Arab League Background Guide

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Dear delegates,

Welcome to the fourth edition of AMBMUN, AMBMUN 2027, where you will be a member of the Middle Eastern political forum, the Arab League.

You are the representative of the Arab League and are tasked with looking at this issue in the context of the policies of the countries you represent. Topics to be discussed in the debate are territorial sovereignty, protection of civilians and the role of the United Nations.

This year's topic is on the ongoing occupation and annexation of the Golan Heights and consequences of the same in international law. The Golan Heights has been a focal point in the debates surrounding regional diplomacy, territorial claims, and the enforcement of international law since 1967, when Israel seized the area, and 1981, when it annexed it. Although it has received numerous international condemnations and diplomatic efforts, the question of its status has not yet been answered.

You will get some information here in this background guide, but it is not sufficient for your research and we strongly recommend further in-depth reading on your own.

Warm regards,

Tina Jamoukha & Layan AlQallaa

Committee History

The League of Arab States, also known as the Arab League, is an intergovernmental regional organization that was founded in Cairo, Egypt, on 22 March 1945. It was established by 7 states: Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan (now Jordan), Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen with the purpose of consolidating cooperation and achieving unity among Arab states at a time when independence movements were rampant in the region. The League today is made up of 22 member states in the Middle East and North Africa.

The main objectives of the Arab League are to ensure political, economic and cultural cooperation among its members and to protect their independence, sovereignty and interests. It has one main decision-making body known as the Council of the League, which is composed of representatives of each of its member states. The General Secretariat is responsible for the general administrative matters and for ensuring cooperation between member states.

The Arab League, in the field of regional and international affairs, is an arena for diplomatic dialogue, decision-making and peaceful settlement of disputes. As far as the Golan Heights are concerned, the League has a significant role in coordinating the Arab stance, in demonstrating the national unity of Syria, and in dealing with the political, legal and humanitarian effects of the Israeli occupation. Through the committee, delegates are expected to discuss the potential for regional cooperation and diplomatic efforts in the context of achieving a peaceful and sustainable solution.

Topic: Examining the Continued Occupation and Annexation of the Golan Heights in Violation of International Law.

The Golan Heights is a strategic plateau in the south-western part of Syria, between Israel, Lebanon and Jordan. Since it was occupied by the Israeli military in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the territory has been the subject of one of the longest-standing territorial disputes in the Middle East. Its geographical characteristics, its highlands and its proximity to the water sources have made it of great importance to the security and politics of Syria and Israel.

In December 1981, Israel enacted the Golan Heights Law, under which Israel's laws, jurisdiction and administration cover the territory. The international community widely saw this as an attempt to annex Syrian land. The United Nations Security Council, in turn, unanimously passed Resolution 497 (1981) that stated Israel's action to impose its laws and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and without effect internationally. The resolution also reiterated that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies to the land. Yet Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights has persisted, with the world paying little attention.

The prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force is particularly relevant from the international law standpoint in view of the question. The current occupation poses various questions to be considered on the subject of territorial sovereignty, obligations of an occupying power, protection of civilian populations, and legality of settlement activities in an occupied territory. Israel has had control of the Golan Heights and there are civilian settlements there, but the United Nations still considers the region to be part of Syria.

The Arab League has a particular interest in the Golan Heights issue because it concerns the Arab territorial sovereignty and regional stability, and adherence to international law. Syrian sovereignty of the area has repeatedly been demanded by member states for the end of the occupation. Delegates need to take into account the roles played by international bodies, how the population in the occupied territory will be protected, how a peaceful and sustainable settlement can be reached, and all relevant topics.

The Arab League thus has the task of creating a concerted regional strategy that is not only in compliance with international law, but also the political and security challenges of the Golan Heights.

