

# U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights?

## *A Special Report*

*On October 25, the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D. C., released an in-depth study, conducted by eleven eminent experts, on the idea of stationing U.S. forces on the Golan Heights as an element of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. This study seems to us so thorough and definitive in its analysis of an issue crucial to the U.S., to Israel, and to the relations between them that we are departing from our normal editorial practice by publishing it in its original form.*

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## *I. Introduction*

AS PART of its search for a “comprehensive” peace, Israel is negotiating an agreement with Syria that is expected to entail Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and possibly, over time, the complete return of the Heights to Syria. Relinquishment of this territory is a sensitive military and political issue, not just in Israel but also in the United States, because Israel expects that compensatory security arrangements will include the deployment of American troops to the Golan as monitors or peacekeepers.

This study evaluates the benefits and costs to the United States of such a Golan mission for the U.S. armed forces. The benefits—that is, the rationale for such a deployment—divide into three categories: monitoring, deterrence, and support for a Syrian-Israeli peace. The study concludes that the costs—undertaking of risks, commitment of resources, and transformation of the U.S. role in the region—would substantially outweigh any benefits. It concludes that the United States should not deploy its troops on the Golan Heights and that the cause of peace would not in fact be served by such a deployment. This study does not attempt to weigh the merits of the Arab-Israeli negotiating process or the resulting or anticipated accords. Nor does it purport to judge whether Israel should withdraw from the Golan Heights in pursuit of peace with Syria. Indeed, the signatories to this study represent a range of opinions regarding Israel’s peace policies and the issue of Israeli territorial concessions to Syria.

Israel is a sovereign state and does not require leave from outsiders, even its friends, to make its own national-security calculations regarding peace opportunities and military risks. The issue of U.S. forces on the Golan, however, does not lie solely within Israel’s sovereign prerogatives. It involves the lives of Americans and the national interests of the United States. Americans have a right and duty to evaluate this issue independently.

Finally, this study does not exhaustively examine the policy considerations relating to a U.S. troop deployment on the Golan. In the absence of more detailed information about the size, nature, responsibilities, level of armament, rules of engagement, mission definition, and other characteristics of the U.S. peacekeeping force, this study aims only to identify major considerations that would apply irrespective of the specific form of the deployment.

## *II. Background*

### THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

THE Golan is a semi-mountainous escarpment of some 400 square miles, ranging in height from 400 to 3,000 feet. It rises steeply from the eastern and northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, runs the length of the Huleh Valley, and overlooks the coastal plains of the Galilee and northern Israel.

At the end of World War I, during the division of the defeated Ottoman empire, the Golan Heights were included in the territory of British Mandate Palestine. In 1923 they were transferred to French Mandate Syria under a Franco-British agreement delineating the boundary between Mandate Syria and Mandate Palestine. After Israel declared independence in 1948 and defeated the Syrian and other Arab forces that invaded to destroy the new state, that boundary became the basis for the Syrian-Israeli armistice line negotiated in 1949.

For the next eighteen years, until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Syria used its position on the Heights to shell Israeli farms and settlements in the Galilee below and to attack Israeli water projects in the Huleh Valley. Syrians on the Golan attempted to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River, which would have severely curtailed Israel’s water supply. Israel used military force to oppose the diversion.

Israeli soldiers captured the Heights in the Six-Day War of 1967. Six years later, at the outbreak of the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, Syria mounted a massive armored attack into the territory. In a costly stand, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) stopped the

Syrian thrust across the Golan and then counterattacked, driving a fifteen-mile bulge into Syria. Israel later withdrew from this bulge, but stayed on the Heights. In December 1981, Israel enacted legislation extending its civil law and administration to the Golan, replacing the military authority which had ruled there for fourteen years.

Since 1967 and the subsequent attempt in 1973 to retake the Heights, Syria has used various means, including terrorism and diplomacy, to press Israel to relinquish the Golan. Successive Israeli governments, under both Labor and Likud, have characterized the Golan Heights as essential to Israeli security.

### THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO ISRAEL OF THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

**F**IRST, holding the Heights gives Israel *strategic depth*. The Golan territory is roughly 10 miles by 40 miles. All of Israel, including the Golan and the West Bank, is only approximately 45 miles wide by 270 miles. (First-time visitors to Israel almost invariably remark on how small the country is.) Thus, in the north, the Golan makes the territory under Israel's control nearly 50-percent wider than it would be otherwise. This buffer zone, this extension of territory where Israel faces its most formidable enemy, is an important military asset for Israel. As will be explained in greater detail below, this remains true even in the age of missile warfare. It bears noting that, in the summer of 1990, all of Kuwait's valuable assets were in easy reach of Iraq's forces, which took them quickly. But Saudi Arabia's key assets lay across wide stretches of desert, which made an Iraqi conquest far more difficult. Though Iraq had Scud missiles, Saudi Arabia's strategic depth spared it the fate of Kuwait.

Second, control of high ground on the Golan gives Israel direct line-of-sight *surveillance and warning* of threatening Syrian movements in the plains below or in south Lebanon. Early warning is important to a defense posture that relies, in the event of war, upon a thin line of active forces to hold while reserves mobilize to meet the kind of attacks that Syria's large and well-equipped standing army might mount.

Third, modern technology has by no means eliminated altogether the *disadvantages of having to fight uphill*, a reality acknowledged by military commanders everywhere. The operational planning of the U.S. military, for example, still places great emphasis on command of the high ground as a critical force multiplier.

Fourth, possession of the Golan puts the IDF within *easy striking range of Damascus*. This contributes to Israeli deterrence against Syria. If deterrence fails and war occurs again, Israel's Golan position enables it to mount spoiling attacks against likely staging areas. And its proximity to Damascus can help deter especially heinous actions—for example, missile attacks on Israel's cities.

Fifth, the Golan highlands are a *major watershed*. In that arid region, with its growing population increasing the demand for water, control of water resources can have strategic consequences. The significance of this point is often overlooked in military and political analyses, especially those not produced locally. Control of the Golan permits control of Lake Kinneret (the "Sea of Galilee") which supplies roughly 30 percent of Israel's consumption.

Control of the Golan watershed and the Kinneret basin will further increase in importance if Israel makes concessions regarding its other main source of water, the watersheds of the West Bank. Water sources there now satisfy more than 33 percent of Israel's needs. These are at issue in Israel's negotiations with the PLO.

