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# Anglo-French Negotiations Over the Boundaries of Palestine, 1919-1920

JOHN J. McTAGUE JR.\*

Ever since the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967, the question of Israel's borders has been a bitter source of dispute. Having captured the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights during that conflict, the Israelis have insisted upon a readjustment of their pre-1967 borders. Those boundaries in turn resulted from the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948-49 which divided up the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine. The events of those years are well known to all students of Middle Eastern history, but far less familiar are the negotiations which created the perimeters of Palestine in the first place. These dealings took place between the British and French governments, with the Zionist Organization as an interested third party, in the years 1919-1920; they established the present-day boundaries which exist between Israel and Jordan on the one hand, and Syria and Lebanon on the other. The following article will describe these negotiations.

In the Ottoman Empire, no political entity called "Palestine" existed at all. The Holy Land was divided up into three *sanjaqs*, one independent and the other two part of a larger *vilayet*. The *Sanjaq* of Jerusalem extended from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River and Dead Sea, with its northern boundary slightly north of Jaffa and its southern border touching Egypt. Farther north were the *sanjaqs* of Nablus and Acre in the *Vilayet* of Beirut, each ranging from the sea to the Jordan. The northern border of Acre was quite close to the current Lebanese-Israeli boundary, particularly on the

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western side. All the land east of the Jordan was included in the *Vilayet* of Syria.

During the course of the First World War, the British and French governments anticipated the defeat of the Turks, and in the famous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 they divided the Ottoman Empire up amongst themselves, the Italians and the Russians. In this treaty, the three *sanjaqs* were placed in an area slated for international control, but the territory north of Acre and the Sea of Galilee was to be under direct French rule. The Acre-Haifa area was reserved for the British, to give them an outlet on the Mediterranean for their holdings further east in Trans-Jordania and Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup>

This agreement was concluded by the Asquith government, but once David Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December 1916, the British began to take a much more active interest in the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. A British army (the Egyptian Expeditionary Force) crossed the Sinai in the autumn of 1917 and in the course of the following year succeeded in clearing the Turks out of all the territory up to Damascus. Therefore, at the war's end the British were occupying most of the area known as the Levant.<sup>2</sup>

This new situation caused the Lloyd George government to take a rather dim view of the provisions of Sykes-Picot. In early October 1918, the Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that the Agreement was outdated and did not apply to the current circumstances. In what was to become the standard British argument for revision of the treaty, he told his colleagues that "having been concluded more than two years ago, it entirely overlooked the fact that our position in Turkey had been won by very large British forces, whereas our Allies had contributed little to the result."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, he soon took steps to rectify this alleged inequity.

French Premier Georges Clemenceau visited London in early December, a few weeks after the armistice, and Lloyd George managed to get him to agree to hand over Palestine and Mosul to Britain, despite the terms of Sykes-Picot. This new arrangement was never put into writing but the Prime Minister revealed it in his memoirs.<sup>4</sup> The only other record of it was made by Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary, in his diary. His version was

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Hurewitz (ed.), *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, Vol. II (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1956), pp. 18-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Times*, Sept. 23, 1918, p. 8; Oct. 28, 1918, p. 6; Nov. 1, 1918, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> War Cabinet Meeting, Oct. 3, 1918, Cabinet Papers, CAB 23/8/482. The Cabinet Papers are located in the Public Records Office, London.

<sup>4</sup> David Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, Vol. II (London: Gollancz, 1938), p. 1038.

almost identical but he admitted, "That was only secondhand from L.L.G. for I was not present."<sup>5</sup> Despite the informality of this agreement, Lloyd George and Clemenceau held to it and it became the basis for legitimizing the British claim to Palestine.

