



# **International Boundary Study**

No. 61 – January 15, 1966

## **Libya – Egypt (*United Arab Republic*) Boundary**

(Country Codes: LY-EG)

**The Geographer  
Office of the Geographer  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

# INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

No. 61

## LIBYA – EGYPT (UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC) BOUNDARY

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# **LIBYA – EGYPT (UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC) BOUNDARY**

## **I. BOUNDARY BRIEF**

Libya and the United Arab Republic have a common international boundary of approximately 693 miles. It extends southward from the Gulf of Sollum on the Mediterranean to the Sudan tripoint located at 22° N. and 25° E. In general the northern sector of the boundary between the coast and about 29° 14' N. and 25° E. consists of arcs of circles and straight-line segments, and the remainder of the boundary follows the 25th meridian for 503 miles to the Sudan tripoint. Except for a narrow zone of steppe adjacent to the coast, the boundary traverses a desert area. Inland from the Gulf of Sollum, the boundary is demarcated for about 206 miles.

## **II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Following the end of the Egypto–Turkish War and the Treaty of London in 1841, the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire issued a firman on the appointment of Mohammed Ali Pasha as Governor of the subject state of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> A map accompanying the firman indicated the western boundary of Egypt with Tripoli, a Turkish vilayet between 1835 and 1912, as extending southeastward in an irregular line from Khalij al Kana'is on the Mediterranean to a point immediately east of the 29th meridian and slightly north of the latitude of Aswan. Beginning about 1875 the sanjak of Benghazi or Barka was administered separately from the vilayet of Tripoli. British military forces occupied Egypt in 1882; and until 1914, although nominally a vassal of the Turkish Empire, the state was in effect a United Kingdom protectorate. During the Italo–Turkish War of 1911–12, Italy occupied the Turkish administrative units of Tripoli and Benghazi; meanwhile, Egyptian forces held the coastal town of As Sallum. On October 18, 1912, by the Treaty of Auchy, Turkey recognized Italian sovereignty in the occupied units which Italy then administered as the colony of Libya until World War II. The United Kingdom officially declared a protectorate over Egypt on December 18, 1914, which remained in effect until Egyptian independence was proclaimed on February 28, 1922.

Prior to Italian participation in World War I on the side of the Allies, Italy made a so-called secret treaty with the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. Article 13 of the treaty, dated April 26, 1915, promised Italy favorable treatment relative to the acquisition of territory in Africa should there be an Allied victory. In response to Article 13, the Milner–Scialoja agreement in 1919 between the United Kingdom and Italy placed the oasis of Al Jaghbug in Italian Libya. However, Egypt did not agree to the oasis being made a part of Libya at this time. Following Egyptian independence, an Egypto–Italian accord was reached on December 6, 1925, delimiting the entire Egypt–Libya boundary

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<sup>1</sup> During this period the governorship of Egypt was made hereditary in Mohammed Ali's family under Turkish suzerainty.

southward from the Mediterranean to the 22nd parallel or the tripoint with Sudan.<sup>2</sup> The accord was not ratified by the Egyptian Government until July 7, 1932. In the meantime an agreement dated November 9, 1926, clarified the northern part of the boundary and a mixed commission submitted its report in April 1927.

Relative to the accord of 1925, Egypt acquired a considerable amount of territory westward of the boundary shown on the map accompanying the firman of 1841. Approximately 180 miles were gained along the coast, including Bir Ramla and the ports of Matruh and As Sallum, and in the interior the boundary was extended as much as 260 miles westward, to include Siwah and Wahat al Farafirah.

On December 15, 1937, a commission met and arranged to move some of the boundary pillars westward in order to improve inter-visibility and to delimit the boundary as a series of straight lines between beacons instead of the previous line which followed the tracks between the beacons. Nine extra beacons were erected at this time bringing the total to 187. The final proces-verbal, recording the satisfactory completion of a chain of permanent beacons, was drawn up on May 3, 1938.

Following World War II, claims were made by the Egyptian Government to Libyan-administered territory on a number of occasions. Egyptian claims were made in memoranda to the Council of Foreign Ministers and their deputies at the Paris Peace Conference, in a statement before the Political and Territorial Commission for Italy during the same conference, in notes to various governments, and in declarations at the Third and Fourth Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Based on strategic and historical considerations, the claims have varied from time to time, but usually include Bardiyah on the As Sollum plateau and Al Jaghbub. An Egyptian proposal to make the 24th meridian the international boundary between the 30th and 22nd parallels would automatically place Al Jaghbub in the territory of the United Arab Republic.

