

MAPPING ISRAEL IN KATYUSHA RANGE

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A New York attorney is engaged in a one-man map crusade to illustrate the Israeli heartland's vulnerability to attacks, Sue Fishkoff writes

MARK Langfan picks up a clear orange piece of plastic shaped like a pie wedge, his "Katyusha apple pie," and places it over the center of a three-dimensional map of Israel; it covers everything from the Judean hills, now under Israeli control, to the Mediterranean, including Tel Aviv and Gush Dan.

The area covered by the pie wedge represents the range of a Katyusha rocket, 20 kilometers. Langfan looks up and smiles: "I show this to people and ask them, what would Israel do if a Hamas terrorist fired a Katyusha from {Palestinian-controlled} territory into downtown Tel Aviv?"

"By holding this piece of plastic in their hands and moving it around my map, they understand why the security zone is where it is."

Langfan, a 32-year-old Manhattan attorney with his own real-estate business, is on a one-man crusade to save policy-makers, scholars and journalists from their own geographic ignorance concerning the Middle East. Appalled by what he perceived as an alarming lack of knowledge about basic Middle East geographic and military facts, Langfan began two years ago to collect information and construct his own three-dimensional topographical map of Israel and its Arab neighbors.

"People don't understand the simple geography of the area, yet they have these strong {political} opinions," he explains. "I tried to come up with a way to create a common vocabulary that people could accept. Then let them disagree {politically} later."

LANGFAN SPENT \$85,000 of his own and his family's money researching and building his topographical map, which he carts all over America and Israel showing it to anyone who will listen. In fact, it's next to impossible to resist his wildly enthusiastic presentation. He comes bursting into your office, armed with a giant map, multiple clear plastic overlays showing water tables, population centers, military bases and mountain ranges, a hefty briefing book containing pages and pages of well-documented analysis.

He brushes aside excuses of deadlines and heavy work schedules, lays out his materials and launches into his articulate and forceful shpiel.

Despite his assurances that he is not out to convert people to his political agenda, it is clear where Langfan stands on the issue of Israeli security and the settlement movement: staunchly behind them both.

Still, his approach is low-key, and his primary concern is to bring factual information to influential people. Once they know these facts, he is no doubt convinced they will come around to what he considers the only rational political understanding of Israel's defense needs.

Langfan's map and supporting documentation focuses on the crucial areas of water supply and topography. His clear plastic overlays allow viewers to understand the physical relationship between these geographic entities and political facts such as tank routes, population centers and missile bases.

POINTING TO the Golan Heights on his map, Langfan shows how his 3-D creation enables policymakers to visualize how water flows off the Golan slopes into Syria, and how certain ridges now under Israeli control afford not only unparalleled views of the northern half of Israel, but clear physical control over the source of the Jordan's waters.

He opens his briefing book to a map of the Syrian tank attacks during the Yom Kippur War. Then he points between that page and his 3-D map showing the valleys and ridges of the Golan.

"See how those tank attack routes exactly match the topography?" he states excitedly. "Here's the weak point in the Golan! Right along this ridge. You can't understand what the Golan means without this map.

"Once people understand the risks, and then decide to give up the Golan, that's their business," he continues with a sad shrug. "But they should understand what those risks really are."

Langfan has made his presentation to US Senators and Congressmen, to American Jewish groups, to the editorial boards of publications including the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. He maintains a relentless lecture circuit, traveling to American and Canadian colleges, talking to JCCs and UJA groups. Conference of Presidents executive vice-chairman Malcolm Hoenlein keeps one of his maps in his office.

IN ISRAEL, Langfan has made his presentation to everyone from mayors to schoolchildren. The IDF spokesman has endorsed Langfan's map, the Israeli War College has ordered five, and according to Langfan is "building a system around it."

Langfan loves to tell the story of his March 1992 meeting with three editors from the New York Times. Angered by what he considered an anti-Israeli tone to the paper's editorials, Langfan asked to be allowed to present his map to the editorial-page board.

"Deputy editorial-page editor Philip Boffrey looked at my map and said, 'I didn't know the West Bank had mountains.' All three editors had no idea where the settlements were concentrated. None appeared to understand the Allon Plan or how it fit into the settlement structure."

While Boffrey does not today recall the details of their hour-long meeting, he does say he found Langfan's presentation "interesting." And although he has been to Israel, he adds, "to see it all laid out on a map was worthwhile."

Langfan collects his information from numerous sources, including American defense magazines, the US State Department, the personal writings of King Hussein and former Lebanese President Amin Jemayel, encyclopedias and research centers.

The only sources he will not touch, he says, are known right-wing organizations. The unspoken assumption in this method is that if objective or left-wing sources can provide the factual information leading to his political conclusion, so much the better. "When I go to people, I don't try to force my agenda on them," he says. "I don't tell them {the Palestinians} will smuggle in Katyushas.

"I quote a left-wing {Israeli} general talking about the ease with which Katyushas could be smuggled into the West Bank, then I put a picture of a Katyusha in front of people, tell them the size of the hole one rocket would make in Tel Aviv, and say if there were no Israeli border security, what would happen. Their answers are always the same."

Langfan provides his map, including all overlays and briefing materials, free of charge to whoever will use it.

"Are you kidding? Charge for this?" he asks, as if offended by the suggestion that he might. "My father used to give money to the UJA. Now we do this.

"I want to empower people; I'm irrelevant. What's important is that people have the information in this book and on this map."

[Illustration]

Photo; Caption: Mark Langfan: 'People don't understand the simple geography of; Credit: Davidoff Studios

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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