



OneMideast.org is an online discussion arena intended for raising and debating ideas central to the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The project, which represents the first joint Syrian-Israeli online discussion of its kind, was formed through the efforts of private individuals -- bloggers, academics, political analysts, journalists, and professionals -- who embarked on producing an extensive list of objections to peace commonly encountered in both Syrian and Israeli societies.

Through an anonymous online voting process, the group elected the "Top 20 List" of objections to peace (one from each side) as the most important ones to argue, and produced the most effective counter-argument to each objection.

The OneMideast.org online community uses the latest technologies in online dialogue and social networking. The participants representing the Arab side are private individuals with Lebanese or Syrian national origin and are full citizens of the USA, Canada, and other Western countries. These participants are volunteers whose contributions represent their own personal opinions and are not official opinions in any shape or form.

No representatives of either government participated in this project either directly or indirectly. This project and its participants have not consulted with or received guidance, approval, or collaboration from any government or government representatives.

The OneMideast.org communication process took place entirely online. No physical meetings occurred between any individuals on either side of the project.

The results of the project are available for download (text and podcast) on the OneMideast.org website. During its next phase, OneMideast.org will invite experts and opinion leaders to discuss the challenges associated with the Syrian-Israeli peace process, and to submit constructive feedback for publication on the site.

OneMideast.org is an entirely self-funded project with voluntary contributions from its participants. No financing or means of support have been received, or will be accepted, from any government, NGO's, public, or private organizations.

PART 1



SYRIAN
counterarguments
to Israeli objections

1. Israel's border with Syria is its quietest border

Since 1974, there have been very few occasions in which we witnessed an exchange of fire on the Golan front. Syria has been completely deterred, and will never move a single soldier into now-Israeli soil. Why then should Israel give up land to a weak neighbour?

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces:

"Israel and Syria will scrupulously observe the cease-fire on land, sea and air and will refrain from all military actions against each other, from the time of the signing of this document, in implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 338 (1973) dated 22 October 1973."

Should Syria be faulted for following the disengagement agreement to the letter? Would Israel have preferred the opposite situation?

The fact that the border has been quiet is a clear indication of Syria's intention and capacity to abide by her obligations under treaties and agreements in areas under Syrian sovereignty. This is not an indication of Syria's lack of means to pursue a military option. If Hezbollah's 5000 highly effective soldiers are considered to be trained and armed by Syria, shouldn't Syria's 400,000 soldiers and her vastly superior missiles arsenal be taken more seriously?

2. The logic of this argument is fallacious by wanting to have it both ways. On the one hand, Israel rejects true negotiation with the Palestinians and resorts to violent attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, claiming that peace with the two sides is unobtainable due to border incidents, be they rockets or minor incursions. On the other hand, Israel claims that it should not make peace with Syria and return the Golan because the border is the quietest border Israel has. The two arguments are logically irreconcilable.

3. Indeed the Golan border has been quiet and we would hope for it to remain so until a peace treaty is signed.

However, the situation can quickly and dramatically spiral out of control following any of the following developments:

- Gaza: A serious escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that leads to harsh Israeli punishment of Palestinians in Gaza. Syria might be obliged due to public pressure to do something to defend the Palestinian people under attack.
- Lebanon: If Israel decides to launch a pre-emptive attack on Lebanon hoping to deliver a serious blow to Hezbollah, Syria has made it clear that this time it will defend Lebanon.
- Iran: An escalation on the Iran issue through a military strike by Israel or the US will probably lead to a regional war that could result in a serious Israeli-Syrian confrontation.

- Saudi Arabia: Turmoil or a crisis in Saudi Arabia could turn the balance of power in favour of supporting resistance to Israel. An Israeli or American attack on Iran will dramatically increase the chances of instability inside the Saudi Kingdom.
- Egypt: Popular resentment of the Mubarak regime could lead to massive turmoil in Egypt. An anticipated Muslim Brotherhood takeover of power will lead to Egypt's pulling out of its peace agreement with Israel.

Syria is much more confident in 2010 than ever before. It can count on the support of many new close allies including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the new government of Lebanon. In addition, Syria's Iraqi allies have fared very well during the recent Iraqi elections.

It would be a strategic mistake for the Israelis to take Syria's current position for granted. The prospects of a future unplanned war between Syria and Israel are real. Consequently, it would be in Israel's best interest to pursue the path of peace.

2. The Golan Heights are strategically valuable to Israel

With the Golan Heights under its control, Syria will be able to resume shelling northern Israel and Israel will lose the ability to monitor and detect potentially hostile Syrian army troop movements. Giving up the Golan Heights is risky. Israel cannot afford to take that risk.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. "Do you believe that it will be possible to achieve peace with Syria without full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights?" ... "No."

That simple "no" was Former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's answer to President Bill Clinton in March of 1993 when the two leaders were discussing peace in the Middle East.

Under a genuine peace treaty between Israel and Syria – a true peace that is guaranteed by the United States - the military high grounds under the control of either party become less important than is the case between warring nations. Maintaining peaceful relationships would be more strategically important than any high grounds.

2. In the age of early warning systems that include round-the-clock super-resolution satellite observations and space-based or very high-altitude electronic surveillance, the strategic importance of highland territories is diminished to only the traditional battlefield tactical advantage.

This may be true for countries that enjoy a strategic depth which can serve as a buffer against ground troops. However, for Israel this is a mixed case. The basic Israeli argument goes that the strategic significance of the Golan height is twofold: first as an observation post, and second as a rough terrain

buffer that can be 15-20 miles wide in certain locations, which can delay the progress of Syrian ground troops by at least one to two days, therefore giving Israel a chance to counteract any rapid mobilization of Syrian troops.

Some high-ranking Israeli officers have even argued that if the Golan is to return to Syria, the demilitarized zone must extend to the entire southern part of Syria in order to give Israel ample time to mobilize in case of a surprise Syrian attack. These fears reflect not a realistic assessment of Israel's vulnerability, but one of the key elements of Israel's military doctrine, which is based on taking the battle into the "enemy's" territories. The major flaw in this argument is the assumption that the next war will be similar to the previous one. Recent events, such as in the 2006 war in Lebanon have demonstrated that taking the battle to the enemy's territory is not necessarily a winning formula and it guarantees no success.

It is viewed that the Israeli calculation of the strategic value of the Golan is based less on its value as a defensive line and more on the price in blood that Israel may have to pay if it wanted to take it back in case of hostility in order to take the battle back into Syrian territory. Logically, this is also flawed as it puts the strategic value of peace as less than the perceived value of the Golan as a means of ensuring an eternal mirage of full and absolute protection in the face of any possible hostilities whether they are real or imagined.

Insisting on an offensive advantage is no way to reach a peace agreement. Furthermore, Syria is unlikely to rely on tank warfare in the heights or mainly on regular army ground forces if hostilities are to break out. As noted by Levy Morav (1995), the Syrian's intent on not making each war a repetition of the previous war was evident in the Syrian's response to Ariel Sharon's attempts to engage Syrian ground forces during the Lebanon invasion in 1982 as they opted to use air force despite heavy losses.

While Syria will never relinquish sovereignty over the Golan, she is well aware that peace agreements worldwide are characterized by the establishment of de-militarized zones on both sides of the border. And Syria has accommodated since 1973 a demilitarized zone. So far, in all of its cease fire agreements, the demilitarized zones around Israel were established on its neighbours' lands, and the Syrians will be within their rights to refuse extending the demilitarized zone to the extent described by some iron-clad-security theorists in Israel. In a Golan peace deal, one would expect it to guarantee the security of both sides with international monitoring that does not infringe on either sides' rights or abilities to defend itself against an attack within reasonable recognition of each side's sovereignty over its UN recognized land.

Finally, while in cease fire agreements, military considerations are of utmost importance due to the temporary nature of such agreements. Peace is a political decision with intent of permanency and normalcy, and as such it is not to be decided based on military advantage alone.

The argument that Israel should retain the Golan Heights because of their strategic value assumes perpetual war conditions, and resigns the region to a state of temporary cease fires with continued hostility. Insisting on retaining the Golan Heights for their strategic value to Israel is tantamount to insisting that the house hands you a rigged dice before you hit the crap table. This is no way to play if the goal is a durable peace.

3. The argument that the Golan Heights are strategically valuable to Israel may have been true in the 1950s and 1960s. Syria then dominated the Heights and was, with its short range artillery, in a position to threaten Israeli targets below.

With the advance of technology, however, that argument is no longer plausible: Syria has long range surface-to-surface missiles that, if launched from anywhere in Syria, can hit targets anywhere in Israel – with or without the Golan.

3. Syria supports terrorism against Israel

Syria's relationship with Hezbollah and with Hamas goes well beyond a merely political one, and in fact includes financial and military support, which is later used against Israel. How can we make peace with a nation that says it wants peace, but at the same time supports terrorist organizations?

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Choices that nations make under an active state of war are totally different than choices made under peace.

Yes, Syria supports Hezbollah and Hamas in different forms. Although the Golan front has been quiet for 35 years, Syria and Israel remain in a state of war and this state will continue as long as Israel is in violation of UNSC resolutions by choosing to retain Syria's occupied Golan Heights 42 years after it decided to capture that piece of land by force.

Syria's current form of support of Hamas and Hezbollah is a strategic and tactical choice made solely under a state of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This support can change its form under a peace treaty guaranteeing the security of Syria and Israel. If Israel manages to settle its conflict with Lebanon, it is believed that Syria would help Hezbollah as it gradually disarms itself and turns into a regular Lebanese political party that represents the interests and aspirations of Lebanon's largest community (the Shi'a).

