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## **The Essequibo Conundrum: Conflict Analysis of Venezuela-Guyana Border Dispute**

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### **Abstract**

The long-standing boundary dispute between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region comprising 70% of Guyana's territory, is deeply rooted in colonial history and geopolitical interests. The conflict escalated significantly after the 2015 discovery of massive oil and gas reserves off the Essequibo coast, estimated at over 11 billion barrels. This discovery prompted Venezuela to renew its territorial claims, citing historical colonial rights. Conversely, Guyana bases its sovereignty on international legal rulings, such as the 1899

arbitration award, and public opinion surveys that show an overwhelming majority supporting Essequibo's retention. The dispute has led to heightened tensions at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and ongoing international legal proceedings. This research examines the conflict through Johan Galtung's concepts of positive and negative peace, as well as direct and structural violence. It investigates the underlying causes and potential resolutions, including the role of historical grievances, the economic stakes, and political instability. The study explores solutions such as international mediation, joint development agreements, and referendums in the disputed area, while recognizing the obstacles posed by entrenched nationalist sentiments and differing governance approaches. These complexities underscore the challenge of achieving a sustainable resolution to this deeply rooted conflict.

**Keywords:** Venezuela, Guyana, boundary dispute, Essequibo region, oil and gas reserves, territorial sovereignty, International Court of Justice (ICJ), peacebuilding, structural violence.

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## Introduction

Border disputes are one of the most common and contentious issues in international relations. They are often rooted in historical grievances, territorial claims, and geopolitical interests. One such dispute which has been going on for decades is the tension between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region which encompasses 70% of Guyana's territory.

Venezuela claims historical rights that go back to when Essequibo was a Spanish colony and was part of Venezuela. In 1840, the British government established the Schomburgk Line,<sup>1</sup> which significantly expanded the territory of British Guiana, now Guyana, by incorporating land well beyond the previously controlled area, including the strategically important mouth of the Orinoco River.<sup>2</sup> This line played a pivotal role in defining the modern borders of the region, marking the land claimed by the UK and later inherited by Guyana upon gaining independence

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<sup>1</sup> "The British Guiana Frontier," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 12, no. 2 (February 1, 1896): 87–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00369229608732854>.

<sup>2</sup> Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), "Border Dispute Between Venezuela and Guyana: Implications for the Region," n.d., [https://www.icwa.in/show\\_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls\\_id=10255&lid=6532](https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=10255&lid=6532).

in 1966. That same year, Venezuela and the UK signed an agreement aimed at initiating negotiations to resolve the territorial dispute.

But in 2015, large petroleum deposits were found off the coast of Essequibo, which started a territorial dispute that had been going on for decades. According to experts, the area could hold more than 11 billion barrels of oil and natural gas.<sup>3</sup> This has provided Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro with renewed justification to pursue control over the Essequibo region with increased determination. Most recently, a referendum was held in Venezuela to support the claim over the Essequibo region, which Venezuela asserts as part of its territory rather than Guyana's. The referendum, consisting of five questions, passed with an overwhelming 98% approval from the Venezuelan people.<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, the UN Secretary-General determined that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) should adjudicate the dispute between Venezuela and Guyana regarding the validity of the 1899 arbitration award. Subsequently, in 2020 and 2023, the ICJ issued rulings affirming its jurisdiction to resolve the conflict, with no legal barriers preventing it from proceeding.<sup>5</sup> In response, Venezuela announced plans to hold a national referendum in October 2023, asking its citizens whether they supported annexing the Essequibo region to Venezuelan territory and rejecting the ICJ's jurisdiction.

Guyana reacted by urgently requesting provisional measures to prevent Venezuela from taking actions that could undermine the Court's proceedings. On December 1, 2023, the ICJ unanimously issued an urgent directive ordering Venezuela to refrain from altering the status quo in Essequibo.<sup>6</sup> While President Nicolás Maduro has not yet acted to annex Essequibo following the referendum, indigenous communities in the region continue to live in fear of an impending conflict.

