



CENJOWS

GOLAN HEIGHTS SALVO: A NEW NORMAL IN SYRIAN CONNUMDRUM AND ITS LARGER STRATEGIC CONTEXT

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1. A tweet from US president and subsequent signing of a decree declaring recognition of sovereign rights of Israel over the Golden Heights captured in 1967 during six day Arab – Israeli war has global strategic implications. On the very outset it has challenged the sanctity of UN charter, besides setting a precedence of changing the international boundaries where it suits the big powers for their geo political interests.

2. The Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 for their strategic politico-military interests in Ukraine theatre, and now US has chosen to indulge in supporting Israel in legitimizing their occupation of Syrian territory. It surely has an inimical import for regional peace and political equilibrium in the West Asia. Syria and Iran are the obvious targets in this diplomatic exercise who continue to defy the US dictates. China has also done it somewhat similar in South China Sea for their territorial expansion in violation of laws of sea to which they are signatories. **It is a case where in the global conscience keepers have indulged in an obvious opportunist unilateral heady power play.**

3. The world seem to be wearing around once again to early twentieth century environment which saw carving out artificial boundaries disturbing local political structures as it suited the European

colonial powers. As a result it brought unprecedented socio-political upheavals which continue even today impacting the global peace. **Almost all the conflict zones in Africa, West and South Asia have their genesis rooted in political intrusions into their ethnic, religious and cultural milieu of ancient lands ensconced in traditional feudal mindset.**

4. In that, the military intervention has been central to political manipulations for controlling material & mineral resources through regime changes, ethnic and religious divide as a proven western world policy. Iran –Iraq, Iran- Saudi Arab, Arab- Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Turkey- Kurds, Afghanistan, India-Pakistan, African landscape, Korea, Taiwan and many more, all have common fabric of the colonial era legacies.

5. The Syria, since capture of Golan Heights, has been talking of evicting Israel from their illegal occupation of their sovereign territories. The Iranian nuclear ambitions are known to be anti Israel as well as against Sunni fraternity led by Saudi Arab. Hence, an omnipresent military threat exists for the Israel from Syria –Iran combine. **In that, the Golan Heights provide depth to Israel for their defence from the Northern Syrian flank.** Both Israel as well as Saudi Arab are close US allies in the West Asia who are expected to take care of US interests once they move out of the region. Accordingly, their security interests have to be taken care of by the US in appropriate manner.

6. Apropos, the US intensions of regime change in Syria and installation of a more pliable political dispensation seem to be aiming at reducing the Syrian threat to Israel, besides geo politics of oil and gas. However, Iran is supporting Syrian president with Shiite credentials and pushes her anti Israeli and anti sectarian rival Saudi Arab agenda. The Iran is also keen for her economic expansion through Syria which happens to be against known US interests. **Therefore, the US grand game seems to make Syria as well as Iran incapable of imposing any worthwhile military threat in the region.** To do that, they created a political divide on sectarian lines amongst Syrians and provided military support to the rebel groups.

7. The US backed Syrian rebels had achieved substantive progress and were ready for the final push towards Damascus by mid 2015. However, the Russian intervention in Syria in sep 2015 changed the strategic dynamics giving a much needed boost to Syrian government forces and their Iranian allies. In the mean time, the emergence of ISIS in the Syrian landscape became a common threat to both US as well Russia which brought them together to fight them jointly, besides

initiating process for reconciliation amongst the Syrian society. Having stabilizing the situation to reasonable level, the US indicated their intentions of moving out from the Asian landscape.

8. However, there were security concerns in the region consequent to likely US draw down as and when it so happens. In that, Iran with her nuclear credentials is considered to be a threat likely to indulge in coercive politics to occupy regional strategic space. The president Trump reviewed the US policy on Iranian nuclear deal brokered by the president Obama alongside France, Germany, UK and China in 2015. The US decided to pull out of the deal with intentions of rolling back Iranian nuclear as well as their missile programmes.

9. No sooner the US decision was announced, the military ante was increased by Iran by firing rockets on the Israeli positions on the Golan Heights on 10 May 2018. It conveyed a political message that Iran would continue to follow their resolve, since Islamic revolution, to obliterate Israel as a national entity. Israel, in retaliation, conducted counter air raids on Iranian installations on the Golan Heights and subsequently inside Damascus also. The threat quotient to Israel has certainly increased with such military exchanges.

10. Besides above, the UN sponsored talks for reconciliation amongst the Syrians have not been progressing as per US expectations with government forces gaining ground. In the given circumstances, the dilution of the political intransigence of the Syrian government is contingent on change in the force balance in favour of the Syrian rebels. To do that, the Golan Heights fit into this scheme, albeit it would need to change the existing politico-military equation of higher threat level for dislocation of Syrian forces. The current political declaration by the US has done that job.

11. With that, the Israel has been empowered legitimizing their offensive responses in case of infringement of their sovereign rights over the Golan Heights. The message is clear that whosoever dares to temper with her (new) territorial status, should be prepared for its consequences. While Israel is already in occupation of 2/3rd of the plateau since last 52 years and their law prevails since 1981, it makes no difference in the actual ground position at all. However, the mere declaration of Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights raises the hackles and conveys provocative political intentions. With this strategic shift, the politico-military paradigms have changed forever in the region to the benefit of Israel.

12. Syria in the given situation have option to either accept it as a fait accompli, or alternately launch military operations to evict Israel from the occupied Syrian territory. Since the later does not seem to be feasible given the Syrian commitments to save their turf in main land against the rebels, the former is likely to acquire permanency over period of time. The Iran with crippling US economic sanctions is unlikely to be in a position to initiate something substantial which would have a major impact on Israeli status in Golan Heights. Moreover, unlike earlier times there are no violent overtures from the Arab world on such a sensitive politico- religious issue except demonstrations to maintain sanctity of territorial integrity of Syria. **Hence, it appears to be a political checkmate on the face of it.**

13. The media is abuzz with immediate aim of this US political intrusion as an electoral boost to the sitting Israeli prime minister Netanyahu in the forth coming elections. Whereas, such a deliberate declaration certainly goes beyond this seemingly innocuous purpose in the bigger geo-political grand game. **It has also opened up a debate, if this precedence would not be followed in the case of other conflict zones wherever interests of the big powers lie?** Is rest of the West Asia, though contextually different in each case, would be impacted by this new normal as established by the US? Is there any possibility of such political intrusions in the South Asia also in some form? All these, and many more questions need to be looked at by the world community for the possible fallouts of this new political trend.

14. It would be in order for the India to take cognizance of such contingencies which may be imposed upon us with little or no warning at all. There would certainly be a shift in strategic paradigms with US plans of draw down from the Asian landscape. India would surely be impacted being a major stake holder in the region. **We better be aware of its possible manifestations in the back drop of big powers trespassing the established international political sanctities and protocols.**

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