### DEMILITARIZATION

**O**NE of the key security arrangements envisioned for a Syrian-Israeli agreement involving Israeli withdrawal on or from the Golan is demilitarization of the territory from which the Israeli forces are withdrawn. Some analysts expect Israel also to insist that additional Syrian land beyond that territory be demilitarized or made subject to force limitations, perhaps in return for Israel's agreement to limit its own forces on the Israeli side of the border.

IDF Major General (Res.) Moshe Bar-Kochba has noted:

The Syrians are now able to shift the main body of their military force against Israel

within one night. Demilitarization must be such that it does not allow them to march their forces so fast; that is, they must be removed to north of Damascus.<sup>1</sup>

Other military officers sympathetic to the Rabin government's general diplomatic policy toward Syria have made similar arguments. According to Major General (Res.) Avigdor Ben Gal, "It is important that in reality a buffer zone emerge, without any armies, and this zone must include two elements—the Golan Heights and *all of south Syria*."<sup>2</sup> And Major General (Res.) Abraham Tamir, who had responsibility for designing the security arrangements for the Sinai in the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, has called for

a buffer consisting of: a demilitarized Golan; the Horan [the area of Syria immediately to the east of the Golan Heights] in which there will not be more than a mechanized division; and south Syria, the Golan, and the Horan demilitarized from military aircraft and missiles.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding any demilitarization arrangement, it would be far easier for Syrian forces in a war to remilitarize the Golan from the plateau behind the Heights than for Israel to return from below. The Syrians could move two to three divisions unhindered into the Golan overnight from their staging area around Damascus, even if Syria accepted an additional 40-km. demilitarized zone extending beyond the Heights. If Syria seized control of a demilitarized Golan, it would be difficult and costly for Israel to move armor up the Heights under fire. The IDF would have to fight its way up the steep, almost sheer cliffs that face the Israeli side.

Demilitarizing a large portion of south Syria beyond the Golan Heights would mitigate but not eliminate altogether the risks to Israel of withdrawal from the Golan. Demilitarization agreements between adversaries are inherently brittle. The history of Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 illustrates the point. Pledges by democratic states to respond promptly and forcefully to any violation of an arms-control arrangement with a nondemocratic state have often proven hollow when the time for action came. This was true for the Allies after World War I, for the United States during the cold war, and for Israel after signing the peace treaty with Egypt.

So, as desirable as the actual demilitarization of south Syria might be, Israel's security ultimately depends not on a demilitarization arrangement that Syria might or might not respect indefinitely but on the IDF's ability to prevail over Syrian forces if Syria were to renew military hostilities—and on the costs of such a victory.

While the Golan's most difficult and most elevated terrain faces Israel, the topography on the northern and eastern sides facing Syria also constitutes a defensible barrier to massed armored attack. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, control of the Golan's rocky highlands enabled two brigades of the IDF to hold off an attack of over 1,000 Syrian tanks.

Israel's current Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Ehud Barak, has recently reiterated that, even under conditions of peace, the IDF must remain deployed on the Golan. Major General (Res.) Yossi Peled, the previous commander of the IDF Northern Command, which has operational control of the Golan, warned in December 1993 that an Israeli withdrawal from the Heights would constitute "national suicide." If Israel found itself at war again with Syria, General Peled doubted that Israel could ever retake the Golan as it did in the 1967 war, because of the changes since then in the balance of forces.<sup>4</sup>

### STRATEGIC DEPTH IN THE AGE OF MISSILES

**E**VEN in the missile age, land—strategic depth—still matters. The Syrians have missiles. But they are still investing heavily in their ground forces. Major General Uri Sagi, head of the IDF Intelligence Branch, noted in April 1993:

. . . In the conventional field, Syria has improved and is improving its tank fleet in

<sup>1</sup> *Hadashot*, August 9, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> *Ha'aretz*, October 6, 1992; emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, January 30, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Bulletin No. 13, April 1994.

a very impressive manner. If and when Syria will complete its procurement transactions that it has already signed, all of its armored divisions will be equipped with the latest model T-72 tanks. Today Syria has over 4,000 tanks and 300 self-propelled artillery tubes that provide it with an enhanced offensive capability in land battles.<sup>5</sup>

Many Middle Eastern nations are working to acquire ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and many of these nations maintain a longstanding hostility toward Israel. Nevertheless, the principal threat to Israel's existence for the foreseeable future will remain the danger of a physical invasion and occupation by heavily armored forces.

Simply stated, even though missiles can fly over the highest terrain feature, including the Golan Heights, they do not negate the strategic significance of territorial depth. The military value of missiles depends on their accuracy—on their ability to strike specific military targets. Inaccurate missiles like the Scuds used by Iraq in the Gulf war can terrorize large urban areas. But they are not reliable against military targets—airfields, command-and-control centers, bridges—where precision is required.

If, however, the Syrians—by violating a demilitarization regime, for example—were able to move heavy artillery up to the edge of the Golan escarpment overlooking the Galilee and northern Israel, they could use their relatively accurate artillery against military targets within a range of approximately 25 miles, depending on their ability to observe and correct fire. Artillery munitions, of which Syria has large quantities, are relatively inexpensive, especially compared to missiles. Destroying significant military targets within this range would be a matter, in essence, of firing enough rounds.

On the other hand, if Israeli control of the Golan ensured that Syrian artillery were confined to the plateau behind the Heights, few targets in Israel would be within range of the Syrian artillery. The Syrians could attempt to strike those targets with ballistic missiles, but then they would encounter the problem of inaccuracy, not to mention the prohibitive cost and limited number of weapons in inventory. Also, the United States and Israel both have programs to develop defenses against ballistic missiles. Given adequate resources, these programs could substantially limit the military effectiveness of offensive missiles. There are, however, no defenses available against artillery other than counterfire to destroy the artillery pieces themselves, which is a task of great difficulty, especially in rugged terrain like that of the Golan Heights.

What is more, succeeding with missile attacks on distant military targets would be nearly impossible, in part because the essential function of damage assessment would not be possible for Syrian missileers well behind the Golan. (Targeting and damage-assessment abilities would, however, be enhanced if Syria gained access to high-quality, real-time satellite imaging.<sup>6</sup>) In short, possession of intermediate-range ballistic missiles does *not* give Syria a capability to fight Israel as effectively from behind the Golan Heights as it could from the Heights themselves.

