Correspondence

Time and the Intractability of Territorial Disputes

Stacie E. Goddard
Jeremy Pressman
Ron E. Hassner

To the Editors (Stacie E. Goddard writes):

In seeking an explanation for why territorial disputes appear more intractable over time, Ron Hassner's article in *International Security* represents an important contribution to scholarly understanding of conflict.[1] Although his question is compelling, his theory raises serious questions about the role of time, perceptions, and agency in territorial disputes.

WHAT'S TIME GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Time seems integral to Hassner's theory, creating intractable territorial disputes through three processes. First, conquered territory undergoes material entrenchment, as lines of transportation and communication link territory to the core of the state. Second, functional processes, such as mapping, make borders less ambiguous and less negotiable. Third, time creates symbolic attachments: as individuals fight, live, and die in conquered land, they construct myths to legitimate their territorial claims.

Although Hassner's arguments are intuitively plausible, it is unclear what effect time really has in his theory. Neither the duration of a territorial conflict nor a lack of settlement proves that disputes become more intractable over time. For example, territorial conflict could endure because initial conditions make it difficult to solve. Hassner claims that he controls for these conditions and that variables such as initial power and material value are unrelated to the conflict's duration or resolution (p. 114 n. 19). But by his own account, it is initial perceptions of territorial value and cohesion that most affect the dispute's entrenchment. If this is the case, it is not time but actors' existing perceptions that make territorial disputes persist: conflict is not entrenched; it starts out as more difficult to solve.

Hassner might respond that although initial perceptions explain variable rates of entrenchment, entrenchment occurs in all conflicts, even if the territory is initially perceived as worthless. Thus entrenchment is not reducible to initial conditions. This argument would be more convincing if Hassner provided evidence that disputes become intractable in the absence of initial perceptions. His two cases where initial perceptions of value are absent—Antarctica and the Spratly Islands—exhibit no entrench-

Stacie E. Goddard is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College.

1. Ron E. Hassner, "The Path to Intractability: Time and the Entrenchment of Territorial Disputes," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/07), pp. 107–138. Further references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

ment whatsoever. To show that time matters, Hassner must examine cases in which the territory was perceived as worthless, and yet entrenchment occurred anyway.

Furthermore, even if disputes become more intractable over time, this does not mean the process is time driven; a conflict might drag on because of exogenous changes as well. Strategic or domestic concerns might emerge that alter a territory's negotiability.[2] In 1981, for instance, Syria deployed antiaircraft missiles in eastern Lebanon, increasing the strategic value of holding the Golan Heights. And since 1967, Israeli settlers have gained influence in Israel's domestic politics, undermining room for compromise throughout the occupied territories. Neither of these processes was time driven, though both had a critical effect on negotiability.

INTRACTABLE BY DEFINITION?

A further problem is that Hassner's measurements and mechanisms often seem tautological, conflating cause and effect. Entrenchment, Hassner argues, is a perceptual variable: it exists when actors perceive the territory as cohesive, valuable, and irreplaceable. For this argument to be methodologically sound, Hassner must distinguish subjective perceptions of entrenchment from objective failures to settle the dispute. Put another way, if Hassner argues that perceptions cause intractability, but he measures perceptions by looking at bargaining failures, then cause becomes effect.

Ultimately, however, it is unclear how Hassner measures perceptions of entrenchment. In his brief quantitative analysis, he uses a period of twenty years as a proxy variable for entrenchment, yet he does not explain why this captures entrenchment: it seems an arbitrary cutoff determined by an observed drop-off in resolved disputes. In his case study, Hassner shows that the number of Israeli settlements in the Golan Heights increased; that the Israeli government built transportation and communication systems there; and that settlers constructed symbolic myths about the Golan. But none of these observations measures entrenchment; none demonstrates that actors' perceptions changed over time. This measurement problem is particularly troubling, as many scholars argue that the Golan is far from entrenched in Israeli politics; even with the construction of settlements and increasing nationalist sentiment, the majority of Israelis see the Golan as occupied foreign territory.[3] Admittedly, it is difficult to develop a convincing measure of perceptions. If Hassner cannot separate "entrenchment" from "lack of agreement," however, the theory is unfalsifiable.