However, the French maintained that the boundary between Lebanon-Syria and Palestine – whether internationalized or British – would remain as Sykes and Picot had drawn it. Consequently, they were quite surprised – and unpleasantly so – when at the Versailles Conference (June 1919) the British delegation presented several maps which pushed Palestine's border considerably north and east of the Sykes-Picot line. Clemenceau and his Foreign Minister, George Pichon, rejected these proposals out of hand.<sup>6</sup> Although the specific boundary lines are not known, they more than likely were based on suggestions which the Zionist Organization had submitted in February 1919. In their recommendations to the Peace Conference, the Zionists had suggested a boundary which started on the coast north of the Litani River, then ran due east until intersecting that river, whence it headed southeast to the Hejaz Railway. From there it ran south, parallel and slightly west of the Railway all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba, thus including both banks of the Jordan.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, this proposal considerably reduced the area under French control, and it is hardly surprising that the French refused to consider it.

The matter then rested until September, when the British proposed withdrawing their troops south from Syria and Lebanon to be replaced by French soldiers. The question then arose as to how far south they should withdraw. Lloyd George called a meeting of an informal group of advisers on September 10 at Deauville in northern France to discuss the issue. Lord Allenby noted the economic importance of retaining the headwaters of the Jordan and the Yarmuk River which was east of the Jordan, while the Prime Minister himself wanted Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) included. Each of these areas was on the French side of the Sykes-Picot line, but British leaders had obviously decided by this time that that line would have to go.<sup>8</sup> As a result, three days later the Government presented the French with an *aide-mémoire* announcing their withdrawal from Syria and Cilicia. It went on to state that the army would continue to occupy Palestine, "defined in accordance with its ancient boundaries of Dan to Beersheba," a formula

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets*, Vol. I (London: Collins, 1970), pp. 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the Council of Four, March 20, 1919, in Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson and the World Settlement*, Vol. III (New York, 1922), pp. 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Zionist Proposals to the Peace Conference, Feb. 3, 1919, in Meyer Weisgal (ed.), *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann* (LPCW), Series A, Vol. IX (New Brunswick, N.J., 1977), p. 392.

<sup>8</sup> Meeting of British Delegates to Peace Conference, Sept. 10, 1919, CAB 21/153.

which Lloyd George had derived from a book and an atlas on ancient Palestine written by a Scottish theologian named George Adam Smith.<sup>9</sup> The *mémoire* added that the Government was prepared to negotiate the boundary question, recommending that President Woodrow Wilson be allowed to arbitrate any disputes that might arise.<sup>10</sup> At a conference two days later, Clemenceau accepted the offer of the British withdrawal but he insisted that he was not conceding any of the other points in the *aide-mémoire*, including the definition of the border.<sup>11</sup> A month later he reiterated this claim in a letter to Lloyd George, reminding him that the Sykes-Picot line was still the legal boundary between the British and French territories.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a strict adherence to Sykes-Picot was to be the basis of the French position throughout most of the discussions.

The British army initially withdrew to a line which started in the west at the mouth of the Litani, followed that river until it turned north, then moved southeast to Dan (Banias), then south along the western edge of the Leja Desert to the Yarmuk.<sup>13</sup> Although the Foreign Office assured the French that this boundary was strictly provisional,<sup>14</sup> Clemenceau objected vigorously, claiming that the area around Tyre had clearly been given to his country.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, Lord Allenby agreed to retreat further south to territory within the jurisdiction of Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA) South.<sup>16</sup> OETA had been established by Allenby in October 1918 to administer the conquered Ottoman lands, and it had been divided into three areas – North (Lebanon and coastal Syria), South (Palestine), and East (inland Syria and Trans-Jordania). OETA South corresponded to the *sanjaqs* of Jerusalem, Nablus and Acre, and therefore the new provisional border began just south of Ras al-Naqura and ran due east following watersheds to Lake Huleh, where it turned south to follow the Jordan into the Sea of Galilee.<sup>17</sup> This was a considerable distance below the earlier line, but the Quai d'Orsay still protested that it was beyond the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Aide-Mémoire* in regard to the Occupation of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia pending the decision in regard to Mandates, Sept. 13, 1919 in E.L. Woodward and R.A. Butler (eds.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (DBFP), Vol. I (London: H.M.S.O., 1952), pp. 700-701.

