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The Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary: 1841-1992

Thabit Abu-Rass

University of Northern Iowa

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THE EGYPT-PALESTINE/ISRAEL BOUNDARY: 1841-1992

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Thabit Abu-Rass
University of Northern Iowa
July 1992
ABSTRACT

In 1841, with the involvement of European powers, the Ottoman Empire distinguished by Firman territory subject to a Khedive of Egypt from that subject more directly to Istanbul. With British pressure in 1906, a more formal boundary was established between Egypt and Ottoman Palestine. This study focuses on these events and on the history from 1841 to the present. The study area includes the Sinai peninsula and extends from the Suez Canal in the west to what is today southern Israel from Ashqelon on the Mediterranean to the southern shore of the Dead Sea in the east. Both alterations in the boundary and changes in its function are considered. A set of maps describes the stages of boundary development and changes in its exact location.

Subsequent to Mohammed Ali's 1831 invasion and occupation of Ottoman Palestine and Syria, intervention by European powers led to Egyptian withdrawal and a determination in 1841 of a line running from Rafah to Suez as a limit to Egyptian authority.

The political and economic importance of the area increased with the development of the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain intervened militarily in Egypt in 1882. The British goal of using the Sinai as a buffer for the Canal led in 1906 to forced Ottoman recognition of the Rafah-Aqaba line as the administrative boundary between Egypt and Ottoman Palestine. Following World War I, both sides of the boundary came under British control by the League of Nations awarding of the Palestine Mandate to Britain.

The importance of the boundary was enhanced by the hostilities incident upon the establishment of an independent Israel in 1948. The location of the boundary essentially survived the wars of 1948, 1956,
1967, and 1973. Following the demarche of the Egyptian Government in 1977 and the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979, the two states turned to the re-demarcation of the 1906 line and to the resolution of disputes. Today the line of 1906, the oldest in the modern Middle East, serves as Israel's only mutually recognized international boundary.
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This study by: Thabit Abu-Rass
Entitled: The Egypt-Palestine/Israel Boundary: 1841-1992

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last two centuries, territorial disputes and boundary-related issues have been a major factor in conflicts between states. Frontiers, as an integral part of territorial sovereignty, play a crucial role in the life of nations; keeping their integrity is one of the most important conditions for the existence of the state, and usually events along the state's frontier area will affect the behavior of the whole country. Since the rise of nation-states in the 17th century, powerful neighbors have tended to expand and claim the territories of weaker ones, and it is commonly believed that boundary disputes will never disappear.

The concept of boundaries evolved after the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe which was followed by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the emergence of modern Western European states. Boundary lines were still alien terms for nomadic societies of the Middle East at the beginning of the 20th century. These societies were characterized by frequent movement, and their territories could expand and narrow to accommodate transhumance. Middle Eastern tribes maintained real territorial independence by temporal separation or the creation of "no man's lands" between them. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the last few decades all throughout the Middle East territorial disputes have been a direct motive behind conflicts between states. As of 1992 there is still no single Middle Eastern country which has no territorial claims or disputes with at least one of its neighbors. Although many of
the disputes are inactive, the unresolved ones can cause the eruption of conflicts and major wars which may threaten the fragile stability of the region, e.g., in Kuwait during 1990.

The weakening of the Ottoman Empire throughout the 19th century until its collapse in the beginning of the 20th century led to new territorial arrangements in the Middle East between the victorious European powers in the First World War. Britain and France exercised direct and indirect control over most of the area. These colonial powers considered their own interests and placed less weight on geographical and human factors when they partitioned the area and drew the boundaries between the new states. The superimposed boundaries were mostly straight lines through the sand which cut through tribes and peoples who generally share homogeneity and the same historical background and inspiration of unity, e.g., Kurds were split among Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran. Furthermore, the fact that most of the Middle East is desert area and border lines cross these areas adds yet another difficulty in keeping boundaries undisputed. Nothing is permanent in the desert; landforms change through time with the weathering effects of climate (e.g., shifting sand dunes) and there is no permanently settled population in many areas to mark boundary changes. Most of the boundary lines which were allocated and delimited by the colonial powers were never demarcated. This important stage was left to the successor states.

By the end of the 19th century the British Empire, the greatest power on the seas, was a major European country facing the declining Ottoman Empire and playing a major role in the Levant, in Egypt, and
elsewhere. In this period many political boundaries were drawn by the British and other European powers around the world, especially in Africa and Asia. British policy-makers based their experience on elaborate concepts and rules regarding boundary lines.

George Nathaniel Curzon, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, held many positions in the British foreign and colonial offices, served as viceroy in India and was involved in many boundary commissions. In 1907 Curzon gave a lecture at Oxford University titled "Frontiers." From his lecture, which was delivered one year after the 1906 British-Ottoman crisis over the eastern frontier of Egypt, we can learn much about the principles of boundary-drawing in the minds of British policy-makers. These principles were behind the British position in the British-Ottoman confrontation of 1906 (see Chapter 4). Lord Curzon and others highly valued the desert of Sinai as a natural barrier; it is more impassible than the sea and "has retained a physical identity almost unequalled in history" (Curzon, 1907, p. 15).

To support his point, Lord Curzon cited Napoleon's Commentaries. "The greatest captain of modern times" wrote:

Generals who have marched from Egypt to Syria or from Syria to Egypt have in all periods of history considered this desert the greater obstacle the larger the number of horses they took with them. . . . This obstacle, however, was not so great in ancient times as it is to-day, since towns and villages existed, and the industry of man contended with success against the difficulties. To-day scarcely anything remains between Salihiyeh and Gaza. An army must, therefore, cross the desert successively by forming establishments and magazines at Salihiyeh, Katieh, and El Arish. If this army starts from Syria it must first of all form a large magazine at El Arish, and then carry it forward to Katieh. But these operations are slow, and they give an enemy time to make his preparations for defense. . . . An army defending Egypt can either assemble at El Arish to oppose the investment of this place, or at Katieh to raise
the siege of El Arish, or at Salihiyeh: all these alternatives offer advantages. Of all obstacles which may cover the frontiers of empires, a desert like this is incontestably the greatest. Mountains like the Alps take second rank, and rivers the third. If there is so much difficulty in carrying the food of an army that complete success is rarely obtained, this difficulty becomes twenty times greater when it is necessary to carry water, forage, and fuel, three things which are weighty, difficult to carry, and usually found by armies upon the ground they occupy. (Curzon, 1907, p. 16)

The British, having interests in India and Southeast Asia, wanted to continue their control over the Suez Canal, the lifeline of their empire, and the area adjacent to it (see Chapter 3, "Imperial interests..."). The boundary line they imposed was extended about 120 miles east of the Suez Canal to include the Sinai peninsula in order to serve as a buffer zone between the Canal and the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Al-Hijaz. After several attempts to prevent this, the Ottomans were forced in October 1906 to demarcate the boundary line which extended from Rafah to Aqaba (see Chapter 4). After World War I the League of Nations confirmed a British Mandate over Palestine. From that time until 1948, Great Britain controlled both sides of the boundary line, minimizing its importance. The entrance of a new factor to the area, represented by the World Zionist Movement and later by the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, renewed the importance of the boundary.

While there were several attempts to question the legality of the 1906 line and to change it after its demarcation, it remained untouched until 1948. After Israel’s establishment and the several wars between Israel and Egypt which followed, the boundary line passed through various changes.
The importance of the boundary of 1906 between Egypt and Israel rests on the facts that it is the oldest one in the region, that is the political boundary between two continents, and that is virtually the only mutually recognized international boundary Israel has with its Arab neighbors. The process of its creation started out as a "separate administrative line" in 1906 and ended as a de-jure boundary between neighboring countries after the Peace Treaty of 1979.

This thesis will explore the boundary line since its inception in 1841 up until 1992, how it was demarcated between the Ottoman and British empires in 1906, what factors were behind the demarcation of 1906 and the changes made since that time, and how the functions of the boundary line have changed over the years. The study area will include the Sinai Peninsula, from the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Suez, in the west to southern Israel, from Ashqelon on the Mediterranean Sea to the southern point of the Dead Sea, including the Gaza Strip, in the east. This research will not attempt to cover maritime boundaries.

Placenames are rendered in English according to the usage of the 1970 Second (English) Edition of the Atlas of Israel. This is the sole atlas or gazetteer published in English by any Middle Eastern country. Use of this source was the product of some unfortunate Hebraicization of Arabic placenames. However, there does exist some variation in Arabic transliterations (reflecting regional usage), and the Atlas has become an important source for English-speaking cartographers (John Bartholomew & Son, 1985). Variation between the Hebrew and Arabic is not as serious in this edition of The Atlas as in other Israeli sources. In the few instances where places are not listed in this source, usage follows that
of the *Rand McNally Illustrated Atlas of the Middle East*. The gazetteers published by the United States Board on Geographic Names (The National Gazeteers of the United States of America Documents/Maps, 1990) are used as guides to which names are most usefully rendered conventionally, rather than transliterated (e.g., Jerusalem, rather than Al Quds or Yerushlayim). Unfortunately for purposes here, these gazetteers transliterate differently in different state-based volumes (e.g., "shaykh" and "sheikh") and the use of their listings would be confusing here where the controlling state changes.

The maps presented here serve as accompaniments and illustrations for the text. They are much simplified and are not intended for general purposes. In specific instances they generalize or approximate actual geographic features, where such treatment is appropriate to the text and does not substantially distort depiction. Scale is approximate.
CHAPTER 2
THE SINAI PENINSULA

The Physical Geography of Sinai

The Sinai peninsula is triangular in shape, lying between the latitudes of 27° 30. N and 31° 30. N between the continents of Africa and Asia. While the Mediterranean Sea forms a base of the triangle in the north, Ras Muhammad composes its peak in the south. The Sinai peninsula is bordered by the Gulf of Aqaba in the east and the Gulf of Suez in the west. Both of them are connected with the Red Sea in the south (see Figure 1). The peninsula expands to cover an area of over 60,000 km². From north to south it spans a distance of 400 km from Rafah on the Mediterranean Sea to Ras Muhammad on the Red Sea coast; from east to west it spans a distance of 190 km from Rafah to Qantara (Efrat & Orni, 1973. p. 125).

The peninsula is divided into three main regions according to elevation. The southern portion is mountainous and mostly composed of crystalline rocks. This area rises to an elevation of 2,000 m and within it lies the highest point in Sinai, Jabal Kathrina, at 2,637 m (7,911 ft). On one of its slopes is situated the famous St. Catherine Monastery. Not far from that, Moses's Mountain rises to 2,285 m (7,485 ft), which is considered to be the Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The central part of Sinai is called the At-Tih plateau and forms 60% of the total area of the Sinai peninsula. It rises between 400-1,000 m, with a few cases in which there are mountains which exceed this height. The plateau is mainly composed of limestone
Figure 1. Climax Vegetation of Sinai and Adjacent Area.
and dolomite. The third portion of the peninsula contains the northern plain and is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea. Although some hills and mountains rise in this region, it is basically flat with two major hill chains crossing the area from northeast to southwest making communication from east to west difficult. The topographic obstacles give the passes of Gidi and Mitla (see Figure 2) in the southern edges of the plain a strategic advantage (see Chapter 7). The northernmost 20-39 km of the Sinai Mediterranean coast is made up of sand dunes which extend a distance of 230 km east to west (Efrat & Orni, 1973, pp. 123-131).

Climatologically, the Sinai peninsula lies within the subtropical desert zone which extends from the western edges of the Sahara desert to the eastern fringes of the Arabian peninsula. The climate is hot and arid, precipitation being very scarce. Temperatures often peak at 35° C (95° F) in the summer. The summer nights are cold and temperature drops to 15° C (59° F), making a range of 20° C (36° F) which is very typical of desert conditions. Mean annual precipitation is less than four inches and 50% of Sinai receives less than two inches. The desert is generally barren except for a few shrubs and grasses which support nomadic grasses (Atlas of the Middle East, 1979, pp. 19-21).

The harsh climate of the desert can explain the sparse population distribution. The population of Sinai is concentrated around very limited suitable land for agriculture, mainly around the town of El-Arish and on the banks of the El-Arish valley in the northeastern portion of Sinai. Throughout most historical periods, the population of Sinai was mainly nomadic and semi-nomadic. By 1917 only 5,430
inhabitants lived in Sinai. The Egyptian Government estimated that prior to the Six Days War, 130,000 persons lived in Sinai, the majority of them in the northern part of the peninsula. According to an Israeli census conducted in the end of 1967, only 33,441 persons lived in northern Sinai and few thousand others in the rest of the peninsula (Efrat & Orni, 1973, p. 381).

Prior to the 1946 discovery of oil in Sinai, mineral resources were considered very limited. Among the minerals which were later exploited by the Egyptians and the Israelis, between 1967-1978, were manganese, copper, iron, gypsum, and glass sands. Oil was discovered near the town of Suez alongside the Gulf of Suez in 1946. Today the major wells of Sinai are in Ras es-Sudar and Abu Rudeis (see Figure 2). Israel drilled more wells during the early 1970s. Egypt demanded and received the oil fields in the Second Disengagement Agreement of 1975 (see Chapter 7).

Although the road network is presently not well developed, throughout history the Sinai peninsula served as a gateway from east to west between Egypt on one side and Arabia and the Levant on the other. The well-known ancient roads were the Sea Road in the north section of Sinai which connected the Nile civilization with Mesopotamia via Qantara and El-Arish (see Figure 2). The second road is Shur, which today extends between Nizzana (called Auja before 1953) and Ismailiya on the west bank of the Suez Canal. One theory stated that this route was used by Moses and the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt (Efrat & Orni, 1973, p. 369). The third road is Darb El-Haj or the famous Pilgrims' Road. It extends from Suez via the Mitla pass to en Nahl and Aqaba. Prior to the operation of the Suez Canal, Egyptian and North African
Figure 2. Roads in Sinai, 1992.
pilgrims used this route to the holy places in Mecca and Medina.
Moreover, it was used by the Ottoman Turks during their 1915 assault on
the Suez Canal Zone and also by the Israeli military during the 1956 and
1967 wars. The length of the pilgrims route within Sinai is 240 km
(Efrat & Orni, 1973, p. 370). Today, the major routes in the Sinai
peninsula crossing from north to south are from Elat to Sharm esh Sheikh
along the eastern edges of Sinai and from Port Said to Sharm esh Sheikh
in the west. The Egyptian Government heavily invested in the Sinai road
network and there is a plan to connect Sinai with the Saudi Arabian
coast via the Straits of Tiran (Shezif, 1992, pp. 18-19).

The Historical Geography of Sinai

The human history of the Sinai peninsula is very old, dated back
to the kingdoms of ancient Egypt in the third and fourth millennia before
the common era (B.C.E.). This area served as a crossroads between
civilizations, mainly between the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia. The
Hyksos invaded Egypt through Sinai around 1670. The founders of the New
Kingdom of Egypt expelled the Hyksos around 1570 and in turn drove
across the Sinai and conquered Palestine by 1460 Mount Sinai in the
peninsula is known as the place in which Moses received the Ten
Commandments, and the Sinai desert was the wilderness in which Moses led
the Israelite tribe after they were freed from Egyptian captivity.

The armies of other kingdoms and dynasties throughout the first
millenium crossed Sinai to conquer Egypt. This was the case with the
Assyrians in 668. The Persian Cambyses followed in 526. Between the
years 333-323, Alexander the Great marked the birth of the Hellenistic
period in Egypt. Later, the Romans and Byzantines conquered Egypt respectively. The famous Santa Catherine Monastery was built in the Byzantine era. The former Byzantine domain over Egypt ended in the seventh century when Muslim leader Amr ibn El-As crossed Sinai and advanced into Egypt in 640 C.E. Several Muslim dynasties ruled Egypt after that, including the Umayyed and Abbasid Caliphates (640-969). They were followed by the Fatimid from 969-1171, the Ayyubid from 1171-1250, and the Mamluks from 1250-1517 (Haddad & Nijim, 1989, pp. 145-147). Given the period covered in this essay, Ritter's classic 1866 work remains an useful general reference to the ancient geography of the area (Ritter, 1968).

**The Ottoman Administrative Division of Egypt and the Levant**

In 1515 the Turkish military, led by Selim I, advanced into Syria and Palestine, occupying the area in 1515 and 1516. They crossed the Sinai peninsula and conquered Egypt, defeating the Mamluks in 1517. Generally speaking, the Ottomans did not disturb the political arrangements and ethnic composition of the conquered territories; moreover, they did not settle in large numbers within the new territories annexed to their Anatolian base and forming the Ottoman Empire.

The administrative division of the Ottoman Empire followed the pattern set down by the Mamluks. It was divided into vilayets or provinces. The vilayets were subdivided into administrative units called sanjaks or liva, meaning districts, which were further subdivided into kada or counties. There were 26 vilayets in the Ottoman Empire,
five of them in Egypt. The newly occupied territories were governed by an Ottoman viceroy who was sent from Istanbul by the Ottoman Government. While the Ottomans called the governor Vali, the Egyptians called him Pasha. The Vali was in charge of managing the financial, religious, and military activities in his own vilayet. In other areas, the government remained in the hands on Mamluk Beys, under the Vali’s supervision. From the natives the Ottomans demanded loyalty and payment of taxes (Efendi, 1966, p. 4). The title of Vali was distinguished by a Tug, or horse tail. The Sultan of Istanbul had six horse tails, the Valis had three, and the Sanjakbeys had only one tail (Stanford, 1962, p. 9).

By the end of the 19th century, Egypt was divided into 24 sanjaks, most of them concentrated along the Nile River. Only one sanjak (Salihiyeh) was in the Sinai peninsula (Efendi, 1966, pp. 36-37; see Figure 3). Palestine, which at that time was called Southern Syria, was not an administrative division. It was split between the Vilayet of Beirut (the northern section) and the Vilayet of Syria. During the 1870s the importance of the holy places in Jerusalem led the Ottomans to form a new Sanjak of Jerusalem, which was under the direct control of the Sultan of Istanbul. Another sanjak formed was the Sanjak of Lebanon. It was established after the massacre of the Maronite community by the Druze in 1860. In the 1870s, Syria was divided into three vilayets: Beirut, Damascus and Aleppo; Mesopotamia was also divided into three: Basra, Bagdad, and Mosul (Baylson, 1987, pp. 63-65).