Hassner's mechanisms are tautological as well. He argues that changes in actors' perceptions about the value and integrity of the disputed territory make it less negotiable over time: as material and symbolic processes unfold, actors perceive territory as more cohesive, more valuable, and less replaceable. But what determines whether or not these processes occur? As Hassner argues, "The rate of entrenchment is affected by perceptions of the territory's integrity, boundaries, and value at the outset of the dis-

---

2. See, for example, M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 46–83.
3. Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank–Gaza* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of Settlements, 1967–1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006).

pute, as well as by physical constraints on expansion and settlement into the territory"
(p. 111). If territory is seen as valuable today, it is more likely to be seen as valuable in
the future. If there are incentives to integrate territory, territory will become integrated.
Neither of these statements is analytically compelling.

WHITHER POLITICS? AGENCY AND TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

A final problem is that Hassner's theory fundamentally lacks agency. Hassner posits
that entrenchment is practically inevitable, and "irrespective of the degree of govern-
ment initiative," territorial disputes become intractable over time (p. 119). His dismissal
of agency is both undeserved and unfortunate. On the one hand, Hassner claims that
he is giving a social constructivist account of territorial entrenchment, but there is very
little social or constructed about it: entrenchment is not constructed, but inevitable, and
occurs despite what any particular actors are doing.

On the other hand, an emphasis on agency would provide a more convincing empiri-
cal account of entrenchment as well, particularly in Hassner's study of the Golan
Heights dispute. Hassner is right that this dispute has become more intractable since
1967. Yet his description of this process as "inevitable" and "time-driven" conflicts with
much of the existing literature, which argues that changes in the Golan's negotiability
was not inevitable, but a result of government policies.[4] For example, members in both
the Israeli Labor and Likud Parties believed that there was strategic value to encourag-
ing the development of settlements, and the government helped establish settlements
even on strategically worthless land.[5] Narratives, too, were purposively constructed.
After 1967 Labor and Likud politicians alike increasingly turned to religious and na-
tionalist rhetoric to legitimate their claims to the occupied territories. These symbols
were used strategically, both to appeal to settlers as well as to undermine the claims of
the Arab states.[6]

Hassner thus understates the role of political agents in deliberately building settle-
ments and constructing symbolic narratives in the occupied territories. This does not
mean that the dispute over the Golan is easily resolved. Scholars have long argued that
politicians' religious rhetoric has created unintended blowback effects in Israeli politics,
strengthening the hand of religious Zionists and settlers beyond what their size would
suggest.[7] These parties have not uniformly prevented negotiation in the territories, or
kept the government from dismantling settlements. Yet every instance of territorial
compromise is followed by attacks on the Israeli government's legitimacy; as a result

---

4. See, for example, Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire;* Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory:
The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics,* Research Series, No. 51 (Berkeley: Institute of In-
ternational Studies, University of California, 1983); Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands;* David
Newman, ed., *The Impact of Gush Emunim: Politics and Settlement in the West Bank* (London: Croom
and Helm, 1985); and Colin Shindler, *The Land beyond Promise: Israel, Likud, and the Zionist Dream*
(New York: St. Martin's, 1995).
5. Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire,* pp. 92–98.
6. Shindler, *The Land beyond Promise;* and Lilly Weissbrod, *Israeli Identity: In Search of a Successor to
the Pioneer, Tsabar, and Settler* (Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2002).
7. For the argument that these parties have more power than their size suggests, see Ehud
Sprinzak, "The Iceberg Model of Political Extremism," in Newman, *The Impact of Gush Emunim,*
pp. 27–45.

the Israeli government often refuses to compromise—even when it is in its interest—so as to avoid domestic punishment. Ultimately, then, it is not emotion but politics that have undermined a settlement in the Golan Heights.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to criticize a piece with an interesting question and inventive theory. But without clear causation as well as a more nuanced conception of agency, Hassner's argument is flawed. My criticism is more than academic. If the effects of time are inevitable, and if agents cannot change course, then there is little room to solve entrenched conflicts beyond the model of exogenous "shocks" that Hassner proposes. If actors can fight time and reconstruct perceptions, however, then they may be able to redefine their links to specific territory, leaving room for a negotiated settlement.