History

The Golan Heights' history is intertwined with the overall Arab-Israeli conflict and the evolving political and military dynamics in the Middle East. Until June 1967 the Golan Heights was internationally considered as Syrian territory and governed by the Syrian Arab Republic. It was an area of great strategic and military value, due to its high elevation above northern Israel and its close proximity to the borders of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. The preceding years of tension had grown along the border between Syria and Israel, especially in the areas of territorial claims, border incidents and regional political differences.

The Six-Day War erupted in June 1967 between Israel and an alliance of Arab nations including Syria, Egypt and Jordan. Israeli forces captured the Golan Heights from Syria on 9-10 June during the conflict. The occupation led to the displacement of a significant number of the Syrian population in the territory, and to the destruction or abandonment of several villages and settlements. Israel then took control of the conquered land. On 22 November 1967 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 242, which stated that Israeli armed forces must be withdrawn from the territories occupied during the conflict, in addition to the establishment of a just, equitable and lasting peace in the region, and acknowledged that such territory may not be acquired through war.

Another major war broke out in October 1973 as Syria and Egypt attacked Israel together in the Yom Kippur War or the October War. Syria's goal was to win back the Golan Heights from Israel that had been captured by the Israelis six years ago. The Syrians first made their way into parts of the territory before Israel counterattacked. The battle was fought until a ceasefire was achieved by the international community. The Security Council adopted Resolution 338 on 22 October 1973, urging the parties to suspend military activity and start work on the implementation of Resolution 242. The war did not lead to the return of Syria's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, but it did pave the way for later negotiations between Syria and Israel.

The Agreement on Disengagement of Forces was signed by Syria and Israel on 31 May 1974, which stipulated the limits of deployment of military forces and military equipment in certain zones and the separation of the military forces of both countries. In accordance with the agreement, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 350 (1974)

which created the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The mission was to oversee the ceasefire, monitor the area of separation and monitor the implementation of the disengagement agreement. The agreement did not solve the real problem of the two countries: the land dispute, nor did it bring an end to Israel's presence on the Golan Heights.

Israel enacted the Golan Heights Law on 14 December 1981, which brought Israeli laws, jurisdiction and administration under Israeli control to the territory. This was interpreted as an international move to "legitimize" the annexation of Syrian territory. The United Nations Security Council, on 17 December 1981 unanimously adopted Resolution 497. The resolution condemned Israel's action of imposing its law and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan as null and void and having no international legal value. It also called for the revocation of the decision by Israel and reiterated the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the region. This resolution did nothing to change Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights, nor did it do anything to give the annexation international legitimacy from the vast majority of countries in the world.

In the 1990s, and again in the early 2000s, there were several diplomatic efforts to solve the ongoing conflict between Syria and Israel. In 1991, negotiations were held in Madrid and in subsequent years the two countries met for further negotiations. The negotiations did not lead to an agreement, however, because of differences over the length of an Israeli withdrawal, proposals for security measures, access to water resources, and the exact location of the border. However, talks in the United States also failed to resolve the issue in 2000. As a result, the Golan Heights have continued to be under Israeli occupation despite numerous diplomatic efforts to secure its status.

President Trump officially acknowledged Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019. This was a major change from the international stance on the territory. It was rejected by the United Nations and various international players who still consider the Golan Heights as an occupied Syrian territory. The ruling also made the diplomatic negotiations to resolve the conflict more complicated and questioned the principle of territorial conquest by force.

Further developments took place in December 2024 after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government. The 1974 Disengagement Agreement, established between Syria under Hafez al-Assad and Israel, had maintained a U.N.-monitored buffer zone and separation of forces for five decades; however, the collapse of the Assad government created a

political and security vacuum, raising uncertainty over the agreement's continued implementation. On 13 December 2024, UNDOF reported that Israeli military forces were not withdrawn in some areas in the separation area and that they continued to move in these areas, in violation of the Disengagement Agreement of 1974. Israel stated that its military presence was temporary, and that it was in the area for security reasons. Later, however, Israeli officials said there was a plan to keep military forces in the region for the long term.

