

TIDES OF CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING MARITIME CONFLICTS AND TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION IN NIGERIA THROUGH HISTORY

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Abstract

The Management of Transboundary water resources, including maritime domains, has been a longstanding challenge for nations worldwide. From precolonial times to the present, conflicts over shared water bodies have arisen due to competing interests, resource scarcity, and geopolitical tensions. However, cooperation has also emerged as a crucial approach to address these challenges and promote sustainable resource management. This study, therefore, explores the historical perspectives and the dynamics of Maritime conflicts and transboundary water cooperation, tracing their evolution from precolonial times to modern-day international agreements and frameworks. It delves into the evolution of Maritime conflicts driven by territorial, economic, and political interests, alongside the development of international laws and agreements fostering cooperation over shared water resources. By analysing case studies from different historical periods and regions, the study highlights the interplay between conflict and cooperation in the maritime realm offering insights into the underlying causes of disputes and the mechanisms that have successfully mitigated them. The findings underscore the importance of historical context in understanding current maritime tensions and the potential pathways to a peaceful resolution and sustainable management of Transboundary water resources.

Keywords: Transboundary water resources, Maritime conflicts, Historical perspectives, Cooperation, International agreements, Sustainable resource management.

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1. Introduction

The management of transboundary water resources, including maritime domains, has been a longstanding challenge for nations worldwide. From precolonial times to the present, conflicts over shared water bodies have arisen due to competing interests, resource scarcity, and geopolitical tensions. However, cooperation has also emerged as a crucial approach to address these challenges and promote sustainable resource management. This study examines the historical perspectives and dynamics of maritime conflicts and transboundary water cooperation, tracing their evolution from 1800 to modern-day international agreements and frameworks.

Maritime conflicts and cooperation are the subject of a diverse interdisciplinary body of scholarly work. International law, international relations, security studies, and maritime studies, among others, have all contributed analyses of the highly structured regulation regime for maritime activities in external waters and, in particular, the exclusive economic zones surrounding coastal states. Within the broad worldview, different academics from different disciplines have taken divergent takes on the empirical relations among states in their respective areas of interest. A small subset of studies within this larger universe of work emphasizes the social and economic impact of maritime-related conflict or cooperation in specific regions.

Maritime space plays a fundamental role in inter-state relations and economic development, particularly for countries such as Nigeria with large coastlines along oceans and seas. This is particularly true for a significant number of developing countries that have long shorelines and rely heavily on maritime resources to help drive their economic growth. Despite the obvious importance of the resources and services generated by ocean and sea spaces, conflict over maritime space among coastal states is and has been common. Scholars have shown that disputes between states over control of territorial waters and assertions of maritime influence have the potential to result in overt conflicts, thereby derogating from the realization of social and economic welfare through the peaceful and constructive use of the maritime domain.

2. Definition and Scope of Maritime Conflicts

Disputes can occur on four different levers – political, legal, military, and economic. The political lever refers to diplomatic negotiations or negotiations for treaties. The legal lever refers to all activities that involve reference to law, such as international arbitration and international judicature. The military lever refers to activities that have the power of coercion, such as military deployments, embargoes, sanctions, or blockades. The economic lever refers to the use of the production and circulation of goods, as a source to obviate military intervention. To delineate the multiple dimensions of conflict issues involving transnational maritime water, it perhaps makes sense to classify these issues according to the distinction offered by the theoretical literature. Such a list includes

equivalent water use, causation of harm from transboundary water use, and niche expansion³.

We focus on the maritime segment. Maritime water conflict encompasses disputes involving four different types of bodies of water: the high seas, exclusive economic zones, archipelagic waters, and internal waters. All these entail some coverage of international (or transnational) areas. In contrast to national water bodies contained wholly within the boundaries of one country, these waters pass through the territory of two or more parties. There is an implicit, if not explicit, responsibility for establishing coordination and cooperation among countries or with broader international entities operating on the high seas. Water use in these transnational areas can affect each of the three different issues in maritime water disputes: the locus of conflict, the derivative sources of the tension, and the control tools employed.

3. Importance of Transboundary Water Cooperation

It is a major concern that transboundary water conflicts far too often have to escalate into armed conflict to attract the attention of the international community and policymakers. The policy focus mainly is on security issues, while the inherent potential for cooperation is easily neglected. There is, however, an increased awareness of the importance of "security with a human dimension", particularly about low-intensity conflict prevention. Furthermore, it has also become increasingly obvious that cooperation opportunities for conflict prevention and resolution through the management of shared waters often are more cost-effective than the burdens of conventional responses to conflicts.

