Defending polar empire: opposition to India's proposal to raise the 'Antarctic Question' at the United Nations in 1956

Adrian Howkins
Department of History, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station B7000, Austin, Texas 78712-0220, USA

Received October 2006

ABSTRACT. This paper examines the international response to India's 1956 proposal to raise the 'Antarctic Question' at the United Nations. It focuses in particular on the uneasy alliance that developed between the British Commonwealth and Latin America in opposition to the Indian proposal. Although Great Britain, Argentina, and Chile were bitterly disputing the sovereignty of the Antarctic Peninsula region, they shared a common desire to keep the southern continent off the agenda of the United Nations. This ability to work together for common goals, despite their differences, set an important precedent for the Antarctic Treaty that would be signed in 1959. In this way, opposition to the Indian proposal, more than the proposal itself, played an important role in the history of Antarctica in the 1950s. Latin American opposition to the proposal helped to fragment any 'anti-imperial' coalition that might have developed in Antarctica. This fragmentation helps us to place the Antarctic Treaty System into the framework of post-colonial studies.

Contents

Introduction

In February 1956, the Indian Delegation to the United Nations proposed that the 'Antarctic Question' should be discussed at the eleventh General Assembly, hinting that they favoured some form of trusteeship for the southern continent (United Nations 1956a). Under the influence of Krishna Menon, India's leading figure at the United Nations, the Indians suggested that claims to national sovereignty in Antarctica represented outdated vestiges of European colonialism (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956a). They expressed concern at the political consequences of the continuing sovereignty dispute between Great Britain, Argentina, and Chile in the Antarctic Peninsula region, and they worried more generally that cold war rivalries might spread southwards. In particular, the Indians raised fears that nuclear weapon testing in Antarctica could adversely disrupt global atmospheric systems and stop the monsoon.

The Indian proposal was severely criticised by the seven countries with territorial claims to the continent: Great Britain, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, France, and Norway. These countries feared that a United Nations resolution would be hostile to their claims, and some also worried that an unfortunate precedent would be set by submitting sovereign territories to United Nations control. In contrast, the United States and the Soviet Union, neither of which were claimants, but both of which reserved their rights in the whole of Antarctica, showed some sympathy for the Indian proposal. The two superpowers felt that some form of trusteeship could offer a workable political future for Antarctica. Countries with less interest in the southern continent generally remained neutral towards the question, but many, particularly those in the nascent non-aligned movement (NAM), were keen to see the issue discussed at the United Nations. The Indian proposal brought into stark focus competing visions for the political future of Antarctica. The involvement of the United Nations held out the prospect of a genuine 'internationalisation' of the Antarctic continent, as opposed to the *status quo* of individual sovereignty claims or some form of 'condominium' between claimants. Although Great Britain, Argentina, and Chile bitterly disputed the ownership of the Antarctica Peninsula, none of them favoured absolute internationalisation, and they shared a common interest in keeping Antarctica off the United Nation's agenda.

Historians of Antarctica during this period often focus on preparations for the International Geophysical Year (IGY), and tend to pay only cursory attention to the Indian proposal to raise the Antarctic question at the United Nations (Lewis 1965; Auburn 1982). Authors who have considered the episode in more detail see the proposal as an important idea, which, although it went unfulfilled, offered a model for the way Antarctica could be internationalised (Chaturvedi 1990: 72; Klotz 1990: 30–31). In the early 1980's, when the issue was finally raised at the United Nations, the 1956 Indian proposal provided an obvious antecedent. Such idealism in the historiography reflects the way Indians at the time saw their proposal, which was based as much on the 'third way' ideology of the developing NAM as on any intrinsic interest in the Antarctic continent. By focusing on the opposition to the Indian proposal, rather than the proposal itself, this paper seeks to go beyond the idea that India's proposal was a nice idea that did not happen, and suggest that the episode did in fact have a tangible impact upon

the history of Antarctica in the second half of the 1950s. The unlikely alliance that developed between the 'Old Commonwealth' and Latin America in opposition to the Indian proposal revealed that the disputing parties could work together for a common cause. In this way, opposition to the Indian proposal, more than the proposal itself, helped to lay the foundations for the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, in which the twelve signatories 'suspended' their differences in order to focus upon what they had in common. This argument is in keeping with accounts of the origins of the Antarctic Treaty that stress negative as well as positive forces (Beck 1986; Dodds 2002). The approach also contributes to opening up Antarctica to studies from within a post-colonial framework (Dodds 2006). Latin American opposition to the Indian proposal fragmented a potential anti-imperial alliance in Antarctica. Argentina and Chile, both of which had initially presented their claims to Antarctica in anti-imperialist language, were co-opted into the post-colonial project of the Antarctic Treaty System, leaving other 'third world' nations firmly on the outside (Howkins 2006).

Antarctica in the mid 1950s

The 1950s proved to be a critical decade in the history of Antarctica, both in terms of politics and science. At the time, nobody knew what the future of the continent would hold. India's proposal to raise the 'Antarctic Question' at the United Nations responded to three inter-related issues that dominated the politics of Antarctica in the mid-1950s: the Anglo-Argentine-Chilean sovereignty dispute in the Antarctic Peninsula, growing super-power rivalry, and rapidly advancing scientific research. Until 1956, the Indians themselves had minimal contact with the science and politics of the southern continent (Chaturvedi 1990). Its proposal had more to do with ideology than with any intrinsic interest in Antarctica: in 1947, India had gained political independence from Great Britain, and it remained fiercely opposed to colonialism in all its forms. The initial Indian proposal to the United Nations suggested that sovereignty claims to Antarctica were part of an outdated politics of colonialism, and that the Cold War should be kept out of Antarctica. Implicitly, the Indians also recognized that Antarctic science was not politically neutral, and they resented the exclusivity associated with the International Geophysical Year in Antarctica.

