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SIMILARITIES AND NON-SIMILARITIES: HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND POLITICS OF THE BOUNDARIES OF POLAND AND ISRAEL

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Abstract

Although Poland and Israel seem to be very far apart and different in size, history, and culture, there are a lot of similarities when it comes to the history of their international boundaries, the way the boundaries were created, those who established their boundaries, the aim of the location of the boundary lines, and the processes in which the boundaries were developed. Both countries were created by the international community (League of Nations and the United Nations) as nation states; both had large areas in the past but less land area in modern times. Both have two periods of boundary allocations in the modern era: after the first and the second World Wars. Both had been attacked after independence and enlarged their area by fighting the attackers. There are also some non-similarities between their boundaries. The major difference being that Poland's boundaries have remained stable since 1951 and almost nobody has asked for changes. Israel, on the other hand, still does not have permanent stable acceptance of boundaries by its inhabitants.

Key words

boundary making • imposed boundaries • international boundaries • nation state • world wars

Introduction

Israel and Poland both have long histories, yet both are newly established independent states. Both became independent after being parts of other large empires for many years. Although both have different histories and the geographical features are not the same, there are some similarities between the

two countries. One of their mutual similarities, namely their international boundaries, will be discussed here. To begin with, some thoughts concerning the way international boundaries are evolved will be discussed.

The aim of this article is to find similarities concerning the evolution of the boundaries of these two different countries, which share no combined history. The presented case study

can open the way for more research dealing with the evolution of international boundaries. Thus the boundary history of Poland and Israel, and the similarities are examined.

The creation of international boundaries

There are about 200 independent states and sub-independent areas in our world. Some independent countries are islands (Japan, Iceland, the island countries in the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea). Most countries, though, are separated from each other by means of international land boundaries. More than 300 land boundaries exist today (Biger 1996). Despite a trend towards 'a world without boundaries', exemplified in Western Europe, our real political world is constantly enlarging the number of international boundaries. There are new international boundaries: between the former republics of the former Soviet Union, between the former provinces of Yugoslavia, between Czechia (which some still call the Czech Republic) and Slovakia, and between Sudan and South Sudan. These are just a few of the new boundaries established in the past 25 years.

Usually, state's international boundaries reflect historical moments which took place when limits were made by its force and possibility or limits were enforced on it by strong external countries or some international institutes (Prescott 1975). Thus, today's boundaries are relicts of the past and, even if they seem stable, they may change in the future.

International boundaries are acquired in a variety of ways. There are four main ways in which international boundaries can be obtained:

1. Boundaries lines, which mark the territorial limit of a phase of political expansion and conquest – such as the boundaries of France, Britain, Russia, the United States, Spain, Turkey, and China.
2. Boundaries which have been imposed by external powers, either through acts of conquest or through negotiation – such as the boundaries of most of the African

and Middle Eastern boundaries, and Korea (both North and South).

3. Boundaries that were established as an outcome of the division of a large country according to its internal boundaries – such as the boundaries of the new countries which gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the boundary between India and Pakistan, the boundaries of some countries of East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, which were all parts of the former British Empire) and West Africa (Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, which were all parts of former France colonial areas).
4. Boundaries which were formed by peaceful negotiations with neighboring countries – such as the boundaries in the Arabian Peninsula, some boundaries in South and Central America, and some European boundaries.

When a new boundary is established by peaceful diplomatic negotiations between two parties, the process entails both sides submitting their desired claims for the location of the boundary line. The different claims presented in the negotiations can be divided into three main groups:

1. Claims concerning the **past** expansion of each side.
2. Claims dealing with the **present** circumstances of the area in dispute, especially those concerning the distribution of ethnic, cultural, religious and racial populations.
3. Claims which deal with needs for **future** development and the need to secure the area.

Claims concerning the past

Claims which deal with the past are mainly based on the desire to establish the new territory according to the boundaries of the past glorious period. This refers to a past period when the people of the to-be nation ruled a vast area. Usually those claims are for a large area and are backed by historical documents. Both Poland and Israel had glorious pasts. Poland once ruled an area of about 1 million km² in Central and East

Europe, stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, especially in the 15th and 16th centuries, while the Israelites ruled vast area of the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea during biblical times. Even though the present boundaries were fixed and accepted, although not always officially claimed, there are some politicians and other people in both countries, which still seek and wish for the former boundaries. Some people in Poland still look eastward: to the lost area and cities of Lwów (Lviv) and even Wilno (Vilnius), while some Israelis want Israel to annex the whole West Bank: the cradle of the Biblical Jewish nation.