## Literature Review

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<sup>3</sup> Bruno Venditti, "The Venezuela–Guyana Dispute Explained in 3 Maps," *Visual Capitalist*, December 11, 2023, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-venezuela-guyana-dispute-explained-in-3-maps/>.

<sup>4</sup> Nazima Raghubir, "Fears Simmer in Essequibo Region as Venezuela Eyes the Disputed Territory," *Al Jazeera*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/11/fears-simmer-in-essequibo-region-as-venezuela-eyes-the-disputed-territory>.

<sup>5</sup> Matrix Chambers, "International Court of Justice Orders Urgent Provisional Measures Against Venezuela," December 4, 2023, <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/news/international-court-of-justice-orders-urgent-provisional-measures-against-venezuela/>.

<sup>6</sup> *International Court of Justice*, "Summary of the Order of 1 December 2023," n.d., <https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203344>.

The territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela over the Essequibo region has been the subject of extensive scholarly examination, with various authors exploring its historical, political, and economic implications.

Odeen Ishmael's *The Trail of Diplomacy: The Guyana-Venezuela Border Issue* examines the issue of the territorial conflict between Guyana and Venezuela since 1966. Ishmael focuses on developments after a decision made by an 1899 arbitral tribunal that gave the Essequibo region to British Guiana (now Guyana). Venezuela, dissatisfied with this decision, denounced it as "null and void" in 1962, and the dispute was thus escalated. Ishmael details the subsequent political events, including Venezuelan incursions into Guyanese territory and diplomatic efforts from both countries. A milestone was reached with the 1966 Geneva Agreement which aimed at solving the dispute using diplomacy. In 1970 the Port of Spain Protocol temporarily suspended these attempts, but another twelve years of bilateral negotiations ended in 1982 when Venezuela announced the termination of the protocol with this reignited conflict.

Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner's *The Venezuela-Guyana Border Dispute: Britain's Colonial Legacy in Latin America* revisits the historical and legal foundations of the dispute, emphasizing the colonial-era territorial arrangements that shaped the conflict and Venezuelan irredentist demands of a war to regain the Essequibo region. While the government rebuffed them they tried unavailingly to resume the Port-of-Spain Protocol on its terms but in doing so put Guyana into very difficult negotiations. She examines the historical-legal basis for the dispute, all of its claims, and their means to develop land. It also analyzes the role of external actors, particularly the United States, in the dynamics of the dispute and explores potential pathways to resolution, including violent conflict, compromise, and international mediation.

Recent studies have shifted the focus to contemporary developments in the dispute. Arnab Chakrabarty's *Border Dispute Between Venezuela and Guyana* examines the implications of Venezuela's 2023 referendum. Ninety-five percent of voters supported annexing the Essequibo region from Guyana. In certain ways, the roots of his study began more than 100 years ago. This region is abundantly rich in oil and ores and its beginning can be traced back to the colonial period. Chakrabarty traces the origins of the conflict to the colonial-era Schomburgk Line and critiques the failure of the 1966 Geneva Agreement to resolve the issue. Recent ICJ rulings prohibited altering the status quo, but tensions remain high. Guyana and CARICOM condemned the referendum, while Venezuela hailed it, leading to increased regional tensions

and Brazil boosting its military presence there. Despite all the clamor, an open conflict seems unlikely, with regional organizations playing a key role in seeking peaceful solutions.

Aaron Marcus Homer, in *Guyana-Venezuela Border Dispute: Seeking a Peaceful Solution*, analyzes international dispute-resolution mechanisms, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and their effectiveness. He contrasts Venezuela's preference for bilateral talks with Guyana's demand for judicial resolution. He also explores the colonial legacy that underpins the dispute and assesses the legal principles that may be relevant in resolving the conflict.

Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith's *Understanding the Venezuela-Guyana Controversy: A Study in Geopolitics* offers a geopolitical analysis of the dispute, with a particular focus on the presidency of Nicolás Maduro. Griffith examines Venezuela's use of intimidation tactics, including threats of annexation, and situates these actions within broader geopolitical dynamics. The study underscores the strategic significance of the resource-rich Essequibo region and its role in Venezuela's domestic and international strategies.