By the mid-1950s, seven nations claimed various parts of Antarctica. New Zealand, France, Australia and Norway asserted uncontested, but generally unrecognised, sovereignty claims over large sections of the Antarctic continent. In the Antarctic Peninsula, directly to the south of South America, the claims of Great Britain, Argentina, and Chile overlapped substantially. Since World War II, the three countries had actively contested the sovereignty of this region. Britain's formal claims to the 'Falkland Islands Dependencies' dated back to 1908, and rested, among other factors, on self-proclaimed scientific authority and the assumption that Britain was the country most capable of regulating the Antarctic whaling industry (Clifford 1948). Contrary to these claims, Argentina and Chile both argued that their rights to Antarctica dated back to the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, through which the Spanish Empire had been granted dominion over most of the Western Hemisphere, theoretically stretching from pole to pole. They added that since the Antarctica Peninsula was a geological continuation of the Andes mountains, this was further proof that the region belonged to them. In 1953, the three countries came close to war, after Britain forcibly removed Argentine and Chilean huts from Deception Island (*Diario de las Americas* 1956). In 1955, Britain had unilaterally taken the case to the International Court of Justice, ostensibly preferring traditional legal arbitration in favour of an individual sovereignty claim, rather than any form of international agreement (Antarctica Cases 1956). Both South American countries rejected this arbitration, claiming that the Antarctic Peninsula was part of their national territory, and therefore a domestic question. This left the question of sovereignty in the Antarctic Peninsula very much unresolved.

The 1950s witnessed escalating cold war tensions throughout the world, and Antarctica was not exempt. The United States and the Soviet Union both refused to recognise any claims to sovereignty in Antarctica, while reserving their rights to make their own claims to any part of the continent. Of the two superpowers, the United States had shown greater interest in Antarctica during the twentieth century (Klotz 1990). However, United States policy towards Antarctica had been hampered by internal indecision and by the sovereignty claims of 'friendly' nations (Moore 1999; Templeton 2000). One central element in United States' policy, despite this indecision, was that the Soviet Union should be kept out of Antarctica. This desire was shared by the seven claimant nations, all of which lined up broadly on the 'Free World' side of the cold war. Since the second half of the 1940s, Russian whaling vessels had been operating in Antarctic waters, Soviet scientists were beginning to show an interest in the South Pole to complement their traditional interest in the North Pole, and official organisations and government departments had made various statements claiming Soviet rights in Antarctica based on the early nineteenth century expeditions of Bellingshausen (Auburn 1982: 78). In terms of cold war strategy, Antarctica remained very much an unknown quantity. Interest rested on the possibility of finding strategically useful mineral resources and in denying any potential geopolitical benefits to military rivals. Antarctica also seemed to offer a potential test-ground for nuclear weapons tests that were becoming all too common in the tense international atmosphere of the 1950s.

Running alongside the growing political interest in Antarctica in the mid-1950s, scientists were becoming increasingly involved in the continent. In 1950, British and north American geophysicists meeting in Maryland had proposed a world-wide International Geophysical Year to

be held in 1957–1958 (Lewis 1965: 62–63). The idea had rapidly gained governmental support, particularly in the United States. At a meeting in Paris in July 1955, twelve nations, the seven claimant nations, the two super-powers, Belgium, Japan, and South Africa stated their intention to participate in IGY research in Antarctica. Most dramatically, the Soviet Union announced its intention of establishing a base at the South Pole, which the United States had already staked out for itself (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 82). After a moment of tension, the Soviet representative creatively changed his country's plans, and declared that the Russians would build a base at the 'pole of relative inaccessibility', the most difficult place on the continent to get to. The twelve nations settled upon a 'gentleman's agreement', which stated that nothing done during the IGY would affect the sovereignty claims made to Antarctica. Nevertheless, the IGY was highly political. The British Commonwealth countries, for example, announced their intention to complete the journey that Ernest Shackleton had famously set out upon in 1914, and traverse the entire continent (Dodds 2005). This was an attempt to infuse Commonwealth sovereignty claims to Antarctica with the spirit of the heroic era. More generally, the western countries worried about the penetration of the continent by the Soviet Union, and the possibility that the communists would establish submarine bases in Antarctica (Central Intelligence Agency 1957). In late 1955, the United States initiated conversations with its Commonwealth allies about the best way of dealing with the Soviet Union in Antarctica (Jasper 1956a). It was in these tense and rapidly developing circumstances that India made its proposal that Antarctica should be discussed at the United Nations.

The Indian proposal

In April 1955, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, made a famous speech at the Asian-African Conference held at Bandung, Indonesia. In this speech he set out his principles of anti-colonialism and non-alignment, before explaining his fears of nuclear weapons:

> Today in the world, I do submit, not only because of the presence of these two colossuses but also because of the coming atomic and hydrogen-bomb age, the whole concept of war, of peace, of politics, has changed. We are thinking and acting in terms of a past age. No matter what generals and soldiers learned in the past, it is useless in this atomic age. They do not understand its implications or its use . . . The difficulty is that while Governments want to refrain from war, something suddenly happens and there is war and utter ruin. There is another thing: because of the present position in the world there can be aggression. If there is aggression anywhere in the world, it is bound to result in world war. It does not matter where the aggression is. If one commits the aggression there is war. (Kahin 1956, 69–70)

Although Nehru's speech made no mention of Antarctica, its basic assumptions, that war could break out anywhere, and that nuclear weapons could devastate the world, would have important implications for India's attitude towards the southern continent.

The Bandung conference also helped to lay the foundations for the establishment of the non-aligned movement (NAM), a group of 'Third World' nations that challenged colonialism and sought to remain neutral in the cold war. Latin American countries had not been invited to attend the meeting. During the early years of the NAM, Latin America retained an arms length relationship with the 'Third World' because of a perceived closeness with the United States (Atkins 1977: 378). Nevertheless, the Latin American bloc at the United Nations had a history of supporting the discussion of anti-colonial causes, and countries such as Argentina and Chile, both of which, like the rest of Latin America, had historical experiences of colonialism, were certainly potential allies of the NAM. Juan Domingo Perón, President of Argentina from 1946 to 1955, had built his Justicialista political philosophy upon his own concept of a 'third way' between east and west (Mundo Peronista 1954). For their part, the Indians viewed the NAM and its central 'Panch Shila' philosophy of non-aggression and peaceful co-existence, as a movement open to all (Lok Sabha 1956). As the NAM grew, the countries of Latin America were well placed to join the movement.