<sup>11</sup> Meeting of the Five Principal Allied and Associated Powers, Sept. 15, 1919, CAB 23/12/622, App. I.

<sup>12</sup> Clemenceau to Lloyd George, Oct. 10, 1919, *DBFP*, IV, p. 454.

<sup>13</sup> Meinertzhagen to Curzon, Nov. 17, 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 533-35.

<sup>14</sup> Curzon to Cambon, Nov. 22, 1919, *ibid.*, p. 550.

<sup>15</sup> Note by Lord Hardinge, Nov. 29, 1919, *ibid.*, p. 560.

<sup>16</sup> Allenby to Churchill, Nov. 29, 1919, *ibid.*, p. 591.

<sup>17</sup> Capt. Cyril Falls and Sir George McMunn (compilers), *Military Operations: Egypt and Palestine*, Vol. II (London: H.M.S.O., 1930), p. 607.

Sykes-Picot boundary.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, reminded them that Lloyd George had reserved the right at Deauville to retain Palestine from Dan to Beersheba (although the OETA border was south of Dan) and refused to heed their request.<sup>19</sup> This so-called Deauville Line remained the northern boundary until a permanent border was agreed to in 1923.

In seeking that permanent border, the British based their arguments on the issue of economic necessity. E.A. Stanton, a geographer who had studied Palestine, told the Government that the headwaters of the Jordan and other waters north of the legal boundary were essential for the successful development of agriculture.<sup>20</sup> His opinion was seconded by Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, a Zionist sympathizer who had recently been appointed Chief Political Officer for Palestine. He argued that both the Sykes-Picot Line and the Deauville Line were woefully inadequate for the development of Jewish agriculture. Therefore, he proposed a new boundary which began on the coast just north of the Litani and followed it east and then north beyond the headwaters of the Jordan before turning southeast. It moved due south until reaching the Gulf of Aqaba, remaining 25 to 30 kilometres west of the Hejaz Railway, but considerably east of the Jordan River. Thus, his proposal granted Palestine less territory than did the Zionist suggestion, but it was far more generous than either the Deauville or Sykes-Picot lines.<sup>21</sup>

Philippe Berthelot, Secretary-General of the French Foreign Ministry, sent the Foreign Office a note early in December conceding some minor revisions of the Sykes-Picot Line and the use of water resources on the French side of the border. But Eric Forbes-Adam and Robert Vansittart, who reviewed his proposal at the Foreign Office, did not consider it satisfactory and, as a result, a meeting was held in London later in the month to discuss the issue, along with several other Middle Eastern questions.<sup>22</sup>

Berthelot was met across the table by Lord Curzon. The Frenchman began the discussion by claiming that Clemenceau insisted on the Sykes-Picot Line but was willing to grant Palestine 33 percent of the water power from rivers flowing south from Mount Hermon. The British then proposed that the Meinertzhagen Line be accepted but Berthelot quickly rejected that idea. Curzon noted that Lloyd George had publicly committed himself to a

<sup>18</sup> Ministère des affaires étrangères to Lord Derby, Dec. 26, 1919, *DBFP*, IV, p. 604.

<sup>19</sup> Curzon to Derby, Jan. 8, 1920, *ibid.*, p. 610.

<sup>20</sup> Stanton to Foreign Office, Oct. 22, 1919, Foreign Office Papers, F.O. 371/4184/144025. The Foreign Office Papers are located in the Public Records Office, London.

<sup>21</sup> Meinertzhagen to Curzon, Nov. 17, 1919, *DBFP*, IV, p. 533-35.

<sup>22</sup> Berthelot to Foreign Office, Dec. 12, 1919, and Comments by Forbes-Adam and Vansittart, Dec. 18, 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 577-87.

