The 1990 USSR-USA Maritime Boundary Agreement

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During the Bush–Gorbachov summit held in Washington, in May/June 1990, an agreement was signed establishing a maritime boundary between Alaska and Siberia in the Bering and Chukchi Seas.¹ The 1600 nautical miles (nm) maritime boundary is the longest in the world (see figure 2). The conclusion of the treaty was preceded by nine years of negotiations. The main point of contention during the negotiations regarded the interpretation of the 1867 Convention on the Cession of Alaska.² The 1867 Convention defines a line which establishes what islands were ceded to America together with Alaska. Both parties disagreed as to what cartographical method was intended to be used to define this line when the treaty was drafted. The area enclosed by the two different lines advocated by the parties comprised about 15,000 nm².

Background

Before analysing the terms of the boundary treaty some attention has to be paid to its historical background. The need to delimit their respective jurisdictions first arose when both countries extended their fisheries zones.³ In an Exchange

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¹ “Agreement between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Maritime Boundary” (Agreement on the Maritime Boundary; Signed 1 June 1990). The text can be found in the Appendix 1, infra. For an overview of the agreement see Elizabeth Verville, “Report No. 1–6”, in J. I. Charney and L. M. Alexander (eds.), International Maritime Boundaries (forthcoming).
² “Convention Ceding Alaska between Russia and the United States” (Convention on the Cession of Alaska; Signed 30 March 1867; entered into force 20 June 1867), 134 Consolidated Treaties Series, p. 331.
United States - U.S.S.R. Maritime Boundary