Introduction

One salient factor in international relations which has not been widely taken into serious consideration by scholars of African and other developing countries is the issue of the sea or international waters. Two-thirds of the surface of the earth is known to be made up of waters. This fact attributes to the indispensable relevance of this liquid matter to humanity.

Every nation or state considers not only the biological necessity of water but also shows more interest in the political, military and economic benefits that accrue from the sea. Since the prevalence of the state system in the history of human race, mankind has witnessed several political manoeuvres and disagreements over the control of and access to the seas which often resulted in diplomatic rows, scuffles and even outright wars.

In recent times, politics of national interests in the exploitation of ocean resources has continually led to the struggle by states to acquire as much portion of waters as possible-as part of their jurisdictional territories. Though this development can rightly be traced to earlier periods, it became more pronounced from the twentieth century, with the existence of advanced technology and accelerated improvements in international law. Development in science and technology play contributory roles in the exacerbation of tensions in the quest for the exploitation of mineral and other resources of the ocean bed and high seas. The result of this is that the developing states are known to be apprehensive of the technological prowess of such developed countries as USA, Japan, Germany, Great Britain and France. These countries possess the technical know how used in the exploitation of the mineral resources of the sea bed area. Perhaps, it was in order to douse this and other apprehensions that two major conferences on law of the sea were held in 1958 and 1982. As naturally would be expected, these conferences were characterized by high political intrigues aimed at achieving exploitative interests by advanced capitalist states and on the other hand, the quest for equity by the developing world.
In this paper the author hopes to analyze the political intrigues of states in the politics of the sea and concludes that international law is the panacea needed by developing countries to achieve advantage and equity in the exploitation of sea resources.

**Status of the Sea in International Law**

Politics of the sea is claimed to be as old as nations. The status of the sea in international law is equally as old as international law. For centuries after Hugo Grotius' treatise, *Mare Liberum* the law of the sea was "the most stable and least controversial branch of international law". This stability and lack of controversy remained relatively so till the 1960's when the newly independent states of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean began to agitate for new order in international relations. From the 1980's, a realm of uncertainty over the status of the sea began to manifest.

Following the triumph of Hugo Grotius over John Selden on the controversy pertaining to the freedom of the seas in the seventeenth century, international law granted the sea a status of *terra nullus* (no man's land). This status impliedly portrayed the sea as an entity which belonged to every state or to no state. *Mare Liberum* (freedom of the seas) was, therefore, the basic principle of the law of the sea. Freedom of the seas meant that no state was free to exclude others. As the use of the sea grew in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exceptions to the freedom of the seas began to develop slowly in favour of coastal states. Such states claimed national jurisdiction over territorial seas, continental shelf, exclusive economic zones, etc and created a distinction between these zones and the "rest of the seas, thereby giving the latter the distinguishing label the 'high seas'".

The emergence of coastal state jurisdiction has changed the perception of total freedom of the seas and that of the status of *terra nullus*. This situation has also paved the way for high wire politics of the sea in the international system. National sovereignty over territorial sea has also resulted from the customary recognition that a coastal state had special interests in waters adjacent to its shores for military, economic and other purposes.

**Political Doctrines Governing the Seas: An Historical Insight**

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portugal and Spain ruled the seas, resulting in the concept of exclusive navigation of the waters through which their vessels sailed in their endearing voyages of 'discovery'. Britain later became a maritime power, and enthusiastically embraced this concept. A major challenge to this situation came in 1609 from a Dutch jurist and diplomat, Hugo Grotius,