

Geography Report September

Jane Harrison

Our speaker was Professor Martin Pratt, who is an expert in boundaries and territorial dispute resolution. Martin runs Bordermap Consulting and is based in Canada, so we were very fortunate that he was able to speak to our group whilst attending a conference at Durham University.

Martin was previously Director of Research at Durham University's International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU). To illustrate his talk on "The Next Cold War: Boundaries and Geopolitics in the Arctic" he used maps from the acclaimed IBRU's Arctic Map Series.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, now governs the use of the oceans and their resources. Over 170 states are now signed up. Coastal states and islands have sovereignty over their inland and 'Territorial' seas up to 12 nautical miles and have exclusive rights to the resources in their 'Exclusive Economic Zone' (EEZ), which extends up to 200 nautical miles.

The maritime boundaries between the territorial seas and EEZs of neighbouring Arctic states have largely been agreed upon but there are some unresolved issues. Canada, for example, claims that its Arctic archipelago lies in inland rather than territorial waters and therefore holds that there is no right of innocent passage for foreign shipping. This could become more contentious with global warming as the Northwest Passage becomes ice free for more of the year.

More disputed are the areas of 'Extended Continental Shelf' (ECS) which lie beyond 200 nautical miles in 'The High Seas'. Where claims overlap, states must make submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). These are costly, time consuming, and voluminous.

Central parts of Arctic Ocean contain extensive areas of shallower water, such as over as the Lomonosov Ridge and Mendeleev Rise. These areas, which include the North Pole, are the subject of overlapping submissions by Canada, Denmark and Russia. This complex situation can be seen on the accompanying map.



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The key and briefing notes are available on the website.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/ibru-borders-research/maps-and-publications/maps/arctic-maps-series/>

The CLCS has already made some recommendations for the Arctic and others are pending. Its decisions are considered final and binding, but it is up to a state to determine the outer limit of its continental shelf. With untapped resources, such as oil, gas and minerals, to be exploited, tensions could increase if agreements cannot be reached.

There are only two tiny areas of Arctic Ocean which are not subject to any claims. These areas of very deep water form part of 'The Area' and are administered by the International Sea Bed Authority.

Next meeting: In the Witham at 2pm. Thursday 20th November "The physical, political and social geography of ice" Gerald Blake.