Regardless of how Syria modifies its support of Hamas after she signs a fair and just peace treaty with Israel, Hamas will probably remain the most popular Palestinian organization as long as Israel is unable to decide to end its conflict with the Palestinians based on UN resolutions calling for a comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflicts based on the land for peace formula in which Israel withdraws to the pre 1967 borders.

Syria's support of Hamas and Hezbollah is not making those organizations more popular; it is instead a recognition of the popularity of those organizations in their respective countries and in the Arab world in general.

Syria is not the only Arab country to support Hamas. For example, Hamas gets virtually all its weapons by smuggling them from Egypt. It is widely assumed that Egyptian security officers know and even oversee the smuggling operations to Gaza.

Only Israel can weaken the military power of Hamas and Hezbollah, and it can only do it by demonstrating its genuine will to accept the most widely recognized formula for peace in the Middle East: land for peace. The 2006 Lebanon war and the 2008 attack on Gaza demonstrated that Israel's use of massive military force is not going to lead to the desired objectives. Asking Syria to close the Hamas office in Damascus will not help Israel get rid of Palestinian resistance (Hamas) either. But it will lead to dangerous friction between Syria and half a million Palestinian refugees residing in Syria. One would hope that this is not one of Israel's objectives.

The Israelis do not have to fear Syria's support for paramilitary resistance to Israel's occupation under a peace treaty. Although rational behaviour has not been an attribute of governments in the Middle East or even around the globe, it is beyond obvious that supporting resistance to occupation after peace with Israel would be clearly counter-productive for Syria.

2. Labelling every opposition to occupation as terrorism is not an Israeli monopoly. It has been practiced by colonialists in the bygone era, it is practiced by governments facing secessionist movements worldwide, and it is a defensive, self assuring mechanism aiming at de-legitimizing both legitimate and no-so legitimate forms of resistance.

Psychologically, it aims also to pre-empt any efforts to establish fruitful dialog that requires recognition of the evils of occupation or of denying the rights of ethnic groups in case of secessionist movements. The label "terrorist" has been so abused by Israel and the USA, that it does not mean much anymore, and a sincere dialogue on peace should not use it.

The Arab response to Israeli occupation evolved a long time ago. Hezbollah does not assassinate Israeli officers while they travel abroad and Hamas has stopped sending young men on suicide missions into Israel. Despite frequent Israeli provocations, both Hezbollah and Hamas showed enough restraint by not retaliating against Israeli citizens, civilian or even military. Many believe that Syria played a role in modifying the behaviour of these two organizations.

If I were an Israeli, I would pause to reflect on these points. History has shown that you need to talk to popular movements resisting your occupation if you are genuine about peace.

3. Syrian "support" of Hamas and Hezbollah translates to positive and constructive influence on these two non-state actors. For example, if one compares the position of Khaled Meshal before he settled in Damascus to his recent positions, it is quite clear how much more [moderate](#) he has become. "When the occupation comes to an end, the resistance will end, as simple as that," Mashaal said in an interview in Damascus on "The Charlie Rose Show," broadcast yesterday. "If Israel would go to the 1967 borders," [he said](#), "that will be the end of the Palestinian resistance."

Similarly, there were numerous stories in the press that Syria convinced Hezbollah to NOT retaliate for the killing of its senior officer Imad Mughnyieh who is widely believed to have been assassinated by Israel. Furthermore, it is worth pointing out Hezbollah did not operate outside the Israeli occupied parts of South Lebanon.

4. Syria lost the Golan because it attacked Israel

Israel captured the Golan Heights in 1967 because Syria attacked periodically or continuously Israeli settlements below the Heights, inside Israel. Syria and Egypt were planning to destroy Israel, and Israel was left with no choice but to pre-empt, and to capture this strategic territory. Israel later annexed it, and today it is a part of Israel. Why should Israel have to pay this price for peace? Peace should not be had with Syria, unless it is Peace-for-Peace, not Land-for-Peace.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. The New York Times revealed in 1997 that the late Israeli defense minister, Moshe Dayan, had admitted 21 years earlier that the [Golan](#) was seized from Syria because Israeli farmers wanted more land, not because Syria posed a threat as claimed by Israel.

Here is a partial quote from General Dayan's 1976 interview:

"After all, I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there started. In my opinion, more than 80 percent, but let's talk about 80 percent. It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow some area where it wasn't possible to do anything, in the demilitarized area, and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until in the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that's how it was"

2. [This clip](#) from a PBS documentary titled "50 years war, Israel and the Arabs" shows that it was in fact Syria that was feeling threatened by an Israeli invasion. The Soviets passed that information to the Syrians (and Egyptians) before Israel invaded its Arab neighbors in June 1967
3. At first, the war was really between Israel and the Egyptians. It was only later when Israel defeated the Egyptian army with ease, that it decided to take the Golan Heights as well, simply because Israel realized it was doable.

General Ezer Weizman, Israeli head of Operations, admitted in [this segment](#) of a PBS documentary titled "50 years war, Israel and the Arabs" that when Israel started the war, it was between Israel and the Egyptians ... "we did not plan to take the Golan"

5. Syria has close relations with Iran, a mortal enemy of Israel

Syria is Iran's ally. Iran poses an existential threat to the state of Israel. The president of Iran periodically makes statements predicting the end of Israel. Israel should not talk to Syria until it cuts its relations with Iran.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Many countries have close relations with Iran. Why do some Israelis find it reasonable to demand from Syria what they cannot demand of Turkey or Brazil?

Israeli demands that are not derived from the many UN resolutions on the Middle East conflict, will lead the Syrians to wonder if the Israelis would still like to see their country dictating the terms of a peace agreement on a weaker Syrian peace partner. Peace will not be achieved this way.

2. The Bush administration had plans for an invasion of Syria. In [this clip](#), four-star General Wesley Clark describes a memo from secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld in which he wrote that Syria was about to be invaded next as soon as the Iraq war was under control.

Despite the obvious fact that the Bush administration was posing a real existential threat to Syria, Israel was never asked to cut its ties with the United States as a precondition of the peace process. Had Syria asked, it would have been laughable. Asking Syria to volunteer turning into an enemy of Iran as a precondition to being an acceptable peace partner of Israel's is equally illogical.

3. Israel worked hard in the past to gain the friendship of both Iran and Turkey. [Alliance of the periphery](#) (periphery doctrine) was a strategic principle advanced by David Ben Gurion holding that Israel should seek alliances with the non-Arab states of the Middle East periphery in order to counteract the opposition to Israel of bordering Arab states.

Today, Israel continues to appeal to the Iranians whenever it can. The web site of Israel's Foreign Ministry has an active and continuously updated section [in Persian](#). Israelis who insist that Syria should voluntarily throw away its current status as Iran's closest friend simply because Israel failed to remain Iran's best friend, are not being very reasonable

4. After a few years pass on a successful implementation of a peace agreement between Syria and Israel there will be a natural change in the type of relationship between Syria and Iran. A change that will render current Israeli security concerns irrelevant.

An Israel that is at peace with Syria and the Arabs will not have any enemies in the Middle East, not even Iran.

6. Syria has not engaged in any trust-building actions

Syria has not made any effort towards seeding a trust-building process. For instance, Syria had welcomed Mr. Azmi Bishara in 2001, whilst he was a member of the Israeli Knesset, yet despite the fact that there are other members of the Israeli Knesset of non-Arab descent, who are also pro peace with Syria, the Syrian government never invited them over. No Israeli journalist has ever been invited to Syria either. This lacking of trust-building steps from the Syrian side contributes negatively to the Israeli street's perception of the real Syrian demeanour vis-a-vis potential peace with Syria.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Israeli writer Gideon Levy [wrote](#) in Haaretz:

"Israel of 2009 is a country whose language is force. Anwar Sadat may have been the last leader to win our hearts with optimistic, hope-igniting speeches. If he were to visit Israel today, he would be jeered off the stage. The Syrian president pleads for peace and Israel callously dismisses him, the United States begs for a settlement freeze and Israel turns up its nose."

"Israel of 2009 is a spoiled country, arrogant and condescending, convinced that it deserves everything and that it has the power to make a fool of America and the world."

This [Newsweek article](#) says that a majority of Israelis today do not feel the need to pay a price for peace nor do they see the urgency to seek a peaceful settlement.

The way Vice President Joe Biden, a close ally of Israel, was [humiliated](#) by Israeli leaders on the same day he was reassuring the Israelis of his unlimited personal commitment to Israel, certainly did not help any Syrian to think more positively about any kind of trust-building measures.

A Syrian trust-building measure will not make the same difference in today's highly confident Israel that Sadat's initiative made in the seventies when Israelis, still feeling generally vulnerable after the difficult 1973 war, valued the reassuring signals that accompanied Sadat's visit. Israelis will not value a trust building measure as long as they view Syria as a much weaker enemy.

If and when a majority of Israelis, leaders and people, seem to genuinely respect Syria, its people and its right including a commitment to peace with Syria that is based on UN resolutions that call for the full return of Syria's occupied Golan Heights, Syria will be quick to acknowledge the new reality through trust building measures and more.

7. The Golan is a favourite getaway destination for Israelis

The Golan, as a beautiful, relatively undeveloped destination provides Israelis a relaxed, safe experience, much sought after by many with intense lifestyles. The Golan is, to most in Israel, our "Tuscany".

