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Icy relations: the emergence of South American Antarctica during the Second World War

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ABSTRACT. During the Second World War, both Chile and Argentina advanced sovereignty claims to the Antarctic Peninsula and surrounding sub-Antarctic islands that overlapped substantially with claims that the United Kingdom had made in 1908 and 1917. This article explores the emergence of the concept of a South American Antarctica during this period. Although, at one level, the two South American countries attempted to create a united front against the British, they actually decided to press their claims to Antarctica for different and sometimes conflicting reasons. In Argentina, nationalists connected the question of sovereignty in Antarctica with their claims to the Malvinas and with a broader struggle against a supposed British economic imperialism. In Chile, patriotic officials were less concerned with British claims to the Antarctic Peninsula and more worried about Argentina's growing interest in the region. The article concludes that a better understanding of the complex and contradictory history of the emergence of the idea of South American Antarctica during the Second World War leads to an enhanced appreciation of the subsequent development of the so-called 'Antarctic Problem' as it developed over the next 15 years. In order to avoid the artificiality of the term 'Falklands (Malvinas)', the British terms 'Falklands' and 'Falkland Islands' have been used when discussing the United Kingdom's position, and the Argentine term 'Malvinas' when discussing that of Argentina.

Contents

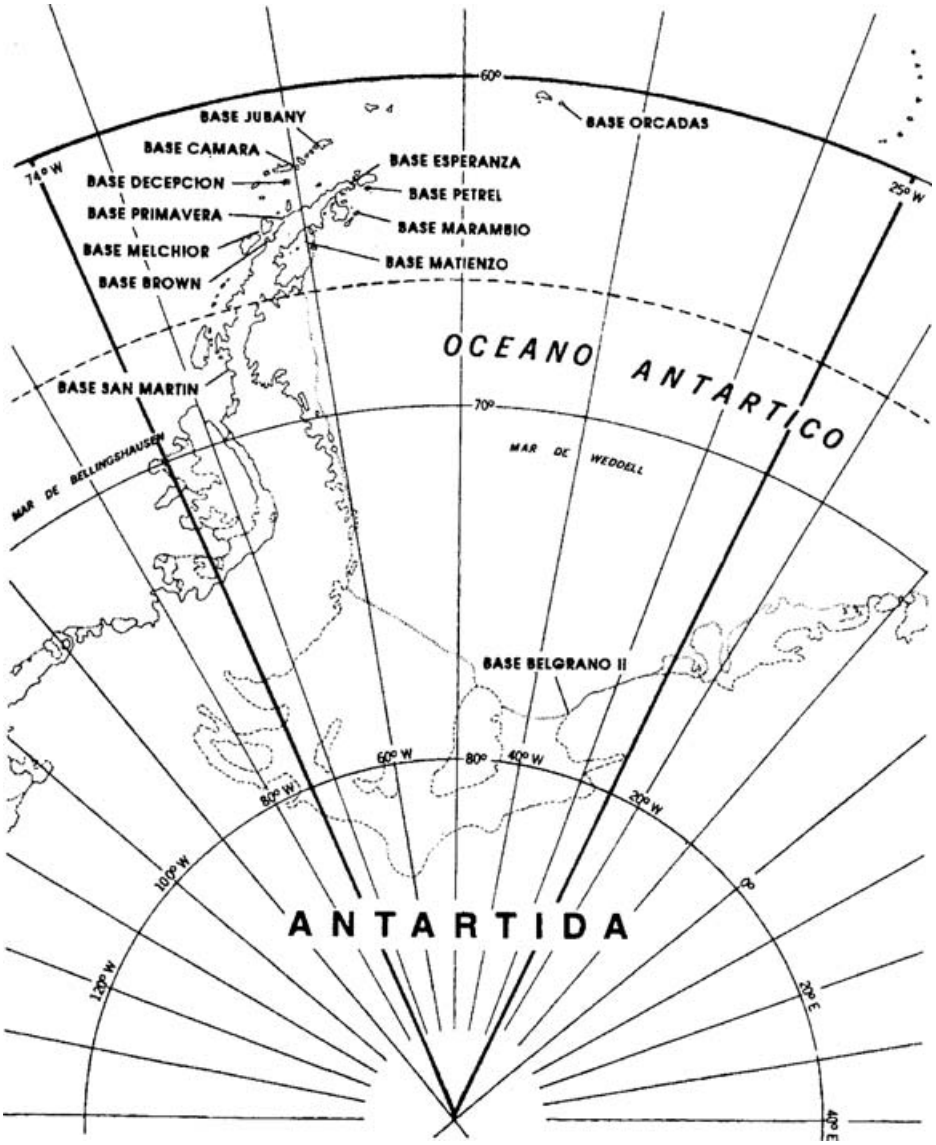
Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, Captain Enrique Cordovez, a retired naval officer and a member of the Chilean Antarctica Commission, published a book entitled *Antártida Sudamericana* (South American Antarctica) (Cordovez 1945). In this book, he described his experiences as a Chilean guest on the 1943 Argentine expedition to the Antarctic Peninsula. Cordovez praised the idea of Argentine-Chilean co-operation in Antarctica, and suggested the existence of an exclusively South American sector in the southern continent. A copy of this book, annotated by General Ramón Cañas Montalva, who became head of the Chilean Instituto Geográfico Militar after the war, can be found in the Cañas Montalva Collection at the Chilean Library of Congress in Santiago. Cañas Montalva was another important figure in Chilean Antarctic affairs in the 1940s and 1950s. In the margins of his copy of *Antártida Sudamericana*, Cañas Montalva scribbled angry notes rejecting confraternity between Chile and Argentina and accusing his compatriot of treachery for even contemplating the notion of a South American Antarctica. For the Chilean General, the Antarctic Peninsula belonged to Chile alone: any Argentine presence in the region threatened his nation's geopolitical security. Even Cordovez remained ambivalent towards the idea of a South American Antarctica. Despite his public expressions of trans-Andean goodwill, Cordovez had privately fumed at having being forced to witness Argentine ceremonies of possession taking place in the Antarctic Peninsula (Fernandez 1943). His embarrassment was compounded by the Chilean government's inability to send an expedition to Antarctica in the following season and its consequent failure to keep its reciprocal promise to invite Argentine officials. The idea of South American Antarctica, even when just seen from the Chilean perspective, was not a straightforward alliance against British imperialism, but rather a complicated and contested union of convenience.