On 17 February 1956, less than a year after the Bandung Conference, Arthur Lall, India's permanent representative to the United Nations, circulated a letter to the Secretary General asking for the question of Antarctica to be raised as an item on the provisional agenda of the eleventh session of the General Assembly (United Nations 1956a). The initial proposal contained no explanatory memorandum, but at a meeting with the other Commonwealth delegations in New York, Lall said that he thought some form of United Nations Trusteeship was a possibility (United Kingdom Delegation to the United Nations 1956b). The Indian representative told his Commonwealth colleagues that the current interest in Antarctica generated by the IGY was one reason for the proposed UN debate, another was the question of the various territorial claims that existed there.

The leading figure behind the Indian proposal was Krishna Menon, a veteran anti-colonial campaigner who had been at the Bandung Conference and was continually looking for new ways to challenge European imperialism (Arora 1998). Until recently, Menon had served as India's permanent representative to the United Nations, and at the General Assembly meeting to be held in November he would be the head of the Indian delegation. Educated in India and England, Krishna Menon had been a staunch member of the British Labour Party's left wing, with close associations with the British Parliamentary Group for World Government (Whitehead 1956). He had played a leading role in championing Indian independence and had been rewarded by Nehru with a leading position in

India's foreign service. Menon was known as a skilled diplomat, but somebody who was difficult to work with, a reputation which his proposal to raise the Antarctic question at the United Nations did nothing to diminish. The British Commonwealth Relations Office suggested that Menon was turning to the Antarctic question at this time for lack of any other cause to champion at the United Nations (Man 1956a). 'This is quite a good selection,' one official wryly noted, 'since it will cause the maximum amount of irritation to the largest possible number of countries' (Jasper 1956a). The Foreign Office branded Menon and his colleagues 'professional mischief makers' (Pink 1956). The Antarctic problem did indeed offer Indian diplomats an excellent opportunity to flex their ideological muscles and press for a 'democratic' solution that would be for the good of all peoples rather than just a select few. Such 'mischief making' explicitly challenged the existing international political order that was still, in Indian eyes, riddled with colonial assumptions and hierarchies.

The British government privately fumed at the Indian proposal to raise the Antarctic question at the United Nations. 'This raises all sorts of problems' was the first response of Morgan Man, the Foreign Office official with responsibility for Antarctic affairs (Man 1956a). A day later he added that a debate in the United Nations 'might cause us all a lot of trouble and embarrassment and give the Russians a splendid opportunity for mischief making' (Man 1956b). A minute by I. F. S. Vincent set out Britain's main objections to the Indian proposal:

(i) HMG have steadfastly refused for several years to accept the idea that territories over which they have sovereign rights should be submitted to UN control.

(ii) Important discussions are going on with the United States and interested Commonwealth Governments which we hope will lead to a territorial settlement in Antarctica. These negotiations may, however, take several months, and we should not want them interrupted.

(iii) With increasing exploration of the Antarctic continent, new strategic possibilities and dangers are becoming apparent. Bases on the continent could threaten Atlantic and Pacific sea routes and could affect the stability of for example Argentine or South African defence. Mr. Dulles has also referred to the possibility of 'weather control.'

(iv) The one point on which all territorial claimants are agreed is that Russia must be kept out (Vincent 1956)

Vincent suggested that action should be taken to persuade India not to ventilate the subject at the United Nations. At the same time he saw a need 'to educate public opinion as to the reasons for His Majesty's Government's unwillingness to entertain the trusteeship proposal' (Vincent 1956a). Man added that it should be pointed out to the Indians that the idea of UN Trusteeship in Antarctica was quite inappropriate, since the 'whole object of trusteeship is to safeguard interests of local inhabitants who do not exist in this case.'

Perhaps most annoying to Britain, Australia, and New Zealand was the fact that India had not consulted its Commonwealth partners before writing to the United Nations (Jasper 1956a). At a meeting of Commonwealth delegations at the United Nations four days after the initial Indian proposal, representatives of Britain, Australia, and New Zealand expressed their displeasure that the Indians had made such a move without prior discussion (Commonwealth Relations Office 1956a). The British delegation reported to London: 'My Australian and New Zealand colleagues with whom I briefly discussed the position after the meeting felt as I did that the ventilation in the United Nations of any ideas such as a possible trusteeship over Antarctica might be seriously at variance with the objectives of the discussions proceeding between the Americans, ourselves, and the Old Commonwealth' (United Kingdom Delegation to United Nations 1956b). However, the members of the self-proclaimed 'Old Commonwealth' found themselves constrained in the extent to which they could oppose India. Diplomats pointed out that Britain was reliant upon support from India in other areas of the world, particularly in Cyprus, where a violent Greek Cypriot uprising had recently erupted, demanding independence and union with Greece, and suggested that open opposition to the inscription of the item on the agenda of the eleventh General Assembly would cause unnecessary friction. The Commonwealth Relations Office advised that Britain should not react too sharply, but 'should concentrate on lining up those interested' (Jasper 1956a). The interested countries included both Argentina and Chile.

