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Boundaries of Troubled Nations – History, Geography, and Politics of the Boundaries of Georgia and Israel

1. Introduction

Israel and Georgia are both a newly established independence states, which became independence after long years of outside rule. Also, both had different history there are some similarities between them. One of their mutual similarities, namely their international boundaries, will be discussed here.

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2. The creation of international boundaries

Our world is divided today to more than two hundred independent states. They are separated from each other by means of international boundaries. More than three hundred land boundaries exists and, despite of the trend toward “a world without boundaries” which might be seen in Western Europe, our real world enlarge the number of international boundaries.¹ It can be seen in the creation of new international boundaries between the former states of the former Soviet Union, between the former provinces of Yugoslavia, the new boundary between The Czech Republic and Slovakia, etc.

Usually, international boundaries reflect the historical moments in the life of a state when its limits were made according to its force and ability at that time. Thus, today’s boundaries are relicts from the past and might be changed in the future. States have acquired their international boundaries in a variety of ways.

¹ G. Biger, *The Encyclopedia of International Boundaries*, New York 1996.

There is three main ways in which a new state can obtained its international boundaries:

1. Boundaries, which are, marked the territorial limit of a phase of political expansion and conquest.
2. Boundaries which have been imposed by external powers, either through acts of conquest or through negotiation.
3. Boundaries that were established by peaceful negotiation with neighboring states.

The creation of a new boundary by a peaceful negotiation, both sides place claims for the location of the boundary line, for which they desire. The different claims can be divided into three main groups:

1. Claims concerning the past.
2. Claims dealing with the present.
3. Claims which deal with the future of the area.

Claims which deal with the past are based on the desire to establish the new state according to its boundaries in its glorious period, when the people inhabitants and governing the new state ruled a vast area. Usually, those claims are for a larger area backed by historical document. Both Georgia and Israel had a glorious past – Georgia once ruled most of the Caucasus area and the Israelites rule vast area of the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Also not officially claimed, there are people which still are looking for its former boundaries.

Most of the newly independent states, which were established in Europe after World War I, based their claims on the present distribution of their people. Thus Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, etc. had their boundaries which marked their demographic distribution at the time of their independence. The United Nation decision of 1947 which established two states in the former British Palestine, tried to mark the boundaries according the 1947 distribution of Jewish and Arab population. This was the basic rule, which established the internal boundaries in the Soviet Union, which later became the international boundaries of the independence states. Thus, Georgia was given to the Georgians, and Israel to the Jews, both according to their distribution in the time of the creation of the new states.

In some cases, claims for the boundaries were made according to the future needs of the people involved. When the boundaries of British Palestine were established, in the 1920s, the Zionist Organization asked for boundaries which will establish an independent state in which the Jews from all over the world will come to. Other claims are based on the future needs for economic development of for better defense security against future threat.

3. Israel and Georgia boundaries

Also, both states have difference in the location of their boundaries and the history of their boundaries seems to be different, there are some similarities:

1. Both inherited colonial lines, which were delimited from outside, by external forces.
2. Both have boundary without any consideration to the needs of the local inhabitants.
3. Both still faces change in the delimitation of their line.
4. Both have problems with neighboring countries.

4. Outside delimitation

The boundaries of Israel were created in three distinct stages. British Palestine was established in the early 1920s as an outcome of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.² Britain, which became the Mandatory power in Palestine, established its northern boundaries with the French Mandate areas of Syria and Lebanon through a peaceful negotiation. 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 between Palestine and Trans-Jordan. Those authorities also decided to adopt the 1906 administrative separated line between Sinai and the Ottoman Empire as the southern boundary of Palestine. The boundaries of Israel with Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt are the same as the Mandatory lines. Although Israel occupied the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967 and still keep it.

The southern boundary of Modern Georgia is the outcome of the establishing boundaries between the Soviet Union and Turkey created in the 1920s. Its boundaries with Armenia and Russia are those lines, which were established as internal lines of the republics of the Soviet Union.³

² G.H. Blake, R.N. Schofield (eds.), *Boundaries and State territory in the Middle East and North Africa*, Cambridge 1987.

³ I. Bremmer, R. Taras (eds.), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge 1993.

5. Boundaries with no consideration of local needs

Also, the Zionist Organization placed its claims on the negotiation table, and the needs of the local inhabitants played a small role in the exact location of the line, the boundary line was established according to the needs of the British and the French at that time, in that area. The same hold true for the Soviet Union – Turkey line in which the local needs never played any significant role. The eastern boundary of Israel was placed along the southern part of the Jordan River, which usually connected the inhabitants living in both sides then, separated them. The local migration custom of the Bedouin tribes of southern Palestine was never considered as an argument in the delimitation process.

When the Soviet Union established the internal boundaries between the republics of Transcaucasian, the needs of the local population were never considered the same hold true for the administrative line between Georgia and the Russian republic.

6. Changing of former boundaries

One of the main stories, which follow the modern history of Israel, is the continuation of the change of its boundaries. Also, its external line was not changed up to 1947, the UN resolution of November 29, 1947, was the establishing of internal lines between a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine. Israel War of Independence created new lines between Israel and Lebanon (the former Mandatory line), Syria (the former Mandatory line and a new Cease-fire line), Jordan – parts of the British line and a new Cease-fire line which cut through Palestine (the West Bank – Judea and Samaria, which became part of Jordan) and Egypt – the former British line with the newly created Gaza Strip (Fig. 1). Those two separated areas (Gaza Strip and the West Bank) are now claimed by the Palestinian as their territory



Fig. 1. Map of Israel before 1967

Source: own work.

In 1967 those line was changed as the result of the Six Days War⁴ (Fig. 2). The southern line was change in the 1980s as an outcome of the peace process with Egypt. The eastern line was changed in the 1990s

⁴ M. Gilbert, *The Arab Israeli conflict: Its History in Maps*, London 1979.

during the peace negotiation with Jordan. Both lines were placed on the former Mandatory lines. Israel still facing changes in its northern and eastern boundary lines.⁵



Fig. 2. Map of Israel after 1967 war

Source: own work.

⁵ S. Arieli, *Atlas of the Jewish-Arab Conflict*, Jerusalem 2021.

Georgia, which was created as an independence country in early 1990s, inheriting the former Soviet Union lines, still faces changing in its northwestern boundaries with Russia in Abkhazia and in the South Ossetians Autonomous Republic, while its other boundary lines are waiting to be confirmed (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Map of Georgia

Source: own work.

7. Boundary problems with the surrounding world

Israel's boundary lines are far from completed. Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority have claims to the territory under Israel rule. The final boundary lines are still to be negotiated. The same holds true for the Georgian boundaries. There is an ethnic territorial conflict between Azerbaijan and Georgia, the former calling for the transfer of a southern section of Georgia to Azerbaijan. Others have made demands for the transfer of a northwestern section of Azerbaijan to Georgia. Armenia has claims that the southern section of Georgia – the Dzhavaketia province – should be annexed to Armenia. There are demands to transfer the southern area of Greater Sochi (Russia) to Georgia.

8. Conclusions

Georgia and Israel are both newly establishing independent countries. Israel is 74 years old, and Georgia is 30 years old. Both inherit former boundary lines, which were established according to the needs and ability of their former rulers. Both try to keep to those lines but were forced to change them as the outcome of internal and external wars. Both still facing changes in their international boundaries and both, Israel and Georgia have an urgent need to have secured, final boundary lines to develop their recognized space.

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