

## What is the Green Line?

The term "Green Line" refers to the armistice lines negotiated between Israel and the Arab states at the conclusion of the 1948-49 Israel-Arab war and mediated by the United Nations. These armistice lines became the de facto borders of Israel from 1949 to 1967, and today are widely recognized as the legal borders of Israel.

### ORIGINS OF THE GREEN LINE

In February 1947, Great Britain, unable to maintain the peace under its Palestine mandate, announced that it would evacuate Palestine and leave the problem to the United Nations. Britain had been unable to suppress the violence between Jews and Arabs or to suppress Jewish resistance to British rule.

The United Nations established a commission to recommend a solution to the Palestine problem. It recommended that Palestine be partitioned into a Jewish and an Arab state, and it awarded about 56% of the territory of the mandate to the state of Israel and 44% to the Palestinian state. The Jewish agency accepted this decision; the Arab states did not. They objected to the fact that the partition left a large Arab minority within Israel territory and that the total Arab population of Palestine was in fact larger than the Jewish population. The Jewish population of Palestine in 1947 was about 600,000, the Arab population over one million. The Palestinian Arab Authority argued for a single state with autonomous communities in which the Arabs would enjoy a majority. In November 1947, the United Nations voted for partition in a historic decision that established the legal basis for the existence of Israel. The British pulled out, and Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948.

The Arab states rejected the United Nations decision, and violence broke out immediately between Arabs and Jews. The surrounding Arab states – Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq – sent troops to join the Palestinian cause. However, Arab troops were ill-trained and equipped, had poor morale, and failed to coordinate their tactics; despite a numeric advantage and more weapons, they failed to defeat the Haganah, Israel's volunteer army, which managed to expand Jewish-held territory to about 78% of the territory of the mandate before an armistice was negotiated in 1949.

The expanded territory of the 1949 armistice lines constitutes the Green Line as shown on maps as the legal borders of Israel. Jordan then annexed the remaining Palestinian territory, preventing a Palestinian state from coming into existence on the remainder of the land, the "West Bank" of the Jordan River.

### THE 1967 WAR

Israel has fought three major wars since its establishment. In 1956, after the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal and the acquisition by Egypt of Soviet heavy weapons, France armed Israel, and France and Britain enlisted Israeli help in a plot to recover the canal. Israel was to launch the war and invade the Sinai Desert, stopping short of the canal; the British and the French would then occupy the Canal Zone to "protect" it from harm by either Egyptian or Israeli troops. Israel agreed to this plan because of continued incursions over its border with Egypt by Palestinian Arab guerrillas, thus hoping to secure the Green Line from attack. Israeli forces quickly occupied the Sinai Peninsula as a result of a brilliant military campaign. However, the United States opposed the British and French landing in the Canal Zone and mobilized the United Nations against it; President Eisenhower pressured the British to halt operations, and the French followed suit; Israel in turn was

forced to withdraw from the Sinai in February 1957 and returned to its borders behind the Green Line. United Nations peacekeepers took control of the border zone on the Egyptian side to prevent further incursions over the Green Line. President Nasser was successful in holding the Canal, and he continued to arm himself with Soviet armaments. Israel, meanwhile, purchased heavy weapons from France, which also helped it to build a nuclear reactor.

In 1967 Nasser began a general mobilization against Israel in the Sinai Desert and threatened to destroy the Jewish state. He blocked Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba and ordered the United Nations peacekeepers to leave, which they did, leaving Egyptian forces and Israeli forces in confrontation. Israel mobilized in turn; unable economically to continue the standoff with a citizen army, and fearing that the Egyptians and their Syrian ally would strike, Israel struck first on June 6, destroying the Egyptian air force on the ground, and conquering the Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in what became known as the Six-Day War. This is one of the few preemptive wars in history that enjoys general recognition as having been provoked.

The United Nations ordered a ceasefire, to which Israel agreed; in U.N. Resolution 242, the Security Council called for a just peace recognizing the mutual rights of Arabs and Jews in Palestine, followed by Israeli withdrawal from "territories" conquered by Israel during the war. The absence of the article "the" before "territories" in Resolution 242 left deliberately ambiguous the question of whether there could be territorial adjustments in the Green Line in Israel's favor as part of a peace agreement, but it was generally understood that Israel was prepared to exchange territory for peace.

The Arab states, however, refused to negotiate with Israel and joined together in a "rejectionist front" against the Jewish state. In 1973, under Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, Egypt struck across the canal in an attempt to regain its territory, catching the Israelis off guard on Yom Kippur, and provoking the third Arab-Israel war since the armistice of 1949. The Egyptian effort failed, and Israel defeated Egypt and Syria again, thanks to an emergency infusion of American weapons, in what became known as the Yom Kippur War. But the Israelis had been caught off guard, and Israel seriously faced near defeat for the first time.

Egypt felt it had recovered its dignity following its initial success in the Yom Kippur War and Anwar Sadat accepted a public Israeli invitation issued in 1977 to come to Jerusalem to negotiate peace. Israel, under a right-wing government headed by Menachem Begin, did exchange the Sinai Peninsula for peace with Egypt at Camp David in 1979. However, Syria still refused to negotiate with Israel for the return of the Golan Heights, and Jordan now showed no interest in recovering the West Bank, inhabited as it was by Palestinians, nor did Egypt want the Gaza Strip, entirely inhabited by Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war. The result was that Israel was left in military occupation of the entire Palestinian population that still lived within the territory of the mandate; to return to the Green Line was to allow the creation of a Palestinian state, which the Israeli government refused to officially consider until 1992.

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