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. The Golan under Syrian control can still be easily accessible to Israeli tourists: same resort, different management. Syria will surely be happy to continue to welcome tourists no matter what country they come from.

After Israel settles its conflict with its Arab neighbours, Israeli nature-lovers will be able to explore the coastal region of Lebanon and Syria in addition to the usual Golan destination.

2. If income from tourism is indirectly implied in the above objection, then one needs to remember that losses from Golan tourism income for Israel are only a small fraction of the cost of the continuation of the conflict. There is a significant net gain for Israel if it settles its conflict with Syria.

3. The Golan is indisputably beautiful. The beauty of the Golan's landscape, however, does not justify its military occupation. Israel's occupation of the Golan is, according to Article II of the UN charter, "inadmissible." That Israelis "relax" in the Golan does not validate Israel's occupation – whether in the eyes of its inhabitants who have been refugees since its occupation in 1967, or under international law.

8. Syria arrogantly refuses to compromise on any of Israel's demands

Syria's insistence on determining the outcome on borders a-priori, while it refuses to meet Israel's conditions for starting those negotiations (terminating Syria's relations with Iran and support for terror organizations).

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. It is understandable that some Israelis feel confused by Syria's close relations with Iran, which do not seem to be consistent with Syria's frequently-expressed wish to reach a peaceful settlement with Israel.

On the other hand, Syrians also wonder how can they trust Israel's intentions after Israel surprised the both the Syrian and Turkish peace negotiating teams in 2008 by attacking Gaza and killing over 1300 Palestinians. That unnecessary, bloody action put an end to peace talks between Syria and Israel that were on the verge of success.

Yet Syria is not letting that tragic war stop her from engaging Israel again in peace negotiations. Syria understands that former enemies behave differently after peace is achieved, and Syria hopes that Israeli leaders and Israeli people also show the same understanding.

A long-lasting, warm and stable state of peaceful coexistence can only be reached if both countries are ready to respect international law and respect each other.

If Israel is not ready to make peace with Syria based on mutual respect, there can be no meaningful peace.

To set the peace process on the right track, Syria has the right to expect an Israeli statement demonstrating Israel's willingness to recognize Syria's rights that are guaranteed through international law (resolution 242, 338, and 497).

Israel has the right to expect from Syria in return recognition of all relevant UN resolutions including the ones that recognize the state of Israel within pre-1967 borders, in addition to UN resolution 1701. Both recognitions would obviously be contingent on the successful completion of negotiations.

2. Syria's insistence on determining the outcome on border pre-negotiation stems from the fact that most of the recent Israeli prime ministers have recognized that Israel will need to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the June 4th 1967 line as retired Israeli Major General Uri Saguy confirmed to Maariv.

Syria has been negotiating one Israeli prime minister after another since 1991, always reaching "near final agreement" before something happens on Israel's side that prevents that final agreement.

After twenty years of repetitive and inconclusive negotiations, there is nothing arrogant about Syria's lack of patience with yet more negotiations with more Israeli prime ministers who, for some reason, always want to go back to negotiating from square one again despite the advanced progress that Syria and Israel achieved during previous negotiations.

Syria is interested in a successful conclusion to the peace process. Unfortunately, we've learned time and again that Israeli leaders change - or change their minds - so often that it is almost inevitable that any fresh-start negotiations will never be concluded before the political dynamic in Israel changes.

9. There is no pressure placed upon Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights

Unlike with the Palestinian issue, and settlement activity and withdrawal from the West Bank, no pressure is being placed upon Israel to withdraw from the Golan. Inside Israel, Israelis are saying "If America isn't pressing us to withdraw, why should we initiate such a move?"

1. Syria is a central player in the region. It has influence in Iraq, Lebanon and among Palestinians, as well as very close relations to Iran and Turkey. As the US is pursuing its policy goals with all of the above actors, collaboration with Syria becomes very valuable.

Since the Golan issue is a central objective of Syria's policy, it is clear that the Obama administration and other interested parties will be pressuring Israel on this issue to facilitate collaboration with Syria, as it becomes clear that they not be able to succeed anywhere in the Middle East without taking into account Syria's legitimate concerns. Israel's illegal annexation of the Golan Heights will sooner or later become more difficult to justify.

Syria will expect US assistance in restarting peace talks with Israel in return for helping the United States maintain stability in the Middle East. US Arab allies also need Syria's assistance badly. They've already started to back Syria's position and will be expected to place more pressure on the US administration to focus its attention on the Syrian-Israeli peace track.

Finally, Europe is increasingly realizing the central and often unique role Syria plays in the Middle East. While the economy is the main driver for Syrian-European collaboration, support for the return of Golan Heights will be a natural extension of this collaboration.

After Syria successfully navigated through the exceptionally difficult years of the Bush administration, the United States, Europe and America's Arab allies are all moving closer to Syria. There will be much less demonizing and much more understanding and sometimes appreciation of Syria's strategies, objectives, and actions.

Syria will tell each of its many visitors that while it values economic cooperation, the Golan is paramount. Israel will be pressured again just as it was pressured during the Carter, Bush Sr., and Clinton administrations.

10. Syria does not have enough tangibles to offer in return for the Golan

The main Israeli concerns are security, territory and water rights. It seems that in all three parameters a peace deal will not be favourable for Israel. Obviously Israel stands to lose territory and potentially also water rights from the deal. Israel has currently no security issues directly with Syria, so the only possible improvement could be had vis-a-vis Hamas and Hezbollah, but it is not clear whether Syria will be able to deliver on these fronts.

1. The issues of [water](#) and [territory](#) are addressed in other counter-objections.

With regard to security, it is well-known that Syria maintains close relationships with Hezbollah and Hamas, and has served as an effective moderator and interlocutor with these groups over the course of their respective histories. A change in the nature of Syria's relationship with Hezbollah and Hamas (from military cooperation to a purely political relationship) is a significant tangible reward sought by Israel, which Syria will offer in return for peace and the return of its occupied lands.

2. In addition to security, territory, and water, one assumes that living in peace and having normal relations with the entire Arab world would be a desideratum for Israel. As the Arab Peace Plan has made clear, such an eventuality is conditional upon Israel's acceptance of the basic principles outlined therein, which include returning the Golan to Syria.

3. This argument -- that Syria is too weak or insignificant a country to offer any real tangibles -- is commonly encountered in the mainstream media. At the same time, however, the opposite view is also regularly encountered, which holds that Syria represents a major strategic obstacle to American and Israeli interests in the Middle East.

Upon his election as Prime Minister in 1996, Mr. Netanyahu commissioned a study entitled "A Clean Break", by an Israeli-American think tank. The study called for sweeping changes to Israel's environment, with the goal of weakening or destroying all of Israel's enemies:

"Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions."

Surely, if Syria is significant enough to merit waging a three-trillion dollar war in Iraq, then peace with Syria must be worth something to Israel.

11. Syria only understands power

Not long after the Turks moved forces to the Syrian front, did the Assad regime finally gave up Alexandretta (Hatay). Why shouldn't they give up the Golan Heights, a much smaller piece of land and less inhabited?

1. Syria and Turkey agreed to postpone the resolution of the Alexandretta issue until such a time in the future when relations between the Syrian and Turkish people were healthy enough to allow a frank discussion about the status of Alexandretta (Hatay). One would assume that, eventually, some special arrangement could be agreed upon to recognize the special status of that region.

Syrians do not consider Alexandretta an occupied territory that was taken from them by force. Turkey was practically given that region as a gift from France, which was occupying the Levant at the time. France wanted to bribe Turkey away from joining Hitler's Germany in WWII. Elections in Alexandretta (the residents of which include Arabs, Armenians and Turks) produced an alleged small majority (22 out of 40) of representatives who opted to join Turkey. In 1939 France formally delivered the province to Turkey while Syria was still occupied by France.

In a sense Alexandretta is similar to Lebanon. Both were historically integral parts of historic greater Syria. Both were carved out of Syria by the French occupiers before Syria gained its independence.

The Golan, however, was taken by force. In 1967 Syria was an independent sovereign country. Many UN resolutions clearly state that the Golan Is Syrian. Syria can clearly make a strong case for demanding the return of its illegally occupied Golan Heights.

There are no UN resolutions supporting a Syrian claim to Lebanon or Alexandretta.

Incidentally, it is worth considering in this context the startling changes made in Syrian-Turkish relations. A decade ago Turkey was considered hostile to Syria. Today Turkey is one of Syria's closest allies and a genuine friend. There is no reason why Israel and Syria cannot expect the same kind of neighbourly relations in the future if and when Israel manages to respect international law by returning all occupied Arab territories.

12. Israel cannot take a chance with Syria on the water issue

Water is one of the scarcest resources in Israel. It is one of the most sensitive issues for all Israelis. Israelis believe Syria has tried in the past to alter and affect the flow of water to Israel. Syrian access to the Lake of Gallilee opens up still-fresh wounds. So is the thought of Syrian control of the water sources on the Golan. Syria's environmental record is also worrisome, and we cannot trust that she will not mistreat water that ends up in Israel.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. This runs counter to many observed developments in Syria, where the environmental movement is beginning to take hold. Even if one shore of the lake is under Syrian control, a peace agreement leading to normalization will require a trans-boundary water agreement through which the water quality in the lake will be monitored, and isotope analysis could easily be used to discern the source of any pollution.

Modern history is full of examples of trans-boundary treaties binding parties sharing a body of water. Such treaties govern the use of the water source entering the shared body of water as well as its thermal and chemical qualities. Negotiating teams can resort to international organizations such as UNESCO and UNEP to assist in drafting the water component of the treaty.