Boundary claims which take into account various populations

Most of the newly independent countries which were established in Europe after World War I, based their boundary claims on the distribution of their people at that time. Thus Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czechoslovakia (for the Czech and the Slovakian nations), and Yugoslavia (for the South Slavic people) asked for boundaries which marked the demographic distribution of their national people at the time of the discussions. British India was partitioned between Hindu India and Moslem Pakistan according to the dispersion of the Hindu and the Moslem populations in 1947 (Chester 2002). In 1918, Poland was established to include most of the Poles living in Eastern Europe at that time. The 1947 decision of the United Nations was meant to establish in the former British Palestine two states: a Jewish one and an Arab one. The decision tried to mark boundaries according to the 1947 distribution of the Jewish and Arabic populations (Fig. 1).

Claims concerning future development

There are rare cases in which boundaries were designed according to the future needs of the people involved. The United States asked for a boundary which would give the American people the opportunity to expand their settlements westward to the Pacific

Ocean. Some claims were based on future needs for economic development – the Romanians' claim for Transylvania after World War I was based on the future needs for the Romanian people (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2009). Some claims were for better defensive boundaries – after World War I, Italy claimed defensive borders which included the Tirol area in the Alps, against the future threat of Austria (Stieninger 2003). In 1918, Poland asked for the rich coal area of Silesia. In 1919, the Zionist Organization asked the Council of the League of Nations to allocate enough area in Palestine for all those Jews who wanted to immigrate to the new Jewish state. An estimated 3,000,000 Jews wanted to immigrate, while there were only 60,000 Jews who lived in Palestine at that period (Biger 2004).

The histories of the Polish boundaries and the Israeli boundaries

The modern history of Israel continues to include boundary changes, Although up to 1947, the external lines of Israel were not changed, the UN resolution of November 29, 1947 established boundary lines between a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine (Blake 1987). An outcome of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 was that Israel created new lines between Israel and Lebanon – the former Mandatory line, and between Israel and Syria – the former Mandatory line and a new armistice line, between Israel and Jordan – parts of the Mandatory line and a new armistice line which cut through Palestine (the 'Green Line'), creating the Jordanian occupied West Bank taken from the proposed Arab state of Palestine, and between Israel and Egypt – the former Mandatory line with the newly created Gaza Strip by establishing an armistice line around the area occupied by Egypt from the proposed Arab state of Palestine. In 1967, those armistice lines (but not the Israel-Lebanon line) were changed as the result of another war between the Arab countries (Syria, Jordan and Egypt) and Israel when Israel occupied the West Bank from Jordan, the

Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The southern line was change again in the 1980s as an outcome of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt. The Sinai Peninsula (but not the Gaza Strip) was returned to Egypt. The eastern line with Jordan was changed in the 1994 peace agreement between Israel and Jordan which created a new line based on the mandatory line. Israel is still facing changes in its northern boundaries with Syria and Lebanon. The creation of a boundary line between Israel and the Palestinian authority is also still being formed.

Poland, which was created as an independent country in 1918 with imposed

lines, changed its eastern line as an outcome of the Polish-Soviet Union war of 1921. Poland lost its independence in 1939, but got it back in 1945, though with new boundaries imposed on her by the victorious countries of World War II. Later some small changes were made in Poland's eastern boundary line with the Soviet Union.

There are many more similarities between the boundaries of Poland and Israel, namely:

- A. Both countries inherited previous boundary lines, which were delimited from outside, by external forces.
- B. In modern times, both had two periods where boundaries were established: the time period from 1918 to 1923, and from 1945 to 1949.