During the Second World War, the governments of both Chile and Argentina actively put forward sovereignty claims to large parts of the Antarctic Peninsula region (Table 1; for the Argentine claim see Map 1). These claims overlapped with each other and with the territory known to the British as the Falkland Islands Dependencies, which had been created by Letters Patent in 1908 and 1917 (Beck 1983). The resolute British position in the ensuing dispute has been well documented (Dodds 2002; BBC Radio 4 2005). So too has the theoretical 'geopolitical' background to the South American claims (Child 1988; Kelly and Child 1988; Dodds 1997). The important role played by the United States in the development and resolution of the dispute has also been examined in detail (Klotz 1990; Moore 1999). This article attempts

Table 1 Evolution of territorial claims to the Antarctic Peninsula region (Christie 1951).

Year	Country	Type of Claim	Claim
1908	United Kingdom	Government Decree (Letters Patent)	Between 20°W and 80° W, South of Latitude 50° S
1917	United Kingdom	Government Decree (Letters Patent)	Between 20° W and 50° W, South of Latitude 50° S, and between 50° W and 80° W, South of 58° S.
1940	Chile	Government Decree	Between 53° W and 90° W, undefined northern limit
1942	Argentina	Sovereignty markers left in Antarctica	Between 25° W and 68° 34'W, South of 60° S
1946	Argentina	Official Map	Between 25° W and 74° W, South of 60° S



Map 1. Contemporary map of the Antarctic Peninsula showing the region of the Anglo-Argentine-Chilean sovereignty dispute. All the Argentine bases shown, with the exception of Base Orcadas, were constructed after the Second World War.

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to contribute to a better understanding of the so-called 'Antarctic Problem' by presenting a detailed historical analysis of what caused Argentina and Chile to put forward sovereignty claims in Antarctica during the Second World War, and by exploring the idea of a South American Antarctica that emerged at this time (Christie 1951).

At first glance, the concept of a South American Antarctica appears to have been an attempt to overcome national divisions and to create an exclusively South American region in the Southern Continent. Early in the twentieth century the British had made sweeping claims to the Antarctic continent (Beck 1983). When Chile and Argentina came to press their claims to the Antarctic Peninsula during the Second World War they both faced this powerful adversary. It appeared to make sense for them to work together in pursuit of their 'common interests' (Genest 2001). Against the British, the two South American countries shared very similar legal arguments for asserting their sovereignty: both could claim legal titles inherited from Spain, and both could argue that geographical proximity gave them rights that the British did not have. With the British distracted by the Second World War, the time was opportune for the two South American countries to put forward their claims to Antarctica. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Simón Bolivar, one of the leading generals in the wars of independence against Spain, had dreamed of continental unity. The idea of united Argentine-Chilean efforts to create a South American Antarctica might appear to be a first step towards fulfilment of the Bolivarian dream, especially in the context of conflict against an extra-continental empire.

In contrast to this somewhat idealized notion of Argentine-Chilean co-operation against the British, this article argues that the idea of a South American Antarctica emerged, in large part, out of fundamental disagreements between Chile and Argentina in Antarctica. Chilean and Argentine interest in the southern continent during the Second World War developed for distinctive reasons. In Argentina, claims to the Antarctic Peninsula were closely linked to nationalist agitation against British possession of the Malvinas and against British 'informal empire' in Argentina itself (Gallagher and Robinson 1953). In Chile, fear of Argentine expansionism and the consequent possibility of territorial loss provided the driving force behind interest in Antarctic sovereignty. Regional rivalry, not co-operation, lay at the centre of South American interest in Antarctica, especially on the Chilean side. When we look carefully at the emergence of South American Antarctica during the Second World War, we see the development of a complex four-way relationship between Argentina, Chile, the United Kingdom, and the United States, rather then a truly united front against the British. Such an observation helps us better in understanding the subsequent history of the dispute.

Both Argentina and Chile had a history of involvement in the Antarctic Peninsula region. In Argentina, the dramatic rescue of the Nordenskjold expedition in 1903 by the Argentine ship *Uruguay* had bought the Southern Continent into the popular imagination (Argentina 1903). A year later, the government of Argentina had taken over the operation of a meteorological station on Laurie Island in the South Orkneys, which had been constructed by the Scotsman William Speirs Bruce (Speak 2003). The Argentine owned Pesca company was the first to begin commercial whaling from South Georgia (Hart 2001). Chile also had an early interest in the Antarctic whaling industry though the Sociedad Ballenera de Magallanes, although it was soon taken over by the Norwegian Hektor Whaling Company (Pinochet de la Barra 1948: 79). In 1916, the Chileans would have their own Antarctic drama to celebrate when *Yelcho* sailed south to rescue the members of Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition from Elephant Island. In 1907 and again in 1908, ministers from Chile and Argentina had met to discuss the question of Antarctic Sovereignty (Pinochet de la Barra 1994**;** Genest 2001). But these negotiations broke down without any agreement being reached. Following the First World War, South American interest in Antarctica waned, partly due to the economic problems of the Great Depression. Although Argentina maintained its occupation of the Laurie Island meteorological station, and occasionally added the Antarctic region to its protests against British occupation of the Malvinas, the Argentine government did little to assert its sovereignty to the region in an active manner. The failure of Argentina and Chile to agree upon territorial limits in the Antarctic Peninsula meant that Britain's claims to the Falkland Islands Dependencies, made first in 1908 and then revised in 1917, went largely unchallenged until the late 1930s.

Reawakened South American interest in Antarctica, 1938–1939

In the middle of 1938, a Norwegian invitation to attend a polar conference in the city of Bergen began to reawaken Argentine and Chilean interest in Antarctica. In the context of Antarctica in 1938, Norway was one of the few non-claimant countries to have any serious interest in the question of Antarctic sovereignty because of the massive Norwegian involvement in the Antarctic whaling industry (Tønnessen 1982). In an attempt to resolve the question of sovereignty, the Norwegian government proposed to hold an international conference that would include all countries with an interest in Antarctica. The United Kingdom, Argentina and Chile were among the countries invited to attend. The invitation stimulated the two South American republics to start thinking about their own rights to sovereignty in the Antarctic Continent, and how best they could assert these rights.

