

Research Question

Why have Canada and the U.S. **failed to delimit** the boundary of the **Dixon Entrance**? What does this **strategic ambiguity** communicate about the nature of the two States' diplomatic relationship in regard to maritime law?

Context

- Canada and the U.S. share three coastlines, where **five boundaries remain undefined**.
- National usage practices have precipitated **competing claims to maritime boundaries** by both States.
- The Dixon Entrance is at the **terminus of the Canada-U.S. land border**, near the delineation between the Alaskan Panhandle and the province of BC.
- The contested area amounts to approximately 80 kilometres in width and 50 kilometres in length.

Undelimited Boundaries

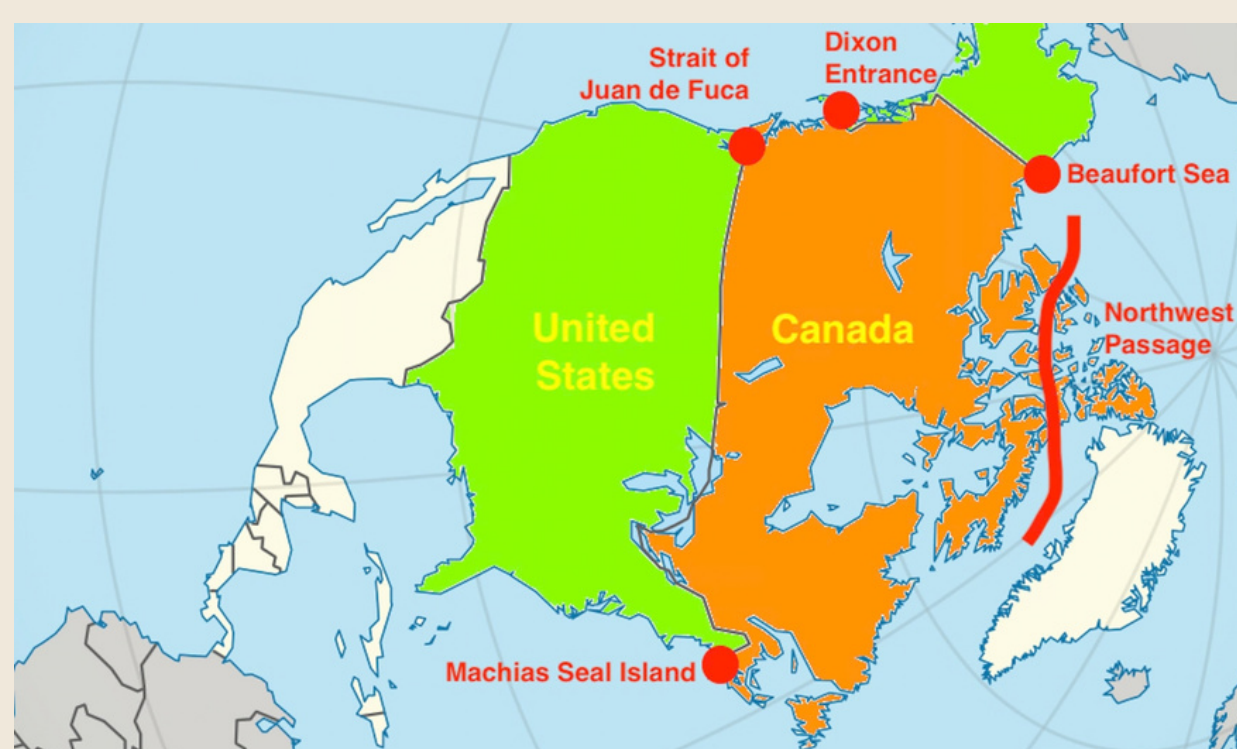


Figure 3. TUBS, CC BY-SA 3.0 / image processed by Ruland Kolen.

Employed Methodologies

- Legal mapping (evolution of legal opinion);
- Government documentation (in relation to the Canadian government's obligations vis-a-vis the Haida Nation);
- Historical material (previous legal renderings; evidence of State conduct and practice).