Luis Fernando Panelli, in *Is Guyana a New Oil El Dorado?* shifts the focus to the economic implications of the dispute, particularly Guyana's burgeoning oil industry. Panelli highlights the transformative economic potential of Guyana's oil reserves, particularly the Stabroek Block, which has led to projections of Guyana becoming one of South America's wealthiest nations on a per capita basis. He argues that the growing economic importance of the Essequibo region's resources has exacerbated the territorial dispute, intensifying both nations' claims to the region.

In *Illuminating How Guyana's Amazing Oil Discovery Rekindled a Border Dispute*, Anthony R. Cummings examines how Guyana's oil discoveries have affected diplomatic relations between the two countries. Cummings uses archival material and a classification system to analyze shifts in bilateral relations before and after the discovery of oil. He argues that Venezuela's claim to two-thirds of Guyana's territory has gained renewed significance with the oil boom, which has served to distract from Venezuela's internal political issues and amplified the dispute.

P.K. Menon's *The Boundary Dispute Between Guyana and Venezuela* (1984) traces the historical roots of the conflict, going back to the Spanish discovery and occupation of South America's northeastern coast in the 17th century. Menon examines the Treaty of Münster (1648), which marked a critical step in recognizing Dutch colonies in the region, and the 1966

Geneva Agreement, which established a Mixed Commission to resolve the dispute. Menon argues that this agreement, although a diplomatic effort to address the issue, ultimately failed to bring a lasting resolution.

In *Guyana's Border Disputes with Venezuela and Suriname*, R. A. T. Ramraj examines Guyana's territorial conflicts with both Venezuela and Suriname. Ramraj argues that Guyana's claim to the mineral-rich region between the disputed border and the Atlantic Ocean is politically justified, despite opposition from Venezuelan chauvinistic forces. The territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela spans over 50,000 square miles, rich in untapped resources like oil, gold, diamonds, and timber. Ramraj highlights how both countries have shown a strong interest in the region's economic potential. He describes the use of diplomacy in managing these disputes but also acknowledges the sporadic flare-ups of armed conflict. Furthermore, environmental issues and objections to Guyana's development projects in the disputed areas have increased tensions with Venezuela. Ramraj's work underscores the complexity of resolving border conflicts, particularly when geopolitical and resource-based interests are involved.

Finally, D.M. Rozental's *The Territorial Trap: Venezuela-Guyana Relations* offers a comprehensive exploration of the territorial conflict between Venezuela and Guyana, with a focus on recent tensions sparked by ExxonMobil's exploration activities in the disputed Essequibo region. Rozental traces the historical roots of the dispute and examines how political and economic crises in Venezuela have intensified the conflict. He also provides a detailed analysis of the differing strategies employed by the Venezuelan and Guyanese governments. Rozental argues that the conflict has become a political tool for both governments, used to rally domestic support, while trade and economic relations continue to play a critical role in maintaining bilateral ties. He also highlights the involvement of international organizations in mediating the dispute, demonstrating the broader geopolitical implications of the conflict.

## **Research Methodology**

This paper will adopt a qualitative approach grounded in Johan Galtung's conceptual framework on the nature of peace, specifically focusing on positive and negative peace, as well as structural violence, in analyzing the Venezuela-Guyana boundary dispute over the Essequibo region. The approach draws on a thorough review of historical and contemporary sources, including legal documents, scholarly articles, and media reports, to examine the causes of the conflict, assess its current status, and explore potential solutions.

## **Stakeholders**

This analysis primarily incorporates perspectives from Venezuelan government representatives and historical documents, alongside popular sentiment reflecting the Venezuelan viewpoint on the dispute, which is driven by historical and economic motivations. For Guyana, the analysis includes the official government stance and legal arguments, as well as public opinion, which underscores the country's reliance on international law, particularly the 1899 arbitration award and the rulings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to assert its sovereignty.

Subsequently, statements and decisions by the International Court of Justice, United Nations, and other international bodies mandated to mediate or adjudicate on the conflict are analyzed. Other states' interests in the dispute include China, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom are also analyzed through economic, geopolitical, and strategic perspectives.