The reactions of Argentina and Chile, the two claimant nations in dispute with Great Britain, were equally indignant. Shortly after the Indian proposal, *La Unión* newspaper of Valparaiso declared on behalf of the Chilean Government that 'Chile would not accept the Indian proposition' (*La Unión* 1956). In late February the Chilean delegation in New Delhi officially protested against the Indian move, on the grounds that it was 'a matter within the field of Chilean sovereignty' (United Kingdom High Commissioner in India 1956a). The Argentine government was slower to respond, but it soon became clear that the two South American countries would take a united stand at the United Nations to oppose the discussion of Antarctica (British Embassy Buenos Aires 1956a). At a meeting of the Latin American caucus held on 29 February 1956, the delegates of Argentina and Chile requested full support for opposition to the inscription of the Indian item onto the General Assembly's agenda (United States Delegation to United Nations 1956a). The Nicaraguan representative reported to the United States that he thought 'almost all Latin American delegations would back up the Chilean-Argentine request.' However, the Mexican delegate spoke for several members of the caucus when he stated that, while he felt sympathy with

the South Americans' request, it had been Mexico's traditional policy that 'any country had the right to inscribe any item' (United States Delegation to United Nations 1956a). Therefore, despite the widespread support, Chile and Argentina were not guaranteed the backing of all the members of the Latin American bloc.

In comparison to the British Commonwealth and South American reactions, the United States responded more ambivalently to the Indian proposal (Operations Coordinating Board 1956). This ambivalence reflected the ambiguity of its policy towards Antarctica as a whole (Moore 2001). US officials dismissed as 'mere speculation' a British suggestion that the Soviet Union was behind the Indian proposal (Vincent 1956; Merchant 1956). Instead the north Americans took the Indian proposal at face value and saw it as offering both advantages and disadvantages to US policy in Antarctica. On the one hand, an open debate in the United Nations threatened to circumscribe the United States' much vaunted freedom of action in the Antarctic, and conflicted with the spirit, if not the letter of the United States' latest policy statement on Antarctica (National Security Council 1954). An Operations Coordinating Board memorandum referred ominously to the possibility that Antarctica 'might later be a most valuable site for manufacturing and processing of a dangerous nature,' adding that 'internationalization could preclude this type of activity' (Operations Coordinating Board 1956). Discussion at the United Nations also presented the danger that the dispute between Britain, Argentina, and Chile, three important Cold War allies, would get a very public airing to the benefit of communist propaganda. On the other hand, the possibility of some form of United Nations trusteeship for Antarctica offered the United States a way out of the political impasse in Antarctica, both domestic and international. Domestically, a favourable United Nations resolution on the internationalisation of Antarctica offered a way of overcoming differences of opinion between the State Department and Defense Departments by presenting both with a fait accompli. Internationally, the United Nations offered a way of forcing its disputing allies to resolve their differences while retaining some form of US influence in the region. Therefore, despite the potential dangers raised by debate at the United Nations, the United States had very little incentive to upset India by openly opposing inscription.

During the second half of the 1950s, the Soviet Union's policy centred upon increasing its presence in Antarctica while making sure that it was not shut out of the continent's political decision making process (Central Intelligence Agency 1957). At the same time it hoped to profit from its rivals' disputes in the region. The Soviet Union therefore had nothing to lose and much to gain through an international debate of the 'Antarctic Question.' Although the Soviets did little actively to promote the Indian proposal, the opponents to inscription took it for granted that the eastern bloc would vote in favour of a United Nations debate (Ortega 1956). So long as its own interests in the region were not threatened, the Soviet Union was happy to sit back and watch its cold war rivals squabble.

As claimants, France and Norway were the only other countries with a direct interest in the Indian Proposal. The French government took a position of quiet opposition, part of a solid western European bloc that the British believed they could count on to oppose inscription. The government of Norway was more vocal in raising its objections, and the Norwegians worked hard to form a united Scandinavian bloc to oppose inscription (British Embassy Oslo 1956). They hoped that such an approach 'would start a snowball of opposition' which would make the Indians drop the item. Few other countries showed much interest in the Indian proposal. British diplomats at the United Nations calculated that most governments would follow their traditional voting patterns, with the Afro-Asian countries and the eastern bloc firmly behind the Indians and with most other countries willing to follow any lead taken by the Western powers. If it were to come to a straight vote on inscription the initial odds favoured India, especially if the United States remained non-committal (United Kingdom Delegation to United Nations 1956c).

An unlikely alliance

The Indians appear to have been genuinely shocked at the level of hostility generated by their proposal, particularly among the Latin Americans. They soon abandoned the idea of United Nations trusteeship for Antarctica and replaced it with a vague notion of 'peaceful utilization' (United Nations 1956b; United Kingdom High Commissioner in India 1956b). In an attempt to steer the item away from the vexed question of sovereignty, the Indians highlighted their fears of nuclear weapons testing in Antarctica as the main reason for wanting to raise the question of Antarctica at the United Nations. During a 'Questions and Answers' session in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru stated that 'broadly speaking . . . we are not challenging anybody's rights there,' adding:

> But as it has become important and more especially because of the possible experimentation of atomic weapons and the like, we feel that the matter should be considered by the United Nations and not be left in a slightly chaotic stage with various countries trying to grab it (Lok Sabha 1956: 2211–2214).

The Indians feared that such tests would alter the climate of the southern hemisphere to the detriment of India (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956d; DePalma 1956a). The Indians suggested that even if the British themselves had no intention of testing hydrogen bombs, the Commonwealth countries would not stand in the way of the United States conducting tests (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956a).

When drafts of the Indian explanatory memorandum were finally circulated, the Indians made a veiled

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reference to nuclear testing, reflecting Nehru's stance at the Bandung conference and in the Lok Sabha:

> Modern science is likely to reveal many possibilities for the peaceful utilization of a region hitherto regarded as unproductive. At the same time the influence of the Antarctica [sic] on the climatic and related conditions throughout the world, while obviously considerable, requires further study. Any disturbance of the equilibrium of natural forces in this area might lead to incalculable consequences for the world as a whole involving the animal and plant life. In view of these facts and bearing in mind the size of the area, its international importance and the growing interest in it, the Government of India consider that in order to strengthen universal peace it would be appropriate and timely for all nations to agree and to affirm that the area will be utilized entirely for peaceful purposes and for the general welfare. All nations should agree further to harmonize their actions to this end and to ensure also that no activities in the Antarctica will adversely affect climatic and other natural conditions. (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956e).

