

## The Curzon & Oder-Neisse Lines

The **Curzon Line** was a demarcation line between the Second Polish Republic and Bolshevik Russia, first proposed on December 8, 1919 at the Allied Supreme Council declaration. The line was authored by British Foreign Secretary, George Curzon, 1st Earl Curzon of Kedleston. In the wake of World War I and the Russian Civil War, the two countries disputed their borders, and the Polish-Soviet War erupted.

In July 1920, Curzon asked the Soviet government to accept it as a possible armistice line. Curzon's plan was initially not accepted by the Soviets, as the military situation was at that time in their favor, and later was not accepted by the Poles when the military situation had shifted to their favor. As such, the line did not play any role in establishing the Polish-Soviet border in 1921. Instead, the final Peace of Riga (or Treaty of Riga) provided Poland with almost 135,000 km<sup>2</sup> (52,000 sq mi) of land that was, on average, about 200 km east of the Curzon line. A close approximation of the Curzon line is the current border between the countries of Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland.

With minor variations, the Curzon line lay approximately along the border which was established between the Prussian Kingdom and the Russian Empire in 1797, after the third partition of Poland, which was the last border recognized by the United Kingdom. The line separating the German and Soviet zones of occupation following the defeat of Poland in 1939 followed the Curzon Line in places, while diverging from it around Białystok in the north and in the southern region of Galicia. While there is a widespread perception by historians that the line was based on the ethnic composition of the area, this viewpoint has been disputed by other historians who describe its origins as diplomatic and historical.

The Curzon line was used by Joseph Stalin as a significant argument in the talks with the Allied Powers during 1942-1945. Stalin argued that the Soviet Union



could not demand less territory for itself than the British Government had reconfirmed via Curzon some two decades prior. This has been described as a strong strategic move by Stalin, adding more land to the Soviet Empire than a pure ethno demographic study of the time would have justified.

There were two versions of the line "A" and "B." Version "B" allocated Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) to Poland. The line "A" was used in 1945 as the basis for the permanent border between Poland and the Soviet Union, although with some differences.

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The **Oder-Neisse Line** (Polish: **Granica na Odrze i Nysie Łużyckiej**, German: **Oder-Neiße-Grenze**) was drawn in the aftermath of World War II as the eastern border of Germany and the western border of Poland. The line is formed primarily by the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers, and meets the Baltic Sea west of the seaport cities of Szczecin (German: Stettin) and Świnoujście (German: Swinemünde). All pre-war German territory east of the line (23.8% of the former Weimar Republic lands, most of them in Prussia) was awarded either to Poland or the Soviet Union after the war, and the vast majority of its native German population was expelled by force. The line marked the border between the German Democratic Republic and Poland from 1950 to 1990. As of 1990, it has formed the border between reunited Germany and the Republic of Poland.