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# The Boundaries of Israel— Palestine Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Geographical View

## ABSTRACT

Palestine, Eretz-Israel, Israel, Terra Santa, The Holy Land, Philistines—all those names have been given to a stretch of land situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. This was, and still is, one of the most important pieces of land, which the world has been dealing with during the last two thousand years. The Arab-Israeli conflict, which has run for the last hundred years, is but the last in a series of long struggles, which dictate the history of that area. One of the main issues is the delimitation of Palestine, a process that began about 100 years ago but is far from complete. Understanding this process is the aim of this essay, which will present an historical review and an analytical view concerning the actors involved in the process and an overview dealing with the three eras of boundary making of Israel.

## THE ESSENCE OF “ERETZ-ISRAEL”—PALESTINE

**F**OR A LONG PERIOD, PALESTINE was more a geohistorical concept rooted in historical consciousness than a defined and measured stretch of land lying within clear geographical boundaries or stable political borders. With the exception of the Mediterranean Sea, there are no geographical limits based on prominent topographical features that separate Palestine from the larger region in which it is situated. In most periods, the borders hinged on the outcome of a struggle between world powers for control over the entire region; in some cases, political and cultural frontiers divided the country internally, while on other occasions the land in its entirety became a part of a much larger political unit. Only for brief periods was the area under the uniform control of its residents.

The Jewish name “Eretz-Israel” appears in the Bible (I *Samuel* 13:19), while the name Palestine which came from the old name Pleshet (Palasta in Roman usage) gained wide currency from the second century CE. The Roman emperor Hadrian endeavored to quash Jewish nationalism after a revolt that took place in 135 CE. The name Palaestina or Provincia Syria Palaestina was used in an attempt to eradicate any trace of Judaism in that area.<sup>1</sup>

Since the fall of the Crusades (1299), Palestine has not been an independent state. For four hundred years prior to World War I Palestine, or Philistines as it was known to its Ottoman rulers and the local inhabitants, was not even a separate administrative sub-division of the Ottoman Empire. The term Philistines appeared on Official maps<sup>2</sup> and was used in official documents, but it did not relate to any clearly identifiable area. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the southern part of Palestine was organized as a detached district. Bounded by the line from Jaffa to Jericho in the north, the Jordan River in the east and the Dead Sea–Raffia line in the south, this unit was called the El-Quds (Jerusalem) district and its governor was responsible directly to the supreme authority in Istanbul. The area north of the Jerusalem district was part of the Beirut province, the area east of the Jordan River was part of the Damascus province, and the area south of the Jerusalem district was part of the Hejaz province that extended into the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> None of these areas carried the name Philistines.

Any attempt to deal with the geographic definition of Palestine at that period shows that the more descriptions that are read, the more confused the reader becomes.<sup>4</sup> Even though the descriptions differ, the area of agreement is still considerable. It covered an area of about 26,000 sq km. The lower Litani (Qassamiye) River bound it in the north and the southern foot of the Mount Hermon in the northeast. The eastern line was either the Jordan River or the desert line, some 40 km eastward; the southern line passed from the Arnon River (Wadi Al Mujib) through the southern point of the Dead Sea and Beer-Sheva, westward to the mouth of Wadi Gaza. This is very different from the modern political definition of Palestine.

## THE ACTORS WHICH CREATED PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

Many actors were involved in creating the modern boundaries of Palestine and Israel, a process that has continued for the last 100 years. Understanding their motives can explain their activities concerning the process, which

established the boundary's lines. The ten main actors were (according to their historical appearance in the area):

1. The Ottomans.
2. Britain.
3. France.
4. The Jews—the Zionist Movement and later the Israeli Government.
5. Trans-Jordan—later Jordan.
6. Syria.
7. The League of Nations and the United Nations.
8. Egypt.
9. The Palestinians.
10. United States.

