



Syria No Longer Looks Down on the Galilee

President Donald Trump added a new notch to his belt of foreign policy moves Monday night, signing a proclamation officially recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria in 1967 and has controlled ever since.



President Donald J. Trump, joined by Vice President Mike Pence and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, signs a proclamation formally recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights Monday, March 25, 2019, in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead, public domain via Wikimedia Commons).

Trump initially announced the policy about-face last week via Twitter, writing: "After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and regional stability!"

The decision is major in a few ways. It's yet another rejection by the Trump administration of decades of U.S. policy; it recognizes Israeli sovereignty over a territory internationally recognized as belonging to an Arab state and it's seen as a boost to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of Israel's elections.

It also makes things awkward for Washington's Arab allies, whose populations oppose Israeli "seizures" of Arab lands. [Then it could be said that Arab nations shouldn't have attacked – or planned to attack – Israel in 1948, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2006.]

In addition, some are calling it a double standard when it comes to the U.S. response to Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. "It could be used by the Russians to legitimize their annexation of Crimea," he added. "Plus, it would make movement on the peace plan considerably more awkward."

Although US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday, "We believe this increases the likelihood that we get resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We think it speaks with the clarity that takes this away from any uncertainty about how we'll proceed."

The signing, which took place in the White House with PM Netanyahu present, makes the U.S. the only country in the world besides Israel to recognize the annexed territory, which comprises the western two-thirds of the Golan.

Netanyahu called it "historic" while Syria labeled it a "blatant attack on its sovereignty" and pledged to take the territory back by "all available means." Turkey's Erdogan pledged to take action against the U.S. at the UN, while France, Germany and Russia quickly voiced their opposition.



Ancient Caesarea Philippi in the Golan Heights, where Peter confessed Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," in Matthew 16:16

(Photo by gugganij, via Wikipedia, CC-BY-SA-2.5).

PM Netanyahu also thanked Pres. Trump for his controversial relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem last May and for withdrawing from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.



The ancient Jewish city of Gamla in the Golan – discovered by Israeli archaeologists after 1967's Six Day War – is the site of the battle described in Josephus' "Jewish Wars" against the Roman Empire. Here also is one of the oldest synagogues in Israel, where Jesus likely taught (see Matt. 4:23-34) (Image by טלי אראל, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0).

Israel maintains its right to remain in control of the Golan for its own security. The security argument is compelling, analysts say — the U.S. and Israel see Iranian forces using Syria as a launch pad for attacks on Israel, and the Golan is the front line. Washington's recognition came several hours after a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip hit a residential area just north of Tel Aviv. (*Ynet News, March 2019*)

What difference does it make?

But despite the international reverberations of Trump's proclamation, this may not make a massive difference to the status quo on the ground, experts say.

"In terms of facts on the ground, it doesn't change very much," Graham Griffiths, a senior analyst at Control Risks, told CNBC on Tuesday.

"Israel has been in control of this territory for decades now, but this symbolic recognition by the U.S. constitutes a turning point and shows again the extent to which the Trump administration is willing to set aside past U.S. policy precedent to support Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel." (*CNBC, March 2019*)

Actually, in biblical days, the Golan was known as Bashan, and was conquered by Israel, so they simply recaptured it in 1967.

"He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings...Og king of Bashan...and he gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his people Israel" (Psalm 135: 10-12).

In Messiah,
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