

Obstacles to Middle East peace: Borders and settlements

By Martin Asser BBC News - 2 September 2010



Without fixed borders, Israel has unilaterally drawn and fortified its own lines

“The modern Israeli state was forged in the fires of the first Middle East war in 1948-1949, but from the beginning it was a state without clear borders. (...)

Occupying the West Bank in 1967 was an important strategic gain in Israeli eyes, and successive governments have ignored the Green Line and built numerous Jewish settlements on the territory. The

settlements are illegal under international law, but Israel disputes this and has pressed ahead with its activity despite signing various agreements to curb settlement growth.

Today, more than 430,000 settlers live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Settlements have separate civil infrastructure to surrounding Palestinian areas and are protected by a vast military infrastructure.

The land is strategically significant, but in Judaism is also religiously and historically so. The first settlers were religious Jews who remained in Hebron after celebrating Passover there in 1968. The settlement movement has become closely affiliated to Jewish religious nationalism, which claims boundaries of modern Israel based on Genesis 15:18: *"God made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates'."* (...)

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin pushed for a two-state solution in the 1990s, and was made to pay for it with a Jewish nationalist assassin's bullet. (...)

Not all Palestinians, however, want a two-state solution. Hamas, which won the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election and holds sway in Gaza, wants to avoid at all costs a negotiated deal with Israel that involves drawing permanent borders along the Green Line. Its wider aim is to establish a single, Islamic state within the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. It believes such a state, with the return of 1948 refugees, would have an impregnable and growing Arab, Muslim majority, and would spell the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

In the long term, therefore, Israel's reluctance to accept the existing Green Line in some ways plays into the hands of militant Islamist groups such as Hamas.”

Questions.

1. Underline or highlight key information in the article.
2. What policy has Israel been carrying out in the Palestinian Occupied Territories since 1967? Why does it fuel so much resentment among Palestinians?
3. What is the religious significance of land in the Jewish society?
4. Does everybody agree with the principle of a two-state solution? Why?