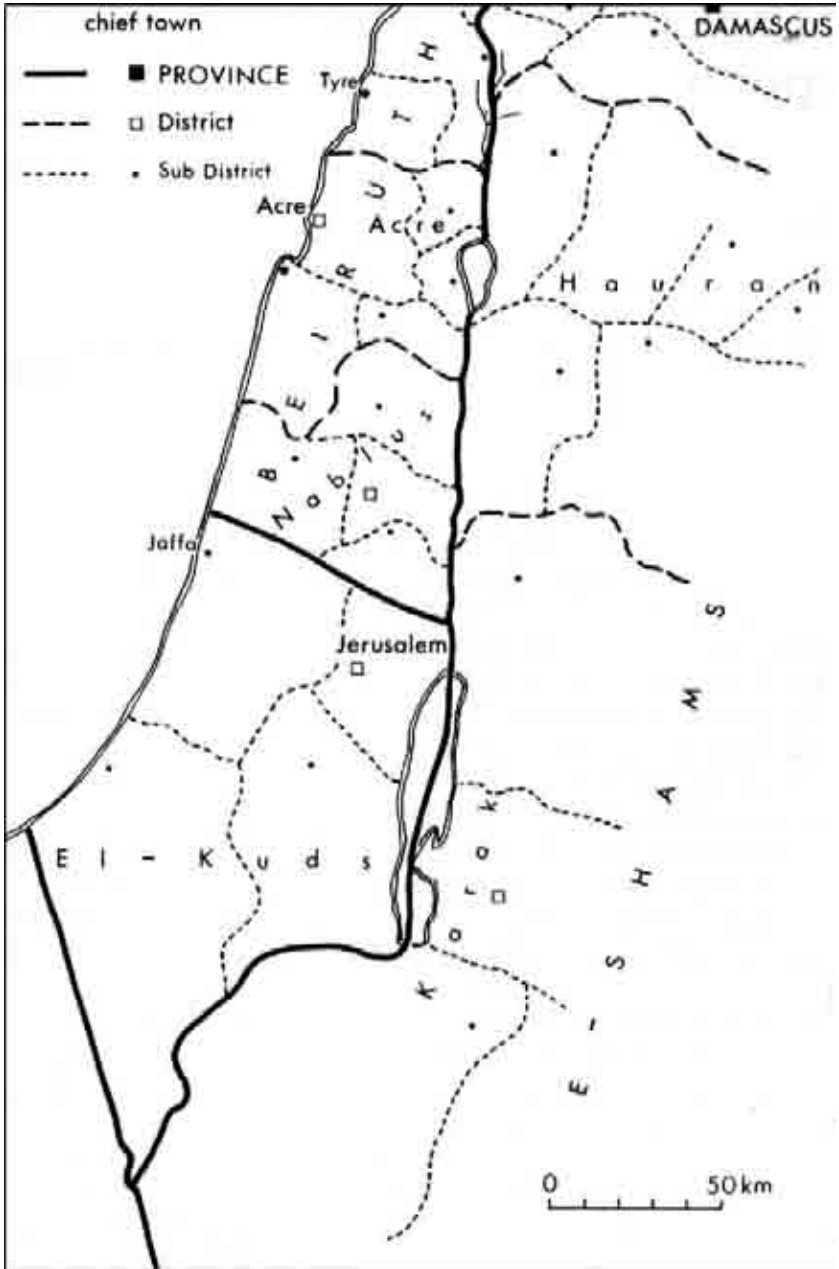
#### *THE OTTOMANS*

The Ottomans ruled the area which later became Palestine from 1516 to 1918 (see map 1). Israel's boundary with Egypt is, in fact, the "administrative separating line between Sinai and the provinces of Jerusalem and Hejaz" establish by an agreement between Egypt (then ruled by Britain) and the Ottoman Empire in 1906. The Ottoman Empire had a line running from Rafa to Suez, a line established in 1841 between it and Mohammed Ali, the governor of Egypt.<sup>5</sup> British pressure to move this line eastward, in order to place it as far as possible from the Suez Canal, created a new line running between Rafa and Taba in the Gulf of Aqaba. The Ottomans succeeded in holding the line west of Aqaba, thus enabling Israel, many years later, to establish the city of Eilat on the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba.

#### *BRITAIN*

The British activities concerning the boundaries of Palestine took place only during a short period, 1916–1937, but Britain's influence was a major one. The British were involved, more than any other foreign power in the creation of Palestine as a modern political entity and in establishing its boundaries. Britain found itself at the end of World War I as the sole ruler of the area that later became Palestine. In accordance with the Zionist Organization, Britain tried to establish a Jewish national homeland in Palestine as an outcome of the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 (see map 2).

Britain adopted the 1906 "administrative separated line" between Sinai and the provinces of Jerusalem and Hejaz and established it as the boundary between British Palestine and Egypt.<sup>6</sup> They separated East and West

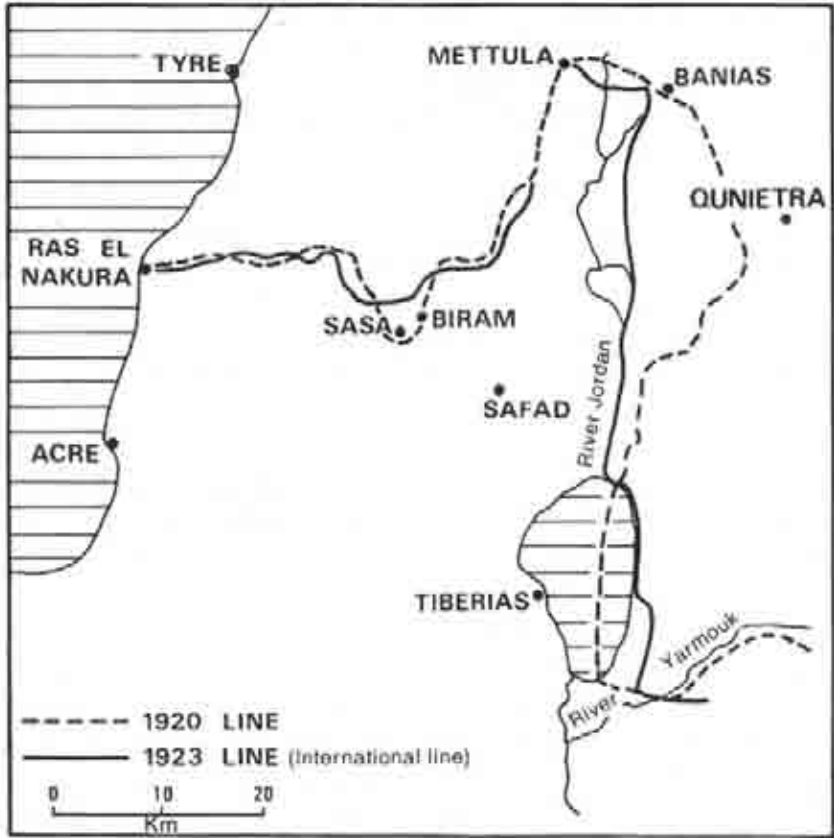


Map 1: Ottoman Palestine, 1914



Map 2: British view of Palestine 1919

Palestine and established Trans-Jordan east of the Jordan River and Arava Valley, thus creating the eastern boundary of Palestine. Through negotiations with France, Britain established the northern boundary of Palestine versus Lebanon and Syria<sup>7</sup> (see map 3). The British activities were done to provide the future Jewish State with an economic potential in Palestine, thus giving Palestine the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and Lake Hula, providing Palestine the water needed for irrigated modern agricultural land. The southeastern and the southwestern boundary lines gave Palestine a land corridor to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea, toward the Indian Ocean. Britain, which established Trans-Jordan as part of the promises given to the Arabs helping her during World War I,<sup>8</sup> tried to create need for cooperation



