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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

March 7, 2017

It's Time for the U.S. to Recognize Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights

Dear Friend of FLAME:

As we've noted over the last few months, Donald Trump's ascent to the Presidency portends well for Israel and us Israel advocates. On the other hand, while Mr. Trump has been quick to act on other campaign pledges, his steps to restore—and improve—the U.S. relationship with Israel have until now been optical, not substantive.

While the President's attitude toward Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have certainly been friendly, his commitments to Israel have yet to result in concrete changes.

While it's too early in the Trump administration to begin hard pressure, Mr. Netanyahu used his recent visit—and substantial political capital with the President—to push not for relocating the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, but for U.S. recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. While both changes in U.S. policy would clearly benefit Israel, for many reasons, recognition of the Golan as Israeli territory would bring more benefits, both to Israel and the U.S.

Quick background: Following the Arabs' attack on Israel in 1967, and their ignominious defeat in just six days, Israel, for security reasons, took control of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Since that time, Israel has made peace with Jordan and Egypt, relinquishing rights to water and lands, most notably the Sinai, which was returned to Egypt.

Syria has steadfastly resisted a reasonable deal for peace, in fact insisting on a full return of the lost Golan lands, which would lead to a security disaster for Israel. From a military standpoint, the Golan Heights provide the perfect view and attack platform over

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YOU DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH...

Israel's Settlements: Obstacle to Peace?

Arabs opposed the State of Israel before there were settlements—and they oppose it still today. It's time to clear up 5 false myths about settlements.

The U.S., as well as some American media and politicians, claim Israel doesn't want peace, since Jews build houses in disputed territories of Judea and Samaria (i.e. the West Bank). But the facts reveal settlements to be a misconception. What, such people think is preventing peace?

What are the facts?

Palestinian Arabs have violently fought Israel's existence since the Jewish state's founding and only much later cited Israel's settlements as an obstacle to peace. When Israel withdrew its settlements in Gaza in 2005, it was rewarded with a warzone run by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. Five major misconceptions underlie criticism of Israeli settlements.

Myth #1: Palestinians "own" these lands. In fact, Jews are indigenous to the indigenous people of Palestine (including Israel, Judea and Samaria), who have lived in the region for millennia and ruled it as a state, predating Arab settlement by 1,000 years. Palestinians have never had a state nor possessed public land in this region. Thus, the idea of "Palestinian lands" is false. In fact, both people can live claim in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). It is a disputed territory.

Myth #2: Jews have no right to live in the disputed territories. Jews and Arabs have lived together for hundreds of years in Palestine. The only exception is during 49 years of Jordanian rule, when Jews were evicted from the West Bank. Today, some two million Arabs live on full citizenship of Israel, and some 400,000 Jews live in Judea and Samaria. Yet Palestinians insist that no peace with Israel is possible so long as Jews live among them. In 2013, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas stated that "in the final resolution, we would not see the presence of a single Israeli—civilian or soldier—on our lands." Why should Abbas, who accuses Israel of "apartheid," issue a racist ban on Jews? Why should Arabs be welcomed in Israeli society—as they are—where Jews would be forbidden from living with Palestinians in the West Bank?

Myth #3: Israel is increasing new settlements in Judea and Samaria. In December 2014, President Obama's dispute neutral committee advised Ben Netanyahu to comply with PLO's holy Wadatfeh of "tens of thousands of settlements being constructed" by Israel. *It just no new settlements are under construction in Israel, and Israel has created no new settlements in over 20 years.* The number of settlements, plus illegal outposts, now totals just 210. While the number of settlers on living in established settlements has increased by 355,000 since 2005, the number of settlers living out of Israel's anti-Arabian separation barrier has since 2009 increased by only 20,000. Less than 1% of the population in the disputed territories, Israel, Israeli communities take up only 2% of the land of the West Bank. *Almost all the settlements are located on land not previously occupied, used or privately owned by individual Palestinians.*

Myth #4: Israel's settlements are illegal under international law. Most who assert Israeli settlements are illegal cite the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Cyprus and China have settled Chinese into occupied Tibet. The United States has never transferred any of its people into the West Bank. All countries in Judea and Samaria have been voluntary, undertaken by private Israeli citizens. Why does the world focus on Israel—which has not broken this law—while allowing other nations to violate it liberally?

