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Thoughts on Customary International Law

By Dr. Louis B. Sohn

The refusal of the United States Government to sign the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the proclamation by President Reagan of a 200-mile exclusive economic zone, putting more than two million square miles of ocean space under United States control, have dramatized the fact that international law is not only made by international agreements but is also created by other means. There are two interconnected questions—how the community of nations develops common principles binding on all the states, and who on behalf of the United States is entitled to participate in this law-creating process.

Treaties and other international agreements are binding in principle only on states which ratify, or accede to, them. But some law-making treaties are so generally accepted that even states which have not become parties to them follow them in practice. For instance, although the United States (because of a controversy in the Senate about so-called executive agreements) has not ratified the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which has codified international rules relating to the making, interpretation and termination of treaties, both the State Department and the courts have applied it as determinative of questions arising internationally or domestically with respect to the interpretation or application of treaties. The International Court of Justice in the North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (involving a dispute between the Federal Republic of Germany, on the one hand, and Denmark and the Netherlands, on the other hand, with respect to the division of the oil- and gas-rich areas of the southern reaches of the North Sea) went even one step further and declared that a law-making treaty need not be accepted as a whole, that some parts of it can become customary international law binding on all, while other parts may be rejected by some states. (1969 I.C.J. Rep. 3, 38-41.)

This is the position that the United States is relying upon as far as the law of the Sea which relate to the mining of the so-called manganese nodules (potato-sized lumps containing not only manganese but also copper, nickel and cobalt, which may be found in some deep areas of the oceans far from shores of any nations), but has in fact accepted as customary international law most other provisions of the Convention, especially those relating to navigation and overflight through ocean areas under the jurisdiction of coastal states. President Reagan issued on March 10, 1983, Proclamation 5030 asserting sovereign rights over the natural resources, both living and non-living, of a 200-mile exclusive economic zone, measured from the baseline of the territorial sea of the United States (i.e., from the shore or the line drawn across the mouths of bays and rivers). He made it clear in the proclamation that the United States will exercise those rights only “to the extent permitted by international law” and that it will recognize that in this area all other

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states will continue to enjoy "the high seas freedoms of navigation, over-flight, the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea." In an accompanying Statement on United States Ocean Policy, he explained that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea "contains provisions with respect to traditional uses of the oceans which generally confirm international law and practice and fairly balance the interests of all states," that the United States is prepared to act in accordance with this balance of interests relating to traditional uses of the oceans which is reflected in the Convention, that the United States will exercise its navigational and overflight rights on a worldwide basis "in a manner that is consistent with the balance of interests reflected in the Convention," and that the United States will recognize "the rights of other states in the waters off their coasts, as reflected in the Convention, so long as the rights and freedoms of the United States and others under international law are recognized by such coastal states."

Taken together, these two documents simply mean that the United States, though it did not sign the Convention, accepts its provisions relating to traditional uses of the sea (i.e., other than those relating to the novel problem of deep seabed mining) as customary international law binding on the United States. This is even more dramatic than the prior acceptance of the technical provisions of the Convention on the Law of Treaties, as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea codifies in more than 300 articles and 8 complex annexes the vast field of law of the sea, a subject which has led to many controversies in the last forty years. This action points out that the President may by a stroke of a pen accept a large number of provisions of international law as binding upon the United States without having to resort to the process of obtaining prior advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate. The Constitution of the United States makes clear only the procedure for ratifying treaties; it is silent on the issue of customary international law and how it may become a part of the law of the United States. The Congress was given the power to "define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations," and can, therefore, determine for which violations of international law individuals can be punished. Criminal law is, however, only a minute portion of international law, embracing originally piracy and slave trade, and more recently war crimes, trade in narcotics, highjacking, terrorism and apartheid. The remainder of international law seems more within the powers of the President who is in charge of United States relations with foreign countries, which involve correspondence with foreign governments and participation in international conferences and in meetings of international organizations. It is in this way that the President expresses the will of the United States to participate in the creation of new rules of customary international law. It has to be also remembered that customary international law is part of the law of the United States, and as the Supreme Court made clear in The Paquete Habana case, such international law "must be ascertained and administered by the courts of justice of appropriate jurisdiction, as often as questions of right depending upon it are duly presented for their determination." 175 U.S. 677, 700 (1900). In exercising this function the courts are independent of the Executive and need not follow the views of the Executive on the subject. On the other hand, once the Supreme Court has spoken, a determination or interpretation of customary international law by it would usually bind the Executive as far as domestic law of the United States is concerned.