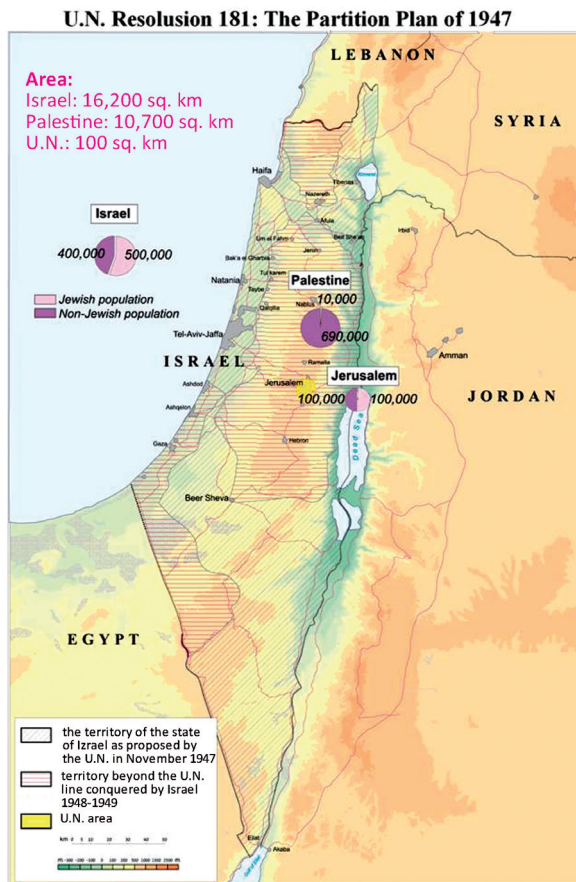


Figure 1. U.N. Partition Plan, November 1947

- C. Both have had boundaries imposed on them without any consideration of the wills of the local inhabitants in the border areas.
- D. Both have boundaries which have almost nothing to do with their past.
- E. Both, after accepting boundaries imposed on them, changed those boundaries by war after being attacked by external forces.
- F. Both countries slightly changed their boundaries through the use of peace negotiations.
- G. Both countries were established as a nation-state: Poland for the Poles and Israel for the Jews.
- H. Both countries had a major population change as an outcome of their independence.

Re A. Inherited delimitation

The boundaries of Israel were created in three different stages. British Palestine was established in the early 1920s as an outcome of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Britain, which became the Mandatory power in Palestine, established Palestine's northern boundaries with the French Mandate areas of Syria and Lebanon through peaceful negotiations (Biger 2004). The established line was the outcome of the ability and needs of the imperial powers. The eastern boundary of British Palestine was created by an inside decision of the British authorities, which separated Trans Jordan from Palestine (Gil-Har 2000). Those authorities also decided to adopt the 1906 administrative separated line between Sinai and the Ottoman Empire as the southern boundary of Palestine (Kliot 1995). The existing boundaries of Israel with Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt are the same as the Mandatory lines.

Likewise, some sections of the boundary between modern Poland and Czechia and between Poland and Slovakia, are the outcomes of the boundaries established between Austria and Germany in the 19th century (Eberhardt 2004).

Re B. The two boundary establishment periods

The boundaries of modern Poland, like the first boundaries of modern Palestine (which later became Israel), were first established after World War I, in the early 1920s. Moreover,

both states had new boundaries established later on, after World War II. Poland's boundaries were established in 1945, while Israel established its boundaries in 1949. Israel changed its boundaries after the 1967 war, but those changes were never accepted by any country in the world.

Re C. Request of the nations were not considered

The Jewish Zionist Organization and the Arabs placed their claims on the negotiation table at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (Fig. 2). Those requests and the needs of the local inhabitants, however, played a small role in the exact location of the boundary lines of Palestine: the entity which was established in the former Ottoman Empire. The boundary line was established according to the needs of the British and the French who became the Mandatory rulers of that area at that time. The same hold true of the Polish requests for the Polish-Soviet Union boundary in 1918 (Fig. 3), as well as the Free Polish requests in 1944-1945 (Eberhardt 2012: 16). The eastern boundary had been suggested by the

