

## Maritime Naming Practice for Shared and Divided Features: Common Perceptions and Harmonious Coexistence

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A land border between two countries may terminate at a coastline, beyond which lies a bay, gulf, or small sea. Such a maritime feature is subject to the legitimate interest - including the toponymic interest - of both neighbouring littoral countries. This paper shows that, in most instances around the world, the two countries agree without demur on a single common name for a maritime feature of this type, despite the fact that this single name often reflects an associated toponym relevant to only one of the two countries. The paper explores the reasons for this remarkable measure of agreement - reasons which are to do with toponymic perception - and concludes with the observation that this situation provides us with an object lesson in harmonious coexistence.

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It is a relatively common phenomenon that a land border between two countries terminates at a coastline, seaward of which there is located a bay, gulf, or small sea. A maritime feature of this type is subject to the legitimate interest – including the toponymic interest – of both neighbouring littoral countries. The United Nations, at its various conferences on the standardization of geographical names (UNCSSGN), has passed two resolutions (I/8 and III/20) which assist neighbouring littoral countries to determine a name for features of this type. These two UN resolutions read as follows<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the wording of Resolution III/20 is the result of a UNCSSGN III recommendation that Resolution II/25 (1972) should be re-worded. There is therefore a potentially useful precedent here for existing UN resolutions to undergo small changes at a future juncture.

I/8 (1967) Treatment of names of features beyond a single sovereignty

The Conference,

- Recognizing that some features common to, or extending across the frontiers of, two or more nations have more than one name applied to them,
- Further recognizing that the names of some features of this kind have different applications or extent,
- Considers that it is preferable that a common name or a common application be established, wherever practicable, in the interests of international standardization,
- Recommends that the geographical names authorities of the nations concerned attempt to reach agreement on these conflicting names or application.

III/20 (1977) Names of features beyond a single sovereignty

The Conference,

- Considering the need for international standardization of names of geographical features that are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided among two or more countries,
- Recommends that countries sharing a given geographical feature under different names should endeavour, as far as possible, to reach agreement on fixing a single name for the feature concerned,
- Further recommends that when countries sharing a given geographical feature do not agree in agreeing on a common name, it should be a general rule of international cartography that the name used by each of the countries concerned will be accepted. A policy of accepting only one or some of such names while excluding the rest would be inconsistent in principle as well as inexpedient in practice. Only technical reasons may sometimes make it necessary, especially in the case of small-scale maps, to dispense with the use of certain names belonging to one language or another.

It is gratifyingly apparent that these UN resolutions are for the most part being followed. In fact, the recommendations called for in the resolutions were often already in place long before any UN involvement, as we can observe from the examples given below, which are listed in the alphabetical order of the reading form of their English-language conventional name. The fact that one single common name is accepted without demur by neighbouring littoral countries in each instance shows that the spirit of UN resolutions I/8 and III/20 can be readily attainable.

	<u>Feature</u>	<u>Countries concerned</u>	<u>Continent</u>
1	Bay of Fundy	Canada; United States	North America
2	Chetumal Bay	Belize; Mexico	South America
3	Courland Lagoon	Lithuania; Russia	Europe
4	Gulf of Gdańsk	Poland; Russia	Europe
5	Gulf of Venezuela	Colombia; Venezuela	South America
6	Gwater Bay	Iran; Pakistan	Asia
7	Narva Bay	Estonia; Russia	Europe
8	Salish Sea	Canada; United States	North America
9	Sea of Azov	Russia; Ukraine	Europe
10	Sollum Bay	Egypt; Libya	Africa

In all of the above examples, as in most instances globally, the two neighbouring littoral countries agree on a single name for the maritime feature marking the end of their joint land border. Moreover, they agree on this despite the fact that the single maritime feature name often reflects an associated toponym relevant to only one of the two countries; this happily does not seem to be problematic to the neighbouring country, as can be seen in the following details relating to the above features<sup>2</sup>:

<b>1. Bay of Fundy</b>	12,500 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada (English/French) &amp; United States (English) = Bay of Fundy</li> <li>• The US accepts the name despite its probable French Canadian origins</li> </ul>	

<b>2. Chetumal Bay</b>	1,100 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belize (English) = Chetumal Bay</li> <li>• Mexico (Spanish) = Bahía de Chetumal</li> <li>• Belize accepts the name despite the feature being named after a town in Mexico</li> </ul>	

<sup>2</sup> Areas are approximated from Internet sources or have been estimated by the author; romanizations are according to the BGN/PCGN Systems for Arabic, Persian, Russian and Ukrainian as appropriate.