Libya was administered by the United Kingdom and France from World War II until independence on December 24, 1951. Pursuant to decisions made by the United Nations in 1949 and 1950, Libya was the first independent state created by the world organization.

On February 22, 1958, Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic. Syria withdrew from the union on September 28, 1961, but the Egypt region has retained the terminology of the United Arab Republic as the official name of the state.

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<sup>2</sup> The Sudan was proclaimed a condominium by an Anglo–Egyptian agreement dated January 19, 1899 under joint British and Egyptian administration. The agreement established the parallel of 22° N. as the political boundary between Egypt and the Sudan, although the western terminus of the boundary was not determined until 26 years later by the Egypto–Italian accord of 1925. On January 9, 1954, a Sudanese self-government parliament was inaugurated, and on January 1, 1956, the Sudan achieved independence.

### **III. POLITICAL–GEOGRAPHIC SETTING**

Inland from a narrow coastal plain a steep escarpment overlooks the Mediterranean. Southward of the escarpment, the boundary traverses a rocky undulating surface to east of Al Jaghbub, where a series of below sea level depressions contain both marshes and lakes. The boundary then passes successively through the Great Sand Sea characterized by large dunes, a featureless sand and gravel area, and the Libyan Desert to Jabal al 'Uwaynat. The Libyan Desert has alternate areas of nearly flat sand and gravel surfaces, exposed bedrock, and dunes; about midway between the parallels of 22° and 23° is an almost impenetrable dune barrier.

Adjacent to the coast, a low-latitude steppe climate prevails, and the remainder of the boundary has a low-latitude desert type. Temperatures are hot throughout the year, and precipitation amounting to less than 10 inches on the coast decreases inland to become negligible. Southward from the coast are patches of grass and dwarf shrubs for a short distance, following which the boundary route is practically barren except for vegetation in scattered oases.

Most of the boundary traverses uninhabited areas with small population concentrations adjacent to the coast and in oases. To the west of the boundary, Al Jaghbub, the Holy City of the Sanusi (Senussi), has a sanctuary containing the tomb of the founder of the sect. Sayyid Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi of the sect is the present King of Libya. Jabal al 'Uwaynat is near the center of a large area of scattered oases inhabited by Bideyat people. The Bideyat occupy oases in the four states of Libya, United Arab Republic, Sudan, and Chad. Except for a road between As Sallam and Bardiyah, only tracks and trails cross the boundary. Recent petroleum discoveries have been made in eastern Libya, and reserves may reach to the boundary.

### **IV. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT**

The Egypto–Italian accord of 1925, known as the Treaty of Jaghbub, and the Egypto–Italian agreement of 1926, which clarified on the ground certain points of the 1925 accord, determine the alignment of the Libya–United Arab Republic boundary as follows:

Article 1 of the 1925 accord states:<sup>3</sup>

The frontier line between the Italian territory of Cyrenaica and Egyptian territory shall start from a point on the coast to the north of Sollum, situated ten kilometres from Beacon Point (Ezbet el Gattara) as a centre and with a radius of ten kilometres from the point above-mentioned until it meets Masrab el Sheferzen. The line shall continue, running immediately west of Masrab el Sheferzen [Shafarzan] and passing through Sidi Omar [Sidi 'Umar], Bir Sheferzen [Bir Shafanzan] and Bir Shegga [Bi'r ash Shaqqah]. Hence leaving Masrab el Sheferzen, the frontier line shall be drawn immediately to the west of the old caravan route which leads to the locality called Melezz Sidi Ibrahim, and it shall then run on the west of Masrab el Alshwan until its junction with Masrab el Garn in the locality called el Garn ul Gren. Hence immediately to the west of Masrab el Garn until its meeting with Masrab el Ajram. From the meeting of Masrab el Garn with Masrab el Ajram, the line shall be drawn along and immediately west of Masrab el Ajram as far as the edge of the Oasis of Melfa [Ain Melfa] ....