It is generally recognized that international law has only one source—the common will of states. It is created by

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The Author

Dr. Louis B. Sohn is University of Georgia School of Law professor who assumed the Law School's Woodruff Chair in International Law on July 1, 1981. He previously taught at Harvard Law School for 35 years, when he was Bemis Professor of International Law and John Harvey Gregory Lecturer on World Organization. Professor Sohn, as member of the United Nations Secretariat, started the research that led to the first Law of the Sea Treaties in 1958. As State Department Counselor on international law in 1971, Sohn helped to draft proposals and negotiated for the United States as a member of the American delegation to the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea.
general acceptance by states of a new principle of international law or of a modification of an old principle. This acceptance is usually made by a positive act; for instance, by a diplomatic note or official statement by the government, such as a proclamation by the President, a statement by the Secretary of State or a properly authorized statement by a United States representative at an international conference or at the United Nations or a meeting of one of the many international organizations to which the United States belongs. But acceptance can be also the result of silence and acquiescence, symbolized by lack of protest against the assertion by other states that a certain principle has been generally accepted as a rule of international law. For instance, when President Truman proclaimed in 1945 United States jurisdiction over the resources of the continental shelf, thus putting vast oil resources off the coast under United States control, several other states made similar claims and the remaining states acquiesced in these acts. By 1958, the First United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea was able to codify the rules thus proclaimed by the United States and other states in a Convention on the Continental Shelf as reflecting the new rules of customary international law on the subject. On the other hand, the claims by several Latin American states to a territorial sea of 200 miles, or to a fishing zone of 200 miles, were strongly opposed by the United States, by other maritime powers, and later also by a large group of land-locked and geographically disadvantaged states (i.e., states with small coastlines). The right to a fishing zone of this width was only generally accepted when the United States broke the common front of the major powers and, under the pressure of the domestic fishing industry, adopted the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. Thereafter it proved much easier to reach an agreement on an exclusive economic zone, and as was noted above the United States considers that the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea have in a short time become customary international law which the United States, though not a party to the treaty, is willing to accept.

It is quite obvious that the traditional rule that customary international law develops over a long period of time is no longer an absolute requirement. As the International Court of Justice said in the above noted North Sea Continental Shelf Cases, “the passage of only a short period of time is not necessarily, or of itself, a bar to a formation of a new rule of customary international law,” provided there is an “extensive and virtually uniform” state practice (including that of states whose interests are specially affected), showing “a general recognition that a rule of law or legal obligation is involved.” (1969 I.C.J. Rep. 3, 43.)

In general, a new rule does not bind a state which from the beginning has consistently opposed its formulation. As the International Court of Justice pointed out in the Fisheries Case (United Kingdom v. Norway) in reply to a United Kingdom contention that the closing line for bays may not exceed ten miles, this rule cannot be applied to Norway “inasmuch as she has always opposed any attempt to apply it to the Norwegian coast.” (1951 I.C.J. Rep. 115, 131.) Similarly, as far as deep seabed mining is concerned, Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and related annexes, which establish a special international regime for such mining, may not be applied to the United States which has insisted throughout the negotiation that this regime would become applicable to the United States only after the United States has expressly accepted it through the ratification of the Convention.

The controversy about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea has thus clarified to some extent the scope and effectiveness of current procedures for developing new customary rules of international law. It has to be remembered, of course, that international law is based firmly on reciprocity, and the precedents established by the United States can as well be invoked some day against the United States.

Southeastern Conference of International Law Societies

The Georgia Society of International and Comparative Law will host the First Annual Southeastern Conference of International Law Societies on April 6 and 7, 1984. The conference, to be held at The University of Georgia School of Law, will examine three controversial sections of the proposed revised draft of the Restatement of Foreign Relations Law of the United States. In addition, members of the various international law societies will meet to exchange ideas and discuss common problems. A highlight of the two-day conference will be a dinner for the participants hosted by Professor Dean Rusk.

