

The Effect of Sea Level Rise on Maritime Zones: The Need for a Negotiated Solution

Aziel-Philippe GOULANDRIS, French and Greek national
French Navy, French Ministry of Defence
contact@goulandris.fr

The disappearance of territories underwater, and in particular of islands is commonly acknowledged as one of the most radical but inevitable consequences of sea level rise. More dramatically it is reckoned that entire countries, made up solely of low lying islands could end up totally submerged by the rising sea.

If the debate remains to be settled concerning the extend of the rise and therefore extent of the above dramatic consequences, there is broad consensus on the fact that a significant rise of at least 0,5 meters is to occur in many parts of the world.

Therefore, and without focusing exclusively on the worst case scenario of physical disappearance of landmasses, the aim of this paper is to analyse the effects that such a rise could have on maritime zones

The aim of this paper is to analyse the effects that such a rise could have on maritime zones in the world from a legal point of view and the potentially contentious issues this could raise in the light of UNCLOS, without focusing exclusively on the worst case scenario of physical disappearance. Insular nations are of course the most directly concerned, nonetheless, our approach also aims to include other potentially endangered territories, insular or not, that belong to continental states. Also, apart from the evident consequences of physical disappearance existence of landmasses, sea level rise could also have an impact, and that in a nearer future, on the living conditions in these areas. In the case of islands this could trigger legal problems related to their qualification as islands according to international law and thus their entitlement to an EEZ.