

1949 Armistice: The "Green Line"

After armistice with the Arabs ended the 1948 War of Independence, [Israel](#) sought peace with its neighbors for nearly the entire next two decades before being forced again to defend itself against Arab aggression in [1967](#). Upon defeating the invading Arab armies in just six days, Israelis thought the Arab leaders would realize they could not defeat Israel militarily and would instead choose the path of peace. Instead, the [Arab League](#) declared following the war: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it..."

Israel would not have captured the [West Bank](#) or reunified [Jerusalem](#) if [King Hussein](#) of Jordan had heeded the [warning](#) of Prime Minister [Eshkol](#) to stay out of the war. Instead, the Jordanian army was ordered to attack and, in the course of defending itself, Israel eventually took control of these territories.

The Arab states lobbied the [UN](#) to require that Israel withdraw from "all the" territories it captured. This is the demand made by the Arab League in a plan put forward by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. The [UN rejected this formulation](#), though, when it adopted [Resolution 242](#) because the [Security Council](#) understood the 1949 armistice lines were not secure or defensible.

Since 1967, Israel consistently says that in the context of a peace agreement it would be prepared to withdraw back to the 1949 armistice lines with slight modifications - that is, to a new border that meets Resolution 242's requirements of being secure and ensuring territorial inviolability.

After the [1967 Six-Day War](#), Israeli Foreign Minister [Abba Eban](#) told the [United Nations](#):

"The June [1967] map is for us equivalent to insecurity and danger. I do not exaggerate when I say that it has for us something of a memory of Auschwitz."

President Lyndon Johnson [also rejected the idea](#) that Israel should withdraw to the pre-war frontier:

"There are some who have urged, as a single, simple solution, an immediate return to the situation as it was on June 4....this is not a prescription for peace but for renewed hostilities."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded in 1967:

"From a strictly military point of view, Israel would require the retention of some captured territory in order to provide militarily defensible borders."

More than three decades later, Lieutenant General (Ret.) Thomas Kelly, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War, reiterated Israel's strategic concern:

"It is impossible to defend Jerusalem unless you hold the high ground....An aircraft that takes off from an airport in Amman is going to be over Jerusalem in two-and-a-half minutes, so it's utterly impossible for me to defend the whole country unless I hold that land."

In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister [Yitzhak Rabin](#) - the leader who came the closest to making peace with the Palestinians - reiterated that Israel cannot return to the de-facto 1967 boundary. "The border of the State of Israel ... will be beyond the lines which existed before the Six Day War," said Rabin. "We will not return to the June 1967 lines."

In 2004, President [George W. Bush sent a letter](#) to Prime Minister [Ariel Sharon](#) that outlined U.S. policy concerning the possible borders of Israel and Palestine. "It is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return [by Israel] to the armistice lines of 1949," Bush wrote. His letter was [overwhelmingly supported](#) by both houses of the [U.S. Congress](#).

If forced to withdraw back to the 1949 armistice lines, Israel would lose almost all of its tactical, strategic, geographic and topographic military advantages.

Tactically, a missile shot at Israel from inside the [West Bank](#) could land in any city as well as Israel's main international ports in under two minutes, negating the possibility for any counter-measures to intercept the warhead. *Strategically*, Israel would lose early warning radar stations and its control over the [Jordan Rift Valley](#) where the [IDF](#) protects Israel from illegal weapons smuggling into the [West Bank](#). *Geographically*, within the 1949 lines Israel would be diminished to only 9 miles at its narrowest point and every major city would fall within short missile range. *Topographically*, the [West Bank](#) and [Golan Heights](#) provide more than a 3,000 foot incline over the coastal plain- giving this up would enable the Arabs to have unfettered access to attack major Israeli population centers and transportation hubs from highly defensible positions.

[President Bush](#) put the border issue in perspective:

"For a Texan, a first visit to Israel is an eye-opener. At the narrowest point, it's only 8 miles from the Mediterranean to the old Armistice line: That's less than from the top to the bottom of Dallas-Ft. Worth Airport. The whole of pre-1967 Israel is only about six times the size of the King Ranch near Corpus Christi."

A withdrawal to the 1949 armistice lines, however, is not even satisfactory to the radical Islamists. [Hamas](#) and [Islamic Jihad](#) have made clear that they will not end their [terrorist](#) campaign against Israel even if the Jewish state withdraws to the pre-war frontier. It is the mere existence of a Jewish state - in any form - that these and other [Muslim](#) extremist organizations have said they will never accept .

When [Egypt's Anwar Sadat](#) declared he was prepared to make [peace](#), and matched his words with deeds, Israel [withdrew completely from the Sinai Peninsula](#), dismantled every Jewish [settlement](#) in the region, and turned over its oil fields and radar stations. When Jordan's [King Hussein](#) agreed to make [peace](#), Israel agreed to return the small swath of Jordanian territory it held.

To date, Israel has withdrawn from approximately 94 percent of the territories it captured in 1967. In return for peace with [Syria](#) and an end to Palestinian terror, Israel is prepared to withdraw from much of the remaining 6% in dispute. In truth, the whole fight over the [West Bank](#) now boils down to an area of about 200 square miles out of the more than 26,000 originally captured by Israel.

Israel remains committed to trading land for peace, and never annexed the [West Bank](#) or [Gaza Strip](#) because it expected to return part of these territories in negotiations. When the Palestinians finally declared that they

would recognize Israel and renounce terrorism, Israel agreed to begin to withdraw. Plans to withdraw from additional territory were scuttled by Palestinian terrorism and their violation of the [Oslo agreements](#).

For peace, Israeli Prime Minister [Ehud Barak offered](#) to withdraw from 100% of the [Gaza Strip](#) and 95-97% of the [West Bank](#), that is, to the 1949 armistice lines with minor modifications. He also agreed to dismantle settlements, and allow the Palestinians to establish a state with east Jerusalem as its capital if they would end the conflict.

[Arafat](#) rejected the offer and did not even offer a counterproposal.

Israel offered to negotiate a return of the [Golan Heights](#) to [Syria](#), and a succession of Prime Ministers declared a readiness to concede this strategic high ground in exchange for peace. Neither Syrian President [Hafez Assad](#) nor his Bashar, who succeeded him, have been prepared to follow Sadat and Hussein's example and offer peace in return.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the [Gaza Strip](#). The [disengagement plan](#) also involved the dismantling of four settlements in northern [Samaria](#).

In 2006, Prime Minister [Ehud Olmert](#) proposed a plan in which Israel would evacuate most of the settlements in the [West Bank](#), while holding onto five large [settlement blocs](#). This plan, known as "Realignment" would be executed unilaterally if Israel cannot negotiate an agreement with the Palestinians. The plan sought to permanently define Israel's borders with a future Palestinian state, and ensure that Israel will maintain its Jewish majority. The breakout of the [Second Lebanon War](#) in the summer of 2006 and the EU's opposition to an Israeli unilateral withdrawal led to the plan's demise.

In 2011, President [Barak Obama](#) called on Israel to use the 1949 lines as a basis for peace negotiations and assured that Israel's strategic depth would be maintained through "mutually agreed land swaps." "Israeli's and Palestinians," [Obama pledged](#), "will negotiate a border that is different than the one that existed on June 4th, 1967."

Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) has made clear that he is ready and willing to negotiate the border as President Obama said, and he maintains that Israel cannot be expected to move back to the 1967 lines. "I am willing to make painful compromises to achieve peace," Netanyahu [said before a joint session of Congress](#) on May 24, 2011. "I recognize that in a genuine peace, [Israel] will be required to give up parts of the Jewish homeland."