This represented a subtle challenge to one of the British Empire's justifications for its sovereignty in Antarctica: environmental stewardship through good management (Clifford 1948). The Indians implied that rather than safeguarding the natural environment for the good of humanity, existing political arrangements in the southern continent in fact threatened to adversely disrupt global climate systems. Fears of nuclear testing in Antarctica were not without precedent. In February 1955, an article in the Soviet *Pravda* newspaper had suggested that the United States was interested in Antarctica for the purpose of testing nuclear weapons (United States Embassy Moscow 1955). By March these rumours had spread to Santiago, where the left-leaning press published articles that claimed that Great Britain wanted to test a hydrogen bomb in Antarctica (United States Embassy Santiago 1955; Ortega 1956). Although these reports appear to have been malicious rumour, some British officials did indeed consider the possibility that Antarctica might be useful for Atomic weapons testing, and they were not prepared to make any commitments to the Indians for fear of further limiting areas available for nuclear tests (Murray 1956; Bendall 1956).

Britain responded to India's challenge to its scientific legitimacy by attempting to re-assert its authority, while at the same time trying to undermine Indian scientific credentials. Despite the relative lack of scientific knowledge about Antarctica, the British took a classic colonialist position in asserting their place at the top of the scientific order of things. The Foreign Office referred Indian fears about nuclear testing in Antarctica to the Atomic Energy Authority (Thompson 1956). A year earlier, British nuclear scientists had considered the question of Soviet nuclear testing in the Arctic. Noting that it would take at least 100 000 tons of uranium 235 to melt all the ice at the North Pole, and that a single atomic bomb contains only a 'matter of kilograms of this material,' the nuclear specialists responded that Indian fears about blowing off the Antarctic icecap were 'scientific rubbish.' In writing to the UN Department to inform them of the scientific conclusions, a Foreign Office official claimed 'there is, of course, much more ice at the North Pole than at the South.' Less than two years later, IGY research would reveal that this British assertion was itself 'scientific rubbish': there is in fact much more ice in Antarctica than in the Arctic. Confident in their own scientific misconceptions, however, British officials challenged India's lack of knowledge of Antarctica, and implied they should respect traditional knowledge hierarchies (United Kingdom High Commissioner in India 1956b). The British also claimed that India's proposal to discuss Antarctica at the United Nations threatened to undermine the already high level of international cooperation already going on as part of the preparations for the IGY. If India really wanted to contribute positively to the future of the southern continent, British officials insinuated, they should send scientists to Antarctica, at no small expense, to participate in the international research programme. In retrospect, India's fears about nuclear testing in Antarctica were justified. Neither Britain nor the United States was willing to rule out such tests in Antarctica. Given what we now know about Antarctica's centrality in global atmospheric systems, such tests might indeed have had severe consequences.

Even if the British believed Indian fears to be fantastical, the Indian proposal to raise the Antarctic question at the United Nations still represented a real threat to Britain's position in Antarctica, as well as that of Australia and New Zealand. Commonwealth officials toyed with face saving ways of getting the Indians to withdraw their proposal or to make it less potentially damaging to their sovereignty claims. One suggestion was to constrain the debate to a discussion of United Nations funding for the World Meteorological Organisation's IGY data collection centre (Jockel 1956). But despite India's newfound interest in Antarctica's weather and climate, this idea came to nothing. Attempts to convince India that the United States was not planning nuclear tests in Antarctica similarly failed to convince India to withdraw its proposal (United States Embassy Canberra 1956). At the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting, in June and July 1956, attempts were made to persuade Nehru that, in relation to the Anglo-Argentine-Chilean tensions in the Antarctic Peninsula, 'there has seldom been a more peaceful dispute between nations than this one' (Commonwealth Relations Office 1956b). But Nehru was unreceptive to this argument and had 'nothing to say' when Selwyn Lloyd, the British Foreign Minister, raised the Antarctic question with him (Jasper 1956b).

It quickly became apparent that the only way to get the Indians to back down would be to suggest that they might be defeated in a vote on inscription. Commonwealth opposition to India was made more difficult by their reliance on Indian support in other areas of the world,

particularly in Cyprus, and in the possible need 'to sabotage quietly any efforts [the communists] make to secure an undesirably large expansion of the Security Council and E.C.O.S.O.C [the Economic and Social Council]' (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956f). Several departments within the Foreign Office advised against opposing the Indians at all, but others, led by the United Nations department, argued that the wisest course would be to attempt to block inscription (United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations 1956g). Given this precarious diplomatic balancing act, British officials thought that it would be best to rely upon Argentina and Chile to take the lead in opposing the Indian proposal, despite being rivals in the Antarctic Peninsula. As the British Embassy in Buenos Aires pointed out, such cooperation was only possible due to the overthrow of Perón in the previous year, and the consequent scaling back of Argentina's antagonistic foreign policy, especially in Antarctica (British Embassy Buenos Aires 1956b). The British representative at the United Nations stressed that it would be impossible to defeat inscription without the support from the Latin American caucus (United Kingdom Delegation to United Nations 1956g). At a meeting held at the Commonwealth Relations Office on 24 August, 1956, there was general agreement that 'the Latin Americans should if possible be encouraged to lead the opposition to inscription in New York,' with the added consideration that 'it was clearly wisest that the UK should not play a prominent part' (Commonwealth Relations Office 1956c).