Before the Bergen conference could be held, the Norwegian government accelerated its plans to make a sovereignty claim. On 14 January 1939, facing the threat that Germany might annex large parts of Antarctica, the Norwegian government issued a decree claiming for Norway the coasts of Dronning Maud Land, to the east

of the Weddell Sea. Upon hearing of the Norwegian claim, the Government of Chile expressly reserved 'all and any right that the government of Chile might have upon the Antarctic territories in question.' (Ortega 1939). The Chilean Foreign Ministry explained to the Chilean Consul in Oslo that it was acting in this manner not because the territory was claimed by Chile, but because it was not certain that Chilean rights did not exist. The Chilean reaction to the Norwegian claim demonstrated a renewed interest in the Antarctic regions, tinged with an element of uncertainty. Argentina shared with Chile this feeling of latent sovereignty rights, and in 1939 both countries set out to investigate the exact nature of their rights to the region.

In June 1939, the Argentine government of President Roberto Ortiz established a provisional Antarctic Commission in order to prepare Argentina's position for the Conference of Bergen (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1948). The provisional commission was headed by Dr. Isidoro Ruiz Moreno, a distinguished international lawyer, and who had close connections with the Foreign Minister. It also included Captain Francisco J. Clarizza, representative of the Navy, and Alfredo G. Galmarini, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture. The text of the decree that created the provisional commission suggests that the Argentine government was already thinking in terms of how to make a case for Argentine sovereignty in the Antarctic continent. The decree claimed that Argentina had 'a natural right to participate in the questions surrounding the problems of the Antarctic Continent' (Genest 2001: 81). At this moment the Argentine government was using geographical proximity, geological continuity, scientific investigation, and the effective occupation demonstrated by the Laurie Island meteorological station, to support Argentina's rights to a place at the negotiating table. But soon these arguments would be used to make a case for Argentine sovereignty in Antarctica.

The formation of the provisional Antarctic Commission in Argentina under the leadership of Ruiz Moreno was a 'top down' initiative. The Government of President Ortiz belonged to the so-called Concordancia tradition of conservative politics, which governed Argentina during the 1930s on the basis of widespread electoral fraud (Rock 1987: 218). Throughout the 'infamous decade' the Argentine government maintained strong economic connections with foreign powers, most of all with the British. Exports of agricultural commodities continued to represent the driving force of the Argentine economy. So great was British economic influence in Argentina in the 1930s, that Argentina came to be known as the 'Sixth Dominion.' As the decade progressed, the conservative governments faced increasing criticism for their policies of supposedly 'selling out' to foreign powers. However, the Concordancia governments did maintain the traditional Argentine attitude of protesting against the British occupation of the Malvinas, and a tradition of elite patriotism or 'liberal nationalism' existed among the elite, which was shared by the quality press (Escudé 1986: 206). Such liberal nationalism had a particular focus on the territorial integrity of the Argentine state. It was not anti-British, but it was pro-Argentine. Faced with the prospect of the international discussion of Antarctic sovereignty rights at the conference of Bergen, the liberal nationalists of the Ortiz government wanted to know what Argentine rights were. Argentine involvement in Antarctica was sufficient to suggest that the country had good reasons for a claim, and the harder they would look, the more evidence they would find.

The connection between Antarctica and the Malvinas, so explicit in the name Falkland Islands Dependencies, gave a popular dimension to Argentine interest in the southern continent, especially among nationalists. Popular nationalism, in various forms, was a growing force in Argentine politics during the 1930s, defining itself against the Condordancia governments and their supposed foreign allies (Piñeiro 1997). In contrast to the liberal nationalism of the governing classes, popular nationalism had a definitely anti-British focus. British claims to the Falkland Islands Dependencies were added to a long list of British crimes against the Argentine nation, which included British 'economic imperialism' in Argentina itself, and, of course, the British 'theft' of the Malvinas in 1833. Early in 1939, British diplomats translated a nationalist pamphlet published by the Alliance of Nationalist Youth during celebrations of the anniversary of the 're-conquest' of Buenos Aires from the British at the time of Spanish American independence (British Embassy 1939). The pamphlet linked these various grievances:

> 132 years ago the native people of this country made the
>
> ENGLISH
>
> invaders bite the dust of defeat in the streets of Buenos Aires. Today the vanquished of 1806 and 1807 dominate our Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) of which they deprived us by violence thus doing honour to their well established fame as
>
> PIRATES
>
> And now they are endeavouring to take possession of Antarctic Regions under Argentine sovereignty. At the same time they control the essential factors which govern our economic life, and while they wax rich as a result of our Railways, our Urban Transport Systems and our Frigoríficos, the native population of the country suffers hunger and misery. This is why we now proclaim the necessity for
>
> ANOTHER RECONQUEST.

British diplomats tended to attribute such claims to the work of Nazi propaganda in Argentina (Ovey 1939). There were certainly strong connections between

several popular nationalist groups and Nazi Germany, for example, the German embassy backed pro-Nationalist newspaper *El Pampero*. But the clandestine nature of this connection makes it difficult to prove. Whatever its origins, popular nationalist interest in Antarctica also gave the increasingly beleaguered Ortiz government additional motivation for pursuing its sovereignty rights in Antarctica: the government could refute its anti-nationalist reputation without doing too much damage to the fundamental Anglo-Argentine economic relationship.

One month after the formation of the provisional Argentine Antarctic Commission, Señor José María Cantilo, the Argentine Minister of Foreign Relations, handed a note to the Chilean Ambassador in Buenos Aires inviting Chile to collaborate with Argentina at the conference of Bergen (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 36). In September, the President of Chile, Pedro Aguirre Cerda issued a decree that created a Chilean Antarctic Commission. This Commission, under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had a similar remit to its Argentine equivalent: namely, to study Chilean titles to Antarctica. The Commission was made up of Julio Escudero, a distinguished international lawyer, and Comandante Enrique Cordovez Madariaga, a retired naval officer who had headed the Navy's Institute of Navigation and Hydrography. The timing of the decree, coming so soon after the creation of the Argentine Commission and Cantilo's suggestion of co-operation, suggests that to some extent Chile was responding to Argentine initiatives. But at the same time, as the earlier Chilean reply to the Norwegian claim had shown, the Chileans believed that they too might also have some rights to sovereignty in Antarctica.

