

FOREWORD

This is the sixth book of the series of studies organized and edited at the Center for the Study of Marine Policy at the University of Delaware on international straits of the world. From 1974 to 1982 the nations of the world have tried to reach agreement on a comprehensive convention for the law of the sea through the Third United Nations Law of the Sea Conference. Sessions have been held in Caracas, Geneva, and New York attended by the representatives of more than 150 states, and it is still uncertain when adoption of the draft convention of 320 articles and eight annexes will take place. It is even less certain when and whether an adequate number of states will ratify the convention, once adopted, without significant reservations, to give it legal force.

Passage through straits used for international navigation has been one of the key sections of the draft convention on the law of the sea, with an entirely new regime of "transit passage" incorporated in the articles. Whatever may ultimately be adopted and ratified by states on this subject, history indicates that several straits of the world ocean will continue to breed contention because of their strategic and economic importance to navies and trade, involving not only coastal and regional states, but also distant maritime powers. It may be helpful, then, to review the physical characteristics, the political and economic importance, and the legal status of certain narrows of the world ocean, so that policy decisions by all concerned may be wisely taken in the interests of peace, prosperity, and a sound marine environment.

For this study of the Baltic Straits, the Center was fortunate in enlisting the talents of Gunnar Alexandersson, Professor of International Economic Geography at the Stockholm School of Economics. Born in Bergkvara, Sweden, he has been an avid scholar of shipping and ports in the Baltic region, and a frequent traveller through Europe, America, and Asia. He has been a research associate at the University of Maryland and a visiting professor at both the University of Nebraska and the University of Wisconsin. Professor Alexandersson is the author of five books as well as co-author of *World Shipping: Economic Geography of Ports and Seaborne Trade*.

The Baltic Straits have a long and interesting history. They were called the Danish Straits, when Denmark was a great power that straddled those waterways and encompassed Norway, parts of Sweden, Germany, Poland, and Estonia to the east, and also colonized the Scottish isles, the Faeroes, Iceland, and Greenland to the west, while exercising control over much of England for centuries. For several hundred years Denmark collected "dues" from ships passing through the Sound and the Great Belt, the two important gateways to

the Baltic sea. In the early nineteenth century the British fleet had to force its way into the Baltic sea, denying Denmark's claim of a right to close the sea to non-littoral fleets.

Only in 1857, led by the United States, did the maritime states throw off the burden of the dues upon their commercial ships. Even then they indemnified Denmark generously, with the United States alone paying \$393 million. During World War I Denmark was neutral and the straits were the object of considerable strategic attention by both Germany and Great Britain. Although mined to protect Danish neutrality, the straits were considered by London as an avenue of attack upon Germany, while the German fleet passed through the straits to meet the British fleet at Jutland on 31 May 1916. Many thousands of merchant vessels, moreover, were piloted through the minefields of the Great Belt during World War I.

During the late 1930s Denmark, like other states of Europe, came under heavy political pressure from the demands of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich in Germany, and Copenhagen was forced to sign a non-aggression pact, allow overflight of the straits, and the passage of submerged German submarines. But immediately after the defeat of Hitler, the Baltic and the straits became a political arena of potential conflict between the NATO forces of the West and the WP forces of the East, led by the Soviet Union.

Professor Alexandersson has carefully drawn the physical-hydrographic elements of the Baltic Sea and its approaches; he has vividly described the historical interests, both politically and economically of the littoral states, analyzed the legal status and uses of the Baltic Straits over time, and calculated the role of the Baltic region, with its waterways, in the global struggle between the western alliance and the Soviet bloc. He has especially delineated the delicate role of Sweden and Finland, caught between the juggernauts. Of particular value is his description of the various legal views of the Baltic Straits, particularly in light of the emerging law of the sea, and, finally, his estimate of the opportunities for peace and prosperity in this region marked for trade, environmental cooperation, and political rivalries by different systems of political economy.

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Director

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