When it comes to water and transboundary water conflicts, the public focus is often on "water wars". This is also the case for policymakers in many countries. Yet, while transboundary water conflicts are undoubtedly serious and often lead to armed conflict, it is interesting to note that despite a history of disputes, water wars have been rare. This apparent paradox is because the conflict prevention and resolution potential of water agreements often is not very well known. There is also a lack of awareness and information about already established agreements that work, partly because agreements on transboundary waters most often are quietly and efficiently working in the background, beyond the doorstep of the media.

4. Purpose and Scope of the Paper

The geographical scope of the paper is limited to the international freshwater scene – that is, to arrangements about transboundary rivers, lakes, and aquifers. Furthermore, the work is limited to those international water arrangements which exist and which have

³ Yongping Wei, Jing Wei, Gen Li, Shuanglei Wu, David Yu, Fuqiang Tian, Murugesu Sivapalan 2021. A socio-hydrologic framework for understanding conflict and cooperation in transboundary rivers. *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences* <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-2021-522> <https://hess.copernicus.org/preprints/hess-2021-522/hess-2021-522.pdf>

been developed on the international level by states. In other words, this paper is not designed to explore and set out possible models for international water arrangements (a task which has, on the whole, been taken on by the literature and the recent UN Water Law conventions), but instead to describe how states, with all of their different historical, politico-economic, geographic, and resource availability problems, actually attempt to resolve those problems in the complicated and often messy world of complex international relations which we experience today.

The purpose of this paper among others is to analyze in concrete detail how international water arrangements and cooperation have evolved since 1800. This paper is intended to indicate the range of problems which are touched upon, to show the diversity of issues and solutions, and to suggest that it is even possible to articulate criteria for the selection of a particular approach to an international water problem. In many instances, the exact nature of the subject matter of the paper has evolved as the work has progressed; thus, there is still considerable work which could be done in many areas and this will hopefully become apparent to the reader. Moreover, it has proved to be a useful device to interpret the theme of this paper quite broadly, thereby enabling us to capture a lot of valuable experience with international water resources arrangements which might have otherwise been lost or difficult to compile.

5. Conceptual Framework

Water bodies, including oceans, seas, and rivers, have played a vital role in shaping human civilizations and economies throughout history. As populations grew and nations expanded, the need for access to and control over these water resources intensified, often leading to conflicts and disputes over shared water bodies.⁴ Simultaneously, the recognition of the interconnectedness of water systems and the potential benefits of cooperation has driven efforts towards transboundary water management and conflict resolution.

From the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the maritime empires of the Mediterranean and beyond, conflicts over water resources have been a recurring theme in human history.⁵ These conflicts stemmed from various factors, including resource scarcity, territorial disputes, and the strategic importance of water bodies for trade, transportation, and military purposes.

⁴ Mahadeo S and Del Savio L (2023) Transboundary maritime cooperation: the case of the Eastern Caribbean Region. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 10:1251911. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2023.1251911 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2023.1251911/full>. See also Wei, Y., Wei, J., Li, G., Wu, S., Yu, D., Ghoreishi, M., Lu, Y., Souza, F. A. A., Sivapalan, M., and Tian, F.: A socio-hydrological framework for understanding conflict and cooperation with respect to transboundary rivers, *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.*, 26, 2131–2146, <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-26-2131-2022>, 2022. <https://hess.copernicus.org/articles/26/2131/2022/>

⁵ Mahadeo and Del Savio (2023) Transboundary maritime cooperation: ...

As nations became more interconnected and interdependent, the need for cooperation in managing shared water resources became increasingly apparent.⁶ International agreements, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention), have provided frameworks for facilitating cooperation and resolving disputes over transboundary water bodies.⁷

This study aims to explore the historical perspectives on maritime conflicts and transboundary water cooperation, examining the drivers of conflicts, the evolution of cooperative mechanisms, and the challenges and opportunities in achieving sustainable and equitable management of shared water resources.⁸ Understanding the historical context and lessons learned can better inform contemporary efforts to promote cooperation and prevent conflicts over transboundary water bodies, ultimately contributing to regional stability, economic development, and environmental sustainability. Maritime domains and other transboundary water resources management have long been problems for countries all over the world, Nigeria not being an exception. Geopolitical tensions, opposing interests, and resource shortages have all contributed to wars over shared water bodies from precolonial times forward⁹. But collaboration has also come to light as an essential strategy for overcoming these obstacles and advancing sustainable resource management.