Palestine from Dan to Beersheba and could not now back down; Berthelot replied that France had never agreed to such a border. The meeting then adjourned with no agreement.<sup>23</sup>

Forbes-Adam concluded from these discussions that the French were being obstinate in order to gain some concessions elsewhere from Britain. Since Berthelot had hinted that France was interested in gaining Trans-Jordania and might give way on the Palestine boundary in return, Forbes-Adam suggested that His Majesty's Government go along and consider some type of bargain in order to gain their desiderata.<sup>24</sup> From this vantage point, it does appear that the French were justified in expecting some *quid pro quo*; they had already made two major concessions (handing over Palestine and Mosul) without receiving anything in return. Now they were being asked to agree to a third revision of Sykes-Picot, on the premise that Palestine needed certain waterways for its economy. One cannot fault them for their unwillingness to concede without some compensation.

The discussions were resumed in February 1920 at another conference in London, but by then a familiar figure had left the scene. Clemenceau had decided to run for the office of President of the Republic in January, but he had been defeated by Paul Deschanel, who then appointed Alexandre Millerand as Premier. This change made negotiations somewhat more difficult, for the Middle East settlement had been based on the verbal agreement made by Lloyd George and Clemenceau in December 1918. Nonetheless, at this new conference, the British leader used all of his considerable powers of persuasion on Berthelot; he protested that the British were taking on a heavy burden by assuming Palestine and that for the country to have any chance for prosperity, it would be necessary to have more than "the barren rocks of Judea." He argued that the northern waters, though on the French side of the Sykes-Picot Line, were vital to Palestine but of minor significance to Syria. He and Berthelot went back and forth for two days along familiar lines, and finally Lloyd George asked the Frenchman to meet privately with Curzon in an attempt to reach some compromise. Three days later Berthelot returned to announce that he would accept Palestine "to be defined in accordance with its ancient limits of Dan to Beersheba." He claimed that what had changed his mind had been Smith's book on Palestine (which Lloyd George had just given to him), but more than likely he and Curzon had arranged some trade-off, for the two negotiators immediately launched into a discussion of French oil rights in Mesopotamia. In any event, he qualified his acceptance of the boundary by

<sup>23</sup> Anglo-French Meeting in London, Dec. 23, 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 595-603.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum by Forbes-Adam, Dec. 30, 1919, *ibid.*, pp. 607-9.

adding that it “must be regarded as provisional pending M. Millerand’s approval.”<sup>25</sup>

Such approval was to prove very difficult to come by, for the Premier was taking a much more intractable line in his own conversations. The Zionist Organization was not satisfied with the “Dan to Beersheba” formula and had been pushing for the Meinertzhagen Line as a minimum,<sup>26</sup> but when Nahum Sokolow interviewed Millerand on February 8 he found him uncompromising. The French Premier remarked that, while he wished to be helpful, the people of Syria would not allow him to turn over any additional territory or water power; therefore, he would not consent to any border rectifications.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Foreign Office became convinced that they had better accept Berthelot’s offer while it was on the table, and they recommended that Lloyd George do so at the next Allied Conference at San Remo in April.<sup>28</sup>

But the Prime Minister apparently hoped to win even more generous boundaries, for when Berthelot spoke at San Remo of finalizing the “Dan to Beersheba” formula, Curzon replied that the boundaries should not be fixed without consulting Emir Faisal, who was to rule Syria under a French mandate. This appears to have been a rather blatant attempt to use Faisal’s influence to win further border concessions from the French. Berthelot was somewhat annoyed at this tactic, but he agreed to postpone consideration of the border question if the disposition of the mandates was settled. Consequently, Britain was awarded the Mesopotamia and Palestine mandates and France the one for Syria, but the borders between these territories were left undetermined.<sup>29</sup>

With the temporary cessation of Inter-Allied Conferences, the boundary question was now left to Vansittart, who was stationed in Paris. In June he reported that public opinion there was turning anti-British because of the seemingly incessant demands Lloyd George was making, and that Berthelot was under attack for being too conciliatory. Therefore, he feared that no further concessions would be gained for the time being.<sup>30</sup> A week later he had even worse news – that Millerand had rejected Berthelot’s proposal of February and had substituted a new border which started just north of Acre, jumped north to include Dan, then followed the Jordan River south from

<sup>25</sup> Allied Conference in London, Feb. 17, 18, 21, 1920, *DBFP*, VII, pp. 99-119, 173-85.

