

THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

The resource-rich, strategic Golan Heights has long been a prized asset for both Syria and Israel

SIZE

1,800km² (1,200km² under Israeli control, and 600km² under Syrian control)

Length = 65km | Width = 12 - 25km

POPULATION

49,700 (2018)

Arab & Druze – 25,700 | Jews – 22,300

Pre-1967 war population = 130,000-145,000 (only 7,000 remained after war, in six villages: Majdal Shams, Mas'ade, Buq'ata, Ein Qiniyye, Ghajar and Shayta)

100+ Syrian villages and farms in Golan Heights destroyed

TIMELINE

Ancient times

Occupied by Amorites, Arameans, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks & Romans; ultimately fell to invading Arabs after Battle of Yarmouk in 636AD

Middle ages

Under numerous Muslim groups: Abbasids, Shi'ite Fatimids, Seljuk Turks & Kurdish Ayyubids

During Crusades

Under Emirate of Damascus, posed an insurmountable obstacle to Crusader armies

Ottoman Empire

Ottoman Turks conquered Syria (1600s)

1700-1800s

Druze communities established in Golan

After Russo-Turkish War (1877-78)

Influx of refugees from Caucasus region

Jewish settlement – late 1800s to early 1900s
Zionist associations in Romania, Bulgaria, US & England began purchasing land in Golan

MODERN HISTORY

December 1920

Ottoman Empire falls – Franco-British Boundary Agreement – bulk of Golan under French control

September 1923

Formed part of French Mandate of Syria

1944

Became part of newly independent state of Syria

After Arab-Israeli war (1948-1949)

Partly demilitarised (DMZ)

1950s and 1960s

Multiple border clashes – mainly over status of DMZ, culminated in **War over Water in 1960s**

MODERN HISTORY

(continued)

Six-day War and Israeli occupation

9-10 June 1967: Israel captured Golan Heights from Syria; 80,000-130,000 Syrians fled or forced to leave, only 7,000 remained (Israel hasn't allowed former residents to return for security reasons)

Israeli settlement began

Merom Golan founded in July 1967; by 1970 there were 12 settlements

Yom Kippur War 1973

Syrian forces overran much of southern Golan, before being pushed back by Israeli counterattack

1974 ceasefire

Most of Golan under Israeli control

DEFACTO ANNEXATION BY ISRAEL & CIVIL RULE

14 December 1981

Israel passed Golan Heights Law – extending Israeli "laws, jurisdiction and administration" to Golan Heights (effectively annexing territory to Israel, but not a formal annexation)

Golan Heights Law not recognised internationally

- declared "null and void and without international legal effect" by UN Security Council Resolution 497

Israel maintains retention of area

Based on Resolution 242 for "safe and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force"

International community rejects Israeli claims
Golan Heights widely regarded as sovereign Syrian territory

By 1995

32 Israeli communities created

Constant 'bargaining chip' in Israeli-Syria peace discussions

US STANCE ON TERRITORIAL DISPUTE

1975

US President Gerald Ford wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, emphasising "that a peace agreement with Syria must be predicated on Israel remaining on the Golan Heights"

1991

US Secretary of State James Baker told Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir that the US would honour the position expressed in Ford's letter

25 March 2019

US President Donald Trump signed proclamation recognising Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights

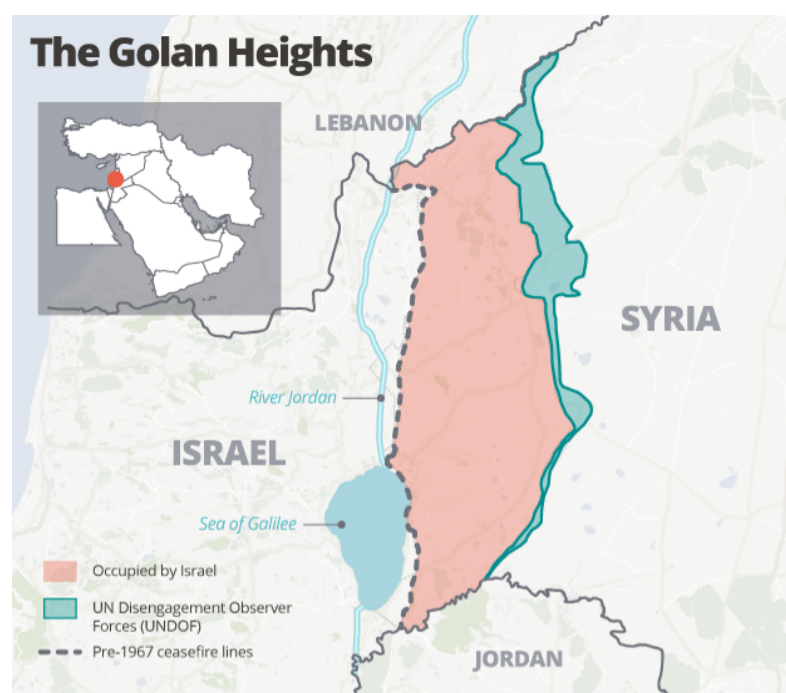
Shift in US policy rejected by Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Russia, Iran, the European Union, Germany, France, the Arab League, and the Gulf Cooperation Council