For further information, write to Alan Sutin, President, Georgia Society of International and Comparative Law, The University of Georgia School of Law, Athens, Georgia 30602.
Rusk Center Activities

The Center conducts research, presents conferences, promotes teaching, and provides information concerning international and comparative law. Through these activities, the Center seeks to place scholarship at the service of the decision makers, including governmental officials and private sector leaders; to provide a sound basis for policy judgments for the improvement of the lives of the people of the State of Georgia and the nation; to increase international understanding; and to contribute to the solution of problems and issues of international significance.

The activities of the Center include the following:
—On October 11-12, 1983 a delegation from the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China visited the Rusk Center and the Law School to hold discussions about educational exchanges.
—From January 1 - April 1, 1984, Professor Liang Xi of Wuhan University in China will be a visiting Distinguished Scholar at the Rusk Center and the Law School. Professor Liang will study with Professor Sohn and work on international law and law of the sea problems.
—The Rusk Center will sponsor a course in “Japanese Language and Culture” in the Spring Semester, intended especially for Law and Business students. The course will be taught by Dr. James Buck of the University of Georgia faculty. This marks the initiation of the teaching of the Japanese language at The University of Georgia.
—On September 27, 1983, Professor Günter Roth of the University of Innsbruck, Austria, gave a public lecture entitled “A Comparison of Minimum Capital Requirements in the United States and in Germany.” Professor Roth pointed out that whereas in the United States the trend in corporation law is to dilute or eliminate minimum capital requirements, the trend in the Federal Republic of Germany is just the opposite. Professor Roth, drawing from the American experience, questioned the need for high minimum capital requirements in Germany.
—On November 17, 1983, Professor Hermann Soell of the University of Regensburg, Germany, presented a lecture entitled “Natural Protection in the Federal Republic of Germany.” Professor Soell gave a very interesting overview of the protection of natural areas and the relationship to the “taking” problem in the Federal Republic of Germany.
—The first Distinguished Fellow in Admiralty to be invited by the Rusk Center is Professor Robert Grime at the University of Southampton, England. Professor Grime will be in residence in March-April 1984 for the purpose of doing research and delivering a series of lectures on marine insurance law.
—Professor Nobuo Kumamoto of Hokkai-Gakuen University in Sapporo, Japan, will give a one-hour course in the Law School entitled, “Introduction to the Japanese Legal System.”
—Dr. Bernhard Schloh, legal advisor to the Council of Ministers of the European Community in Brussels will be in residence in March-April 1984 and will give a course entitled, “European Community Law.”

The University of Georgia International Law Collection

The international law collection in the Law Library at The University of Georgia is truly outstanding, containing some 30,000 items. Included is a rich collection of books, periodicals, and other printed materials and documents from a wide variety of international agencies. The collection at The University of Georgia Law Library is unique in that it includes documentation from many of the lesser international organizations which are often not represented in law libraries. One example is the library’s collection of documentation from the International Whaling Commission. Emphasis is also placed upon collecting legal materials on international trade which are beneficial to both practicing attorneys and scholars.

The international law collection is housed mainly in the new Law Library Annex which was dedicated in 1981. The Law Library Annex provides room for the growing international law collection and comfortable reading rooms for serious research. The Law Library Annex is also home for the Georgia Law Review and the Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law. Additionally, access is available to international materials for student and faculty research through the use of LEXIS which is located in the Law Library Annex.

The Rusk Center for International and Comparative Law also maintains a growing library of international materials and a small reading room for research. The comprehensive collection of printed international materials in the University of Georgia Law Library and the Rusk Center Library is available for use by any serious researcher. It is also possible to arrange interlibrary loans of printed material.

The Rusk Center Newsletter will include a section entitled Recent Selected Acquisitions in each issue which will list some of the newest additions to the international collection of The University of Georgia Law Library and the Rusk Center Library.
International Developments

Georgia's Governor, Joe Frank Harris, has announced a new economic development program to promote the state of Georgia on an international level. Harris' program relies on business people who will act as "ambassadors" for the promotion of Georgia trade internationally. The program is called "Jobs for Georgians" and calls for a council of state agency directors which will be chaired by Georgia’s Industry and Trade Commissioner, George Berry. The council will develop a written, long-term economic development strategy. Upon receipt of the council's recommendation, Harris plans to hold a statewide economic conference to review the recommendation and plan appropriate actions. "Jobs for Georgians" will focus on getting industrial prospects to consider moving to Georgia.