—Stacie E. Goddard
Wellesley, Massachusetts

To the Editors (Jeremy Pressman writes):

In his article, Ron Hassner uses the case of the Israeli-Syrian dispute over the Golan Heights to trace "the mechanisms and processes of entrenchment over the course of a territorial dispute."[1] I agree with Hassner that Syria's commitment to a return to the June 4, 1967, line is deeply entrenched. But Israeli policy on the Golan is not as deeply entrenched as Hassner claims; Israeli leaders have been willing to part with the Golan. Furthermore, in comparison to the West Bank, Israel's symbolic ties to the Golan are weak.

As Hassner notes, entrenched conflicts are unresolved fights "marked by an enhanced reluctance to offer, accept, or implement compromises or even negotiate over territory" (p. 109). In the case of the Golan Heights, however, both Israel and Syria have offered compromises and negotiated territory. First, on May 31, 1974, they signed an agreement resulting in the pullback of Israeli troops from a sliver of Syrian territory Israel captured during the 1973 war, and United Nations peacekeepers took up positions in the area evacuated by Israel. The agreement has held for more than thirty years. Second, from 1991 to 2000, Israeli leaders became increasingly willing to make significant territorial concessions in negotiations with Syria. Four prime ministers—Yitzhak Rabin (1992–95), Shimon Peres (1995–96), Benjamin Netanyahu (1996–99), and Ehud Barak (1999–2001)—privately endorsed plans for an Israeli withdrawal from 98 percent or more of the Golan Heights.[2] The sticking point in the Israeli-Syrian talks was

---

1. Ron Hassner, "The Path to Intractability," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/07), p. 120.
2. See Jeremy Pressman, "Mediation, Domestic Politics, and the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations, 1991–2000," *Security Studies,* Vol. 16, No. 3 (July–September 2007), pp. 350–381. On Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (2001–06), see Akiva Eldar, "Israeli, Syrian Representatives Reach Secret Understandings," *Haaretz,* January 16, 2007; and Akiva Eldar, "The Syrian Secret Sharon Did Not Reveal to Olmert," *Haaretz,* March 20, 2007.

the exact location of the final border, not whether Israel should engage in a total withdrawal.

Israeli willingness to withdraw from the Golan was due to strategic factors. As Hassner notes, "The balance of power overwhelmingly favors Israel." Long-range missiles, he adds, have "obviated the topographic value of the Golan as a crucial strategic asset to either party" (p. 121). Hassner is correct: Syria cannot hope to best Israel on the conventional battlefield or compete with its nuclear program. Changing military technology has reduced Israel's need for strategic depth in territory. Israeli prime ministers grasped this change in their country's strategic position before the Israeli public did. Moreover, they were ready to accept full withdrawal from the Golan even as a slight majority of the Israeli public clung to the security factor as a reason for opposing withdrawal.[3]

The slight majority did not grasp this change in Israel's strategic position for several reasons other than entrenchment. In contrast with Prime Minister Netanyahu's private position, his right-wing Likud Party, one of Israel's two largest parties at the time, publicly opposed withdrawal. According to its 1996 platform, "Israel will conduct peace negotiations with Syria, while maintaining Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights and its water resources."[4] The Third Way, which split from the Labor Party over the Golan, won four seats in the 120-member Israeli parliament and joined Netanyahu's Likud government. Meanwhile, leaders who embraced the new strategic reality were largely silent. In addition, Syria continued to support anti-Israeli forces such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. This support obscured the overall strategic shift. Lastly, some Israelis feared that withdrawal from the Golan would result in a loss of control of some water sources.

Israelis have never integrated the Golan into the national consciousness of the Jewish state. The Israeli state and other proponents of maintaining possession of the Golan for strategic reasons constructed the emotional factors cited by Hassner as evidence of entrenchment. Then the public perception of the Golan's importance outlasted the strategic reality. Once convinced of Syria's threatening nature, Israelis have been reluctant to adjust.

