



# **International Boundary Study**

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## **Israel – Lebanon Boundary**

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**The Geographer  
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## ISRAEL - LEBANON ARMISTICE LINE

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# ISRAEL - LEBANON ARMISTICE LINE

## I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Israel-Lebanon Armistice Line extends eastward from Ra's an Naqurah (Ras el Nakurah) on the Mediterranean to the Syrian tripoint on the Hasbani River. The line measures 49 miles in length and coincides with the former Lebanon-Palestine international boundary. This boundary was demarcated by 38 permanent pillars erected in 1922 by a mixed Anglo-French commission. The present Armistice Line was created by the Armistice Agreement signed by delegations of Israel and Lebanon on March 23, 1949.

## II. GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

### A. Physical

The frontier zone between Israel and Lebanon is not a distinct physiographic region. Two parallel chains of mountains, with elevations ranging up to 9,000 feet, are situated in Lebanon and Syria to the north of the frontier. To the south, in Israel, are the lower (less than 2,000 feet) rounded hills of Galilee. The frontier is the zone of transition between the two. Topographically, the western portion of the armistice line includes a series of low, east-west ridges which serve as a local water divide. The peaks on the ridges range between 1,000 feet and 1,800 feet in elevation. In the central sector, elevations increase gradually eastward from 1,800 feet to approximately 2,500 feet. Deeply entrenched valleys create a very rugged landscape.

In the east, the armistice line turns northward along the western rim of the graben, the great structural valley of the Jordan River-Dead Sea system. Near the eastern terminus, the armistice line enters the graben. Elevations on the bank of the Hasbani in the vicinity of the Syrian tripoint are approximately 145 feet above sea level.

The frontier area has a climate roughly analogous to southern California. The dominant characteristics are moderate temperatures with minimum precipitation in summer and maximum in winter; this climatic regime is typically designated Mediterranean. Rainfall in general decreases from north to south and from the interior mountains westward. Beirut to the north receives approximately 35 inches annually, while Haifa registers about 25 inches and Tel Aviv about 22 inches. The westward (western) slopes of the Lebanese mountains have stations measuring over 60 inches per annum. In contrast, stations along Lake Tiberias measure about 18 inches and those on the Dead Sea, ten. Eilat, in the extreme south on the Gulf of Aqaba, receives about one inch per annum.

Most precipitation falls as rain except in the highest of the Lebanon mountains. A "three-fold" pattern of precipitation occurs. Early rains begin in October and last through mid-November, followed by a short dry period. These rains yield about one to five inches and serve to moisten the soil for fall plantings. In December, heavier rains begin and last

through February. About one-half of the annual total is registered in these two and one-half months. Another brief dry spell is followed by a third period of rain, similar in amount and type to the late fall period. Summers are virtually rainless; with the high rate of evaporation and transpiration in relationship to the low amount of rainfall, there is greater potential aridity than the annual rainfall would indicate. Along the Dead Sea, for example, the potential evaporation/transpiration rate is over 150 inches per annum; natural precipitation is about one-tenth of that amount. Consequently, irrigation becomes a vital element in any agricultural scheme. The quest for water, or the control of water, has been one of the principal causes for the struggles which have plagued the Near East.

## **B. Historical**

The weakness of the Turkish state and the divisive forces acting on the peripheral territories invited economic expansion by the great powers of Europe. Railroad and petroleum concessions were obtained by Germany, France and Britain, all of which claimed extra territorial rights for their citizens. Jockeying for spheres among Germany, Russia, Italy, France and Britain intensified as the Sultanate declined in vigor. At the outbreak of the World War, Turkey joined the Central Powers. During the period 1914-18, various interested groups and organizations began to develop plans for a dismembered Turkey. Arab nationalists led by the Hashemite family of Mecca and Medina spearheaded a drive for the independence of the region south of the Taurus Mountains including Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. In addition, various Zionist leaders throughout the world saw the possibility for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Official French and British interests also demanded protection.

Anglo-Arab talks began in earnest in 1915; the French, fearing exclusion from territories of historical interest, then propose formal Anglo-French negotiations. The two series progressed simultaneously with Britain agreeing to the independence of an Arab area to the east and south but including Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Damascus. Though the exact excluded area was never clear, the territories comprehended presumably were intended to be divided into a French zone in the north and a British sphere or an international area (Palestine), in the south. The exact area intended in the exclusion was never too clear. Concurrent Anglo-Zionist talks in London centered on the possibilities for a Jewish national homeland, either independent or under British tutelage. Certain Arab-Zionist discussions also took place regarding Jewish settlement.