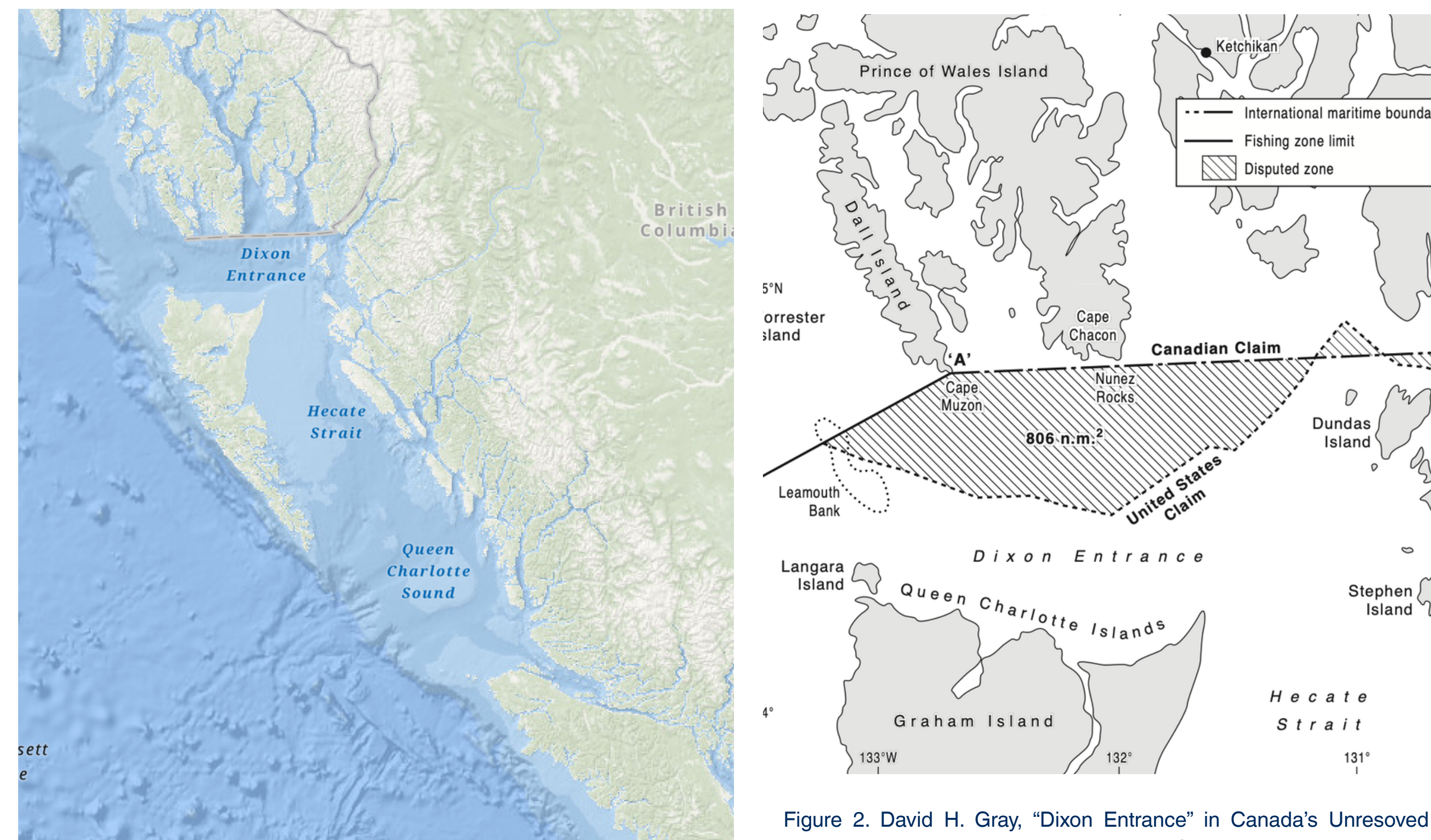


Figure 1. Author's rendering of the Dixon Entrance, ArcGIS, 2025.

Figure 2. David H. Gray, "Dixon Entrance" in Canada's Unresolved Maritime Boundaries, IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin, 1997.

A.B. Line Decision

- The A-B Line, established by a **1903 arbitral decision** is Canada's preferred legal position.
- Canada argues that the **A-B Line delimits the land and sea boundaries** of the border. The U.S. argues that the A-B Line only pertains to the land boundaries between the two States.
- This line predated the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982)**, which significantly extended seaward national maritime jurisdiction and developed exclusive economic zones.
- This line would confer the **preponderance** of the Dixon Entrance to Canada.

Equidistance Regime

- The U.S. has called for the **implementation of an equidistance line** across the Dixon Entrance, bifurcating the sea passage to create respective maritime title.
- Canada argues that the equidistance regime is **inappropriate** in light of historical conduct between the States.
- The successful application of an equidistance line would lower the current boundary down by 20 kilometres to **the advantage of the U.S.**

Findings

- The **Haida Nation** lies directly south of the Dixon Entrance. While Canada possesses the **international right and legal personality** to engage in maritime delimitation, the Haida are entitled to articulate their own interests in relation to the use of the Dixon Entrance.
- A moratorium on offshore oil and gas production on Canada's west coast has inhibited exploratory ventures in the Dixon Entrance, yet it is possible that this area could possess **significant hydrocarbon resources**.
- Access to the **rich fishing grounds** in the Dixon Entrance area could be widely different depending on delimitation outcomes secured by adherence to the A-B line or an equidistance principle.
- Both countries have demonstrated an ability to work around and accommodate their diverging opinions on the territorial status of the Dixon Entrance. I term this state of affairs one of **strategic ambiguity**.

Future Questions

- Ongoing security concerns that derive from the strategic military importance of the area.
- The international maritime legal order has been destabilized by the conduct of President Donald Trump's second administration (chiefly through Executive Order 14285).

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During my LiA summer, I worked in the Oceans Law and Policy department at the Centre for International Law, where I researched under-explored elements of the international maritime legal regime, such as deep-sea mining and sub-sea cable protection.