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U.S. Troops on the Golan

Would they further the cause of peace in the Middle East?

Now that formal peace has been established between Israel and Jordan—a peace that has de facto prevailed for over 20 years—many believe that the next step should be a peace treaty between Syria and Israel, that in order to attain such a peace it would be necessary for Israel to return the Golan Heights to Syria, and that, after such return, U.S. troops should be stationed on the Golan so as to safeguard the peace between the two countries.

What are the facts?

Should Israel Return the Golan? A point can be made that the whole idea of Israel's yielding the Golan Heights to Syria in order to obtain peace has no merit. Syria's historic claim to the Golan is dubious. But even conceding it, the historic fact is that Syria attacked Israel in three wars and that Israel wrested the Golan from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day-War. The Golan is a desolate plateau, the size of the borough of Queens. It covers less than one percent of Syria's territory. Its only purpose for Syria is as a launching pad for attacks against Israel. For Israel, on the other hand, it provides indispensable strategic depths against attack and the ability, through placement of sophisticated electronic surveillance systems, to monitor any hostile movement on the part

of the Syrians. The current Israeli government seems to be disposed to return part or all of the Golan to Syria. But it would be a first in the history of the world that, in order to attain peace, the victor returned to the vanquished aggressor any territory that had been acquired in the conflict. A much saner and more justified approach would be for Syria, in the spirit of "land for peace", to yield the Golan to Israel. It would be a small price to pay for peace, but neither Syria nor the world seem to consider this common-sense solution.

There are those in Syria, in Israel and even in the United States who believe that if such a return of part or all of the Golan should ultimately be agreed upon, a United States military force should be stationed indefinitely in the area in order to serve as a buffer between the two countries. One wonders what peace it could be if it required outside military force to keep the erstwhile enemies apart. But there are practical reasons why station-

ing U.S. forces on the Golan would be a very bad idea.

A Potential Vietnam-like Scenario. U.S. forces on the Golan would be stationed in a very small area. It would be populated by a menagerie of well-armed terrorists, proxies of hostile radical regimes, such as those of Syria itself, but also of Iran, Iraq, Libya and others. They would not hesitate to target U.S. servicemen. Can one doubt that a suicide bomber would wish to find glory by blowing up a U.S. barracks and killing perhaps hundreds of American soldiers, just as happened in Lebanon in 1983? And it is clear, again just as happened in Lebanon, that an outraged American public would demand the

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immediate return of its troops from such a costly project that is of no discernible benefit to the United States. Putting a U.S. military presence into the stormy junction border-

ing Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and numerous terrorist groups would inevitably drag the United States into costly inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli disputes. It would deepen Russia's involvement in the region, Moscow having resumed strategic cooperation with Syria.

Israelis have always fought their own battles. Their national and military doctrines are based on the precept that they and they alone must protect their country. If U.S. troops were introduced into the area, Israel would become militarily dependent on the United States and that would be to the detriment of both countries. Because Israel is the most important strategic and political asset that the United States has in the entire Middle East, an area of immense geopolitical importance to our country. Deployment of U.S. troops on the Golan would change Israel's role from being such an asset to that of becoming a potentially substantial liability.

A U.S. military presence on the Golan, an area immediately adjacent to the Syrian capital of Damascus, would in time be perceived by Syria as an infringement on its sovereignty. President Assad or his successor could therefore be expected to push for eventual removal of such force, similar to Egypt's demand in 1967 for withdrawal of U.N. troops from Sinai—the event that triggered the Six-Day-War. Thus, war rather than peace could result from a deployment of U.S. troops. Involvement of the U.S. as a military buffer between Syria and Israel could be incredibly expensive in dollars, in casualties and in political capital. Worst of all, entering this quagmire could involve the United States in a Vietnam-like scenario, certainly a most unwelcome development.

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