On March 9, 1916, a secret Anglo-French memorandum, the so-called Sykes-Picot Agreement, laid the basis for a partition of the Near East. A truncated, independent Turkey was to be restricted to Anatolia. A French Zone included south-central Turkey and the coast of the Levant. Southeast of this zone was to be the independent Arab state (under French influence). Beyond the French zone, the agreement projected an international zone (Palestine) situated south of a line from the coast near Tyre to the Jordan River between lakes Hula and Tiberias. (Britain obtained the port and hinterland of Tyre.) The southern limit of the zone was to be the line from Gaza to the north-central part of the Dead Sea. These were the first "boundaries" for modern Palestine.

As British and Arab forces advanced into Turkey, British officials thought underwent certain changes and Zionists, with rising hopes, began to consider seriously the boundaries envisioned for the homeland. The Zionists pressed not only for the inclusion of river basins necessary for the proper development of large-scale irrigation projects, but for lands capable of exploitation by a large number of immigrants. One Zionist projection placed the boundary with Lebanon on the lower Litani to include in the northeast the headwaters of the Jordan (Hasbani etc.) and the "snows of Mt. Hermon." On the east, the Jewish state would include the fertile Hauran and the Yarmuk valley (with the Baghdad-Maan rail line as the approximately eastern limit). Aqaba and Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba were to be claimed as part of the Sinai (El Arish). Even this territorial extent was considered too small by many, but most Zionists sought balanced limits for an economically and strategically viable Jewish state. The plans, of course, conflicted with the still secret Sykes-Picot agreement.

After the complete conquest of the Arab area, Britain created zones of military occupation. Occupied Enemy Territory Administration, (OETA), South roughly corresponded to Palestine: (bounded on the north by an east-west line from Lake Hula to the coast; in the east, by the Jordan-Dead Sea line; and in the south, by a boundary from the southern end of the Dead Sea to a point roughly midway on the Egypt-Turkish boundary) encompassing the Turkish independent sanjak of Jerusalem and the Beirut sanjaks of Nablus and Acre. OETA North extended northward in modern-day Lebanon; OETA East comprised greater Jordan and Syria. The OETA boundaries were merely military occupation lines but the OETA-South Limit came to affect the ultimate Lebanon-Palestine boundary.

At roughly the same time, the British, in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, committed themselves publicly to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine, with vague limits: "... from Dan to Beersheba...". With military occupation, came the desire to maintain Palestine under British rather than international control. As this intent became known to the French, they requested that French troops participate in the occupation.

The line of military separation between French and British troops soon required definition. The British Army proposed a boundary from Sidon eastward to include the lower Litani valley and (farther east) the oil fields of Mosul and Kirkuk. The French protested vehemently and made counter-proposals which, in the west, remained close to the Sykes-Picot boundary. Many factors entered into the discussion, including railroad projects and pipelines joining the Iraqi oil fields with the Mediterranean. The British sought the best topographic routes for their projects while the French insisted on maintaining the frontier along the Yarmuk.

Ultimately, British troops offered to withdraw to the northern boundary of OETA South, and proposed a compromise to satisfy the requirements of Palestine to control the headwaters of the Jordan and those of Syria to insure to Damascus control of its fertile surrounding plains. The British solution drew the frontier from Ras el Nakurah eastward to include the big bend of the Litani in Syria and Lebanon and then northeastward to the lower slopes of Mt. Hermon. Then the line was to proceed southward. The French, however, refused to

compromise and in June 1920 proposed a line from Ras el Nakurah, the ladder of Tyre, to a point on the Jordan north of Metulla-Dan, then southward to lake Hula, the Sea of Galilee and the Yarmuk. All existing Jewish colonies were situated to the south or west of this line. From the Palestinian viewpoint, it had little else to commend it. Finally in December of 1920, this boundary, placed a few miles north of the Sykes-Picot line, became the division between Palestine and Lebanon and Syria.

An Anglo-French commission erected demarcation pillars along the frontier and incorporated their report into the boundary agreement of 1923. In the meantime, the concept of mandates was advanced and the territories, instead of becoming protectorates, were designated as League of Nations mandates under the administration of France and the United Kingdom. As a result of the negotiations, Palestine gained the Safad-Metulla-Hula region centered on the middle Hasbani. The boundary remained stable throughout the mandate period. The 86th session (1934) of the Council of the League of Nations approved the 1923 boundary agreement.

By the end of the interwar period, however, the future status of Palestine showed promise of becoming a vexatious issue. In 1939, the United Kingdom in a white paper declared "... unequivocally that it is not part of ... policy that Palestine should become a Jewish state." With the Second World War, Jewish settlers continued to arrive, legally and illegally, in limited numbers. After the war, the persecuted remnants of European Jewry sought escape from the terrors they had experienced. Many fled to Palestine and many more sought a way to enter.

