



International Boundary Study

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Mozambique – Tanzania Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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MOZAMBIQUE–TANZANIA BOUNDARY

I. BRIEF SURVEY

The Mozambique–Tanzania Boundary initially delimited German and Portuguese spheres of influence in East Africa. In accordance with the terms of a German-Portuguese Declaration¹ signed at Lisbon on December 30, 1886, a boundary was established between the Indian Ocean and Lake Nyasa. Subsequent treaties delimited the boundary in additional detail, and a joint expedition in 1907 changed the boundary slightly in the west and demarcated the land segment by pillars. Following World War I the former German territory of Tanganyika² was made a British mandate, and during 1936 and 1937 an exchange of notes between Portugal and the United Kingdom determined the sovereignty of the islands in the Ruvuma (Rio Rovuma) river, which forms more than 90 percent of the total boundary. Prior to independence on December 9, 1961, Tanganyika was administered by the United Kingdom as a trust territory. The United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar³ was constituted by a merger of the two entities on April 27, 1964, and the name of the state was changed to the United Republic of Tanzania on October 29, 1964. Mozambique has remained continuously under the administration of Portugal since 1886⁴.

At the time of the declaration of 1886, the Sultan of Zanzibar claimed the coastal area between the Uмба (Vanga) and Ruvuma Rivers, which was to become part of German East Africa. On April 28, 1888, the coastal area was ceded to the German East African Association by the Sultan and was formally placed under the administration of the organization on August 16, 1888. In accordance with the terms of Article XI of an Anglo-German agreement on July 1, 1890, Germany agreed to pay the Sultan compensation for the loss of revenues resulting from the cession of the coastal area and the island of Mafia. An exchange of notes between the British and German Governments on October 27–28, 1890, fixed the amount of indemnity to be paid the Sultan.

After occupation by German forces of the so-called Kionga triangle immediately south of the mouth of the Ruvuma and inland from the Indian Ocean for about thirty miles, Portugal ceded the territory to Germany through an exchange of notes on August 30 and September 1, 1894. From a point on the Ruvuma at about 10°43' S, the new boundary paralleled the right (south) bank of the river for a short distance leaving a narrow strip in German territory as far upstream as the lowest ford. Thence it bore generally easterly to the coast at Ras Lipuu, a point on the promontory of Cape Delgado, so that the territory on both sides of the

¹ Complete titles and sources of boundary documentation are listed in the Appendix.

² From 1885 until World War I, Tanganyika comprised the major part of German East Africa, the remainder being Ruanda-Urundi and Kionga triangle.

³ Zanzibar as characterized as a Protectorate of the United Kingdom from 1891 until independence on December 10, 1963.

⁴ Often referred to as Portuguese East Africa, Mozambique (Província de Moçambique) is an overseas province of Portugal. The coast of present-day Mozambique was visited by the fleet of Vasco da Gama in 1498, and colonies were established in the territory as early as 1505.

Ruvuma was German. After World War I a decision by the Supreme Council of the League of Nations on May 6, 1919, restored the Kionga triangle to Portugal, and the Ruvuma again became the international boundary in this sector.

II. POLITICO-GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

With a total length of 470 miles, the Mozambique-Tanzania boundary is demarcated throughout by streams or boundary pillars⁵. Upstream from the Indian Ocean, the Ruvuma forms the boundary for 438 miles to its confluence with the Messinge. Thence westward the boundary follows the Messinge and Shipingue rivers for two and four miles, respectively. Between the Shipingue and the Txuinde rivers, the boundary follows a nearly straight line across a mountainous area demarcated by pillars. The final segment of the boundary follows the Txuinde for less than a mile westward to the Malawi tripoint on the shore of Lake Nyasa.

The boundary extends between Lake Nyasa, located in the trough of the Great Rift Valley, and the mouth of the Ruvuma on the Indian Ocean. Inland a short distance from Lake Nyasa, it traverses a mountainous surface with average elevations in excess of 6,000 feet. For the remainder of the distance the boundary passes through alternate hill and plain areas. In its middle and lower courses, the Ruvuma flows through a valley four to eight miles in width that is poorly drained in many places.