Druze community in Golan heights protested against Mr Trump's comment

SOURCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golan_Heights
https://www.middleeasteye.net/sites/default/files/styles/wysiwyg_large/public/images/Golan-heights-map.png?itok=Wy_1L-3t
<https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-11-16/druze-golan-heights-have-long-been-fence-between-syria-and-israel-syrias-civil>
<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2015/11/07/black-gold-under-the-golan>
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/qanda-golan-heights-an-area-of-beauty-strategic-value/2019/03/22/50f6b17e-4cd3-11e9-8cfc-2c5d0999c21e_story.html?utm_term=.5a41989f1179
<https://www.rt.com/op-ed/454231-golan-heights-oil-recognise/>

HEIGHTS



https://www.middleeasteye.net/sites/default/files/styles/wysiwyg_large/public/images/Golan-heights-map.png?itok=Wy_1L-3t

STRATEGIC POSITION AND RESOURCES

Hilly and elevated – a natural barrier and vantage point



Visible from Golan: Israel's Jordan Rift Valley, Sea of Galilee and Jordan River, and Syria's capital, Damascus (60km north)

Mount Hermon – highest point: 2,814 metres

Main plateau – average altitude of 1,000 metres

OIL

Early 1990s – Israel National Oil Company (INOC) granted shaft-sinking permits in Golan Heights

1992-1995 – Permits suspended to advance peace efforts

2012 – Exploratory oil drilling, despite environmental concerns

2013 – Israel awarded Genie Energy rights to drill in Golan Heights despite international opposition [GOGAS - board members/investors include highly influential people and is a parent company of Israel Energy Initiatives Ltd (IEI)]

2015 – Report of massive oil reserves – "billions of barrels, which will easily provide all Israel's oil needs"

Major obstacle to extraction – legality of Israeli sovereignty of Golan Heights



WATER

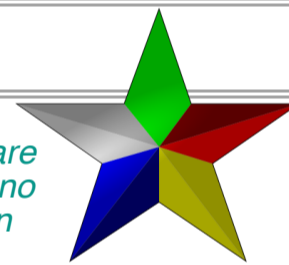


Golan's catchment feeds Jordan River, Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), the Yarmuk River and underground aquifers

Provides 15-25% of Israel's water supply (a water-stressed nation)

Land is fertile – volcanic soil – vineyards, orchards and cattle – 25% of Israeli wines; 30-50% of some fruit

WHO ARE THE DRUZE?



"The Druze have no borders. We are connected to our homes but have no nation. Our fate is never in our own hands. We adapt."

– Juury, a Druze in the Golan Heights



An ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural and political minority – are neither Muslim, Jew, nor Christian



An 11th-century offshoot of Ismailism (their secret beliefs are known only to select elders)



±1 million Druze worldwide - most have lived for centuries in the area where Israel, Lebanon and Syria meet



Historically, they have no national aspirations and develop loyalties to the countries in which they live



Druze in Israel (± 140,000) are full citizens and most Druze men serve in the Israeli army – in Golan, however, few Druze accepted offer of citizenship when Israel formally 'annexed' the area in 1981; they hold Israeli residency status with rights to travel and work freely



Before digital technology, separated families communicated via megaphones placed on two opposite sides of a valley named the "valley of tears"



D
R
U
Z
E



"Under current legal conditions, oil in the Golan cannot be commercially extracted and traded on international markets because that would violate UN resolutions. However, if Washington were to declare Golan to be part of Israel, then oil could be legally traded with the US."

– Finian Cunningham (freelance journalist)