Water has been more a conduit of peace than of war.

2. Needless to say, it is anticipated that certain types of development aids will be provided to Syria in lieu of a treaty. One of these aid programs could be in the form of a few modern sewage treatment facilities, with one of these facilities installed to ensure that the lake's water is maintained in pristine condition and allocated fairly.

13. Syria's regime is not actually interested in peace

The Baathist regime survives on perpetuating a state of emergency through its "war" with Israel. Ending the war will remove the state of emergency and threaten the regime's legitimacy, especially in the eyes of Syria's strongly pro-Arab nationalism Sunni population.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Former and existing heads of Israeli intelligence (IDF and Mossad) have unequivocally stated that Syria is serious about peace. For Israelis, what better assessment or analysis of Syria's true intentions do they need?
2. The same thing was said by Israel about the Egyptian state – “it is illegitimate and keeps itself in power by emergency laws that can only be justified through war with Israel.” This argument turned out to be pure propaganda. Sadat made peace with Israel and the Egyptian state survived happily and prospered. It has been the staunchest ally of Israel in the region. It has practically gone to war against Hezbollah in Israel's support. Egypt heavily polices its border with Gaza so that arms cannot be smuggled in for use against Israel.

The same argument used against the Syrian state is no less propagandist and wrong. Contrary to what Israel's Foreign Minister once arrogantly stated, a war with Israel cannot topple the Syrian regime. Peace with Israel will certainly not topple it either.

The regime's evident popularity among Syrians derives from the stability and security that it provides Syrian society. This security is all the more prized by Syrians since George Bush made such a mess of Iraq in his effort to undo the Iraqi state. Lebanon, the other example of “democracy” in an Arab country has had little respite from civil war and ineffective government. Syrians are not convinced that US mandated “democracy” is right for them today.

If Bashar Al-Assad can win the Golan Heights back, he will be hailed as a hero by Syrians. Syrians and Assad are not adverse to peace with Israel. They just want international law to be satisfied and a modicum of justice to be observed. All Syrians look forward to peace dividends. They want to prosper and provide better lives for their families. They believe peace in the region will help produce this. Assad has every interest in bringing prosperity to his people. It is his stated goal – as is peace with Israel. There is no reason to disbelieve him.

14. Peace with Syria will not solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Only peace with the Palestinians will solve the deep Arab-Israeli conflict. There is no rush, nor particular benefit, in engaging the Syrians before the Palestinian issue is resolved.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. This argument is the first part of a useful pair of arguments. Here is the second part:

"Peace with the Palestinians is very difficult. The Syrian track is much more promising. [Peace with Syria should come first](#)"

Since the peace process between Israel and its Syrian and Palestinian neighbours started in 1991, Israel's leaders have adopted the two arguments in a predictable alternating sequence.

Every time negotiations along a specific track (Syrian or Palestinian) reached a near agreement, Israel dropped that particular track and started to rediscover the virtues of adopting the opposite track.

2. Syria agrees that only a comprehensive and just peace settlement will solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a mistake to think that peace with Syria will be a substitute to peace with the Palestinians.

Having said that, peace with Syria, coupled with serious negotiations with the Palestinians will lead to a considerable reduction in tensions and violence in the region.

If a peaceful settlement is reached between Syria and Israel, Syria's unique relations with Hamas can help Syria to act as an effective mediator between Israel and Hamas and other hardline Palestinian factions.

Peace with Syria is not sufficient, but it is necessary.

15. If the Syrian regime falls and the Muslim Brotherhood comes to power, Israel will find itself at war again

Why give up valuable land, water, and security in exchange for a deal with a regime that could easily be replaced one day by a hostile government that renews its efforts to undermine Israel's security?

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. The same could be said about Egypt or Jordan. And yet, not only have these regimes been extremely stable, they have followed their peace agreements to the letter!
2. The Syrian regime has been in power since 1970. When the late President Hafez Assad passed away ten years ago, many speculated that the regime would crumble without its strong man. It did not and in fact has shown admirable resilience.

During the Bush administration's years of active engagement in the Middle East, Syria was subjected to intense pressure because of its strong opposition of the Iraq war. During that period, the Bush administration and its Arab allies in addition to French President Jacques Chirac, tried relentlessly to isolate, weaken, or even topple the Syrian regime.

In 2006, UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw [said](#)

"The pressure on the Syrian regime now is much stronger now than it's been for decades,"

They failed, and the result was the exact opposite: a considerably [stronger](#) regime.

A recent University of Maryland poll conducted in leading Arab moderate countries [showed](#) that President Assad is the most popular leader in the Arab world.

Syria's Muslim Brotherhood recently [decided to withdraw](#) from the main Syrian opposition group (the National Salvation Front). The reason for their decision was to show support to the Syrian leadership's role in assisting Palestinian resistance.

The Syrian leadership will continue to be committed to solving the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts with Israel and will not lose popularity the way Egypt did after it abandoned Palestinian rights when it signed the Camp David Accords.

[President Assad](#) is highly popular in Syria and in the Middle East in general. He is precisely the Arab leader that Israel needs to make peace with.

16. Syria's control over Hezbollah has diminished significantly

Despite Syrian claims, Syria cannot deliver concessions from, and cannot control the behaviour of, Hezbollah. That organization reports to Iran and not to Syria.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. If Syria really has no influence with Hezbollah, why are many Israelis insisting that Syria must cut its relations with that organization as a prerequisite to starting peace negotiations? If those relations are valuable to Hezbollah then it is only logical that Syria has some influence over Hezbollah.
2. Many leading Israelis [claimed](#) the past few weeks that Hezbollah is now much stronger after Syrian made missiles were added to their inventory.

Israelis cannot claim that Syria is Hezbollah's main supplier of heavy arms when those Israelis want to lobby the United States to renew its sanctions on Syria while claiming no Syrian influence over Hezbollah, to justify their argument that Syria cannot help Israel feel more secure near its borders with Lebanon after a land for peace agreement and therefore it is not in Israel's interest to give Syria back the occupied Golan Heights as part of a peace settlement.

17. No intifada is expected on the Golan

Unlike the situation in the Palestinian territories, the Druze inhabitants of the Golan live in Peace with Israel. Most of them commute to the Israeli cities and villages, live their life peacefully with the Israeli authorities, and would never revolt against the Israeli army, in which many of their Druze brothers from within Israel serve. If vast majority of the "Syrians" of the Golan don't want to become Syrian again, why should Israel betray them and "transfer" them to Syria?

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Not true. The Druze living in the occupied Golan Heights identify themselves as Syrians. They [frequently demonstrate](#) (peacefully) against Israel's occupation of their land and they want to reunite with their Druze relatives in Syria.

Here is a quote from Wikipedia's [Druze page](#):

"Few of them (Druze living in the Golan Heights) have accepted full Israeli citizenship, and the majority are citizens of [Syria](#).^[41] Druze in the Golan are not drafted into the Israeli army (although a minority serve voluntarily) and many travel to Syria regularly to visit family or receive university degrees in [Damascus](#). A

year after Israel annexed the Golan, on April 14, 1982, the Druze communities around [Mt. Hermon](#) launched a six-month non-violent general strike in protest of Israel's annexation of the Golan."

18. Bashar Assad is a weak leader

The current leader of Syria belongs to a small minority (Alawite) and does not represent the majority in Syria. He is a weak leader, not courageous enough (like his father was), and is not decisive enough.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. To claim that President Assad is weak because he comes from a minority would require applying the same logic to any leader who is a member of a minority group.

Regardless of the type of political system, a leader's strength or weakness has rarely been linked to his or her ethnicity or social belonging. In fact, Assad today enjoys large popular support in Syria and in the Arab World. As late as 2009, a public opinion poll conducted by University of Maryland in cooperation with Zogby International Foundation for Polls held in six Arab countries that are considered moderate (as opposed to radical) and Western-friendly (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) showed that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is the most popular Arab leader.

Furthermore, the notion of that Assad belongs to a small Syrian minority and therefore he is weak, does not represent the majority (of religion), and cannot deliver peace to Israel is false as demonstrated by reviewing the long history of Syria. From [Saladdin](#) (a Kurd from northern Iraq), to [Baibars](#) (a Mamluk Sultan from Egypt), to [Sultan Pasha Al Atrach](#) (a Syrian Druze leader), to [Ibrahim Hanano](#) (a Kurd), to [Fares al Khoury](#) (a Christian), many names of very popular Syrian leaders emerge from various small and large minorities in Syria.

It is clear that Syrians have accepted and loved leaders from many diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds in a consistent manner. A Syrian leader's charisma, legitimacy in representing Syrian aspiration and pride, and accomplishments are the most determining factors of his strength or weaknesses.

2. In 2005 Dennis Ross wrote in the Washington Quarterly a paper titled "US policy towards a weak Assad". Here are some excerpts from that paper:

"When Bashar spoke about the situation in Iraq just prior to the war, his comments bordered on the hysterical."

"Ultimately, a new reality will likely emerge in Syria due to Bashar's ineffectiveness and his inability to gain the respect that his father had at home and abroad."

"In fact, one often gets the sense from the Egyptian and Saudi leaders that Bashar simply does not get it."

That was in 2005. Four years later, it became clear Assad was the one who “did get it” after all. The young Syrian leader had the vision, courage, and decisiveness to oppose the Iraq war and to predict that it will be a disaster (and a quagmire for the US) before it even started.