3. Courland Lagoon <i>or sometimes</i> Couronian Lagoon	1,600 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lithuania (Lithuanian) = Kuršių marios</li> <li>• Russia (Russian) = Kurshskiy zaliv [Куршский залив]</li> <li>• Russia accepts the name despite its Lithuanian/Baltic origins</li> </ul>	
4. Gulf of Gdańsk	6,000 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland (Polish) = Zatoka Gdańska</li> <li>• Russia (Russian) = Gdan'skiy zaliv [Гданьский залив] <i>or sometimes</i> Gdan'skaya bukhta [Гданьская бухта]</li> <li>• Russia accepts the name despite the feature being named after a city in Poland</li> </ul>	
5. Gulf of Venezuela	17,800 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombia &amp; Venezuela (Spanish) = Golfo de Venezuela</li> <li>• Colombia accepts the name despite the feature being named after the neighbouring littoral country</li> </ul>	
6. Gwatar Bay	500 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iran (Persian) = Khalij-e Gavāter [ خلیج گواتر ]</li> <li>• Pakistan (English) = Gwatar Bay</li> <li>• Pakistan accepts the name despite the feature being named after a town in Iran</li> </ul>	
7. Narva Bay	3,600 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estonia (Estonian) = Narva laht</li> <li>• Russia (Russian) = Narvskiy zaliv [Нарвский залив]</li> <li>• Russia accepts the name despite the feature being named after a town in Estonia</li> </ul>	
8. Salish Sea	18,000 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada &amp; United States (English) = Salish Sea</li> <li>• Canada accepts the name despite its US origins</li> </ul>	

9. Sea of Azov

39,000 km<sup>2</sup>

- Russia (Russian) = Azovskoye more [Азовское море]
- Ukraine (Ukrainian) = Azovs'ke more [Азовське море]
- Ukraine accepts the name despite the feature being named after a town in Russia

10. Sollum Bay

1,000 km<sup>2</sup>

- Egypt & Libya (Arabic) = Khalīj as Sallūm [ خليج السلوم ]
- Libya accepts the name despite the feature being named after a town in Egypt

The blue boxes show features shared by countries with a common language; the green boxes illustrate features shared by countries that do not share a common language. What all these features have in common is that their waters are either (a) jointly pooled or shared between the two countries concerned; or (b) divided between the two countries concerned. Apart from that crucial common factor, however, they vary considerably in attributes. They range in size from Gwatar Bay, no more than 500 square kilometres, right through to the Sea of Azov, which at 39,000 square kilometres is larger than Taiwan and almost the size of the Netherlands.

In a sense, it might be expected that there would be no disagreement in the name of the two features between Canada and the United States (Bay of Fundy and Salish Sea), since these are two friendly countries which share a common language. On the other hand, Colombia and Venezuela also share a common language, but they do not always enjoy the closest of relationships. Yet Colombia is perfectly relaxed about allowing the sizeable gulf that the two countries share to be named after its neighbour, Venezuela – even in Colombian reference materials. Libya and Egypt also share a common language and although they too do not enjoy a close relationship, they both accept a single name for their shared bay.

Russia has no problem in accepting into the Russian language three feature names that are based on toponyms lying outside its territory, in countries that are by no means long-standing soul-mates of Russia: Lithuania, Poland and Estonia. For the huge Azov Sea, Ukraine is happy to accept into the Ukrainian language a feature name based on the name of a small town in Russia. And in a similar fashion, Belize and

Pakistan are also willing to accept the use of feature names based on towns lying outside their own territories.

In an age of conflict and tension such as we are witnessing at present, it may seem surprising that these naming patterns survive. One might expect nationalist instincts in Colombia and Pakistan – and especially in Russia and Ukraine – to demand that their own portions of these particular features be renamed in favour of towns within their own territories. Yet, by and large, right across the world's continents these single names persist and there is in reality no demand for such a change<sup>3</sup>. It is worth examining the reasons for this continuing relaxed approach: reasons which are related to toponymic perception.

The name of a particular town or village usually carries a considerable amount of significance. At some point in history, an influential and usually a knowledgeable group of people has thought long and hard about the naming process for the settlement, and has made what in their opinion is the most appropriate choice. The binding connection has been between the name and the settlement, and provided that the inhabitants of that settlement and the authorities in power are content with it, the name is likely to endure.

The action of naming an associated body of water after a particular settlement usually comes at a later juncture in time. It is a natural and obvious course of action to take, since it relates the water body to the nearby settlement and provides a geographical connection between the two features. But we should remember that the name of the settlement was initially not intended as the name of the water body. The name has been attached to the water body by a process of extension, at a later stage, and in extending the scope of the name its meaning has become attenuated. In other words, the naming of the water body produces a label which is to some degree vicarious. The name certainly provides a identifier that shows where the feature lies – that, after all, is the whole point of the exercise – but the perception of the name is that it no longer possesses that crucial element of “belonging” that was designed to be present in the settlement name.