Israelis' limited symbolic connection to the Golan is also apparent when their feelings about it are compared with the other territories Israel captured in the 1967 war: East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank. Israeli emotional links to the West Bank and historic parts of East Jerusalem were deep before the war and remained so in its aftermath. These preexisting Israeli links led to a much deeper Israeli entrenchment in the West Bank.

On the one hand, Israel established settlements in all five areas, and Jews who lived in those settlements were still full citizens of Israel. Israel built roads and other networks that tied these areas to pre-1967 Israel. Wherever possible, Israel preached biblical, emotional, and national Jewish links to the land, echoing Zionist settlement efforts

---

3. For polling data, see Aaron Lerner, "IMRA's Gallup Poll on Critical Golan Issues—Main Results," December 29, 1999, http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=3259.
4. "1996 Likud Party Platform," http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/likud .html.

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, Israeli archaeologists argued that a Gaza archeological site that Egypt claimed was a church was definitively a synagogue.[5] And in 2002 Prime Minister Sharon told a parliamentary committee, "The fate of Netzarim [a small Gaza settlement] is the fate of Tel Aviv."[6]

On the other hand, the scope of the settlement project in the West Bank and East Jerusalem dwarfs the others. In 1983, for example, the West Bank contained 28,290 settlers compared with 800 in Gaza and about 7,000 in the Golan. In 2004 Gaza had about 8,000 settlers and the Golan had 17,265, whereas 234,487 settlers lived in the West Bank and 182,243 in East Jerusalem.[7] One reason the settlement project was much larger in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is geographic happenstance. The proximity of the West Bank to the majority of Israel's population made it a more appealing place to settle. In contrast, the Sinai is largely a desert and, like the Golan in the north, located farther from Israel's most populous areas. Another explanation is that unlike the Golan, where the symbolic and emotional factors were largely constructed after the Israeli conquest, the strong Jewish emotional attachment to the West Bank predates the Israeli occupation. In all the newly occupied territories, some Israelis tried to emphasize symbolic arguments after 1967 while others rejected the emotional linkage, but the emotive starting points were different. Scholars debated whether Gaza was included in the ancient land of Israel. Sinai was a launching point for the biblical Israelites headed to the promised land; it was not the promised land itself.

In contrast, the West Bank, today widely referred to even among leftist Israelis as Judea and Samaria, was the backbone of the ancient Jewish kingdoms of Solomon and David. The West Bank resonates with the words of the Bible in a way that is not true of Gaza, the Golan, or the Sinai. The post-1967 interest in the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Hebron) or Rachel's Tomb (Bethlehem), for example, was a result of the widespread Jewish perception that Israel was returning to the Jewish heartland. In contrast, manufacturing an emotional commitment to the Golan takes time, given a weaker starting point.

Moreover, Israel's security calculations, including its relations with its Arab adversaries, probably play a more important role than infrastructure networks or ex post emotional appeals in determining Israel's willingness to withdraw from occupied territory. In 1979, when territory became a useful bargaining chip and Israel could realize a land-for-peace deal with Egypt, the material and symbolic constraints seemed to fall away, and a Likud prime minister ordered Israel's withdrawal from Sinai. A quarter century later, Prime Minister Sharon, a stalwart leader of the Greater Israel camp, pulled Israeli settlers and soldiers from Gaza. Someday in the future, the West Bank may well serve as an important test case for both Israeli entrenchment and the importance of national security factors.

---

5. A. Ovadiah, "The Synagogue at Gaza," in Lee I. Levine, ed., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), pp. 129–132.

6. Quoted in Scott Wilson, "After 38 Years, Gaza Settlers Gone," *Washington Post,* August 23, 2005.

7. These figures are from the website of the Foundation for Middle East Peace, http://www .fmep.org. Although Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem is part of the West Bank that Israel captured in 1967, I treat it as analytically separate here because I am focusing on Israeli perceptions.