Unlike other tributary states and provinces in the Ottoman Empire, Egypt was only loosely connected to the Ottoman central government.
Figure 3. Egypt of the Khedive and Principle Ottoman Sub-Divisions of the Levant in the Early 1880s.
This situation continued until World War I. The Ottomans were challenged as early as the 17th century by the Mamluks, a people of Circassian origin and the descendents of military "slaves" who had been brought to Egypt since the Middle Ages and had ruled Egypt until 1517 (Weigall, 1915, p. 52). Although Egypt continued to pay annual taxes to the Sultan of Istanbul, it was under the Mamluks' practical control. The situation did not bother the Ottomans as long as Egypt paid revenues and participated in the Ottoman army. Holt (1966) provides useful chronologies and geneologies for the period 1516-1922.

**Egypt During the 18th Century**

In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte initiated a military campaign to conquer Egypt. His goal was to interrupt the British communication links to India. After completing his occupation of Egypt, he advanced into Palestine. He crossed Sinai and reached Sidon in southern Lebanon. Napoleon's campaign failed to gain any political advantages for France. However, the British perceived Napoleon as a serious threat to their imperial interests. They were determined to expel the French from Egypt. By 1801 the British occupied Egypt and in 1802 they expelled the French and restored the Mamluk governor to power (Lenczowski, 1980, p. 34).

Mohammed Ali, an Albanian of strong personality, was an officer sent by the Ottomans to Egypt to fight the French. When the French and the British left the country in 1803, he defeated all local competing factions, including the Mamluks, and became viceroy in 1805. Ali strengthened his rule and introduced a new policy of openness towards
Europe. He had friendly relations with the French who trained and equipped his army. By the 1820s, Ali's army was strong enough to carry out several military campaigns against the Wahhabis, Greeks, and Sudanese, and finally to stage an uprising against his suzerian, the Sultan of Istanbul (Perets, 1962, pp. 191-192). The intervention of Britain and other European countries against Mohammed Ali's expansion in 1840 forced him to evacuate Greater Syria, a territory he had occupied in 1831-1832.

The power vacuum left by Ali in Greater Syria and the political circumstances in the Ottoman Empire enhanced British power in the area. Increasingly since their gradual domination of India, the main goal of the British Government was the protection of the trade routes between Europe and India and the maintenance of a complete British naval monopoly in the Indian Ocean. This was true before the creation of the Suez Canal and after. Before, Britain moved to secure two land routes to India. The first was by sea to Alexandria and over land to Suez, then by water from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. Britain planned as early as 1839 to construct a railway from Alexandria to Suez via Cairo, but it failed to carry the plan out until the 1850s for local reasons. The second route was via the northern section of the Syrian desert along the Euphrates and then to the Persian Gulf. During the 19th century, Great Britain occupied several strategic places along the route to India and signed various agreements with several countries. In 1814 Britain made a defensive alliance with Persia. Earlier it guaranteed control over Malta in 1803 and the Ionian Islands in 1809. It signed a treaty with the Trucial States in 1820. The acquisition of Aden in 1839
followed (Baylson, 1987, p. 48). The creation of the Suez Canal in 1869 enhanced the importance of Egypt and the areas adjacent. In 1878 Britain moved to occupy Cyprus (see Figure 3). Then four years later it occupied Egypt itself. Britain controlled the new sea route to India and needed to establish the boundaries of the territory of Egypt in which it ruled. Britain demanded a clear demarcation between Egypt and Ottoman territory through the Sinai.

The Importance of the Boundary and Related Studies

The Egypt-Sinai boundary is of special interest for many scholars. Geographers, lawyers, historians, and political scientists have contributed to its study. The number and diversity of the writers indicates not only the importance of the boundary but the different countries involved. While geographers are interested in the 1906 line as an element affecting the cultural landscape, lawyers are interested in the determination of the limit of the judicial system and the sovereignty of the states adjacent to the boundary line. Historians have analyzed the boundary changes though different periods, and political scientists are interested in the administration of the state in the frontier as well as in the core or the center.

The importance of the boundary line between Egypt and Palestine, and between Egypt and Israel since 1948, is derived first and foremost from its location. This boundary forms the limit of the political boundary between the African and Asian continents. An obvious question is, if the Suez Canal had not been created in the 1870s, whether the continental boundary would be located farther east, e.g., at the Isthmus
of Suez, which seems more natural. A second factor making the boundary important is that it is the oldest modern boundary in the Middle East. Although the boundary has changed for brief periods with opposing armies crossing it several times, it has remained permanent since its delimitation in 1906.

Moreover, the Egypt-Palestine boundary became an international boundary without any signed agreements between the states involved. The boundary was imposed by the British on the Ottoman Empire. It was an administrative line until 1915 when Great Britain unilaterally declared the secession of Egypt from the Ottoman Empire. The Egypt-Israel line became a mutually recognized international boundary de-jure for the first time in 1978 when the two countries, represented by their leaders President Anwar Al-Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, signed the Camp David Agreement under the auspices of the Carter Administration. The fact that the Egypt-Israel boundary line is the only international boundary between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries adds further weight to its significance. Israel still has cease-fire, disengagement and armistice lines with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, respectively.

Literature and resources regarding the boundary line and its development are available, especially in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. The English literature is written mostly by scholars as academic research. One of the most remarkable sources is Palestine Boundaries 1833-1947 edited by P. Toye (1989). This documentary reference is a detailed account of the political activities related to the boundary issue conducted between London and Cairo on one hand, and Istanbul on
the other. Lord Cromer's book *Modern Egypt* (1908) contains detailed memoirs of the British Governor of Egypt during his service there. Other research in English is largely academic and objective, but is limited in scope and to particular periods.

Much of the Israeli and Zionist literature regarding the boundary issue is tendentious. As one might expect, Israeli writers are affected by their national or ethnic interests. Due to the fact that all of the 1948 Israeli boundaries were officially temporary, many Israelis believe that the Jewish State's boundary problem is part of the issue of its very existence. This has made Israeli literature less objective. Moshe Brawer, a leading Israeli expert on the boundary issue, argues in his book *Erets-Israel Boundaries, Past, Present and Future*, that Israeli officials, in the redemarcation of the boundary in 1982, showed ignorance and negligence. He described the arrangement as a new major error (1982, p. 7). More typically, Martin Gilbert, who published *Atlas of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (1974), describes the boundary conflict from a Zionist perspective as a series of Arab penetrations and attacks on Jewish settlement in Palestine (p. 40).

Egyptians generally do not believe the existence of Egypt depends on its exact boundaries or its neighbor's recognition. But similar problems do appear. Treatment often involves emotions and lack of objectivity. Mahmood El-Deeb, in his book *Palestine Boundaries* (1979), claims that the eastern Egyptian boundary runs from Rafah to Aqaba. He extends the boundary to include the east coast of the Gulf of Aqaba and farther south in Saudi Arabian territories (p. 114). Unlike other scholars, he derives this boundary according to the Ottoma Firman of
1841, recognizing Mohammed Ali's relative independence. Moreover, the Taba Conflict and the other disputed points along the boundary became for the Egyptian writers a "national issue." This is true for example in Abdel Hai's book Taba (1991) and Rizik's Taba, the Generation Problem (1989). The amount of literature regarding the Taba Arbitration exceeds the literature otherwise written about the boundary since its establishment. Unfortunately, the peace treaty of 1979 between Egypt and Israel, and the re-demarcation of the boundary, did not make the literature less emotional or more objective.

Rushdi Merlo Pasha, the Turkish officer stationed at Aqaba during the Crisis of 1906, wrote a memoir on the crisis titled Aqaba Affair (1910). He stated that the conflict with Britain was not over a few miles around Taba, but rather over the entire area of Palestine (p. 20). Similar problems for Israelis and Egyptians appear in current literature.

Generally, the wealth of literature does not cover the whole story of the Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary. Not only is it limited in scope and by time period, but also in objectivity and fairness. Much theoretical and comparative literature exists—geographic, legal, historical, philosophical, etc. about the nature and purposes of boundaries. Glassner and de Blig (1989, pp. 134-153) provide an initial bibliography from the geographic perspective. To treat and apply this literature to the Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary will likely be focus for future work. The purpose of this essay is to provide a continuous descriptive account of the Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary
from 1841 to the present. The development of the boundary line and changes in its functions are considered.
CHAPTER 3
THE EGYPT-OTTOMAN BOUNDARY BEFORE 1906

Imperial Interests in the Middle East Before the 1906 Incident

The European powers' interests in the Middle East were connected with routes for shipping and trade with the Far East. The competition between Great Britain and France over India in the 18th century elevated the overall importance of the Middle East, especially Egypt. Even before the creation of the Suez Canal, Egyptian territories were important for European powers as a route for trade with India and the Far East via Suez and the Red Sea. For the British, this route saved 4,500 miles or three months on the voyage from London to Calcutta; while the other route took five months via the Atlantic and Indian Oceans around the Cape, it took just two months via Egypt (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, p. 51).

France had played a major role in Egypt since the occupation staged by Napoleon in 1798. France had a strong relationship with Mohammed Ali, ruler of Egypt 1805-1848. In 1840, France, which trained and equipped Mohammed Ali's army, was the only European power which failed to rush support to the Ottoman Sultan when Ali's army threatened his overthrow. The rivalry over Egypt between France and Great Britain accelerated after the creation of the Suez Canal. While the major investor in the canal, France, had received the concession to build it in 1854, Britain was the major user and benefactor after 1869. The status of Egypt was drastically altered after the British moved in and took control over the Canal Zone. Since it was their lifeline to India,
the British were very careful in their administration so as not to arouse the hostility of the populace and thereby avoid any troubles which would threaten their general interests. The French earlier held influence over Egyptian affairs, but after British domination, Egypt became a vital link in Indian trade. The Anglo-French rivalry over the status of Egypt marked the two European powers' relations for more than a century and finally ended in 1904 when the two countries settled this divisive colonial conflict in the Entente Cordiale of April 1904. According to the agreement, France gave up in her quest for Egypt and accepted the de facto British occupation; in return, Great Britain accepted French dominance over Morroco (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, p. 51).

Another factor which complicated the geopolitics of the Middle East in the late 19th century and the early years of the 20th century was the rise of a unified Germany. The German Empire shared a close relationship with the Ottomans. Their economic activities were enhanced when in 1893 the Ottoman Sultan granted a concession to a German company to build a railway from Istanbul to the Persian Gulf through Baghdad (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, p. 55). German economic and military aid to the Ottomans strengthened the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. According to Warburg, the German ambassador in Istanbul was behind the suggestion of the omission of Sinai from an 1892 investiture firman of the Khedive¹ (Warburg, 1979, p. 681). The German strategy under Bismark was to play off the British against the Ottomans so as not to give the British any strategic advantages in the
region, e.g. control over Sinai. Heyd (1963) suggests that the British-Ottoman crisis of 1906 was part of the Anglo-German competition over economic interests and hegemony in the Ottoman Empire (p. 201).

The concession which was given to the German company upset the British who claimed hegemony over the Middle East and were concerned by the German advances in the region. One of the most important sections in the Istanbul-Gulf railway was the section which was planned by Germany to Basra and the Persian Gulf (see Figure 4). The competition over this section would give the Germans very important strategic access to the Persian Gulf which the British viewed as a threat to their route to India due to its geographic proximity. The British wanted to thwart any possible German intrusions into the region before they ever got off the ground. To foil the German plan, the British reached an agreement with Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait. In response, the Ottomans and the Germans incited Ibn Rashead, the tribal leader of central Arabia, against the Kuwaiti sheikh. But Ibn Rashead and the Ottoman troops who rushed to join him were defeated in 1904 by Abid El-Aziz Bin Saud, who came to support the Kuwaiti sheikh. With this stunning success of a

Khedive or viceroy, a title of Persian origin given by the Ottoman Sultan to Ismail Pasha, the grandson of Mohammed Ali, in 1870. Ismail was not satisfied with being a nominal ruler and wanted the Sultan to greatly expand his authorities so he could make treaties and establish diplomatic relations with European powers. He requested to be called Aziz or Almighty. The Sultan refused and gave him the title of Khedive, which is less pretentious than Aziz (Weigall, 1915, p. 91). The title was used by other Egyptian rulers until 1914.
Figure 4. Railways in the Ottoman Empire, 1918.
British foreign policy initiative in the region, the strategic Persian Gulf coastal area of Kuwait fell under British control and influence, thereby thwarting German ambitions and ending plans for the railway (Heyd, 1963, p. 202).

The fate of the Damascus-Al-Hijaz railway proposals was similar (see Figure 4). The Sultan had hoped that the construction of the railway would improve his position in the Islamic world and ease the burden of pilgrims to Mecca. The project started in 1900 and by the end of 1904 it reached a point, just 100 km east of Aqaba. The Ottomans planned to link Aqaba with the project, which would free them from reliance upon the British-controlled Suez Canal. The British foreign office was very concerned with the possibility of the Ottomans constructing a branch to Aqaba. According to the British command in Egypt, such a project would threaten the sea route to India and the Far East and enhance Egyptian vulnerability (Khalidi, 1980, p. 21).

The Ottomans, who perceived the British occupation of Egypt as only temporary and the delimitation of an El-Arish-Aqaba line as only an administrative one, did not abandon their claims over Egypt. A possible confrontation with the British over Sinai would enhance the Sultan's position in the minds of the Egyptian population. Moreover, the political situation in Egypt was extremely volatile. The nationalist movement in Egypt led by Mustafa Kamil El-Rifai was very powerful and supported the Sultan against the British. The victory of Japan over Russia in 1904-05 increased the confidence of the Egyptian population in confronting a European power (Warburg, 1979, p. 692).
The Egypt-Ottoman Rivalry over the Eastern Egyptian Frontier

Since the occupation of Egypt and Syria by the Ottoman Turks, the Sinai peninsula had been the administrative boundary between the province of Egypt and the province of Syria (see Figure 3). The Sinai, a harsh desert sparsely populated by Bedouin tribes, captured little Ottoman administrative attention. While the provinces of Egypt and Syria paid annual taxes to the Sultan in Istanbul, the Bedouin tribes received an annual sum of money for allowing Islamic pilgrims to pass safely through the desert to Mecca and Medina with their protection (Stanford, 1962, p. 27).

The eastern Egyptian frontier took shape for the first time after the occupation of Syria by the forces of Ibrahim Pasha during the 1830s. Ibrahim Pasha, general and son of Mohammed Ali who led an earlier Egyptian revolt against the Ottomans, was threatening the Sultan's overthrow. By 1833 he reached as close as 100 km to Istanbul, and for the following eight years (1833-1841) Egyptian forces exercised control over the area from the Nile Valley to the Taurus Mountains in southern Anatolia (Biger, 1978, p. 323).

In 1840, the European powers of Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Russia and Great Britain intervened to protect the Ottoman throne and halt Ali's ambitions. They regarded him as a threat to the peace of Europe in general and their overseas interests in particular. As a result, Ali's troops were forced to vacate their occupied Ottoman territories. In compensation, Sultan Mahmud II with consent of the European powers, issued an imperial edict (firman) to Mohammed Ali allowing him and his heirs control of Egypt (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xiv).
Egypt's effective independence had been recognized internationally in the 1840 Treaty of London (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 59). The Firman of 1841 recognized Egypt's status and regularized it within the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the Firman of 1841 and later firmans (e.g., 1866, 1869, 1872, 1873, and 1892) had quasi-constitutional status for Egypt (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 60). They recognized or regularized the Egyptian succession, form of government, treaty and borrowing powers, etc. The Firman of 1892 will be seen to be especially important in the Egyptian-Palestine boundary.

Contained in the firman was a map showing the extent of control for Ali and his successors. This was the first map to indicate the eastern frontier in the formation of a sovereign Egypt (see Figure 5). According to the accompanying map, the boundary ran from a point just east of Rafah (between Rafah and Khan Yunis) on the Mediterranean to Suez, giving Egypt control over only the northwest portion of the Sinai peninsula (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xiv). There is a widely held belief that the only two copies of the 1841 map were lost forever (Biger, 1978, p. 325; Mitwali, 1989, p. 11). The map deprived Egypt of the rest of Sinai and of Al-Muwaylih, Ziba and Al-Wajh, areas along the east coast of the Gulf of Aqaba in the pilgrimage route to Mecca. These areas had been garrisoned by Egyptian troops to protect the pilgrimage routes before the Firman of 1841 (Mitwali, 1989, p. 46; see Figure 3). Ali and his successor, who did not accept the new line, continued to control these forts along the pilgrims' route for several decades.

The importance of Egypt and its eastern frontier escalated during the 1850s and 1860s, accompanied with an increasing rivalry between
Figure 5. The Ottoman-Egyptian Border Disputes, 1841-1906.
France and Great Britain over Egypt. While the British sponsored the building of railroads between Alexandria to Suez through Cairo, French engineers planned to create a canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea for international shipping (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xii). In 1854, Ferdinand de Lesseps, a former French consul in Egypt, received permission from Egyptian Vali/Pasha Said to establish a company to finance the creation of the Suez Canal (Vatikiotis, 1991, pp 85-88).

During the 1870s the Egyptian economic situation became worse, arguably due to a combination of corruption, mismanagement, and bad investments in the canal and other projects. By 1876, the public debt had reached £94 million and Egyptian Treasury Bills were suspended. Britain purchased Egypt's shares in the canal. Egypt experienced severe financial distress, and during the year 1880, unrest in the Egyptian army led to a popular uprising, and Egypt was threatened with a state of anarchy (Chirol, 1921, p. 38).

The British were concerned about the future of the Suez Canal, since the shipping route was the lifeline of the British Empire. This became especially so after the revolt of Ahmad Urabi, the Egyptian nationalist officer who opposed the intrusion of foreign powers. Urabi, a member of a fellah peasant family, served at the Palace of Cairo in 1863. He was dismissed by Khedive Ismail for insurgent activities and became a leading figure in dissent against the Khedive and his policies. He utilized dissatisfaction among army officers to his advantage and incited the officer corps against Khedive Ismail and then his son Khedive Tawfiq. In 1882, Egypt was in a state of anarchy and Khedive Tawfiq fled to European protection in Alexandria. In an
attempt to resist the nationalist movement, the British sought to restore the Khedive’s authority and to induce reforms (Mansfield, 1972, pp. 42-50).

In 1882, Great Britain occupied Egypt. According to Lord Cromer (1908), the purpose for the occupation was to restore law and order and to balance the Egyptian budget. Urabi, who fought against the British, was defeated and deported from Egypt (p. 328). Great Britain, which soon controlled Egypt at all levels except the lowest, came to face a growing nationalist movement opposing the occupation. In the late 1880s the situation in Egypt was far from Cromer’s attitude that the Egyptian masses were "supposed to be, or at least ought to have been, grateful for British reforms" (Cromer, 1908, pp. 193-94). In the mind of Cromer, the British were there to save Egypt from utter chaos and the ruin of anarchy, and an uprising was not the proper way for the Egyptian populace to welcome their British saviors.