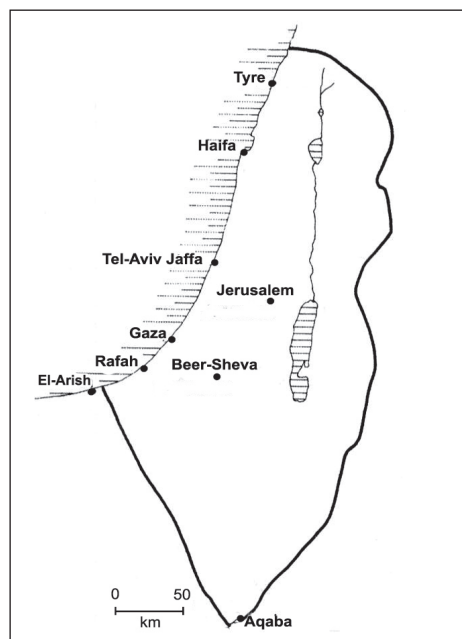


Figure 2. The Zionist request of 1919

League of Nations. The eastern boundary was positioned on the Curzon line, placing lots of Polish people beyond it. The western boundary of Poland in 1945 (Debra 2003) was established by the victorious allies of World War II, without taking into consideration the will of the local German population. In both cases, the established lines were never placed with the desires and the needs of the people who lived in the boundary area. Such was the case of the eastern boundary of Palestine which was placed along the southern part of the Jordan River. The River usually connected the inhabitants living in both sides rather than separating them. The local migration habits of the Bedouin tribes of southern Palestine were never considered as an argument in the delimitation process of the southern boundary between Egypt and Palestine in 1919.

Re D. Nothing in common with the boundaries of the past

When comparing the map of today Poland with that of the League of Nations proposed lines, including the Curzon line, (Fig. 4) and with maps of historical Poland, one can find,



Figure 3. The Dmowski's Line 1918. Poland in 1921-1945 are in dark area

Source: on the basis of Wikipedia 2014c.

especially in its western and the eastern lines, no connection between the historical lines and the existing lines. The existing western line of today is situated far west of any Polish boundary from the 14th century and onwards. After World War II, cities like Wrocław, Szczecin as well as the area of Silesia (Śląsk), were added to the historically known territory of Poland. This was done partly to make up for the areas in the east taken from Poland during the same period. The eastern city of Lwów (now Lviv) and all the area which today is part of western Ukraine had been governed for more than 400 years as part of Poland. The city of Gdańsk (the former Danzig) was not a part of Poland throughout most of history but was added to Poland after WWII. A new Poland was established by the Soviet Union, Britain, and the United States.

In Israel, all the old historical biblical areas and the later independent kingdoms of the Israelites, especially the Judea and Samaria mountain areas, were not allocated to the proposed Jewish state by the United Nation resolution of November 1947 (Fig. 1). Instead,

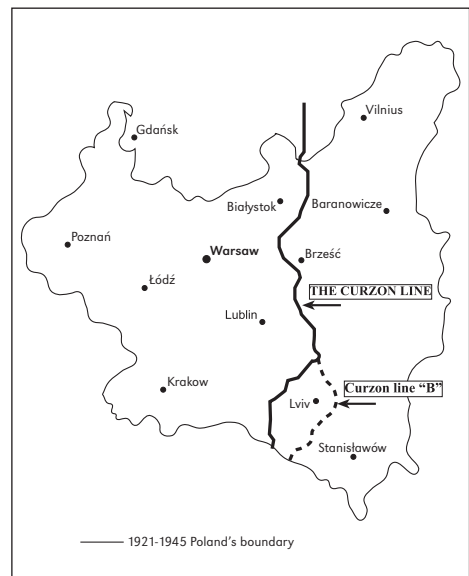


Figure 4. The Curzon line, 1921 and 1945 Polish boundary lines

Source: on the basis of Wikipedia 2014d.



Figure 5. Armistice lines between Israel and the Arab countries, 1949

these areas were placed in the hands of the Arabs. On the other hand, the southern Negev area, which was never part of ancient Israel, was placed in the proposed Jewish state. Those decisions were made according to the dispersion of the Jews and the Arabs at that time. The decision was mainly made against the will of the Arabs since the Arab had called for an Arab state which would cover all of Palestine.