Except for variations due primarily to differences in elevation, climatic conditions and vegetation types are relatively uniform along the boundary. Precipitation totals between forty and sixty inches and falls mainly during the high sun period or summer months. In general, July is the coldest month with average temperatures in the various localities between 60° F and 70° F. January is the warmest month with average temperatures between 70° F and 80° F. Seasonal temperature ranges are usually between 5° F and 15° F. The typical vegetation consists of grass with scattered broad-leaved deciduous trees, although adjacent to the mouth of the Ruvuma broad-leaved deciduous forest predominates.

In general, population densities are relatively low along both sides of the boundary, although near the mouth of the Ruvuma there are between fifty and 100 persons per square mile. The density ranges between five and fifty persons per square mile along the western

⁵ The Karte der Deutsch-Portugiesischen Grenze Zwischen dem oberen Rowuma und dem Njassa (Deutsch-Ostafrika) accompanying references 6 and 7 of the Appendix indicates the position of the boundary pillars placed by the demarcation commission of 1907. Also, map sheet No. 25, Lago-Rovuma (1945), of the Portuguese series Carta da Colónia de Moçambique at a scale of 1:250,000, published by the Ministério das Colónias, Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações Colonis, indicates the positions and numbers of the boundary pillars. Other sheets of the Portuguese series showing the boundary from west to east are No. 39, Rovuma (1946); No. 47, Rovuma-Negomano (1946); No. 55, Palma-Mueda-Mocimboa (1955); and No. 54, Palma (1955).

sector of the boundary but drops to less than five persons along much of the central sector of the boundary. Some of the islands in the Ruvuma are populated.

Migrations of people between Mozambique and Tanzania have occurred over a number of years. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Makonde, Makua, Mweru, and Mawia, all matrilineal groups from Mozambique, began to move into Tanzania. Some Yao, Makua, and Makonde, particularly the latter two, are known to have migrated into Tanzania from Mozambique since World War II. At the present time the boundary divides the territorial areas of the Yao, Makua, and Makonde. Swahili linguistic groups are a significant part of the population in the coastal areas adjacent to the mouth of the Ruvuma. Except for the inhabitants who have a more highly developed type of agriculture along the lower Ruvuma, most of the people are engaged in a shifting-cultivation type of farming.

The boundary is reached only by trails or tracks. Roads extend to the Ruvuma at Negomano and north of Quionga in Mozambique and south of Mtwara in Tanzania. Roads also extend northward to Olivença and Nangade near the boundary in Mozambique. Between Mtwara on the Indian Ocean and Mbamba Bay on Lake Nyasa, a road in Tanzania parallels the boundary at distances ranging from about twenty-five to fifty miles.

III. BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The boundary was described as follows in treaties in 1886 and 1891. Article II of the German-Portuguese Declaration of 1886 stated, "The boundary line which is to divide the Portuguese possessions from those of Germany in Southeast Africa shall follow the course of the Rovuma from its mouth as far as its point of confluence with the River M'sinje, and thence westwards as far as the bank of Lake Nyasa." Dated June 11, 1891, an Anglo-Portuguese treaty delimited the respective spheres of influence of the two states in Africa. The treaty described the boundary in a manner similar to the declaration of 1886, stating that from the confluence of the Rovuma and "the River M'singe, and thence westerly along the parallel of latitude to the confluence of these rivers to the shore of Lake Nyasa."

In order to rectify certain inequities evident in the use of a parallel for an international boundary, a joint German-Portuguese boundary demarcation commission made minor adjustments in 1907⁶. Thus, the present Malawi tripoint at the mouth of the Txuinde (Kwindi) River resulting from the boundary change is about 0.5 kilometer southward of the initial tripoint. The tripoint is located at a latitude of approximately 11°34'30" S and is presumed to be the median or center of the stream because it is doubtful that a thalweg could be determined in such a small stream. Likewise the commission surveyed and placed boundary pillars numbered one through twenty-six eastward between the mouth of

⁶ The commission indicated that the boundary from the confluence of the Messinge and Shipingue followed the latter upstream for four miles before traversing the mountains to the west, although no mention had been made of the Shipingue in the declaration of 1886.

the Txuinde and the confluence of the Messinge and Ruvuma.