Achieving military success in a war requires more than lobbing a few score (or even a few hundred) missiles of limited accuracy at soft targets. Iraq fired approximately 40 Scuds at Israel in the Gulf war, killing fewer than 10 civilians and no soldiers and achieving nothing of military significance. To win a war against Israel, Syria must move armor, infantry, and artillery forward and down into Israeli proper, and then destroy Israeli forces on the ground. This was true in 1948, it was true in 1967 and 1973, and it remains true in today's Age of Missiles.

#### LAND FOR PEACE

**P**ROPOSERS of a Golan withdrawal commonly state that "peace is a better basis for security than territory." That assertion is essentially a political, not a military, judgment. If a military officer, for example, makes this assertion, his opinion on the reliability of a peace treaty with the Assad regime carries no special weight because of his military status. No military expert in Israel (or anywhere else)

<sup>5</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, April 5, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> This is one reason why strong concerns are being expressed about the proposal now being considered by the Clinton administration to allow one of Syria's sometime allies, Saudi Arabia, to acquire access to—and control over—one-meter resolution satellite imagery.

argues that, *in the event of war*, Syrian possession of the Heights would not matter. The argument that “peace is better than territory” is valid only as long as there *is* peace. But if war were to break out again, no one can seriously suggest that Israel would be better off holding a treaty signed by Assad than holding the Golan Heights.

Israel would, of course, be more secure if it actually enjoyed peace—that is, if its neighbors no longer aspired to destroy it. Indeed, having peaceable neighbors is a safer and more desirable basis for securing one’s country than retaining various military assets. This is simply another way of saying that one is better off not having to defend oneself than being able to defend oneself effectively.

Whether it is likely that Israel, through a peace agreement with the Assad government, can achieve a permanent end to hostility with Syria is a question beyond the scope of this study. Nor does this study assess whether the chances of achieving peace with Syria at present outweigh the military risks (discussed above) inherent in Israel’s relinquishment of Golan territory.

### *III. Analysis of the U.S. Mission on the Golan*

A MILITARY commander on a mission—whether combat or peacekeeping—requires a clear statement of the nature of the mission: what is supposed to be accomplished? The commander also must know the criteria by which success is measured and when the mission is deemed completed—that is, when the troops can come home.

Regarding the possible deployment of U.S. troops on the Golan, the mission or rationale has never been spelled out by Israeli or American officials with any precision. There are three categories of mission or function that might apply to a deployment: (1) *monitoring*; (2) *deterrence*; and (3) *demonstrating U.S. support*.

Examining each in turn, we ask what U.S. forces on the Golan can realistically be expected to accomplish, whether the mission is feasible *without* a commitment of U.S. forces (i.e., can it be done at less cost and with less risk?), and what are the likely but unanticipated harmful consequences of assigning such a mission to U.S. troops.

#### MONITORING

A MONITORING mission might focus either on (1) the monitoring of military activity for purposes of early warning and military intelligence; or (2) monitoring the parties’ compliance with the peace agreement.

**1. Military Intelligence:** Neither Israel nor Syria would in fact look to U.S. monitors (or those of a multinational force) to provide early warning of the other side’s significant military activities. That kind of military-intelligence collection and analysis is an essential national-security function. Neither country would shift such a function to outsiders. Although a country might, under certain circumstances, choose to rely to some extent on another country for military intelligence, this is less likely to be the case when the second country is doing its monitoring *not as an ally*, but as an impartial or neutral observer, as would be the status of any U.S. forces deployed on the Golan under an Israeli-Syrian agreement.

Israel would not look to “peace monitors” for military intelligence because its margins of safety are thin and its defensive military doctrine and security hinge on accurate and timely intelligence, unfiltered by foreign interests, and, most especially, on prompt warning of military threats. Syria would not because its relations with the United States will remain cool and mutually distrustful for the foreseeable future even if the Assad government signs a peace agreement with Israel.

*Finding: U.S. troops on the Golan are not required—and would not be relied upon—to provide military intelligence and early warning.*

**2. Treaty Compliance:** The U.S. troops could help perform the function of monitoring the parties’ respective compliance with an agreement. This is a realistic function of some value. But it could be performed effectively without the permanent

stationing of U.S. troops on the Heights, with all the attendant costs and risks of such a deployment (as set forth below). If a compliance issue arises and a party wants American personnel to serve as “honest brokers” to mediate the issue or monitor specific treaty conditions, that party could invite those personnel in on a case-by-case basis. The best U.S. personnel for that function, moreover, might not be military.

***Finding:** There is no need for the United States to undertake an expensive, risky, and open-ended commitment of troops to carry out the relatively minor (and not inherently military) task of serving occasionally as a third-party referee on compliance issues.*

## DETERRENCE

SOME commentators suggest that U.S. forces on the Golan could help deter Syria from violating a peace agreement and attacking Israel militarily in the future. How might the U.S. forces fulfill this function? Are they to serve as a deterrent on the military level—i.e., the forces themselves would be a military factor in the calculations of a Syrian military commander—or are they to serve simply as a contribution to deterrence on the political level?

**1. Military Deterrence:** There are two ways the forces could function as a military deterrent: either (a) the U.S. deployment would be large enough to serve as an effective military barrier to a future Syrian military offensive; or (b) the U.S. deployment would serve as a “tripwire” to ensure that such a Syrian offensive would trigger a large American military intervention to oppose it.

**A. EFFECTIVE MILITARY BARRIER:** No one has suggested that the United States deploy to the Golan a force with the numbers and types of men and equipment that would allow it to serve as a military barrier against Syria’s large armored forces. As noted above, Syria has over 4,000 tanks and 300 self-propelled artillery pieces. A fully-equipped U.S. brigade is probably the maximum force that might be used here. More likely there would be an even smaller deployment—perhaps as few as 800 lightly-armed troops.