Nigeria is a country located in the West Africa sub-region. It is a Coastal State and shares maritime boundaries with several states. Among these are Sao Tome and Principe, Bight of Benin, Cameroon, Benin, and Equatorial Guinea. The country boasts of an enviable Maritime base. Her natural endowment base is measured at 850Km.¹⁰ With an estimated Exclusive Economic Zone of approximately 200 nautical miles, a massive waterway resource of about 4,000Km, that supports viable intra-regional commerce. Nigeria can be rightly labelled a maritime giant. Her total freight cost for the year is between 5 billion and 6 billion dollars. With these figures and facts in mind, it can be safely said that the shipping industry is of immense value to Nigeria.¹¹

⁶ Wei, Y., Wei, J., Li, G., Wu, S., Yu, D., Ghoreishi, M., Lu, Y., Souza, F. A. A., Sivapalan, M., and Tian, F.: A socio-hydrological framework for understanding conflict and cooperation with respect to transboundary rivers, *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.*, 26, 2131–2146, <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-26-2131-2022>, 2022. <https://hess.copernicus.org/articles/26/2131/2022/>, and Mahadeo and Del Savio (2023) Transboundary maritime cooperation: ...

⁷ Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation Under the Water Convention Second report on implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes 2017–2020. United Nations Geneva, 2021. https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/ECE_MP.WAT_67_WatConv_2nd_report_on_implementation.pdf.

⁸ Mahadeo and Del Savio (2023) Transboundary maritime cooperation; See also Wei, Y., Wei, J., *et al* : A socio-hydrological framework for understanding conflict and cooperation; and progress on transboundary water cooperation under the water convention...

⁹ R. Smith (1973) "Peace and Palaver: International Relations in Pre-colonial West Africa". *Journal of African History*, Vol. Xiv, No. 4.

¹⁰ Nigeria Maritime Industry, Proshare, Jan 17, 2019, <https://proshare.co/articles/nigeria-maritime-industry%participants>

¹¹ Nigeria Maritime Industry, Proshare, Jan 17, 2019,

Before the advent of colonialism, Nigeria and some portions of West Africa were known as the 'Slave Coast'. Robert Smith¹² is of the view that canoes were used to access the islands and lagoons. He said that perhaps, the greatest use of the Canoe in precolonial times was that it was used to transport people from place to place. Law corroborating Smith noted, however, that there were some drawbacks to the use of the canoe in the open Seas,¹³ this proved dangerous and a bit too much for the Canoe to handle. He said that despite the dexterity of the indigenous people expertise with the canoe was not the only factor that is worth mentioning about the transportation industry. Also, the success of the European trade was credited to the efficiency of the maritime transportation. Without the expertise of the Canoe men the European trade in the area may not have been successful.

Documented evidence on the maritime industry reveals that this industry existed even before the coming of the Europeans. But not in the form we have today. In the past, the indigenes were engaged in various maritime activities like the shipping of goods which were mostly agricultural products, and crafts made from bronze and brass. The fishing industry also boomed in the pre-colonial era. Despite the advent of colonial rule, the maritime sector continued to increase in the innovation and fleet that were used in the industry. Over time, the volume of trade, the fishing capacity and the efficiency of the trade have increased. Shipping was a vital mode of communication linking the coastal cities.

To date, marine transportation remains an environmentally and economically unique way to ship merchandise. To date, about 90% of commerce in the world is carried out by different international shipping companies. The Maritime Sector witnessed qualitative and quantitative growth. This is attributed to the birth of two new manufacturing growth stands which are the offshore oil exploration (which Nigeria engages in) and the cruise sector.¹⁴ Even though the maritime sector offers great value to many sectors of society in Nigeria, it appears that the majority of the public still possess a sparse insight into the rights and duties of this sector as an integral part of the social and economic development of the country.