If Israel and Syria ever begin peace negotiations again, the status of the Golan will be a central issue. While Israeli leaders will demand much in return for an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, entrenchment will not prevent its return.

—*Jeremy Pressman*
Storrs, Connecticut

Ron E. Hassner Replies:

I appreciate Stacie Goddard's and Jeremy Pressman's thoughtful comments on my recent article in *International Security*.[1] Whereas Goddard's main criticisms pertain to missing variable bias and tautology, Pressman voices concerns about the central case study in my article: the Israeli-Syrian dispute over the Golan Heights. Both take issue with the absence of agency from my argument.

WHERE THE MISSING VARIABLES LURK

Goddard claims that my argument suffers from missing variable bias. She states that it neglects exogenous shocks ranging from domestic and strategic concerns to war and revolutions in weapons technology. She implies that these shocks, rather than time, might be driving the intractability of some territorial disputes.

They might, of course. All manner of stochastic events can affect the resolution of a dispute. The problem with shocks is that they are shocking. None of the factors that Goddard lists can be easily foreseen, and all could either prolong or shorten the duration of a given dispute, depending on the circumstances. My article identifies a variable that affects all territorial disputes, without exception, in the same way: time always reduces the odds of resolving a territorial dispute.

At the heart of my argument lies an invitation to view territorial disputes, indeed, all disputes, as institutions (pp. 113 and 137–138). Shocks affect the durability of institutions: one thinks of the effects of war on the survival of international organizations such as the League of Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Agents also shape these institutions and thus affect their stability. All of these unpredictable events occur against the relentless flow of time. Due to mechanisms scholars can identify, measure, and thus test, time always serves to enhance the durability of institutions, other things held equal. Territorial disputes are among the least desirable institutions in international affairs, but they are institutions nonetheless.

Goddard overstates my case in suggesting that initial perceptions "most affect" a dispute's entrenchment. I argued, instead, that initial perceptions combine with physical constraints and time to determine the intractability of a dispute. If one conceives of entrenchment as a movement down a path, as I proposed in the title of my article, then time is the inexorable engine that drives disputes along this path. Initial conditions determine the starting point (with disputes characterized initially by high emotive incen-

1. Ron E. Hassner, "The Path to Intractability: Time and the Entrenchment of Territorial Disputes," *International Security,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/07), pp. 107–138.

tives starting farther down the path), and physical constraints determine the pace of movement (the lower the constraints, the faster the movement).

To show that time, and not just initial conditions, matters, I demonstrated that even disputes initially characterized by low emotive incentives undergo entrenchment. Goddard remains unconvinced that the Antarctica and Spratly disputes illustrate this process. Yet she does not consider the other two cases I use to make the same point: the frontier dispute between El Salvador and Honduras and the Golan Heights dispute. At the outset of all four disputes, the respective rivals attached little or no value to the contested lands and perceived the territories as neither coherent nor integrated, a perception that changed as these disputes matured. Goddard must find the latter case persuasive, given her concession that "Hassner is right that [the Golan Heights dispute] has become more intractable since 1967."

RECURSIVENESS EQUALS TAUTOLOGY PLUS TIME

Goddard's harshest criticism relates to the supposed tautological nature of my argument. If it were so, it would a grievous fault. It is not so: my argument does contain a recursive element, but that is another matter entirely. Recursiveness (in which cause creates effect, which then feeds back into cause, and so forth) collapses into circular reasoning (in which cause and effect compel one another simultaneously) if there is no time lag and if there are no intervening variables between cause and effect that can be identified and measured. Circular reasoning then collapses further into tautology if the author conflates the definitions for cause and effect.

Take, for example, my claim that "the more integrated the territory seems, the more important it becomes to the contenders, and the more important it will become to maintain and promote its integrity" (p. 113). Goddard dubs this reasoning tautological. Yet it is neither tautological nor circular, but recursive. It would be circular if I could not "freeze" the recursive cycle to show how integration at time t_0 caused a rise in the perceived value of the territory at time t_1, which in turn created incentives to further integrate the territory at time t_2, and so forth. But I can and I do (e.g., pp. 117–118, 121–126, and 136). The argument would become tautological if I defined integration in terms of value and value in terms of integration, which I do not (pp. 119 and 128).