Washington’s own decision-making mechanisms could preclude U.S. forces in any event from playing an active role in a crisis in the narrow Golan theater of operations. Dore Gold, director of the U.S. Foreign Policy Project at Israel’s Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, has observed:

By far the most complex and sensitive element involved in the deployment of U.S. forces on the Golan Heights is the decision-making process on the U.S. side, in the event that a real Syrian threat is created. Would the U.S. really order its force to open fire on the Syrians? How much time would the American political system require to make this decision? Given the narrow confines of the Golan theater, the American reaction time has to be especially rapid. Yet American forces would almost certainly not be allowed to react virtually automatically. Israel will be dependent upon political decision-making in Washington.<sup>7</sup>

**B. TRIPWIRE:** Some commentators have spoken of the contemplated U.S. deployment as a “tripwire”—that is, a device to ensure that a future Syrian aggression would more or less automatically trigger a substantial U.S. military intervention to defend Israel. This is an idea of enormous strategic importance. It is the concept most likely to affect Israeli public opinion about the security risks of territorial withdrawal in favor of Syria. The concept deserves the most intense scrutiny, for it represents the gravest danger to U.S. interests.

If U.S. forces on the Golan are intended to be a tripwire, this connotes that Israel would become, like South Korea and the NATO states, an ally dependent to some extent on U.S. armed forces for its security. An attack on Israel by Syria would be treated as an attack on the United States, which would be obliged, legally or practically, to enter the war. This would be a radical departure from the traditions of the U.S.-Israeli relationship and the traditions of U.S. Middle East policy in general.

A major element of Israel’s reason for being, a key source of Israel’s national pride,

<sup>7</sup> “U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights and Israeli-Syrian Security Arrangements,” Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum No. 44, August 1994.

and a principal basis for U.S. popular support for the U.S.-Israeli relationship has always been the self-reliance of the IDF. Though outside material support has been important to it, especially since 1967, Israel has never requested or desired U.S. forces to risk their lives in its defense. In addition to the metaphysical reasons for Israeli military self-reliance, there are practical grounds for Israel's preferring not to rely on outside commitments that, in a crisis, may not be fulfilled or fulfillable. These practical grounds should give U.S. policy-makers pause about offering such commitments:

- As noted, a tripwire arrangement would create, in essence, a mutual-defense alliance between Israel and the United States. Such an alliance, however, could not be built on a trilateral peacekeeping agreement including Syria. It would require a formal defense treaty between Israel and the United States, duly ratified with the approval of the U.S. Senate. It would be reckless for Americans or Israelis to suppose that U.S. forces on the Golan could in fact function as a tripwire in the absence of such a formal treaty commitment. The United States has an interest in preserving the credibility of its commitments, so it should actively disabuse any Israelis who think of U.S. peacekeepers on the Golan as a tripwire.

- The question arises: is a U.S. tripwire force on the Golan in the U.S. national interest, assuming the commitment could be duly formalized? If this question were posed directly to Israeli or American officials, their answer would undoubtedly be negative. The chief reason is that Israel can now defend itself *without* the use of U.S. troops. There is no reason for the United States to undertake now to enter into a war if its intervention may not be necessary. Moreover, if intervention by U.S. forces were necessary to defend Israel in the event of renewed Syrian aggression, it is not likely—given current constraints on U.S. military capabilities, especially in the field of sea- and air-lift—that the United States could make the necessary intervention in a timely fashion. Months were required to get U.S. forces in place and ready for action in the recent Persian Gulf conflict. As a former Israeli Prime Minister observed, when asked about U.S. security guarantees for Israel: “By the time you get here, we won't be here.”

- Might U.S. peacekeeping forces on the Golan serve a useful tripwire-like function even in the absence of a formal U.S. defense commitment to Israel? It has been suggested that, even if a U.S. military response to renewed Syrian aggression against Israel were not legally mandated or automatic, the probability of such a response would increase if U.S. troops were placed in harm's way (i.e., in the path of the Syrian forces) on the Golan.

Here again, the United States has an interest in discouraging its Israeli friends from harboring unrealistic expectations. Israel should not count on a peacekeeping force functioning as a mechanism that can be relied upon to engage the United States deeply on Israel's behalf in the event of another war with Syria. Were a future Syrian attack to injure or kill U.S. peacekeeping forces on the Golan, the U.S. government might decide to remove the peacekeeping force altogether rather than reinforce the troops. Recall the history of the Marines in Lebanon in 1983 and U.S. forces in Somalia in 1993, where the killing of American personnel triggered a hasty withdrawal rather than a deepening of the U.S. commitment.

*Finding: It would be irresponsible and unconstitutional for the U.S. government to deploy troops to the Golan as mere “peacekeepers” or “monitors” if the actual purpose were to create a tripwire. And it would be irresponsible to allow our Israeli friends to think that that is what U.S. forces on the Golan would constitute.*

**2. Political Deterrence:** Even if U.S. troops on the Golan did not contribute to military deterrence—as a tripwire or otherwise—might they not be justified as a contribution to deterrence at the political level? In other words, would they not make it less likely that Syria would renew hostilities with Israel, given the added danger of confrontation with the United States?

In the event (1) Israel and Syria sign a peace agreement; (2) Israel withdraws from the Golan under that agreement; and (3) Syria, at some point in the future, decides to launch an attack on Israel to capitalize on that Israeli withdrawal, Syria would know that its aggression would antagonize the United States *whether or not U.S. troops were*

stationed on the Golan. At most, such troops could serve as a marginal factor in Syria's calculations.

The real political deterrent to Syrian aggression is not U.S. troops on the Golan, but the strength of U.S. ties to Israel and the certainty of U.S. support for a swift and effective Israeli response to such aggression. This deterrent requires no U.S. troops on the Golan.

**Finding:** *Stationing U.S. troops on the Golan would be buying an item of little or no deterrence value at a very high price.*

**3. Increased Reliance on Preemption:** In 1967, Israel did not control "the territories." In the face of intense threats from the Arab side, and following Egypt's act of war in blockading the Straits of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Eilat, Israel's leaders felt compelled to preempt the anticipated military attack against it. In 1973, however—with "the territories," including the Golan, under its control—Israel reacted to intelligence of Syrian and Egyptian war preparations by choosing to forgo preemption and to absorb the first blow. If Israel withdraws on or from the Golan, it will have to return to its old posture and increase its reliance on preemption, for it will have no buffer permitting absorption of a first blow.

The problems inherent in this development would be exacerbated by the presence of U.S. troops on the Golan. Such troops would be more likely to deter *Israeli* military action—action required for the defense of common U.S. and Israeli interests—than Syrian military aggression.