Contrary to the earlier perception of Mr. Ross and many analysts and observers, Mr. Assad today is enjoying a remarkable turnaround: The US sending its top diplomats to Damascus, the EU's offer to sign the Association Agreement it suspended in 2005, and a flourishing alliance with Turkey are among the many signs of Syria's rebound and the strength of its leadership.

If Israel wants to reach a real peace with the Arab world, then it needs to talk to popular and strong leaders who represent the sentiments of a large majority of Arabs.

19. Historically speaking, the Golan is more Israeli than Syrian

The Golan contains numerous Jewish landmarks which are about 2,000 years old. The Golan featured prominently in the Jewish struggle for independence against the Romans. The international border between the English and French mandate was set arbitrarily between these two world power in the case of Syria and Palestine (later Israel) as much as it was set arbitrarily everywhere else. Therefore, it should not form the basis for a long term border between the Israeli and Syrian nations. Even the Syrians are insisting on a different line---the armistice line of 1949. Thus, Syria is insisting on getting a piece of land which historically been connected very strongly to the Jewish people, and which it has controlled for only about 20 years, while Israel has controlled the area for 40 years. The Syrians should recognize that both in the distant past and in the recent past, Israel's claim to the Golan is stronger than the Syrian claim.

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. Arguments that claim land based on historical assertions are futile and they perpetuate the state of war in the region. Can a Syrian Christian, for example, claim that pre-1967 Israel "contains numerous Christian landmarks which are 2000 years old" and that Palestine "featured prominently" in the New Testament? Can such a claim justify some hypothetical claim that in historic perspective Palestine (Israel) belongs to the Christians?
2. There is no question that the Golan was part of the internationally recognized state of Syria before Israel occupied it illegally since 1967. The United Nations, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the Arab League, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch, for example, are amongst many other countries and entities that consider the Golan Heights to be occupied territories not part of Israel proper.

The United Nations resolutions are crystal clear in rejecting Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights. The UN Security Council Resolution 497 states that “the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction

and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void and without international legal effect" (section 1).

To realize peace and stability in the Middle East is a dream shared by Israelis and Arabs alike. Few on either side prefer the status quo of instability and the threat of wars and the loss of life over the option of a thriving Middle East with its richness in culture, history and natural resources. The benefits and dividends of peace clearly outweigh the false sense of security that Israel derives from keeping the Golan Heights occupied in violation of International laws and treaties.

20. Syria continues to interfere in Lebanon

Syria has always interfered in the affairs of the sovereign state of Lebanon. It has occupied Lebanon for decades, and has advanced its own financial and political interests as occupier. Syria uses Lebanon, to this day, as a proxy in its ongoing battle with Israel. It has always interfered in the political makeup of Lebanon, often at the highest levels, and has the ability to bring about instability at any moment. Not to mention Syria's alleged role in the assassination of Rafik al Hariri. How can Israel trust such a "partner"?

Syrian Counter-Arguments

1. A recent poll conducted by "information International SAL" and published in the Lebanese daily Assafir indicated that 73% of the Lebanese people see Syria as [a friend of Lebanon](#) (up from 47% in 2007). Only Qatar was ahead of Syria at 86% approval.

In comparison, 93% said Israel is their enemy.

Persistent allegations that Syria was behind the assassination for Lebanon's late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri turned out to be unfounded. After four years of intense international investigations, there was no evidence that Syria ordered, organized, or facilitated the assassination. All four Lebanese generals (friends of Syria) who were detained for four years for being potential suspects were released this year.

It would be not consistent with western values to make accusations that can not be backed up. Presumption of innocence is not an optional legal right. During the Bush administration many attempts were made to fabricate stories against all Middle Eastern countries that the administration wanted to weaken (or [invade](#)). Accusing Syria of killing Hariri was one of them.

This year Syria established a Syrian embassy in Lebanon. An embassy that has very limited use, given the fact that Damascus is an hour or two away from Beirut, but it was simply a move that was meant to demonstrate that Syria recognizes the sovereignty of Lebanon.

Despite many mistakes and corruption by Syrian officers in Lebanon (every army fighting in a foreign country makes mistakes, not only the Syrian army in Lebanon), the big picture was that Syria was invited by the Lebanese government and the Arab league (with US/European approval) to stop Lebanon's civil

war. Syria lost [13,000 soldiers](#) until that war was ended and Lebanon was stable enough for late Prime minister Hariri to spend the 90's rebuilding the country.

Despite any economic benefits that Syria gained from its military presence in Lebanon, estimated cost of maintaining security for Lebanon was huge ... Syria saved Lebanon billions per year when Syria handled the army and even police functions for decades when Lebanon could not. The United States' presence in Iraq will end up costing the US over a trillion dollars for comparison. At least Syria succeeded in ending the Lebanese civil war. Syria was not there for economic benefits.

A look at [the map](#) will make it clear why Syria cannot ignore what is happening in Lebanon, especially if other countries as far as the United States, France, Saudi Arabia and Egypt insist on interfering in Lebanon.

Geographically, Lebanon is practically inside Syria Historically, Lebanon was always Syria, socially, Lebanon and Syria are twins. The word "interfere" does not apply in the case of Syria's relations with Lebanon.

PART 2



ISRAELI
counterarguments
to Syrian objections

1. What was taken by force can only be regained by force

Israel only understands force. Its army withdrew from Lebanon (Twice) because it could not defeat Hezbollah. We should opt for resistance even if it will take many more years before we can liberate our land. Israel will eventually understand it cannot continue to hold to the occupied Arab lands by force.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. It has been argued by many, Syrians, Israelis and other parties who take interest in this conflict, that opting for peace is a strategic decision. If it is decided, it will be because the alternatives are worse. A constant threat of war. An ongoing antagonism. There is always opposition to strategic decisions. Attempts to end war or conflicts have always met this charge. "Our enemies understand only violence." It is almost a tautology to say that enemies are those with whom you deal by force, but it is equally true that enemies are those with whom you make peace.

This objection sounds familiar because we Israelis have heard it from our own demagogues. It is heard about Syria. It is heard about Palestinians and it was heard about Egypt when Sadat and Begin made a strategic decision 30 years ago. Those who said it were wrong.

That peace came also from a history of violence. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary. However, neither country was coerced by the threat of immediate force. They did, of course, act under the fear of future wars.

That peace, between Israel and Egypt, has not yet become friendship, but it is not valueless. It has been largely respected by both countries. Since its signing, neither country fears the other. Force has ceased to be the sole instrument of communication, yet messages are still, occasionally, understood.

2. Syria has already tried "resistance", by supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran. It has gotten her no closer to the Golan, only farther.

In this day and age, when Syria cannot fight Israel with its weaker army, if it chooses to use force it will likely be with its SCUD missile arsenal. If SCUDs begin showering Israeli towns and cities, it may well be perceived by Israelis as a real existential threat, and Israel's response will be very harsh. Syria will lose much more than Israel, and there is no guarantee that after the international community intervenes, a process will begin that will culminate in the return of the Golan. If anything, perhaps it will highlight Syria's weaknesses further, and decrease her chances of retrieving the Golan.

2. Israel cannot survive without a conflict

Israel is a country that must be continuously involved in war and conflict in order to sustain its standing in the Middle East. Peace and open trades/borders with its Arab neighbours will dilute Israel's Jewish identity and cause it, in the long run, to dissolve in Middle East's vast sea of religious and ethnic minorities. In addition, the continuous threats of Arab and Muslim invasion and "wiping Israel off the map" are helping the Israeli government to keep internal divisions under control. The conflict with the Palestinians and Syria is critical to Israel's survival for the foreseeable future.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. If peace is so culturally or politically threatening to Israel, why did Israel make peace with Egypt and Jordan? Israel is the side on these peace agreements who'd like to drive for further normalization, Israel is not showing any signs of being afraid from more intensive relationships with Egypt or Jordan, together a significant part of the Arab world. Israel also seeks any opportunity for establishing ties with other Arab countries, such as countries in the Gulf and Morocco. If making peace with these countries made Israel stronger, why should Israel be afraid of repeating this pattern with Syria and the Palestinians? And if Israeli governments truly need the "fear factor" in order to rule, isn't the one generated by Iran enough?

The truth is that Israel is already a melding of East and West, a majority of the Jews in Israel have originated in Arab states and their culture, now more than ever, is integrated into the Israeli melting-pot. The Palestinian population within Israel is also leaving a significant positive mark on the new Israeli identity. This demonstrates that Israel has the tools and the desire to be better integrated in its environment. It just needs a fair chance to be able to do so.

2. Assuming this is true, why do Syrians need to concern themselves with this? If peace with Syria weakens Israel, this should be an Israeli objection, not a Syrian one. If Israelis are willing to accept this danger or are blind to it, why should this be a hurdle from the Syrian perspective?

3. A consistent majority of Israelis recognize that a continuation of the conflict will cause more damage than solving it, because the demographic trends between Jews and Palestinians between the Jordan river and the sea will dictate a reality not congruent with Israel's wish to remain a predominantly Jewish and also a democratic state. Continuing the conflict means Israel is getting closer (perhaps irreversibly so) to a bi-national state and that, in the eyes of a large majority of Israelis, is seen as a more frightening scenario than a two-state solution.

Therefore, even if Israelis are cautious today about resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, many, if not most of them, understand that reaching comprehensive peace in the near future is a prerequisite to Israel's survival. So rather than being a threat to Israel's existence, a comprehensive peace will enable Israel's long-term existence.

3. The only satisfactory solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is a one-state solution, which is antithetical to Zionism.