In contrast to the situation in Argentina, where the Antarctic question was connected to the issue of the Malvinas, Chilean interest in Antarctica at this stage lacked any real popular dimension (Cordovez 1945). Instead, a small group of officials, centred upon the nascent Antarctic Commission, provided the driving force behind Chilean interest in the southern continent. These officials shared something of the liberal nationalism of the Argentine elites, but with important differences. Even more so than in Argentina, the notion of territorial loss marked the consciousness of the Chilean 'official mind', and fear of Argentine expansion motivated Chilean interest in Antarctica. In 1881 Chile and Argentina had signed a treaty, which left much of Patagonia under Argentine control. With hindsight, certain Chileans had come to be very critical of this treaty, believing that the whole of Patagonia should have been Chilean territory (Cordovez 1940a). They wanted to ensure that such an error, caused by careless oversight of Chilean rights, would never happen again. Chilean officials therefore studied the Antarctic question with a view to showing that much of the peninsula region belonged to Chile. The more evidence they accumulated to support the Chilean case, the greater the fear became that Chile would once again lose its rightful territory. Such fear became a constant theme in the vocabulary of Escudero, Cordovez, Cañas Montalva, and others with an interest in the question of Antarctic sovereignty.

The outbreak of war and the Byrd Expedition, 1939–1940

On 3 September 1939 the United Kingdom declared war on Germany and began an all-embracing struggle that would last for the next six years. The Governments of Chile and Argentina, along with all other American republics, adopted a position of official neutrality (Humphreys 1981: 42–75). As an immediate consequence of the war, plans for the conference of Bergen had to be abandoned and the immediate prospects of resolving the question of Antarctic sovereignty through an international conference disappeared. However, the interest in Antarctica that the invitation to the conference of Bergen had reawakened in South America did not go away. With the British obviously distracted by events in Europe, opportunities for the two South American countries to assert their claims to Antarctica increased. With reference to Argentina, J.V. Perowne, head of the South American Department at the British Foreign Office, noted:

> In normal times the Argentine Government probably do not regard the satisfaction of their claims to the Falkland Islands and their dependencies as a matter of practical politics, but as they have no other *irredenta* it is no doubt useful for them to keep the pot boiling. Now that we are at war hopes of acquiring our possessions in the South Atlantic are probably a good deal higher. (Perowne 1939)

Any direct action by Argentina to assert sovereignty in the inhabited Falkland Islands would have constituted an act of aggression. In contrast, the unpopulated Antarctic Peninsula appeared to offer the governments of both Argentina and Chile a region where they could flex their nationalist muscles without directly confronting British inhabitants. More importantly, in the uncertainty of 1939, it appeared very possible that the British might lose the war. Should this happen, British claims to the Antarctic could be lost, and Argentina and Chile would be in line to assume uncontested sovereignty in the region.

With South American interest in Antarctica growing ever greater throughout 1939, the attitude of the United States towards the region complicated the situation still further. In late 1939, a two-part expedition under the command of Admiral Richard E. Byrd set sail for Antarctica (Headland 1989: 302). The basic United States position with regard to sovereignty in Antarctica dated back to the Hughes Doctrine of non-recognition of 1924 (Hall 1989). However, the United States demonstrated an uncertain and at times contradictory attitude to the question of territorial rights in Antarctica (Moore 1999). Byrd took with him instructions from President Roosevelt to perform acts of possession in various parts of Antarctica (Bush 1988: 445). With the United States government looking at the potential for making its own claims, the renewed South American interest in the southern

continent presented something of a problem. Roosevelt's 'good neighbor' policy aimed to create a harmonious pan-American alliance among all the countries of the American continent. The interest of Chile and Argentina in the Antarctic Peninsula meant that any United States claim to the region would not only undermine Britain's claims to sovereignty, but also present a snub to the two South American countries. In an effort to reassure their hemispheric neighbours, the United States sent a letter to the governments of both Argentina and Chile expressing a vague notion of American solidarity and inviting them each to send two officials on the expedition (Genest 2001: 84). The two governments accepted this invitation and four South Americans accompanied the expedition.

While the two sections of Admiral Byrd's expedition were in the process of establishing American bases in Antarctica, one in the Marguerite Bay in the Antarctic Peninsula, the other in Little America on the other side of the continent, the United States State Department sent another letter to the governments of Chile and Argentina (Bush 1988: 446; Genest 2001: 85–86). The base at Marguerite Bay represented a direct challenge to the growing interest of both South American governments in Antarctica, and the letter sought to assuage any suspicions that they might have. It explained that the American expeditions were research orientated and aimed to study the lands and seas of Antarctica with a particular focus on the continent's natural resources. If such resources were to be found, the letter stated, they would be shared with the other American republics. The letter went on to discuss the delicate issue of potential sovereignty claims in the region. The Argentine translation into Spanish of the important passage closely matched the United States original:

> In order to avoid possible complications with respect to the disputed rights in the Antarctic regions investigated and studied by the United States, and in order to promote the development of those regions, it might prove to be convenient to make sovereignty claims upon them. It is believed that such titles could be claimed with greater efficiency by an individual Government, and if such titles were consequently declared by the government of the United States as a result of the investigations and studies described above, it is desired that the other republics of the Americas know that those titles could be considered as a protection of the opportunity for all Governments and citizens of all the American Republics to participate in the development and utilization of the resources that the claimed regions might possess. (Genest 2001, 85–86; see also Bush 1988: 446)

Officials in the Chilean Foreign Ministry translated the final lines of this letter somewhat differently. Instead of reading the letter as a justification for a potential United States claim, the Chileans saw it as a request by the North Americans for the Chilean government to make a claim to Antarctica: 'It is desired that the said claims, in order to be more efficient, are made by one government individually, and that, upon being confirmed by the government of the United States. . .' (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 72). The cause of Chile's differing interpretation was a mistake in translating the letter from English into Spanish, as the Chilean Ambassador in Washington pointed out several years later:

> I have the impression that a translation, which I consider to be defective, [of the Confidential Memorandum presented by the Ambassador of the United States in Chile dated 10 January 1940, reproduced in Confidential Circular No.1 of 10 February 1941] led the Ministry to believe that the United States, in a certain fashion, wanted our government to assert its sovereignty in Antarctica . . . . I believe that a careful reading of the letter will show that it did not ask us to make a formal 'petition' of sovereignty, but on the contrary expressed that if the government of the United States made a claim to the Antarctic, based on the investigations of its Antarctic Service, this claim would act as a safeguard to the opportunities of the governments and citizens of all institutions to participate in the development and utilization of the resources that might exist in the claimed regions (Nieto del Rio 1948).