The United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices had already stated by July 2025 that Israel remains in military occupation in the area of separation and in neighbouring areas of Syria. The report also noted concerns about the expansion of Israel's control and settlement operations in the Syrian Golan that is occupied by Israel. These developments only aggravated an already-longstanding debate and renewed the discussion on the application of international law, the security of Syrian sovereignty and the prospects for the 1974 Disengagement Agreement.

The Golan Heights is still an illegally annexed territory, internationally recognized as Syrian territory, with areas under Israeli occupation and is the subject of many outstanding international resolutions, ceasefire agreements and diplomatic talks over the past few decades. The ongoing conflict over its legal and political identity reflects the challenges that the international community is having in implementing the resolutions and finding a permanent solution to Syria and Israel's dispute.

Analysis

After years of international resolutions and diplomatic talks, the Golan Heights remain under Israeli occupation. The United Nations Security Council reaffirmed Israel's decision to impose its laws and administration on the territory in 1981 in resolution 497; however, resolution 497 has not been enforced yet. It is clear that one of the most serious problems in the system of international law is that of non-compliance by states when they cannot be effectively held accountable due to political disagreements.

The continued expansion of Israeli settlements is one of the primary issues of concern in the ongoing occupation. The changes have led to a number of issues about the rights of the Syrian residents, demographic changes in the territory and violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israeli settlements are also a factor that can impact the future dealings over the territory.

However, things became more complex after the collapse of Assad's regime in December 2024. Developments have further raised the tension between Syria and Israel and added to the region's turmoil.

There is no consensus within the international community as to how to deal with the question. In 2019, the United States recognised Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights; most countries are opposed to the idea of the annexation and consider the area to be an occupied Syrian territory. Moreover, there have been disagreements among the permanent members of the Security Council which have constrained the prospects for the introduction of more stringent international measures.

The Arab League has joined in the call for the return of the Golan Heights to Syrian sovereignty and requested Israel to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 lines. Member states need to think about ways of bolstering cooperation at the regional level, while safeguarding the rights of the Syrian people.

The final solution to the problem will have to be more than a reiteration of the international resolutions already in existence. Delegates should review the ability of the Arab League to foster compliance with international law; discuss settlement expansion;

boost international monitoring; and reinforce a peaceful resolution that is respectful of Syria's sovereignty and regional peace.

Questions to be answered in the resolution

1. What diplomatic measures can the Arab League introduce to encourage Israel's compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 497 (1981)?
2. How can Arab League member states strengthen their cooperation to support the restoration of Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights?
3. What measures can be taken to prevent further Israeli settlement expansion in the occupied territory?
4. How can the international community ensure the protection of Syrian residents and their rights in the Golan Heights?
5. What role should the United Nations play in monitoring the situation and ensuring compliance with the 1974 Disengagement Agreement?
6. How can the Arab League encourage international accountability for violations of international law in the occupied Golan Heights?

Starter Resources

1. UN Security Council Resolution 497 (1981) – The Annexation of the Golan Heights
2. UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) – The Arab-Israeli Conflict
3. UN Security Council Resolution 338 (1973) – The October War and Ceasefire
4. UN General Assembly Resolution 80/73 (2025) – The Syrian Golan
5. UN General Assembly Resolution 80/82 (2025) – The Occupied Syrian Golan
6. United Nations – Report of the Secretary-General on the Occupied Syrian Golan (2025)

7. United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

8. Arab League Condemns Israeli Plan to Expand Settlements in the Occupied Golan (2024)

Country Matrix

Algeria - Bahrain - Comoros - Djibouti - Egypt - Iraq - Jordan - Kuwait - Libya - China - Morocco - Oman - Palestine - Qatar - Saudi Arabia - Somalia - Sudan - Syria - Tunisia - Pakistan - Yemen - Lebanon - United Kingdom - USA - Russia

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