## **Materials:**

Legal decisions, such as the 1899 arbitration ruling, the 1966 Geneva Agreement, and other relevant treaties, form the basis of these claims. In addition, a substantial body of academic literature provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical, political, and economic dimensions of the dispute. Notable works in this field include contributions from Odeen Ishmael, Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner, and Ivelaw Lloyd Griffith, among others.

## **Media Reports**

Newspaper articles and other media reports provide valuable insights into recent developments, public opinion, and the outcomes of referendums, particularly in response to the discovery of significant oil deposits in 2015. These sources also cover actions taken by both Venezuela and Guyana regarding the ongoing dispute.

## **Mapping the Conflict:**

This work applies Galtung's framework to map out the various forms of violence, including direct and structural violence, and identifies the key actors, their interests, and the dynamics between them. It also examines the economic, social, and political instability in Venezuela, along with the security concerns faced by Guyana.

Analysis of historical grievances, economic motivation, political instability, and geopolitical tensions would enable the analysis of the root causes of the conflict and what sustains it.

Case studies of main events and interventions, such as the 2018 decision of the ICJ and the referendum in Venezuela in 2023 show how the processes of international law and domestic political action impinge on the dispute.

### **Contemplation of Possible Solutions**

The study assesses various conflict resolution approaches, including international mediation, joint development agreements, and referendums. Each of these approaches has been critically analyzed in light of strong nationalist sentiments and disparate governance by the parties. The process of triangulation will ensure the validity of this research through cross-checking the validity of the conclusions from historical documents, academic literature, and media sources. The triangulation will bring a full understanding of the conflict and potential resolutions that can come about.

### **Data Analysis**

The data are analyzed using qualitative content analysis, highlighting the interconnections between historical claims, economic interests, and political dynamics. The study explores how these factors influence one another, contributing to the ongoing tensions. Additionally, the paper evaluates the prospects for achieving sustainable peace, drawing on Galtung's concepts of positive and negative peace.

### **Sources of Conflict**

#### **Historical Claims**

The Essequibo conflict has its roots in colonial history. Venezuela asserts its claim based on the Spanish discovery and colonization of the northeast coast of South America in the late 1400s.

Formerly British Guiana, Guyana was colonized by the Dutch and then given to the British. Although Spain acknowledged Dutch possessions at the treaty of Münster in 1648, the boundaries were not clearly defined, which has left complications that still exist now.



An international arbitration ruling that mainly benefited British Guiana was intended to have resolved the boundary issue in 1899.<sup>7</sup> The territorial dispute erupted when Venezuela formally rejected the 1899 award in 1962, claiming the country was improperly affected by political influences.

### **Resources**

Conflicts over resources date back to the very beginning of civilization. It usually relates to material resources such as land, money, or objects. These resources have the potential to be negotiated over. However, the challenge is if not handled properly, conflicts over resources can lead to military actions and extreme measures like wars.

With roughly 11.2 billion oil-equivalent barrels and 17 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves discovered by ExxonMobil in 2015, offshore oil and gas reserves now account for almost half of Guyana's GDP.<sup>8</sup> By 2030, Guyana is projected to become one of the world's leading oil producers per capita. Since the discovery of oil, Venezuela has intensified its territorial claims over Essequibo. In late 2023, Venezuela deployed military personnel to the border, and in December of the same year, it held a referendum to solidify its stance.

### **Lack of Good Governance and Economic Instability**

The United Nations outlines eight key attributes of good governance: being consensus-oriented, participatory, adhering to the Rule of Law, effective and efficient, accountable, transparent, responsive, equitable, and inclusive. Good governance is essential for fostering economic growth, eradicating poverty and hunger, and achieving sustainable development.

Under Hugo Chávez and then Nicolás Maduro, the PSUV party has ruled Venezuela since 1999. Supported by more than 50 nations, opposition leader Juan Guaidó declared himself "interim president" in 2019 following Maduro's controversial 2018 re-election, but Maduro held onto power with the military and diplomatic backing of China and Russia.