<sup>26</sup> Weizmann to Lloyd George, Dec. 29, 1919, *LPCW*, IX, pp. 265-67, and Brandeis to Lloyd George, Feb. 16, 1920, *DBFP*, VII, pp. 183-84.

<sup>27</sup> Sokolow’s interview with Millerand, Feb. 9, 1920, F.O. 371/5113/61/484.

<sup>28</sup> Foreign Office Memorandum, March 11, 1920, F.O. 371/2/1375.

<sup>29</sup> Allied Conference at San Remo, April 24-25, 1920, *DBFP*, VIII, pp. 159-77.

<sup>30</sup> Vansittart to Young, June 21, 1920, *DBFP*, XIII, pp. 291-94.

Lake Huleh.<sup>31</sup> Trying a new tack, Vansittart then attempted to win concessions on the eastern boundary, to include the Yarmuk River in Palestine, but once again he was rebuffed.<sup>32</sup> It was evident that the French had reached the conclusion that they had given in once too often, for they were now taking their most intransigent position of the whole negotiations.

But while Vansittart was painfully aware of the French position, Whitehall apparently was not. An Inter-Departmental Committee on Mandates which had been formed over the summer instructed him to push harder for inclusion of the Yarmuk in Palestine, or at least the use of the Yarmuk and Litani for irrigation.<sup>33</sup> That these demands were highly unrealistic was admitted by Curzon when he wrote Herbert Samuel that "we are, as you know, in a weak bargaining position in these negotiations,"<sup>34</sup> and a week later Vansittart replied that the French attitude was "that they have already made three important concessions on the Sykes-Picot agreement without receiving any counter consideration, and they will not and dare not go further."<sup>35</sup> He reiterated his pessimistic conclusions to Chaim Weizmann, President of the Zionist Organization, telling him that Palestine would not get either the Litani or Yarmuk Rivers or the east bank of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>36</sup> Curzon wrote back explaining that the Inter-Departmental Committee had not expected the French to make a further boundary adjustment but that water rights were essential, since "the foundation of a National Home for the Jews in Palestine... largely depends for its success on the future utilization of the waters of the Litani and the Yarmuk." He suggested that Vansittart offer to adjust the northern boundary as the French had requested in return for this concession.<sup>37</sup>

But when the Zionists heard that an agreement was forming along the lines of Millerand's June proposal, they protested vigorously.<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Curzon, Weizmann explained that his organization envisioned a system of irrigation and afforestation which would be impossible "if the regions where the works are to be laid are unsettled and beyond the jurisdiction of Palestine."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the British Government was now caught in the Middle

<sup>31</sup> Vansittart to Young, June 29, 1920, *ibid.*, pp. 298-301 and Weizmann to Samuel, July 29, 1920, *LPCW*, X, pp. 3-5.

<sup>32</sup> Vansittart to Curzon, July 27, 1920, F.O. 371/4164/9125.

<sup>33</sup> Curzon to Vansittart, Sept. 30, 1920, *DBFP*, XIII, pp. 349-52.

<sup>34</sup> Curzon to Samuel, Oct. 4, 1920, *ibid.*, p. 355, note 2.

<sup>35</sup> Vansittart to Curzon, Oct. 7, 1920, F.O. 371/4164/12403.

<sup>36</sup> Weizmann to Benjamin Cohen, Oct. 14, 1920, *LPCW*, X, pp. 61-63.

<sup>37</sup> Curzon to Vansittart, Oct. 16, 1920, *DBFP*, XIII, pp. 359-61.

<sup>38</sup> Weizmann's Letters to Balfour, Lloyd George and Samuel, Oct. 11, 1920, *LPCW*, X, pp. 57-61.