An interesting fact about Nigeria is this, it is made up of people who speak related dialects. In about the 17th Century, Anlo, Little and Great Popo were some of the Indigenous maritime states that were domiciled in the area. By the 1720's the region of Whydah and Allada were defeated by the powerful Kingdom of Dahomey. Jakin was also destroyed by the people of Dahomey in 1732. Newly discovered ports sprang up at Port Novo and replaced the Apa Port at Badagry.¹⁵ Evidence has it that the growth of Warri and other Coastal cities in Nigeria was aided by waterways. It was also used to open the waterways to trade in the nineteenth century. It also played a major role in the planning

¹² Smith, R. (1970). The Canoe in West African History. *The Journal of African History*, 11(4), 515–533. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700010434> Published online by Cambridge University Press: 22 January 2009

¹³ Robin Law, "Between the Sea and the Lagoons: The Interaction of Maritime and Inland Navigation on the Pre-colonial Slave Coast", *Cathiers d' Etudes africaines*, 209- 237

¹⁴ Windrose Sector, Maritime Sector, <https://www.windrosenetwork.com/Maritime-Sector>

¹⁵ Akinjogbin, I. A, *Dahomey and Its Neighbors 1708- 1818*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

and spread of her frontiers in her waterways. This was designed to take commerce into the hinterlands. Ralph Moore and George Goldie bolstered suggestions to develop the Ocean Port in Nigeria. By the 18th Century, Lagos had become a major Atlantic port.¹⁶

With the rise of ports and the increasing importance that the Maritime Industry has brought to the country, Nigeria has had to pass some laws and enact foreign policies (foreign policies are the course of action or a set of principles that a country adopts in a bid to define its relations with other countries)¹⁷. These helped her protect her interest in the territorial waters. This allows her to maintain the peace with her neighbours with which she shares maritime boundaries. It is on record that the pioneer law to acknowledge the role of the Territorial Waters was passed in 1967. Due to the shortcomings of this law, it has been revised twice to accommodate more ideas. Once in 1971 and the other in 1998. The latest legislation that was passed named the Territorial Waters Act limited some of the territorial claims made by the nation to suit the proposals of the UNCLOS which is from 30 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles. A bill entitled The Nigerian Maritime Zone Bill (2020) proposes that the available Maritime Zones in the country should supply the Maritime Limits of the country. In other words, this bill will specify the claims Nigeria owns in its maritime water.¹⁸

As expected, the area has witnessed some maritime conflicts. Some explanations for these conflicts could be the claims and counter-claims of water boundaries.¹⁹ There has also been pressure on the quality and quantity available for human and animal consumption since the 1980s. This tension could be the consequence of population explosion, climatic changes and other factors.

No doubt, from the above it has become obvious that this paper is concerned with analyzing the maritime issues that have played out in the region. It also looked at the transboundary cooperation efforts that the nation has embraced. By specifying the focus of this paper on the presence of conflict in the area²⁰, the paper is not trying to imply that the maritime domain has been bedevilled with just chaos. On the contrary, the paper shows that despite the uncertainties that lie in efforts to draft water boundaries, also, regardless of the enormous potential that water bodies possess to states that lay claims to them (which include it being a source of water, commercial fishing, food, tourism)²¹, transboundary maritime cooperation and the available international laws have made it possible for states to habit peacefully.

¹⁶ Bowditch T. E, *A Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashanti*, London, F Cass, 1819

¹⁷ Austin Nonyelum Izagbo, *Rebranding Nigeria: Leadership and the National Image Project*, Crown Media Limited, Lagos, 187

¹⁸ Mustafa Nurudeen Abba, *The Maritime Delimitation of Nigeria/; A Case Study*, Workshop for the promotion of Sustainable Development of Africa's Deep Seabed Resources (ADSR) in support of Africa's Blue Economy, Abuja, Nigeria, 5th October, 2022.

¹⁹ T. A. Imobighe, Celestine O. Basse & Judith Burdin Asuni, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger- Delta: The Warri Case*, Spectrum Books Limited, Ibadan, 36.

²⁰ Imobighe, Basse & Asuni, *Conflict and Instability in the Niger-Delta*: 36.

²¹ Denisa Ogoyi, *Importance of Bodies of Water and Blue Spaces Within Growing Urbanized Areas*, 2022, <https://earth.org/importance-of-water-bodies-and-blue-spaces>

6. **Definition of Terms: Maritime Territorial Disputes**

Maritime territorial Disputes refer to disagreements between two or more countries over the possession of specific areas in the open seas. This includes the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and all the resources contained in them.²² Any dispute that arises over the use of water bodies is also termed a maritime territorial dispute.