The United States had not asked the Chilean Government to make a claim to Antarctica, but what mattered was that the Chileans thought that they had.

The different interpretation of one line of the American letter led to very different reactions by Argentina and Chile. Thinking that the United States was about to make claims that would extend to the peninsula region, the Argentine government responded diplomatically but firmly with a letter to the State Department that stated that their own claims to Antarctica had always been guided by the same pan-American concerns that the United States was now expressing: 'as your Excellency knows, our country claims as its own property and sovereignty some parts of the Antarctic, based on geographic and historical reasons and in the acts of occupation that have been realized for a number of years' (Genest 2001: 86–87). The wording of the Argentine letter made it clear to the United States government that a conflict of interests would occur should it make a claim to the portion of Antarctica that Argentina thought of as its own. The precise area of this 'Argentine Antarctic' remained unclear. Considering the United States' preoccupation with pan-Americanism, this letter may have had some effect on that Government's decision not to make a claim on the Antarctic continent (Moore 1999).

In May 1940, the Argentine Antarctic Commission, which had been established on a permanent basis a month earlier, wrote a long letter to José María Cantilo, the Argentine Minister of Foreign Relations (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1940). This letter expressed in detail the Commission's thinking with respect to Argentina's rights in Antarctica. After an introduction to the history of the Antarctic continent, which acknowledged that the United Kingdom was the country

that had demonstrated most interest in the region, the letter proceeded to examine the economic, strategic and aeronautical benefits that possession of the region would accrue to Argentina. Unsurprisingly, whaling featured prominently amongst the potential economic advantages that the region could offer that country. The Commission also stressed the geological continuity of the Antarctic Peninsula with Tierra del Fuego in making their case that Antarctica could potentially contain a treasure trove of mineral riches. Furthermore, the authors believed that the region presented opportunities for developing new transcontinental flight routes, cutting the distance between Australasia and South America. Interestingly, given the later geopolitical preoccupation with strategy, the Antarctic Commission's letter noted that: 'the lack of resources, the bad ports and the climate, at the present moment take away from this region all military and naval strategic importance' (Child 1988; Kelly and Child 1988; Dodds 1997). In 1940, it was economic, legal, and, above all, nationalist considerations that remained the driving force of Argentine Antarctic policy.

The Antarctic Commission's letter continued by asking the all-important question: 'within the American sector, does Argentina have rights and could it sustain them? And, in the affirmative case, what are these rights and how far do they stretch?' The letter summarized the theoretical and practical legal precedents that could be relevant to the sovereignty of Antarctica. The principal problem from a legal perspective was that due to its inhospitable climate, the normal legal requirement for proving sovereignty, namely that of effective occupation, could not easily be applied. In these circumstances, Argentina's Laurie Island meteorological station gave them the legal advantage, shared only by the United States by virtue of the Byrd expedition, of being able to prove some kind of effective occupation of the region. At the same time, following precedents set in the Arctic region, the Argentine Antarctic Commission also stressed the importance of the sector theory and the clear existence of an American sector in Antarctica. This sector belonged to Argentina and Chile by undisputable virtue of its geographical 'nearness'. Taken together, the arguments put forward by the Commission's letter presented a convincing case for Argentine sovereignty, with the only caveat that, due to the nature of the sector theory, the Chileans would have to be consulted as to limits within the American sector. Moreno and his colleagues recommended that Argentina ought to claim for themselves the sector between 25°W and 68°34′W, south of 60°S.

The Chilean claim, 1940

During 1940, the Chileans followed a similar course to their South American neighbours by investigating the legal basis for their sovereignty in Antarctica. In Santiago, although Julio Escudero fulfilled a similar role to that of Isidoro Ruiz Moreno in Buenos Aires, his companion Enrique Cordovez exercised a greater influence in Chilean affairs than did the individual members of the Argentine Antarctic Commission in their affairs. From the outset Cordovez stressed the economic, scientific and strategic bases of Chilean interest in Antarctica. There were also other differences between the Argentine and the Chilean approaches to the Antarctic Question. Firstly, following the mistranslated letter of January 1940, the Chileans believed themselves to have the backing of the United States in the pursuit of Chilean sovereignty in Antarctica. This gave them a confidence that otherwise they might have lacked. Secondly, the Chileans could not claim to have the recent history of effective occupation that the Argentines could demonstrate through their maintenance of the Laurie Island meteorological station. Thirdly, the issue of Antarctica for the Chileans had no connection to the question of the Malvinas, although for the Chileans, even more than the Argentines, the rhetoric of territorial loss underpinned many of the arguments for securing Chile's sovereignty rights in Antarctica. Importantly, such arguments often cast Argentina, rather than the United Kingdom, as the principal rival in Antarctica. Consequently, although Chilean attitudes to Antarctica were superficially very similar to those of the Argentines, they were in many ways very different, and in some cases in direct opposition.

The arguments that Escudero and Cordovez produced to support Chilean claims to sovereignty in Antarctica fell into two groups: firstly, those of a juridical-historical nature, and secondly those of a 'scientific' nature. The legal arguments deployed were fairly conventional. Escudero looked for historical precedents for Chilean administration and occupation of Antarctica, citing Chilean whaling activities, the related administrative acts, and the rescue of Shackleton's expedition from Elephant Island in 1916. He also cited the Argentine-Chilean negotiations that took place in 1907 and 1908 as international recognition of Chile's rights. Although the Chileans would later put considerable emphasis on the legal rights that they had inherited from Spain, at this early stage the focus remained on the more modern period. The central Chilean argument was very similar to that of Argentina: Antarctica belonged to Chile though reasons of nearness and geographical continuity (a form of the sector theory). In the so-called 'scientific' arguments in favour of Chilean sovereignty, mainly advanced by Cordovez, the Chilean Antarctic Commission sought to prove that Chile was nearer and more similar to Antarctica than any other country. Such arguments went as far as proposing that Chile had a superior claim to Antarctica because the continent's snows and ice appeared very similar to the snow and ice of Chilean Patagonia (Cordovez 1943). One danger of the Chilean 'scientific' approach was that it put a great emphasis on the area of southern Patagonia that was also contested by Argentina.

