



What you need to know about the Green Line

WHAT IS THE GREEN LINE?

Said to be named for the green marker with which it was drawn, the Green Line was the armistice line of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and marked Israel's borders (78% of Mandate Palestine) for the first 18 years of its existence. In 1967, it became the line separating Israel from the territory it captured in the Six Day War—the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

These territories are viewed by the US and the international community as being under “military occupation,” though their status is seen as more complicated within Israel. The Israeli government officially annexed East Jerusalem in 1967 and the Golan Heights in 1980, and withdrew its civilian population and army from Gaza in 2005, while maintaining significant control over its borders.

Israel considers the West Bank—home to over 2 million Palestinians and 400,000 Jews—to be “disputed territory.” The 1995 Oslo II Accords gave the Israeli military temporary authority over most of the area, granting limited autonomy to the Palestinian Authority in Palestinian population centers.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Over the past two decades, a growing international consensus has recognized the Green Line as the basis for negotiations of any border between Israel and a future Palestinian state. The US, the European Union and the Arab League support negotiations for a two-state solution based on the Green Line with land swaps. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) recognized Israel's right to exist within the Green Line in 1988, and has sought in negotiations to limit additional land concessions to Israel.

Past Israeli governments have shown willingness to negotiate based on these lines, recognizing that Jews are becoming a minority in the territory under Israeli control, which jeopardizes the state's democracy and Jewish character. However, the current coalition led by Prime Minister Netanyahu rejects the Green Line as “indefensible,” stressing the need for a long-term military presence in the West Bank, and permanent control over Israeli settlements and East Jerusalem. The Prime Minister has stated on occasion that there will never be a Palestinian state, and many of his government's ministers are fierce opponents of the two-state solution. This position has put the government at odds with the vast majority of the international community.

HOW IS ISRAEL BLURRING THE LINE?

Most Israelis cross the Green Line in the West Bank or East Jerusalem without ever realizing that they have left Israel—and entered occupied territory on which Palestinians hope to build a state of their own. Since 1967, the Israeli government has politically and economically encouraged Jewish settlement over the Green Line, an act that is considered illegal, according to Article 49 of the Geneva Convention. What began with a few security outposts scattered across the Jordan Valley slowly grew into today's settler population of 400,000—most living in cities with tens of thousands of residents.

Following the rise of Netanyahu's Likud party in 1977, Housing Minister David Levy removed the Green Line from official Israel maps. The Knesset rejected an effort in 2007 by then-Education Minister Yuli Tamir to return the Line to Israeli textbooks, and today, the State Department reports that over three-quarters of Israeli maps lack any distinction between Israeli and Palestinian territory.

HOW IS LIFE DIFFERENT OVER THE GREEN LINE?

Most Israeli settlements act as enclaves of Israeli sovereignty within the West Bank: their Jewish residents are Israeli citizens and can vote, receive public funding and benefits, and enjoy all other rights afforded to Israelis living within Israel proper.

However, their Palestinian neighbors do not live under democracy—rather, they are subject to Israeli military law. Palestinians in the West Bank are not permitted to vote in Israeli elections or obtain Israeli citizenship, though they may be tried and sentenced by Israeli military courts. The Israeli military restricts freedom of expression and demonstration for Palestinians, and limits freedom of movement, with mandatory security checkpoints and restricted access to land and roads under military control. These limits, as well as Israeli control over tax collection, and access to electricity, water and other utilities, severely impede Palestinian life and development.

HOW ARE WE BLURRING THE GREEN LINE?

While some Jewish institutions use maps with the Green Line, the vast majority—including synagogues and Hebrew schools—use maps with no Green Line, thereby failing to make a distinction between pre-1967 Israel and the occupied West Bank. This is just one example of the ways in which the Green Line is being erased from the Jewish communal consciousness. Another example is many Jewish organizations' lack of clear funding policies that distinguish between Israel and the Palestinian Territory.

Blurring the Green Line damages the prospects for peace and a two-state resolution. By recognizing the Green Line, we are moving the two-state solution back to the forefront of our communal conversation. We are showing our community what a secure, Jewish and democratic Israel looks like and stressing the importance of a two-state solution in realizing it. In the words of Theodore Herzl: "If you will it, it is no dream."