If Israel, having withdrawn from Golan territory, receives serious "indicators and warnings" (I&W) of Syrian aggression and decides it must strike Syria preemptively, the presence of U.S. troops on the Golan will necessitate its soliciting the U.S. government's consent. American officials can be expected to treat the I&W reservedly, even skeptically, and to counsel patience and additional diplomacy. The United States is never quick to launch a war or flash an ally a green light to do so. If Israel believes that immediate preemption is required for its security, it will face the choice of (1) overriding its own armed forces' judgment on the military necessity of immediate preemption out of deference to its U.S. ally, whose Golan peacekeeping forces would be endangered in a war; or (2) rejecting the U.S. government's counsel of delay and thereby risking antagonism of its key ally (and endangerment of the U.S. Golan peacekeeping forces) at *precisely the moment*—the start of a war—when close bilateral cooperation is crucial.

In the absence of U.S. troops on the Golan, the difficulty of this choice and the risks of bilateral tension would be substantially less. If those troops suffered casualties in a war initiated by Israeli preemption, this would damage the U.S.-Israeli relationship, notwithstanding that Syria might be legally culpable for provoking the war.

In this regard, it is worth recalling an Israeli military preemption that occurred in 1981: the aerial attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor outside Baghdad. The Israeli government properly viewed that facility as an integral part of Saddam Hussein's effort to develop nuclear weapons. Israel had worked closely with the United States for years to block Iraq's nuclear-weapons program through diplomacy with Iraq's suppliers, and Israeli and U.S. officials agreed that Iraq's nuclear facility created a grave threat. Nonetheless, at the time, the United States condemned Israel's action as dangerously provocative, and joined in formal criticism of Israel by the UN Security Council. If Israel had asked for U.S. consent before the raid, it would not have received it.

Ten years afterward, however, on October 28, 1991, then-Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney acknowledged that the United States benefited greatly from that Israeli action: "There were many times during the course of the build-up in the Gulf and the subsequent conflict that I gave thanks for the bold and dramatic action that had been taken [by Israel] some ten years before."

**Finding:** *The presence of U.S. troops on the Golan would increase the likelihood of U.S. opposition to preemptive military action by Israel, no matter how urgent or well-advised. The standard American tendency to disapprove military action would be reinforced powerfully by solicitude for the U.S. peacekeepers. Hence, the effect of the U.S. deploy-*

*ment might be the opposite of that intended: it could reduce fear of Israeli preemption among potential Arab aggressors. By tending to embolden rather than deter those contemplating renewed aggression against Israel, this would tend to undermine any Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, decrease regional stability, and increase the risks of war.*

### DEMONSTRATING U.S. SUPPORT

**E**VEN if U.S. peacekeeping forces on the Golan are not justified by their monitoring function or their contribution to deterrence of aggression, would they not serve as a symbolic demonstration of America's commitment to the Syrian-Israeli peace process?

Perhaps, but such a use of U.S. armed forces would make a point that no one doubts anyway. And it would make it in an extravagantly costly fashion. How important is it that the U.S. government offer another visible sign of its desire for Syrian-Israeli peace? The United States has championed the idea for decades. It has invested diplomatic capital in it. The United States was the prime mover behind the Madrid talks, which built on the American-led military success in the 1991 Persian Gulf war to inaugurate the first open and direct peace negotiations between Syria and Israel. If there is to be a peace treaty between the parties, it is likely to be signed at the White House. And U.S. financial resources will undoubtedly be tapped to shore up the peace arrangements. Under the circumstances, one cannot reasonably contend that U.S. forces on the Golan are required to demonstrate symbolically U.S. support for peace in the region.

***Finding:** As a general proposition, it is not sensible for the United States to make a commitment of indefinite duration to put U.S. troops on the Golan for symbolic purposes, when the necessary symbolism can (and undoubtedly will) be supplied amply by other means. Such a commitment would not be sensible even if the troops were to be stationed in a stable and safe environment. Given the dangers of terrorism in the region, and the political instabilities and risks of war, it would be very irresponsible to deploy those troops as symbols.*

### MULTILATERAL FORCE

**I**T SHOULD be clear from the foregoing discussion that none of the major problems inherent in a U.S. peacekeeping force on the Golan would be solved through the use of a multilateral force in which U.S. troops would form a part. In fact, U.S. participation in a multilateral force would give rise to additional difficulties regarding command structures and international politics, especially if that force were under UN auspices. Israeli government officials have said that they do not want UN auspices for multilateral peacekeeping forces on the Golan, but, if the Clinton administration agrees to contribute to such forces, it may insist on a UN umbrella.

***Finding:** As the experience of UNPROFOR in Bosnia has demonstrated, multilateral peacekeeping contingents tend to become part of the problem. They feel constrained to try to appease those who pose the greatest threat to peace—if only to reduce the risks to their own personal safety as they operate in dangerous situations under severe force and firepower limitations. Frequently, such “peacekeepers” wind up tacitly allied with the aggressors, promoting a false moral equivalence between the latter and their victims. Such units simply cannot be relied upon to deter or defeat attacks against the more vulnerable party—in this case, Israel.*

### COSTS AND RISKS OF DEPLOYING U.S. FORCES ON THE GOLAN

**1. Danger to U.S. Troops:** U.S. troops on the Golan Heights would face threats of terrorism and also the possible outbreak of war or low-level conflict. As Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres observed on October 5, 1994:

Syria is likely to attack Israel even if a peace agreement is reached, if extremist

elements in Damascus are disappointed by it. It is likely that leaders will arise in Syria who will deploy anew their tanks and planes, and therefore we must be careful.

Because of the Golan's compact area and terrain, U.S. troops would be operating close to a substantial and potentially hostile population. They would be within range of Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations based in south Lebanon. The Syrian government has influence over Hezbollah and other active terrorist groups, but so do Iran and other states hostile to the United States. Even if Syria chose not to stimulate terrorist attacks against U.S. peacekeeping troops on the Golan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, or other states could find it convenient to do so, because the logistics of targeting U.S. forces on the Golan, in the immediate vicinity of south Lebanon, would be far easier than those required to hit U.S. forces elsewhere.