Japan Week in Atlanta, sponsored by the Japanese Consulate, was held in November. Kagechika Matano, the Consul General of Japan for the Southeast works from his Atlanta office with Japanese investors who are interested in the Southeast as well as with local companies interested in trading with Japan. The Southeastern Region which includes Georgia, Alabama, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia has seen Japanese investment expand 35 times and bilateral trade expand more than 100 percent since the creation of the Consulate General of Japan in Atlanta eight years ago. A welcoming labor market and shared values between southerners and Japanese are two reasons for this growth. Georgia is second to California in Japanese investment.

Atlanta's largest company, the Coca-Cola Company, currently plans to double its size by 1990. Analysts believe that such growth is likely. Coca-Cola has restructured its U.S. bottling franchises at the expense of $2 billion, rejuvenated investment in its foreign bottling operations, extended the Coca-Cola brand to include Diet Coke and expanded into the entertainment industry in the recent past to add to its profitability. Valuation of the U.S. dollar against currencies of foreign countries in which Coca-Cola does business will affect the companies projected growth; sixty percent of Coca-Cola's operating income comes from business outside the United States. If the dollar remains flat against other currencies the company would grow 15% annually and reach its goal within five years. If the value of the dollar decreases growth could be greater.

A four day conference on the Middle East was held in November at Atlanta's Emory University. The conference was hosted by former presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford and attracted scholars from the United States, the Middle East and Europe.

The Reagan administration's wish to develop space weapons has met with increasing opposition by a group of independent arms experts. These outside technology experts, although not organized, are united in their belief that the proposed weapons would be extraordinarily expensive, probably unworkable and probably would increase the threat of nuclear war. These experts are physicists, engineers and political scientists, who are familiar with complex arms issues and the intricacies of political policymaking with regard to nuclear age weapons.

Pressure from these experts is especially directed toward the Reagan administration's recent advocacy of a new defense strategy which relies heavily on space weapons, from anti-satellite weapons to exotic laser and particle-beam devices which would attack satellites and ballistic missiles in flight. There are signs that political opposition to this new defense strategy is spreading. Some of the specific arguments against the proposed development of space weaponry are the following; the proposed weapons have tremendous technical problems; they violate existing anti-space weaponry treaties; they are likely to cost more than a trillion dollars; they are very vulnerable and subject to countermeasures; they could all be attacked by alternative offensive missiles and therefore would tend to encourage an offensive missile race; they would be more successful in a first strike than they would be if used defensively; they would be politically destabilizing.

The European Common Market's executive commission proposed that member states relax antitrust laws that hinder joint research and development within the community. A "plan" will probably be developed by the end of 1984 for states to follow. Most companies will probably be required to register agreements with the commission and will then proceed with their agreement unless an objection is raised within six months. An objection will be required within three months in cases which involve projects of common European interest.

The Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law
Volume 13:2 of the Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law is now available. This issue includes articles on the Canadian Foreign Investment Review Agency and on the property rights of spouses cohabiting without marriage in Israel. The Journal anticipates the publication of Volume 13:3 in January 1984.
Inquiries concerning subscriptions and manuscript submissions should be addressed to the Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law, The University of Georgia School of Law, Athens, Georgia 30602. Telephone: (404) 542-7289.
Exporting in the 80's: The New Economic Challenge

March 29-30, 1984
Auditorium, School of Law
The University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia

Parking is available at the Holiday Inn parking lot adjacent to the campus and a five minute walk to the Law School Auditorium.

PROGRAM

Thursday, March 29, 1984
8:15 REGISTRATION AND COFFEE (Law School Auditorium Foyer)
9:00 WELCOME
J. Ralph Beaird, Dean, School of Law, University Professor of Law and Counselor to the President, The University of Georgia, Athens
9:05 INTRODUCTION
Thomas J. Schoenbaum, Program Chairman, Rusk Professor of International Law, Dean Rusk Center for International and Comparative Law, Athens
9:10 OPENING REMARKS
Dean Rusk, Sibley Professor of International Law, former Secretary of State of the United States, Athens
9:20-12:30 REGULATION—U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL LAW
Professor Louis Sohn, presiding, Woodruff Professor of International Law, The University of Georgia, Athens
The Changing International Law Framework for Exports: The GATT and Side Agreements
John H. Jackson, Professor, University of Michigan Law School, Ann Arbor, Michigan
The Changing Regulatory Framework: The Export Administration Act
Arthur T. Downey, Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, Washington, D.C.
Taking Advantage of the Export Trading Company Act
Cecil Hunt, Assistant General Counsel for International Trade, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.

