

Drawing the line

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Canada and U.S. attempt to settle their maritime boundary differences

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The Canadian Press

The final step to 200-mile fisheries jurisdiction — the negotiation of boundary lines — will probably take at least a year, federal officials think.

Of immediate interest in the talks are fish stocks in four "unsettled maritime boundaries" — the official term for areas where boundary claims are under dispute.

Issues at stake

The Americans are involved in boundary lines for the Georges Bank area off southern Nova Scotia; the Strait of Juan de Fuca area between British Columbia and Washington state; the Dixon Entrance between B.C. and Alaska; and the Beaufort Sea area between Alaska and the Yukon.

Following is a summary

of some of the issues at stake in negotiations:

Georges Bank: Canada has drawn a boundary line equidistant from the U.S. and Canadian coasts that gives it the northeastern section of the bank, its teeming fish stocks, productive scallop ground and good petroleum potential. The U.S. has staked out a boundary line along the Fundian Channel, which would include all of Georges Bank. Georges Bank, a traditional fishing ground for Nova Scotians and New Brunswick, may be the most difficult problem to resolve.

Strait of Juan de Fuca: The boundary line inside the strait was settled in an 1846 treaty. Both countries agree that the boundary extension should be determined by equidistance but there is some technical disagreement on how the line should be

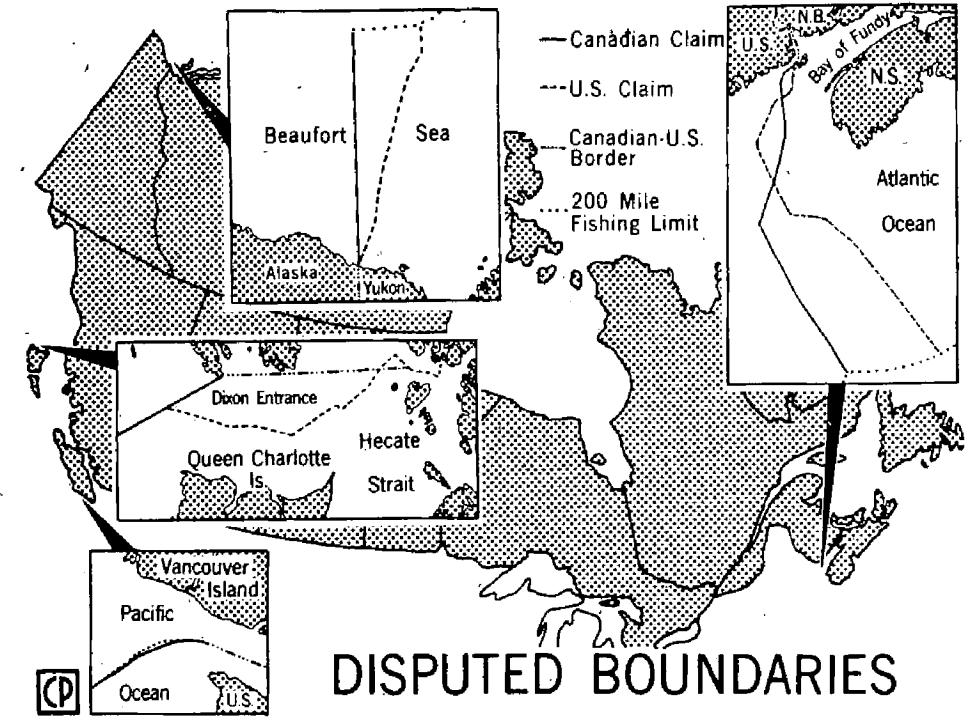
drawn and there are several areas where boundaries proposed by the two countries overlap.

Dixon Entrance: Here, too, the two countries have agreed on equidistance but little else. The 1903 Alaskan Boundary arbitration, gave the U.S. the large panhandle along the Northern B.C. coast and was a major political issue of the day because Canada considered Britain sacrificed Canadian interests for good relations with the Americans.

The arbitration drew a line at the top of Dixon Entrance which Canada immediately said was the boundary line. The U.S. said it gave the U.S. the land north of the line and Canada the land to the south but made no provision for the water.

Unresolved

By the 1920s the line had become a "clear difference of opinion between the two countries" that has remained unresolved. Canada has drawn its boundary line by equidis-



tance using the seaward terminal of the line as its starting point.

The U.S. has drawn its line from the inner end of the line, claiming a chunk of the inside portion of Dixon Entrance.

Beaufort Sea: An 1825 treaty between Britain and Russia established the

boundary between the Yukon and Alaska including the "water boundary up to the frozen sea".

While Canadian officials admit that the term "frozen sea" is vague, they support the treaty's boundary definition. The U.S. wants an equidistant line starting from the head

land which would cost Canada a hefty section.

The area is well to the west of the region where offshore drilling for oil is being attempted.

Editor's Note

* the "water boundary up to the frozen sea" is incorrect and should read "its prolongation as far as the Frozen Ocean".

† The first sentence in the next paragraph should read, "Canada takes the position that the language in the treaty indicates that the parties intended to delimit maritime as well as land territory."

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