Anti-Zionist feelings grew among the Arabs who felt their brothers were being displaced from their homeland. Unable to find a solution to the growing chaos, Britain withdrew its forces and thrust the issue into the United Nations. The U.N. in November 1947 decreed the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab sectors joined only in economic union. The Zionist state was to include 5,670 square miles; Jerusalem and its surroundings were to constitute an international zone. Before the plan could be implemented, war broke out between Jews and Arabs. The Israelis proclaimed a new State on May 15, 1948.

Hostilities were halted by a Security Council cease-fire decree, and as a result of United Nations arbitration, armistice agreements were signed by representatives of Israel and its neighboring states. The Lebanese agreement created an armistice line which coincided exactly with the existing international boundary (Lebanon-Palestine). Since the termination of hostilities, the Israel-Lebanon Armistice Line has remained relatively quiet.

### **III. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT**

The Israel-Lebanon Armistice Line follows "the international boundary between the Lebanon and Palestine". The demarcation agreement of 1923 described that boundary as follows:

The frontier leaves the Mediterranean Sea at the point called Ras-el-Nakurah (Rosh Haniqra) and follows the crest of the spur to cairn 1, situated 50 metres north of the Palestinian police post of Ras-el-Nakurah.

Thence the frontier follows the same crest to cairn 2 at Khirbet Danian.

Thence it follows the same crest to cairn 3, which is an old point of triangulation 400 metres south-west of Labuna (Labbouna) village.

Thence it follows the same crest to cairn 4, 1 kilom. east-southeast of the village of Labuna.

Thence, running southwards, it follows the thalweg of an unnamed wadi to its confluence with the Wadi Kutayeh; runs up the thalweg of Wadi Kutayeh east-north-east for 2 kilom.; thence runs up the thalweg of a small tributary on the left of the Wadi Kutayeh, coming from the east up to cairn 5, which is situated at the south-east limit of the cultivated lands of this valley. Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 6, which is situated on the crest between the Wadis Kutayeh and El Dalem. From cairn 6 it follows a straight line of 700 metres in a south-south-east direction to cairn 7, which is situated at the confluence of Wadi Dalem with a small thalweg running from the north; it continues up the Wadi Dalem 1,300 metres in an east-north-east direction, then 400 metres in a northerly direction, then 600 metres in a west-north-west direction and 1 kilom. again in a north-north-east direction up to cairn 8, situated on the road from Alma-el-Shaub (Aalmaech Chaab) to Yurdeth, (Jurdeih) and 2,500 metres east of the village of Alma-el-Shaub.

Thence it follows the road passing a few metres to the north of Yurdeth, and thence a few metres to the south of Birket-el-Rishe to cairn 9, situated 700 metres south-east of Khirbet Balat at the junction of the road from Ramia (Ramiye) to Terbikha with the road from Ramia to Alma-el-Shaub.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 10, situated at 600 metres south-south-east of cairn 9, thence along the crest between Wadi Teribikha to the south and the basin of Ramia to the north to cairn 11, situated 1 kilom. south-east of the village of Ramia.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 12, situated on the peak 700 metres west of the village of Aita-el-Shaub, (Aita ech Chaab).

Thence it follows the crest in a generally southern direction to cairn 13 on Tel Rahib. (Tallar Rahib)

Thence running in a straight line to the confluence of Wadi-el-Waul with an unnamed wadi at 300 metres to the north-east of Tel Abu Babein, it follows this unnamed wadi which passes east of Mansurah (Al Mansura) and west of Samuklieh as far as cairn 14, situated at 600 metres west of Ain Katamun.

Thence it runs in a straight line in an easterly direction to cairn 15, situated in the valley of Wadi Bediyeh.

Thence it runs in a straight line to cairn 16, situated at the confluence of Wadi Bediyeh with Wadi Khelal.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 17, situated on the west peak of Jebel Haramun.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 18, situated on the east peak of Jebel Haramun.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 19, situated on a hill 2,100 metres south-east of the village of Yarun.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 20, situated on a spur 2 kilom. east of the village of Yarun. (Yaroun)

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 21, situated on the top of Jebel-el-Asy.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 22, situated on the bank of a wadi, and 600 metres to the north of Khirbet Auba (Uba) and about 1 kilom. to the south of the Birket.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 23, situated on the top of Jebel Ghabieh and at 600 metres to the south of Deir-el Ghabieh.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 24, situated on the spur east of Jebel Ghabieh.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 25, situated in the valley, on the east bank of a thalweg 600 metres north-west of the village of El Malkiyeh. (El Malikiya)

Thence it follows the thalweg in a generally northern direction to cairn 26, situated where the thalweg is cut by the path from Kades (Qadas) to Aitherun. (Aitaroun)

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 27, situated 700 metres west-north-west of

the village of Kades, near the large tree of Khirbet Menafir. (Kheurbet el Manafir).

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 28, situated at the crossing of the path from Kades to Meis (Meiss ej Jebel) with the Wadi Atabeh.