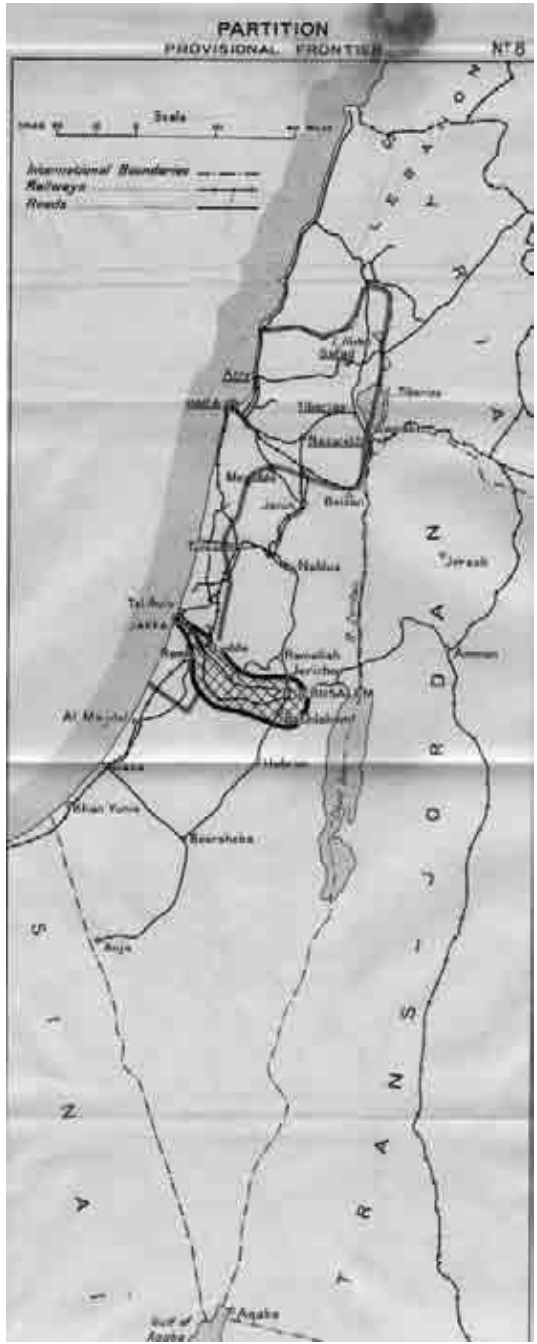
Map 3: Northern boundary of Palestine, 1920–1923

between the Jewish and the Arab States by dividing the Jordan River and the Dead Sea between them, forcing its “two established states” to cooperate in using the shared water and the Dead Sea mineral resources.

By its activities, Britain created the modern territorial entity of Palestine. From the 1920s onward, all historical boundaries were “disappeared”. The area defined by Britain as Palestine is still the modern definition of that area accepted by nearly all that are dealing with it.

More than this, as Britain realized in the mid-1930s that it could not establish a Jewish State in the whole area of Palestine, in July 1937, a British Royal Commission suggested the division of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs,<sup>9</sup> thus creating two separate states in Palestine (see map 4). Although the Royal Commission’s suggestions were never accepted, they opened the way to 70 years of discussions and struggling, which aimed to





Map 4: British Partition Plan, 1937

create a better line for this or that side. Thus the idea of partition, which is the only real solution to the future of that area, was also a British idea.

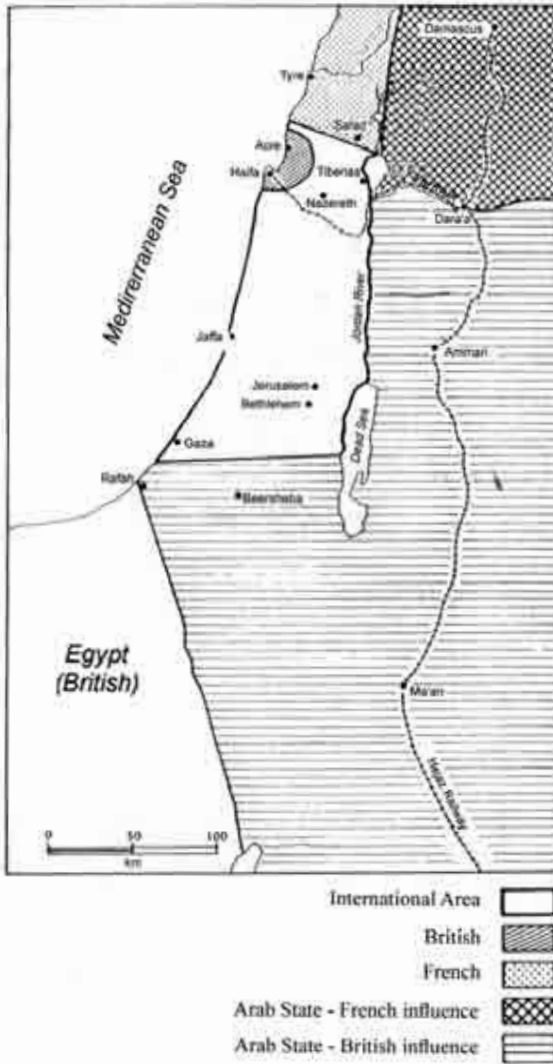
#### *FRANCE*

For a short period (1916–1923), the French were involved in the process of establishing the northern border of Palestine, which later became Israel's north and northeast boundaries. Their claims were based on the Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916 (see map 5) in which a line running from the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean Sea has to be the northern boundary of “International Palestine”. They refused to accept the British claim to the Litany River Boundary but accepted the notion of Palestine as stretching “From Dan to Beersheba” meaning that the Jordan River will run in British Palestine,<sup>10</sup> thus creating the “Galilee panhandle”.

