"Stamps of the American Quadrant of Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands"

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Introduction

Exploratory drilling for oil in 2010 by British firms some 150 kilometers north of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas to the Argentines) has placed new strains on the relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina over competing claims to the Islands and similarly competing claims to large areas of Antarctica. Claims to also competing large areas of the submerged continental platform are exacerbating and complicating the situation.

The differences between these two countries (plus Chile) are reflected in the stamps focusing on this area and the claims. These claims in a sense reflect the relationship between the "three South Americas": mainland, Antarctica, and the South Atlantic islands in between.

This presentation will use relevant stamps and maps will examine three factors involved (especially for the Argentines): different perspectives, propinquity (the notion that proximity to a disputed area conveys certain rights), and lastly the way geopolitical thinking in South America has affected these issues.

The vision of Antarctica held by Northern Hemisphere European nations, Japan, China, Korea and the United States is that the frozen continent is a distant and exotic place, difficult to get to, and in some ways more like a planet than a piece of the Earth. But for New Zealand,
Australia and the nations of South America’s Southern Cone, and especially Argentina and Chile, Antarctica is close (approximately 1,000 km from Cape Horn Island to the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. It is linked to their continental homeland by geography, geopolitics, possible resource exploitation, nationalism, propinquity, search and rescue, tourism, science (especially ozone depletion concerns), and presence. As one initial and rough measure of these different perspectives, a recent search on the web for items dealing with Antarctica in a one-month period resulted in: US-New York Times: 6; US-Washington Post: 6; Chile: Mercurio: 9; Argentina: Nación: 27. This difference of perception is at least partially molded not just by propinquity (special rights because of closeness) but by geopolitical thinking, especially in Argentina and Chile, and Brazil to a lesser degree

Map 1: The Far, Far South
**Geopolitical Thinking in South America**

Geopolitical thinking in South America was especially influential and prolific during the long periods of military governments in that area from the 1960’s to the early 1980’s. Geopolitical and strategic thinking strongly influence each other, so it should not be surprising that both foreign and domestic policy should be significantly informed by geopolitical thinking during periods when the military is in power. The Southern Cone military governments who believed in the National Security State, the organic theory of the nation-state, and in the need for a state to have space to live and grow depended for much of their ideological framework on various aspects of geopolitical thought.ii

But it would be a mistake to think of South American geopolitical thinking as thriving and influential only during periods of military dictatorship. For many decades geopolitical ideas had been taught in schools using curricula prescribed (and enforced) by a ministry of education in a highly centralized arrangement. These geopolitical ideas were linked in these schools, and in the media, to patriotism, history, and national identity. If a country had lost territory in the past to another nation (and many South American nations had this experience), then geopolitical analysis frequently provided justification for strong action to regain these lost territories.

In terms of Antarctica, propinquity has been closely tied to a nation’s policies, perspectives and geopolitical thinking regarding the continent, and this is especially true for Chile and Argentina. In the past propinquity has meant support for (and sometimes rescue of) Antarctic expeditions launched by European nations or the United States. The early 20th Century examples of Sir Ernest Shackleton and the Swedish 1902-03 Nordenskjold expedition come to mind, with Chilean and Argentine navy ships playing a key role in their rescue. The support and encouragement the Argentines gave the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition in 1902 under
William Bruce was repaid many times over when Bruce, annoyed with the British government for its lack of support, turned his base station in the South Orkneys over to the Argentines. That station has been continuously occupied by the Argentines since 1904, and gives them the right to proclaim that they have a special position as the first nation to operate an Antarctic base for over a century. In the last few decades the Chilean city of Punta Arenas has been the launching platform for a number of expeditions and logistical support from other nations, including the Brazilians, the Ecuadorians, and the Americans. The “air bridge” between Punta Arenas and the Chilean landing strip in their Teniente Marsh station on the Antarctic Peninsula has served as a logistical and medical lifeline for the Antarctic programs of these countries, most recently with the emergency evacuation of two American doctors (4 years apart) for critical medical situations.

With the return to democratic and elected civilian governments in all of South America in the last twenty years, one might expect the influence of geopolitical thinking and the quantity of publications distributing these ideas, to have declined dramatically. Indeed, this period saw the disappearance of a number of geopolitical journals, and the number and prominence of geopolitical works in the bookstores of Buenos Aires and Santiago have declined notably.

