



International Boundary Study

No. 14 (Revised) – October 1, 1965

U.S. – Russia Convention Line of 1867

(Country Codes: US-RS)

**The Geographer
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Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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U.S. - RUSSIA CONVENTION LINE OF 1867

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I. U.S. - RUSSIA CONVENTION LINE OF 1867

Rather than a boundary per se, this report concerns a convention line which ordinarily appears on official maps in the same manner as a boundary. According to Boggs¹ "Most lines in water areas which are defined in treaties are not boundaries between waters under the jurisdiction of the contracting parties, but a cartographic device to simplify description of the land areas involved...". He further describes such a line being a "line of allocation" of land. For example, all land areas to the east of the Convention line in question belong to the United States; to the west to the U.S.S.R. without regard to the water areas involved.

Early in 1955, a group of U.S. cartographic experts in the ACC/MAP², after a rather long period of consultation and deliberation, issued the "Coordinate Positions for the Plot of U.S. - Russia Convention of 1867." This document, which is reproduced in part below, has been adopted as the standard description for the cartographic representation of the Convention line. Its re-issue in this series results from the large number of questions on the line which have been raised in recent months from offices unfamiliar with the original document.

II. TREATY

The only treaty establishing a so-called "boundary" between the United States and the modern Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is the Convention Ceding Alaska concluded March 30, 1867 with ratification advised by the Senate on April 9, 1867 and proclaimed by the President on June 30, 1867. The Convention line, as given below, marks the limit, to the east of which, the Emperor of Russia ceded all territory or claims to territory in North America. The 1867 Convention's territorial article on the western limits of the Alaskan cession reads as follows:

The western limit within which the territories and dominion conveyed, are contained, passes through a point in Behring's straits on the parallel of sixty-five degrees thirty minutes north latitude, at its intersection by the meridian which passes midway between the islands of Krusenstern, or Ignalook, and the island of Ratmanoff, or Noonarbook, and proceeds due north, without limitation, into the same Frozen Ocean. The same western limit, beginning at the same initial point, proceeds thence in a course nearly southwest, through Behring's straits and Behring's sea, so as to pass midway between the northwest point of the island of St. Lawrence and the southeast point of Cape Choukotski, to the meridian of one hundred and seventy-two west longitude; thence, from the intersection of that meridian, in a southwesterly direction, so as to pass midway between the island of Attou and the Copper island of the Kormandorski couplet or group, in the North Pacific ocean, to the meridian of one hundred and ninety-three degrees west longitude, so as to include in the

¹ Boggs, S.W., "Delimitation of Seaward Areas under National Jurisdiction," American Journal of International Law, Vol. 45, No. 2 April 1951, footnote 2, page 240.

² The Map Sub-Committee of the Air Coordinating Committee.

territory conveyed the whole of the Aleutian islands east of that meridian.

In the Convention, 193° West Longitude coincides, of course, with 167° East Longitude. The modern names for selected places mentioned in the Convention are as follows:

| <u>Convention Name</u> | <u>Modern Name</u> |
|-------------------------|--|
| Krusenstern or Ignalook | Little Diomede Island |
| Ratmanoff or Noonarbook | Big Diomede Island or Ostrov Ratmanova |
| Frozen Ocean | Arctic Sea |
| Cape Choukotski | Mys Chukotskiy |
| Attou Island | Attu Island |
| Copper | Ostrov Mednyy |
| Kormandorski couplet | Komandorskiye Ostrova |

III. SUMMARY

The wording of the Convention is rather precise. The principal question left unsolved is whether the lines between the fixed points should cartographically be expressed as "rhumb lines" or as "great circle lines". It was decided that great circle lines should be understood by the Convention wording of "straight lines" on the earth and the ACC/MAP group resolved:

"The lines between points herein described are great circles except those lines which connect adjoining points on the same parallel shall follow the parallel."³

The Coordinate Positions for the Plot were listed as follows:

Coordinate Positions for Plot of U.S. - Russia Convention Line of 1867

| <u>POINT</u> | <u>POSITION</u> | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| | <u>Latitude</u> | <u>Longitude</u> |
| Mys (Cape) Chukotski, southeast extremity | 64° 14'.2 N | 173° 05'.5 W |
| St. Lawrence Island, northwest extremity | 63° 47'.3 N | 171° 45'.8 W |
| Medny (Copper Island) eastern extremity | 54° 32'.2 N | 168° 00' E |
| Attu Island, | 52° 55'.3 N | 172° 26'.8 E |

³ The actual wording applied to ADIZ boundaries in the vicinity of the Convention line. The significant point is made first and applied to the Convention line.

western extremity

| <u>POINT</u> | <u>POSITION</u> | |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| | <u>Latitude</u> | <u>Longitude</u> |
| Initial Turning Point | 65° 30'.0 N | 168° 58' 22".587 W ⁴ |
| Turning Point No. 2 | 64° 12'.3 N | 172° 00' W |
| Mid Point between Medny and Attu Island | 53° 45'.0 N | 170° 16'.0 E |
| End Point, southwestern extremity of Convention line | 50° 36'.4 N | 167° 00' E |
| 5° increments of longitude along great circle arcs | 65° 04'.2 N | 170° 00' W |
| | 62° 59'.4 N | 175° 00' W |
| | 60° 33'.5 N | 180° |
| | 57° 28'.0 N | 175° 00' E |
| | 53° 31.0 N | 170° 00" E |
| Starting point of Convention Line | 72° 00' N | 168° 58' 22".587 W |

It should be noted that the original Convention language stated that the line "proceeds thence due north, without limitation, into the same Frozen Ocean". Since the United States does not support so-called "sector claims" in the polar regions, the northernmost point for the representation of the Convention line was agreed to be 72° 00' N. Furthermore, in keeping with the policy that the line does not constitute a boundary, the standard symbol for the representation of an international boundary should never be used. Furthermore, labeling of the line as "U.S. - Russia Convention of 1867" is recommended.

The plotted points, it should be remembered, are subject to minor modification resulting from improved surveys, changes in datum, alteration in the spheroid, etc.

⁴ This value was given erroneously in the distributed ACC/MAP minutes as 168° 50' 22".587 W. and copied in the original edition of this study instead of the correct value, 168° 58' 22".587 W.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared in the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8744, State Department Building, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (telephone: Code 182, Extension 4507).