<sup>39</sup> Weizmann to Curzon, Oct. 30, 1920, *DBFP*, XIII, pp. 373-76.

between the Zionists – who wanted further border changes – and the French, who believed they had already granted too many.

Although concerned about a possible estrangement with the French,<sup>40</sup> the Foreign Office decided to back the Zionist claims, with Curzon noting sharply that the Government “cannot but continue to regard the attitude of the French Government in this matter as unreasonable....” Since he was under the impression that the French were anxious to finalize the mandates and other related matters, he reasoned that His Majesty’s Government had considerable leverage to employ.<sup>41</sup>

Vansittart was quick to disabuse him of that notion, however. Responding to Curzon’s arguments, he revealed that the French were far from eager to sign the proposed Convention but, on the contrary, would be delighted to see it rejected, in which case they would fall back on Sykes-Picot as the only legal boundary. The Quai d’Orsay was claiming that they had agreed to Lloyd George’s “Dan to Beersheba” formula only to see the British now supporting more extravagant claims made by the Zionists. He suggested that HMG accept the French offer because “the Convention is better than nothing, plus the consequences of nothing.”<sup>42</sup>

By this time, the French had become highly suspicious about the identity of views between the Zionist Organization and Whitehall, tending to regard the former as a front for British penetration in the Middle East. Vansittart noted this belief in another letter when he concluded: “Reduced to barest terms the proposition is that the French are increasingly anti-Zionist. They mistrust and fear our whole policy in Palestine.... It is this fundamental view, rather than any superficial desire to haggle about waters, that has lain at the root of their attitude throughout the negotiations and now emerges clearly.”<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, Vansittart’s letters finally succeeded in convincing Lloyd George that no further extension of the frontier could be wrung from Millerand. At another Anglo-French Conference held in London in early December, the Prime Minister conceded that “he had come to an agreement with M. Clemenceau that the limits of Palestine should be the historical ones of Dan to Beersheba. He was prepared to abide by this agreement, and he could not support the claims of the Zionists to territorial expansion outside historic Palestine.” Pleased with this announcement, Berthelot replied that France would grant water rights on the upper Jordan and the Yarmuk (but

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum by Young, Nov. 6, 1920, *ibid.*, pp. 376-80.

<sup>41</sup> Curzon to Vansittart, Nov. 9, 1920, *ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>42</sup> Vansittart to Curzon, Nov. 13, 1920, *ibid.*, pp. 384-87.

<sup>43</sup> Vansittart to Curzon, Nov. 16, 1920, *ibid.*, pp. 390-91.

not the Litani) for any surplus not required in Syria. Both sides agreed that the water supply should be studied by a team of French, British and Zionist engineers, with any disputes to be settled by the governments in London and Paris.<sup>44</sup>

It seems somewhat surprising that the French suddenly became conciliatory after having taken such an intransigent line, a turn of events which led Hankey to believe that Lloyd George had outmanoeuvred Berthelot. He noted in his diary that it "is a good illustration of L.G.'s methods of doing business – to produce a maximum of informality, to get a snap decision at the fag end of a long meeting on a difficult subject, and possibly to have no record."<sup>45</sup> It may be for that reason that the Prime Minister praised Berthelot so lavishly in his memoirs as "much the ablest official in the Quai d'Orsay,"<sup>46</sup> although Vansittart, who had less success in negotiating with the Frenchman, also had kind words to say about him.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, there are strong indications that the British gave Syria reciprocal rights to electric power produced in Palestine, which may have been enough to satisfy Berthelot.<sup>48</sup>

Consequently, a Franco-British Convention, including a section on borders, was signed on December 23, 1920. This Convention, which established what are still the legal boundaries between Israel and Syria-Lebanon, represented only a minor change from the border proposed by Millerand in June. In the east it ran south from the Yarmuk almost to the Jordan but included the mouth of the Yarmuk in Palestine. It gave the French part of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but moving north it remained east of the Jordan, leaving it in Palestinian territory up to Banias. Here it turned northwest to skirt Metullah, then due south until reaching the latitude of Lake Huleh. Then it headed west following watersheds until reaching the coast just south of Ras al-Naqura.<sup>49</sup> The specific boundaries were determined by a joint Boundary Commission which completed its work in February 1922, and the two countries signed that agreement on March 7, 1923, at which time the new borders went into effect.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Anglo-French Conference in London, Dec. 4, 1920, *DBFP*, VIII, pp. 864-65.