Article IV, Chapter I, of the 1926 agreement delimits the remainder of the boundary to the Sudan tripoint as follows:<sup>4</sup>

From the junction of Masrab el Ajram with the northern border of the Melfa Oasis, the boundary line shall be marked out as follows:

The line shall extend in an exact south-southeasterly direction (157° 30' Greenwich east) to a point on Mount Guegab 10 (ten) kilometers north of Manasseb Pass [Naqb al Munassib]. Then it shall follow an arc of a circle having as its center Manasseb Pass and a radius of 10 (ten) kilometers. This arc shall pass through Masrab Jalo and continue until its intersection with another arc of a circle that shall have as its center Williams Pass and a radius of 10 (ten) kilometers. The line shall follow this second arc of a circle to a point west-southwest ten kilometers from Williams Pass; then it

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<sup>3</sup> Articles II and III, Chapter I of the 1926 agreement clarify the boundary of the 1925 accord adjacent to the Mediterranean. "I. The center of the arc of a circle with a radius of 10 (ten) kilometers around Sollum shall be placed in the spot marked on the maps as Beacon Point and on the terrain by a cairn placed on the cape that closes the Bay of Sollum. II. The truck road beginning at Sollum and passing through the locality of Sidi Omar shall be considered to be the road which is called Masrab el-Sheferzen in the second sentence of Article 1 of the Accord [1925] and which, according to the Accord, is to cross the arc of the circle in question and to be extended by the boundary line as far as three kilometers south of Sidi Omar. It is understood that the aforesaid truck road is in Egyptian territory."

<sup>4</sup> Article 1 of the 1925 accord initially delimited the remainder of the boundary as follows. "The line shall then be drawn from the junction of Masrab el Ajram to the north of the Oasis of Melfa, in a general direction south-southeast across the Oases of Melfa and Guegab, as far as meridian 25° East (Greenwich), but in such a manner that after having crossed Masrab Djalo the line shall not pass through any point situated less than ten kilometres to the west of the el Manassib and Williams passes. The line shall then continue to follow meridian 25° East (Greenwich) until the meeting of the said meridian with the parallel 22° North."

shall continue in an exact south–southeasterly direction until its intersection with the 25th Greenwich Meridian. It shall then follow that Meridian until its intersection with the 22nd North Parallel.

#### **V. PRESENT SITUATION**

There are no known disputes relative to the alignment of the boundary. Likewise, available information indicates there have been no Egyptian territorial claims made on the newly independent state of Libya.

## APPENDIX

### DOCUMENTS

1. Agreement between Her Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Khedive of Egypt, relative to the future Administration of the Soudan. Cairo, January 19, 1899. British and Foreign State Papers, Vol. 91, 1898–99, pp. 19–22.
2. La Frontiere Occidentale de l'Egypte. December 6, 1925. Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres (Royaume D'Egypte) No. 1, 1926.
3. Accord Egypt–Italien du 9 November 1926 en execution de l'Accord du 6 December 1925. Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres (Royaume D'Egypte) No. 2, 1926 (Green Paper).
4. Loi No. 34 de 1932 portant approbation de l'Accord Italo–Egyptien relatif a la frontiere occidentale de l'Egypte. Journal Officiel No. 59 (Royaume D'Egypte) du 11 Juillet 1932.
5. Memorandum on the Subject of Djarabub and Memorandum on the Subject of the Western Frontiers of Egypt. United States Department of State, Paris Peace Conference, Publication 2868, Conference Series 103, 1946, pp. 353–356.

### MAPS

1. Egypt (North Coast): scale 1:100,000; published 1938 by Department of Survey and Mines; Geographical Section, General Staff (GSGS) No. 4086, United Kingdom War Office; sheet A.
2. Egypt (Western Desert): scale 1:100,000; GSGS No. 4085; published 1941 by United Kingdom War Office; sheets 6 (Shaqqa), 10 (El Qarn), 13 (Qeiqab), and 18 (Siwa).
3. Libya: scale 1:100,000; published 1936 by Istituto geografico militare (Italy); sheets 1698 (Bardi'a), 1798 (Amseat), 1797 (Sidi Omar), 1897 (Gasr El-Abid), and 1997 (Esc-Scegga).
4. North Africa: scale 1:250,000; published 1961 by United States Army Map Service; sheets NH 35-1 (Bandia), NH 35-5 (Bir Bayly), NH 35-9 (Giarabub), and NH 35-13 (Great Sand Sea).
5. Libya: scale 1:400,000; published by Istituto geografico militare (Italy), sheets 14 (Bardial), 32 (Gur Et-Tibbu), 41 (Gra'ra El-Blata), 49 (Archenu), and 55 (El-Auenat); and published by Comando Superiore Forze Armate Africa Settentrionale sheet 23 (Giarbub).



6. World: scale 1:500,000; series 1404; published 1960 by Director of Survey, United Kingdom War Office and Air Ministry; sheets 448-A (Salum), 448-D (Siwa), 543-A (Uadi El-Blata), 543-D (Cufra), and 568-A (Gulf Kebir Plateau).

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

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