But geopolitical ideas have not disappeared with the end of military rule, and these ideas relating to the Antarctic sustain the Antarctic programs of several countries. Furthermore, some interesting new ideas relating to Antarctica have emerged, to include cooperative approaches and the notion of a “South American Antarctica” in the 90 degree quadrant between the Greenwich and 90 degree West meridians, with that quadrant being reserved for South American Antarctic programs and requiring the departure of bases of other nations, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, China, and Russia, among others. Cooperative programs with Spain around the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the “encounter” (or pillaging and
destruction, from a different perspective) starting in 1492 included the launching of an Antarctic program by Spain, which now has a permanent station on the Antarctic Peninsula. The inclusion of Spain in the South American Antarctic condominium was based on the geopolitical idea of an “Ibero-American Quadrant” of Antarctica, occupying the same sector defined by the meridian of Greenwich and 90 degrees West. The notion of a “South American Antarctica” has a strong manifestation in the 1947 Rio Treaty for Interamerican Reciprocal Assistance, which, at the urging of Argentina and Chile, extends the area of applicability of the Treaty to the South Pole, and includes their Antarctic claims and the Southern Islands.\textsuperscript{iv}

The military influence in national Antarctic activities is also based on the simple fact that the military is probably the only institution in these countries which can mount a successful (and permanent) Antarctic station, using its aircraft, ships, and logistical systems to support the program. Visits to a number of Antarctic stations leaves one with the clear impression that the South American stations are like military bases, with a military culture based on organization and discipline. Uniforms are commonly seen in these South American bases, which are frequently named after military heroes or soldiers, sailors and pilots who have died in Antarctic accidents or expeditions.

We should be aware of differences between the Antarctic geopolitical approaches taken by the most active South American countries, and turn now to a brief examination of their main features.
Argentina: Antarctic Geopolitics

Despite the fact that the heart of Argentina lies in the capital of Buenos Aires and the pampas that surround it, many Argentines believe they are an “Austral nation”, via Antarctica, Malvinas (never Falklands) and other islands, and geopolitical thinking strengthens this perception. The development of this “Antarctic consciousness” (conciencia Antártica) is achieved through a highly centralized school system in which the Ministry of Public Education lays out what will be taught each day in every classroom in Argentina, and dispatches inspectors to ensure that this is followed. The result is that at all educational levels, from grade through high school (and to a certain extent universities) the students receive instruction that stresses that they have sovereignty over a sector of Antarctica, as well as the Islas Malvinas and other South Atlantic Islands (the key ones being South Georgia and “Islas Orcadas del Sur”, the Spanish
name for South Orkneys). Geopolitical thinking, linked to nationalism and patriotism, further reinforces the case for Argentine sovereignty in these territories through articles in newspapers, popular magazines, books, specialized scholarly monographs, programs on radio and television and postage stamps.

One of the cartographic, geological, oceanographic and geopolitical arguments that strongly makes this case is the notion of “Tri-Continental Argentina” in which mainland Argentina is tied through a chain of Islands (Insular Argentina) to their Antarctic claim. Further cementing this notion is the concept of an “Argentine Sea” from the River Plate, through the chain of southern islands to the South Sandwich Islands, and then through the “Orcadas” (South Orkneys) to the Antarctic Peninsula and their sector claim. While not a sovereignty claim over the vast ocean surfaces, the “Argentine Sea” is more a geopolitical perception of an area in which Argentine influence and presence are paramount. In the case of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, there is a deeply felt emotional tie, which was reinforced by the 1982 War and the deaths of some 700 young Argentine men in that conflict. The notion of an Argentine sea has received new life with the British, and later Argentine, approaches towards the issue of enlarged areas of sub-surface sovereignty.

The geopolitical “Tri-continental Argentina” concept is sometimes also inserted in the notion of a “Greater Argentina” which would encompass the limits of colonial Buenos Aires at the end of the 18th Century plus the later Antarctic claim. A number of means are used to support these perceptions in schools and on postage stamps, including the obligatory use of maps which show Argentina’s Antarctic claim. “Greater Argentina” would include today’s’ continental Argentina, plus Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, and substantial portions of Brazil and Chile. This “Greater Argentina” based on these geopolitical ideas has occasionally found its expression...
in the search for a great “national project”, perhaps best enunciated by General Juan D. Perón in the early 1950’s, and also in sometimes bizarre schemes to “recover” (never “invade”) the Malvinas Islands. It appears the latter “great national project” was in the back of the minds of the military Junta in April 1982 when it launched the operation against British presence on the Islands. In one of his more effusive speeches in 1982 after taking the Islands but before the British Task Force arrived, President/General Galtieri stated that the recovery of the Malvinas was only the start of a larger operation aimed at restoring Argentine greatness and repossession of territories which had been stolen from her in the past.