Most Arabs and Muslims have no objection to co-existing with Jews. We had been doing it for hundreds of years in good faith and in peace, before Zionism took over Judaism. It is the Aggressive Zionist ideology that has changed the entire picture. Israel, since its first day in existence, has used brute force to uproot people from their existence and purge them away into the diaspora. This severe injustice is institutionalized and legitimized by the Zionist ideology that shapes Israel today. The only way Israel can hope to maintain the status-quo is to use extreme force, which indeed it has been using at liberty. However, extreme force has its limits, and that course of action is doing little more than aggravating the pain even more, making the desired reconciliation even more difficult. Israelis have to recognize that their fortress model is not sustainable. We should not support a two-state solution that has no chance of success. We will have to wait until Israelis realized that everyone will be better off if they abolish Zionism and accept to live with Arabs as fellow citizens in one state where one man counts as one vote.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. To many Israelis, Zionism is about other things. It is not about purging, or uprooting, or using extreme force to achieve its goals. It is about ensuring the Jewish people in this world have a single safe-haven, a state we can call our own. There are no nations on this planet where Jews are a majority, except for Israel. That too may one day change, but most Israelis today are still afraid of that day. Not because we are innately racist, but because we are innately fearful. Our painful past has caused us to trust no one, and it will take a long time before we can once again feel safe. Living in a peaceful Middle East will help bring that about. We will see that Muslims and Christians all around us are not a threat. Those outside Israel and those inside Israel.

The longer we wait, the less likely a two-state solution becomes. But even a one-state solution does not guarantee the Palestinian people freedom and equality. Israel may still become a true-Apartheid in such a state. Only Peace can bring about freedom for the Palestinian people, be it in their own state, or in a single state shared with Israel.

2. Even in a world where everybody has the best intentions, bi-national states have proven to be unstable and ridden with problems. But in the Middle East, we know that not everyone is well intentioned. The resolution to a 100 year old conflict will not come about instantly in one cataclysmic declaration of bi-nationalism. Time is required for Jews and Palestinians to heal from the conflict, each in the safety of their own independent state. As time passes and relationships improve between the countries, they may naturally decide to enter a union or a federation.

It is also not necessarily true that an equitable solution based on the two-state formula cannot be found. If resources are divided proportionally and symmetrically between Israelis and Palestinians in a manner that is agreed upon by the two sides, then what makes this solution not just enough to meet the bar of Syrian concern?

3. Zionism is a label. It was used by the founders of Israel and is used by Israelis today. In most of the Arab world it is a slur. In Israel it is not. It's not always useful arguing about labels. It would be easier if you would put your objection in more specific terms. What about Zionism do you object to?

Zionism can still be Zionism and grant all democratic rights to non-Jewish members of the state. It can even grant additional protections to them as a minority. It can recognise their rights to the land and it can recognise their history, their loss. None of this is contrary to Zionism, as we use the word. All of these were discussed by Zionist leaders even 100 years ago. For example, 75 years ago the most militant of Zionism's leaders famously argued for embedding Arab equality in the state's constitution.(1) It's not necessarily true that anything about Zionism, as Israelis define it, is a barrier to relations between our countries.

When we insist about arguing about "Zionism" rather than specific policies, laws or anything tangible, we are arguing about the word itself. This kind of arguing about words is something the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, has recently refused to do. The Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, has recently refused to 'accept Israel as a Jewish state. Why? According to him "It is not my job to give a description of the state. Name yourself the Hebrew Socialist Republic – it is none of my business" (2)

It is not Israel's job to make demands on Syria's internal structure or state ideology. Whether Syrians decide on Syrian Arab Republic or Arab Socialist Kingdom is also not Israel's decision. Israelis may object or disagree with certain aspects of Syria's structure but diplomatic relations are not conditional to agreement on everything.

It is similarly not Syria's job to decide on Israel's self-definition. It is not up to Syria to decide on a one-state or two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the group you aim to protect are the Palestinian/Arab citizens of Israel, why not defer to their consensus. All three parties with majority Arab voters support a two state solution. (3) Definitely they also support peace between Israel and Syria.

(1)Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Jewish War Front* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1940), pp. 216-7. ;
Wikipedia:

(2) Video: 1 min Arabic: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPsOe9yRqTU>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ze>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/28/world/middleeast/28middleeast.html>

(3)<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadash>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balad_%28political_party%29#History

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_List

4. There is little evidence that Israel values peace

Some statements and actions by the Israeli government stir the prolonged doubt of the Syrian and Arab world in Israel's real motivations and sought goals for engaging in peace negotiations. An impetus for this doubt is the absence of any evidence that Israel realizes the tactical and strategic value of peace with Syria. This is often

manifested in Israeli pre-negotiations demands, such as that Syria sever its relations with Iran, while, for instance, the Israeli ally Russia has similar, if not stronger, ties with Iran.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. One can always speculate about the “real motivations” behind each side’s participation in peace talks over the past two decades. For every Arab voice doubting Israeli sincerity there will be an Israeli one doubting Syria’s. But fact remains, both sides found various interests in showing up at the table.

In the end, it is not the will of one leader, one party, or one government that matters. It is the will of the people itself. Are the Syrian people any more interested in Peace for their children’s future than the Israeli people? No, both seek a better, safer future.

Both Israel and Syria have been portrayed as having made non-starter preconditions. The former, with regards to Syria’s alliances with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The latter, with regards to full withdrawal from the Golan. In Israel, some people do not understand why Israel must commit to a full withdrawal in advance. Why this cannot be discussed during negotiations. In Syria, likewise, people do not understand why Syria should “give” its strategic alliances away either in advance, or at all. Again, similar situation.

Continuing to focus on the preconditions of each side, even if they are justifiable and legitimate, will not get us very far. Beginning to develop the language and the concepts that will present to each nation the benefits of Peace, is much more beneficial and necessary.

To build trust, neither side must pose preconditions upon the other. Red lines can be introduced later on. They will be far more easily accepted, understood, and appreciated by the other side, after trust has been established.

2. It is true that Israelis today have become more disinterested in peace, compared with the excitement that took hold over Israel after signing the peace agreement with Egypt in the late 70’s, and even compared with the euphoria that reigned after the signing of the Oslo accord, an euphoria that didn’t encompass all Israelis, but was still shared by the majority.

Compared with these past times, Israelis are now much more cynical about peace. To a large degree, it is the disappointment from those past agreements, which have not translated into normalization opportunities, which has devalued the worth of peace in the Israeli mind. In other words, Israelis automatically assume that a peace accord with Syria will lead to “cold peace” and as such, find it difficult to justify the price that will be paid in return for peace (e.g., the Golan).

Perhaps, if Syria were to “give us a taste” of what normalization might look like, e.g. by inviting journalists from Israeli papers to tour Syria. Perhaps after such confidence building measures (CBM’s) are implemented, Israel will start to see the advantages of peace, yet again.

5. There is no guarantee that successive Israeli governments will recognize earlier agreements

During the last round of the indirect Syrian-Israel negotiations in Turkey, the Israeli team could not even guarantee that the next Israeli government would honour the agreed pre-negotiations terms and preparatory steps! Therefore, it appears to the Syrians that such engagement with any Israeli team is an utter and futile waste of time, even if the Israeli teams are sincere in their aim for peace. The lacking of internal Israeli cohesive agenda and guidelines, binding to successive Israeli governments, is even more problematic from the Syrian point of view, as the Syrians fear the potential for future Israeli governments to renege on even the definition of some terms in an agreement.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. By law, successive governments in Israel must abide by agreements reached by previous governments. Things that have not been formally agreed upon may or may not be honoured. But as Israeli governments have a tendency of changing not only after 4 years, but sometimes after 1 year, time is of the essence. That is why negotiations should not drag on for years.

It should be understood that hawkish governments aren't always a threat to previous negotiations. They could indeed turn out exactly the opposite – a blessing. It is important to remember that those Israeli leaders who handed back more control, evacuated more settlements, and withdrew from more territory, have been Netanyahu, Sharon, and Begin.

Hawkish governments also have a supportive dovish opposition that will make it easier to ratify a peace treaty. Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza, for example, received the support of his opposition.

Lastly, when we consider the current Likud led government, there is no political leader, even in the back rows, which seems to be able to catch up to PM Netanyahu's authority and popularity. Therefore, there is much more hope to see continuity over his reign, which will allow Israel and its neighbours, Syria chiefly amongst them, to finalize peace treaties. Netanyahu has brought stability to the Israeli political arena. He is the one Syria should negotiate with.

6. Obama cannot pressure Israel, and Israel will not move without pressure

It is evident by now that the Obama administration will not be able to risk confronting Israel's powerful allies in the United States. So far, differences between the Middle East policies of the Bush and Obama administrations seem to be mostly stylistic in nature. Even if negotiations start, the United States will not be a neutral partner. Syria will be sitting alone on one side, Israel and the United States will sit on the opposite side.

1. Regardless of whether the U.S. can ever be a true “honest broker” between Israel and Syria, neither nation should wait to see if and how things develop. After all, Turkey was chosen by both sides, to serve exactly that purpose. We cannot allow Peace to be made or not made based on a particular administration in Washington. There are other significant parties in the region (Turkey) and outside it (EU, Russia, etc.), that can certainly help the sides get closer to an Agreement.