The protection of the eastern frontier was one of Lord Cromer’s top priorities because the British were afraid that the Ottomans might try to exploit the situation and intervene. During the crisis of 1841, Britain had supported the Ottoman Sultan in retracting the Egyptian frontier farther west from Syria because of French influence in Ali’s Egypt. In 1882 the situation was reversed. Egypt had come under British occupation, and the British wished to push Egyptian territory farther east.

In 1892, when Khedive Tawfiq died, Sultan Abdulhamid issued a Firman of Investiture for the enthronement of Khedive Abbas II Hilmi. The Firman failed to mention Sinai and the Egyptian forts on the eastern
coast of the Red Sea as being subject to the new Khedive (Kishtainy, 1970, p. 17; Hurewitz, 1989, p. xiv). During the 1880s, the Ottomans occupied the Egyptian forts on the eastern coast of the Red Sea (see Figure 3). By this time, Egyptian and North African Muslim pilgrims had started to use the Suez Canal as a route to Mecca and no longer needed protection along the risky overland route.

The Sultan in Istanbul, by his new firman of investiture, tried to restore his influence in Egypt, the most important province in the Ottoman Empire, because Egypt was the wealthiest territory in the region, bringing in the largest revenues and holding a strategic location on the pilgrimage route to Mecca as well as for military purposes. He tried to turn the clock back to the line determined in the Firman of 1841. According to that boundary, the Ottomans controlled 3-4 km along the southern end of the canal on the eastern bank (Brawer, 1972, p. 5). The Ottomans valued such a claim along the Suez Canal because they valued the maritime route for troop movements to guard the holy places in Mecca and Medina, and for better connection with their vassal states along the Red Sea coast and in the Gulf.

Lord Cromer, who was carefully watching Ottoman activities regarding the eastern frontier, protested to Istanbul the omission of Sinai as a part of the Khedive's governorship. He delayed the ceremony of the enthronement of the new Khedive and demanded a new firman. The firman crisis was settled by the Grand Vizir (the Ottoman prime minister), who sent a telegram to the Khedive of Egypt recognizing his rule over the Sinai peninsula, stating: "The status quo is maintained in the same manner as it was administered at the time of your
grandfather. . . and of your father. . ." (Toye, 1989, p. 59). Lord Cromer wrote to Tigrane Pasha, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs, accepting the offer as "bounded to the east by a line running in a southeasterly direction from a point a short distance to the east of El-Arish to the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, just west of Aqaba itself" (Toye, 1989, p. 59) (see Figure 2). Cromer's letter was published in an official gazette and the Sultan did not formally take objection. In view of later developments, it is useful to note that Cromer's description uses El-Arish, rather than Rafah and Kan Yunis, to mark the northern terminus of the line.

Meanwhile, the Ottomans annexed Aqaba and the Egyptian forts along the east coast of the Red Sea to the Vilayet of Al-Hijaz (Kishtainy, 1970, p. 17). In his memoirs, Cromer mentions he believes that the Sultan's uncertainty and suspicion regarding Jewish settlement near Aqaba also underlay the crisis (1908, pp. 268-69).

Although Egypt lost Aqaba and its forts along the pilgrimage route, for the first time it received Ottoman recognition of an eastern boundary which included the whole Sinai peninsula. The British were satisfied because they had achieved their strategic goal of keeping the Sinai peninsula as a "natural" barrier for the defense of the Suez Canal (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xvii). This set the stage for the delimitation of the Egyptian-Ottoman boundary (Rizik, 1989, p. 46; Brawer, 1972, p. 5).
CHAPTER 4

THE EGYPT-OTTOMAN BOUNDARY, 1906-1918

The Aqaba Incident of 1906

The 1892 description of the frontier between Egypt and the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Al-Hijaz stood for 14 years. During this period the Ottomans remained in silent disagreement with the British over two critical points regarding the frontier. First, the fact that the Sinai peninsula was part of the territory in which the Khedive exercised his control did not, according to the Ottoman position, make the area an integral part of Egypt. The Ottomans considered Sinai separate from the Egyptian privileged territories described in the investiture Firman of 1892. Second, the tactical acceptance of the 1892 boundary line by the Sultan had never been formally recognized by the Ottoman government (Hurewitz, 1989, xii).

The importance of the Egyptian eastern frontier brought Lord Cromer to assign Jennings Bramly as British frontier administration officer in Sinai. The Egyptian government allocated 5,000 Egyptian pounds in 1905 for the development of Sinai (Mitwali, 1989, p. 71). Bramly arrived at en-Nahl 120 km east of the town of Suez, where he established his headquarters. Meanwhile, he headed to the frontier area and began constructing military outposts. Bramly negotiated with local Turkish officers over the exact location of the boundary: he claimed that Quseima, Kuntilla and the eastern area alongside the Aqaba-Gaza road were Egyptian territories (Kliot, 1987, p. 55; see Figure 6).
Figure 6. The Bramly's Proposal for the Boundary Line, 1906.

Based on: (Brawer, 1970).
British activity in the frontier area upset Ottoman authorities in Istanbul. When some Egyptian newspapers opposed to the British occupation exaggerated reports of the frontier issues, the Ottomans initiated a response. The Ottoman authorities asked Egypt to withdraw troops from the frontier, and they ordered the Turkish officer in Aqaba to establish Ottoman military posts in Quseima and Kuntilla (Mitwali, 1989, p. 72). In January 1906, Bramly and five Egyptian soldiers arrived at Umm-Rashrash (the site of the later Israeli Elat), five km west of Aqaba, and stationed themselves there awaiting additional orders (see Figure 7). Rushdi Pasha, the Turkish officer in Aqaba during the crisis, gave an account of the incident which followed in a detailed book published in 1910 titled Agaba Affair. In this book he reveals how he met with Bramly at Umm-Rashrash and ordered him to vacate the area because it belonged to the Ottoman Empire. He suggested trying to solve the problem between Cairo and Istanbul (p. 7). A few days later Bramly left Umm-Rashrash for Suez with a letter from the Turkish officer confirming that Umm-Rashrash belonged to the Ottoman administrative province of Al-Hijaz.

With the absence of Bramly, Rushdi decided to establish a military post in Umm-Rashrash. His goal was to prevent further British expansion and to protect Wadi Araba (which extends from the southern end of the Dead Sea to Aqaha), especially after Bramly's claim that Wadi Araba belonged to Egypt (Rushdi, 1910, p. 20). A wadi is a "desert watercourse which is usually dry, and contains water only occasionally, after a heavy rainfall" (Moore, 1974, p. 236). The term is often used to refer to the entirety of the depression (i.e. from ridge to ridge)
Figure 7. Taba Area.
carried out by the watercourse. The wadi can be long enough (here from the Dead Sea to Aqaba), wide enough, and have ridges high enough to be important both in transportation and militarily.

In addition to Umm Rashrash, Rushdi occupied Taba with Ottoman troops. Taba was then a small village located a few miles to the south of Umm-Rashrash on the Red Sea coast. The Egyptian government sent a military unit to verify the Ottoman occupation of Taba. Rushdi refused to speak with the Egyptian officer regarding the Ottoman presence at Taba. On January 22, 1906, an Egyptian naval vessel, Nur al-Bahr, arrived on the western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba near Taba. Rushdi, who had approximately 3,000 Ottoman troops stationed in the area, prepared forcefully to prevent the vessel from anchoring (Rushdi, 1910, p. 25). When the Egyptian soldiers tried to reach Taba by boat, the Ottomans threatened to open fire on them. The British-Egyptian naval vessel had no choice but to anchor off Faroun Island, just two miles from Taba. There the British captain waited for new orders (see Figure 7).

Bramly was ordered back to the disputed area in an attempt to solve the problem. He questioned Sudqi Efendi, the Ottoman officer in Taba, regarding his prevention of Egyptian troops from landing in Taba. Bramly threatened, in case of the continuation of the situation, to bring additional vessels with more troops. Bramly met also with Rushdi Pasha, in overall Ottoman command at Aqaba, and demanded the right to anchor at Taba and to put 50 Egyptian troops ashore in Taba and Aqaba. Bramly’s demands followed the order of the Khedive’s government in Cairo. In response, Rushdi read the telegram he had received from
Istanbul. He was ordered to use all measures necessary to prevent Egyptian troops from being stationed in Taba (Rushdi, 1910, p. 27).

Meanwhile, the Egyptian troops stationed at Faroun Island awaited new orders. The British captain chose Faroun Island for several reasons:

1. The island, being only two miles from Taba and several miles from Aqaba, was a useful site for monitoring Ottoman troop movements in the area.
2. The island was uninhabited.
3. While the British had powerful naval forces, the Ottomans depended on infantry and had no naval vessels in the Gulf.
4. The Ottomans had never claimed the island before and the island was not mentioned in the Firman of 1892 (Mitwali, 1989. p. 74).

In the weeks that followed, diplomatic efforts alternated between Cairo and Istanbul. In the frontier area, both sides attempted to avoid a confrontation between Ottoman and British military. Bramly asked Rushdi to inform his government that London was interested in the demarcation of the boundary by a joint Ottoman-Egyptian commission. The Sultan in Istanbul postponed a response to Rushdi's telegram. Meanwhile, Bramly waited at Faroun Island for a reply from the Turkish officer. The simple reason for the delay was the unwillingness of Istanbul to demarcate a boundary because Egypt was considered to be at least in the Ottoman sphere of influence even if not a fully subject part of the Ottoman Empire. This situation increased the likelihood of a possible confrontation on the frontier.
The British, who were determined to restore Taba to Egypt and to demarcate the boundary, sent additional forces to the area. Another British naval vessel, the Diana, arrived at Farun Island. The British, who formerly had left formal negotiations to the Khedive and the Sultan, now officially asked the Sultan to withdraw Ottoman troops from Taba and to demarcate the boundary. The Sultan refused, stating that there was no argument over the boundary (Warburg, 1979, p. 680). With the arrival of the Diana, the number of British and Egyptian troops reached 700 (Rushdi, 1910, p. 46). An angry Ottoman telegram sent to the Khedive on February 22, 1906, demanded the complete withdrawal of the vessels and the troops from the area.

The British turned to active diplomacy backed by the threat of using force. The British embassy in Istanbul was the core of this activity. In addition, the British increased their military forces and naval vessels in Egypt. To convince the Ottomans of their determination, the British enhanced their naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea. After the British threat, the Ottomans softened their position. This attitude was obvious in the new orders sent to Rushdi. He was requested to use all means necessary to prevent a confrontation with the British. The Ottomans agreed to send a delegation to the border to survey the area in order to determine whether it belonged to Egypt or the Ottomans (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xiii).

The Ottoman officers who were assigned to carry out this mission, however, postponed their arrival in the border area. During the second half of March and into April 1906, the Egyptian authorities tried unsuccessfully to find the Ottoman delegation. Rushdi claimed that he
did not know their whereabouts or their authority. Meanwhile, Egyptian authorities tried to convince Rushdi to leave Taba and refused to withdraw Egyptian forces from Faroun Island (Rushdi, 1910, p. 62).

The British government became concerned about the behavior of the Ottoman survey delegation. The British ambassador in Istanbul protested and demanded the withdrawal of Ottoman troops from Egyptian territories. The Ottoman response was they would not withdraw until the delegation made a report. The British then decided to put more pressure on the Sultan, informing Istanbul that they were going to send more naval vessels to Aqaba (Toye, 1989, p. 179). The Ottomans then moved to cooperate with the Egyptians. On April 2, they informed the British that, according to the delegation’s report, the disputed area was located within Ottoman territories. They were not willing to negotiate with Britain over the Egyptian border and instead were only willing to negotiate with Egypt directly (Toye, 1989, p. 190).

During the month of April, Istanbul and Cairo exchanged many telegrams regarding the border issue. The Ottoman position was the following:

1. Egypt’s eastern border is a straight line from El-Arish to Suez, according to the Firman of 1841. The Sinai territories given to Egypt in 1892 were a trust.

2. Egypt’s population is an integral part of the Ottoman Empire.

3. The Egyptian military forces are part of the Ottoman forces.

4. Egypt does not have the right to establish diplomatic ties with foreign countries.
5. Great Britain does not have the right to be in the Taba area. Only the Egyptian Khedive may be involved in this issue (Mitwali, 1989, pp. 135-42).

The Egyptian Khedive, backed by Lord Cromer, strongly opposed Istanbul's position. He demanded the demarcation of the border according to the Firman of 1892, and the joint letter of the Grand Vizir which confirmed that the Egypt-Ottoman boundary was a line extending from Rafah to Aqaba. London perceived Istanbul's position as a violation of the 1892 understanding. The government decided to put more pressure on the Ottomans by rallying the European powers and threatening the use of force.

In facing the British threat, the Sultan tended to compromise. He suggested dividing the Sinai peninsula. He offered the Khedive control of, without claim of privilege, all of Sinai except the triangular area located between El-Arish, Suez and Aqaba (see Figure 5). Egypt refused to accept the offer and demanded Rafah-Aqaba as a separation line. The Sultan of Istanbul proposed an alternative partition which would extend straight from El-Arish in the north to Ras Muhammad on the southern tip of the peninsula (see Figure 5). The fate of the second proposal was as the first (Heyd, 1963, p. 199; Hurewitz, 1989, p. xv).

Lord Cromer's position was to push the Ottomans to the east as far as possible. Both Ottoman suggestions on partitioning the Sinai peninsula contained a big threat to the Suez Canal. Cromer believed that the Germans were encouraging the Ottomans in their confrontation with the British (Toye, 1989, p. 207). Ottoman plans to construct a branch of the Damascus-Al-Hijaz railway to reach Aqaba would not only
threaten the Suez Canal, but also disrupt possible British construction of a railway from Cairo to the Persian Gulf via Aqaba (Heyd, 1963, p. 202).

Britain moved to put an end to the tug of war with the Ottoman Empire after a provocative incident which took place on April 28, 1906, at Rafah. An Ottoman army unit occupied Rafah and pulled out two old telegraph poles which had been emplaced as pillars marking border points between Egypt and Palestine since 1898. On May 3 Great Britain, supported by France and Russia, issued an ultimatum to the Ottoman Sultan to vacate Taba and agree to the demarcation of the Rafah-Aqaba line within 10 days. If the Sultan failed to comply with the demands, the British government would use force and "the situation will be grave" (Hurewitz, 1989, p. xvi). To prove its determination, British naval vessels were sent to Greek waters at Piraeus and ordered to be ready to occupy two small Ottoman islands in the Agean sea, Liminos and Mytilene, and to stop all Ottoman ships in the Mediterranean (Bloomfield, 1957, p. 122).

The Sultan's response after the British actions in the Aegean Sea was immediate. He sent a letter to the British ambassador in Istanbul confirming that the Ottomans would respect the understanding of 1892 and that they no longer had any claims in the west of the Gulf of Aqaba. British Ambassador O'Connor responded that the Sultan should take steps to confirm that by vacating Taba and demarcating the boundary (Toye, 1989, p. 407). The Sultan suggested a proposal to solve the crisis containing the following points:
1. The British would give recognition to the Sultan's sovereignty over Egypt.

2. The Sultan would give confirmation of all the firmans regarding Egypt.

3. The Sultan would give agreement to defend Egypt and the Suez Canal on the side of Britain in the case of threat.

Moreover, Istanbul suggested that both sides vacate the Taba area and assign a joint Ottoman-British commission to demarcate the boundary. British officials rejected the Sultan's proposal and demanded unconditional compliance with the British ultimatum (Toye, 1989, pp. 465-66). Two days before the deadline, the Ottomans agreed to vacate Taba and to discuss the demarcation of the boundary between Egyptian and Ottoman officers (Rushdi, 1910, p. 83). Lord Cromer achieved another compromise from the Sultan. While the Firman of 1892 and the letter from the Grand Vazir mentioned the boundary as a line running from El-Arish to Aqaba, the British demanded a line running from Rafah 25 miles to the east of El-Arish to at least three miles west of Aqaba. By agreement, the boundary line was termed a Khat Fasil Idarih, i.e., an "administrative separating line".

At the end of May, the British-Egyptian delegation to the talks on the demarcation of the boundary arrived in Aqaba. Owen, the chief of security intelligence, and the Egyptian minister, Ibrahim Pasha Fathi, joined by two British engineers met with the Ottoman representatives, including two Ottoman officers stationed in the border area, Phahmi Mohammad and Mozaphar Ahmad.
The British and Ottoman Suggestions for the Demarcation

The joint commissioners on the boundary demarcation were in disagreement from the beginning. Their argument was over the exact location of the starting point of the administrative line three miles west of Aqaba. While the British-Egyptian delegation demanded measuring the three miles on the ground, the Ottomans were in favor of more precise measurement from the air as opposed to less accurate ground measurements (Rushdi, 1910, p. 103). Although the joint commission worked together alongside the border from Aqaba until they reached Rafah on June 28, they drew separate lines and came up with conflicting suggestions.

The Ottomans suggested a line which deviated in order to take into consideration the Aqaba-Gaza road and centers alongside the road which should be within Ottoman territories. They started the administrative separating line from Ras Taba on the Red Sea coast (i.e. from Taba Cape, on the Gulf of Aqaba) crossing the top of the hills reaching El-Mafirak, and from there followed the Aqaba-Gaza road to the top of Ahekiba mountain where they turned to the northwest to Bir-Ajrod. The line continued following the Aqaba-Gaza road until it reached the important centers of Quseima and El-Muweisilah and included them within Ottoman territories. It passed El-Rwafah in El-Arish Wadi, following the wadi until it reached El-Makdabah. From there the tribal limits of Syarkah and Tarabin served as the line until reaching Rafah (see Figure 8).

The British-Egyptian delegation, joined by two British engineers, Keeling and Wade, drew a guideline extending straight from Umm-Rashrash 3¾ miles west of Aqaba to Rafah. Ras en Naqb was the first point it
Figure 8. Ottoman and Egyptian Proposals for the Demarcation of the Rafah-Aqaba Line, 1906.

Based on: (Mitwali, 1989).
reached. Faced with topographic obstacles, they turned to the northeast and followed a straight line until they reached Rafah at 29° 36' N latitude and 35° 52' 8" E longitude. The line was straight and deviated only as the topography dictated in the Jebel Kharuf/Jebel Arif en-Naqa area and in the Ras en Naqb-Gulf of Aqaba section (Mitwali, 1989, pp. 225-26; see Figure 8).

The two delegations discussed the different proposals but failed to agree on one line. Both delegations informed their governments of their respective lines and arguments. At this point, the decision became one to be made at the highest levels. Both governments reconciled their differences and on September 13, 1906, sent telegrams regarding their agreement to the joint commission. The agreement reached was based on four principles.

