate the power of the Syrian armed forces, but to set limits on the offensive capabilities of both sides. For example, the number of launchers will remain the same, but both parties will reduce the number of missiles at their disposal. At the same time, the parties would have to agree on the location of the launchers. This will necessitate monitoring by a third party.

MONITORING AND VERIFICATION

Monitoring and the verification of the agreement will take place on three different levels. The first is aerial surveillance. Satellite photographs will be supplied to both sides, most likely by the United States. At the same time, there will be photographic flights (by airplanes or remotely-piloted vehicles) to monitor the agreement, either by American aircraft as in the Sinai, or by UN teams. The second level, outside ground inspections, will be carried out by UN observers from countries that maintain diplomatic relations with both parties. They will conduct regular inspections as well as unannounced

inspections on their own initiative or at the request of either party.

The third level of the monitoring system, mutual inspections, is vital for the increase of mutual trust. It is extremely important that the agreement allow the formation of mutual patrols of Syrians and Israelis who will undertake joint inspections of each other's areas. The agreement should create a supreme monitoring committee representing both sides, with a rotating UN representative acting as the chairperson.

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Israel has always objected to foreign forces taking responsibility for Israel's ongoing security, as a formula for misunderstanding and conflicts with friendly countries. It is best not to invite the United States to dispatch military units to keep the agreement between Syria and Israel and stand between them. Rather, the United States can offer its services in another way—through monitoring the agreement. This can take a number of forms: satellite services and reconnaissance flights over the demilitarized area, sending teams of monitoring experts, partial staffing of Israeli and Syrian warning stations (perhaps fully staffing these stations later on), and, of course, supplying sophisticated electronic equipment for the warning stations and the unmanned electronic sensors both in the buffer zone and along the possible routes of attack.

The force stationed in the buffer zone will be an international force, similar to the force currently monitoring the Separation of Forces Agreement. This force will not be evacuated from the area except by the consent of both parties. If there is a need to replace the force of one of the countries participating in the international force, the new force will be determined by the Security Council, which will act as a guarantor of the agreement.

U.S. GUARANTEES

The United States will be asked to provide its own guarantees to the agreement between Israel and Syria and to be a witness to the agreement, as it was in Camp David. At the same time Israel will ask Washington to make a commitment

to Israel to provide military aid should it become necessary as a result of a massive violation of the agreement by Syria.

Israel will have to ask the United States to be even more mindful of keeping the military qualitative edge in favor of Israel, especially after Israel gives up territories on the Golan, and probably on other fronts. This does not mean that the United States need compensate Israel for any sale of weapons to Syria, as has been the case with respect to Egypt, but rather that the United States should refrain from selling any weapons to Syria as a reward for agreeing to sign a treaty with Israel.

BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST

Steps for building mutual trust are possible once an understanding is reached between the parties on the declarations of principle, even before they reach an agreement regarding the details. In other words, they may be undertaken even during the negotiations.

First, Syria has to join the deliberations of all the multilateral committees established at Madrid, including the arms control and water issues committees. Additional steps that may be taken towards building mutual trust early on include: a joint declaration to refrain from pre-emptive war; setting up a hot line to prevent crises; early notification of maneuvers at division strength or more (with foreign observers) or of surface-to-surface missiles testing; and rescue operations on the high seas. These steps may also encompass southern Lebanon, including such measures as evacuating SLA forces from the Jezzin area, and disarming Hezbollah.

CONCLUSION: SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

Security arrangements are not meant to make things difficult for the parties but to put them at ease and make them feel more secure. In many respects, the security arrangements can provide each side with better and more sophisticated strategic depth. They do not, of course, offer a guarantee against incidents or intentional violations, but it is clear that a massive violation of the agreement will be detected quickly and recorded by the Security Council and the international community, without whom it is not possible to maintain and keep the agreement.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Avi-Ran, Reuven. *Syria's Intervention in Lebanon.* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1986) [Hebrew]

Cobban, Helena. *The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict.* (New York: Praeger, 1991)

Dupuy, Trevor. *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978)

Eisenstadt, Michael. *Arming for Peace? Syria's Elusive Quest for "Strategic Parity."* Policy Paper No. 31. (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1992)

Fivaz, George. *Does Israel Need to Retain the Golan Heights?* Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1980 [on file with author].

