

## **The Return of the Green Line**

**By Nir Eisikovits**

In the course of six days in June of 1967, Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Gaza strip from Egypt. Israeli law has since been applied to the Golan Heights. The West Bank and Gaza were never officially annexed to the Jewish state. Most of the international community recognizes Israel only in its pre-June 1967 borders. Moderate Israelis and Palestinians understand that a two state solution to the conflict between them must be based on a return to these frontiers. It is only within them that a Jewish majority exists. And yet, the pre 1967 borders, otherwise known as ‘the green line,’ are not marked in any of the textbooks Israeli students use in their studies. As far as any young Israeli looking at an atlas is concerned, Judea, Samaria, and even Gaza, are as much a part of her country as Haifa and Tel Aviv are.

Earlier this December, Yael Tamir, Israel’s minister of education, decided to address this anomaly and ordered that the green line be marked in maps and text books. The argument she offered for her decision was clear enough: Israel could not demand that other Arab countries recognize its right to exist within the 1967 borders if it officially ignores those borders.

This line of thought makes good sense, but I believe there is a more fundamental justification for Tamir’s decision. The lack of a clearly defined eastern border has turned Israel into a political Rorschach blurb onto which different political groups can project their fantasies and aspirations. The state’s amorphousness has allowed the ideological hardcore of the settler movement to portray it as a revival of the biblical empire promised by god to the Jews. At the same time this formlessness has furnished anti-Zionists with a basis for describing Israel as an apartheid state, since it raises the specter that, within a few years, a minority of Jews will forcefully rule over a territory populated mostly by Arabs. Finally, the lack of a clearly defined eastern border has provided the grounds for the surreal proposal that the entire area between the Mediterranean and the river Jordan be turned into one, bi-national state, erasing the distinction between Israeli and Palestinian national identities. The 1967 borders are the only frontiers that make sense of Israel’s self- understanding as a Jewish Democratic state.

And when all is said and done that understanding, with all its inconsistencies, is still the only game in town. If Israel wishes to return to a sustainable, morally defensible version of itself it must eventually converge back to the green line. Tamir has correctly understood that such a convergence requires reinstating the green line into the mental geography of the young. Whether or not maps can actually change minds remains to be seen. Even if they cannot, Tamir’s step carries a great deal of symbolic import. A map is a national self-portrait of sorts, declaring ‘this is how we look.’ For the first time in quite a while, Israel’s self-portrait, though still quite a ways from reflecting actual political reality, is beginning to seem attractive.