Also, U.S. forces on the Golan would have large, heavily equipped Syrian and Israeli armies, respectively, on either side of them and would be close (fewer than 50 miles) to Syria's capital, Damascus. (In contrast, U.S. elements of the Multilateral Forces and Observers [MFO]<sup>8</sup> in the vast and virtually unpopulated Sinai are not stationed near cities, known terrorist bases, or likely lines of attack in any future Arab-Israeli wars.)

The history of American deployments in Lebanon and Somalia suggests to hostile local forces that, by killing some U.S. peacekeeping forces, one might compel the withdrawal of the U.S. contingent altogether. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, explained the syndrome on April 12, 1994: "Unless your vital interest is at stake, you are not going to be able to take American casualties for very long—*nor should we.*"<sup>9</sup> This has created an incentive for attacks on U.S. troops.

***Finding:** Placing U.S. forces in proximity to Syrian population centers and to the south-Lebanon base areas of various terrorist organizations would enable hostile forces to attack those forces without Syria's having to take responsibility. When U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel Rich Higgins, serving in a UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, was killed in 1988 by terrorists there, the United States was unable to hold anyone in particular responsible—a point not lost on those who might threaten U.S. personnel deployed to the region in the future.*

**2. Drawing on U.S. Defense Resources:** As already noted above, it has been speculated that a U.S. peacekeeping deployment on the Golan might entail a token force of 800 or so troops. Experienced military officers appreciate, however, that any such contingent should be large enough and well-enough equipped to be able to defend itself effectively in the event of renewed hostilities. According to this view, if there is to be an American contingent on the Golan Heights, it should be a functioning unit, specifically an armored brigade—roughly 5,000 troops and their heavy equipment.

The size of the U.S. deployment thus represents a dilemma. A lightly-armed token force of approximately 800 troops would be more vulnerable in various respects than an armored brigade. If such troops were to suffer casualties, questions would inevitably arise as to whether a stronger force could have prevented the casualties. On the other hand, the United States might not be able to sustain the commitment of an armored brigade to a long-term Golan deployment.

To have a brigade in place on the Golan at all times would require the commitment of three times as many troops. At any given time, one brigade would be on site for a tour of approximately six-months' duration, one would be training and preparing to deploy, and one, having just rotated home, would be recovering and retraining for other missions. In other words, the equivalent of a full division would be required to sustain a brigade-size force on the Golan for any length of time.

***Finding:** The Clinton administration's "Bottom-Up Review" plan, even assuming that there are budget resources adequate to implement it, contemplates maintaining only ten active-duty divisions in the entire U.S. Army force structure. It is difficult to imagine*

<sup>8</sup> The MFO is the multilateral peacekeeping force stationed in the Sinai peninsula under the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

<sup>9</sup> *National Journal*, April 23, 1994.

*that such a substantial part of the nation's total combat capability would be allocated to this purpose.*

**3. Unreliable Commitments:** U.S. peacekeepers or monitors would not necessarily be maintained on the Golan during a crisis. As the administration's Bottom-Up Review states:

If a second Major Regional Conflict (MRC) breaks out shortly after the first, we will need to pull together and deploy another building block of forces to assist our allies in the threatened area in halting and defeating the second aggressor. *The force for that effort would come from a further reallocation of overseas presence forces, any forces still engaged in smaller-scale operations, and most of the remaining forces based in the United States.* [Emphasis added]

The administration's National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake, on February 6, 1994, implied that even a *single* major regional conflict could trigger such dislocation: "We [would not] hesitate to end our engagement in a peace operation if that were necessary to concentrate our forces against an adversary in a major conflict."

The open-ended nature of a commitment of U.S. troops for peacekeeping or monitoring is inherently problematic. Such a mission is never completed. U.S. flexibility to use those troops for another mission elsewhere would be constrained by vulnerability to the accusation that we have abandoned a commitment—and perhaps endangered the peace thereby.

**Finding:** *Peacekeeping and other "smaller-scale" operations, including a deployment on the Golan Heights, would have to be judged expendable if international crises arose and required reallocation of units and resources. A misunderstanding or lack of clarity on this point would damage U.S. credibility. The United States has an interest in ensuring that its Israeli allies realize that U.S. peacekeeping forces on the Golan might not be present at a time of tension in the future should they be required to fill a gap elsewhere.*

**4. Deterring Friend or Foe?:** There is danger that a U.S. Golan deployment might deter the wrong party. As discussed above, the United States could harm its own interests and damage regional stability by deploying peacekeeping forces whose effect would be to deter defensive Israeli military action rather than aggressive military action by Syria.

Yet senior Clinton-administration policy-makers seek to appeal to Arab interlocutors in the Middle East on precisely this score—by stressing America's singular ability to deter *Israeli* use of force. For example, Dennis Ross, the administration's Special Middle East Coordinator, has written:

What has been overlooked for too long in America, but not in the Arab world, is that we are the only ones who can stop the Israelis in wartime. The specter of war may be lower now, but it has surely not disappeared, and the Arab world—especially the confrontation states—knows well that it has been the U.S. that pressured the Israelis to stop in every war. This alone provides a certain baseline in our relations with states like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. . . .<sup>10</sup>

**Finding:** *It would be neither in the U.S. interest, consistent with Israel's security, nor conducive to genuine stability in the Middle East to have U.S. forces serving in such a way as to deter not Syrian aggression but Israeli defense.*

**5. Strained Relations:** A U.S. "honest-broker" role as provider of peacekeeping forces on the Golan would likely strain relations between Israel and the United States in the event of tension between Syria and Israel. The United States and Israel are unlikely to react harmoniously to signs that Syria might be violating its treaty obligations or preparing an aggression. The presence of U.S. troops in the region would give the United States (1) an added incentive to urge restraint (perhaps undue restraint) upon Israel; (2) a greater claim for deference from Israel; and, therefore (3) greater

<sup>10</sup> "Acting With Caution: Middle East Policy Planning for the Second Reagan Administration," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1985, p.28.

potential for a bitter falling-out in the event that Israel deemed it necessary to act inconsistently with U.S. wishes.

Such U.S. troops would have the effect of limiting the freedom of action of both the United States and Israel. Both allies derive benefits from the ability of each to take independent action for which the other need not bear responsibility. These benefits would be compromised by a U.S. deployment on the Golan. The obvious potential for the U.S. Golan force to strain relations between the United States and Israel would create an incentive for Syria to manufacture compliance crises and other situations of tension.