Kemp, Geoffrey. *The Control of the Middle East Arms Race.* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 1991)

Lanir, Zvi. *Israel's Involvement in Lebanon: Precedent for an "Open" Game with Syria?* (Tel Aviv: Center for Strategic Studies, 1980) [Hebrew]

Ma'oz, Moshe. *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus.* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988).

Nimrod, Yoram. *The Fire Didn't Cease: Causes of Tension on the Israel-Syria Border.* (Jerusalem: The Center for Arab and Afro-Asian Studies, 1967) [Hebrew]

Pipes, Daniel. *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991.* Policy Paper No. 26. (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991)

Rabin, Yitzhak. *The Rabin Memoirs.* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979)

Rabin, Yitzhak and Itamar Rabinovich. *Syria: Lectures on Israel-Syrian Relations.* (Tel Aviv: Yad David Elazar/Tel Aviv University/Zmora-Bitan, 1984) [Hebrew]

Rabinovich, Itamar. *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Rabinovich, Itamar. *Syria Under the Ba'th, 1963-1966.* (Jerusalem: Israeli Universities Press, 1972)

Saunders, Harold. *The Other Walls: The Politics of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1985)

Schiff, Ze'ev and Eitan Haber. *Israel, Army and Defense Lexicon.* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1976) [Hebrew]

Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Yaari. *Israel's Lebanon War.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984)

Seale, Patrick. *Assad: The Struggle for the Middle East.* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988).

Shalev, Aryeh. *Cooperation in the Shadow of Conflict: The Israel-Syria Ceasefire Regime, 1949-1955.* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1989) [Hebrew]

Tlas, Mustafa. *Israel's Invasion of Lebanon.* (Damascus: Tishrin Publishing House, 1983) [Arabic]

Weinberger, Naomi Joy. *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-6 Civil War.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)

Yaniv, Avner, Avi Kober, and Moshe Ma'oz, editors. *Syria and Israel's Security*. (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1991) [Hebrew]

Articles

Alan, James. "The UN on the Golan: Peacekeeping Paradox?" *International Relations*, May 1987, pp. 64-84.

Albargy, Nabiyah. "The Golan Battle and the Military Options." *Istratijiyya*, January 1982, pp. 15-20. [Arabic]

Al-'Assali, Bassam. "The Golan in Israel's View of the Future." *Al-Majallah al-Askariyya*, April 1975, pp. 21-29. [Arabic]

Avi-Ran, Reuven. "Is a Syrian-Israel Arrangement in Lebanon Possible?" *Ma'arachot*, no. 286, 1983, pp. 38-40. [Hebrew]

Azmy, Mahmoud. "The Syrian Missile Crisis: The War that Might Happen." *Al Fikr al-Istratiji al-Arabi*, July 1981, pp. 420-430. [Arabic]

Gilboa, Amos. "Syria's National Security Concept." *N'tiv*, July 1991, pp. 15-24. [Hebrew]

Gur, Mordechai, Transcript of interview on Israel Television, August 13, 1992

Haupert, J.S. "Political Geography of the Israel-Syrian Boundary Dispute, 1949-1967." *Professional Geographer*, May 1969, pp. 163-171.

"The Military Balance Between Israel and Syria," in *IDF Yearbook* 1986, pp. 65-72 (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1986)

Jonah, J. "Peace Keeping in the Middle East." *International Journal*, Winter 1976, pp. 100-122.

Khalidi, Ahmed and Hussein Agha. "The Syrian Doctrine of Strategic Parity," in Judith Kipper and Harold Saundrs, editors, *The Middle East in Global Perspective*. (Boulder: Westview, 1991), pp. 186-218.

Land of the Golan: A Series of Lectures on Israel-Syrian Relations (Tel Aviv: Yad David Elazar/Tel Aviv University/Amikam, 1985) [Hebrew]

Levran, Aharon. "UN Forces as an Element of Security Arrangements on the Northern Border." *Skirah Hodshit*, No. 32, 1985, pp. 32-41. [Hebrew]

Mawlawi, F. "The Syrian-Israeli Border Confrontation." *Arab Journal*, 1967, pp. 13-17.

Pa'il, Meir. "The Golan Heights in Exchange for Peace: A Military Plan." *New Outlook*, March 1991, pp. 12-15.

Pedatzur, Reuven. "The Great Missed Opportunity." *Ha'aretz*, April 19, 1991. [Hebrew]

Pedatzur, Reuven. "Settlement Outposts in the Golan." *Ha'aretz*, May 3, 1991. [Hebrew]

Rabinovich, Itamar. "Controlled Conflict in the Middle East: The Syrian-Israeli Rivalry in Lebanon," in Gabriel Ben-Dor and David B. Lewitt, editors, *Conflict Management in the Middle East* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1987), pp. 97-111.