The French were willing to create “Grand Liban” (Greater Lebanon) by adding to the Christian Lebanon Mountain the southern Shi’a Moslem region of Tyre and Sidon, as well as the Moslem area of Tripoli (today in northern Lebanon). In order to strengthen the Christians of the newly established Lebanon, they needed the support of the Jewish British Palestine to create a Christian-Jewish Barrier on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea against the inland Moslems of Syria. As the Mandatory regime, France, with Britain, created the Israel–Lebanon boundary and the so-called “international boundary” between Israel and Syria, which is now only a line on historical maps but can be accepted as the future international boundary between Israel and Syria.

#### *JEWISH–ISRAELI VIEW*

The modern state of Israel is an outcome of the main Zionist goal, namely to establish a modern, independent state for the Jews in the land of their forefathers. In order to achieve this aim, the Zionist Organization was created in 1897 and, up to 1948, held the role of the main activist for establishing a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Government of Israel has been the sole actor on the Jewish side calling for establishing “secured and defined boundaries” for Israel. In the late nineteenth century, the Zionists had no clear geographical notion concerning the future boundaries of their goal. However, after World War I, when the time came to implement the idea, the Zionist leaders presented their view, in February 1919, before the Council of the Ten at the Paris Peace Conference. The main reasons for drawing the desired line were the economic arguments. The Zionist goal, which was (and still is) establishing a Jewish State for most of the 15 million Jews who lived in



Map 5: Sykes-Picot Agreement, March 1916

the world in 1919, called for a large area, suitable to secure the economic life of the immigrant Jews. As the ideology calls for a “return to the land” by establishing hundreds of agriculture villages, fertile areas and water for irrigation were the main arguments in the Zionist demand.<sup>11</sup> This led to the demand by the Zionist Organization in 1919 asking that Palestine should be formed within the following boundaries (see map 6):

In the North—from a point on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, close to and south of Sidon, continued along the watershed toward the foothills of the



Map 6: Zionist's demands—1919

Lebanon Mountains, to El-Qara'un Bridge on the lower Litany River. From there it will continue to El-Bira, along the line that separated the basins of El-Koran and Tiam streams. From here the line will continue south, between the eastern and the western slopes of Mount Hermon, to a point close to and west of the town of Bait Jan. From there the line will continue east, along the watershed of the Muganiya River, close to and west of the Hijaz Railway. In the East—a line that run close to and 10 miles west of the Hejaz Railway, to the Gulf of Aqaba. In the south—a line that will be agreed upon with the Egyptian authorities. In the west—The Mediterranean Sea.<sup>12</sup>

This line is presented here in detail not because it was accepted (it has never been accepted or even considered) but because it was seen, and is still seen, as the ultimate goal of the Zionist boundaries. Although never fulfilled, many on the Jewish side see those lines as the modern view of “the Promised Land” and raise the demand to have it (the Rightists’ song says, “The Jordan River has two banks, both are ours”). Many, especially

the Arabs, believed that those are the boundaries that the Zionists tried to have, explaining the whole history from 1919 as the onset of the Zionists' aggressive attempt to achieve this line, by diplomatic means or by wars.

Thus, some believe that for the Jews, any situation, which is less than having this line, is a temporal one, waiting for the next opportunity to enlarge the area. Thus the Jewish diplomatic efforts in 1920–23 and the political fighting during the Mandate era (1920–1948). This is the motive, according to that view, for the 1948, 1956, 1967, 1982, and even the 2006 wars, in which Israel tried to obtain the “missing areas”.

The urgent need to have the Jewish State established in the crucial years 1937–1947 led the Zionist leaders to accept the territorial division of Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs suggested by the British Royal Commission of 1937<sup>13</sup> and the United Nation decision of November 29, 1947.<sup>14</sup>

Establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 raised another, more powerful demand—that of defensive, secured lines. Israeli governments, from 1948 onward, base their demand for establishing permanent boundary lines on the need to have “secure boundaries”. Accordingly, the last 60 years of history is seen as an outcome of Israel's desire to have the “best defensive line”. Thus, Israel is still holding the Golan Heights and the River Jordan line against possibilities of hostile attacks from the east, as well as its staying in Lebanon for 18 years (1982–2000). Israel is building its Security Fence in the West Bank in order to protect Israel from suicide attacks.

Another, not least powerful, notion is “Historical and Promised Boundaries”—which led to the establishment of many Jewish settlements. The Settlements of Sinai, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) are an outcome of two main notions—the first is “this is our historical land”, the second is the notion that “the plow will determine the future boundary line”. That means that wherever a Jewish settlement will be established, there the future line will run. Thus, Israel is trying to hold most of its settlements, especially in Judea and Samaria, the birthplace of the old Jewish nation.

On the other hand, recent history tells us that the notion of “the force of the plow” was never a reality. Settlements never determine the boundary lines, except the unique phenomenon of the northern Jewish settlement of Metula, which determined the northern-most point of British Palestine. All other settlements never influenced the actual, rather than suggested, boundary lines. The sword, rather than the plow, established boundary lines in Palestine—Israel, during the years 1948–1974. Thus, the “Green Line”—the armistice line between Israel and its neighboring states

(Lebanon, Syria, Trans-Jordan, and Egypt) established in 1949—were the outcome of military activities during the 1948 war. The Six Days War of June 1967 established the cease-fire lines, changed in 1974 after the 1973 war. The Jewish settlements, which were established in Sinai between 1967 and 1977 never, withstood the Israeli–Egyptian Peace agreement of 1979, which reestablished the Mandatory line, ignoring those settlements. The Israeli settlements established in the “Gaza Strip” did not influence the Israeli withdrawal from that area in 2005 (see map 7). Thus, that “mystical” notion never influenced any real lines. Many in Israel believed that some of the settlements established by Israel in the “West Bank” (Judea and Samaria) would influence the delimitation of the future line between Israel and the Palestinians. That is still to be proved.