<sup>45</sup> Roskill, *Hankey*, II, pp. 200-201 (diary of Dec. 11, 1920).

<sup>46</sup> Lloyd George, *Peace Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 1103-4.

<sup>47</sup> Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London, 1958), pp. 247-49.

<sup>48</sup> Tilley to Deedes, Dec. 21, 1920, *DBFP*, XIII, pp. 419-20, and Samuel to Curzon, Nov. 27, 1920, *ibid.*, p. 392, note 2.

<sup>49</sup> "Franco-British Convention of 23 December 1920, on Certain Points Connected with the Mandates for Syria and the Lebanon, Palestine, and Mesopotamia," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1921, XLII (Cmd. 1195).

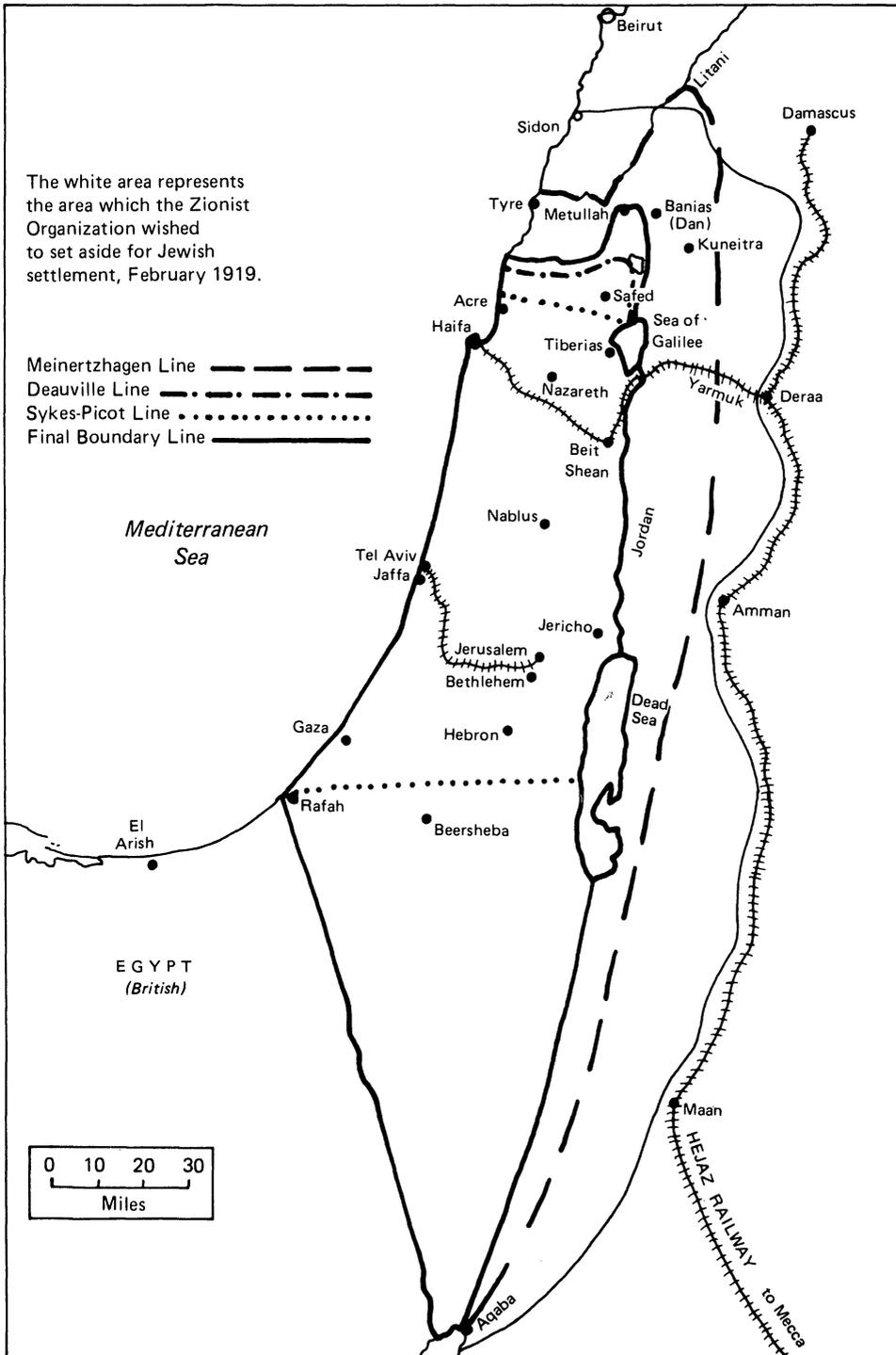
<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, the final boundary between Syria-Lebanon and Palestine was the result of nearly two years of intense and sometimes bitter negotiations. A year later the eastern boundary was established at the Jordan and the Dead Sea when Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill decided to separate Trans-Jordania from Palestine,<sup>51</sup> while the southwestern border remained the pre-war one with Egypt. But these decisions were not controversial compared to the one we have described. The basic problem derived from the fact that the British Government, backed by the Zionist Organization, wanted to revise the borders laid down in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Their argument was based on the importance for Palestinian agriculture of waters which flowed north of that boundary, but the French countered by stressing the sanctity of a written agreement. In Britain's favour was the indisputable fact that its troops had conquered the Middle East without French assistance but, on the other hand, France had already consented to two revisions of Sykes-Picot without any compensation. Throughout the year 1919, Lloyd George campaigned to move the border north as far as Dan (Banias), and in February 1920 Berthelot made that concession. But no sooner had he done so when British negotiators, at the request of the Zionists, began pushing for borders even further north and east as well. This impertinence