Those who articulate this notion sometimes use the argument that Argentina has been “mutilated” in the past by neighbors and outside nations. The 1833 taking of the Malvinas/Falklands by the British (with help from the United States, according to the Argentines) was only the beginning, now that many other nations are establishing a presence in the Antarctic sector claimed by Argentina.

Argentina has six major Antarctic bases and a number of smaller summer-only stations, as well as numerous emergency huts spread out across the Antarctic Peninsula and the mainland of their claimed sector. The bases are generally identified as Army, Navy or Air Force bases depending on which service set them up and who staffs them. The resulting cost of Argentine Antarctic programs, frequently somewhat hidden in various military budgets, is not an inconsiderable amount: ten million dollars a year is one estimate. During Argentina’s economic and political crises of 2001-2003 there was talk of consolidating and shutting down some of these bases, or converting several of the six major bases into summer-only installations. This suggestion was quickly denied by Argentine authorities, and has not been implemented, although the staffing of many of the stations has been reduced.
The first human being to be born in Antarctica (and thus the first true Antarctic “citizen”) was the son of an Argentine military officer in 1978 who, with strong government urging, brought his pregnant wife to a major Argentine base. The perhaps apocryphal story goes that the Chileans, in a gesture of one-upmanship, sent to one of their bases a recently married couple (two civil servants who volunteered for the mission), so that a year later the first baby both conceived and born in Chilean Antarctica would be Chilean.

Stamps showing Antarctic claims: Argentina, Chile, United Kingdom

Chile: Antarctic Geopolitics

Chile, the land of “crazy geography” has a strong tradition of geopolitical thinking, especially naval, which has emphasized the need to strengthen Chilean sovereignty in its claimed Antarctic sector as well as a number of Islands. This strong current of geopolitical thinking was especially nurtured during the long reign of President/General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). Pinochet himself visited Chilean stations in Antarctica twice, and he is an excellent example of geoplitician as ruler (albeit non-democratic) whose foreign and domestic policies were strongly influenced by his geopolitical ideas.
Chile perceives itself as the “southernmost country in the world” (Terra Australis), possessing the most Austral city on earth (Puerto Williams, on the Beagle Channel). As such, Chile argues that it is the geopolitical “guardian of the doorway” dominating the Strait of Magellan, the Beagle Channel, Cape Horn and the Drake Passage. These are the only ice-free routes in the world between Atlantic and Pacific (leaving out the Panama Canal and the icy, treacherous Canadian/US Northwest Passage), and this is important, argue the Chileans, because world economic and political power is shifting from Europe/US to the Pacific rim, and Chile is a Pacific nation which sits on top of the only feasible natural naval routes between Atlantic and Pacific.

This notion is linked to the geopolitical idea, much like Argentina’s, of Chile as a Tri-continental nation, with sovereignty on mainland South America, Pacific Islands (Easter and Juan Fernandez Islands) and its Antarctic claim, leading Chilean authorities to stress the national “Antarctic consciousness” much like that of its historic, and Antarctic, rival: Argentina.

But the geopolitical relationship with Argentina, sometimes strained by border and diplomatic disputes, also has cooperative strains as well as conflictual ones. Among these are a 1948 agreement to mutually recognize and support their two Antarctic claims (although the border between Argentine and Chilean Antarctica has never been specified). More recently, there has been talk of a joint Argentina-Chilean overland expedition to the South Pole, where probably, much to their annoyance, they would find the large U.S. Polar station.

Chile’s southerly location has made Punta Arenas and Puerto Williams important “last landfall” points for Antarctic expeditions as well as rescue efforts. Shackleton’s was the most noteworthy of these efforts, which also included the medical emergency evacuation of two different U.S doctors from the South Pole station in 1999 and 2001. These two Chilean locations
also play a key role as one of four gateway cites for Antarctic tourism in the Peninsula (the other two being Argentina’s Ushuaia and the Falkland Islands). Typically aircraft bring tourists to the southerly locations, where they board expedition cruise ships heading south to Antarctica.

Another geopolitical factor is Chile’s claim to have established the first “Antarctic City” at Villa Las Estrellas next to the Teniente Marsh base on King George Island. This “city” includes a few families with children, a small shopping center, a bank, a post office, a souvenir store, and a hotel. The base also boasts the only runway in this area useable by aircraft as large as the C-130 transport planes of the Chilean Air Force, which have a steady stream of missions involving resupply cargo, and transportation for scientists, staff, military officers and tourists.