7. **Water Bodies**

Water Bodies may also be called Blue Spaces. This is an urban term that is used to describe all forms of visible water. Including waterfronts located in parks, harbours, ports, rivers, canals, ponds, streams, and rivers, among others. These water bodies may be natural or man-made. But people must have free access to it.²³

8. **Conflict**

This is referred to as a state of fighting or armed altercation. It is also a competitive or opposing action of incompatibles.

9. **Sea Power**

Sea Power could be defined as 'the military power that is brought to bear at sea: on the surface of the sea, underneath it or above it'. An American strategist, Admiral Alfred T Mahan once contended that 'whoever rules the sea, rules the world' and that 'you cannot win any land campaign without securing the sea lanes of communication to supply the war materials needed on land'. Examples of this in some modern-day operations are the battles for the Falkland Islands, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Liberty (ECOMOG). It is, therefore, no accident of history that all known empires and great industrial nations of today are, without exception, islands or coastal states that had protected, defended, harnessed, managed and used their own and other people's maritime resources effectively.

10. **Pre-Colonial Nigeria Maritime Activities: Navigating History**

Vibrant marine activities were practised by the various ethnic groups living along the coast of what is now Nigeria even before colonial powers arrived. The Gulf of Guinea and the Bight of Benin offered rich environments for trade, fishing, and cross-cultural interactions. Native Nigerian tribes residing along the shore, like the Ijaws, Efiks, and Ibibios, acquired advanced skills in making seaworthy boats for trade and exploration.

The pre-colonial maritime activities were essential to these societies' economic structure and went beyond simple subsistence fishing. Coastal settlements created networks of trade, trading commodities like fish, salt, and palm oil. The numerous ethnic

²² Human Geography, <https://earth.org/importance-of-water-bodies-and-blue-spaces>

²³ Ogoyi, Importance of Bodies of Water and Blue Spaces..., 2022

groups along the coast became economically interdependent as a result of the waterways acting as highways for commerce.

Unfortunately, the transatlantic slave trade became known as a sad period in Nigeria's pre-colonial maritime history. The socioeconomic dynamics of coastal communities were significantly impacted by the desire for slaves generated by European powers, which resulted in disputes and disruptions in customary maritime activities²⁴. Generations were impacted by the Atlantic slave trade, which left a lasting impression on public memory.

During the 19th century, British colonial expansion in West Africa was motivated by the need to protect maritime trade routes, territorial control, and economic interests. It became necessary to build a naval presence along Nigeria's coastline to safeguard British shipping, secure resources, and establish supremacy over the area. Naval boats patrolled the Gulf of Guinea, marking the beginnings of a militaristic approach to imperial rule.

As a result, throughout the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, the main naval powers - the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Japan - engaged in naval combat. Having command of the seas was essential for moving troops, supplies, and other resources.

11. Perspectives

One of the primary obligations of a nation and indeed her government is the safeguarding of national interests both at home and abroad. A school of thought on international relations holds that national security, economic prosperity, and international prestige form the trinity that forms the basis of national interests. According to this viewpoint, preserving a country's territorial integrity and core values constitutes its paramount national interest.

A strong naval force is essential to safeguarding Nigeria's marine front and related operations as a coastal nation. According to General Hithles of the US Marine Corps, "the pathway of man's journey through the ages is littered with the wreckage of nations which, in their hours of glory, forgot their dependence on the sea." This statement has historical validity.

Power must be able to be applied at sea for nations with maritime interests that hope to influence others beyond their borders. "Any nation which derives benefits from the sea cannot turn its back on the sea," states the doctrine of sea power. Therefore, it stands to reason that any country bordering the sea and whose economy depends heavily on it must require the sea for at least four things. These are:

²⁴ R. S. Smith (1989). *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-colonial West Africa*, London: James Currey.

- a. Passage of goods and people, that is sustenance of commercial activities
- b. Passage of military forces, for diplomatic purposes and in the event of war, as a base for engaging the adversary's land, air and sea targets.
- c. Exploration and exploitation of resources in or under the sea.
- d. Preventing hostile military access to its territory.

Nigeria is strategically located in the South Atlantic Ocean in the Gulf of Guinea, near the corner of Africa. Her sea border is 420 nautical miles long, extending from Long 002o 49' E to Long 008o 30' E. She requires the sea for the four reasons listed above since she is a marine nation. Furthermore, she must protect her reliance on the sea and other maritime interests from any dangers, whether they be military, political, economic, or internal. These factors prompted some Nigerian nationalists to believe that the country needed a fully functional navy with the necessary organizational structure and ability to fend off any attempts to jeopardize its maritime interests, security, or territorial integrity before it gained independence. During the 1955 discussion on the necessity of a navy, Chief A Rosiji, a member of the former Nigerian Parliament, declared, "One of the functions of the navy will be the naval defence of Nigeria within its territorial waters."