More than this, Israel annexed area around Jerusalem in 1967, thus creating “large Jerusalem”. Later, in 1981, Israel annexed the Golan Heights. No one but Israel accepts those acts. The Israeli Government’s views concerning the future boundaries of Israel are far from clear.

#### *TRANS-JORDAN—JORDAN*

The British established Trans-Jordan as an outcome of the War’s promises to the Arabs. Abdulla, the son of the Arab leader Hussein, was nominated as the Emir of Trans-Jordan and later became the king of that country, after it received its independence in 1946. Trans-Jordan’s boundary with Palestine was established by the British in 1922 as a separation line between the area nominated to become a Jewish National Home (Palestine) and the Arab area east of the Jordan River and the Arava Valley. In the war of 1948, Trans-Jordan occupied an area designated by the United Nation’s resolution of 29 November 1947 to be part of the Arab State in Palestine. Against all international code, and against all Arab states, Trans-Jordan annexed that area later called the West Bank. No one but Britain and Pakistan agreed to that annexation. Trans-Jordan (later Jordan) and Israel established an armistice line, “The Green Line”, between them. This line stood for 19 years, until 1967, but Jordan insisted on keeping the “West Bank” until 1988, when it was “transferred” publicly to the Palestinian Authority (actually to the P.L.O.).

Israel unlawfully occupied a large area in the Arava Valley between 1955 and 1993. The Peace Agreement between Israel and Jordan signed in 1994, returned that area to Jordan but allowed some minor territorial changes in order to facilitate the cultivation of plots of agricultural land of some Israeli villages along the line, thus establishing a permanent international boundary between them.

## The Unilateral Disengagement Plan ההתנתקות החד-צדדית



Map 7: Unilateral Disengagement Plan

*SYRIA*

The Boundary between Syria and Palestine was established in 1923 by an agreement between France (Syria) and Britain (Palestine).<sup>15</sup> Syria, an independent state since 1946, never accepted this line, claiming it was a colonial line established without considering the will of the Syrians. In the War of 1948, Syria occupied a large area designated by the United Nation's resolution of November 1947 to be part of the Jewish State. During the armistice negotiation of 1949, Syria agreed to retreat from those areas, which became a "Demilitarized Zone". Syria insisted that the sovereignty of those areas is yet to be determined and Israel cannot change anything in that area.

During the years 1949–1967, Syria occupied some plots in the demilitarized zone (El Hamma area, the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, and areas adjacent to the Jordan River) thus creating what is called the "4 June 1967 lines". Israel occupied the Golan Heights in 1967 and from then onward, Syria declared its willingness to "return to the "4 June 1967 line" which Israel refused to accept. This willingness was presented during the peace talks between Israel and Syria in January 2000. Israel's refusal brought those talks to a halt and the problem of the boundary line is still open.

*THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS—UNITED NATIONS*

In the early 1920s, the League of Nations gave Britain the Mandate of Palestine. By this act, the whole process of establishing a separate political area named Palestine was begun. The League of Nations was not involved in creating boundary lines in Palestine; it just accepted the British and the British-France agreements concerning Palestine boundaries. Later, after the establishment of the United Nations, it found itself involved twice in Israel's boundaries. When the British Government decided to withdraw from Palestine in early 1947, the United Nations sent a delegation (UNSCOP) to study the problems of Palestine and to suggest a solution to those problems. The UN adopted the British idea of 1937 of the partition Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Partition Resolution no. 181 which called for establishing two states in Palestine, one—a Jewish State, the other—an Arab State, leaving the Jerusalem–Bethlehem area under UN administration (see map 8).

The Jews accepted it but the Arabs refused to adopt it and the war of 1948 marked the actual (but never a formal) abolition of the Partition plan. Later on, in 1949, the UN helped Israel and its four neighboring countries to agree on armistice lines, later known as "the Green Lines", which,





although only armistice lines, became the base lines for future boundary negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

In 1967, after the June 1967 war, the United Nations adopted Resolution 242, calling on Israel to withdraw from the area occupied during the war, creating “secure and recognized boundaries” for Israel. Egypt, Syria, and the Palestinians based their claims at the boundary’s negotiation tables on this basis.

### *EGYPT*

The northeastern line of Egypt was created in October 1906 as “an administrative separated line” between the Egyptian province of Sinai, governed then by the British and the Ottoman provinces of Jerusalem and Hedjaz. The First World War placed Britain on both sides of that line and as early as 1919 Britain decided to adopt the 1906 line as the international boundary between Egypt and British Palestine. During the 1948 war between Israel and Egypt—and other Arab states—Egypt occupied an area northeast of that line, later called the “Gaza Strip”. That area was allocated by the United Nations resolution of November 29, 1947 to the future Arab State of Palestine and Egypt never incorporated the “Gaza Strip” into Egypt. Between 1949 and 1967, the Egyptians held the Gaza Strip as a “military occupied area”. During the 1967 War Israel got hold of the Sinai Peninsula, placing the cease-fire line on the Suez Canal. During the peace talks between Israel and Egypt in the late 1970s, the Egyptian formal demand was “to return to the international boundary between Egypt and British Palestine”. Egypt refused to make some changes along this line, placing the Taba area in Israel’s hands and getting some area east of the international boundary. The Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt placed the boundary line along the Mandatory boundary. Egypt renounced the “Gaza Strip” saying that it belongs to the Palestinians.

