



International Boundary Study

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Iraq – Jordan Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Iraq - Jordan boundary is about 83 miles in length and is delimited. Beginning at the Saudi Arabian tripoint on Jabal 'Unayzah at 32° 13' 51" North Latitude and 39° 18' 09" East Longitude, the boundary follows a straight line north - northwestward to the Syrian tripoint at approximately 33° 22' 29" North Latitude and 38° 47' 33" East Longitude near Jabal at Tanf.

II. BACKGROUND AND BOUNDARY ANALYSIS

The Iraq - Jordan boundary is an outcome of the exceedingly complex geopolitical rivalries which erupted in the form of the Arab Revolt of 1916 - 1918 and Great Power competition for the exploitation of the weakened Ottoman Empire. The boundary itself, however, is a comparatively simple delineation of a straight line connection which followed the eventual resolution of boundary delimitations creating both northern and southern terminals.¹

The Allied Conference at San Remo on April 24, 1920 partitioned the former Arab Ottoman territory into British and French mandates, in effect, formalized the "secret" Sykes-Picot Agreements of 1916. The delineations of territory, however, between British and French spheres of influence, as well as within their respective allocations, remained vague and subject to later determination. Subsequently the Franco-British Convention of December 23, 1920 defined the boundary for Syria and Lebanon, and Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq), but again left more specific determination on the ground to the future.

Following King Faysal's expulsion from Syria by the French Army in July 1920, he became King of Iraq under British Mandate in 1921. His brother, Amir 'Abdullah, in 1922 became head of the newly-created semi-autonomous Arab principality of Trans-Jordan also under British Mandate. No specific mention was made regarding a boundary between Trans-Jordan and Iraq. At the time, as with the Suez Canal as a "lifeline" to India and South Asia, the British Empire regarded as vital a land communication link to the same area.

The Trans-Jordan Constitution of April 16, 1928 again omitted a reference to an actual boundary between Iraq and Trans-Jordan. Two months later in the Nationality law of June 1, 1928, the boundary was described inadequately and provisionally as:

"A line drawn from the intersection of meridian 39° east and parallel 32° north to the nearest point on the frontier laid down in Article 1 of the Franco-British Convention of the 23 December, 1920."

¹ For more information, see International Boundary Study No. 94, Jordan - Syria Boundary, December 31, 1969; International Boundary Study No. 100, Iraq - Syria Boundary.

Earlier, the Iran - Najd Boundary Agreement of May 1922 defined the Iraq - Najd tripoint with Trans-Jordan at:

"Jabal 'Unayzah situated in the neighborhood of the intersection of latitude 32° North with Longitude 39° East where the Iraq - Najd boundary terminates."

The northern tripoint with Syria in the vicinity of Jabal at Tanf is delimited in the Protocol between France and Great Britain, October 31, 1931. The same trijunction is confirmed in the Iraq - Syria Boundary Commission's Report to the League of Nations at Geneva, September 10, 1932. As noted in International Boundary Study No. 94, December 30, 1969, the tripoint is determined to be 33° 22' 29" North Latitude and 38° 47' 33" East Longitude.

The first instance of a mutual agreement in the delimitation of the Iraqi - Trans-Jordan boundary came with an exchange of letters between the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri as-Sa'id, the British Resident in Amman C.H.F. Cox, and King 'Abdullah (July 31 - 16 August 1932). The boundary was described as:

"The frontier between Iraq and Trans-Jordan starts in the south at the point of junction of the Iraq - Nejd frontier and the Trans-Jordan - Nejd frontier and ends in the north at that point on the Iraq - Syria frontier and the Trans-Jordan - Syria frontier, as ultimately delimited, which is nearest to the summit of the Jebel Tenf. Between these two terminal points the frontier follows where possible prominent physical features, provided that it shall not diverge more than 5 kilom. from a straight line between these two terminal points."

Given the determination of the southern tripoint on Jabal 'Unayzah, located at 32° 13' 51" North Latitude and 39° 18' 09" East Longitude, the straight line delimitation of the boundary is measured at about 83 miles in length. No commission was ever appointed to determine a boundary other than the straight line.

III. SUMMARY

The Iraq - Jordan boundary, approximately 83 miles in length, is delimited. There are no boundary markers or actual demarcation on the ground. Like other boundary delineations of former Ottoman Arab lands, the boundary is essentially artificial and associated with the division of spheres of interest between Britain and France following defeat of Ottoman Turkey in World War I.

The entire boundary area is desert and part of the plateau known as the Syrian Desert. The only hard-surface all weather road crossing the boundary is near the midpoint, about 43 miles from the northern tripoint. Running for the most part parallel, on the south side of the highway, was the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) pipeline which until 1948 transmitted

Iraqi oil to the Mediterranean at Haifa. The pipe now removed, petroleum is diverted to the Syrian and Lebanon coast through Syria by way of Tadmur (Palmyra) and Hims (Homs).

There are no active disputes between Iraq and Jordan regarding the specific alignment of the boundary. Grazing and watering practices traditionally conducted by tribes crossing the boundary remain undisturbed. A reasonably accurate, medium scale representation of the boundary is found on Army Map Service 1:250,000 scale (Series 1501) Sheets NI 37-10, NI 37-14, NI 37-15. A small scale depiction is found on the map accompanying this study. For purposes of compilation, especially since many maps of the boundary lack precision, it is advised that the coordinates noted in this study be used.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Strategic and Functional Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520 (Telephone: 63-22022).