

Center of Valley versus Thalweg: Revisiting The Israel – Jordan Aravah Boundary Dispute

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SUMMARY

River boundaries are a source of continuous conflicts between bordering countries due to their dynamic nature. Water flows in arid deserts are more of a wide flood events rather than flows restricted to stable streams. Consequently, during the peak of the flow there will be parallel flows not restricted to one thalweg and distinctive thalweg shifts may take place at each event. Desert streams are therefore less suited for adopting the thalweg boundary delineation approach. The surface flow in the Aravah valley in Southern Israel has in some sections a clear thalweg, in parts it is more characterized by flood flow, and in other parts it has no surface drainage at all. Israel-Jordan negotiations regarding the delineation of a boundary between them in the Aravah concerned interpretations of the formal definition published by the British Government in 1922, stating that : "The Palestine Order in Council 1922 shall not apply to the territory lying east of a line drawn from a point two miles west of the town of Akabah in the Gulf of Akabah up the centre of the Wadi Arabah, the Dead Sea and the Jordan River". Two main interpretations were given for this definition: line of lowest points and a line following the center of the wadi (center line) as perceived in its generalized wide extent. During the conference I will analyze the origins and differences between these interpretations based on a Carto-morphological analysis of the Aravah valley area. This presentation concerns the conceptual and methodological aspects of a search for a boundary in an arid desert. The final delineation of Israel-Jordan boundary in the Aravah was agreed based on a wide synthesis of historical, cartographic, geographical and political considerations.

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