Myth #5: The Palestinians would make peace if settlement building stopped. "Israel has created no new settlements in over 20 years." In 2009, Israel froze new settlement activity for 10 months to entice the Palestinians to negotiations sponsored by the U.S. The Palestinians refused. Indeed, Israel has made numerous land-for-peace offers to the Palestinians, most recently in 2009 and in 2010, in which the Palestinians would have received more than 90 percent of the disputed territories, given land swaps—plus a capital in Jerusalem. *But the Arabs snafled these down. They refuse to accept Israel as a Jewish state and insist on "rights" of five million descendants of Arab refugees from 1948 to "resettle" in Israel, which would swamp Israel demographically.*

Israel has a standing offer to resume negotiations with the Palestinians with no preconditions. *But the Arabs reject, citing Israeli settlements as an obstacle. One thing is certain: Settlements are not an obstacle to peace in 2017—what Israel was aware of three years ago—and they're not the obstacle today.*

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East

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Israel's vulnerable central Galilee plain.

Certainly the unfolding of Syria's sorry history over the last six years has supported Israel's refusal to relinquish this precious strategic territory. The notion of Iran's Hizbollah terror surrogates or ISIS seizing the Golan from Syria—either of which would have been likely—represents an unthinkable existential nightmare for the Jewish state.

This week's *FLAME Hotline* featured article, by Matthew Brodsky, lays out a compelling justification for the Trump administration to show leadership on the Golan question—and in the process do the United States a great favor on the Middle East chessboard.

Brodsky, senior Middle East analyst at Wikistrat and former director of policy at the Jewish Policy Center in Washington, D.C., argues that this is an opportunity for the U.S. not only to do Israel a valuable favor, but also to leverage influence against Russia and Iran.

Once you've reviewed this concise and convincing piece, below, we recommend you contact your Senators and Representative, recommending that they support such an action.

Finally, I hope you'll also quickly review the P.S. immediately below, which describes FLAME's current *hasbarah* campaign to expose five despicable media myths about Israel's settlements in Judea and Samaria.

Best regards,

Jim Sinkinson
President, Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

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FLAME is the only organization that defends Israel with paid editorial *hasbarah* messages placed in media nationwide every month: The dire threats from Iran, Hamas and Hizbollah, the injustice of BDS, Palestinian anti-Semitism and more. If you support a bold voice that tells the truth about Israel in American media, please donate now.

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P.S. You've no doubt often read in the *N.Y. Times* and other mainstream media of "Israeli settlements on Palestinian land" or "settlements regarded as illegal by the international community." Yet these objective-sounding phrases represent malicious propaganda—disguised lies told so often that millions of Americans believe them. In order to make Americans—especially college and university students—aware of this media treachery, FLAME has just begun publishing a new position paper: "[Israeli Settlements: Obstacle to Peace?](#)" This paid editorial, exposing the five greatest myths about the settlements, is appearing in magazines and newspapers, including college newspapers, with a combined readership of some 10 million people. In addition, it is being sent to every member of the U.S. Congress and President Trump. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a donation now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate now](#). Now more than ever we need your support to ensure that the American people and the U.S. Congress end our support of blatantly anti-Semitic, global jihadist organizations.

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Why the U.S. Should Recognize Israeli Sovereignty over the Golan Heights

Netanyahu's request for the US to recognize Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights represents a bold move that would help accomplish several American objectives in the Middle East

By Mathew R.J. Brodsky, *Jerusalem Post*, February 28, 2017

The biggest news to come out of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington is not what's grabbing most headlines. Rather, it's his decision to ask the US to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. It comes at a time

when US President Donald Trump is seeking to reinvigorate US relations with its Middle East allies and entertaining new strategies to solve a myriad of challenges facing the United States. In that context, Netanyahu's idea should prompt more than a casual review from Washington.

Israel captured two-thirds of the Golan territory from Syria in the 1967 war and annexed it in 1981, to the international community's consternation. The strategic highlands represented less than one percent of Syrian land area, yet under their control it served as a forward operating position from where Syrian artillery regularly shelled northern Israel and the Palestinian Fatah organization launched regular cross-border raids.

What the Trump administration decides to do about Syria necessitates an even more important decision, about Russia. Seeing clearly where Russian President Vladimir Putin's interest intersect with or diverge from America's will serve as a keystone in crafting a coherent, wider Middle East strategy that fulfills Trump's twin objectives of destroying Islamic State (ISIS) and pushing back against Iran. At the same time, Washington's definition of Moscow's regional role will have direct implications for Israel's security posture and intelligence sharing.

There are several reasons why recognizing the annexation of the Golan Heights would benefit both the US and Israel.

Whether the previous Syrian-Israeli peace attempts were conducted under Hafez Assad during the 1990s and 2000, or overseen by his son Bashar in 2008 and 2010, the results were the same: the Syrian leaders demanded more than either Egypt or Jordan received in their agreements, while offering significantly less in return. In essence, they were asking Israel to pay a premium for several additional decades of Syrian belligerence.