In connection with this point, we should recall the 1970 cease-fire agreement between Egypt and Israel which the Nixon administration brokered to end the so-called War of Attrition. Immediately after agreement was reached, Israeli military intelligence detected that Egypt was violating it by moving SA-2 and SA-3 air-defense missiles to the Suez Canal. U.S. intelligence clearly confirmed the violation. Nevertheless, after ten days of silence on the subject, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, announced that it was "impossible to prove or disprove Israeli charges about the missiles." Israel was dissuaded from taking military action against the new missile sites. After further study, the State Department confirmed "forward deployment of missiles by the Egyptians around the time the cease-fire went into effect," but stated that the evidence of continued missile movements after the deadline was "inconclusive." These missiles, which had been moved in violation of the cease-fire agreement, nevertheless remained in place. Three years later, they played an important role in denying the Israeli air force control of the skies over the Canal when Egypt crossed it as part of the surprise attack that launched the Yom Kippur War.

The United States would find it difficult to be both an "honest broker" and honest in monitoring Syrian compliance. With U.S. troops on the Golan, the United States would be reluctant to respond to Israeli intelligence-collection requests if doing so increased the possibility of Israeli preemption against Syria. And in any event the United States would be inclined to withhold information from Israel if providing it would lead Syria to accuse the United States of favoring Israel or of functioning on the Golan effectively as an arm of the IDF.

As an "honest broker," would the United States deem itself obliged to provide early-warning data to both parties? This would represent a quantum improvement in Syrian intelligence-collection capabilities, and negate a factor in Israel's "qualitative edge."

***Finding:** Given their different interests and responsibilities, U.S. and Israeli intelligence officials could be expected to disagree about the conclusions to be drawn from data supplied by U.S. peace monitors. Policy-makers would similarly be likely not to see eye-to-eye. Such disagreements are most likely to occur—and be most intense—during periods of crisis, as was evident during the Gulf war.*

**6. Adverse Repercussions with Syria:** U.S. troops on the Golan would likely give rise to additional problems in the U.S. relationship with Syria. Syria could be expected to believe that Israel was benefiting disproportionately from intelligence produced by U.S. monitors. This might lead to terrorist or other attacks on U.S.-manned early-warning facilities.

Since such facilities also play an important part in providing combat command, control, and intelligence necessary for effective battle management, they are routinely targeted in the opening phases of any armed conflict. For example, the Syrian army in 1973 attacked Israeli early-warning sites on the Golan at the outset of the Yom Kippur War. It must be expected that they would do so again in the event of another war with Israel—particularly if the Syrians believed that the U.S. personnel associated with these facilities were providing information to the IDF.

Syria would want to use strains in its relations with the United States to induce U.S. officials to offer concessions to "keep Syria in the peace process." A skillful Syrian leader like Hafez al-Assad would play upon U.S. eagerness to preserve that process in order to strain the relationship between the United States and Israel. Dore Gold of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies believes Assad's desire to advance this objective may

explain his apparent willingness to accept the substitution—at least temporarily—of American forces for Israeli forces on the Golan:

The Arab states have aspired for years to weaken the “special relationship” between Israel and the United States. The stationing of a significant American force on the Golan is likely to serve as an efficient political instrument in the hands of Syria, to try to convert the U.S. from a close partner of Israel to an external superpower obligated to follow an evenhanded policy in order to protect its soldiers. This neutrality could find expression in the form of harsh American reactions to IDF actions in Lebanon (to the extent that peace did not entirely remove the security threats from this sector). And over time, American neutrality could also influence more central aspects of strategic cooperation between the U.S. and Israel, such as the supply of advanced weaponry.”<sup>11</sup>

***Finding:** Syria could be expected: (1) to exploit its position vis-à-vis U.S. forces on the Golan to dilute the U.S.-Israeli relationship, insisting that the United States act “evenhandedly” between Israel and Syria; and (2) to press the United States to wipe the slate clean on such bilateral problems as Damascus’s continuing support for international terrorism, drug-trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and counterfeiting of U.S. currency.*

**7. Damage to U.S. Public Support of Israel:** Israel has always opposed relying on U.S. troops for its security. Its reasons have been sound, including a spirit of independence, an unwillingness to overburden an important ally, and the realization that in a war U.S. troops would arrive too late to save Israel, given its small size. Another reason is the essence of Zionism itself—Jewish self-reliance—combined with the lessons of the Holocaust, which showed that in the ultimate life-and-death crisis Jewry could not depend on salvation by others. All of this has served to win the admiration of Americans who appreciate an ally that does not desire or expect U.S. forces to defend it.

Two decades ago, Yitzhak Rabin stated the case against Israel’s relying for its security on American forces. His remarks related to proposals for an American deployment in the Sinai:

An Israel that got American soldiers involved in the Middle East would stand out in U.S. public opinion in a negative light. . . . I fear that when the time comes for a comprehensive arrangement in the Middle East, the Americans will propose their own military presence in exchange for extensive concessions on our part in the territories on the basis of the interim agreement. *No army is a substitute for the IDF for the protection of Israel’s security.*<sup>12</sup> [Emphasis added]

Admiration for Israel’s military self-reliance became a major strategic asset, which facilitated U.S. appropriation of substantial economic and military aid for Israel. There is importance in U.S. public support for Israel and danger in undermining it. If Israel insists upon a hazardous deployment of U.S. forces on the Golan, it can be expected to damage its standing with the U.S. public.

***Finding:** If U.S. forces on the Golan were to suffer casualties—from terrorism, for example—there would be U.S. public pressure to end the Golan mission, and Israel’s image as a self-reliant ally would be tarnished. Israeli anxieties about the reliability of the United States as a “peacekeeper” on the Golan would intensify, and with good reason. U.S. credibility would be at stake.*

## THE SINAI MFO AND THE GOLAN MISSION

IT HAS been suggested that U.S. peacekeeping forces on the Golan mission would create no more difficulties than has the U.S. contingent in the Multilateral Force and Observers in the Sinai. The risks of a Golan deployment, however, are significantly greater than those attending the Sinai mission.

