

## Has the Peru-Chile boundary dispute finally been resolved?

[Allie Nawrat](#) discusses the outcome of recent Peru-Chile border dispute negotiations

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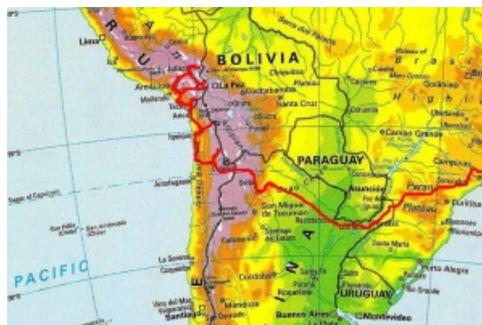


Photo Credit: thejourney1972

Latin American history is riddled with border disputes due to its links with European Empires. The Peru-Chile border dispute is one of the continent's few remaining ones.

The origins of the boundary dispute between Peru and Chile can be found in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), caused by disputes over the nitrate industry in the Atacama Desert.

The region sits within Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Argentina, and over the mineral-rich provinces of Peru and Bolivia. Chilean businesses felt threatened by the Peruvian nationalisation of all nitrate mines and the Bolivian imposition of a 10% tax on the Antofagasta Nitrate & Railway Company.

The Chileans dominated on both sea and land, and in 1881 the Chilean army occupied the Peruvian Capital, Lima, following the withdrawal of Bolivia.

The guerrilla fighting was not capable of changing the outcome of the war, and in 1883 Peru and Chile signed the Treaty of Ancón in 1883. Bolivia signed a truce with Chile in 1884. The terms of the Treaty – the mineral-rich Tarapacá province was formally given to Chile, and it was to occupy the provinces of Tacna and Arica for 10 years until a plebiscite – allow us to understand why antagonisms over territorial boundaries prevail.

The most contentious issue was over the terms of the plebiscite. The parties involved were so unable to compromise that US President Hoover's mediation in 1929 granted Tacna to Peru, Arica to Chile, and fixed the land boundary.

US mediation may have settled the land boundary but it had not resolved the maritime boundary. The three West coast countries – Ecuador, Peru and Chile – attempted to settle this amongst themselves in the Santiago Declaration of 1952, but this was viewed as being in Chile's favour because the boundary was due West rather than perpendicular to the land boundary. Some sources also mention the Peru thought of the area as being good for only fishing.

In reaction to this, Chile asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to review the maritime border in 2008. It made three requests: a new border should be fixed equidistant between the two countries' coasts i.e. run southwest instead of west; that the boundary should start at Punta Concordia; and that a Peruvian external triangle of 29,000 sq km should be confirmed 200 miles to the West of Chile, but less than 200 miles from Peru's coast.

What was the decision of the ICJ in January 2014? It upheld the established agreement from the Santiago Declaration for 80 nautical miles and beyond that point a new boundary was drawn running southwest.

Chile has therefore retained its inshore waters, which contain most of the fish in the area, and Peru has won 21,000 sq km and the external triangle. This increase in deeper waters means Peru has greater access to swordfish, tuna and giant squid.

What was the reaction of the Peruvian and Chilean governments to this decision? Some Peruvians were disappointed, but this victory is symbolic because it means that Peru has finally won a battle with Chile and it has used legitimate methods to do so. The Chileans seem content and relieved by the outcome.

Both countries have pledged to abide by the ruling, which should mean rapid implementation and thus further improvement of relations between these two economically prosperous countries, which is important to their political and business elites. The success of this diplomatic approach achieving a compromise may be an example to other Latin American countries that territorial disputes need not be settled by war.



## One comment

George Naxera

14 Mar '14 at 4:34 pm

Correction: It was Peru that requested the ICJ to review the maritime border in 2008, not Chile. (Fifth paragraph from the bottom.)

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