Brazil: Antarctic Geopolitics

In discussing Brazilian geopolitics, one must be careful to note that Brazil, in comparison to Argentine and Chile, has major geographic disadvantages with regards to Antarctica, and is generally considered the “newcomer” on the Antarctic geopolitical stage. In 1982 the Brazilians launched their first Antarctic expedition, and a year later built their first base (named Comandante Feraz, for a deceased naval officer active in Antarctica), which has been active year-round since then.

Despite their status as newcomers, Brazilian geopolitical writers have had considerable influence on the nation’s Antarctic policies (especially during the period of military dictatorship under a series of unelected general/presidents from 1964 to 1985), although one cannot speak of a national Brazilian Antarctic consciousness similar to that of Argentina or Chile.

Brazil’s Antarctic geopolitics are reinforced by the notion of Brazilian “grandeza” which, they feel, will be part of Brazil’s eventual status as a major player on the world scene. Brazilian
analysts and officials have often stressed Brazil’s special geopolitical status as a major power sitting astride key navigation sea-lanes of communication in the Atlantic from the Equator to Antarctica. This notion has always been resisted by Argentina, but after that country’s ignominious defeat by the British in 1982, Brazilian geopoliticians felt they had to fill the power vacuum left by Argentina and become the “guardian of the South-West Atlantic”.

A Brazilian geopolitician, Therezinha de Castro xvii, came up with a concept in the South American Quadrant of Antarctica which had a considerable impact on Argentina and several other South American nations: the notion of “defrontaçao” (frontage). Under this concept, in the South American sector of Antarctica (Greenwich 0 degree meridian to 90 degrees West) all non-South American nations would be required to remove their bases. The one-quarter piece of Antarctica as defined above would come under the control (although not necessarily sovereignty) of those six South American countries which had “open” meridians to the South Pole (i.e. north-south lines which did not touch or include any other nation’s South American territory). This approach would greatly diminish the sectors presently claimed by Argentina and Chile, would eliminate the British sector, and would give small, but significant, sectors to Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador (thanks to the Galapagos Islands). Brazil would have the largest sector (see map).
Frontage theory was never an official Brazilian government position, but it was widely accepted by Brazilian geopoliticians and others with an interest in Antarctica. As might be expected, it was strongly opposed by Argentine and Chilean geopoliticians, and welcomed by those in Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador, whose Antarctic perceptions and programs we will examine next.

**Other South American Nations:**

The Antarctic geopolitics and presence of Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador are much smaller than those in the three previously examined nations, and often rely on those Southern Cone countries with which they have good relations for help with their programs and bases in the Antarctic. Peru and Uruguay have small year-round stations, while Ecuador has only supported a summer-only station so far. Thus, in a sort of balance of power notion as applied to Antarctica, and which has been called a pattern of “perpendicular antagonisms and diagonal alliances”\(^{\text{xviii}}\), we can see the following geopolitical and diplomatic patterns:

**Ecuador**, which historically has had poor relations with Peru, but good ones with Chile, has depended on Chile for support in their Antarctic programs.

**Peru**, which likewise has had strains (and a 19\(^{\text{th}}\) Century war) with Chile and with Ecuador (a long-running territorial dispute in the Amazon) has good relations with Argentina, which has helped her establish an Antarctic base.

**Uruguay**, as the classic buffer state between Argentina and Brazil, has been careful not to irritate either of its powerful neighbors over Antarctic issues.

These three nations are keenly aware of the Brazilian frontage theory, but geopoliticians generally prefer to call it the “sector theory” to avoid giving too much credit to the Brazilians.
Geopolitical thinking in these three countries is not as well developed or manifested as in Argentina, Chile and Brazil, so there is relatively little media output or attempts at national consciousness-raising\textsuperscript{xix}.

Even some countries with no segments stemming from the “Frontage” theory, have expressed interest in Antarctica, and have sent a few of their citizens (usually military officers or civil servants) to Antarctica via ships of the nations which have permanent Antarctic stations. These nations have included Cuba, and Venezuela under the Hugo Chávez regime\textsuperscript{xx}

**Recent Developments**

In terms of our geopolitical considerations, there are grounds for optimism and pessimism in Antarctica.