Goddard also argues that I conflate cause and effect by defining both in terms of the failure of bargains over territory. This is not the case: my argument has an independent variable (time), an intervening variable (perceptions), and a dependent variable (intractability), which are defined and measured independent of one another. Time "represents entrenchment processes that unfold as territorial disputes mature" (p. 112). These include the extension of infrastructure into a disputed territory, efforts at mapping its boundaries, the erection of military memorials, and so on. These processes, in turn, shape perceptions of a territory's cohesion, boundaries, and value (p. 110).

Throughout my article, I offer evidence for these perceptions by citing the words and deeds of settlers, soldiers, leaders, and voters. Societal perceptions are revealed through what members of a society say and do, not through the bargaining strategies of their leaders. Instead, I use these strategies to measure intractability, defined as "an enhanced reluctance to offer, accept, or implement compromises or even negotiate over territory" (p. 109). Even though these three components—entrenchment mechanisms,

perceptions of territory, and intractability—affect one another, creating a harmful feed-back effect, this effect is neither circular nor tautological.

IS THE GOLAN DISPUTE INTRACTABLE?

My critics are at odds as to whether the Golan Heights case strengthens or weakens my argument. Goddard states explicitly that the Golan dispute has become intractable, but she also implies that it has not, based on her erroneous belief that most Israelis still see the Golan as occupied foreign territory. Pressman agrees with me in part. He claims that Syria's position is deeply entrenched but thinks that Israel's position is not, because Israeli leaders have been willing to part with the Golan.

Unlike the Golan Heights dispute itself, our disagreement can be resolved with relative ease. Opinions polls, which offer one means for measuring Israeli public perceptions regarding the Golan, are unanimous in finding increased reluctance among Israelis to cede the Golan to Syria. In 1974 about half of Israelis polled supported a transfer of the Golan to Syria; less than a quarter of Israelis did so in 2007.[2] Indeed, between one-half and two-thirds of Israelis oppose the very idea of negotiating with Syria over this territory.[3] A poll conducted in June 2007 found that only 10 percent of Israelis support full withdrawal from the Golan.[4]

Since the publication of my article, Ehud Olmert has become the most recent in a line of Israeli prime ministers to initiate negotiations with Syria over the Golan, only to see his plans scuttled by the Israeli public.[5] This failure not only demonstrates that world leaders should dedicate more time to reading *International Security* articles about territorial disputes; it also suggests that there is no necessary contradiction between Pressman's claims and mine. Israeli leaders have indeed striven to resolve the Golan dispute. Yet in so doing, they have had to face increasing opposition from a public that has developed strong emotive ties to the Golan over the years.

THE GOLAN IN A COMPARATIVE LENS

Pressman and I agree on the relative value of the Golan to Israelis. He argues that Israeli entrenchment in the West Bank and Jerusalem, as evidenced by symbolic con-

---

2. The 1974 poll is cited in William Wilson Harris, *Taking Root: Israeli Settlement in the West Bank, the Golan, and Gaza-Sinai, 1967–1980* (Chichester, U.K.: Research Studies Press, 1980), p. 81. The 2007 poll was conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Palestinian-Israeli Public Opinion Poll," PSR Survey Research Unit, June 28, 2007, http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2007/p24ejoint.html.
3. Poll by Geocartographia, commissioned by Israel Radio, reported by the Angus Reid Global Monitor, "Israelis Reject Dichter on Golan," August 29, 2006, http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/view/12956.
4. Poll by Teleseker, commissioned by the Israeli daily *Maariv,* cited in Ed O'Loughlin, "Olmert Makes Secret Overtures to Syria," *Sydney Morning Herald,* June 9, 2007; and Ken Ellingwood, "Suddenly, Syria Is Hot Topic in Israel," *Los Angeles Times,* June 11, 2007.
5. Matti Friedman, "Olmert Signals on Golan Heights," Associated Press, June 8, 2007; "Right Wing Blasts PM's Syria Plans," *Jerusalem Post,* June 8, 2007; O'Loughlin, "Olmert Makes Secret Overtures to Syria"; and Ellingwood, "Suddenly, Syria Is Hot Topic in Israel."

nections and scope of settlement, is greater than on the Golan. I concur and say as much in my article (pp. 129–130).