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<sup>7</sup> Cebri Revista, "Notes on the History of the Venezuela/Guyana Boundary Dispute," *CEBRI Revista*, n.d., <https://cebri.org/revista/en/artigo/138/notes-on-the-history-of-the-venezuelaguyana-boundary-dispute..>

<sup>8</sup> "Guyana-Venezuela Tensions: How Oil Discovery Revived Essequibo Crisis," *WION*, December 30, 2023, <https://www.wionews.com/business-economy/guyana-venezuela-tensions-how-oil-discovery-revived-essequibocrisis-674201>.

A worsening of the economic crisis brought about by protests between 2014 and 2017 included hyperinflation, shortages, and the exodus of nearly 7.5 million people.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, the opposition replaced Juan Guaidó and announced plans to hold a primary election in 2024 to select a unified candidate, but a deal for free elections fell apart in January 2024.

Political instability has made Maduro desperate to gain public support. A certain way of doing so is the annexation of the Essequibo region. The natural resource-rich region also holds the promise of turning Venezuelan economic conditions in a better direction.

## **Conflict Analysis**

### **Peace**

According to Johan Galtung, Peace is the elimination of structural violence, where social institutions and structures prevent people from meeting their basic needs.<sup>10</sup>

Galtung categorized peace as negative and positive. Positive peace is a condition where social justice is present alongside the absence of violence. Which in this particular case would be a permanent solution between Venezuela and Guyana over the Essequibo region. Negative Peace, on the other hand is merely the absence of violence. In this case it would be the avoidance of war over the Essequibo region but reaching no sustainable solution.

### **Violence**

Johan Galtung defined violence as the gap between the potential and the actual, emphasizing that violence can manifest in two key forms.<sup>11</sup> Direct violence refers to actions that threaten life or diminish the ability to fulfill basic human needs, such as going to war over the Essequibo region. Structural violence, on the other hand, is the systematic denial of equal access to opportunities, resources, and services necessary to meet fundamental needs. An example of this is the ongoing security threats faced by the indigenous people of the Essequibo region, which disrupt their daily lives and create an atmosphere of constant uncertainty.

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<sup>9</sup> Vanessa Buschschlüter, "Venezuela Crisis in Brief," *BBC*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latinamerica-48121148>.

<sup>10</sup> Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (September 1, 1969): 167–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>.

<sup>11</sup> Vittorio Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," *Political Studies Review* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 193–204, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9299.2005.00023.x>.

## **Competing Interests in the Dispute**

Every conflict has a multiple number of actors/parties vying for their interests. The conflict over the Essequibo region is no different. However, to view this centuries-long conflict through a simplified lens for easier understanding, only two parties are taken into consideration: Venezuela and Guyana

The conflict over the Essequibo region highlights distinct challenges and priorities for both Venezuela and Guyana. Venezuela faces significant political and economic instability, compounded by historical grievances rooted in colonial-era disputes over the territory. Additionally, geopolitical tensions arising from its territorial claims further complicate its position. On the other hand, Guyana is primarily concerned with safeguarding its territorial and resource security, given the strategic importance of the Essequibo region's vast natural resources. These concerns are exacerbated by the country's economic vulnerability and the broader geopolitical tensions sparked by Venezuela's aggressive claims.

The Essequibo dispute revolves around the distinct interests of Venezuela and Guyana, shaped by their political, economic, occupational, and social aspirations. Venezuela's primary objectives include taking control of the Essequibo region, extracting its abundant natural resources—such as oil, natural gas, and minerals—to stabilize its domestic political and economic conditions, and mitigating geopolitical tensions while securing international support. Guyana, on the other hand, aims to maintain its sovereignty over the Essequibo region, use its natural resources to drive economic growth, address the security threats posed by Venezuela, and stabilize geopolitical tensions while safeguarding its national interests.

The interests of both parties overlap and diverge across various dimensions. Occupational and economic interests are shared, with both nations focusing on resource exploitation and financial stability. Venezuela emphasizes political interests in addressing internal instability and garnering international legitimacy. Social aspirations, especially from Venezuela, are tied to nationalistic sentiments and historical grievances. These overlapping and conflicting interests illustrate the complexity of the dispute and highlight the challenges in achieving a peaceful resolution.