greatly angered the French and as a result they took a much tougher line, refusing any further concessions. Vansittart attempted to negotiate with them throughout the summer and autumn of 1920, but with a singular lack of success. Then, fearing that they would lose everything if no agreement was signed, the Foreign Office convinced Lloyd George to accept the "Dan to Beersheba" he had originally demanded, which was therefore incorporated into the Franco-British Convention of December 1920.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these negotiations was the complete absence of any input from the Palestinians. Despite the fact that they comprised roughly 90 percent of the population, leaders of the Palestine Arab community were never consulted about the borders of their own country; on the other hand, Zionist officials were regularly briefed by the Foreign Office on the state of conversations with the French. This was a typical example of the manner in which the Palestinian Arabs were treated after World War I – as a conquered people who had no right to determine their own future.<sup>52</sup> The only instance in which any Arab was mentioned in regard to the negotiations came at San Remo when Curzon suggested that

<sup>51</sup> Conversations between Churchill and Abdullah, March 28-30, 1921, CAB 24/126/1123, pp. 172-74.

<sup>52</sup> For a more complete discussion of this unfair treatment, see my unpublished dissertation "British Policy in Palestine, 1917-1922," University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1974.



Faisal be consulted before final borders were fixed; but this was only a ruse to extract further concessions from the French. The British imperialist mentality was unable to admit the right of the Arabs to self-determination, and thus the Foreign Office never considered the possibility that the Palestinians might have their own ideas about the boundaries of their country. As a result, the borders of Palestine were drawn up to meet the needs, not of the indigenous Arabs, but of the Zionists, most of whom had never been any closer to the country than the pages of the Old Testament could take them.