In the middle of 1940, Don Marcial Mora became the new Chilean Minister of Foreign Relations. On 8 August, Cordovez wrote a letter to the new minister setting out the Chilean case for polar sovereignty that had

been developed by the Chilean Antarctic Commission (Cordovez 1940b). After summarizing the various arguments, the letter concluded that Chile had rights to the region between approximately 60° W and 80° W, this area being the same as that which had been discussed in the Chilean-Argentine negotiations at the beginning of the century. Cordovez suggested to the new Minister that he should prepare a draft decree to present to Aguirre Cerda, the President of the Republic. At the same time, the Navy would prepare a detailed plan for an expedition to take formal possession of Antártida Chilena. Once the decree had been passed, Cordovez suggested that Chile should enter into negotiations both with Argentina and with the United States in order to fix the precise limits of Chile's claim to Antarctica. Such a policy, first pass the decree, then discuss it, suggests both boldness in Chilean Antarctic policy and a certain degree of flexibility. As Cordovez imagined the Chilean decree, its limits would not be set in stone, but would be open to negotiation with both Argentina and the United States. The United States Ambassador to Santiago, Claude Bowers, wrote of Chile's willingness to negotiate in a letter to the State Department (Moore 1999: 127).

Cordovez's letter to Marcial Mora achieved its objective. The new minister of Foreign Relations quickly became a strong proponent of Antártida Chilena, and over the next two months the Chilean Antarctic Commission formulated a decree delimiting Chilean Sovereignty in Antarctica. On 6 November 1940, President Pedro Aguirre Cerda passed Decree 1747: 'The following form part of the Chilean Antarctic or Chilean Antarctic Territory: all the lands, islands, reefs, glaciers (pack ice), and everything else, known or unknown, and the respective territorial seas, inside the limits of the sector between 53° W and 90° W' (Pinochet de la Barra 1948: 86). The limits set by the decree were almost twice those proposed by Cordovez less than three months earlier. These expanded limits gave Chile the room for the diplomatic manoeuvre that Cordovez had proposed. On the same day as the decree was passed, the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations issued a verbal note to the Argentine government inviting them to send a delegation to Santiago in order to discuss the question of Antarctic sovereignty.

Outside Chile, Decree 1747 met with almost universal disapproval. The first reply came from Argentina, where the Chilean claim had caused an outpouring of nationalist condemnation among both popular nationalists and government officials (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 37). The Argentine government's response stated that the only thing that they liked about the Chilean government's measure was its apparent willingness to amend it (Ministerio de RR.EE. 1940). More of a surprise to Chile was the reply of the United States, which it received on 10 December. Far from endorsing the Chilean claim as had been expected, the United States, following its traditional policy of non-recognition of claims, politely refused to accept it (Embajada de los Estados Unidos 1940). Finally, almost three months later, the British government rejected decree 1747, reminding the Chileans of the Letters Patent of 1917 that had defined the limits of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. Despite the delay in replying, the British response was significant because it showed a continued interest in the region. In March 1941, the crew of HMS *Queen of Bermuda* landed at Deception Island and destroyed the fuel installations left by the Hektor Whaling Company (Headland 1989: 304). This action was ostensibly to prevent fuel falling into enemy hands, but it was also an early demonstration of the firmness of Britain's attitude towards retaining their sovereignty in the Falkland Islands Dependencies.

South American Antarctica, 1941

The Argentine government keenly accepted the Chilean proposal for a meeting to discuss the question of territorial limits in Antarctica. Ruiz Moreno had repeatedly stressed the need to negotiate with the Chileans in order to strengthen the common South American position (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1940). Despite the overlap of their respective claims, legal theorists from both sides of the Andes saw the advantage to be gained from working in partnership. However, the Argentine government wanted to limit the scope of the negotiations (Ruiz Moreno 1941). Argentina had still not formally advanced an official claim to Antarctica in the way that Chile had just done, and because of this its position remained more tentative. Rather than sending the entire Antarctic Commission, the Argentines thought it better to send just Ruiz Moreno, considering that this would give the talks the appearance of preliminary negotiations rather than a full-scale diplomatic mission. The Argentine government gave Ruiz Moreno strict instructions not to enter into substantive negotiations with his Chilean counterpart on the future of the Antarctic region.

In contrast to the Argentines, the Chilean government was keen for the negotiations to lead to an immediate and permanent settlement of the Antarctic problem. In preparation for the Escudero-Ruiz Moreno conversations, the Ministry of Foreign Relations requested the Chilean Ambassador in London to search for historical antecedents to the Chilean claim in the archives in London (Bianchi 1940). The documents that they were looking for included a letter from Bernard O'Higgins, the founder of the Chilean state, to Captain Coghlan, of the British navy written in 1833 and containing references to Chilean possession of the South Shetland Islands. As Escudero saw the case: 'the juridical concept of effective occupation (the Argentine position) opposes the concept of continuity and geographical similarity (the Chilean position)' (Escudero 1941a). The Chilean instructions made very little mention of the United Kingdom's claims in Antarctica. Instead they focused on challenging the Argentine claims to sovereignty. For example, the instructions to Escudero, probably written by his companion Cordovez,

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criticized the hydrographic research conducted by Argentina in Antarctica (Bianchi 1941). The Chileans hoped to set a legal trap for Argentina: Chile was able to use the idea of continuity because the Argentines used it in their case against Great Britain in the Malvinas. The instructions permitted Escudero to use the Monroe doctrine in supporting Chile's case, but prohibited him from including the substantive discussion of other disputes such as the Beagle Channel.

The Escudero-Ruiz Moreno negotiations took place between the 14 and 26 March 1941 (Donoso 1941). During the negotiations, Escudero tried to argue that Antarctica was an extension of the American continent, and therefore the Monroe Doctrine could be applied to it without objections; Ruiz Moreno tried to interest the Chileans in shifting their claim to the west (Pinochet de la Barra 1994: 37). Both negotiators asserted their sovereign rights through vicinity and the sector theory. Although no positive agreement was reached, the two countries agreed to continue the discussion at a later meeting to be convened in Buenos Aires. They also issued a joint statement recognizing the mutual rights of both countries to a 'South American Antarctica' (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1948: 71). Ruiz Moreno was welcomed in Santiago, and received numerous honours and banquets. In Buenos Aires, suspicion existed that he had exceeded his brief by entering into discussions that went beyond mere preparatory dialogue. In particular, many extreme Argentine Nationalists did not like the conversations (*Crisol* 1941).