### *THE PALESTINIANS*

The Palestinians were not involved in the process of delimitating the first boundaries of Modern Palestine in the 1920s. During that period the Arab side was presented by the Emir Faisal, who claimed for a united Arab Middle East under his regime. During the British regime of Palestine (1918–1947), the Palestinians demanded that the whole area of Palestine should become an Arab independent state, without any sharing of government with the Zionist Organization. Any attempts to divide the area of Palestine between them and the Jews were rejected. The recommendation of the British Royal Commission (1937) and the United Nations’ decision

of November 29, 1947 concerning the establishment of two separate states, an Arab and a Jewish one, were rejected and the Palestinians tried to achieve their goal by force. They were beaten militarily during the war of 1948, losing their share of Palestine to the Jordanians, the Egyptians, and to the newly born State of Israel. Up to 1967 the Palestinians were not involved in the discussions concerning the boundaries of Palestine.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank (from Jordanian holdings) and the Gaza Strip (under Egyptian occupation) gave them a political goal—establishing an independent Palestinian State in those areas, using the armistice line of 1950—“the Green Line”—as the boundary line between them and Israel. During the last 40 years, the Palestinians have held to that goal, against the Israeli view of enlarging Israel into those areas. In the 1990s, Israel and the Palestinians achieved an interim agreement giving the Palestinian Authority some kind of self-rule in most of the Gaza Strip and in some parts of the West Bank. During the formal discussions between Israel and the Palestinians there was talk about changing the location of the “Green Line”, as Israel would have some area beyond that line, replacing it with areas inside Israel of 1967, but nothing had been formally agreed. Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2006, giving the whole area to the Palestinians while holding large areas in the West Bank, area that is seen by the Palestinians as their land.

#### *UNITED STATES*

Officially, the United States never established any line in Palestine–Israel but it was, is, and will be involved in creating boundaries in that area. The United States supported the United Nations resolution of 1947, later accepted (but never officially) the “Green Line” as the lines of the State of Israel, even though the United States never accepted Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and never established its embassy in Jerusalem.

After the war of 1967 it adopted the English version of Resolution 242, calling for Israel to withdraw from areas occupied during that war—not “the areas”. The United States never recognized including the Golan Heights and larger Jerusalem into Israel. The United States was involved in all the peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states from 1977 onward.

The Peace talks between Israel and Egypt took place in Camp David under President Carter, although the boundary issues were discussed without any American involvement. The first agreement between Israel and the Palestinians was signed in the White House. The Peace agreement between Israel and Jordan was signed also by the United States. The

Americans hosted the unsuccessful peace talks between Israel and Syria in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, in January 2000 with the deep involvement of President Clinton, who was also deeply involved in the unsuccessful Israeli–Palestinian talks of 2000–2001. President George W. Bush’s statement concerning the need to make some changes along the “green line” as an outcome of the presence of Israeli settlements beyond that line is a major acceptance of some of Israel’s demands in future negotiations concerning the establishment of a boundary line between Israel and the Palestinians (see map 9).

## THE LONG PROCESS OF BOUNDARY-MAKING IN ISRAEL

The process of delimitation of the boundaries of modern Palestine-Israel can be divided into three main stages. There are:

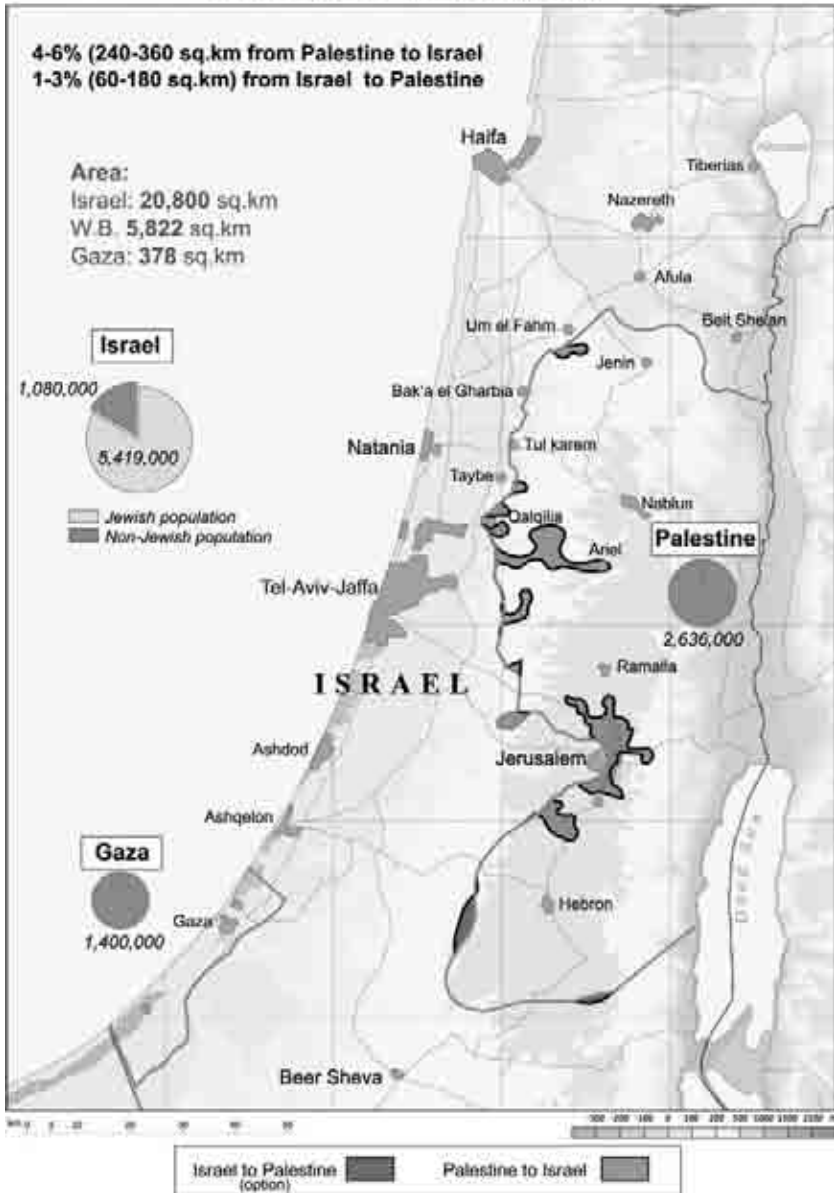
- A. The outside political delimitation.
- B. The “Period of the Gun”—the forced delimitation.
- C. The local bilateral diplomatic delimitation.

