

Golan Heights: Trump Aims to ‘Shore up’ Support for Netanyahu Ahead of Israeli Vote

Statement makes 'mockery of international law' to help Netanyahu in forthcoming Israeli elections, analysts say

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Donald Trump's announcement that Washington will recognise Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is an effort to boost the re-election chances of Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**, analysts said.

[The US president's comments](#), made on Twitter on Thursday afternoon, come only 19 days ahead of the Israeli elections.

And with them, Trump has made it clear he wants to “shore up” support for Netanyahu, who is heading into the election on shaky ground, **Khalil Jahshan**, executive director of the Arab Center Washington DC, told MEE.

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!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [March 21, 2019](#)

“The message to people out there, in the region particularly, and worldwide: If you have military power, and you have US support, go ahead and occupy other people's land by force,” Jahshan told MEE.

Jahshan added that the US president's statement serves as a distraction from both Trump's and Netanyahu's respective legal troubles at home.

The Israeli leader is facing several corruption investigations and a looming indictment by the country's attorney general, while US politicians are anticipating the release of special counsel Robert Mueller's report on possible collusion between Trump's election campaign team and Russia.

Amid scandals that may threaten his presidency, Trump is also trying to reassert his commitment to Israel ahead of the annual AIPAC conference early next week, Jahshan said.

Indeed, the US president has recently [called](#) on Jewish-Americans to abandon the Democratic Party, pointing to his own staunchly pro-Israel policies, including moving the US

embassy to Jerusalem and withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal.

Jahshan said the Golan statement also coincides with Netanyahu's forthcoming visit to Washington, where the Israeli premier will meet Trump and take part at the AIPAC conference next week as a keynote speaker.

'Racist president'

Nihad Awad, the executive director of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), called Trump's Golan tweet a clear attempt to intervene in Israeli politics and provide a boost to Netanyahu.

"Trump is intervening in a foreign election on behalf of a politician who has aligned with racists, and who has passed segregationist nation-state laws in Israel," Awad said of the Israeli prime minister.

Israel approved a controversial nation-state law last year, which says that the country is "unique to the Jewish people". Critics have condemned the legislation as racist, saying it enshrines discrimination against Israel's Palestinian minority into law.

Netanyahu cited the law last week to proclaim that Israel is for Jews only, "not a state of all its citizens".

Awad drew a link between Trump's domestic policies against immigrants and Muslims, and Netanyahu's foreign policy.

"He's now seen as a symbol for white nationalists and white supremacy in America and around the world," Awad said. "What do we expect from a racist president except spewing racist policies and positions against people of colour, minorities and people under the occupation?"

Despite his comments, the US president does not have the moral or legal authority to grant Israel sovereignty over Syrian land, Awad told MEE. "It's not his position to legitimise the occupation of a foreign land by the state of Israel."