In addition, the Essequibo dispute reveals stark value differences between Venezuela and Guyana, deeply rooted in their historical, political, and economic priorities. Venezuela considers the Essequibo region a part of its national heritage, based on historical claims from

the colonial era, making its reclamation a matter of national pride. Its desire to control the resource-rich region is also driven by economic needs. Venezuela prefers bilateral negotiations to resolve the dispute, often using the controversy to rally domestic support and divert attention from internal political and economic challenges.

Conversely, Guyana views the Essequibo region as an integral part of its national identity and sovereignty. The country prioritizes adherence to international legal rulings, such as those by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to affirm its territorial rights. For Guyana, the region's resources are essential to fostering economic growth and stability, which aligns with its broader goals of maintaining peace and securing national prosperity.

These value differences underscore the contrasting approaches to the dispute. Venezuela emphasizes historical and nationalistic narratives alongside bilateral solutions, while Guyana prioritizes sovereignty, international law, and long-term economic development.

The human needs driving the Essequibo dispute reflect the underlying motivations spanning security, economic stability, identity, and governance.

For security, Venezuela prioritizes national security and the protection of its borders, viewing control over Essequibo as a critical extension of its territorial integrity. Meanwhile, Guyana considers maintaining sovereignty over Essequibo vital to its national security, emphasizing the need to safeguard its borders from external threats.

In terms of economic stability, Venezuela sees access to Essequibo's abundant natural resources as essential for its economic recovery, particularly in light of its ongoing domestic challenges. On the other hand, Guyana regards these resources as indispensable for sustaining its economic growth and securing financial independence.

The issue of identity and recognition further underscores the dispute. For Venezuela, reclaiming Essequibo is deeply tied to its national identity and historical claims, making it a symbol of pride and heritage. For Guyana, Essequibo is equally significant, forming a core part of its national identity, pride, and the country's international recognition.

Political autonomy and governance play pivotal roles as well. For Venezuela, taking control of Essequibo strengthens governmental autonomy and legitimacy by showcasing the ability to reclaim what it views as its rightful territory. For Guyana, retaining and governing Essequibo is crucial for implementing policies and fostering regional development.

Lastly, the fulfillment of basic needs is a shared interest between both parties. The natural resources in Essequibo have the potential to provide critical funding for meeting basic human needs such as food security, healthcare, and infrastructure development, serving as an economic lifeline for both nations.

### **Strategies in the Essequibo Dispute**

Venezuela has employed a variety of strategies to assert its claims over the Essequibo region. Firstly, it has pursued diplomatic negotiations, emphasizing its historical claims to the region dating back to colonial times. Venezuela has consistently pushed for bilateral talks with Guyana, preferring these direct negotiations over multilateral or judicial solutions. Additionally, the country has periodically demonstrated its military presence near the disputed area, signaling its ongoing territorial claim and willingness to use force to assert its position.

Guyana, in contrast, has focused on leveraging international legal frameworks to resolve the dispute. Guyana has taken the issue to international bodies such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), seeking a legal resolution to the conflict. To strengthen its position, Guyana has also sought the support of regional and international allies, including CARICOM (the Caribbean Community) and the United Nations, in hopes of gaining diplomatic backing. Moreover, Guyana continues to develop the Essequibo region by granting oil exploration rights to multinational companies like ExxonMobil, seeking to capitalize on the region's natural resources to bolster its economic and geopolitical standing.

### **Conflict Mapping: Analyzing Relationships and Power Dynamics**

Relationships between the parties to a conflict at a certain moment in time are analyzed via conflict mapping.<sup>12</sup> A conflict map resembles a topographical map revealing the relationships between all the parties to a dispute.

Conflict mapping assists in:

1. Precise identification of the relationships between actors;
2. Identification of the power and relative amounts of power of each actor;
3. Identification of allies or potential allies;
4. Identification of chances to act or interfere.

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<sup>12</sup> IPIS, "Conflict Mapping - IPIS," March 15, 2024, <https://ipisresearch.be/home/conflict-mapping/>.