Re E. Changing imposed boundaries by war
 Poland in 1919-1921 and Israel in 1947-1949, both changed the borders imposed on them. In both cases, the surrounding countries attacked the newly established state. The Soviet Union attacked Poland while the Palestinian Arab and all the Arab countries surrounding Israel, namely Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, as well as Iraq, attacked Israel. Poland succeeded in enlarging its area east

of the Curzon line which was designed by the League of Nations (Eberhardt 2012) (Fig. 4), while Israel occupied some of the areas that were allocated to the Palestinian Arabs (Figs. 5, 6). Other areas proposed to the Palestinian Arabs were occupied by Jordan (the West Bank) and Egypt (the Gaza Strip). In the case of Poland, its 1921 boundaries held till 1939, and were abolished during World War II. New boundaries were imposed on her in 1945. In Israel, the 1949 armistice lines were held till 1967. The War between Israel on one side and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on the other side, which took place 5-11 June 1967, brought Israel's borders to the Suez Canal in Egypt, to the Jordan River in Jordan, and to the Golan Heights in Syria. In accordance with the Peace Agreement between Egypt and Israel signed in 1979 (The Avon Project 1979), Israel returned the Sinai



Figure 6. U.N. Partition Plan of 1947 and the 1949 Armistice lines

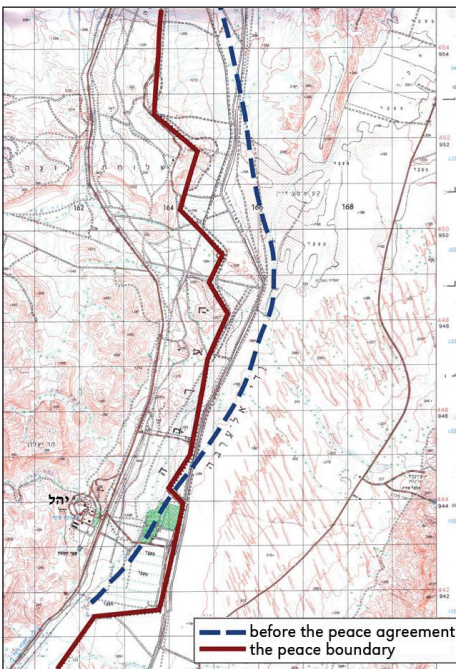


Figure 7. Boundary change in the Wadi Arava region, Israeli-Jordan peace treaty signed in 1994

Peninsula back to Egypt but not the Gaza Strip. Egypt declared that the Gaza strip was not part of Egypt. Today Israel still holds all the other areas it occupied in 1967, although Israel retreated from the Gaza Strip in 2006.

Re F. Peace process used for changing imposed boundaries

When Israel signed a peace agreement with Jordan, in 1994, both countries agreed to some modifications of the former Mandatory line (Rubinstein 2004). Those modifications involved an exchange of some plots of land, in equal areas, along the southern boundaries. The exchanges were mainly for the benefit of some Israeli agriculture villages located near the boundaries (Fig. 7). The same holds true for the eastern boundary of Poland, which was established in 1945 but was changed for Poland's benefit by the 1951 Soviet Union-Poland agreement, although the border was actually imposed on Poland by the Soviet Union (Wikipedia 2014a) (Fig. 8). Both of those changes were minimal, but important on the local level.

Re G. Nation States

Both countries had the idea of establishing nation-states, Poland for the Poles and Israel for the Jewish Nation. The actual imposed boundaries, however, created multi-national states. Poland was established in 1918 as the land of the Poles. This was done even though the 1931 census showed a minority population of 30.8%, and only 69.2% were Poles. About 13.9% were Ukrainians, 8.7% were Jews, 3.1% Belarusians, 2.3% German, and 3.1% others (Mauldin 1954). In 1939, there were about 65.5% Poles, 15.7% Ukrainians, 9.5% Jews, 6.1% Belarusians, 2.3% German, and 0.9% others (Eberhardt 2011: 191). Thus, less than two-third of Poland's population before 1939 were actually Poles.

When the United Nation adopted its partition plan for Palestine, according to the 1947 proposed lines, the Jewish State would be made up of about 500,000 Jews and more than 300,000 Arabs, while the designed Arab state was to be a nearly pure Arab state with about 900,000 Arabs and 11,000 Jews (Katz 1998).