Netanyahu hails move

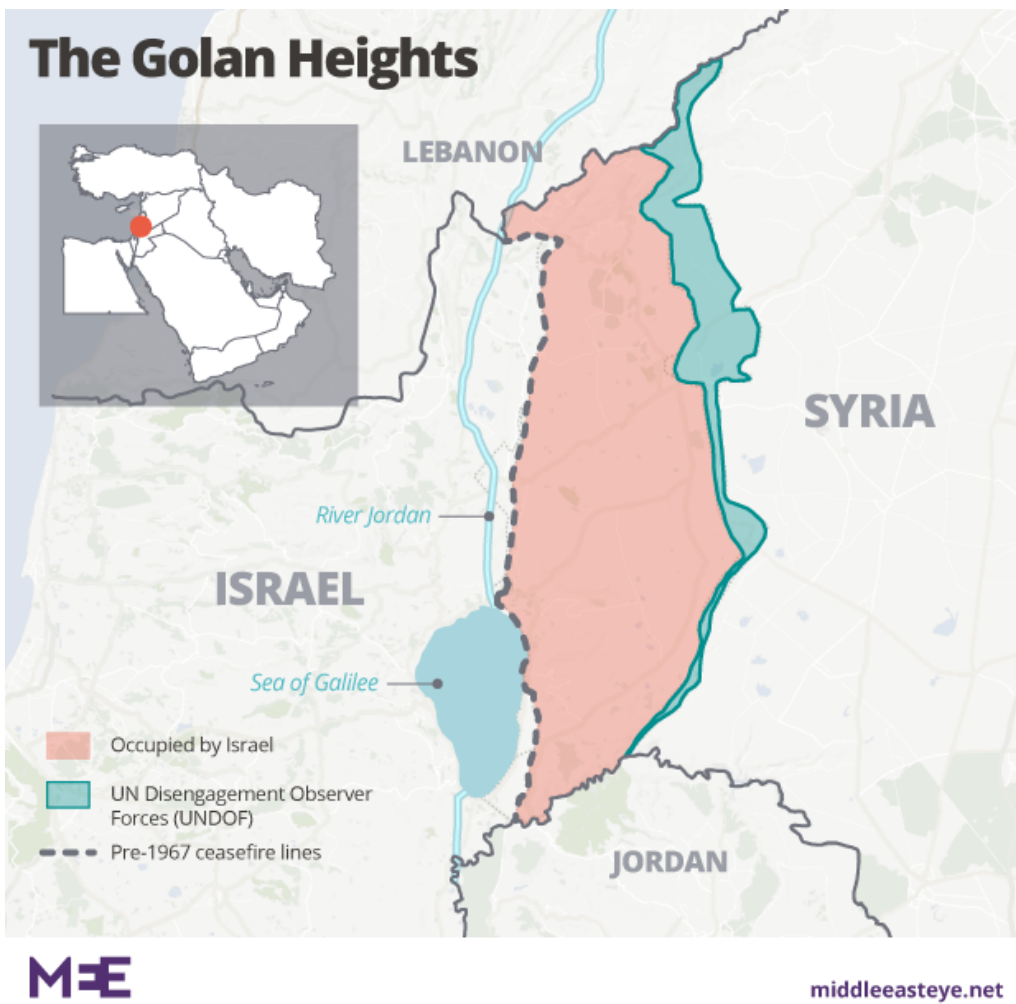
Israel occupied Syria's Golan Heights in the 1967 war and annexed the territory in 1981. It is now home to 34 settlements housing tens of thousands of Israelis.

Ariel Gold, co-director of the feminist anti-war group CODEPINK, said Trump is solidifying his alliance with right-wing leaders around the world, including Netanyahu and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro.

The Golan statement further isolates the US from a global consensus - Israel's annexation of the Golan has never been recognised by the international community - while diminishing the prospects of peace in the Middle East.

"This lets Israel know - like the embassy move did - that their government has the backing of the US, and so, with the backing of the world's superpower, they

don't need to take into account as much what will help create peace," Gold told MEE.



That's exactly what Netanyahu himself said on Thursday, as he hailed Trump's statement recognising Israel's hold on the Golan Heights.

"The message that President Trump has given the world is that America stands by Israel," [he said in a statement](#).

"We are deeply grateful for the US support. We're deeply grateful for the unbelievable and unmatched support for our security and our right to defend ourselves."

'Mockery of international law'

Trump's announcement sparked fears that US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan may lead to Israel's annexation of parts of the Palestinian West Bank, if not the entire territory, with US support.

Omar Baddar, deputy director at the Arab American Institute, said Trump is marginalising the US role in the world by disregarding international law and pledging "full support for Israel's illegitimate acquisition of territory by force".

Both Trump and Netanyahu have stressed that Israel's hold on the Golan must continue

indefinitely to preserve the country's security, pointing to the ongoing civil war in Syria and the presence of Iranian troops near the territory.

Baddar rejected that rationale.

“What is most insulting to everyone's intelligence about Trump's announcement is that it is framed as an effort to advance 'security' and 'regional stability', when the reality is that occupation is perhaps the biggest contributor to instability and violence,” he told MEE in an email.

Indeed, Thursday's tweet is the latest example of Trump showing a blatant disregard for international norms and institutions in favour of Israel.

After his administration recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital against the objections of some of Washington's closest allies, it also left the UN Human Rights Council in protest against its scrutiny of Israel's policies.

Washington also cut off humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

But Trump is not concerned with UN resolutions and international treaties that govern territorial disputes, said Jahshan of the Arab Center.

That was made all the clearer on Thursday, Jahshan said, as the president's statement “makes a mockery of international law”.

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