With conflict iceberg,<sup>13</sup> one looks at the underlying structural elements as well as the surface problems that lead to a conflict. Many times, it is applied to comprehend ethnic conflicts.

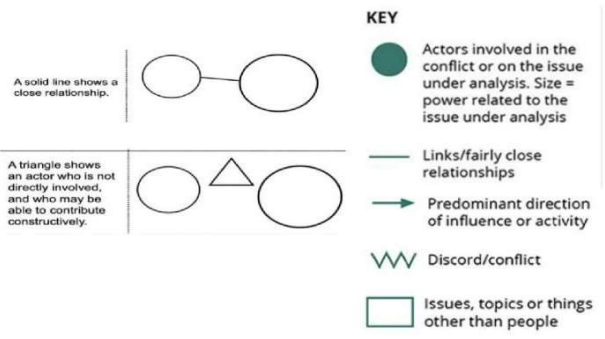
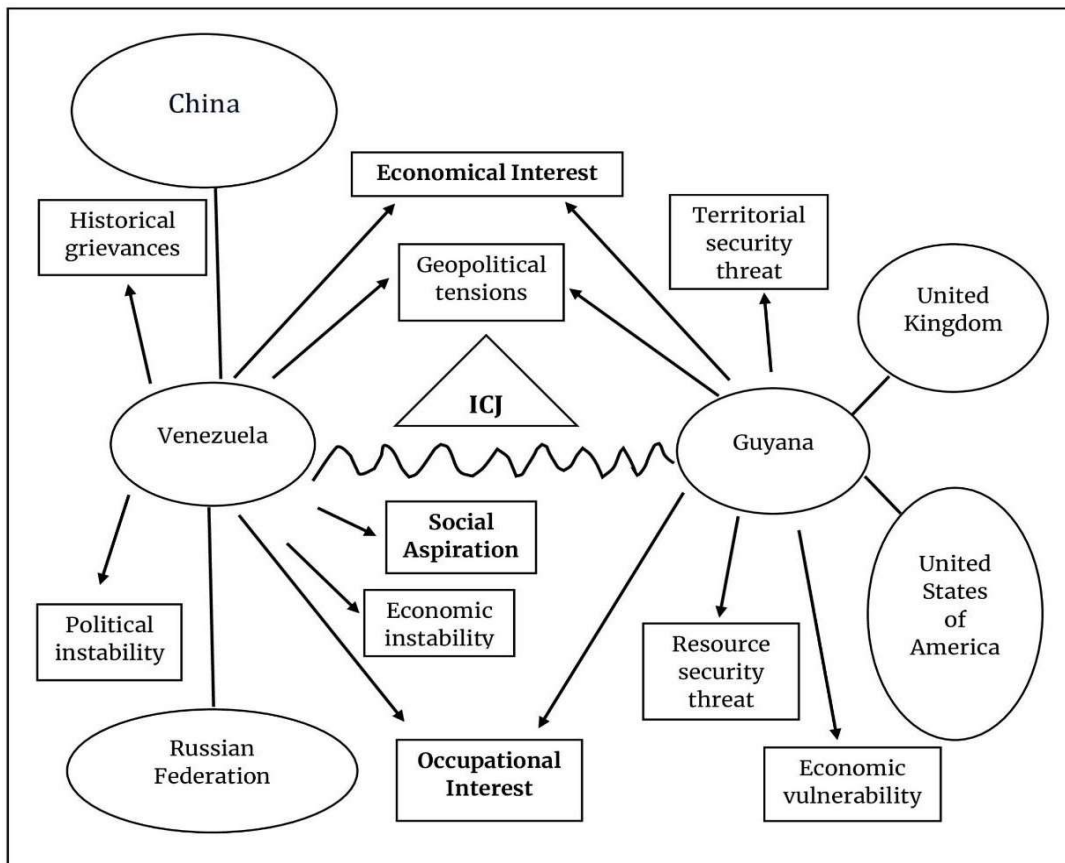
A timeline facilitates the chronological organization of the developments and occurrences in the war.<sup>14</sup> Though it may not completely reflect the intricate relationships and interests involved, a timeline helps comprehend the events and the historical development of the disagreement.