1. The area along the coast of the gulf between Ras Taba and El-Mafraf to the east should belong to Aqaba (Ottomans). El-Mafraf itself and the area between Ain Kadies and Quseima, including Ain-Gedeirat, would belong to Sinai (Egypt). The line between Mafraf and Rafah should be very close to a straight line, as suggested by the Egyptian delegation.

2. Pillars should be constructed along the line by the joint commission.

3. The boundary was agreed to be subject to transhumance. Bedouin tribes living on both sides of the line would have the right to make use of water resources on the western (Egyptian) side of the line; moreover, Ottoman soldiers and gendarmes could do so as well.
4. The Bedouin tribes should continue living on their own lands and using water sources as before the demarcation (Mitwali, 1989, p. 242).

The joint commission then redrew the line based on the four principles mentioned above and on October 1, 1906, both parties signed the agreement.

The Demarcation Agreement of 1906

The demarcation agreement was written in two copies in Turkish, the official language of communication between Cairo and Istanbul. In addition, the two parties agreed to translate the agreement into English and Arabic. It should be pointed out that only Turkish copies and the joint map were signed by both parties. The agreement was titled, "Agreement signed and exchanged at Rafah on October 1, 1906, between the Commissioners of the Turkish Sultanate and Commissioners of the Egyptian Khedive concerning the fixing of a separate administrative line between the villayet of Hijaz and Governorate of Jerusalem and the Sinai peninsula" (Mitwali, 1989, p. 244).

The agreement mentioned in the beginning the names of the representatives of both parties and their titles. It included eight articles. It will be useful to have the text of the first article.

The Separating Line, as shown on map attached to this Agreement, begins as Ras Taba on the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and extends to the summit of the mountain lying east of and overlooking Wadi Taba, and from the summit of Jebel Fort the Separating Line extends by straight lines as follows:

From Jebel Fort to a point not exceeding two hundred metres to the east of the summit of Jebel Fathi Pasha, thence to that point which is formed by the intersection of
a prolongation of this line with a perpendicular line drawn from a point two hundred metres measured from the summit of JEBEL FATHI PASHA along the line drawn from the centre of the summit of that hill to MOFRAK POINT (THE mofrak is the junction of the GAZA-AKABA and NEKHL-AKABA roads). From this point of intersection to the hill east of and overlooking THAMILET EL RADADI-place where there is no water--so that the THAMILA (or water) remains west of the LINE, thence to the summit of RAS RADADI marked on the above mentioned map as A. 3., thence to summit of JEBEL SAFRA marked as A. 4., thence to summit of eastern peak of UM GUF marked as A. 5., thence to that point marked as A. 7. north of THAMILET SUEILMA thence to that point marked as A. 8. on the west-north-west of JEBEL SUMAUI, thence to summit of hill west-north-west of BIR MAGHARA (which is the well in the Northern branch of the WADI MA YEIN, leaving that well east of the SEPARATING LINE), thence to A. 9., thence to A. 9. bix west of JEBEL MEGRAH, thence to RAS EL AIN marked as A. 10. bis, from thence to a point on JEBEL UM HAWAWIT marked as A. 11., from thence to half distance between two stone pillars (which pillars are marked as A. 13.) under a tree hundred and ninety metres south-west of BIR RAFAH, it then runs in a straight line at a bearing of 280° of the magnetic north (viz., 80° to the west) to a point on a sand hill measured four hundred and twenty metres in a straight line from the above mentioned pillars, thence in a straight line at a bearing of 334° of the magnetic north (viz., 26° to the west) to the MEDITERRANEAN SEA passing by hill of ruins on the SEA SHORE. (Mitwali, 1989, pp. 245-246)

Article II described how the line was drawn on the annexed map and confirmed that both sides had signed the map. Article III dealt with intervisibility between pillars. Article IV stated that both parties were to protect the pillars. Article V mentioned that in case a need to renew the pillars, both parties should send representatives to accomplish the renewal. Article VI confirmed that it was the right of all tribes, Ottoman soldiers, and gendarmes to use the water resources as it was before the demarcation. Article VII confirmed the right of Bedouin tribes to continue to own waterwheels and land as before 1906 (Rizik, 1989, pp. 366-67).
Demarcation on the Ground

The process of demarcating the line contained two stages: (a) surveying the topographical features of the area, and (b) construction of the pillars. In the first stage, the joint commission surveyed and mapped an 8 km strip alongside the line from the Gulf of Aqaba to Rafah on the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, they placed guiding stations, each based on astronomical observations of latitude and longitude. It should be pointed out that points 1, 9 and 10, for topographic reasons, did not keep to the principle of intervisibility, i.e., each pillar could not be seen from those adjacent to it from both vantage points. In order to guarantee functional intervisibility, the joint commission marked 1, 9 and 10 bisects (El-Deeb, 1979, pp. 134-36). According to the demarcation, the administrative separation line started on 29° 29' 16" N latitude on Ras Taba on the Gulf coast and ended on 31° 17' 46" N latitude on the Mediterranean beside Rafah. The line approximately follows 34° E longitude. Its starting point at Taba is 34° 55' 9" E and its ending point at Taba is 34° 14' 20" E. The 14 stations and their locations are found on Table 1.

The second stage of the demarcation was the construction of pillars along the extension of the line. The joint commission started this time from Rafah and moved to Taba. They built telegraph pillars every 1-2.5 km keeping the principle of intervisibility. The first pillar at Rafah was marked No. 1 and the last one was No. 91 at the top of Ras Taba. The base of the pillars stood 2.5 meters high. Pillars were constructed in the shape of a pyramid with its top sheared off and with an iron pole coming out of the top. The overall placement was in straight lines
Table 1

Demarcation on the Ground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Latitude North</th>
<th>Longitude East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>on the Gulf sea shore at Taba</td>
<td>25° 29' 16&quot;</td>
<td>34° 55' 9&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bis.</td>
<td>on Ras Taba</td>
<td>29° 29' 12.4</td>
<td>34° 55' 5&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alm Afrak</td>
<td>29° 31' 52&quot;</td>
<td>35° 00' 39&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ras el Raddadi</td>
<td>29° 38' 31&quot;</td>
<td>34° 53' 42&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Top of Jabal Safra</td>
<td>29° 41' 09&quot;</td>
<td>34° 52' 24&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jabal Om-Guf</td>
<td>29° 45' 29.2&quot;</td>
<td>34° 51' 55&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ras el Geradi</td>
<td>29° 53' 53&quot;</td>
<td>34° 50' 08&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>on a hill between Thamilat and Suielma</td>
<td>30° 06' 58&quot;</td>
<td>34° 42' 45&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>on the top of the hill northwest of Jabal Samawi</td>
<td>30° 22' 14&quot;</td>
<td>34° 37' 02&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jabal Kharuf</td>
<td>30° 29' 39&quot;</td>
<td>34° 33' 48&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 bis.</td>
<td>Jabal Kharuf</td>
<td>30° 31' 39.8&quot;</td>
<td>34° 31' 44&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ras el Ain/Gederat</td>
<td>30° 39' 03&quot;</td>
<td>34° 26' 08&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 bis.</td>
<td>Ras el Ain</td>
<td>30° 39' 34&quot;</td>
<td>34° 29' 52&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jabal Om Hawawit</td>
<td>30° 51' 37&quot;</td>
<td>34° 25' 46&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Khashm el-Garn</td>
<td>30° 57' 42&quot;</td>
<td>34° 25' 01&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>80 meters south of Rafah</td>
<td>31° 17' 46&quot;</td>
<td>34° 14' 20&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tal el-Kharayib on the Mediterranean coast</td>
<td>31° 17' 48.9&quot;</td>
<td>34° 14' 20&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (El-Deeb, 1979, p. 136).
connecting with each other forming a geometric boundary for the extension of 210 km (El-Deeb, 1979, pp. 137-38). It is of unique interest to note that, in spite of agreements and demarcation, the memoirs of a former British governor of the Sinai (Jarvis, 1932, end paper) still show the boundary beginning east of Rafah and ending west of Taba.

Physical Features of the Boundary Line Area

The boundary line between Egypt and Palestine separated two geographic units. Southern Palestine, known as en Naqb (Negev), occupied 11,700 km² and the Sinai peninsula composed 60,000 km². As in most cases in the Middle East, the boundary line crossed semi-arid and arid areas. Scarcity of water is common, and broad-leafed deciduous shrubs and short grasses form the natural vegetation (Held, 1989, p. 334).

In the northern section of the boundary in the Gaza Strip and Rafah, the low land that prevails is the sandy coastal plain of the Mediterranean Sea (see Figure 1). Southward the elevation increases and in the Auja area, hills covered with gravel deposits and sand are common. Farther south, the area continues to rise and become more rigid and more sharply sloped. Elevations reach in some cases 1000 m. In the Ras en Naqb and Taba area the precambrian fundament of plutonic and metamorphic rocks are exposed. The boundary line ends at Taba on the Red Sea, which is part of the Rift Valley.

Climatically, the northern section enjoys a Mediterranean type of climate. Precipitation ranges between 200-375 mm (8-15 in.) in the Gaza
Strip. This amount of rain falls entirely in the winter and supports agricultural activities mainly of citrus and grains. Southward at Auja, the steppe prevails. The amount of precipitation is less. Farther south at Taba, the desert climate is common and the area receives less than 100 mm (4 in.) of precipitation. Temperatures become very high and there is a large diurnal range of temperature (United States Department of States, 1961, p. 3).

The population of the area in 1906 was nomadic, moving back and forth between the two regions, Sinai and en Naqb. These tribes concentrated mainly in the center section of the border in the Auja area and farther north. In the coast area, permanent dwellings were maintained. By 1906, El-Arish, Rafah, and Khan-Yunis were permanent settlements, as was the older Gaza.

The ultimate establishment of Israel in 1948 would markedly change the human landscape. Nomadic movement decreased and Jewish agricultural settlements were constructed in the frontier. The administrative line of 1906 became one separating Egyptians on one side from Israelis on the other, from a few kilometers south of Rafah to the Gulf of Aqaba.

Factors Related to Demarcation of the Aqaba-Rafah Line

The British imposed the Aqaba-Rafah line. It was never mentioned in the Sultan’s firmans. The British perceived this line as the best for several reasons: (a) politico-geographic, (b) human, and (c) topographic.

Politico-Geographic Factors

By adopting the Rafah-Aqaba line, Great Britain could exercise control over the entire Sinai peninsula. It was the deepest line
possible Britain could demand from the declining Ottoman Empire at that time. This line could protect the Suez Canal better than the former Ottoman suggestion of El-Arish-Suez, El-Arish-Ras Muhammad or El-Arish-Aqaba lines. Moreover, it was the shortest possible line between the two water bodies, the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. From a military perspective it could be defended easier than the other lines. The scarcity of population in Sinai made it into a "natural barrier" (Curzon, 1908, p. 16). In terms of Sinai, El-Arish was the most populated town, and it could serve as a strategic base for defense against possible attack on the Suez Canal. By depriving them of control of El-Arish, the Ottomans would have a major obstacle in case of war against Egypt.

Bramly, the British officer stationed in Sinai who surveyed the area, had suggested a line which deviated from that which was eventually accepted in order to follow physical features and the distribution of Bedouin tribes along the border area (see Figure 6). His proposal was rejected for being too long, for giving the Ottomans greater advantages (such as water resources), and for being too close to El-Arish. In addition, Bramly had suggested attaching the southern portion of Wadi Araba to Egypt. British policy-makers did not believe that the Ottomans were willing to compromise so much even if war were threatened (Brawer, 1979, p. 371).

Human Factors

The British planned to command as many resources as possible in the area. By depriving the Ottomans of water resources and routes, they gained defensive advantages. The British surveyors who studied the
water resources available on the Sinai peninsula supported the notion of the Rafah-Aqaba line because this line guaranteed most of the water resources lay on the Egyptian side. It is not surprising that the British, according to the demarcation agreement, granted water for "Turkish soldiers, native individuals and Gendarmes" by using sources west of the separating line (Brawer, 1970, p. 7). It should be pointed out that the agreement did not include a statement of the right of Egyptian or British soldiers to acquire water from the east side because the British knew that there was little left for the Ottomans on that side, which was extremely poor.

In addition, the Rafah-Aqaba line gave the British and the Egyptians the major travel routes. The most important was the Gaza-Aqaba route. Most of it ran in the southern section within Egyptian territories. Furthermore, the Egyptians commanded the most important junctions and passes linking Palestine with Egypt. These are Ras en Naqb, Quseima, and Kuntilla. While the British could easily transport goods and keep solid communications on the western side, the Ottomans were left in extreme difficulty on their side of the line.

The British, who perceived the Bedouins as a nomadic people, ignored the fact that the straight line from Aqaba would split tribes and clans on both sides. Unlike Bramly, who suggested a line which considered and safeguarded Bedouin lands and properties, the line adopted by British policy-makers cut through the lands of three large tribes in Sinai (Tarabin, Taiyah, and Haiwat) and yet allowed them travel rights back and forth through the line (Brawer, 1970, p. 8).
Topographic Factors

According to the agreement signed between the Ottomans and the Egyptians, the administrative separation line linking the western edge of Rafah with a point three miles west of Aqaba should be straight. But there were two major deviations declared by the topography of the region, one lying between Jabal Kharuf and Jaba Arif en-Naqa in the mid-section of the boundary, and the other one lying in the southern section between Ras en Naqb and the Gulf of Aqaba. Jabal Kharuf is a very harsh and rugged mountain, attaining an elevation of 1080 m. and possessing very deep and narrow gorges around it. The deviation of the southern section was due to high and rugged mountains and deep ravines which prevent the possibility of drawing a straight line with the principle of intervisibility of the pillars (Brawer, 1970, p. 107). It should be emphasized that the demarcation was carried out in hot and dry weather and in the process, some mistakes were made. The British representatives, who were not accustomed to such conditions, wanted to complete the work as soon as possible. One of the most obvious mistakes was that the last pillar (No. 91) at Ras Taba extended six miles from Aqaba instead of the three mentioned in the agreement (Brawer, 1970, p. 107-08).

The status of the boundary did not change until 1914 and until then the frontier area was quiet. Following the eruption of World War I, Great Britain separated Egypt from the Ottoman Empire. It declared Egypt a protectorate in 1914, deposed Khedive Abbas II Hilmi, and installed his uncle Husayn Kamil with the new title of Sultan of Egypt (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 253). From that time British maps indicated the
separate administrative line of 1906 as an international boundary. The Ottomans sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary during the war and opened a campaign in 1915-16, attempting to capture the waterway of Suez. It failed. The British occupied the Sinai peninsula and Aqaba in 1917. They expanded farther north which they perceived as deepening the defense of the Suez Canal. With the end of the war in November 1918, Great Britain exercised control over the entire Levant and both sides of the 1906 boundary.
CHAPTER 5

THE EGYPT-PALESTINE BOUNDARY, 1918-48

A direct outcome of World War I regarding the Egypt-Palestine boundary was that it became a boundary within the British Empire. Since Great Britain controlled both sides of the boundary, the line might have lost some of its significance. The issue of sovereignty, however, was still a question. While the status of the territories to the west (Egypt) was obvious, the status of the eastern side (Palestine) was still ambiguous. According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 between Great Britain and France, an Arab country should be declared on the east side of the 1906 boundary line (Goldschmidt, 1983, p. 184). Moreover, it should be pointed out that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 did not mention the subject of boundaries (Goldschmidt, 1983, p. 234).

After the occupation of Palestine at the close of the year 1917, the British initially moved to establish their control and interests. At that time Britain was a conqueror, not a mandatory power. The Mandate over Palestine would be awarded two years later at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Proposals for the Boundary Changes Before the Paris Peace Conference

The question of the viability of the 1906 boundary was discussed among British officials more intensively during 1918, and after the end of the First World War different proposals were made. The common feeling among the participants in the discussions was that the 1906
boundary should by changed. A new factor was involved in the boundary issue after the Balfour Declaration of 1917: the World Zionist Organization. Except suggestions from Zionists, all other proposals came from British officers who had been stationed on both sides of the boundary in Egypt and in Palestine. Since the status of Palestine was yet to be determined, British concerns tended to push the boundary further to the northeast in order to enhance the buffer zone protecting the Suez Canal. Two distinct trends in the discussions followed. The British officers who had been stationed in Egypt suggested a line running approximately from Rafah to Beer Sheva to the Dead Sea, and officers who had served in Palestine proposed a line to the west of the 1906 boundary to be laid along El-Arish Wadi in the northern section of the 1906 line. At this same period, the Zionist Movement, which had earlier demanded the boundary of the Jewish national homeland to run from Dan (in the north of modern Israel) to Beer Sheva, adopted the "historical southern limit of Erets Israel" to be along the El-Arish Wadi (Brawer, 1982, p. 75).

The phrase "Erets Israel" can be translated as "the land of Israel." When used by Zionists or Israeli commentators, it can have the sense of "the rightful homeland of the Jewish people." When used by Zionists before 1948, it suggests what territories should be included in an area where Jews can freely settle or what territories should be within an independent Jewish state. When used after 1948, it refers to the territories Israelis and others who accept the common Zionist view believe to be historically the Jewish homeland, with or without a
connotation that such territory should be included, if it is not presently, within the Israeli state.

The Paris Peace Conference

Before the Paris Peace Conference and following, there was much disagreement among British policy-makers regarding the boundary. Arnold Toynbee, a member of the British political delegation, was nominated to prepare a complete memorandum on the 1906 boundary line. The British political delegation submitted to the conference Toynbee's proposal for a new boundary extending from a point "5 miles west to Tafila going west in a straight line. It meets the 1906 line at Auja and then in a straight line northwest to El-Arish." Hogarth, a British officer in Egypt who was asked to confirm the suggestion instead authored a new proposal recommending a new boundary line farther north, extended from "a point on the Mediterranean following Gaza Wadi to a point south of the Dead Sea and then through Wadi Araba to a point in the northeast on the Aqaba Gulf" (Biger, 1981, p. 128) (see Figure 9). The most extreme suggestion came from Parker, the governor of Sinai, who suggested a boundary line beginning farther to the north of what is today Gaza Strip—and then following Hogarth's line.

Other proposals by British officers and officials stationed in Egypt were made, but the most well-known was made by General Allenby, the British Governor of Egypt, and T.E. Lawrence (the famous Lawrence of Arabia), a member of the British delegation sent to the Paris Peace Conference (see Figure 9). This proposal was to establish a separate area termed Mandate (C) which was to include the triangular region
Figure 9. Various British Proposals for Boundary Change, 1917-1919.
between Rafah-Aqaba-Tafila, because this area was formerly under Ottoman control and it was felt that this should be placed under the direct control of the British Empire (Biger, 1981, p. 132).

