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WITH SYRIA, TRADE PEACE FOR PEACE

In implementing the separation of forces agreement with Syria after the Yom Kippur War, Israel withdrew from territory it had captured at Kuneitra and its surroundings. Subsequently, prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, reporting to the Knesset on June 3, 1974, said, 'There is no place for an interim stage. Once we achieve further progress in a settlement with Egypt the question will arise whether Syria is indeed ready to sign a peace treaty with Israel.'

The agreed line of separation (which included the whole of the Golan) promised Israel security from future attacks from the Syrian aggressors. Indeed, that line has been the most untroubled border experienced by Israel to this day.

Thus it was that prime minister Begin in 1981 received the Knesset's consent to incorporate the Golan into Israel's territory. A thriving Jewish community has been growing on the Golan ever since.

The Yom Kippur War was not the only occasion for an unprovoked Syrian attack on Israel. It was the third. Syria had joined in the Arab League campaign to abort the very creation of Israel in 1948. The Arabs were thwarted in their major objective - Israel survived - but Syria converted the Golan into a tremendous system of fortifications for future attack on Israel. That, indeed, was the only constructive Syrian act in the years of its possession of the Golan.

Meantime, it contented itself with making life in the Galilean plain below as miserable as possible, mainly by the intermittent lobbing of shells into Jewish villages. During those years there were children who did all their schooling in the underground bunkers erected as protection against Syrian shelling.

Then came the attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria in June 1967. That attack was bombastically proclaimed in advance - by Egyptian president Nasser - as the war that would put an end to Israel.

This time Israel decided to put an end to the towering threat of the Golan. IDF units scaled its formidable heights, bringing the Golan into Israeli hands at last.

Six years later, on Yom Kippur, the complete surprise of the Syrian attack (like the Egyptian attack in the south), momentarily threw Israel off balance. It was only after some hard fighting and heavy casualties that Israel regained control of the vital Golan bastion.

DOES THE sane nation exist which would, after that threefold experience, hand back the Golan to Syria on any terms? It is all the less likely when, throughout the years, the Syrians have been one of the most important backers and sources of terrorism against

Israel - harboring some of its leading perpetrators; sowing, spreading and teaching its children murderous propaganda, demonizing not only Israel, which it threatens to destroy, but the Jewish people as a whole.

Winston Churchill, during World War II, laid down a clear-cut principle for a very similar set of circumstances: 'Twice in our lifetime,' he told the House of Commons on February 22, 1944, 'Russia has been violently assaulted by Germany. Many millions of Russians have been slain and tracts of Russian soil devastated as a result of repeated German aggression. Russia has the right of reassurance against future attacks from the West, and we are going all the way with her to see that she gets it.'

Yitzhak Rabin phrased it succinctly in a speech in 1992: 'Whoever abandons the Golan endangers the existence of Israel.'

For the Jewish people, the Golan has a fascinating history, largely associated with the post-biblical period and the revolt against Rome, its memories resonating historically as Jewish as those of Judea and Samaria. What has, moreover, been forgotten is that it was so recognized in the Mandate for Palestine.

Yes, most of the Golan was included in the territory envisaged for the establishment of the Jewish National Home in the Mandate in 1922. But the British, to whom the League of Nations had entrusted the Mandate as a trustee for the Jewish National Home, violated the Mandate and, a year after its promulgation, illegitimately gave away the Golan to Syria. Article 5 of the Mandate for Palestine reads:

'The Mandatory [power] shall be responsible to seeing that no Palestinian territory shall be ceded, or leased, or in any way placed under the control of the Government of any foreign power.'

That was in 1923. The British signed an agreement with France whereby in return for certain benefits to itself in Europe, Britain transferred the Golan to France. France then included the Golan in its own Mandate for Syria.

When France's Mandate came to an end in 1945 and Syria became an independent sovereign state, Syria became also the mistress of the Golan; and therefore the Golan was turned into a powerful base for attacking - and destroying - the Jewish National Home.

The undignified decision of Israel's president, in a knee-jerk reaction to a seemingly softer tone from Damascus, to honor President Bashar Assad with a visit to Jerusalem indicates once again the ease with which Israeli political leaders constantly ignore the painful lessons of 50 years experience with the Arabs. They seem to forget Israel's national policy and the Golan's status as a part of Israel.

Three prime ministers in turn acted out of the deluded belief that Syria would make peace with Israel if the Golan was given back. They did not grasp that Syria needs the Golan

primarily as a base against Israel. They forgot the reasons why the Golan was incorporated into Israel and why it must remain there for good.

Israel can offer Syria peace and, indeed, economic and cultural cooperation - but Syria must first put an end to the promotion of terror and the harboring of terrorist organizations, the anti-Semitic politicization of children, and its virulent anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda.

But these are not matters for negotiation; putting an end to them is a normal basis of civilized behavior. Otherwise it is useless, indeed counterproductive, to call for negotiations for the sake of negotiating.