The given contexts and data suggest that applying mapping as the tool to analyze this conflict would render the best result.

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<sup>13</sup> God'Salvation Oguibe, "Conflict Analysis: The Iceberg and Conflict Tree," n.d., [https://www.academia.edu/45247199/Conflict\\_Analysis\\_The\\_Iceberg\\_and\\_Conflict\\_Tree](https://www.academia.edu/45247199/Conflict_Analysis_The_Iceberg_and_Conflict_Tree).

<sup>14</sup> Christine Bell, Benjamin Bach, and Tobias Kauer, "Ways of Seeing: Peace Process Data-viz as a Research Practice," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 2022): 150–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565211050748>.



The conflict is mapped using circles to represent the actors, squares to denote key issues, and triangles to signify neutral or constructive roles, such as the ICJ. This illustration effectively captures the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the conflict, showing how the relationships and interests of various actors intertwine to shape the dispute.

Venezuela’s motivations in the conflict intersect with its relationships with China and Russia, where China has economic interests in Venezuela, while Russia's occupational interests align with Venezuela's position.

Guyana, in opposition, is primarily depicted as a victim of territorial and resource security threats. With significant economic vulnerabilities, Guyana receives support from the United Kingdom and the United States, aligning it with Western powers.

### **International Stakeholders and Alliances**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is influenced by economic interests, particularly in Venezuela's resources. Russia aligns itself with Venezuela based on shared occupational interests. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom and the United States support Guyana due to its concerns over territorial sovereignty and resource security.

### **The Role of the International Court of Justice**

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) holds a crucial role in the conflict as the potential arbitrator, although it is not directly involved in the ongoing tensions between the parties. The ICJ could play a constructive role in resolving the dispute through legal adjudication.

### **Relationships and Dynamics in the Dispute**

- **Solid Line:** Represents a close relationship between entities, such as the strong bond between Venezuela, China, and Russia.
- **Dashed Line:** Reflects the primary direction of influence or activity, for example, China's economic interests driving its relationship with Venezuela.
- **Wavy Line:** Symbolizes discord or conflict, highlighting the ongoing tensions over the contested region between Venezuela and Guyana.

### **Core Issues and Geopolitical Tensions**

#### **Geopolitical Tension**

At the heart of the dispute, this issue affects not only Venezuela and Guyana but also China and Western nations, who have interests in the region's stability.

#### **Economic Instability and Vulnerability**

Venezuela faces internal instability, while Guyana's economic concerns revolve around the contested region and its potential resources.



### **Social Aspiration**

Nationalism and territorial pride in Venezuela drive its actions and motivations in the dispute.

## **Potential Solutions for Resolving the Essequibo Dispute**

### **International Mediation**

One potential solution is to enlist a neutral third party, such as the United Nations, to mediate the conflict. This would require both Venezuela and Guyana to agree on the choice of mediator and to accept the terms of any resolutions, which may prove challenging given the historical distrust between the parties and the high political stakes involved.

### **Joint Development Agreement**

Another possible avenue is for both countries to enter into a Joint Development Agreement, allowing them to collaborate in the exploration and sharing of the Essequibo region's natural resources. While this would foster mutual benefit, it necessitates a high level of trust and cooperation—qualities that may be hard to achieve due to the entrenched patriotic sentiments and differing political systems of the two nations.

### **Referendum in the Disputed Area**

A third option is the organization of a referendum in the disputed Essequibo region, enabling its inhabitants to determine their national affiliation. However, ensuring that the referendum is conducted fairly, transparently, and without external influence presents a significant challenge, particularly given the contentious nature of the dispute and the potential for political manipulation.

## **Conclusion**

Rooted in historical claims, economic interests, and political dynamics, the Essequibo dispute between Venezuela and Guyana is a complex issue. While various approaches have been attempted, none have provided a lasting solution. A successful resolution likely requires a multidimensional strategy that incorporates bilateral, regional, and international efforts, all aligned with international legal standards, to benefit both nations and contribute to broader regional stability.