The idea of South American Antarctica that emerged from these negotiations is important for both its positive and negative implications. Superficially, it represented an attempt to transcend national divisions and create an exclusively South American region in the Antarctic Continent. However, from the beginning, this idea was, in large part, a cover for the fact that the two countries could not agree upon a common frontier in the extreme south. Both countries went away from the Escudero-Ruiz Moreno negotiations thinking about how they could strengthen their own claim at the expense of the other. An interesting result of the conversations was that Escudero decided to investigate in much greater detail the historical antecedents to the Chilean claim, especially those from the colonial era:

> I consider it equally indispensable to complete our studies related to our colonial titles, which up until now have only been very briefly studied; and to make a thorough examination of the judicial nature of the polar dominion, all without forgetting the consideration of the theory of the continuation of the Andes on which we await a pronouncement from the Argentine Antarctic Commission. (Escudero 1941b)

The negotiations with Argentina had shown him that vicinity and continuity alone were not enough to strengthen the Chilean claim against the Argentines, who could use for themselves precisely the same arguments. By looking to the colonial past the Chileans hoped to trump their South American neighbours. Meanwhile, the Argentines looked for a practical way of asserting their sovereignty rights in the region.

Argentine expeditions to Antarctica, 1941–1943

Following the Escudero-Ruiz Moreno negotiations early in 1941, the Argentine Ministry of Marine spent the rest of the year organizing an expedition to Antarctica for the Antarctic summer of 1941/42. This had been one of the major recommendations of the Comisión Nacional del Antártico in its earlier report on Argentine sovereignty (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1948: 71). In October 1941, Argentina's Instituto Geografico Militar published another map of Argentine Antarctica, this time at a scale of 1:2,500,000 (Genest 2001: 24). Contrary to the spirit of a South American Antarctica, this map made no mention of Chilean interests in Antarctica. Amidst the plans for an Argentine expedition, the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires reported that territorial nationalism was fast becoming an 'integral part' of Argentine nationalist rhetoric (Ovey 1941a).

In December 1941, on the eve of Argentina's planned expedition to Antarctica, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. At the conference of American Foreign Ministers held in Rio de Janeiro immediately after the Japanese attack, the Argentines, in particular, conspired to further their territorial ambitions (Ovey, 1941b). The Argentines wanted to be given full responsibility for the defence of the Falkland Islands, which the Japanese had promised them in the event of a successful invasion. J. V. Perowne, at the Foreign Office in London, condemned the Argentine policy:

> These blackmail tactics are what might have been expected of the Government of acting President Castillo and Sr. Ruiz Guiñazu [Foreign Minister]. Either way they have something to gain. If they do not get the Falklands they have an admirable excuse for staying out of the war; if they do get them they at once become national heroes instead of being disliked and despised by 90% of the Argentine public. (Perowne 1941)

British officials successfully put pressure on the United States not to grant Argentine requests, noting that once such a concession had been made it would be virtually impossible ever to get the islands back. The Argentines responded exactly as Perowne had predicted, refusing to break off relations with the Axis nations. Chile, which, in common with Argentina, had a large German immigrant population, also refused to break off relations with the Axis (Humphreys 1981). The nations involved in the growing Antarctic problem were the only American countries that did not sever relations with Germany, Japan, and Italy following the raid on Pearl Harbor.

As Argentine politicians and diplomats argued unsuccessfully for territorial concessions at the conference of Rio, the Argentine Navy put into action their claims to sovereignty in Antarctica. *1° de Mayo* left Buenos Aires in January 1942 under the command of Captain Alberto J.

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Oddera (Comisión Nacional del Antártico 1948: 71). The ship first visited Deception Island, where it conducted an inventory of the abandoned factory of the Norwegian Hektor Whaling Company and hoisted the Argentine flag. The whaling factory had been blown up and burnt by the British in order to avoid the facilities being used by German submarines (Genest 2001: 25). From Deception Island, *1° de Mayo* sailed on to the Melchior Archipelago where the crew put up a lighthouse in Dallman Bay. Next the Argentines landed on Winter Island where they performed a ceremony of possession. After a failed attempt to reach Marguerite Bay, the ship returned to Buenos Aires, via the Melchior Archipelago and the Argentine Islands. During the voyage, Lieutenant Eduardo Lanusse, in a Stearman seaplane type 76-D-1, achieved the first aerial photography of the region navigated.

In Santiago, the Argentine expedition to Antarctica caused certain unease. On 3 March 1942, the Chilean Ambassador handed a memorandum to the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs protesting against the publication in the previous October of the Instituto Geográfico Militar's map of Antarctica (Genest 2001: 24). The Chilean Ministry of Foreign Relations made renewed attempts to prepare their own vessel, *Vidal Gomez*, for an expedition to Antarctica (Cordóvez 1942). But the Ministry of Marine decided that the vessel was unfit for sailing to Antarctica. In the midst of these difficulties the Chilean government received an invitation from Buenos Aires suggesting that both countries should send an expedition to Antarctica in the season 1942/43 (Jefe del Estado Mayor de la Armada 1942a). Lacking a suitable ship, the Chileans could not accept this proposal. In an attempt to make the most of a difficult situation, the Chilean Head of Naval Policy [Jefe del Estado Mayor de la Armada] suggested an exchange with the Argentines. Under the terms of this, Chilean officials would accompany the Argentine expedition this year, and, in exchange, Argentine officials would accompany the Chileans in the following year. The Chilean Navy, perhaps somewhat naively given the international situation, hoped that this promise would put pressure on its own Government to look abroad for a suitable vessel that could be purchased (Jefe del Estado Mayor de la Armada 1942b). The Chilean suggestion was accepted by the Argentine Naval Minister, and the two countries entered into an agreement.

1° de Mayo under the command of Cápitan Silvano Harriague left Buenos Aires for a second voyage to Antarctica on 4 February 1943. This expedition took three Chilean naval officials including Enrique Cordovez, one of the two members of the Chilean Antarctic Commission. This expedition again visited the Melchior archipelago and then sailed to Port Lockroy. From Port Lockroy, *1° de Mayo* continued to Marguerite Bay, where Byrd's East Base had been located throughout 1940. The Argentine ship took away certain scientific instruments that had been left by the American expedition when it was evacuated. The Argentine Expedition performed acts of possession at Port Lockroy (1 March 1943) Marguerite Bay (5 March) and Deception Island (11 March). In a top-secret report to the Ministry of Foreign Relations, Cordovez noted that 'These acts of possession represented a cause of shame for the Chileans who had travelled with the Argentine expedition' (Fernandez 1943).

