

THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AFFAIR

In its survey of several months ago, the JCRC discovered that about 2 out of every 3 Jews in the San Francisco Bay Area agreed that Israel should annex the Golan Heights. About 1 out of 3 "approved strongly" while only about 1 out of 10 "disapproved strongly."

To the contrary, almost 2 out of 3 Bay Area Jews agreed that the Israeli government was opening too many settlements in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and thereby endangering a peace settlement. And almost 2 out of 3 disagreed with the proposition that Israel should annex that "West Bank" out of hand. Why was there such a strongly different feeling about the Golan Heights?

Perhaps so many Jews had that feeling because they remembered the image of the Syrians, before 1967, continually shelling Israeli kibbutzim in their fields far below the Golan Heights. It was like a duck shoot. In his first visit to Israel, this columnist had occasion to dive for safety, along with the school children he was visiting, to avoid random shooting from the Golan Heights. Many other American Jews had the same experience.

The Golan Heights represents an impossible security risk -- especially when President Hafez al-Assad of Syria says, as he did late Sunday, that Syria would refuse to recognize Israel "even if the Palestinians deign to do so." When the Syrians say that this annexation of the Golan Heights by Israel represents "a declaration of war," it must be seen as a form of Levantine humor. The Syrians had to accept an armistice, but they never left any doubt that they considered themselves in a state of war with Israel, even if it had to be suspended for a while.

Also, the informed Jews of the Bay Area may make a distinction between the Golan Heights and the West Bank on other grounds. There are hundreds of thousands of Arabs now residing in the West Bank and comparatively few Jews. There are several thousand

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Arabs now residing in the Golan Heights, almost all of them Druse, and about an equal number of Jews.

There were about 30 thousand Syrian Muslim Arabs in the Golan Heights before the 1967 war. Many of them were involved in conducting a continuous war against the Israelis below. The Golan Heights, about 400 square miles of rocky land, had a specific Jewish history. There are remains of 2000 year old synagogues, and Golan was a biblical city. The Baron Rothschild Fund purchased a large section of the Golan Heights in 1894 for Jewish agricultural settlement, but the Ottoman Empire, which controlled that area, foiled the settlement efforts. The French controlled the Golan Heights after World War I, and it became Syrian political territory only in 1941, when Syria gained its independence.

But of course, the security problem is the chief fact in the Golan Heights affair. It ~~is~~<sup>is</sup> inconceivable that any country in its right mind would relinquish such a strategically crucial area -- while it was still controlled by an enemy which refuses recognition and swears a war to extinction. Under the circumstances, no population in its right mind would allow a government to relinquish such a point of vulnerability and historic abuse.

Questions will certainly be raised about the timing or even the necessity of this formal annexation. Did the Israeli government take this action in order to make it easier to evacuate Jewish settlers from the Sinai, in pursuance of the Camp David agreement? Or did the formal annexation do more harm than good for the health of the Camp David agreement? Are the Egyptian complaints about the annexation serious or *pro forma*? Will the enemies of the Camp David agreement in the United States use this move as grist for their mill? Why not just hold onto the land without a formal action?

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These are tactical questions, questions of judgement; and perhaps more light will have been thrown on them by the time this week's *Bulletin* goes to press. If a tactical or timing error *was* made, it will not have been the first time in the history of Israeli governments and it would be regrettable. But, in any case, no one should forget the fundamental *strategic* realities -- and even, if you will, the *moral* realities -- with respect to the Golan Heights and Israeli security.

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