

Commentary, July 1995

Readers' Letters

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In the May letters columns, the authors of the Center for Security Policy report, "U.S. Forces on the Golan Heights?" [December 1994], give a conclusive reply to their critic, Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. But one thing should be added. It may seem secondary yet it goes to the root of the dispute, and is a good example of the subtle, even subliminal, pro-Arab propaganda spread around the world by supposedly "honest arbiters" who manage, habitually, to suggest that whatever happens, Israel is in the wrong.

Mr. Eisenstadt write that "the return of the Golan would eliminate Syria's central grievance vis-à-vis Israel." Syria's grievance? In 1948, to prevent Israel's very birth, Syria (in alliance with six other Arab states) wantonly attacked Israel – from, *inter alia*, the Golan Heights. Israel, woefully lacking in arms, nevertheless came out fighting and (at a cost of 1 percent of its entire population) consolidated its sovereign existence. For nineteen years thereafter, Syria contented itself with attacks, intermittent but frequent, sometimes daily, on the Galilean plain below. Many Israeli children in the area had to attend school in underground bunkers, sheltered against Syrian shells lobbed down from the Golan.

Then in 1967 came a second, no less wanton, all-out Syrian offensive against Israel (in coalition with Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan), with the Golan as its heavily fortified launching pad. This time Israel fought back onto the Golan Heights, and scaled them (again at a heavy cost in lives).

That is how Israel came to be on those intimidating heights. In 1973, in partnership with Egypt, Syria exploited the sanctity of Yom Kippur to launch yet another attack, which threatened to overwhelm the whole of northern Israel. The attack was repulsed – and *that* is why Israel holds the Golan, which was, and remains, a vital element in its basic defense. . . .

After Syria's Yom Kippur attack, Israel was persuaded (by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) to withdraw from its forward defenses to new lines. Those (1974) defense lines, however, are still so near Damascus as to make the Syrians think twice and three times before venturing on a *fourth* all-out attack on Israel. Hence we have had peace for over twenty years on that front. But instead of stating simply that Israel's defenses have ensured that peace, Mr. Eisenstadt writes that "*Syria* has ensured nearly absolute quiet on the Golan for twenty years" (emphasis added). . . .

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