2. If that is the case then Syria should insist that a more unbiased broker is used, such as Turkey or the quartet. A more disinterested broker may relieve both sides from the constant vying for recognition and support that is taking center stage when America is involved as a broker, and which reduces many peace negotiations into a charade meant to impress the Americans, rather than find a solution to the conflict between the countries. America’s involvement may only be necessary at the end of negotiations, to bring the necessary military, political and financial guarantees that may be required to cement a deal.

In other words, if both sides are generally interested in peace, then America’s bias would not be in anybody’s interest, as it would prevent reaching a deal, and therefore, again if there is true interest, the sides will be able to agree to use a different broker.

7. Israel is a "Crusaders' outpost"

Since the arrival of the Crusaders in the 11th century AD to the Levant, the West has never stopped dreaming of occupying and controlling the land of the Muslims. The West, after being defeated several times, has finally decided to use the Zionism cause (maybe even invented it) to plant its modern presence in the Middle East. Israel today is nothing more than an outpost of the racist West underscoring its intent to permanently deprive the people of the Middle east of their freedom and liberty. Why does the West feel such hostility to the Muslim and Arab World? Why is the West determined to keep the Arabs and Islam under constant turmoil? They are afraid of us. The West is fully aware of the power and potency of our civilization and religion. They are afraid that unless they keep the area engulfed in conflicts and wars, the Arab and Muslim will rise to overtake Europe and the Western civilization. Israel’s presence in the Middle East enforces the Western objectives in keeping the natural resources of the Middle East under Western control while preventing the Arabs from rising to become a threatening force to the West. The West has used Zionism to its advantage? Get rid of the European Jews and send them to Palestine while keeping them busy fighting the Arabs and the Arabs fighting them. A win-win situation to the West. This is a war waged by the West against Arabs and Muslim. Israel is just one example of it.

1. To us Jews, Israel is no Crusader Outpost. We are not here in the service of any “Western Agenda”. We are here in the service of our own people, the Jewish people. We are here because, once upon a time, it was also our home. In no other nation have we ever felt at home. This is where our deepest roots

originate. This is where we always longed to return (it is mentioned even in our prayers, that have been repeated for centuries).

Nearly half of us have originated from Arab nations all around this region, from merely 50 and 60 years ago. We are much more Middle Eastern, than we are “Western”.

The real question is not whether Israel is here to turn the region into something different, but whether we as Israelis can learn to feel a true part of the Middle East, and whether the Arabs can learn to accept us as equals.

Let’s all sit down and acknowledge that we, the children of today, did not make the past, but it was imposed on us. Let us then agree that we both have a rightful claim to this land, and we can make a new beginning, and a new, better history.

8. Israel's long-term strategic goal is to expand "from the Nile to the Euphrates"

The writing on the wall of the Knesset of the Biblical verse about the Nile and the Euphrates and the two blue stripes of the Israeli flag symbolize the Nile and the Euphrates prove that Israel's long term strategic goal is to continue expanding in the area. Israel is not interested in peace. It is all a show

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. If Israel’s long term strategic goal was to expand the territory under its control, why did it withdraw from Sinai, Lebanon, and Gaza? Why did it hand back control over many if not most of the West Bank towns and villages to the Palestinian Authority?

Though some in Israel may still dream of a “Greater Israel”, most do not. Israel’s standing power cannot support lengthy wars, nor ones that force our troops to penetrate deep into enemy territory. This is why Israeli troops had to stop 101 km away from Cairo, this is why they couldn’t reach Damascus, or continue to hold on to Beirut. A nation of 7 million cannot conquer the entire Middle East.

The two blue lines on the Israeli flag originate from the Jewish prayer shawl - the Talit. Not two large rivers in our region.

9. Israel is an immoral and illegitimate state that should never be recognized by anyone

On March 13 2009, in a speech commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, Hezbollah secretary-general Hasan Nasrallah had this to say about the prospect of recognizing Israel: "Today, and tomorrow, and after one year, and one hundred years, and one thousand years, until the Hour of Judgment, we and our children and our grandchildren and our people? as long as we are Hezbollah, we will not recognize Israel. What is Israel? Israel is a plundering entity, an illegal and illegitimate state, a racist, belligerent, terrorist state. By what standard can a human being, Muslim or Arab, recognize an entity of this kind, and come and say, simply: "Yes, this is Israel," while three quarters of it or more has been given to foreigners brought from all corners of the world, and while the people who are in the right, who are the legitimate ones, the people of the land and the holy places, the Palestinians? Muslims and Christians? Have to let go, and leave, and surrender, and submit!"

اليوم وغداً وبعد سنة وبعد مئة وبعد ألف سنة، إلى قيام الساعة ، نحن وأولادنا وأحفادنا وأجيالنا ، طالما نحن حزب الله لا يمكن أن نعتزف بإسرائيل. ماذا يعني إسرائيل، إسرائيل كيان غاصب ودولة غير قانونية وغير شرعية، دولة عنصرية ودولة معتدية ودولة إرهابية، بأي معيار يمكن لإنسان مسلم أو عربي أن يعترف بكيان من هذا النوع وأن يأتي ببساطة ويقول نعم هذه هي إسرائيل وثلاثة أرباعها أو أكثر أعطوه لشذاذ آفاق جيء بهم من كل أنحاء الدنيا، أما أصحاب الحق الشرعيون وأهل الأرض وأهل الديار وأهل المقدرات من الشعب الفلسطيني مسلمين ومسيحيين هؤلاء يجب أن يتركوا وأن يخرجوا وأن يستسلموا وأن يخضعوا

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. If a comprehensive peace agreement is reached, it will undoubtedly include recognition by Israel of the pain and suffering brought upon the Palestinian people. It may not entail a one-state solution, but it will finally bring about Palestinian freedom and independence. It will not be a complete and just solution, but it will be something significant we can build our future on. It will be the first real step towards an open and free Middle East.

10. Israeli governments don't last long enough to sign a peace agreement.

The Arabs have been negotiating with successive Israeli governments since the Madrid conference in 1991. Each time negotiations neared a final agreement the Israeli government collapsed, new elections were called and a new government announced it will not accept all the understandings reach between the previous Israeli government and one of its Arab negotiating partners.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. This is the Israel that you have. And indeed it does highlight the significance of time. Negotiations must not be spread over a long period of time.

Italy has even a greater rate of government change than Israel. Some in Israel and the U.S. have claimed that we should not make peace with non-democratic nations, because their regimes do not necessarily represent their people. But this is the Middle East that we have.

Can we wait for a different Middle East?

11. Israel wants Syria's submission

Even if Israel accepts to return the Golan Heights, Israel won't abandon its nuclear weapons which clearly threaten Syria and the Arab world. Israel, despite being the aggressor, will refuse to put listening posts inside its territory to forewarn Syrians of future Israeli attacks. The aggressor expects, on the other hand, the victim to allow being monitored. Arabs have become so terrorized by Israel that even basic balance, like this minimally fair demand, have ceased to cross one's mind ... forgetting that it is the powerful aggressor's actions that should be monitored not those of its much weaker victim.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. If Israel has nuclear capabilities, it can certainly be said that in at least one major war fought against Israel, it did not and has never used these alleged ultimate weapons.

Peace will not occur as long as each side defines itself as the victim, and the other the aggressor. We must get beyond that (regardless of the "objective truth"). Peace will only be reached by parties that are willing to trust one another, or to take a chance on trusting one another.

As part of the give-and-take that must occur in negotiations, Israelis will demand tangibles in return for the Golan Heights. Today, "Peace" is not enough. Actual physical assurances are also necessary. Syria will receive the actual physical territory back. Israel will have paid the price. Fearful Israelis want Peace to be made in greater payments, including ones less comfortable for the Syrians to pay, such as early-warning stations, disproportionate disengagement (demobilization) of troops between the Golan and Damascus, etc.

These are mainly intended to dissolve rational or irrational concerns many Israelis still have towards Syria and its intentions.

12. Israel consistently lets down moderate Arab leaders

Arab leaders, such as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who took serious conciliatory steps to recognize Israel's concerns, did not get anything tangible from Israel in return. Consequently he, like others before him, is now perceived by most Arabs as a weakling.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. Mahmoud Abbas made a mistake. He got too close to Israel and to the U.S. One cannot receive financial, security, and other aid from an enemy, then sit across the negotiation table and expect to be treated equally.

In a de facto capacity of "Israeli-US Puppet", Abbas cannot represent the best interests of his people.

13. Israel is not interested in peace, only in the process

Israel uses peace negotiations to blame the other side for its intransigence when the negotiations inevitably break down due to Israeli arrogance.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. This could have been said back in 1977 as well, as a reason for Egypt not to talk to Israel. But despite great difficulties for Begin (to sell the idea of withdrawing from the entire Sinai), he did find the way, and he did make peace. He, and Israel, were very interested in peace and not only in the process.

Itzhak Rabin was the same. He made peace with Jordan. He tried to make peace with the Palestinians.

Sharon was a man of action more than of words. He forced Jews out of Sinai, and 25 years later forced Jews out of Gaza. He was going to do the same in the West Bank. That's what he was elected to do, by the majority of the Israeli people, who wanted peace not just a process.

If Netanyahu was only interested in blaming Syria, why should he offer to sit at the negotiation table without preconditions? Why not simply demand, as Sharon and Olmert did, that Syria first "flip"? And as long as it doesn't, he could always blame Syria.

There's every reason to believe that Bibi knows his government is the only one that can make Peace and, therefore, that he is interested in achieving it.