Thence it follows the thalweg of Wadi Atabeh to cairn 29, situated at the confluence of Wadi Atabeh with the Khallet Ghuzeleh.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 30, situated on the crest east of Merj Tufeh.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 31, situated on a small spur 800 metres to the east of the eastern village of Meis.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 32, situated at 300 metres to the north-west of Khirbet-el-Menarah, at the junction of the paths from Meis to Hunin and from Khirbet-el-Menarah to El Hola. (Houle)

Thence it follows the crest in a generally north-north-western direction to cairn 33, which is the old triangulation point called Sheikh Abbad.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 34, situated in the valley of Hunin, and 1 kilom. north-north-west of the village of Hunin.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 35, situated on the watershed between the Litani and the Huleh and 1,300 metres north of Hunin village.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 36, situated on the summit of Jebel-el-Meruj.

Thence it follows a straight line to cairn 37, situated on the col of Odeissa (El Aadeisse) 300 metres to the east of the last houses of the village and south of the path Odeissa to Metallah. (Metulla)

Thence it follows the path from the col of Odeissa, and passing 1,400 metres to north-west and to north of Jebel Ariak, turns to the south-east at the junction of the paths leading to Jedeida of Merj Ayoun, (Marjayoun) Khiam and Kaleia, (Kela); thence it passes over the bridge 200 metres north-east of the village of Metallah, then it follows the path from Metallah to Baniyas in a generally southerly direction to cairn 38, situated on a hill 900 metres north-north-east of the village Abl.

Thence it follows a line parallel to and 100 metres to the south of the path from Metallah to Baniyas, passing by the old Roman bridge over the River Hesbani, (Hasbani)...

#### IV. TREATIES AND OTHER ACTS

The current line of separation between Israel and Lebanon stems from the acts creating and delimiting the mandates after World War I. Pre-war boundaries were not a factor although the deviations from them were not significant.

- A. **Franco-British Boundary Convention** signed in Paris on December 23, 1920 (United Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, Misc. No. 4, Cmd. 1195 (1921); 22 LNTS 353)

The convention delimited the frontier between Palestine and the Lebanon and Syria from the Mediterranean to the banks of the Yarmuk near El Hamme. The line is slightly to the north of the Sykes-Picot boundary determined earlier in the war. The delimited boundary was followed, with only very minor deviations instituted by the demarcation commission of 1922:

- B. **Agreement ... representing the Boundary Line between Syria and Palestine from the Mediterranean to El Hamme (with three maps)** signed in Paris on March 7, 1923. (United Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 1910 (1923); 22 LNTS 364)

The agreement comprises the "Final Report on the Demarcation of the Frontier between the Great Lebanon and Syria on the one side, and Palestine on the other Side, from the Mediterranean Sea to El Hamme (in the lower Valley of the Yarmuk) in Pursuance of Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention of Paris of December 23, 1920." The boundary and the description of the location of the pillars constitutes the principal part of the report. The Lebanon-Palestine delineation has been quoted in Section III above.

The three maps are at the scale of 1:100,000 and they show the pillars erected and all of the features mentioned in the delimitation.

The League of Nations approved the delimitation and demarcation in 1934.

- C. **Agreement between Palestine and Syria and the Lebanon ... in connection with Frontier** Questions, signed at Jerusalem on February 2, 1926. (United Kingdom, Foreign Office, Treaty Series No. 19 (1927); 126 LNTS 622)

The agreement was concerned with the administration of the frontier and certain properties divided by the boundary. The alignment was not affected.

- D. **Agreement between Palestine and Syria and the Lebanon regarding Frontier Questions** signed on November 3, 1938. (United Kingdom, Foreign Office, Treaty Series No. 34 (1939))

This agreement modified the 1926 frontier administration treaty. The boundary itself was unchanged.

- E. **General Armistice Agreement between Lebanon and Israel** signed at Ras en Naqoura on March 23, 1949 (United Nations, Security Council, Special Supplement No. 4, S Document 1926/Rev., April 8, 1949); 42 UNTS 287)

Article V, Section 1 states that "The Armistice Demarcation Line shall follow the international boundary between the Lebanon and Palestine."

## V. **SUMMARY**

The Israel-Lebanon frontier should be shown on official United States maps only as an armistice line. It should never be symbolized as an international boundary except where the scale of the map is so small that differentiations in categories can not be made.

The alignment should follow that of the treaty of 1923 as shown on the 1:100,000 maps annexed to the agreement. The armistice agreement between Israel and Lebanon did not contain a map supplement. However, the Army Map Service 1:250,000 sheet Bayrut, is acceptable as a medium or small-scale compilation source.

Because the frontier is an armistice line, the standard disclaimer that the boundary representation is not authoritative should be utilized.

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