All proposals were suggested under the uncertainty of a Palestine Mandate. There were common agreements regarding the Wadi Araba line from south to north, but not on the Mediterranean-Dead Sea line from west to east. The Zionist delegation, under pressure from the British, eased its demands. It should be pointed out that unlike the other Palestine frontiers, the British Government and the Zionist Movement were in disagreement regarding an appropriate Egypt-Palestine boundary. While they held common interests and agreement regarding the boundary in the north and the east, they were at odds in the south and as a result, the Zionist delegation never mentioned the exact boundary line they were demanding at the Peace Conference. Several months later in the summer of 1919, Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization, wrote to Sir Herbert Samuel, British High Commissioner for Palestine, asking for the Rafah-Aqaba line to include the port of Aqaba itself (Waingradov, 1965, p. 6).

The British delegation at the Peace Conference proposed one final line which was close to the first suggestion (see Figure 10). All discussions mentioned above had been held in secret within the British delegation itself, which perceived the issue as a British one. By the end of 1919, the British government was certain of the Mandatory power it would obtain over Palestine. The Peace Conference convened on April 1, 1919, at San Remo and the European delegations signed an agreement on the mandates. At that time the British again began rethinking what
Figure 10. The Final British Proposal for 1906 Boundary Change, 1919.
constituted the boundary of 1906. Unlike the Palestine border in the north, British control officially extended on both sides in the south. The government decided to maintain the 1906 boundary line without any redefinition of its status (Brawer, 1982, p. 76).

The British decision upholding the 1906 boundary was actually a compromise between different proposals and political ideologies. The adoption of the 1906 line was temporary. Britain, which apprehended the boundary as a line within its Empire, did not give publicity to administrative divisions between Egypt and Palestine.

Although Britain controlled both sides of the boundary line, there was not any significant joint administration in the area. After the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference, in July 1920 London Government established a British civil administration in Palestine without determining Palestinian boundaries. By October 1920 the civil administration in Palestine was in charge of the railway system in Palestine. However, the railway line which was built during World War I by the British across the Sinai peninsula between Rafah and Qantara on the west bank of the Suez Canal was left under the control of the British military in Egypt (Biger, 1981, p. 134).

Factors Related to the Proposals

Although the boundary line of 1906 failed to change after the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the British held serious concerns and interests regarding the line which led to the different proposals. These factors can be considered separately:
Strategic Factors

In the First World War, new weapons were introduced, especially air forces and large extended-range artillery. The British wanted to draw a new line which was defensible and to deepen the distance buffer from the Suez Canal, taking into account the ability of these new weapons in striking deep behind enemy lines. They were also concerned about the latest advances in capability for mass troop movements. Most of the proposals depended on physical features which could serve as obstacles for crossing and penetration, features which would slow and hinder the ability of enemy armies from reaching the Canal Zone.

Human Factors

The 1906 administrative line cut through the nomadic lands of several Bedouin tribes and separated the tribes of Palestine from those of Sinai. After the demarcation of 1906, the movement of nomads continued as before. The new proposals considered this factor extremely important, as had Bramly's proposal in 1906 (see Figure 6). Some proposals considered Gaza, Rafah, and Beer Sheva as centers for the tribes and included them within Sinai territories.

Economic Factors

The British highly valued the natural resources of the Dead Sea. They planned to exploit these resources and transfer them overseas via the Red Sea. In addition, the Standard Oil Company, an American oil company which surveyed the Kurnub area southeast of Beer Sheva, planned drilling there (Biger, 1981, p. 136). The possibility of cultivating the land was the main factor in the Zionist Movement's demands for the area between Rafah and El-Arish. For the same reason, British officers
in Egypt rejected the idea because the British wanted to reserve use of the land for defense and were concerned about surrendering it.

**Geopolitical Factors**

While the Zionist Movement demanded the inclusion of Aqaba in Palestinian territories, the British wanted Aqaba as part of Sinai. The Zionist Movement wanted to separate Al-Hijaz from Sinai and Egypt, and the British planned to keep the Gulf of Aqaba under their control, where they desired to improve port facilities. When the British were certain about the Palestinian Mandate, they preferred the bridgehead of the Red Sea to be in Palestine (Biger, 1981, p. 136).

**The Boundary After the Paris Peace Conference**

The southern limit of the Sanjak of Jerusalem did not follow the 1906 line in its whole extension as far as the Gulf of Aqaba. In 1922, King Abdullah, who was offered the Emirate of Transjordan one year earlier in the Cairo Conference of 1921, demanded to annex the area to the south of the former Sanjak of Jerusalem. But the British chose to continue their control over southern Palestine too.

Increasing confrontation and unrest in Egypt following the First World War, especially during the years 1918 and 1919, convinced the British that Egyptian nationalism could no longer be suppressed by military means. The demand for independence by Egyptians was overwhelming. On February 28, 1922, London unilaterally announced the independence of Egypt. Sultan Fuad of Egypt became King Fuad I.
Egyptian independence did not prevent Great Britain from continued intensive control over Egypt by British advisers (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 261-264).

Following the Lausanne Treaty of July 1923 and Turkey's declaration of renunciation of all rights and titles over Egypt, the question of Egypt's sovereignty over Sinai and its eastern boundary was raised (Toye, 1989, p. 734). John Fischer Williams, a legal assessor of the Sinai Mining Company, raised the question in December 1926, whether Sinai was Egyptian territory on August 1, 1914, the beginning of World War I. The issue was debated on a reparation claim with the British foreign office. The official response was "the boundary thus established [from Rafah to Aqaba] was in effect an administrative division between two Ottoman provinces" (Toye, 1989, p. 734). Earlier in the same year, Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmad Ziwar Pasha wrote to Lord Lloyd "recognizing the special position of His Majesty's Government in relation to the territories of Palestine and of Irak," asking if the eastern Egyptian frontier will be affected by the delimitation of Palestinian and Iraqi territories. In response, London assured Egypt that the Palestine-Egypt frontier "as defined in the year 1906" would not be affected (Toye, 1989, p. 719).

The question of Egyptian sovereignty was raised again after the Second World War. Bramly, the British Empire's administrative officer in the Sinai peninsula during the demarcation of the 1906 line, insisted that the agreement of 1906 between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire failed to settle the issue of the legality of the eastern Egyptian boundary. In a letter sent to the foreign office in 1946, he proposed that Britain
claim the Sinai peninsula for itself by the right of conquest. Bramly suggested the establishment of military bases in Sinai (Toye, 1989, p. 743). During the year 1947, several papers were written supporting and opposing Bramly's position regarding the status of the Sinai peninsula. Those in support of Bramly's proposals, argued that Sinai—except for the northwest corner—was never part of the privileged territories of Egypt (Recall the Ottoman position in 1906.). Furthermore, following the Lausanne Treaty, the Sinai peninsula turned into a "no man's land" (res nullius) after the renunciation of Turkey's claims and titles over Egypt. Those opposed to Bramly's proposals argued that Britain assured Egypt regarding the status of the boundary in 1926, in Lord Lloyd's letter reading that the boundary will be "as defined in the year 1906" (Toye, 1989, p. 219). In addition, England and Egypt had signed a Treaty of Alliance in 1936. Finally, Egypt had received implicit acceptance of the 1906 boundary from the League of Nations upon joining in 1937 (Warburg, 1979, pp. 687-89).

From the period 1918-47, and in spite of all attempts to alter the 1906 line, the boundary remained as demarcated in that year. The movement of Bedouin tribes crossing that line continued, but was reduced. In the 1940s the nomadic people tended to adjust to the new reality and the line became more of a line of separation than in previous decades. During the Second World War, the British neglected the existence of the boundary and troops, supplies and miscellaneous equipment crossed as if it did not exist (Brawer, 1982, p. 77).
The modern history of Palestine began with a series of partition plans. The confrontations between Arabs and Jews during the British Mandate and the unbridgeable gap between them led to the formation of various commissions of inquiry on Palestine. As early as 1937, the Peel Commission suggested a division of Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. The argument over the principle of partition and the allotment of lands accelerated when the British Government asked, in April 1947, the United Nations Secretary General to place the problem of Palestine on the agenda of the United Nations. London recommended sending another commission to do an inquiry on the issue.

Though Britain likely preferred specific plans for partition to others, because of its continuing interests in the Canal and in Trans-Jordan, i.e. for reasons similar to those discussed earlier in reference to the period 1918-1922, the issue of partition was by 1917 much more multi-national in scope. Changes in the status of India (partition and independence in August 1947) may also have influenced Britain to place greater responsibility on the United Nations (Lloyd, 1984, p. 328). The question of to what extent Britain expected to retain its authority within Egypt under the treaty of 1936 (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 322) or in Trans-Jordan is important in the history of the region that is separate from the issues considered here. In fact, the British announced an intention of withdrawing and accepted United Nations involvement in partition.
The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP), after investigation, recommended the partitioning of Palestine. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on the partitioning of Palestine. Arabs, mainly the Egyptian and Trans-Jordanian Governments and the Arab people of the former Palestine Mandate, rejected the resolution on the basis of principle (Goldschmidt, 1983, p. 224). They claimed that the United Nations did not have the jurisdiction to partition countries and demanded that the issue be referred to the International Court of Justice.

The various proposals for partitioning Palestine referred to the Egypt-Palestine boundary as an international one. All the proposals concerned territory east of the Rafah-Aqaba line. The question was over which country was going to share the boundary with Egypt. While according to the Peel Plan of 1937 only the Arab state would share the border with Egypt, the United Nations Partition Plan allowed both newly proposed states to share portions of this line (Hadawi, 1959, p. 41; Gilbert, 1974, p. 38). The Rafah-Aqaba line, which extends for 210 km, was proposed to be allocated between the two parties. The portion of the line extending 110 km from the area of Rafah in the northern section to Auja and further to the southeast was to belong the the Arab State, while the remaining 100 km in the southern section was proposed to be given to the Jewish State (see Figure 11).

The partition plan of November 29, 1947, failed to end the hostilities between Arabs and Jews. Well-trained and equipped Jewish soldiers led by the Haganah, the Jewish Army, were highly successful in battle. By May 15, 1948, the Israelis had occupied portions of the
Figure 11. U.N Partition Plan of Palestine, 1947.

Based on: (Gilbert, 1974; Goldschmidt, 1983).
territories allocated to an Arab State. The British Mandate authorities, who were supposed to withdraw by August 1948 according to the Partition Resolution of 1947, announced their desire to terminate the Mandate on the 15th of May after Israel declared its independence on the 14th. The Palestinian Arab High Committee appealed to the Arab states. They declared their willingness to take measures to prevent the establishment of the Jewish State. On May 15th, 1948, joint Arab armies entered Palestine. The Egyptian forces penetrated the Rafah-Aqaba line. By June of 1948, southern Palestine was under the control of the Egyptian forces, especially along coastal areas including Ashqelon and Ashdod. They reached a point 30 km south of Tel-Aviv (El-Sayid, 1985, p. 28).

During the period of the fighting between May 1948 and January 1949, the UN Security Council issued eight cease fire resolutions which were violated by both parties. While the first truce of May 29 was violated by Egypt, the second truce of July 18 was violated by Israel. By initiating Operation Horev on December 22, 1948, the Israelis occupied the southwest section of Palestine, capturing Auja and advancing into Sinai. Their raids reached Bir Hasna and Bir Hama in the heart of Sinai, and only the cease fire saved El-Arish from coming under occupation (see Figure 12) (Lorch, 1961, p. 490).

There was a strategic reason behind Operation Horev and the penetration of the Rafah-Aqaba line into Sinai. The existence of Israel as a new state was accepted by the world's most powerful countries, but its boundaries were not. Israel, which proclaimed its independence on May 15, 1948, did not define its boundaries. The southern section of
Figure 12. Egyptian Territory Occupied by Israeli Forces, January 1949.
Palestine, en Naqb, was disputed. The British Government was still interested in that area. Israel attempted to gain complete control over southern Palestine after a suggestion was made by the UN mediator, Dr. Ralph Bunche, to exchange southern Palestine (en Naqb) with the northern area of Galilee as part of the new Arab State. Galilee was already occupied by Israel (Lorch, 1961, p. 491). Britain, watching the theater carefully, demanded the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egyptian territories behind the Rafah-Aqaba line and threatened to intervene and expel the Israelis from Sinai under the title of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. During Operation Horev the Israelis shot down a British airplane which circled over the battlefield area, killing five British soldiers. In response, the British strengthened their garrison at Aqaba (Lorch, 1961, p. 525).

By January 6, 1949, Egypt accepted the cease fire and entered into negotiations with the Israelis. Egypt was still holding some positions in southern Palestine (Lorch, 1961, p. 525).

The Egypt-Israel Armistice Agreement of 1949

The Armistice negotiations between Israel and Egypt started on January 13, 1949, in the Hotel of Roses on Rhodes in the Mediterranean. The Egyptian delegation demanded immediate Israeli withdrawal from positions captured after the UN Security Council Resolution of November 4. They meant for Israel to abandon positons captured in Operations Yoav and Horev (Lorch, 1961, p. 535). The Israelis insisted upon Egyptian forces withdrawing from all territories within the former Palestine Mandate. As a starting point, UN mediator Bunche convinced
both delegations not to renew hostilities. The first crisis in the negotiations was over the Faluja (an area 40 km east of Ashqelon on the way to Beer Sheva). The Egyptians and the Israelis were in disagreement over the evacuation of a besieged brigade of Egyptian forces, which contained a third of their forces in Palestine, from Faluja. One of the commanders of this army was Gamal Abd El-Nasser, who three years later became the leading officer in the Egyptian Revolution and then President of Egypt. The Israelis exploited the isolation of the Egyptian forces at Faluja as a bargaining chip.

The defeated Egyptian Army agreed to most of the Israeli demands and an Armistice demarcation agreement was signed on February 24, 1949, under the auspices of the United Nations. According to the terms of the agreement, Egypt exercised control over what became the "Gaza Strip," and a demilitarized zone around Auja was established. Later, on February 22, 1950, a modus vivendi to the General Armistice Agreement cleared up the armistice line by delimiting the Gaza Strip within the Armistice Agreement of 1949 (The Geographer, 1961, p. 2).

The Armistice line of 1949 between Israel and Egypt follows the Egypt-Palestine line of 1906. It extended between the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gaza Strip, just 8 miles from the Mediterranean Sea (see Figure 13). The demarcation was based on Article I of the Egypt-Ottoman agreement of 1906, which explained the Rafah-Aqaba line in detail. The status of the Armistice line was clarified in Paragraph II of Article V.

The Armistice Demarcation Line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to the rights, claims and positions of either party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestinian question. (United Nations, 1949, p. 256)
Figure 13. Israel-Egypt Armistice Line, 1949.
The Demilitarized Zone

The first paragraph of Article VIII stated the following.

The area comprising the village of El-Auwja and vicinity, as defined in Paragraph 2 of this Article, shall be demilitarized, and both Egyptian and Israeli armed forces shall be totally excluded therefrom. The chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission established in Article X of this Agreement and United Nations Observers attached to the commission shall be responsible for ensuring the full implementation of this provision.

Paragraph 2 added the following:

The area thus demilitarized shall be as follows: From a point on the Egypt-Palestine frontier five (5) kilometers north-west of the intersection of Rafah-El-Auwja road (MR 08750468), south-east to Khashm El-Mamduh (MR 09650414) thence south-east to Hill 405 (MR 10780285), thence south-west to a point on the Egyptian-Palestine frontier five (5) kilometers south-east of the intersection of the old railway tracks and the frontier (MR 09950145), thence returning north-west along the Egypt-Palestine frontier to the point of Origin. (United Nations, 1949, pp. 261-62) (see Figure 14)

Auja is an Arab village located in the central section of the Egypt-Palestine boundary just three km from the boundary line. The area of Auja has two main advantages which caused heated arguments during the negotiations of the Armistice Agreement. First, the topographic features of the area include a hill which gives the party in control of it strategic advantage. From Auja, conceivably, the dominance of the Sinai desert and the en Naqb Desert is possible. Second, the area contains the strategic crossroads from Beer Sheva to Cairo and Gaza to

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2 MR denotes "Map Reference."
Figure 14. The Demilitarized Zone of Auja, 1949.
Aqaba. Moreover, this crossroads was a station on the pilgrims route to Mecca (Al Mawsoôh al-Phalastinia, 1984, p. 358; Alexander, 1954, p. 325).

The importance of the area led to a crisis during the Armistice negotiations. Egypt claimed that the area was supposed to be allocated to the Arab State according to the Partition Plan, and Israel, which exercised military occupation over the area, refused to withdraw its claims over the highly valued area.

Israel, which realized the determination of the Egyptians not to sign the agreement without Auja, agreed to the demilitarization. The sovereignty of the area was ambiguous. In response, Israel demanded and achieved the demilitarization of the area facing Auja in the Egyptian section. The Egyptian delegation agreed for Quseima and Abu-Aweiqila, 26 km farther west in Sinai desert, to be areas without defensive positions (El-Sayid, 1985, p. 55).

Israel, which realized the importance of the Auja area for military purposes in the First World War, moved to occupy the demilitarized zone. The President of the joint commission for the demilitarized zone informed the UN Security Council on September 21, 1955, that Zahal (the Israeli Defense Forces) had occupied the area. One year later the joint commission was prevented from holding its meeting at its headquarters in the village of Auja. In October 1956, Israel launched a major assult on Egyptian forces from Auja (Higgins, 1969, p. 108).
The Gaza Strip

On the eve of the beginning of the Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel in February 1949, the Egyptian forces were stationed in the Gaza area. Moreover, this area was crowded by native Palestinian Arabs and by Arab refugees from areas which had been allocated according to the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947 to the Arab State. Under the Armistice Agreement, Egypt exercised control over the area defined as the Gaza Strip.

The Gaza Strip came into existence only after the conclusion of the 1949 Armistice demarcation line. The limit of the strip followed the cease fire lines between the Israeli forces and the joint Egyptian-Palestinian forces. Paragraph 1, Article VI of the General Armistice Agreement stated the following.

In the Gaza-Rafah area the Armistice Demarcation Line shall be as delineated in Paragraph 2.B(i) of the Memorandum of 13 November 1948 on the implementation of the Security Council Resolution of 4 November 1948, namely by a line from the coast at the mouth of the Wadi Hasi in an easterly direction through Deir Suneid and across the Gaza-Al Majdal Highway to a point 3 kilometres east of the highway, then in a southerly direction parallel to the Gaza-Al Majdal Highway, and continuing thus to the Egyptian frontier. (United Nations, 1949, p. 258)

Gaza Strip covers 360 km² (139 mi²) of territory. It extends for a length of 45 km (28 miles) from northeast to southeast with an average width of 7 km (4.5 miles) facing the Mediterranean Sea on the west end of the Egypt-Palestine boundary line in the south and the demarcation line in the north of Gaza just 7 km (4.35 miles) to the north of the city (see Figure 15). On February 22, 1950, one year after the signing of the Demarcation Agreement, a modus vivendi to the General Armistice
Figure 15. The Gaza Strip Demarcation of 1951.
altered and limited the northern and eastern parts of the Gaza Strip demarcation line. Paragraph 1, Article I of the Modus Vivendi is the following.