Rabinovich, Itamar. "The Foreign Policy of Syria: Goals, Capabilities, Constraints and Options." *Survival*, July/August 1982, pp. 175-183.

Rabinowitz, Yosef. "Towards the Golan Front." *Mi'bifnim*, 1975, pp. 256-262. [Hebrew]

Rosen, Steven J. "The Occupied Territories." *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Fall 1977, pp. 125-144.

Ryan, Raphael. "UN Soldiers on the Golan Heights." *Military History*, September 1983, pp. 422-429.

Schiff, Ze'ev. "A Confrontation with Syria." *Midstream*, June 1986, pp. 3-6.

Schiff, Ze'ev. "Dealing with Syria." *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1984, pp. 92-112.

Shishakli, Hashem. "Zionist Settlements and Plans on the Golan." *Al-Majallah al-Askariyya*, August 1975, pp. 56-79. [Arabic]

Sofer, Arnon. "The Geography Behind the Law." *Skirah Hodshit*, December 1981, pp. 39-43. [Hebrew]

Symposium on the Future of the Golan Heights, with Dan Meridor, Haim Bar-Lev, Avigdor Ben-Gal, Moshe Bar-Kochba, *Ha'aretz*, October 6, 1992. [Hebrew]

Yaniv, Avner. "A Syrian-Israeli Detente?" *Middle East Insight*, January 1988, pp. 27-33.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE

Enduring Partnership: Report of the Commission on U.S.-Israel Relations—Report by a distinguished bipartisan panel sketching a blueprint of U.S.-Israel relations in the post-Cold War era

UN Security Council Resolution 242: The Building Block of Peacemaking—A Washington Institute Monograph featuring Adnan Abu Odeh, Nabil Elaraby, Meir Rosenne, Eugene Rostow, Dennis Ross, and Vernon Turner

Democracy and Arab Political Culture—A Washington Institute Monograph by Elie Kedourie

PeaceWatch Anthology—Day-to-day analyses of the peace process by the scholars and associates of The Washington Institute

Towards a New Era in U.S.-Israel Relations—Proceedings of The Washington Institute's Seventh Annual Policy Conference

A Tunisian View of the New Middle East—Proceedings of Statesman Series speech by Tunisian Foreign Minister Habib Ben Yahia

Pursuing Peace: An American Strategy for the Arab-Israeli Peace Process—Report of The Washington Institute's Strategic Study Group, with recommendations for U.S. policy in the peace negotiations by a distinguished group of Middle East experts including Samuel Lewis, Michael Mandelbaum, Peter Rodman and Martin Indyk

POLICY PAPERS SERIES

Policy Paper 33: *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and Why* by Patrick Clawson

Policy Paper 32: *"The Arab Street"? Public Opinion in the Arab World* by David Pollock

Policy Paper 31: *Arming for Peace? Syria's Elusive Quest for "Strategic Parity"* by Michael Eisenstadt

Policy Paper 30: T*he Economic Consequences of the Persian Gulf War: Accelerating OPEC's Demise* by Eliyahu Kanovsky

Policy Paper 29: *King Hussein's Strategy of Survival* by Uriel Dann

Policy Paper 28: *The Arrow Next Time? Israel's Missile Defense Program for the 1990s* by Marvin Feuerwerger

Policy Paper 27: *Palestinian Self-Government (Autonomy): Its Past and its Future* by Harvey Sicherman

Policy Paper 26: *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991* by Daniel Pipes

Policy Paper 25: *Economic Consequences of Peace for Israel, the Palestinians, and Jordan* by Patrick Clawson and Howard Rosen

Policy Paper 24: *The Future of Iraq* by Laurie Mylroie

Policy Paper 23: *"The Poor Man's Atomic Bomb?" Biological Weapons in the Middle East* by Seth Carus

Policy Paper 22: *Jerusalem* by Teddy Kollek

Policy Paper 21: *"The Sword of the Arabs:" Iraq's Strategic Weapons* by Michael Eisenstadt

Policy Paper 20: *OPEC Ascendant? Another Case of Crying Wolf* by Eliyahu Kanovsky

For a complete listing or to order publications, write or call The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1828 L Street, NW, Suite 1050, Washington, D.C. 20036 Phone (202) 452-0650, Fax (202) 223-5364