As a result, when a Colombian sees the name “Golfo de Venezuela”, or a Russian sees the name “Narvskiy zaliv” [Нарвский залив], they see a straightforward and indeed a rather anodyne feature name, not a label from which they instinctively recoil because they think it implies possession by a neighbouring foreign country. And of course this is

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<sup>3</sup> However, see the paragraphs on the Bay of Piran, below.

also normally true at a more broad-brush scale, too, for maritime features which stretch away from the shore and into the open seas and oceans. To re-state the obvious: no-one in the United States believes that the Gulf of Mexico belongs to Mexico; no-one in the United Kingdom believes that the Irish Sea is the property of Ireland. Equally importantly, indeed perhaps more importantly, no-one in Mexico or Ireland believes this, either. The perception is clearly that maritime names such as these are labels of convenience, bestowed in an attenuated and an exclusively geographical sense. They are not names which are freighted with any possessive baggage.

There is one notable and oft-cited exception to the general rule of neighbourly harmony that has been outlined thus far in this paper. This exception concerns the Bay of Piran, a small body of water which – depending on one's point of view – either lies wholly within Slovenian territory or is divided between Slovenia and Croatia. The disagreement stems from differing interpretations in Slovenia and Croatia over the appropriate method that should be used for the drawing of borders that were once internal within the former Yugoslavia but which are now international in character. In the years before 1992, when both Slovenia and Croatia were non-independent republics within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the question of a boundary in the Bay of Piran would have been of theoretical interest only. But today it matters, and both countries have presented detailed arguments to support their case. In short, Slovenia believes the entire bay to be within its national jurisdiction, whereas Croatia believes that there is an international border between the two countries running along the bay's median line.

As with the other maritime features discussed in this present paper, the Bay of Piran was named by a process of extension, taking its name from the name of the principal town on the coastline – Piran, which lies within Slovenia. The name of the bay was common to both the Slovenian [*Piranski zaliv*] and the Croatian [*Piranski zaljev*] languages. But as part of its argument in favour of an international border running through the bay, Croatia has stated that the bay should also have a separate Croatian name, Savudrija Bay [Savudrijska vala], a name taken from the small village of Savudrija, located on the supposedly Croatian stretch of coastline<sup>4</sup>. Croatia has endeavoured to construct a legacy of antecendence for this name, but the authenticity of this legacy is questionable.

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<sup>4</sup> The village of Savudrija has a population of only 250: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savudrija>

From an international perspective Croatia's stance is disappointing, since it would introduce a second and wholly different toponym into a feature which is clearly singular and discrete. But the issue has not altogether been helpfully answered by Slovenia's response to this Croatian *démarche*, which was in part as follows:

*[t]he very name 'Bay of Piran' shows that the Bay has historically belonged to the town of Piran and its inhabitants. From the historical perspective, the economic power of the region was for centuries concentrated in the town of Piran, which controlled and influenced all activities in the Bay, which were of no interest to other entities. Piran, on the other hand, had a historic interest in keeping the Bay under its control*<sup>5</sup>.

Slovenia's decision here to emphasise "belonging" and "control" runs counter to the relaxed nature of the other maritime examples cited in this present paper, which display a general acceptance of the reality that names of this type do not inherently contain – and therefore should not be suggestive of – any possessive qualities.

The boxed summary of the anomalous Bay of Piran situation would therefore read as follows:

<b>Bay of Piran</b>	20 km <sup>2</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slovenia (Slovenian) = Piranski zaliv</li> <li>• Croatia (Croatian) = Savudrijska vala</li> <li>• As part of a wider ongoing border dispute, Croatia has rejected the traditional name Bay of Piran and has introduced its own new national name instead</li> </ul>	

The background is coloured red to indicate that there is a disagreement regarding terminology in the Bay of Piran issue. But it is important to bear in mind that this paper has dwelt on this particular issue precisely because it is an exception, out of character with the global pattern for such names, and for which the ten other case studies in the paper are typical exemplars. In almost all instances, the manner in which countries have chosen to treat names of this type – relating to small shared or divided maritime features – is wholly commendable, providing us with an object lesson in harmonious coexistence.

<sup>5</sup> *White paper on the border between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia*: Tiskarna Delo, Ljubljana, 2006; p7: ISBN 961-91820-0-6: [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/slovenia\\_SLO-white%20book-2006.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/slovenia_SLO-white%20book-2006.pdf)