(a) the "A" Zone is delineated as follows: It is the Zone between the demarcation line and a line from M.R. 10170-11160 in a straight line to point M.R. 10690-10740 at the railway crossing and then in a straight line to point M.R. 10795-10640, to point 72,9 M.R. 10900-10565, to point 82,2 M.R. 10 9180-10410 and then to the demarcation line at point 95,1 M.R. 10695-10240 (all points inclusive to Egyptian side).

(b) the "B" Zone is delineated as follows: It is the Zone between the line delineated in paragraph (a) above and the Egyptian fighting line north of Beit Lahia.

(c) the "C" Zone is delineated as follows: It is the Zone between the demarcation line and a line from point M.R. 08935-08590 in a straight line to point 76,6 M.R. 09035-07970, M.R. 08970-07790 and from this point to the demarcation line at M.R. 08735-07670 (all points inclusive to Egyptian side). (United States Department of States, 1961, p. 5) (see Figure 10)

Southern Palestine

During the 1948 War and the beginning of 1949, Israel gained control over most of the area of southern Palestine (en Naqb). Israeli forces reached Ein Hosb by Operation Lot, and Auja by Operation Morev (Lorch, 1961, p. 537). Yet a large triangle between these two locations and the Gulf of Aqaba, which was bounded by the 1906 Egyptian boundary in the west and El-Araba in the east, remained (see Figure 16). Most of the southern part of Palestine was allocated, according to the Partition Plan, to the Jewish State. During the Armistice negotiations, Egypt removed its claims over the area. Transjordan, which had some of its military units locked up in the harsh, rugged, and unpopulated area,
Figure 16. The Southern Cone of the Palestine Mandate, Occupied by Israel during March 1949.
claimed it; Transjordan exercised military control there when the cease
fire began (Lorch, 1961, p. 537).

Israel, which signed the Armistice Agreement with Egypt in February
of 1949 and began negotiations with Transjordan on March 1, launched on
March 5 the final military operation to conquer the southern tip of
Palestine. The Israeli forces penetrated the Jordanian truce lines on
March 7 and reached the Gulf of Aqaba on March 11 (Lorch, 1961, p. 537).
Now Israel controlled the whole eastern side of Rafah-Aqaba line of
1906. The Partition Plan apportioned 56 percent or 15,850 km$^2$ of the
total territory of Palestine for the Jewish State. Over 9,500 km$^2$ of
this area was in the southern part of Palestine. After the 1948-49 War
and the conclusion of the Armistice Agreements, the Jewish State held
20,770 km$^2$ of territory, of which the southern portion comprised around
13,000 km$^2$ of the total area (Kliot, 1987, p. 61).

The Egypt-Israel Boundary, 1950-56

As soon as the Armistice agreement was concluded and signed, Egypt
and Israel were in disagreement over its interpretation. Moreover,
incidents which took place along the border accelerated tensions in the
area. During the summer of 1950 Israeli authorities expelled an
estimated 6,000-7,000 Bedouins belonging to the Azazme tribe from the
demilitarized zone and other areas to Sinai across the international
border. Others were deported by Egypt back to Israel from Sinai.
Furthermore, about 2,000 Palestinians were expelled from El-Majdal
(which became Ashqelon after 1948) to the Gaza Strip. Egypt complained
to the Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC) which decided that "these Arabs be repatriated to the Israeli-controlled area" (Higgins, 1969, p. 147).

The refugee problem caused considerable trouble along the border area. Many Palestinians had begun crossing the border back to their properties inside Palestine. The early crossings and incidents along the border originated from innocent motives. Confirmation of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1948 increased the number of crossings to Israel. Moreover, some crossings were accidental because the demarcation line was no longer clear in some areas. Israel claimed the crossings were for theft and smuggling and deaths resulted when crossers were shot (Khouri, 1968, pp. 183-84).

The question of the demilitarized zone was one of the issues most affecting the border area and the Demarcation Line Agreement. The Israeli Government exploited the ambiguous paragraph in the agreement regarding the DMZ and moved to take it over. As early as September 1953, Israel established Kibbutz Qetsiot within the demilitarized area. The settlement expanded to establish other kibbutzes in that area. Moreover, Israel decided to confine the movement of the United Nations observers in the demilitarized zone. Later, Israel refused any entree to Auja to the Egyptian members of the MAC. The commission was not allowed to meet in its headquarters in Auja so it did not fully function after October 1951. In September 1956, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion stated: "No meetings of the Mixed Armistice Commission at Auja should be allowed" (Higgins, 1969, p. 156). The justification presented was "Egypt's non-compliance with Article I and the security
council resolution of 1st September 1951 concerning interference with the passage through the Suez Canal of shipping bound for Israel" (Higgins, 1969, pp. 156-57).

The controversy over the right of Israeli passage through the Suez Canal directly affected the behavior of the two parties along the border. Israel insisted on Article I of the Armistice Agreement reading, "No aggressive action by the armed forces--land, sea, or air of either party shall be undertaken, planned. . . . The establishment of an armistice between the armed forces of the two parties is accepted as an indispensable step towards the liquidation of armed conflict and the restoration of peace in Palestine" (United Nations, 1949, p. 254).

Egypt argued the military meaning of the agreement and referred to Article V of the Agreement stating, "The Armistice Demarcation Line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to rights, claims and positions of either party to the Armistice. . . ." (United Nations, 1949, p.256).

Egypt, which initiated an economic boycott against Israel in 1948, started searching for and in some cases confiscating goods and items shipped to Israel through the Suez Canal. Moreover, Israeli ships were not allowed to pass through the canal. Egypt justified its measures claiming that a state of war still existed with Israel, and that Egypt had these reduced rights of belligerence. Israel emphasized that the United Nations Charter prevented members from using the rights of belligerence against other members, pointing to the intent of the Armistice Agreement. As early as 1949 Israel complained to the MAC
regarding Egypt's action. In September 1951, the Security Council passed a resolution in favor of the Israeli position (Khouri, 1968, pp. 205-06).

The incidents along the border area between Egypt and Israel, mainly along the Gaza Strip front, intensified in late 1954 and during 1955. Arabs tended to sabotage settlements which Israel constructed and fortified very close to the demarcation line and Israel retaliated and in some cases initiated actions behind the border. In February 1955, Israel attacked the town of Beit-Hannun in the northern section of Gaza Strip, resulting in at least 39 deaths. Egypt retaliated in August 1955 by establishing the Fedayeen group which took action and raided the Israeli frontier settlements, again resulting in deaths. The raids and counter-raids continued, leaving both sides with hundreds of casualties, mostly civilian. An Israeli writer suggested in 1955:

There is a feeling in Israel that the only way to get the reluctant Arabs to the peace table is to make the armistice situation disadvantageous to them. . . . Those bloody "border incidents" are seldom accidental. . . . They are part retaliation, part a deliberate plan to force the Arabs to the peace table. Some call it "realistic," others "cynical"--but it promises to be effective. (Brilliant, 1955, pp. 68-9)

Besides the local clashes along the border, regional and international actions hastened the confrontation of 1956 between Israel, Britain and France on one side, and Egypt on the other. The behavior of Nasser, the Egyptian president, and his policy were the core of these actions. Nasser's buying weaponry from communist countries, his formation of diplomatic relations with China and his non-aliens policy caused him to be perceived with intransigence in western eyes (Vatikiotis, 1991, p. 391). Because the U.S. administration was
displeased with Nasser's actions, it suspended the American offer to help construct the High Dam at Aswan. Nasser's retaliation was dramatic. He announced on July 26, 1956 the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. Western countries condemned Nasser's action. While the Americans supported a diplomatic solution, France and Britain demanded military action to restore their rights in the Canal Zone. France and Britain likely wished to remove Nasser, who was accused by France of supporting the Algerian rebellion. Britain, after the formation of the Bagdad Pact of 1955, apprehended Nasser as a threat to the peace and stability of the region (Vatikiotis, 1991, pp. 390-393).

Israel was a major beneficiary of the new situation. Strong anti-Nasser sentiment after the nationalization of the Suez Canal encouraged Israel to invade Egypt. The goal of the destruction of the Fedayeen bases in Egyptian territories and in the Gaza Strip encouraged Israel to act. Moreover, opening the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba for Israeli shipping and forcing Egypt to abolish the Arab boycott against Israel were important reasons behind the invasion (Khouri, 1968, p. 214). By the end of October, Israel, Britain and France were in a common agreement regarding the Suez Canal crisis and the actions which should be taken to end it.

Israel penetrated the Egyptian lines on October 29, 1955, and approached a line just 10 km east of the Suez Canal in two days (see Figure 17). Earlier, it declared its suspension and denunciation of the Armistice Agreement (Higgins, 1969, p. 109). On October 31 the French and British forces, which were stationed in the Mediterranean Sea and on Cyprus, bombed Egyptian airports and landed at several places in the
Figure 17. Sinai and the Gaza Strip, Occupied by Israel, 1956.
Canal Zone. By November 6 the French and British forces occupied Port Said, the Egyptian city at the mouth of the canal. On the same day, Soviet Prime Minister Alexander Polganin issued two ultimata to Israel, Britain, and France to stop the fighting and to withdraw from Egyptian territories. Moreover, the U.S. administration announced its opposition to the invasion and initiated a UN Security Council meeting calling for an "immediate cease fire" and "prompt withdrawal" of Israel forces. France and Britain accepted a cease fire on November 6 and Israel on November 8 (Khouri, 1968, p. 217). While France and Britain withdrew immediately, Israel completed its withdrawal from Sinai and Gaza Strip by March 8, 1957.

The Egypt-Israel Boundary, 1957-67

As one outcome of the 1956 War, the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) was established. These forces were stationed along the demarcation line in the Gaza Strip and the Egyptian side of the demarcation line and in Sharm esh-Sheikh (see Figure 18). Israel refused to accept UNEF forces on its side (Higgins, 1969, p. 335). The rules of the peacekeeping forces were to monitor the withdrawal of forces and to guarantee free navigation and compliance with UN resolutions. The Gulf of Aqaba opened for Israeli ships. Egypt continued to close the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping.

During 1957-59, Egypt permitted the passage of foreign ships to Israeli ports but after that restored the restrictions, stopping ships and checking and confiscating certain types of cargo bound for Israel. It began to search for and confiscate Israeli-owned commodities. The
Figure 18. Deployment of UNEF in 1957.
situation along the Armistice Demarcation Line was quiet for a few years, but in the first half of the 1960s incidents took place along the border mainly as air violations. According to UNEF Report 667, incidents took place during 1961-62 and according to Reports 669, 630, 664, in the following three years (Higgins, 1969, p. 335). However, they were minor compared with other incidents along the Israel-Jordan and Israel-Syria lines.

Tensions between Syria and Israel in 1965-67, in part over the diversion of Jordan River waters, led to military cooperation between Syria and Egypt. The Nasser government moved into the frontier area with Israel. Nasser's aim was apparently to assure the Israeli Government of his willingness to interfere in favor of Syria if the former was attacked by Israel. The Egyptian military movement started on May 15, 1967. Egypt requested on the following day the withdrawal of UNEF forces. U-Thant, the United Nations Secretary General, ordered the evacuation on May 19 (El-Sayid, 1985, p. 152). Egypt blockaded the Straits of Tiran on May 23 (see Figure 17). Israel perceived the latter Egyptian action as a casus belli.

The Israeli Government's Perspective on the Boundary, 1948-67

Territorial and border issues concerning Palestine were of great import to Zionists before 1948, and they have remained important in the Israeli Government since the establishment of the Jewish State. On the eve of the proclamation of Israel, on May 14, 1948, and prior to the Arab invasion, Zionist decision-makers opposed the boundaries of the
Partition Plan, and these boundaries were not included in the Israeli Independence Convention. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, stated that the Yishoav, the Jewish community in Palestine, should oppose the territorial partition of the UN. He believed that the UN partition proposal was harmful in terms of military matters and the future protection of a Jewish State (Bar-Zohar, 1978, pp. 500-01).

On June 14, 1948, the Israeli Government held the first discussion regarding the boundaries of Israel. The dominant proposal was that Israel should exercise permanent control over the territories allotted for the Arab State and occupied by Jewish troops, in addition to the control of territories allocated to the Jewish State in the United Nations partition plan of 1947. The Israeli Government accepted the recommendations of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion not to make any decision while the military situation was still fragile, so the first decision regarding the boundary issue taken by the Israeli Government was to wait and not to decide. Two weeks later, on July 2, the Israeli Government decided to include the occupied territories allocated for an Arab State within its control. Israel did not accept the United Nations resolutions calling for withdrawal from those territories. During 1949, Israel signed armistice agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria (Rawder, 1980, p. 280).

The Demarcation Line System between Israel and Egypt collapsed in October 1956 when Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the Sinai peninsula. Earlier and since March 1955, Israel had adopted a new territorial doctrine. While between the years 1949-54 Israel tended to accept the Armistice Demarcation Line as the permanent boundary line
between Israel and Egypt, in 1955 it demanded changes in the boundary line. Ben-Gurion, returned to service in the Israeli Government as Defense Minister and supported by Moishe Dyan, the Israeli Chief of Staff, initiated a plan in April 1955 to occupy the Gaza Strip and the western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. He sought to eliminate the raids on Israel which were coming from the Gaza Strip and to open the straits of Tiran to Israeli vessels for free passage. Ben-Gurion considered the annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel and the deportation of the population to Egypt and Jordan as a possible permanent solution to terrorist actions and raids (Rawder, 1980, pp. 334-35). Six months later, he gave publicity to his thoughts in an interview with a New York Times journalist on September 27, 1955. But only on October 28, 1956, did the Israeli Government pass his plan.

Ben-Gurion was used to making decisions without bothering with consulting others. In a speech given by him on July 11, 1956, in the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament), he explained that the goal of the 1956 Israeli attack on Gaza Strip was "to free the homeland from the Egyptian invader," and added "The Sinai Desert never was an Egyptian territory." One day before, on November 5, 1956, he spoke in front of Israeli soldiers at Sharm esh-Sheikh proclaiming the creation of the third Israeli Kingdom (Rawder, 1980, p. 341).

The international condemnation of the joint British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt pressured Ben-Gurion and the Israeli Government to agree to withdraw from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Ben-Gurion continued to look at the possibility of making arrangements with Egypt for Israeli
navigation through the Suez Canal and finding better solutions to protect Israel from the raids coming from Gaza.

Social Consequences of the Egypt-Israel Boundary, 1949-67

The creation of the State of Israel drastically altered the uneventful nature of the boundary of 1906. It was an antecedent to Jewish settlement. In the early 1950s and during the year 1967 following Jewish immigration to Israel, the Israeli Government built tens of settlements in the frontier. Nahal (National Pioneer Youth) is a branch of the Israeli Defense Forces. Israeli youth belonging to this group do agricultural work near their settlements and sometimes engage in military activities (Gilbert, 1974, p. 59). In the early 1950s nomadic movement across the line was totally stopped. The Bedouin tribes in the border area either moved to Egypt or were deported by Israel, small portions of them being transferred to the Beer Sheva area farther north from the boundary. Again, the sealed boundary became an ethnic separation line: the Arab population (Egyptian and Palestinian) on one side, and the Jewish population on the other to the north (Brawer, 1979, p. 374).

In addition, the landscape along the boundary area drastically changed. On the Israeli side, even with the very limited water resources the Ottomans have been reluctant to accept in 1906, grasses and trees could be grown without any threat of consumption by Bedouin animals, while on the other side the animals continued to eliminate the grasses and scattered trees in the area.
The June War of 1967

Early in the morning on Tuesday, June 5, 1967, the Israeli air force severely damaged most military airfields throughout Egypt, reaching south to the Sudanese border area. This operation was followed by a large scale penetration of the boundary between the two countries by armored Israeli infantry. A few days later Israel and Egypt agreed on a new cease fire line (see Figure 19). The Suez Canal, the use of which was one of the main factors behind the 1967 War, became the separation line between the two parties. The canal was closed to international navigation due both to geo-political circumstances and wreckage, and it remained closed until 1975 (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, p. 289).

The immediate outcome of the 1967 War along the Egyptian frontier was that Israel suddenly controlled as much as three times its previous land area. An irony was that its effective border with Egypt was shortened from 242 km to 168 km along the Suez Canal. Control of the Sinai peninsula gave Israel a great strategic advantage. The 60,000 km² area contains Sharm esh-Sheikh near its southern tip, the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba leading to the Israeli port city of Elat. Moreover, it gave Israel strategic depth in a shorter border. A few years later it was obvious that the area held promises for economic development (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, pp. 291-292).
Figure 19. The Israeli Occupation of June 1967.
Between 1967-78 Israel invested heavily in the area, militarily and otherwise, exploiting the economic resources of Sinai and the Gaza Strip and integrating them into the Israeli national economic system. Agricultural settlements were built, especially in the area between Rafah and El-Arish.

Israel’s Security and the Boundary Issue

Formulating a peaceful settlement between two members of the international community following a war is presumed to be under the jurisdiction of international law. In this case, following the June War of 1967 and the occupation of Sinai and the Gaza Strip on the Egyptian front and other Arab territories on other routes, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 242 on November 22, 1967. The Resolution required both "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" (Perry, 1977, pp. 416-417), and:

Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threat or acts of force. (Blum, 1971, pp. 119-20)

The Resolution became the blueprint for any possible settlement between Israel and Egypt and the other Arab neighboring states involved in the 1967 confrontation.

From its establishment in 1948 up to the occupations of 1967, Israel expressed dissatisfaction with its security and the vulnerability of its borders. Following the adoption of UN Resolution 242, Israeli officials insisted in their demands on "secure and recognized
boundaries," hinting at possible changes in the armistice lines with the Arab countries.

Yehuda Blum, the former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, argued that the Armistice Demarcation Line with Egypt was neither "boundaries" nor "secure" nor "recognized." He added that Israel could not tolerate Egyptian air forces just five minutes flying time from the center of industry and population of the state. Moreover, it was unacceptable that Israel had only five miles outlet on the Red Sea between the Jordanian and Egyptian boundary lines (Blum, 1971, pp. 72-75).