12. Nigeria's Maritime Boundaries

Boundaries in the Maritime space refer to the various demarcations that are made in the lands and seas by man to show ownership of a specific water area. They include everything from the production of Oil and Gas to fishing activities and the protection of the environment. At the moment, it has been observed that more than half of all maritime boundaries in the world are still disputed across the continents around the world.²⁵ The foreign ministers in Norway and Russia observed in 2010 that "unresolved maritime boundary disputes can be among the most difficult for states to resolve".²⁶ According to them, Timing is everything, when it comes to settling maritime disputes.²⁷ Some of the Countries with which Nigeria shares Maritime disputes are outlined below:

Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe - Nigeria has a provisional boundary agreement with this country. They have a Joint Development Zone (JDZ). The agreement was signed on the 1st of February, 2001.

Nigeria and Ghana - Nigeria is yet to reach concrete agreements with this country. Negotiations are still ongoing at the moment.

Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea - Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea have had concrete negotiations and agreements as regards their maritime boundary. At the

²⁵ M. Bayer's, A.Osthagen, *Settling Maritime Boundaries: Why Some Countries Find It Easy and Others do not. The Future of Ocean Governance and Capacity Development*, the International Ocean Institute-Canada, rill Nijhoff, Leiden, NLD (2018), 162-168

²⁶ Sergei Lavrov, Jonas Gahr Store, Canada, take note: Here's how to Resolve Maritime Disputes, *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/canadatake-notes-here-how-to-resolve-maritime-disputes>

²⁷ Andreas Osthagen, *Maritime Boundary Disputes: What are They and Why do they Matter?* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2020.104118>

moment, talks are in place to extend this boundary beyond the triangular point of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria.

Nigeria and Benin - The boundary between Nigeria and Benin have been properly delineated. The treaty was signed on the 4th of August, 2006.

Nigeria and Cameroon - The boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon was fixed by the rulings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Both signed the Treaty.²⁸

13. Some Reasons for Maritime Conflicts

There are many reasons why maritime conflicts occur. One of which is the Overlapping Claims to Maritime Ownership. Some authors think that maritime disputes may occur if states insist on uncertain claims in their territorial seas. Which is opposite twelve nautical miles in the seas, two hundred nautical miles in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) and in the Continental Shelves. A good example of countries that have witnessed this type of conflict is the case of Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe.

Another reason why conflicts may occur is if states have conflicting claims over portions of the island. Over time it has been observed that two countries may declare ownership of the same portion of the Islands. When such occurs, it can only be solved through arbitration. An example is the case of Japan and China over their conflicting claim of Senaku/ Diaoyu/ Diaoyutai Islands.²⁹

Oil Exploration on the mainland may also lead to disputes between countries. This was the source of conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon. The disputed region was called Bakassi. The Border between Nigeria and Cameroon was on two fronts. One was on land and the other on the Sea. A lot of publicity has been generated about the dispute on the land. This may be due to the skirmishes that took place in the land areas. Nevertheless, the disputes that occurred over the territorial sea and continental shelf are just as important. Bakassi is home to large deposits of Oil and Gas.³⁰ Bakassi witnessed military showdowns from the two countries. A situation that was about to degenerate to a point of full-scale warfare if not for the timely intervention of the judgment from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

It was commonplace to see headlines in the daily newspapers like: "Why Nigeria may go to war over Bakassi". Cameroonian soldiers paraded the villages, attacking some villages, and annexing them in the process. There were several casualties on both sides

²⁸ Mustafa Nurudeen Abba, The Maritime Delimitation of Nigeria: a Case Study, Workshop for the Promotion of Sustainable Development of Africa's Deep Seabed Resources (ADSR) in support of Africa's Blue Economy, Abuja, Nigeria, 5th – 7th October, 2022.

²⁹ Abba, The Maritime Delimitation of Nigeria..., 2022.