In early 1943, the British sent a warship to Antarctica in response to the Argentine expedition. HMS *Carnarvon Castle* sailed to the South Shetland Islands where the crew removed Argentine sovereignty markers and replaced them with British ones (Headland 1989: 308) The British Foreign Office cautioned against an open confrontation with Argentina, noting the importance of the Anglo-Argentine economic relationship (Perowne 1943). Shortly afterwards, the British Cabinet took the decision to send an expedition of effective occupation to the Falkland Islands Dependencies (Beck 1986: 32). The top-secret Operation Tabarin, as the expedition became known, set sail for Antarctica in late 1943. In its first year, Operation Tabarin established permanent bases on Deception Island (Base B) and at Port Lockroy (Base A) on the Antarctic Peninsula, thereby demonstrating a form of 'effective occupation' needed to establish a legal title to a territory. News of the expedition was not announced until after the end of the austral summer, in order to prevent any South American response.

The dispatch of Operation Tabarin coincided with a temporary lull in South American interest in Antarctica. In Argentina, a coup in the middle of 1943 plunged the country into political confusion and put expeditions to Antarctica on hold. In Chile, although a certain level of official interest in Antarctica continued, scarcities caused by the war meant that no ship could be found and no expeditions could be sent. For the duration of the conflict, Chile was therefore unable to comply with the promises it had made to take Argentine officials to Antarctica. With the British establishing a permanent occupation of the Falkland Islands Dependencies, the nascent sovereignty dispute quietened down until the end of 1945. However, this suspension of South American Antarctic activity would prove only temporary. In the years immediately following the war, both Argentina and Chile would once again assert their rights to sovereignty in Antarctica with annual expeditions and bases of permanent occupation. General Juan Domingo Perón, who emerged from the Argentine coup of 1943 to become President in 1946, would play a leading role in both the campaign against British 'economic imperialism' in Argentina itself, and in the establishment of 'Argentine Antarctica'. President Gabriel González Videla of Chile became the first head of state to visit Antarctica in 1948, and he used his trip to speak openly against the 'spent imperialism' of Britain's claims to the region. The period of active territorial conflict in Antarctica, which had started during the Second World War, would continue up to the signature of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.

Conclusions

The idea of a South American Antarctica emerged during the Second World War for diverse and sometimes

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contradictory reasons. As aggrieved nationalists in Argentina sought to rally popular support against British 'imperialists', they increasingly turned to the powerful idea of an unjust British occupation of Argentine territory in both Antarctica and the Malvinas, thereby creating an overlap of supposed informal and formal empires (Gallagher and Robinson 1953). Patriotic nationalism among the elite meant that the Argentine government was willing first to investigate and then to put forward its country's claims to sovereignty in the Southern Continent. In Chile, politicians saw this growing Argentine interest in Antarctica and, fearing their neighbour's expansionism, sought to make their own claims. At the same time as nationalist grievances and fears were growing, the war offered an opportunity for Chile and Argentina to assert their claims to Britain's Falkland Islands Dependencies while that power was occupied elsewhere. Had it not been for the war, it is highly unlikely that Chile and Argentina would have challenged Britain's claims to the Falkland Islands Dependencies so brazenly.

Once the two South American nations had started to assert their sovereignty to the 'Argentine Antarctic' or the 'Chilean Antarctic' there was no turning back. The legal rights that both South American Governments came to believe they possessed in the Antarctic region did not simply disappear at the end of the Second World War. The very act of sending expeditions to Antarctica brought the continent into the public imagination and created a new tradition of South American involvement with Antarctica. Once decrees had been passed claiming parts of Antarctica as Chilean or Argentine, revoking these decrees would have implied the cession of national territory. This was a measure that South American nationalists simply could not contemplate. Equally, from the British perspective, the dispatch of Operation Tabarin confirmed British interest in a region that had previously been largely ignored. The expedition confirmed that there would be no quiet retreat from empire in the Falkland Islands Dependencies in the interests of a peaceful relationship with Chile and Argentina. The stage was therefore set for a post-war confrontation between assertive South American nationalists and intransigent British imperialism, which forms part of the broader history of British decolonization.

In order to understand the subsequent course taken by the Antarctic sovereignty dispute in the years after 1945, it is helpful to understand how and why the idea of South American Antarctica emerged during the Second World War. From the Argentine perspective, the question of Antarctica had been connected to broader questions of British imperialism from the outset. It is therefore no surprise that Perón continued to present Argentine claims to Antarctica alongside his campaign against British economic influence in Argentina itself. The Argentines were more than happy to work with the Chileans against the British as long as they remained the dominant partner in the relationship. In Chile, fear of Argentina was at the centre of the growing interest in Antarctica. For the Chileans the question of sovereignty in Antarctica was more flexible and less absolute: as long as Argentina did not gain exclusive sovereignty in Antarctica they were happy. This attitude helps to explain why the Chileans attempted to foster a close relationship with the United States in the affairs of Antarctica, often talking in terms of an 'American' Antarctic rather than a 'South American' Antarctic (Pinochet de la Barra 1948: 108). It also helps to explain why Chile was at the forefront of efforts to internationalize the region in the late 1940s through the Escudero plan (Moore 1999). At the same time, as demonstrated by the political use made of the Antarctic issue by President Gonzalez Videla, in Chile just as in Argentina, patriotism or 'territorial nationalism' was a powerful force in its own right.

The idea of South American Antarctica that emerged during the Second World War was not only fragile, but it was also contradictory: in its origins it contained the seeds of its own demise. In 1947 and 1948, representatives of the Chilean and Argentine governments met again to discuss the question of sovereignty in Antarctica. In March 1948 the two countries signed the Donoso-La Rosa declaration, once again re-affirming the existence of a South American Antarctica. However, mutual fear and hostility continued to underlie the Chilean-Argentine relationship in Antarctica. The joint declaration was, once again, a cover-up for the fact that the two countries could not agree on a common frontier in Antarctica. It remains a matter of pure speculation what would have happened to the history of the Antarctic sovereignty dispute if Chile and Argentina could have agreed upon a division of their respective claims. If this had occurred, the idea of South American Antarctica might have won broad international support and might even have become a legal reality. But if Chile and Argentina had been able to agree, the idea of a South American Antarctica may never have emerged at all.

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