A variety of interpretations of UN Resolution 242 regarding the "withdrawal clause" still exist today after the final withdrawal from Sinai Peninsula. While the Israelis insist on the English version of Article I of the Resolution which reads, "Withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," the Arabs interpret this Article as meaning a complete withdrawal, maintaining the French version of the Resolution (the other UN working language at that debate when the Malian representative was the President of the UN Security Council and spoke in French). This version is interpreted to call for withdrawal from all occupied territories. The French version reads, "Retrait des forces armées israélien des territoires occupés lors du récent conflict," adding that the other versions in UN languages (Spanish, Russian, and possibly Chinese) called for total withdrawal from the occupied territories. Moreover, the resolution emphasized "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war." For the Arab
states, the omission of the definite article does not necessarily distort the meaning of the resolution (Perry, 1977, p. 417).

Israel does not accept the requirement of total withdrawal from occupied territories. It underlines the acceptance of the UN Security Council, in Resolution 242, that every state has the "right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force," and as Article II paragraph 3 of the Resolution affirms, "the necessity for guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones" (Blum, 1971, pp. 119-20).

The very slow pace of political activities following the June 1967 War and the unwillingness of Israel to comply with UN Resolution 242 led to a long round of hostilities on the Suez front between Egyptian and Israeli forces. These hostilities, which were known as the War of Attrition, extended for 1,000 days between 1968-70. It caused many casualties for both parties but no territorial changes occurred. The fifth round of major hostilities between Egypt and Israel were to come three years later in the October War of 1973.

The October War of 1973

Between 1971 and 1973 the Nixon Administration tried to act as a mediator between Egypt and Israel towards the aim of bringing lasting peace between the two countries. A political formula was proposed by Secretary of State William Rogers in October 1971. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, traveled between the two countries several times without any lasting accomplishment. The Israeli
Government assured the Nixon Administration of its desire not to return to the boundary prior to 1967 and its insistence on exercising control over Sharm el-Sheikh. Other efforts were made by UN mediator Gunnar Jarring.

The possibility of negotiations between the two countries failed to materialize. This situation led to the creation of a climate of inevitable continuing confrontation. During the last two years prior to October 1973, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat was under domestic pressure to initiate war against Israel to restore the Sinai peninsula. Several thousand students demonstrated in the streets of Cairo on many occasions, demanding "arming [of] the masses" (Sobel, 1974, p. 55).

The war which followed has been referred to by many names, including the Ramadan War and the Yom Kippur War. It erupted at 2:00 P.M. on October 6, 1973, along the Egyptian and Syrian fronts with Israel. After 24 hours of fighting, the Egyptian forces succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal occupying the famous Israeli fortification known as the Bar-Lev Line. On the other hand, Israeli forces later succeeded in crossing the canal to the west side and isolated the Egyptian Third Army in a counterattack. The Soviet Union and the United States became deeply involved in the war, resupplying the parties with new weapons. Both countries initiated a major airlift of military equipment to compensate the parties for their losses. Moreover, the two superpowers threatened to intervene and the U.S. military was, for a limited time, in a state of high alert. The United Nations Security Council debated the hostilities; actions were taken on the 8, 9, and 11 October, but it failed to adopt any resolutions or actions to bring about the end of the
hostilities. The Nixon administration initiated a proposal for a cease fire, calling for a cession of hostilities and a return to positions held before the eruption of the war (Sobel, 1974, p. 91). On October 17 the representative of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exportation Countries (OAPEC) passed a resolution cutting oil supplies to the United States and Western European countries. These attempts were made to bring about a change in U.S. policy in the Middle East.

On October 22, 1973, the Security Council adopted its first resolution, No. 338, regarding the war calling for an immediate cease fire. The Resolution was sponsored by both superpowers. The resolution called for the implementation of UN Resolution 242 adopted in November 1967 and a beginning of negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. Violations of the truce, especially by Israel which continued to fight to the west of the Canal, led to two other resolutions on October 23 and 25, Nos. 339 and 340 respectively, recalling the first Resolution of October 22 and deciding to send United Nations Emergency Forces to the areas of hostilities. Within a bit more than one year, by mid-January of 1975, 7,000 UN peace-keeping forces were stationed in a buffer zone between the two parties.

The U.S. was involved in intense diplomatic activity during the war to stop the hostilities. The U.S., led by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, sponsored a six-point truce between the two countries. The agreement was endorsed by both parties on November 9. The six-point agreement included food supplies to Suez City (which was under seige) and an agreement to discuss the separation of forces and disengagement under the auspices of the United Nations (Sobel, 1974, p. 93).
The First Disengagement Agreement

While the major confrontations between Egypt and Israel in 1948, 1956, and 1967 ended with clear military victories for Israel, the 1973 War ended without so obvious a winner. The war left both parties standing on new and vulnerable lines, from which neither side could tolerate a surprise attack from the other. It was obvious that both parties were interested in a separation of forces to new, defensible lines.

The disengagement negotiations started in a tent at kilometer 101 on the Suez-Cairo highway. General Gamasy and General Yarev were the representatives of Egypt and Israel respectively. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was behind the scenes pushing for a positive conclusion to the talks. The U.S. role in the negotiations was essential. It wanted to derive a credit which would influence the Arab oil producers to lift their embargo and to promote its position in the Arab world (Touval, 1982, p. 243). During the negotiations "shuttle diplomacy" was employed by Kissinger between Tel-Aviv and Cairo until the agreement was signed on January 18, 1974, with the chiefs of staff of both countries and General Siilasvue (the Commander of UNEF) in attendance. The United States offered incentives to Egypt and continued military aid to Israel in order to encourage both parties to sign the agreement.

According to Article B of the agreement, Israel was to withdraw its forces from the west to the east side of the canal and concentrate behind line B (see Figure 20). The Egyptian forces on the east side of the Suez Canal were to be deployed to the west of the line designated as
Figure 20. First Disengagement Agreement, January 1974.

Based on: (Gilbert, 1974).
Paragraph 2 of Article B stated: "The area between the Egyptian and Israeli lines will be a zone of disengagement in which the United Nations Emergency Forces will be stationed." The buffer zone was eight kilometers in width. Moreover, the agreement limited the Egyptian forces between line A and the Suez Canal to an area of a depth of about eight kilometers and the Israeli forces between lines B and C (Sobel, 1974, p. 156). The Egyptian Government did not succeed in regaining the important strategic passes at Mitla and Gidi. The separation of forces was completed on March 4. One week earlier Egypt resumed diplomatic relations with the U.S. which had been severed since the 1967 War (Metz, 1991, p. 301).

The Second Disengagement Agreement

The Nixon Administration exploited the new circumstances of negotiation between Israel and the Arab states. On May 31, 1974, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger succeeded in bringing Israel and Syria to a disengagement agreement. The U.S. wanted to keep the momentum and continue to lead activities to bring peace to the Middle East. During the first half of 1974, Middle East issues were the top priorities of the U.S. administration. The second attempt to bring Egypt and Israel to a new disengagement agreement succeeded in September 1975. Since the first agreement, President Anwar Sadat had continued to press for further withdrawals of Israeli troops so he could open the Suez Canal and strengthen his ability to protect it. Israel demanded a political agreement between the two countries. It wanted the abolition of the state of belligerence and an end to economic warfare against
Israel. Israel rejected the Egyptian demand of withdrawal from the strategic passes and the oil fields on the western coast of Sinai. On March 22 Henry Kissinger concluded his efforts due to inability to bring the parties to a new agreement.

The U.S. administration turned to a carrot and stick policy. It delayed economic and military assistance to Israel and signaled to the Israeli Government the necessity for further compromises. After inviting leaders of both countries, Prime Minister Rabin and President Sadat, both parties agreed to the essential points. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger returned in the middle of August to another shuttle of diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and on September 1, 1975, representatives of both counties signed the second agreement.

The second agreement was modeled after the first one, but with three buffer zones between the two parties and areas with limited forces and armaments (see Figure 21). It was limited in time and the agreement needed annual renewal by the Security Council. Israel agreed to vacate the oil fields and the strategic passes (Touval, 1982, pp. 262-266). Early warning systems were established by both sides to monitor the troop movements of the other. The Egyptian early-warning station was very close to the Israeli line, and the Israeli station was within the buffer zone farther to the west. The United States convinced both parties to be present in the buffer zone beside the UN forces. U.S. civilian personnel were to monitor the activities of both parties in the early warning stations for a range of agreed functions. In the political arena, Egypt agreed to ease the economic boycott against Israel and agreed to Israeli passage of non-military ships and cargos through the
Based on: (Metz, 1991).

Figure 21. Second Disengagement Agreement, September 1975.
Suez Canal. Both parties agreed to solve their problems by peaceful means and not to resort to the use of force (Touval, 1982, pp. 262-66).

In the course of implementing the Second Disengagement Agreement, a new political reality began to arise. Egypt became more and tolerant of the U.S. approach as political activities to bring about a lasting peace continued. A dramatic visit to Israel by Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat in November 1977 led to further peace negotiations, concluding in the Camp David Agreement of 1978. A peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was signed under the auspices of the Carter Administration on March 26, 1979.
CHAPTER 8

The Israeli Withdrawal From Sinai

Following development of the "framework for peace" in the Middle East agreed upon at Camp David, dated September 17, 1978, and the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of March 26, 1979, another phase of change in the Egypt-Israel boundary had begun to occur. Paragraph II of Article I of the Treaty stated: "Israel will withdraw all its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai behind the international boundary between Egypt and mandated Palestine and Egypt will resume the exercise of its full sovereignty over the Sinai."

Article II stated:

The permanent boundary between Egypt and Israel is the recognized international boundary between Egypt and the former mandated territory of Palestine without prejudice of the issue of the status of Gaza Strip. The parties recognize this boundary as inviolable. (The Egyptian-Israeli Treaty, 1979, p. 4)

Moreover, the Treaty, in Annex I, set out stages and a time table for the Israeli withdrawal.

As a security arrangement between the two countries, the Sinai peninsula was at one time divided by 2 lines of longitude--A and B--and was further divided into three zones (see Figure 22). Zone A is bounded by the west bank of the Suez Canal and the east coast of the Gulf of Suez. Zone B extended from the red line to the green line in the middle of the desert. The new arrangement established Zone C, bounded by line B on the west and the international boundary with Israel and the Gulf of
Figure 22. Sinai after the Peace Agreement of March, 26, 1979.
Aqaba on the east. Zones A and C meet in the south of the Sinai peninsula from Jabal Katrinah, approximately, to Sharm esh-Sheikh.

While the Egyptian armed forces were permitted to occupy Zone A with mechanized forces, infantry, artillery, tanks, etc. and to occupy Zone B with light weapons, they were not allowed to be stationed in Zone C. Only Egyptian civil police and United Nations forces were to be active there. On the other side of the international boundary, Zone D was established. This Zone, which has a width of two miles and is bounded by line D is located in the Israeli territories. Israel is not allowed to station heavy weapons in this area (Annex I, Article II of the Peace Treaty, 1979, p. 8). Both Israel and Egypt established early warning systems in Zones D and A respectively.

According to the peace treaty, as Israeli troops withdrew, the United Nations forces were to replace them in the evacuated areas to establish a buffer zone between the two armies (Article I-C appendix to Annex I of the Peace Treaty, 1979, p. 15). The Israeli withdrawal started two months after the peace treaty was signed. The first phase of the pullout began on May 25, 1979, with Israeli troops withdrawing from the northern part of the Sinai peninsula, including the town of El-Arish, the most strategic and highly populated city in the region (see Figure 23). Other stages of the pullout followed. By June 1980, Israel completed its withdrawal from Zones A and B to the interim withdrawal line and a buffer zone was established between the two forces. By this date Egypt controlled 45,000 km² out of the 61,000 km² in the Sinai peninsula area (Abdel-Hai, 1991). The final phase of withdrawal came 20 months later when Israel evacuated the strategic straits of Tiran in
Figure 23. Arrangement for Israeli's Withdrawal from Sinai, 1979-1982.

Based on: (Drysdale & Blake, 1985).
the gate of the Gulf of Aqaba, Sharm esh-Sheikh, and the Jewish settlements in the west coast of the Gulf of Aqaba and in the area between Rafah and El-Arish on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

After completing the withdrawal United Nations peacekeeping forces were stationed in Zone C along the border with Israel and in Sharm esh-Sheikh. The multinational peacekeeping forces in Sinai relied heavily on American troops who had performed a peacekeeping role in Sinai since the Second Disengagement Agreement of 1975. Out of 2,500 members of the multinational force of observers (MFO), 1,200 were American, most of them from the 82nd Airborne Division (Mullin, 1982, p. 26). The role of the MFO was to monitor the Egyptian-Israeli boundary and the implementation of the agreement regarding troop movements. In 1992 these forces were still stationed there.

The Rafah Problem

The members of the joint commission of Israelis and Egyptians established to demarcate the international boundary were in disagreement on how to treat Palestinians who lived to the south of the international border. In the early 1970s, Israeli authorities transferred thousands of Palestinians from the northern part of the Gaza Strip to western sections of the southern Palestinian town of Rafah, i.e., beyond the international boundary into Egyptian territory. In addition, the international boundary between Israel and Egypt had become an administrative one during the occupation of 1967-79. The Palestinian population, which experiences one of the highest rates of natural increase in the world at 3.2%, had expanded into Egyptian territory
While Egypt demanded the reimposition of the international boundary of 1906, Israel proposed changes to include Rafah and its new western suburbs within the Gaza Strip (Silver, 1982, p. 35). Egypt refused any change in the boundary and demanded the transfer of Palestinians to areas within the Gaza Strip. A joint task force demarcated the boundary, which cut through streets and houses (and families) within Rafah the town and the "Canada" refugee camp (a legacy of the Canadian United Nations force stationed there during 1957-67). The joint task force agreed to remove the Palestinians from their homes in the Canada refugee camp and to resettle them within the Gaza Strip. With the help of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), most of the residents resettled in Tal-Essultan, Al-Amal, and "Brazil" building projects ("Brazil" being another remnant of the 1957-67 period) (see Figure 24). Today, the boundary is made up of two systems of barbed wire fences six meters high and fifty meters wide—a created "no man's land." The fences divide the two-thirds Israeli-occupied Palestinian Rafah from the Egyptian third of the same town (Cohen, 1986, p. 28).

The Taba Dispute

The Egypt-Israel boundary extends 210 km from a point near Rafah on the Mediterranean Sea to Taba on the Gulf of Aqaba coast. The boundary was demarcated in 1906 by 91 pillars. After the Israeli withdrawal of 1982, 14 pillar locations were disputed between the countries with a total area of 10.29 km² (Mitwali, 1989, pp. 313-315) (see Figure 25). During the 1967-79 occupation of the Sinai when the 1906 boundary
Figure 24. The Boundary Between Egypt and Israel at Rafah Area, 1982.
Based on: (Government of Israel, 1988; Rizik, 1989).

Figure 25. The Fourteen Disputed Pillars, 1982-1988.
functioned effectively as an administrative one, Israel did not renew the boundary pillars. The disputed pillars were located in three main areas: (a) the northern part of the boundary (9 pillars), (b) the 4 pillars at Ras-en-Nakab area, and (c) pillar No. 91 in Taba, the most important one.

**Disputed Area No. 1 (The northern part)**

The area disputed in this part of the boundary totals only 0.79 km². Some of the main factors behind the dispute were the following: (a) the area is geographically a desert and unpopulated, meaning changing desert features add difficulty in keeping the pillars; (b) the northern area of the boundary had been a theater for hostilities since 1948; (c) both states had been negligent in renewing the boundary pillars to good condition; (d) since its inception in 1906, the boundary was an administrative one for most of its history (Elkosheri, 1990, p. 20), and the pillars were less important. (see Table 2)

**Disputed Area No. 2 (Ras en Naqab)**

The area disputed is the largest among the three areas (8.3 km²). The strategic importance of this area was the cause of this dispute. Elevation is approximately 800 meters, the highest point in that region. From that area there is a clear view to the east over Elat and south into the Sinai peninsula. Moreover, the area is very rigid, making movement very difficult, and contains an important crossroad which links Sinai with the Gaza Strip in the north and Elat in the east (Lesch, 1989, p. 97). (see Table 3)
Table 2

Disputed Area No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location (Pillars)</th>
<th>Dispute (Distance)</th>
<th>Egyptian Claim</th>
<th>Israeli Claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 No. 7</td>
<td>55 meters</td>
<td>straight line between pillars No. 5 and No. 8</td>
<td>westerly direction from the straight line between pillar No. 5 and No. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 No. 14</td>
<td>15 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 No. 15</td>
<td>15 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 No. 17</td>
<td>25 meters</td>
<td>straight line from No. 19 via No. 18</td>
<td>westerly direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 No. 27</td>
<td>1.9 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 No. 46</td>
<td>3 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 No. 51</td>
<td>3 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 No. 52</td>
<td>126 meters</td>
<td>straight line between No. 51 and No. 53</td>
<td>southwesterly direction between No. 51 and No. 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 No. 56</td>
<td>3 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Disputed Area No. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location (Pillars)</th>
<th>Dispute (Distance)</th>
<th>Egyptian Claim</th>
<th>Israeli Claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) No. 85</td>
<td>2571 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No. 86</td>
<td>1740 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) No. 87</td>
<td>1655 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) No. 88</td>
<td>45 meters</td>
<td>easterly location</td>
<td>westerly location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Disputed Area No. 3 (Taba)

The disputed area around the location of pillar No. 91 was the focus of the most heated debate. The disputed area at Taba extended for approximately 1,000 meters. While Egypt claimed an eastern location on the top of Taba Hill, Israel claimed two possible locations farther west to include the west bank of Taba Valley (Government of Israel, 1986, p. 174; Mitwali, 1989, p. 296-97) (see Figure 26) (see Table 3).

The importance of Taba, a 1.2 km sq. area, derived from five considerations.

1. According to Mohammed Abu-Gazala, the former Egyptian defense minister, Taba is a gateway to the Mitla and Gidi passes in central Sinai (Abdel Hai, 1991, p. 90).
Figure 26. Taba Dispute over the Location of Pillar 91.
2. Taba contains an important crossroads to Gaza and El-Arish in the north and Sharm el-Sheikh in the south.

3. Taba was a tourist attraction, possessing a scenic coastline and developed with a 12-storey hotel and recreation village.

4. Although it is a small area, it borders four different countries: Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and, effectively, Saudi Arabia.

5. Israel has a very narrow coast on the Red Sea. The Taba plane is the potential extension of the area around Elat (Abdel Hai, 1991, p. 90; Al-Rashidi, 1990, p. 81; Lesch, 1989, p. 96).