Despite Indian claims that Argentina and Chile were softening their attitude towards a United Nations debate on Antarctica, the two governments in fact continued to oppose the proposal (Man 1956c). In their attempt to defeat the inscription of the item, Chile and Argentina were happy to cooperate, at a distance, with the Commonwealth countries (Man 1956d). Alongside their appeal to the Latin American caucus, the Argentines and Chileans also lobbied the Indian government directly. They suggested that the Indian item was endangering a vague notion of 'third world' solidarity, by forcing the Latin Americans to diverge from their traditional policy of voting for the inscription of any debate. This turned one of India's principal arguments on its head. The most colourful example of Latin American Antarctic diplomacy came in the person of Miguel Serrano, the Chilean representative in India. A poet and a mystic, Serrano had travelled to Antarctica on board the first official Chilean expedition to the southern continent in 1947. He was an unrepentant Nazi sympathiser who fostered the myth that Adolf Hitler had fled from Germany in 1945 to a secret bunker in Antarctica, which had been established by the German Antarctic expedition of 1938–1939 (Serrano 1948; Summerhayes and Beeching 2007). In India, he enjoyed a good relationship with Nehru, and, some suggested, an inappropriately good relationship with Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 86). Serrano attempted to use these connections to influence the Indian Prime Minister against inscription of the Antarctic item.

For all Miguel Serrano's personal diplomacy and direct appeals to the Indian government, what really mattered was the threat that the Latin American caucus, together with the Old Commonwealth and western Europe would raise enough votes to defeat a vote on inscription and thereby embarrass India. The Chileans and the Argentines both did their own lobbying and calculations in New York, and they realised that a vote on inscription would be a close contest (Ortega 1956). On 13 September, at a meeting of the Latin American caucus, Argentina and Chile 'argued violently' against inscription of the Indian item (United States Delegation to United Nations 1956b). The caucus agreed that its president, Ambassador Trujillo, from Ecuador, should approach Arthur Lall and advise him against pressing the matter. However, India's permanent representative failed to reply to the Latin Americans and two weeks later the caucus met again. This time they authorised Trujillo to tell Lall officially that the twenty Latin American countries would vote against inscription (United States Delegation at United Nations 1956c). For a moment, it appeared that this approach had convinced the Indians to drop their item, but then Trujillo over-played his hand. The Ecuadorian diplomat announced India's decision to the Latin American press, and this breach of confidence caused the Indians to renege on their promise to withdraw the 'Peaceful utilisation of Antarctica' item from the General Assembly's agenda.

Up until the last moment, the United States remained adamant that, while it saw 'no need for discussing Antarctica in the United Nations at this time,' it would not oppose inscription (DePalma 1956b). Referring to the 1956 Presidential elections, British officials guessed that 'no new President of the United States (whether Eisenhower or Stevenson) would not want to start off by offending India' (Man 1956e). However, the united Latin American bloc put considerable pressure on the United States to oppose inscription. The north Americans faced a stark choice between offending India and offending their Latin American neighbours. On 5 November, Ware Adams, the State Department's Director of United Nations Political and Security Affairs, wrote to the US Mission in New York informing them that official policy had been changed and that the United States would oppose inscription. The United Nations department had strongly recommended that the United States should support the Latin Americans 'on the grounds that we will be needing their support badly on other matters at this General Assembly.' The vote on inscription came at the height of the Suez Crisis, and at a point of pivotal east-west relations owing to the Hungarian uprising. The twenty votes of the Latin American bloc could be crucial for the United States in winning favourable resolutions on these important questions. Knowing that the United States vote would carry with it several non-committed countries, the Indians faced the real possibility of losing a vote on inscription. They decided therefore, as honourably as possible, to withdraw the item.

Conclusions

On 14 November 1956, at the organisational meeting of the eleventh General Assembly, Krishna Menon made a speech withdrawing India's proposal to debate Antarctica. The British delegation sent the official transcript to London with some satisfaction:

> In explanation Mr. Krishna Menon said that the Indian Delegation would be withdrawing the item in view of the heavy agenda with which the Assembly was faced as a result of the inscription of the emergency items on the Middle East and Hungary. Moreover, certain exploration and investigation was now taking place in Antarctica. Nevertheless the Indian Delegation still attached great importance to the item but did not think that it need to be considered at this session of the Assemby. Their decision to withdraw the item did not mean that they were abandoning it (United Nations Delegation to United Nations 1956h).

The obvious cause of this withdrawal was the United States decision to vote against inscription and the threat of defeat for India that this brought with it (Ramsbotham 1956). But the developing crises in Suez and Hungary also played a role. By November, the United Kingdom's High Commission in India reported Menon's 'almost total preoccupation' with the Suez Crisis (United Kingdom High Commissioner in India 1956c). Most of his attention was spent bringing the British down to size and attacking their 'colonial' intentions in Egypt. As opposed to the beginning of the year when the Antarctic item had first been proposed, Menon now had a question of pressing urgency to talk about at the United Nations.

Without opposition from both the British Commonwealth and the Latin American blocs, it is unlikely that the Indians would have withdrawn their proposal to raise the Antarctica question at the United Nations. The British, Australians, and New Zealanders could not have defeated inscription on their own, not least because they were wary of openly opposing the Indians. Opposition from the Latin American bloc proved to be the decisive factor against the Indian item: firstly because it destroyed the idea of 'third world unity' that the Indians hoped to foster, and secondly because the demands of pan-Americanism eventually forced the United States to oppose the proposition. But in terms of voting arithmetic, the Latin Americans could not have won on their own either. The tacit alliance between the British Commonwealth and Latin America, while distant, was acknowledged on both sides. The British strategy to oppose inscription explicitly involved 'letting others take the lead,' and they recognised the power of Argentine and Chilean opposition. Despite the bitter sovereignty dispute in the Antarctic Peninsula, Britain, Argentina and Chile proved that they could work together when their collective interests depended upon it.

