The Law and Politics of Canadian Jurisdiction on Arctic Ocean Seabed

Summary

Project Leader(s)

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The possibility that the Arctic Ocean seabed contains vast deposits of hydrocarbons is attracting considerable attention. Under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), any state party may, within 10 years of ratifying, seek to extend certain sovereign rights over the seabed beyond its 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone. To do so, it must establish—through the collection and submission of information concerning topography and geology—that the area of seabed in question is a "natural prolongation" of the continental shelf within 200 miles. Canada, which ratified UNCLOS in 2003, is currently mapping the seabed along its northern coastline so that it can submit the necessary information to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf by 2013. The United States, Denmark and Russia are undertaking similar exercises, albeit with different timelines. This international, interdisciplinary research project focuses on several outstanding maritime boundary disputes—involving the United States, Denmark and potentially Russia—that must be resolved before Canada can submit a comprehensive package of information to the UN Commission. The resolution of these disputes is highly desirable because the Commission lacks authority to deal with information submitted by a state where it is possible that another state will have a claim to that same area. The project will analyze the legal and political differences involved in the different disputes, explore the various options for resolving them, and provide detailed recommendations. These recommendations will specify a series of considered options occupying progressive positions on the scale of political and technical acceptability. Then, the government of the day will be able freely to select the option that best suits its priorities and objectives, or use the input from this project to craft a better option of its own.

People

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Publications

Articles Published in Refereed Publications

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