The Taba Arbitration

Article VII of the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty states: "Disputes arising out of the application or interpretation of this treaty shall be resolved by negotiation." Moreover, "[A]ny such disputes which cannot be settled by negotiation shall be resolved by conciliation or submitted to arbitration." The Israeli army and civilians completed their evacuation of Sinai on April 25, 1982. The war in Lebanon which started 40 days later found the Israeli government distracted from dealing with the boundary dispute. In addition, Israel-Egypt relations cooled after the invasion. With the help of mediation organized with the support of the Reagan administration, the two countries agreed to move to the line claimed by the other side and the area between the two lines to be under MFO jurisdiction (Al-Rashid, 1990, p. 106; Lesch, 1989, p. 96).

During the years 1983-86, Egypt wanted a mandatory solution to the problem which demanded the solving of the fourteen disputed points by arbitration, but the Israeli government insisted upon conciliation. In
September 1986, after four years of negotiations, they finally agreed to arbitration. The two countries set the conditions, rules, and time tables, plus agreed on an arbitration panel led by former president of the Swedish Supreme Court, Judge Gunnar Lagergen. The arbitrations refer to the location of the boundary's disputed pillars after the demarcation of 1906 and at the time of the British Mandate of Palestine. Moreover, it was agreed that the tribunal did not have the power to suggest locations for the pillars other than those claimed by Egypt or Israel (Lesch, 1989, p. 111; El-Kosheri, 1990, p. 10).

On May 13, 1987, each country submitted to the arbitration panel its memorial explaining its claims supported by documents and maps. Later on June 12 of that year, both parties submitted their responses to the other's position (counter-memorials). Each responded to the opposing side's claims adding supporting documents and maps. The final phase of the arbitration was the rejoinder of each country which was submitted on March 1, 1988. Both countries submitted general observations and additional pieces of evidence which referred to old claims at critical points and responses to the counter-memorials.


On September 29, 1988, the arbitration tribunal gave its decision publicly regarding the 14 disputed points. It decided in favor of the Egyptian claims in 10 out of the 14. Israel won on the less important
points in the boundary where only a few square meters were in question. The tribunal decided in favor of Egypt in the following boundary pillars: 7, 17, 27, 51 and 52 in the northern sector of the boundary, and pillars 85, 86, 87 and 88 in Ras en Naqb in the southern sector, and in the most important pillar location, No. 91 in Taba (Mitwali, 1989, pp. 372-73; Al-Rashidi, 1990, p. 135).

The tribunal's decisions were based on several points.

1. The tribunal did not accept Israel's claim of mistaken demarcation in 1906 or the claim that some pillars were originally not sited properly based on the 1906 accord, although some relevant evidence exists (see Chapter 4). The panel was concerned only with the correct location of the pillars as originally sited (Lesch, 1989, p. 95).

2. Israel penetrated the boundary and occupied part of Sinai in 1948. It signed an armistice demarcation agreement with Egypt and never claimed sovereignty over Taba or the other disputed points (Lesch, 1989, p. 95; Rizk, 1989, p. 48).

3. The situation was similar in 1956, when Israel occupied Sinai and withdrew after a few months. The UN peacekeeping forces, which were stationed in the border between 1956-67, confirmed the Egyptian claims (Rizik, 1989, p. 49).

4. Israel was not confident about the exact location of pillar No. 91. It suggested to the tribunal two possible sites: 91A at the granite knob and 91B at Bir Taba (Rejoinder of Israel, 1988, pp. 131-32) (see Figure 26).
5. The pillars were constructed in 1906 according to the principle of intervisibility, that each pillar can be seen from the one adjacent to it, and the court maintained this principle (Rizik, 1989, p. 329).

The Egyptian delegation had been able to bring to the tribunal two different official Israeli maps, the first from 1964 with Bir Taba about 700 meters west of the boundary, i.e. within Egypt, and the second from 1983 which shows the same place 300 meters east of the boundary, i.e. within Israel (Rizik, 1989, p. 357).

Israel accepted arbitration and withdrew from the Taba area on March 15, 1989. The disputed pillars were fixed according to the tribunal's decisions. Egypt paid $40 million in compensation to Israeli developers hotel owner in Taba (Abdel Hai, 1991, p. 240).

Immigration and Settlement

Since the early days, the World Zionist Organization had been interested in purchasing land along the Egyptian frontier. Several attempts to acquire land in the Egyptian frontier occurred. In 1890 a Jewish activist named Pol Friedman leading a group of twenty Jewish people tried to settle on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba (El-Deeb, 1979, pp. 115-16). In 1903, the founder of the World Zionist Organization, Theodore Herzl, suggested the establishment of a Jewish State in El-Arish and the Sinai peninsula (Jolan, 1987, p. 7). Other attempts to acquire lands in Rafah and El-Arish occurred in 1905 and in 1907, but
all of these were rejected by Lord Cromer (Walach, 1975, p. 38), though Cromer thought they had influenced Ottoman attitudes in 1906 (see chapt. 4).

The creation of the 1906 boundary didn't discourage Jewish attempts at settlement in the Egyptian frontier. In 1919, President Weizmann wrote to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, to ask for an apportionment of "the desolated land in southern Erets Yisrael for Jewish settlement" (Waingradov, 1965, p. 303).

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 permitted further Jewish settlement along the Egyptian frontier. In the late 1940s and early 1950s several Jewish settlements were erected, the most well-known being Elat on the Red Sea (near the former Umm-Rashrash), and Nizzana (the former Auja), Gevolot and Kerem Shalom in the northern edges of the boundary (Atlas of Israel, 1970, pp. 1, 12). The concept of frontier settlements is well-known in the thinking of Israeli policymakers. This doctrine holds that Jewish settlements on the frontiers help to stabilize and shape the boundary. Many factors influence this way of thinking. The Israeli government since 1967 has accelerated the construction of settlements alongside the boundary and inside the occupied territories for several reasons (Naveh, 1975, pp. 26-27).

1. In the Israeli view, its borders are disproportionately long in comparison to its territory, rendering the borders very difficult to defend, especially when surrounded by hostile neighbors.

2. The size of the Israeli armed forces and its military capability in the event of confrontations with Arab states along the borders is thought to be out of balance with the military capabilities
of the surrounding Arab countries. Building settlements near the borders is taken to enhance Israel's capability.

3. Some Israeli commentators argue that the Israeli Government built settlements to make compromise very difficult.

4. The settlements on the frontiers improve the morale of Israeli soldiers and civilians in the urban and interior areas.

5. In the case of negotiations, cease-fire lines are often taken to be not as permanent as settlement lines. Concentrating Jewish settlements along Israel's frontiers is seen to enhance the government's position in peace negotiations.

According to Dani Rozoluo, an Israeli official, the last campaign in the 1948 War was a settlement campaign on the frontier. Military units were taken to settlements on the frontier to protect it (Rozoluo, 1975, p. 43).

The occupation of the Sinai peninsula and Gaza Strip in June of 1967 was followed by the establishment of Jewish settlements across those areas. On the eve of Israeli withdrawal from Sinai there were 19 settlements. Eleven were in Pethat Rafiah, i.e. in the area between Rafah and El-Arish, and the other 8 settlements were scattered throughout the peninsula (see Figure 27). Five thousand Jewish settlers lived there (Mullin, 1982, p. 25). By 1990 there were 19 Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip inhabited by approximately 5000 settlers (The Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1991-1992; United Nations Relief Works Agency, 1990, p. 1). Israel withdrew from these settlements in April, 1982, as a result of the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel (Drysdale & Blake, 1985, p. 293).
Figure 27. The Israeli Settlements in Sinai, 1978.
Functions of the Boundary and Economic Relations

Since its establishment, the Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary has passed through different phases of development which have affected its function. Prior to World War I the boundary was formal. After the delimitation of 1906, Bedouins continued to cross it for their own purposes. Between the two world wars the boundary became an administrative one between the British Protectorate of Egypt and in the northern and eastern Sinai and the British administration of the Negev. The British authorities enforced measures of supervision over the movement of Bedouins for tax matters and to prevent smuggling and violence (Brawer, 1979, p. 373).

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Armistice demarcation line which followed drastically altered the boundary in its functions. With movements of the Bedouin tribes sealed, many tribes were either deported or moved into the Egyptian territories. Between the years 1949-67, following Jewish settlements on the frontier with Egypt, the boundary became an ethnic one separating two ethnic groups, Arabs and Jews (Brawer, 1979, p. 374).

The occupation of Gaza Strip and Sinai in 1967 changed the nature of the boundary back from international-political to administrative. Due to intensive Jewish settlement during 1967-79, especially in the northern boundary sector, the border was opened for free movement. The Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the evacuation of the Jewish settlements restored the boundary to an international and ethnic separation line. The peace Treaty of 1979 specified that "full, normal diplomatic relations between Israel and Egypt would be established"
As Israel started its pullout from Sinai in 1979, the two countries established diplomatic relations. In 1980, three traffic check points along the boundary were opened, two of them along the edges of the boundary in Rafah and Taba. Both checkpoints opened to serve the movement of tourists and trade. The last checkpoint is in Nissana and serves trade movement only.

In 1979 and 1980, Israel and Egypt signed 55 separate commercial, cultural and scientific exchange agreements (Smith, 1983, p. 17). In the trade arena, oil is the leading commodity between the two countries. As part of the Peace Treaty, Egypt is providing Israel 40,000 barrels of oil per day. The value of the oil trade in 1982 was estimated at $600 million (Benin, 1985, p. 6). Other Egyptian trade with Israel amounted to $700 million in 1982 and $800 million in the first eight months of 1983 (Smith, 1983, p. 17). Israel tried to balance its trade with Egypt mainly with agricultural products. In 1980 Israeli exports to Egypt totaled $12 million. It rose to $25 million in 1982, but due to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, export figures dropped to $6 million in the first three quarters of 1983 (Smith, 1983, p. 17). The cold peace between the two countries following the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai was based on the Taba dispute, the invasion of Lebanon, and the unprogressive nature of negotiations over the issue of "autonomy" for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. All these factors prevented Egypt from normalization of relations and cooperation with Israel.

The dramatic element in trade came with Israeli tourists visiting Egypt. This tourist trade was one-sided and was strongly affected by
the political conditions following the Peace Treaty. Besides air services between the two countries, there is a daily bus service from Tel-Aviv to Cairo via the Rafah checkpoint. Tens of thousands of Israelis benefited from the agreement signed in October of 1981 in allowing tourism between the two countries. However, in contrast, very few Egyptians have visited Israel. In 1982, 30,000 Israelis visited Egypt but only 4,300 Egyptians made their way to Israel. For the first three quarters of 1983 the figures dropped to 25,000 and 1,800 respectively. Between 1979-83, 200,000 Israelis visited Egypt (Millér, 1983, p. 16). Despite incidents of violence against Israeli tourists in Egypt, Israelis—especially Palestinians with Israeli passports—continue to travel to Egypt. The maximum figure of Egyptian tourists visiting Israel was 5,100 in 1987. In 1988, 3,741 Egyptians visited Israel and 4,235 and 3,348 in the following years respectively (Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1991, pp. 58-62).

Although the two countries hoped for more cooperation and mass movement through the border, especially Israel, the normalization process with its three-dimensional diplomatic, economic, and cultural channels was greatly influenced by the total political environment in the region. At a seminar held in 1989 by the Jaffa Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Tel-Aviv to discuss the "ten years of peace with Egypt", some scholars argued that the main factor which determines Egyptian foreign policy with Israel is its own domestic problems, since it is a society with a large natural increase in population. The conflict in the Middle East was interpreted a struggle between two systems with different values and interpretations. Conditions such as
these make it very difficult for warm relations to exist between Egyptians and Israelis. Egypt maintains the position that the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict is the Palestinians: if this problem is solved, the others will be solved by themselves (Mirhav, 1989, p. 64).
CHAPTER 9
SUMMARY

This essay has provided a continuous descriptive account of the Egypt-Palestine/Israel boundary from 1841 to present. The roots of the Egypt-Palestine/Israeli boundary originated in Mohammed Ali's ambition to seize ultimate power in the region when he invaded Syria in 1831. The intervention of European powers forced Ali to withdraw his troops from Syria. In return the Sultan of Istanbul gave Ali's lineage hereditary rule over Egypt. In his Firman of 1841, the Sultan determined the eastern limits of Egypt by a straight line extended from Suez to a point between Rafah and Khan Yonis on the Mediterranean coast. It served as an administrative line within the Ottoman Empire. Ali did not accept the new line and continued to exercise control over Sinai and three forts along the west coast of Arabia for the coming decades. The operation of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased European rivalry and colonial activity in the area. This rivalry began earlier in India and was followed by Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798. The British, who were the main users of and benefactors from the Suez Canal, desired strong unilateral control over the area to protect their highly strategic maritime route to India. The French wanted to gain maximum political and economic benefits as the ones responsible for building the canal and, moreover, wanted to disrupt the British route to India. Facing a real internal threat by an Egyptian nationalist movement and the state of economic bankruptcy and anarchy which existed in Egypt at
that time, Great Britain moved to take advantage of the situation by occupying Egypt in 1882.

Unlike other provinces within the Ottoman Empire, Egypt always had a certain degree of autonomy. This increased during Ali's reign from 1806-48. The British occupation of Egypt enhanced this trend towards weakening of Ottoman control. One of the most important goals of the British invasion of Egypt was the protection of the Suez Canal. The issue of the eastern Egyptian boundary was on the British agenda in 1892. In his Firman of investiture to Khedive Abbas II Hilmi, the Ottoman Sultan failed to mention Sinai and the eastern Egyptian boundary. The British Government represented by Lord Cromer, the British Agent in Egypt, demanded and received a new Firman, stating: "the status quo is maintained in the same manner as it was administered at the time of your grandfather [of Khedive Abbas II Hilmi]. . . and your father" (Toye, 1989, p. 59). For the British it was formal acknowledgement of the Egyptian (British) rule over Sinai.

The issue of the boundary arose early in January 1906 when the British Governor of Egypt started to take greater interest in Sinai and the eastern border. A geopolitical power struggle ensued between the Britian and Ottoman empires which came close to a military confrontation. The British wanted to keep the Sinai peninsula as a buffer zone to protect the Suez Canal and did not accept several proposed Ottoman compromises, thus forcing the demarcation of the Rafah-Aqaba line upon the Ottomans. In accordance with an agreement signed between Cairo and Istanbul on September 13, 1906, a joint commission demarcated the 210 km line as an administrative one within the Ottoman
Empire. They constructed 91 pillars keeping the principle of intervisibility between the pillars. The British, being well aware of the Ottoman weaknesses, achieved their goals and controlled both sides of the Suez Canal.

The end of the First World War brought a new reality to the Middle East as well as the rest of the world. The defeat of Turkey and its renunciation of any title over Egypt, Palestine, and the rest of its former empire, led to new arrangements between the European powers. Beginning in 1922, Great Britain was awarded, as a Mandate, Palestine. Earlier, during 1918-20, there were several proposals made to change the Rafah-Aqaba line, but the 1906 line remained as a compromise between several suggested lines.

Although there were some appeals made and legal questions raised about the sovereignty of Egypt over Sinai, the Rafah-Aqaba line survived and emerged as a stable and permanent boundary. The dramatic events of two world wars, Egypt's independence, the British Mandate over Palestine, the United Nation's Partition Plan of 1947, and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948: all of these events failed to alter the Rafah-Aqaba line of 1906.

For the first time since its demarcation, the boundary changed when Egypt and Israel signed the Armistice Agreement of February 1949. The Armistice Line followed the boundary line of 1906, except around Gaza Strip; however, the boundary's status changed in terms of its definition as a boundary line only, not as a political or territorial border. Moreover, the boundary became sealed to movement and served as an ethnic separation line, with a demilitarized zone established around Auja on
the Israeli side of the border and limited defensive positions in the area allowed within Egypt opposing the Auja area. As one of the outcomes of the Agreement, the Gaza Strip was formed in the southwest corner of Palestine.

The triple attack on Egypt in 1956 by Israel, France and Great Britain led to a temporary change in the boundary line. For a brief period, Israel had a line extended for a great distance alongside the Suez Canal, just 10 km distant. Moreover, after the Israeli withdrawal, the 1956 War brought certain changes in the border system. While the boundary line itself remained untouched, United Nations Emergency Forces entered Sinai in 1957 to monitor the border in the coming ten years. During 1957-67, the Egypt-Israel border was the quietest among the Arab-Israeli borders.

This situation was altered during the first half of 1967. Tensions escalated along the border between Israel and Egypt due to tensions along other Syrian-Israeli frontiers and the Egyptian decisions to close the Straits of Tiran to ships sailing to Elat and to send the United Nations Emergency Forces home in May 1967. Following a strike on June 5 of that year, the sealed armistice line of 1949 was altered in its nature and location, replaced by a cease fire line along the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Suez. The Rafah-Aqaba line became an administrative line between Israel and the territories of Sinai and the Gaza Strip which it occupied. While the Armistice demarcation system was based on bilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1949, the cease fire system was based on United Nations resolutions. The nature of the cease
fire system was unstable. Although it survived the War of Attrition of 1969-71, it collapsed in October 1973.

The October War of 1973—which was initiated by Egypt and Syria—and its military and geopolitical outcomes led to intense political activity. Possible confrontations between the superpowers during the war, the subsequent oil embargo, and the new lines created by the Egyptian and Israeli militaries convinced Washington and Moscow that the status quo on the Middle East was no longer bearable. After intensive diplomatic efforts in the area by the Nixon Administration, Egypt and Israel concluded two disengagement agreements. The first was in January 1974, and the second was in September 1975. The disengagement front line system differed from the former cease fire and Armistice systems. While it was similar to the Armistice system as a bilateral agreement, it differed in that it was limited in time, and required annual renewal by the Security Council of the United Nations. Moreover, the disengagement agreement was based on three lines, not one, as were the previous systems. It followed the principle of establishing a demilitarized zone controlled by UN forces which separated a thin zone of light Egyptian and Israeli forces.

The momentum of political activity continued after the Second Disengagement Agreement of September 1975. In November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat visited Israel. The conclusion of the Camp David Agreement followed, as did the Peace Treaty of 1979. Israel withdrew from the Sinai peninsula during 1979-82 and moved back behind the Rafah-Aqaba line. The few locations along the boundary line which
were disputed were finalized after arbitration accepted by the two countries.

The 1906 boundary antecedent by 42 years to the establishment of the State of Israel has survived many dramatic events. Although it was penetrated several times in both directions, it remains as it was demarcated in 1906. The boundary line, superimposed by imperial interests, gained ultimate permanence and stability after the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1982. It functions in 1992 as a mutually accepted international boundary and allows citizens interaction between states.
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