12:30 LUNCH - Holiday Inn (Speaker to be announced)
2:00-4:30 AGRICULTURE
Thomas J. Schoenbaum, presiding
Agricultural Exports: Opening the Japanese Market
Don W. Sands, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Gold Kist, Inc., Atlanta
Agricultural Exports and the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community
Dr. Bernhard Schloh, Counsel to the European Common Market, Belgium
COMMENTS:
Rhond Roth, Director of Regulatory Affairs, Hauck & Associates, Washington, D.C.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

6:30-8:00 RECEPTION - School of Law (Exact location to be announced)

Parking is available at the Holiday Inn parking lot adjacent to the campus and a five minute walk to the Law School Auditorium.
Friday, March 30, 1984
8:30 COFFEE (Law School Auditorium Foyer)
9:00 -
12:30 *TRANSACTIONS
   Gabriel M. Wilner, presiding, Professor of Law, The University of Georgia, Athens
   Negotiating and Drafting the International Sales Contract and Related Agreements
   John Gornall, Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy, Atlanta
   Export of Services
   Robert Herstein, Arnold & Porter, Washington, D.C.
   Financing Exports
   Carl Gable, Kilpatrick & Cody, Atlanta
   Tax Aspects of Exporting
   Michael Jones, Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan, Atlanta
   COMMENTS:
   Ken Klein, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, Washington, D.C.
   John Carr, Shaw, Pittman, Potts & Trowbridge, Washington, D.C.
   QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
   *There will be a fifteen minute coffee break during this session.

12:30 LUNCH - Holiday Inn (speaker to be announced)
2:00 -
4:00 EXPORTING TO JAPAN
   Thomas J. Schoenbaum, presiding
   Penetrating the Japanese Market: The Japanese View
   Dr. Mitsuo Matsushita, Professor of Law, Tokyo University, Tokyo, Japan
   A Case Study of Problems and Alternatives Facing a Small Business in Selling in Japan
   John H. Steed, Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy, Atlanta
   COMMENTS:
   Nancy Terrell (Terry) Smith, Office of Assistant General Counsel for International Trade, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C.
   QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
   4:00 ADJOURNMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT: This March 1984 seminar will be a Regional Meeting of the American Society of International Law.

REGISTRATION APPLICATION
EXPORTING IN THE 80'S: THE NEW ECONOMIC CHALLENGE

Please register me for the seminar on Exporting in the 80's: The New Economic Challenge to be held on March 29-30, 1984 at The University of Georgia School of Law, Athens, Georgia, telephone 404-542-2522.

☐ My check for $225 registration/tuition fee, payable to ICLE IN GEORGIA is enclosed.

NAME ________________________________________________________________
FIRM ________________________________________________________________
MAILING ADDRESS ______________________________________________________
CITY ___________________________ STATE ___________ ZIP CODE __________
☐ Sorry, I am unable to attend, please send program materials used at the seminar and bill me.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellations received 72 hours before a seminar commences will receive a full refund less a $10.00 administrative fee; cancellations received between 72 hours and the time a seminar commences will receive a refund less $25.00 to cover food and beverage guarantees. There will be no refunds for “no shows”; however, the program materials will be shipped after the program. A substitute may attend for someone unable to do so.

TO REGISTER, MAIL APPLICATION AND CHECK MADE PAYABLE TO ICLE IN GEORGIA TO REGISTRAR, INSTITUTE OF CONTINUING LEGAL EDUCATION, P.O. BOX 1885, ATHENS, GEORGIA 30603

A block of 150 guest rooms is being reserved for this program at the Holiday Inn, P.O. Box 1666, Broad & Hull Streets, Athens, GA 30603, telephone 404-549-4433. These rooms will be held until March 14, 1984. Individuals will be responsible for making their own reservations.
Selected Recent Acquisitions