### *THE OUTSIDE POLITICAL DELIMITATION*

This stage, which took place between 1906 and 1947, marked the stage when outside empires and international institutes delimited the boundaries of the discussed area. As presented above, many political actors, The Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, The French Government, the League of Nations, the United Nations, were all involved in the delimitation process, each contributed its influence. The will of the local population was never been discussed at this stage, which was marked by diplomatic negotiation.

The first time a boundary line was delimited in that area came about in 1906 after Britain established itself in Egypt in 1882. They realized that the line separating Egypt from the Ottoman Empire, established in 1841, reaches the south entrance of the Suez Canal thus giving the Ottoman Empire the ability to control and attack ships running there. The British consul in Egypt, Lord Cromer, tried to convince the British government that the situation threatened the British Empire, which should ask to move the line eastward. He only succeeded in 1906 and the British government asked the Ottoman Empire to place the boundary line on the Rafa–Aqaba line. The Ottoman Empire refused, but under threat of war with Britain, they agreed to move the boundary eastward, toward the Rafa–Taba (not

## US Presidential Parameters (תכנית קלינטון-בוש (סכימה))



Map 9: US Presidential Parameters

Aqaba) line. It was agreed that the line was not a boundary line between Britain and the Ottoman Empire but “an administrative separating line” between the province of Hejaz and the district of El Quds (Jerusalem) on one side and Sinai on the other side.<sup>16</sup> Although there was no mention of Palestine in that agreement, the line established in 1906 is the oldest boundary line of Israel of today.

The events of the First World War brought Britain into Palestine, as the Allied forces led by General Allenby conquered Palestine in 1917–1918. In 1915, during the War, the British promised the Arabs, who helped them, an independent state stretching along all the Arab land held by Turkey, except the area “west of the districts of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus” which, according to the British, did not include Palestine. The Arab version of that promise tells about the area, “west of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, and Damascus” which meant that Palestine was included in the area that was promised to the Arabs.<sup>17</sup> A year later, in 1916, Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot Agreement, in which the area, which is now Palestine, was divided into several parts. Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and the Arabs all got a share of the Palestine area.<sup>18</sup> A year later, in 1917, Britain promised the Zionist Organization that it “view[s] with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people”—The Balfour Declaration.<sup>19</sup>

When the War ended, all of those promises were brought before the newly established League of Nations, which decided, on April 24, 1920, to give Britain a Mandate over Palestine while giving France a Mandate over Syria and Lebanon. Britain and France had to decide where to place their mutual boundary, Britain had to delimit the boundary between Palestine and Mesopotamia, France had to delimit the line between Syria and Lebanon.

Britain decided to adopt the 1906 line as the boundary line between Egypt and Palestine.<sup>20</sup> In 1922, the British established a line between Palestine and Trans-Jordan. It runs from the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, along the center of Wadi Arava, the Dead Sea, the Jordan River to its confluence with the Yarmuk River, and continues in the Yarmuk River up to the Syrian Boundary. Thus, the Eastern boundary of Palestine was established.

In establishing these two lines (the southwestern and the eastern lines), Britain was free to delimit the boundary according to its needs and decisions, as it ruled both sides of the border area. This was not the case in the northern area, where Britain confronted France in establishing a boundary line. Negotiation concerning the location of that boundary line lasted for about five years, concluded by a treaty signed in March 1923.<sup>21</sup> Taking into

consideration the local village boundaries,<sup>22</sup> the line runs from the Ras el Naqura ridge on the Mediterranean shore to El-Hama on the Yarmuk River.

The year 1923 marked the period in which, for the first time in modern history, Palestine was defined as a political-territorial unit, separate from the surrounding area. British Palestine, with an area of about 27,000 sq km was, and still is, what is accepted as Palestine. Politically all past boundaries are seen now as a historical item, without anything to do with the actual issue of the delimitation of that area.

Britain held the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine but the local Arab population never accepted that idea. A series of confrontations with the British regime brought the British Government to suggest, in 1937, dividing Palestine between Jewish and Arab states, holding to itself the holy cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem and a corridor to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>23</sup> This idea was accepted by the Jews (who suggested other partition lines) but was rejected by the Arabs. Even though the idea never died, the Jewish-Arab struggle in Palestine-Israel is mainly a struggle for a better location of a separation line between them. Later, on 29 November 1947, the general assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 181, which called for establishing two states in Palestine, a Jewish one and an Arab one, leaving the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem as a “*corpus separatum*” under a UN regime.

This resolution ended the first period of boundary making in modern Palestine, a period in which outside powers marked its boundaries.

#### *THE “PERIOD OF THE GUN” 1947–1977*

The Jews accepted the United Nations resolution; the Arabs refused to accept it and a war broke between the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine. The war was later continued as a war in which Syria, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt attacked the newly created State of Israel in the spring of 1948. This war of 1948 (the War of Independence of Israel) opened the second stage of boundary making in that area, the “Period of the Gun”.