By uniting with the British Commonwealth against the Indian proposal, Argentina and Chile set an important precedent. Although their dispute with Great Britain over possession of the Antarctic Peninsula had initially been framed in the language of anti-imperialism, in 1956 they were happy to side with 'imperialist' powers in order to defend their own national interests in Antarctica. Both Latin American nations were potential members of NAM, in which India was a leading member, but neither was willing to support India's desire for an open debate on Antarctica. This unwillingness to support the Indian proposal meant that there could be no unified 'anti-colonial' voice in Antarctic politics. Three years later, in 1959, Argentina and Chile joined with Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and seven other economically developed nations to sign the Antarctic Treaty. This acquiescence was somewhat reluctant: there was heated debate in both countries over whether the Treaty should be signed and, along with Australia, Argentina and Chile were the last countries to ratify it (Candioti 1960). Nevertheless, the participation of the two nations in the treaty adds greater urgency to calls for Antarctica to be examined from within the framework of post-colonial studies (Dodds 2006). Not only did the Antarctic Treaty establish an exclusive club which retained the 'imperial' influence of powers such as Britain and the United States, as many of its critics have claimed, but it came into being with the consent of potential opponents to such exclusivity. From being ardent anti-imperialists less than ten years earlier, Argentina and Chile were co-opted into an 'imperialist club', ostensibly to protect their national interests in Antarctica. This is the very essence of the critique made by many scholars of 'post colonialism' of the supposedly post-colonial world of the second half of the twentieth century.

The fact that the 'Antarctic Question' was not raised at the United Nations General Assembly in 1956 had other important implications for the future of Antarctica. It is difficult to imagine that the members of the United Nations would have allowed twelve countries to sign the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and form an 'exclusive club', if they had already had experience of debating Antarctica. More concretely, the fears and discord generated by the prospect of a United Nations debate led United States officials to rethink their indecisive Antarctic policy, and seek a resolution, on their own terms, as rapidly as possible. Over the next three years, this United States policy shift proved to be one of the major driving forces towards the Antarctic Treaty.

In 1958, India again considered raising the matter at the United Nations, possibly in an attempt to gain a place at the forthcoming twelve country Antarctic conference in Washington (Gajardo 1958). But by this stage negotiations towards a treaty were already underway, and the Indian proposal met with much less sympathy. India's ideas were not completely ignored in the Antarctic Treaty: for example, at the insistence of Argentina and other southern hemisphere countries, fears of nuclear testing led to the complete prohibition of nuclear explosions in Antarctica (Scilingo 1963). When the 'Antarctic Question' was finally raised in the United Nations in 1983, India's earlier attempts to inscribe Antarctica onto the agenda provided an obvious antecedent (Beck 1986: 289–295). By this stage India had recently sent expeditions to Antarctica

and joined the Antarctic Treaty system as a consultative member (Larus 1984; Chaturvedi 1990). The Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir led the opposition to the treaty. He met with resistance similar to that which Krishna Menon and India had earlier endured: branded a mischief maker and told that Malaysia knew nothing about the Antarctic 'reality'. The same arguments that had been made by colonial powers before the signature of the treaty continued to be used by the treaty parties to defend their interests in Antarctica. Opposition to India's proposal in 1956 not only helped to lay the foundations for the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, but it also set the tone for the future defence of the Antarctic Treaty system.

Acknowledgements

This article was written during the AHA National History Center's 'Decolonization Seminar' held in Washington D.C. in July 2006. The paper benefited enormously from the comments and suggestions of the seminar leaders and the other participants. I would like to thank the Mellon Foundation for their generous financial assistance. Various papers given at the SCAR History of Antarctic Science Conference held in Santiago, Chile in September 2006, proved useful for this article, and in particular a paper given by Mauricio Jara on a similar theme.

References

TNA. The National Archive, London (formerly the Public Record Office).

USNA. The United States National Archive, Washington D. C.

RR.EE. Archivo Historico. The Foreign Ministry Archive, Santiago, Chile.

Antarctica Cases. 1956. (United Kingdom v. Argentina; United Kingdom v. Chile) Orders of 16 March 1956: removal from the list. International Court of Justice: The Hague.

Arora, K.C. 1998. *V.K. Krishna Menon: a biography*. New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House.

Atkins, G.P. 1977. *Latin America in the international political system*. New York: The Free Press.

Auburn, F.M. 1982. *Antarctic law and politics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Beck, P. 1983. Securing the dominant place in the 'wan Antarctic sun' for the British Empire: the policy of extending British control over Antarctica. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 29(3): 448–461.

Bendall, D.V. 1956. Minute, 25 June 1956. TNA FO371/119836.

British Embassy Buenos Aires. 1956a. Letter to Foreign Office, 1 March 1956. TNA FO371/119835.

British Embassy Buenos Aires. 1956b. Letter to Foreign Office, 8 May 1956. TNA FO371/119829.

British Embassy Oslo. 1956. Letter to Foreign Office, 25 June 1956. TNA FO371/119836.

Candioti, A.M. 1960. *Nuestra Antártida no es tierra conquistada ni anexada. El Tratado Antártico no debe ratificarse*. Buenos Aires.

Central Intelligence Agency. 1957. An appraisal of Soviet plans to remain in the Antarctic after the IGY and of the reported establishment of a submarine base. CIA/RR–GR–145 28 February 1957. USNA.

Chaturvedi, S. 1990. *Dawning of Antarctica: a geopolitical analysis*. New Delhi: Segment Books.

Clifford, M. 1948. Radio broadcast to Falkland Islands, February 1948. Oxford: Rhodes House Library MISS. Brit Emp. s 517 4/1 'Falkland Islands 1946–1957: Clifford.'

Commonwealth Relations Office. 1956a. Letter to J.V. Rob (New Delhi), 1 March 1956. TNA, FO371/119835.

Commonwealth Relations Office. 1956b. Brief for the Secretary of State before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers meeting, June 1956. TNA FO371/119836.

Commonwealth Relations Office. 1956c. Record of meeting, 24 August 1956. TNA FO371/119838.

DePalma, S. 1956a. Memorandum of conversation with Lall, 5 March 1956. USNA 702.022/3–556.

DePalma, S. 1956b. Office memorandum, 9 August 1956. USNA 702.022/8–956.

Diario de las Americas. 1956. Chile y Argentina en pie de guerra contra los ingleses, 13 April 1956. RR.EE. Archivo Historico, Comunicaciones cambiadas con los EE.UU. de America, 1956.

