

***United States v. Alaska*—The Supreme Court's Ruling Concerning Disputes over the Drawing of Territorial Sea Straight Baselines**

Yann-huei Song

Abstract

On the 19th of June 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, by unanimous vote and a vote of six to three respectively, in favor of the United States in *United States v. Alaska*. This case, which remained pending for 19 years before the Court, concerned seaward boundaries and titles to coastal lands along the Arctic coast. This article examines less-noticed aspects of the Court's ruling: the method of baseline-drawing, the historic waters claim, the legal nature of internal waters, and the legal status of islands in maritime boundary delimitation [under the law of the sea in that part of the Beaufort Sea where there were fringing islands and disputed hydrographic features]. This case study discusses U.S. practice and policy taken over the past 40 to 50 years with respect to drawing straight baselines to measure the limit of U.S. territorial sea and to determining the legal status of islands in maritime boundary delimitation. This case study shows that one of the major policy considerations for the U.S. decision not to adopt the method of straight baseline-drawing was to safeguard the interests and rights of the federal government against the states.

Key Words: Straight baselines, islands, United States, Alaska, maritime boundary delimitation