The initial attempts at making peace under the Obama administration shifted from the land-for-peace formula to a land-for-realignment theory where it was believed that Syria could be flipped from the Iranian orbit. The idea that Tehran and Damascus merely shared a marriage of convenience was absurd at the time. President Obama's later decision to "respect" Tehran's "equities" in Syria demonstrated his belated understanding that Assad's rule in Syria was a core Iranian interest. At this point, there is nothing Syria is able to offer Israel or the US that couldn't be secured by engaging with Russia or Iran instead.

In fact, the risk of returning the Golan Heights should be

measured against the fact that Iran is actively setting up another forward command along Israel's border with Syria. It comes at a time when Israelis are acutely aware that the reward for giving up land has been the shower of rockets and mortars from Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Had Israel accepted Hafez or Bashar Assad's previous territorial demands for peace, Iran, Hezbollah or ISIS would be threatening Israel today from their perch along the Golan plateau.

Weakening Iran's hand in Syria and beyond is also

beneficial for the US given President Trump's professed desire to come to an understanding with Russia. The moment has arrived for the Trump administration to realize that Putin's interests do not align with America's. Russia's latest arms shipment to Syria – the largest to date since they sashayed into Syria unopposed by the previous US administration in 2015 – is not designed to crush ISIS. Its purpose is to keep Assad in power, provide security for its Iranian client and increase the Russian threat to NATO's southern flank by upgrading and expanding its Mediterranean base in Tartus, making its presence a permanent feature in the Middle East.

Putin's message to the US is clear: Russia is back, prepared to defend its former Soviet client state, and all roads to solving the conflict lead to Moscow.

With that understanding should come the realization that prying Russia apart from Iran through bilateral discussions is likely as vacuous as the hope Syria could be flipped from Iran. As Hudson Institute Senior Fellow Lee Smith points out, these are strategic partnerships, not marriages of convenience. The way to change the Russian-Iranian dynamic isn't by talking to Putin, it's by devaluing Iran as a strategic asset to Moscow through sanctions, clandestine operations, cyberwar and a variety of other measures.

Capitalizing on Netanyahu's idea will help the US limit Russia's reemergence as a Middle East power broker after a 40-year absence. Rather than being encouraged by the Obama administration as a result of a self-inflicted "red line" wound, their influence will be checked against American interests. That is not to say that Washington and Moscow cannot cooperate where their interests align. Destroying ISIS should be a common goal. But the days of supporting a fundamentally flawed nuclear deal with Iran by giving in to Putin, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Bashar Assad are over.

Yet another benefit from recognizing the Golan Heights as

Israeli is the manner in which it could help reset the moribund peace process with the Palestinians and provide new options for US senior presidential adviser Jared Kushner. It removes the idea that the June 4, 1967 lines are sacrosanct in peace agreements while lessening the damage caused by the recent anti-Israel UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution. That unreasonable decision not only fixes those lines as the starting point for negotiations but also entitles Palestinians to pre-1967 Israeli territory as a part of mutually agreed land swaps.

This approach mistakes the possible outcome of negotiations with the starting point of peace talks. It's no wonder, then, why the Palestinian Authority prefers to avoid direct negotiations with Israel. They pocket benefits and concessions as a reward for their avoidance and belligerence.

UNSC Resolution 242 has long served as the cornerstone of Middle East peacemaking and it called for the return of territory (not all territory) in exchange for peace. At this point, Israel has returned 80% of the land it gained in the 1967 war. Syria has missed the boat; the ship has already sailed. Regarding the Palestinians, the depth of the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank may only match the depth of peace they are offered.

Much has changed since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and convening of the Madrid Peace Conference over a quarter century ago. American policy should also adjust to reflect the lessons learned from past successes and failures. Israel is no longer perceived as enemy number one by the rulers of the Arab states. While they would no doubt oppose an American recognition of the Israeli Golan Heights, they have a better understanding of their priorities and would be more accepting if it was presented as part of a region-wide plan that works in their favor. Besides, given the choice between aligning with Russia or a reanimated America determined to reward its allies and push back against its adversaries, most Arab states will likely lean to the West.

With the changing of the guard in Washington comes the pursuit of new objectives in Syria, the region and beyond. America has pushed the land-for-peace boulder uphill for decades and reached a point of diminishing returns. There should be penalties rather than rewards for truculent defiance, whether Syrian or Palestinian. Netanyahu's request for the US to recognize Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights represents a bold move that would help accomplish several American objectives in the Middle East, while jettisoning policy prescriptions that have long lived past their expiration dates.



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