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International Court of Justice

“The Golan Heights Water Dispute”

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Context & Historical Background



Basic geological information on the Golan Heights:

A land in the Levant, about 1800 square kilometers. It is bordered by Mt. Hermon in the north, the Yarmouk river in the south, and the Sea of Galilee along with the Jordan River in the west.

Pre-Syrian settlements:

Human settlement seems to date back to the late stone age, 10 to 50 thousand years ago. Mentions of the Golan Heights in the Bible claim that it was under Jewish control for a period of time, until it was conquered by Aramaic people, who settled there until the Byzantine period. Led by Omar Ibn Al Khattab, it was then taken over by the Arabs and remained with them through the Ottoman Empire. It went under french Mandate in 1918, and finally became part of the Syrian Arab republic in 1946. There were some parts purchased as Jewish settlements in the 1800's that advocates may or may not decide to research and use as evidence.

Incidents prior to Israeli capture:

Right after the war in 1948-49, the Golan heights were supposed to be demilitarized. This was due to an agreement between Syria and Israel called the Armistice agreement. Despite this, there were many armed disputes between both countries breaking this agreement. Israel wanted full control over the Sea of Galilee, a source of fresh water in the region. Despite having a United States sponsored agreement called the Jordan Valley Unified Water plan, the Arab League attempted to break this agreement to give more dominant control over this source of water to the Syrians. Many years of attacks from both sides resulted from this violation.

The 6 Day War:

Prior to this conflict, there was an increasing number of Palestinian guerrilla attacks. Russian intelligence concerning the possibility of Israeli attacks on Syria also raised tensions in the region. Mobilization of Arab troops, with Egyptian forces joining with Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi forces led to Israel acting quickly. Attacks were carried out on the air forces of these countries, making ground troops extremely vulnerable. The United Nations Security Council then called for a cease-fire. All countries other than Syria accepted, with the latter continuing to fire shells and mortars. This led to a counterattack by Israel, which assaulted the Golan Heights on the 9th of June, 1967. The ceasefire was accepted by Syria the next day, after terrible losses and mass displacement of Syrians living in the region. More than 80,000 Syrians fled the now Israeli-controlled territories.

Further developments

The Israeli government initially voted to return the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace, yet this was soon nullified. Settlement construction began in 1967, with over 10 settlements being built. In 1973, Syrian forces attempted to reclaim the heights, attacking from the south, and failed to do so after heavy Israeli counterattacks. This was known as the Yom Kippur War, and it resulted in a ceasefire that gave Israel the majority of the land.

Points to research

Golan Heights Law-

On the 14th December 1981, Israel passed a law that annexed the Golan Heights, claiming that under Resolution 242 of the United Nations, it was justified in annexing this territory in order to protect itself from unsafe borders.

The Security Council passed resolution 497 calling this annexation “null and void and without international legal effect.”

Peace Negotiations-

Look into peace negotiations, and the difference in the 1948 border vs 1967 borders which are the main reason the Golan Heights remain under Israeli control.

Sources

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