Dodds, K. 2002. *Pink ice: Britain and the south Atlantic empire*. London: I.B. Taurus.

Dodds, K. 2006. Post-colonial Antarctica: an emerging engagement. *Polar Record* 42(220): 59–70.

Dodds, K. 2005. The great trek: New Zealand and the British/Commonwealth 1955–58 Trans-Antarctic Expedition. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33(1): 93–114.

Gajardo, E. 1958. Acta de la Sección Antártica. 14 October 1958. RR.EE. Archivo Historico, Departamento de Limites: Comisión Chilena Antártica, 1949–1956.

Howkins, A. 2006. Icy relations: the emergence of South American Antarctica during the Second World War. *Polar Record* 42 (221): 153–165.

Jasper, R. 1956a. Commonwealth Relations Office, 20 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.

Jasper, R. 1956b. Letter to P.H. Corner (New Zealand House), 6 July 1956. TNA FO371/119837.

Jockel, G. 1956. Letter to Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 10 April 1956. TNA, FO371/119836.

Kahin, G.M. 1956. *The Asian-African conference*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Klotz, F. 1990. *America on the ice: Antarctic policy issues*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press.

La Unión. 1956. Chile no acepta una proposición de la India sobre Antártica. 22 February 1956. (Reprinted in Leon, C., and M. Jara (editors). 2003. *Antártica testimonios periodisticos 1947–1957*. Valparaiso: Editorial Puntángeles: 265).

Larus, J. 1984. India claims a role in Antarctica. *Round Table* 289: 45–56.

Lewis, R. 1965. *A continent for science: the Antarctic adventure*. New York: Viking Press.

Lok Sabha. 1956. Lok Sabha debates. Part 1 – Questions and Answers. Vol. II 1956, 16 March to 16 April, 14 April 1956. New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Man, M. 1956a. Foreign Office minute, 20 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.

Man, M. 1956b. Letter to D.F. Muirhead (British Embassy, Washington), 21 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.

Man, M. 1956c. Minute, 11 May 1956. FO 371/119836.

Man, M. 1956d. Letter to R. Jasper, Commonwealth Relations Office, 1 May 1956. TNA FO371/119835.

Man, M. 1956e. Minute, 20 August 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
Merchant. 1956. Letter to Under Secretary of State, 24 February 1956. USNA 702.022/2–2456.
Moore, J.K. 1999. Tethered to an iceberg: United States policy toward the Antarctic, 1939–1949. *Polar Record* 35 (193): 125–134.
Moore, J.K. 2001. A 'sort' of self denial: United States policy toward the Antarctic, 1950–59. *Polar Record* 37 (200): 13–26.
Mundo Peronista. 1954. *Política Peronista*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Mundo Peronista.
Murray, J.D. 1956. Foreign Office minute, 15 May 1956. TNA FO371/119836.
National Security Council. 1954. Report NSC 5421/1, July 19 1954. National Security Archive, Washington D.C., Presidential Directives PD00414.
Operations Coordinating Board. 1956. Memorandum for discussion on 8 March 1956. USNA 702.022/3–856.
Ortega, R. 1956. Letter to Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations, 17 August 1956. Ministerio RR.EE. Utilización Pacífica de la Antártida.
Pink, I.T.M. 1956. Foreign Office memorandum, 20 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
Pinochet de la Barra, O. 1994. *Medio siglo de recuerdos antárticos: memorias*. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria.
Ramsbotham, P.E. 1956. Letter to H.A.A. Hankey, 19 November 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
Serrano, M. 1948. *La Antartica y otros mitos*. Santiago: El Esfuerzo.
Scilingo, A. 1963. *El Tratado Antártico: defensa de la soberania y la proscipción nuclear*. Buenos Aires: Libreria Hachette.
Summerhayes, C., and P. Beeching. 2007. Hitler's Antarctic base: the myth and the reality. *Polar Record* 43(224): 1–21.
Templeton, M. 2000. *A wise adventure: New Zealand in Antarctica*, 1920–1960. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
Thompson, R.A. 1956. Letter to J. Wilson, Foreign Office, 7 March 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Nations. 1956a. United Nations General Assembly Mimeos. A/3118. 21 February 1956.
United Nations. 1956b. United Nations General Assembly Mimeos. A/3118/Add.1. 13 September 1956.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956a. Letter to Foreign Office. 1 March 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956b. Letter to Foreign Office, 21 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956c. Letter to Foreign Office, 14 August 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956d. Letter to Foreign Office, 28 March, 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956de. Letter to M. Man, 26 July, 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956f. Letter to Foreign Office, 14 August 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956g. Letter to Foreign Office, 25 May 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
United Kingdom Delegation at United Nations. 1956h. Report on General Assembly debate. TNA FO371/119838.
United Kingdom High Commissioner in India. 1956a. Letter to various recipients, 27 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Kingdom High Commissioner in India. 1956b. Letter to various recipients, 24 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
United Kingdom High Commission in India. 1956c. Letter to Foreign Office, 11 October 1956. TNA FO371/119838.
United States Embassy Canberra. 1956. Letter to Secretary of State, April 13 1956. USNA 702.022/4–1356.
United States Embassy Moscow. 1955. Telegram to Department of State, 7 February 1955. USNA 702.022/2–755.
United States Embassy Santiago. 1955. Telegram to Department of State, 14 March 1955. USNA 702.022/3–1455.
United States Delegation to United Nations. 1956a. Letter to Secretary of State, 1 March 1956. USNA 702.022/3–156.
United States Delegation to United Nations. 1956b. Telegraph to Secretary of State, 14 September 1956. USNA 702.022/9–1456.
United States Delegation to United Nations. 1956c. Telegraph to Secretary of State, 28 September 1956. USNA 702.022/9–2856.
Vincent, I.F.S. 1956. Minute, 22 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.
Whitehead, J.S. 1956. Foreign Office Minute, 25 February 1956. TNA FO371/119835.