This is still a far cry from Pressman's claim that "Israelis have never integrated the Golan into the national consciousness of the Jewish state." In my article, I offered ample evidence to illustrate how Israelis gradually integrated the Golan into their homeland, both physically and emotively, by means of infrastructure extension, mapping, the construction of communication and transportation networks, the erection of war memorials, the unearthing of synagogues, and so forth. According to one Middle East scholar, these processes succeeded in incorporating the Golan into Israel proper in the Israeli imagination more than a decade ago.[6]

Pressman's claim regarding the ease with which Israel relinquished the Sinai in 1979–82 raises interesting questions, all of which my argument is well equipped to address. I argued that the resistance of a dispute to resolution depends on perceptions of territorial cohesion, boundaries, and value. For the Sinai case to pose an anomaly, Pressman would have to show that in 1979 Israelis perceived the peninsula as more cohesive, clearly defined, or valuable than the Golan.

This was not the case. The Sinai's size and climate impeded the processes that entrench a territorial dispute over time. By 1979 only half as many settlements had sprouted in the Sinai as compared to the Golan, distributed over an area forty times that of the Golan. Nonetheless, the evacuation of the Sinai, in the face of violent settler resistance, proved to be one of the more painful episodes in Israel's history.[7] Even in this young dispute, with minimal entrenchment, material and symbolic constraints did not just "fall away," as Pressman suggests. If anything, the Sinai case serves as an ominous portent for those who expect the Israeli public to sit idly by if the Golan is transferred to Syria.

Two thought experiments arise from the Golan-Sinai comparison. First, would the resolution of the Golan dispute not have been easier in 1979, concomitant with the resolution of the Sinai dispute, than it would be today? Second, would the resolution of the Sinai today not be more difficult than it was in 1979? Unless the answer to these counterfactual questions is negative, the Sinai "anomaly" leaves my argument unscathed.

WHILE LEADERS SLEEP

Both Goddard and Pressman express alarm about the absence of agency from my argument. This is an understandable concern. Political scientists in the United States are

---

6. By 1991, Helena Cobban writes, "most Israelis had come to consider the Golan as naturally part of their own country, and this was emphatically not a partisan political statement. So for [Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin to be perceived in Israel, and in Labor, as actively pursuing a peace agreement with Syria that would involve the return of the Golan to Syrian sovereignty was without a doubt a position that involved some degree, though not necessarily an unmanageable degree, of political risk." Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991–96 and Beyond* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), p. 72.
7. Ehud Sprinzak, the foremost student of extremist violence in Israel, counted the Sinai evacuation as one of three historical junctures at which Israel has come closest to civil war. Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

trained to phrase their causal statements in active tense, as if every action were driven by an identifiable agent, and they are taught to propose useful policy advice so that leaders can shape the world based on their counsel. In my article, I sought to shift attention away from those processes that leaders can influence to those that occur beyond their immediate reach and that often constrain their freedom.

This is not to exculpate leaders or to suggest that they cannot affect territorial disputes at all, but merely to demonstrate that they cannot do so under self-selected circumstances. Leaders can influence disputes, but their actions must contend with the entrenching effects of time and thus often have unforeseen long-term effects. For example, leaders who hope to temporarily raise the stakes in a territorial dispute by encouraging settlements in the belief that these settlements will be as easy to uproot as they were to plant are courting disaster.

To my critics' warning that scholars not underestimate the impact of leaders on territorial disputes, I add a caution of my own: those who exaggerate the freedom that leaders have to shape the outcome of disputes invite overconfidence, miscalculation, and failure. It is high time that scholars in our discipline diverted some of their attention away from the study of pragmatic decisionmaking by rational agents and toward the social constraints within which agents' actions take place.

—*Ron E. Hassner*
Berkeley, California