14. No peace can be made until Israel ends its occupation of Palestine

The Israelis have always sought to divide the Arab world, and to separate tracks while never intending to leave the Palestinian Territories. Syria should not fall for this trap, as Egypt and Jordan have in the past. Israel must first prove it is ready to end its Occupation of ALL Arab land, not only the Golan Heights.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. Real peace indeed may not occur as long as Israel continues its occupation of the Palestinian territories. But the question is whether a peace agreement must mean Real Peace. Israel has peace agreements both with Egypt and Jordan. But do Egyptians and Jordanians think well of Israelis?

If Israel is ready to withdraw from the Golan, should Syria NOT agree, until Israel pulled out every last Jew and soldier from the West Bank? Sharon has already forced all Jews out of Gaza, and was going to continue with the West Bank. But today the situation is very complex, and it is not clear that a Comprehensive Solution is feasible in the near-future.

Until that happens, Syria must enable any Israeli government to withdraw from the Golan, in return for a peace agreement.

15. Israelis elected Yisrael Beiteinu and Likud to lead them. Both parties refuse to return the Golan in full

This year a majority of the Israeli people voted heavily in favour of right wing political parties. The Israeli left is getting more and more marginalized. Many members of the current government stated very clearly that they are not interested in returning the full Golan Heights back to Syria as required by many UN resolutions such as UNSC resolution 497. Syria will not accept anything less than a full withdrawal. So why should we waste time and talk peace?

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. There is always a good reason to talk about peace, even if only a small chance for peace seems to exist today. For example, before the commencement of peace talks between Israel and Egypt, 70% of Israelis were against the return of the Sinai Peninsula (in return for peace with Egypt). And yet, when hawkish, Likudnik, Israeli PM Menachem Begin presented a peace agreement before the Israeli Knesset, a majority supported him. 70% of Israelis were for the return.

Netanyahu doesn't need the majority of his own party to agree. He needs the majority of Knesset, and the Knesset will follow the wishes of the Israeli public, which could change its opinion fairly quickly, if it sees a true chance for lasting and fair peace.

16. One never knows what new obstacles will appear in Israel that will sabotage an agreement at the last minute

Even if we hope to reach an agreement with the current far right governing coalition in Israel, we can still face newer obstacles which will be near impossible to overcome ... Who knows if the Israeli negotiators suddenly informed us that they now have a new requirement where at least two thirds of all the members of the Knesset must approve the proposed peace agreement. And if that goes through, next, a national referendum might be required to approve the agreement. Syria believes that the return of its occupied Golan Heights is subject to international law and to specific UNSC resolutions 242 and 338, as well as resolution 497 which states that Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights is null and void. It is simply illegal for any country to ask its elected representatives to decide if that country will respect international law or not.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. There are no guarantees for anything in life, not in Israel and not in Syria. But Peace Talks, like Peace, are about taking a chance. If we don't do it, we'll certainly not achieve peace.

As for the 2/3 vote in Knesset, or the national referendum, these are internal Israeli issues which are not Syria's problem. Israel knows how to ratify laws and amendments, and its leader will know how to present a potential peace agreement. Begin did it, and got the majority he needed. Netanyahu can do the same.

17. There is an imbalance between Israel and Syria's regional power and global support

The Israeli regional power, mainly in military and economic sense, is not matched by the Syrian one. Meanwhile, the total support by dominant world powers to Israel is also biased toward Israel. Thus, at the moment at least, it appears that peace negotiations with Israel will put Syria more in the position of a surrendering party than that of an equal participant. The imbalance in the power scale towards Israel is waning down in all aspects since the collapse of the cold war to its latest military defeat by Hezbollah in 2006. Syria may think that it is more to its advantage to play on the time factor, until its own power and those of its allies are increased, both militarily and economically (Iran's rising power, EU relations with Syria, changes in US government, etc.).

1. While it is true that Syria seems to have balanced back to a stronger position, especially with the alliances it has nurtured with Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and lately Turkey, playing on the “time factor” is also risking a lot. With growing fear there is also increased pressure. Our regional situation is far from stable, and too many factors can contribute to fast and dangerous deterioration. One cannot preclude war as a possibility.

Syria has achieved enough strength, and enough strategic alliances, to respectfully sit across Israel at the negotiation table.

18. Syria will risk losing the support of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas in addition to losing its popular support in the Arab street

In a recent opinion poll conducted in moderate Arab countries (all US allies), President Assad was the most popular Arab leader. If Syria signs a separate peace treaty with Israel, Syria will risk losing the support of its Arab and Iranian allies. This includes political leaders, popular resistance organizations, and popular support. In exchange Syria will be forced to risk putting all its eggs in the American and Israeli baskets. Yet, unlike Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, Israel and the United States are not known for being reliable allies.

1. There is no reason Syria must put all its eggs in the American and Israeli baskets. In fact, that would be severely counter-productive for Israel as well. It is crucial Syria remains close ally to Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran, for it can then help bridge the gaps and bring an end to the regional conflict. What better party to bring Israel and Hezbollah and Israel and Hamas together, than Syria? Same for bringing America and Iran together.

2. Israel will definitely insist that Syria stopped arming any groups committed to armed struggle against Israel, as a minimum bar for returning the Golan to Syria. However, it is not clear that Israel will also require Syria to cut off all ties with other countries, even if said countries will continue to be unfriendly to Israel. Both Jordan and Egypt have extensive ties with countries that are still considered to be enemies of Israel. It is obvious that as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved, Israel will not be popular in the Arab world. However perhaps after Syria entered a peace treaty with Israel it will be able to stir the Israelis and Palestinians towards peace in a more constructive way than the one it currently engages in, and with a unified Arab position which is pro-peace and at the same time pro-Palestinian.

3. America has been an extremely reliable ally of all countries that have consistently thrown their lot with America. Let us not forget that NATO is still alive and expending long after the Warsaw pact has been dissolved in defeat.

On the contrary, the alliances Syria has struck with Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran are all short-term and will not prove to be stable in the face of shifting interests, since all three entities are fundamentally religious and thus antagonistic at their core to Syrian secularism. Let's not forget that Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, an enemy of the Syrian regime. Similarly, Iran is using Syria as a staging ground for its Shia takeover of Lebanon, in a manner not always consistent with Syrian interests. This alliance has been limiting Syrian independence. Syria will have little reason or desire to support Hezbollah after the Golan is returned to Israel and the Shebaa farms are returned to Lebanon.

Turkey, which is currently in good terms with Syria, has been threatening war against Syria a decade ago.

Israel's reliability will be proportional to the extent of normalization that Israel enjoys. At any rate, a peace treaty with Israel will ensure Israel doesn't use force anymore in regional disputes. This is the main factor of Israeli unpredictability, which will be removed from the equation.

This all indicates that conventional wisdom with respect to reliable vs. unreliable partners needs to be reconsidered on an ongoing basis.

19. Signing peace with Israel will turn Syria into a U.S./Israeli puppet

What will separate Syria from Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states if it signs a peace deal with Israel?

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. The concern expressed in this objection is mostly something Syrians will have to answer by and for themselves. What does it mean to be a "puppet"? Syria is a sovereign country and it shall decide about its future directions whether or not it signs a peace treaty with Israel. It seems like the biggest concern is that Syria will not be able to side with the Palestinians if it becomes an ally of Israel and the US, or that it would have to ditch its alliance with Iran and the Hezbollah.

Israel certainly expects that Syria will cease arming groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah as part of a peace agreement, yet perhaps a path of compromise is possible that will result in a win-win situation for both Israel and Syria, which does not require ditching existing alliances. Under such a compromise Syria will not lose its old friends, but will act as a bridge, or a moderating force, to bring all these past-enemies into the fold of a political conflict-resolution process. For example, under one possible peace agreement scenario, Syria will cease arming Hezbollah and would instead help it integrate more fully into the political system in Lebanon as a political party. Syria will also help in the formation of a Palestinian unity government and will use its influence over the Hamas movement, to steer it in the direction of resolving the conflict with Israel under the two-state formula.

Provisions in the implementation of the Israel-Syria peace agreement could be made to ensure that the implementation of Israeli retreat from the Golan heights, as well as normalization of relations, are all dependent on the progress across all fronts: moderating of Hamas and Hezbollah, and progress of Israeli-

Palestinian peace. This will ensure that all sides are happy with the peace treaty and nobody is made a puppet of the other side.

20. It is impossible to satisfy all segments of Israeli society

Many Israelis oppose paying the price for peace with Syria, the full return of the Golan Heights, because they feel that Syria poses too much of a threat to be trusted with its control of the strategic Golan Heights. On the other hand, many other Israelis do not support a peaceful settlement with Syria because they do not believe they have any reason to volunteer returning the Golan Heights to Syria given that Syria does not pose any military threat to Israel. Syria will never be able to provide logical arguments to address the two diametrically opposite objections.

Israeli Counter-Arguments

1. Dealing with Israel is dealing with the Israeli public, for better or worse. This is the nature of political culture in Israel. This means that you can expect to find objections, rejections, fringe ideas & everything in between. There are difficulties that arise from dealing with a public this way. Diplomacy, for example, is tricky. There are also advantages. A public can be moved by honest gestures or intentions.

While it is certain that all Israelis will never be convinced of anything, there are many signs that a majority of Israelis can be convinced of peace with Syria, and that is all that matters, since Syria does not need to satisfy “All Israelis”, only a strong majority. It was not that long ago, that 70% of Israelis supported peace with Syria (and the price of the Golan), and only 30% opposed it. That is all that is required (actually, even 60% will be considered decisive). We missed a historic opportunity during Rabin’s days, but we can and we must convince those same 70% once more. In their hearts, they are still there ready to change.