Good Neighbours, Bad Border

Time: 7-8pm, Wednesday 8 April 2015
Venue: 1103, conference center

Speaker: Professor Stephen R. Kelly, Professor of Energy and National Security. Visiting Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University.

The United States and Canada share an 8,000-kilometer long land border, the longest between two countries in the world.   For more than 200 years this border has been peaceful, despite dozens of border disputes caused by inaccurate maps, vague peace treaties and primitive surveying equipment.   Only two small chunks of land are still claimed by both countries, tiny rocks in the Gulf of Maine called Machias Seal Island and North Rock.   But for various reasons, the two countries have been unwilling to invest the time to settle their conflicting claims.

When two countries as close as the United States and Canada cannot settle what appears to be a fairly simply border dispute, this sets a bad example for other countries in the world with similar differences.   In particular, the current conflict between China and Japan over small and largely uninhabited islands in the East China Sea resembles the Machias Seal Island disagreement.   As I will argue, border disputes do not fade away; they fester.   And when they pop back to the surface, caused by the discovery of valuable resources or nationalistic zeal, they can often be even harder to solve.   The U.S. and Canada should solve this one, and offer what might be a model for China and Japan.

Stephen R. Kelly is a former U.S. diplomat and current Visiting Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, and a professor this semester at Duke Kunshan University. During his diplomatic career he served as the senior career official at the U.S. embassies in Canada and Mexico, and as the U.S. Consul General in Quebec City, Canada. He also served with his wife Jane, also a professor at DKU, in Mali, Indonesia, Belgium and Holland. His courses at Duke deal with energy, borders and North American issues. He did his undergraduate work at Cornell University, and received a masters degree in national security strategy from the National War College in Washington, D.C.