First of all, there are important differences in geography, topography, and de-

<sup>11</sup> Gold, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> From Yitzhak Rabin’s memoir, *Pinkas Sherut*, Volume II, pp. 484-85.

mography between the Golan and Sinai. The Sinai is approximately 120 miles wide and has no appreciable population. As such it constitutes strategic depth for Israel even if it is not under Israeli control. By contrast, in the event of Israeli withdrawal, the narrow Golan Heights (to repeat, approximately 10 miles wide and 40 miles long) could be rapidly remilitarized by Syrian forces. It also contains and is accessible to substantial local populations that Syria has said it will augment after Israeli withdrawal. This means that risks of terrorism, under cover of the local population, exist on the Golan that do not exist in the Sinai.

Secondly, the Golan abuts south Lebanon, a major base for terrorist groups hostile to the United States. There is no analogous threat in the Sinai.

Thirdly, the Golan, as discussed above, has special strategic significance as a watershed. This could give rise to Israeli-Syrian conflicts, as in the past, that could lead to violence endangering U.S. peacekeepers. No similar problem exists in the Sinai.

Fourthly, the political relationship between Israel and Egypt is of a different nature from what exists now—or can be foreseen—between Israel and Syria. The Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was based on a profound shift in Egypt's strategic orientation. Then-Egyptian President Anwar Sadat persuaded Israel's government and public that his government (or, at a minimum, Sadat himself) intended to make peace with Israel a cornerstone of Egypt's national-security policy. He completed Egypt's transition from the Soviet camp to the Western camp in global affairs and made Egypt a friend of the United States and a recipient of large amounts of U.S. aid. All of this tended to increase Israel's confidence in the security of its border with Egypt. It kept the Sinai largely free of tension and preserved the MFO from crises or dangers.

No one can reasonably assert that Assad has demonstrated a strategic reorientation similar to Sadat's. Assad's peace diplomacy has been grudging, not confidence-inspiring. Even if he ultimately signs a peace treaty, ample grounds will remain for doubting his sincerity. His record of compliance with international agreements is in general poor. He may view a treaty with Israel as nothing more a tactical maneuver to free Syria from isolation and other difficulties created for it by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Treaty or no, tensions between Israel and Syria will remain high for the foreseeable future and any Golan peacekeeping forces will be squeezed into a narrow area flanked by two heavily armed parties that remain hostile and mutually suspicious.

Lastly, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship is entirely different from that existing or foreseeable between the United States and Syria. Israel aside, the United States has a list of grievances against the Syrian government relating, for example, to support for terrorist organizations, the illicit narcotics trade, the occupation of Lebanon, subversion of the Republic of Turkey, strategic cooperation with Iran, and gross abuse of human rights in Syria. Tensions between Syria and the United States would not end simply because Syria signed a treaty with Israel, even if the United States sponsored the treaty-signing and worked to improve its ties with Syria afterward. The many and deep issues that divide Syria and the United States would create dangers for U.S. forces on the Golan that do not exist for U.S. forces in the Sinai MFO.

***Finding:** The differences between the Golan and Sinai situations are very substantial. U.S. troops on the Golan would have a truly dangerous mission in a high-tension region. They would face threats from terrorists in Syria and Lebanon and would be caught in the middle of heavily armed forces in the event of renewed hostilities. None of these dangers faces U.S. troops in the Sinai MFO.*

## THE NEW FACTOR

FOR decades—to stress the point once again—the Israeli government has opposed the idea of Israel's relying on U.S. troops for its security. This position has been formulated categorically and held virtually universally in politically relevant circles. It has always been based on the arguments set forth above: Israel is more secure, its enemies more effectively deterred, its relationship with the United States stronger—if Israel relies solely on the IDF for its defense.

Why then does the Israeli government now propose to have U.S. troops stationed on

the Golan? Does it no longer subscribe to its longstanding analysis of the virtues of self-reliance? Have Israel's leaders changed their minds on the substance of the issue?

Israel's leaders do not appear to have changed their minds fundamentally on the virtue and necessity of national military self-reliance. What is new is that Israel's leaders are planning to do something which only few previously could ever have imagined: relinquishing Golan territory to the Assad government at a time when the Israeli public is profoundly split on the issue.

For many Israelis across the political spectrum, Israeli withdrawal from the Golan has been unthinkable since 1967. Even those who considered it "thinkable" must have imagined that it would happen only if a dramatic Sadat-in-Jerusalem type of breakthrough occurred in Syria's relationship with Israel. But no such breakthrough has occurred and Israeli public opinion is skeptical.

Israeli officials who favor a U.S. troop presence on the Golan after an Israeli withdrawal believe it will help assuage the fears of their public. They evidently think that such influence on public opinion takes precedence over the longstanding substantive policy of opposing such a role for U.S. troops. Whether U.S. troops on the Golan would, in fact, significantly affect Israeli public opinion regarding an Israeli withdrawal is not clear.

*Finding: The U.S. government must give serious thought to whether it is wise to make an indefinite commitment of U.S. troops to a dangerous and ill-defined mission in order to attempt, in the short term, to influence Israel's domestic debate about the risks and opportunities relating to a peace agreement with Syria. However much the U.S. government favors the peace policy of the Israeli government, there are strong grounds for resisting this kind of misapplication of U.S. military resources. Nor is it in the U.S. interest that the Israeli public mistakenly believe that U.S. peacekeeping troops on the Golan would enhance Israeli security.*

#### IV. Conclusion

THERE is no mission or rationale for a U.S. peacekeeping force on the Golan that would justify the resulting costs and risks. Indeed, the net effect could be negative for Israel's security and regional stability, while the consequences could include the loss of U.S. lives and, possibly, a credibility-damaging retreat of the U.S. forces under terrorist fire. In any event, such a deployment would increase the danger of direct U.S. involvement in a future Middle East war and undermine Israel's standing with the U.S. public as a self-reliant ally.

If Israel withdraws on or from the Golan, it will be required to adopt measures to compensate to the extent possible for the military risks inherent in relinquishing the territory. It will have to consider: investment in more surveillance assets; higher sustained readiness for air and other forces; a larger standing army; and means and methods to increase the speed of military mobilization. All such measures entail large costs—political and societal as well as financial. A U.S. force deployment to the Golan would not significantly reduce those costs. Indeed, one of the dangers of such a deployment is that it may create a false sense of security in Israel and discourage the investments necessary to address such risks. This would not serve U.S. interests, much less Israel's.