

1967 Borders, and How to Lie With Maps

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As Jews in America, Israel and elsewhere continue to mull over President Obama's **Middle East speech** last Thursday, and his subsequent **explanation at the AIPAC conference**, "1967 borders" have become the topic du jour.

In 2008, Hannah Weitzer of **Windows-Channels for Communication** observed **in Sh'ma** that Diaspora Jews are accustomed to looking at maps of Israel which do not mark the Palestinian territories, or the "Green Line" that represents the 1967 border. "Drawing in the internationally recognized border between Israel proper and the occupied territories is not a quick fix for all of the issues surrounding Israel education," she writes. "But teaching with maps that lack the green line is indicative of a larger gap between fact and myth that runs rampant in teaching Israel to Diaspora Jews."

But if a map without the Green Line is deceptive, might not a map featuring a hard, solid, 1967-style Green Line be equally deceptive? In the **same issue of Sh'ma**, history professor Derek J. Penslar **cautions against oversimplification in cartography**:

"I have a colleague at the University of Toronto who teaches a course called 'How to Lie With Maps.' Supporters of Israel might well suggest as required reading for this course Palestinian maps that show a

unitary Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan with no sign of Israel's existence. Yet Israeli maps, and those produced by and for Diaspora Jews, rarely mark the Green Line that constitutes the country's internationally recognized borders."

Yet is the answer simply to replace one simplistic map with another simplistic map?

"The best way... would be through maps that faithfully depict the constant presence of Jews and Arabs in the same landscape... Superimposing maps would display the geographic structure and distribution of each community along with the points of intersection between them."

Penlar's chief concern is diachronic -- he wants to help people to understand the development of Arab and Jewish populations in Israel/Palestine over time. But I think his point is even more interesting if taken synchronically -- as a model for looking at the present moment. The reality of Jewish settlement blocs, along with Arab-majority population centers in Israel proper, makes the prospect of a neat and tidy border along the Green Line completely untenable. Besides which, the Green Line was not set in stone or decided upon by any kind of treaty or decree -- it's basically a cease-fire line marking troop positions during a pause (lasting from 1949 until 1967) in a war that started in 1948 and has never actually ended. President Obama, of course, recognizes this, which is why he included the phrase "mutually-agreed swaps" in his speech.

In any case, Penlar's point at its core is that a simple map is a deceptive map, and I think perhaps observers of all but the most extreme positions can agree with that.