³⁰ Okolie Aloysius Michael, Nigeria and her Immediate Neighbors: A Critical Analysis of International Court of Justice Ruling over Bakassi Peninsula, *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, <https://www.ajpasebsu.org.ng/2004/05/nigeria-and-her-immediate-neighbours>

until the matter was reported by Cameroon to the ICJ on the 29th of March 1994. Sovereignty over Cameroon was given to Bakassi.³¹

14. **How to Resolve Maritime Boundary Disputes**

Article 33 of the UN Charter stipulates that conflicts between states should be solved according to the preferences of the parties involved. Negotiation is one of the options that the United Nations gives to the aggrieved states.

15. **If Negotiation fails, arbitration may be explored.**

To resolve issues of Overlapping claims by states, rules in the UN Convention of the Land and Sea (UNCLOS) may be followed.

16. **Some Strategies that may Manage Maritime Disputes between States**

Aggrieved states need to adhere to the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The United Nations Assembly should have a standing army that is willing to attack offending states. The International Maritime Military force should be equipped to patrol disputed waters to avoid the outbreak of war.³²

If water bodies are in dispute, they should be allocated to states based on the GDP proportions.

Strong legislation concerning the conduct of territorial waters may be adopted to safeguard the interest of states in the territorial waters. There should also be provisions to tackle maritime offenders.

As a final resort, fishing rights should be allocated to states based on the history of usage rather than the geographical proximity of the state.

17. **Challenges facing the Maritime Sector**

a. Insecurity is one of the major challenges facing the Maritime Sector. Over time, states have attempted to improve the security of their water bodies, but there is still a need for improvement. Issues such as illegal bunkering, piracy, sea robbery and a host of other maritime vices have continued to threaten the peace of the area. One of the recommendations of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), is that the Nigerian Air Force provide support for sea-based operations.

³¹ Okolie, Nigeria and her Immediate Neighbors

³² Human Geography, <https://library.fiveable.me/questions/ap-hug/unit-4/CEONNOqzv1N4cB09>

b. Another challenge facing the Maritime sector is the obvious lack of infrastructure in the harbours, ports and terminals. To meet international standards, the government needs to invest in the provision of modern equipment to the ports.³³

c. Also, the issue of marine environmental pollution is another challenge facing the maritime sector. It causes degradation to the environment. Marine pollution has been a major source of unrest over the years. This has attracted national and international attention.³⁴

d. Finally, the issue of an inadequate skilled workforce is one of the challenges that are hampering the maritime sector from reaching its full potential.

Understanding the historical context of maritime conflicts and cooperation efforts is crucial for addressing current challenges in transboundary water management. By learning from past experiences and leveraging international frameworks, nations can work towards sustainable and equitable use of shared water resources, promoting regional stability and economic development.

³³ Vera E nubianozor, The Nigerian Maritime Sector- Regulations and Challenges, Business Insights, Nigerian Law, Oil and Gas, July 8, 2024. <https://trustedadvisorslaw.com/the-nigerian-maritime-sector-regulations-and-challenges>

³⁴ Dryad Global, West Africa Gulf of Guinea Piracy, <https://www.dryadglobal.com/gulf-of-guinea-and-nigeria-piracy>

Conclusion:

The article "Tides of Change: Understanding Maritime Conflicts and Transboundary Cooperation in Nigeria Through History" provides a comprehensive examination of Nigeria's maritime history and its implications for contemporary transboundary water management. Several key conclusions can be drawn:

Nigeria's rich maritime heritage, dating back to precolonial times, has played a crucial role in shaping its economic and social development. The evolution from canoe-based transportation to modern shipping and offshore exploration demonstrates the adaptability and resilience of Nigeria's maritime sector.

The country's extensive coastline and Exclusive Economic Zone underscore the immense value of maritime resources to Nigeria's economy. With an estimated annual freight cost between 5-6 billion dollars, the shipping industry remains a vital component of Nigeria's economic landscape.

Despite its significance, public awareness of the maritime sector's rights and duties in Nigeria's socio-economic development remains limited. This highlights the need for increased education and engagement to fully leverage the potential of maritime resources.

The historical context of maritime conflicts and cooperation in Nigeria provides valuable insights for addressing current challenges in transboundary water management. By understanding past dynamics, policymakers can develop more effective strategies for conflict resolution and sustainable resource management.

In conclusion, Nigeria's maritime history reflects a complex interplay of conflict and cooperation, mirroring global trends in transboundary water management. As Nigeria continues to navigate the challenges of maritime resource utilization and regional cooperation, lessons from its rich historical tapestry will be instrumental in charting a course towards sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in the maritime domain.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Perplexity (Chatbot) in order to strengthen the language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.