The 1948 war ended with an Israeli victory. The Arab armies were defeated and the newly established state not only survived the attack but also succeeded in enlarging its area. British Palestine was divided according the 1949 Armistice agreements between Israel and its surrounding countries into three areas. The State of Israel added to it some areas that were allocated to the Arab State. Thus, the area of Israel was about 20,770 sq km. Trans-Jordan occupied and annexed the West Bank (about 5700 sq km) which was an area allocated to the Arab State. The Egyptian army occupied the Gaza



Strip (about 380 sq km) which was also allocated to the Arab State. The Armistice lines were marked on maps by a green pencil, thus the name “the Green Line”<sup>24</sup> (see map 10). That line marked, with some modification, the line where the armies stood on the day a cease-fire was accepted.

Thus, the gun drew the line. The local needs, geographical considerations, and other reasons which are usually used in delimitation of international boundaries were never discussed as both sides saw the line as a temporary line, to be replaced shortly afterward by a permanent boundary line. This was not the case at that time and the guns were used again in the process of boundary delimitation. In June 1967, another round of war between Israel and the surrounding Arab world took place. Israel took the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan. Thus, new cease-fire lines were established in this area.<sup>25</sup> In October 1973, Syria and Egypt tried to attack Israel to get their territory back. A new cease-fire line was drawn in the Golan Heights in 1974. This war marked the end of the second stage, in which the boundary lines were dictated by force rather than by diplomatic negotiations.

#### *THE THIRD STAGE—BILATERAL DIPLOMATIC BOUNDARY NEGOTIATION*

Nineteen seventy-seven marked a new era in the history of the Middle East. President Sadat of Egypt visited Israel and a diplomatic negotiation for achieving a peace treaty was begun. In the Camp David Agreement of 1979, Israel agreed to give the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt, establishing the Mandatory boundary line between Egypt and Palestine as the international boundary between Israel and Egypt. This was the first time Israel got a recognized international boundary as an outcome of peaceful diplomatic negotiation. This led to the 1994 peace agreement between Israel and Jordan, in which the mandatory boundary line between Palestine and Trans-Jordan was established, with some modification, as the international boundary between Israel and Jordan.<sup>26</sup> An attempt was made in January 2000 to achieve a peace agreement between Israel and Syria, but it failed, as both sides could not agree on the location of an international boundary between them.

The guns never stopped working; in 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, occupying the area north to Beirut. It took Israel about 18 years to withdraw from Lebanon but no peace agreement was established. The line, which today separates Israel and Lebanon, is officially the “Line of the withdrawal of Israeli forces”, agreed upon between Israel and the United Nations, without the involvement of the Government of Lebanon.



### Armistice Lines 1949 גבולות שביתת הנשק 1949



Map 10: Armistice Lines, 1949

*THE INTERNAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS*

The Palestinian Arabs, who refused to accept the 1947 UN resolution, organized themselves into the Palestinian Liberation Organization and from 1967 (actually even earlier) demanded their independence in former Palestine. On the other side, Israel settled itself in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. More than 550,000 Israeli Jews built new settlements in the larger Jerusalem area, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Two rounds of talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority held in the 1990s<sup>27</sup> and 2000 never achieved any final resolution, although some agreements were made, constructing some areas under Palestinian regime. In 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and destroyed all the Jewish civic settlements there. This was not done as an outcome of bilateral negotiations but rather was an Israeli initiative, a one-sided action, which placed the Gaza Strip in the hands of the Palestinian Authority.

There are three major opinions on solving this problem. Some Israelis ask to establish a Jewish State over all of former British Palestine. Some Palestinians have asked the same for an Arab State. Most agreed on establishing two states in the area of former British Palestine, a Jewish one and an Arab one. The main problem is delimitation. The whole issue can be summarized by one question—Where should the separation line run? Solving this problem can bring an end to this troubled area.

## CONCLUSION

The overall process presents some basic points concerning the establishment of Israel's boundaries. There are two main lines that have influenced and will influence future boundary agreements, namely the British Mandate lines and the "Green Line".

The British Mandate lines, which were established in the 1920s, are seen as the boundaries of Palestine, which no one is allowed to cross. For the last 80 years, many tried to cross it by force. Thus during the 1948 war Israel entered Egypt and Lebanon but withdrew from those areas. Egypt occupied the "Gaza Strip" but left it officially in the Peace Agreement with Israel. Jordan occupied the "West Bank" but left it officially in 1988. Israel entered Lebanon several times but withdrew to the Mandate line. The only area in which, up to now, the Mandate lines are not in practical use is in the Golan Heights, but it seems that, although not officially accepted, a peace treaty between Israel and Syria must include a withdrawal of Israel to

the Mandate line. Those lines, which mark the outside boundaries of Israel versus the Arab independent states, are very strong.

The “Green Line”, established as an armistice line in 1949–1950, is less strong but it is the basis for the Palestinians and most of the worldviews concerning the future boundary line. Although Israel declared that “The Green Line is only an historical line” without any meaning for the future line—the withdrawal of Israel from the “Gaza Strip” placing itself along the old “Green Line” may mark the possible future agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. It is less strong than the Mandatory lines but still has its power.

Two models were used in dealing with historic lines in the establishment of the formal international boundary lines of Israel. The first model, “The Egyptian”, calls for using the old line without any change, ignoring any human geographical changes made along the line since it was practically abolished. Thus, Egypt returned exactly to the Mandatory line and Israel accepted that model while withdrawing from the Gaza Strip. The second model, “the Jordanian”, uses the old line as a basis for negotiation but changing it as an outcome of changing the human geography of the border zone. Thus Israel and Jordan established a new line based on the Mandatory line but with some changes, as well as creating the “Blue Line” (although not a boundary line) between Israel and Lebanon based on the 1923 international boundary between British Palestine and French Lebanon. Israel withdrew to the Mandatory line with some accepted changes. Future negotiation will use those models in creating the needed peaceful permanent international boundary lines of Israel.

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