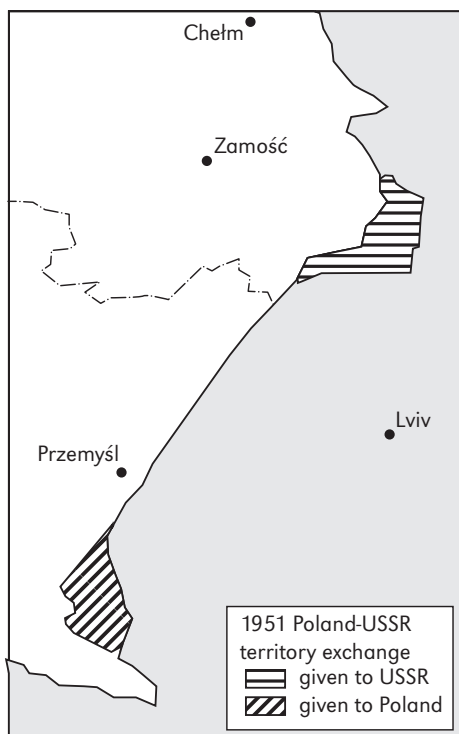


Figure 8. 1951 Poland's territory exchanges with the USSR

Source: on the basis of Wikipedia 2014a

Re H. Mass population changes

The mass murder of the Jews in Poland during World War II, the new imposed boundaries and the mass migration of German, Ukrainians, and Belarusians from Poland as well as the mass migration of Poles from the Ukraine and Belarus into Poland, made the Poland of 1950, one of the most ethnically non-diversified countries in the world. In 1950, out of 24.5 million inhabitants of Poland, 97.8% were Poles, 0.7% were Ukrainians, 0.2% Jews, 0.6% Belarusians, 0.6% Germans, and 0.1% others (Eberhardt 2011: 193). This ratio has not changed during the last 65 years. Today, out of about 40 million people living in Poland, 96.7% described themselves as Poles, only 0.4% are Germans, 0.1% Ukrainians, 0.1% Belarusians, and 2.7% others (CIA 2013). Thus, today Poland really is a Polish nation.

In Israel, the War of 1948 caused a mass migration of more than 700,000 Arabs from the area that became to be known as the modern State of Israel. This war was also caused a mass immigration of Jews into the newly established Jewish state. The immigration of more than 1 million Jews in the period of 1949-1952 put Israel in a situation in which about 80% of its population were Jews and 20% Arabs. This ratio has not changed dramatically during the years. The Arab population has had a natural increase, while more and more Jews have also come to Israel. Now, out of the 8 million inhabitants of Israel, about 79% are Jews (75.1 % Jews and 3.9 others, mainly half-Jews, about 17.4% Moslem Arabs, 2% Christian Arabs, and 1.4% Druze) (CIA 2013). Thus, officially Israel is a Jewish state, though more than 20% of its population are not Jews.

The main difference between the boundaries of Poland and the boundaries of Israel are:

1. Poland's boundaries are now stable and accepted by the world and by most of its inhabitants. In Israel, there are differences between the boundaries according to the official Israel stance and world views. Even in Israel itself, there are those who oppose the official Israel stance.
2. Israel is ruling areas which the whole world accepts as belonging to another nation, the Palestinians.
3. Poland is mainly a Polish state, with only a small number of minorities, while in Israel today, more than 20% of its population are minorities: mainly Moslem and Christian Arabs, Druze, and others.

Conclusions

As presented above, although the two countries are so different in size, location, and history, there are many similarities between them. Poland and Israel are both relatively newly established, independent countries. Israel is 65 years old and Poland is 68 years old. Both were established as nation states and their boundaries were delineated in order to serve this goal. Both had imposed boundary

lines, established for the needs of the imposed regimes, not according to the needs of the local population. Both tried to keep to those lines but were forced to change them in response to internal and external wars.

The main difference between Israel and Poland concerning their boundaries is the attitude of both countries toward their actual boundaries. As for Poland, the present boundaries are seen as permanent boundaries, without any intention to change them. There are some, who still dream about gaining back Lviv and Vilnius, but the official attitude is one of acceptance of the present boundaries.

Israel is still waiting for stable boundaries as it is still facing future changes in its

boundaries which have never been stable from the first day of its establishment. Israel accepted its boundaries with Egypt and Jordan, and was willing to adopt the 1923 boundary line between Israel (British Palestine) and Lebanon, but no such willingness exists when it comes to its boundary with Syria and the Palestinian Authority.

Maybe the Polish attitude and situation can act as an example for the future Israeli boundary story?

Editors' note:

Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the author's, on the basis of their own research.

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