On the positive side, Antarctica is the largest and perhaps the first “zone of peace” and demilitarized/denuclearized region in the world. There have been no armed confrontations since the Antarctic Treaty, which prohibits military operations, took effect in 1961. One excellent example of the demilitarized nature of Antarctica occurred during the 1982 Anglo-Argentine conflict, which began and ended close to Antarctica on the South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. These two Islands, which experienced minor combat operations, are outside the Treaty area. In contrast, there was no armed confrontation in the South Orkney Islands, which are just inside the Treaty’s coverage and which have both a British and an Argentine research station. There seems to be a strong spirit of cooperation in the field, as exemplified by the proposed joint Argentine-Chilean expedition to the South Pole. Additional Latin American nations have signed the Treaty (Cuba, Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela, for a total of 43 nations), although there is little likelihood that their Antarctic presence will be more than the occasional visit to an existing station. The “mother country” of Spain has taken a more active
role in Antarctica under the rubric of an “Ibero-American Antarctica” and has established a permanent station. There have been no new claims (prohibited to signatories of the Antarctic Treaty), and the 1991 benchmark, which could have permitted modifications and withdrawals from the Treaty, passed without any change, even though some nations have expressed dissatisfaction with the Treaty.

On the negative side there has been concern that the delicate ecological balance in Antarctica may be suffering under the effects of global warming which are apparently causing a drop in populations of certain species, such as penguins. The “hole” in the protective layer over Antarctica continues to be problematic, especially for Argentina and Chile, which have the two cities in the world which are closest to the “hole”. Likewise, tourism is seen as something of a double-edged sword: it can create “ambassadors” for Antarctica, but the number of tourists, which the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat estimates will be around 46,000 in the 2007/08 season, is probably exceeding the safe carrying capacity of the relatively few Antarctic sites favored by wildlife, the scientists and the tourists. Any ecological assessment must also include the danger of major damage to the environment and the many species because of oil spills. The 1991 Madrid moratorium on mining is another positive step which will prohibit mining for 50 years, although the pessimists argue that if something really valuable and needed such as oil is found, then countries, perhaps led by an non-Treaty nation, or trans-national corporations will find a hole in the Treaty which will allow them to exploit the resource.

The increased number of tourists traveling in ships not designed for the Antarctic Ice, even in summer, raises the possibility of accidents with dire consequences for the tourists as well as the environment. In the past few years there have been several cases of ships in trouble requiring assistance from either Chilean or Argentine ice-hardened ships and ice-breakers.
designed for the environment: in June 2002 a German transport, which was carrying Russian scientists, got stuck in the ice and had to be rescued by helicopters from South Africa, assisted by an Argentine Navy ice-breaker. A few months later the cruise ship Clipper Adventurer had to be rescued by Chileans after grounding. The tourism issue received a dramatic boost with the sinking of the first Antarctic tourist cruiser, MS Explorer, in November 2007. A Chilean naval icebreaker was among the first ships to reach the scene, and Argentine authorities coordinated rescue efforts. The value of Antarctic propinquity was hailed by both countries.

Recently there was some squabbling over the creation and location of a permanent Secretariat for the Antarctic Treaty System, which up to 2004 had no such office to provide continuity and logistical support. The United Kingdom and Argentina were the two strongest contenders for the site, although Chile argued that it should host the site because of its Antarctic claim. The issue was settled in 2004 when agreement was reached to establish the Secretariat in Buenos Aires.

The old issue of Antarctic sovereignty was revived in 2007 when the United Kingdom made a claim of approximately 400,000 square miles of Antarctic seabed. The British claim was possibly a reaction to the Russian claim to substantial areas of Arctic seabed. In any case the Chileans stated that the British move would not threaten their own Antarctic claim, and Argentina quickly made its own claim to the United Nations of an area approximately equal to that of the UK; it covered the seabeds surrounding the Falkland or Malvinas Islands, as well as the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. All three of these islands have been the subject of Argentine-British rivalry which led them to War in 1982.
Conclusion

Despite the noticeable decline in South American geopolitical writings in the last decade, which presumably is due to the election of civilian governments to replace authoritarian military regimes, geopolitical thinking and the dissemination of those ideas via the schools, media, postage stamps, books and articles continues to be significant, especially in two countries with key roles in the dynamics of Antarctic politics: Argentina and Chile, followed by Brazil. The last two decades have seen the replacement of geopolitics by “geo-economics”, as South American nations experiment with free-market economies. Debate on MERCOSUR, NAFTA, and the FTAA seems far more important than squabbling over the limits of one’s claimed Antarctic territory, which is very likely to continue under the Antarctic Treaty regime where claims are frozen and the continent becomes increasingly internationalized.

Ecological concerns and the possibility of an international “Antarctic Environmental Protection Agency” under the aegis of a permanent Antarctic Treaty Secretariat would seem to be able to overcome the old geopolitical and geostrategic ideas which defined much of southern South America’s approaches to Antarctica.

But regardless of the eventual outcome of major Antarctic issues, geopolitical thinking in the Southern Cone nations, closely tied to nationalism and chauvinistic patriotism, will continue to influence Antarctic policies and activities of these nations, and deserves consideration for this reason.

References

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