A series of British and Portuguese notes between May 11, 1936, and December 28, 1937, relative to the Ruvuma established the sovereignty of islands, delimited the boundary in detail, and determined rights for the use of the river. Provision was made for clarification of the boundary in paragraph 2 of the preamble to the Mandate for East Africa. Terms submitted by the British Government in a note of May 11, 1936, were agreed to by the Portuguese Government and by the Supreme Council of the League of Nations, and they were put into effect February 1, 1938. Included in the note were rights relative to the use of the Ruvuma by the people of both Mozambique and Tanzania for navigation, drawing water, fishing, and the removing of saliferous sands for the extraction of salt.

Following are some of the other terms agreed upon in the Anglo-Portuguese notes of 1936–37:

- (1) All the islands of the Rovuma River situated between the confluence of the River Domoni⁷ with the Rovuma River and the mouth of the latter belong to Portugal.

All the islands situated above the said confluence are part of the Tanganyika Territory.

For the purpose of this agreement there shall be considered as islands only those that emerge when the river is in full flood and that contain land vegetation and rock or firm soil and are not shifting sandbanks.

- (2) Throughout the course of the River Rovuma in those places where there are no islands, the boundary shall follow the thalweg, even when the position of the latter is changed by a natural alteration in the bed of the river. By thalweg is understood the line of minimum level along the riverbed.

In places in the river where the channel between the islands and the bank belonging to the other territory does not contain the thalweg of the river, the boundary shall follow the thalweg of that subsidiary channel until it meets the thalweg of the River Rovuma.

- (3) Should the bed of the river undergo any alteration in the sense of clause 2 of this Agreement, the Government of the territory prejudiced thereby shall have the right, which shall expire at the end of four years, to divert the river into its old bed, or, if this proves impracticable, to compensation on terms to be agreed upon with the Government benefited. But, even in the event of the diversion being practicable, either of the Contracting Parties may, if it prefers, agree upon compensation with the Government of the other territory. In the absence of

⁷ Also referred to as M'Domani, the river flows northward in Mozambique to enter the Ruvuma at approximately 38°08' E and 11°15' S.

agreement the Contracting Governments will submit the point in dispute to arbitration by the Permanent Court of International Justice.

IV. PRESENT SITUATION

There are no known disputes relative to the boundary at the present time. The shifting course of the Ruvuma could create future problems of sovereignty for parcels of land in and along the river. In some of the sparsely populated and poorly developed areas adjacent to the boundary, the population continues to migrate, especially where territorial areas of the people are divided.

APPENDIX

1. Declaration between Portugal and Germany, respecting the Delimitation of the possessions of the two countries, and their respective Spheres of Influence in South Africa, Lisbon, December 30, 1886. Edward Hertslet, The Map of Africa by Treaty, 3 Vols., 3rd ed., London: Harrison and Sons, 1909, Vol. 2, 703–705.
2. Concession from Sultan of Zanzibar to German East Africa Association, Zanzibar, April 28, 1888. Ibid., Vol. 2, 695–700.
3. Notes exchanged between the British and German Governments fixing the Indemnity to be paid to the Sultan of Zanzibar as Compensation for the Cession to Germany of the Coastline between the Rivers Uмба and Rovuma and of the Island of Mafia, Berlin, October 27–28, 1890. Ibid., Vol. 3, 907–908.
4. Treaty between Her Britannic Majesty and His Majesty the King of Portugal, defining their respective Spheres of Influence in Africa, Lisbon, June 11, 1891. Ibid., Vol. III, 1016–1026.
5. Exchange of Notes between Germany and Portugal; for the Delimitation of the Possessions of the two countries in East Africa (Cape Delgado), Lisbon, August 30–September 1, 1894. Ibid., Vol. 2, 706–707.
6. Schlobach, M. "Allgemeiner Bericht über den Verlauf der deutschportugiesischen Grenzexpedition Zwischen dem Knie des Rowuma-Flusses und dem Ostufer des Njassa," Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten, Band XXIII (1910), 49–54.
7. Ambronn, L. "Bericht über die astronomischen Bestimmungen der deutschportugiesischen Grenzexpedition unter Hauptmann Schlobach," Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten, Ibid., 54–56.
8. Exchanges of Notes between His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the Portuguese Government regarding the Boundary Between Tanganyika Territory

and Mozambique, Lisbon, May 11, 1936–December 28, 1937. Great Britain,
Treaty Series, No. 14 (1939), Cmd. 5661.

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