

Recent developments in relations between the United Kingdom and the Argentine Republic in the South Atlantic/Antarctic region

Klaus Dodds

Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX, UK (k.dodds@rhul.ac.uk)

Alan D. Hemmings

Gateway Antarctica, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand

Received November 2012; first published online 14 January 2013

ABSTRACT. This article assesses the current state of UK-Argentine relations with reference to the South Atlantic and Antarctic region. Three major themes are pursued: the current state of UK-Argentine relations, with the contested Falklands/Malvinas looming large in the assessment, alongside fisheries management around South Georgia; the mapping of Argentine Antarctic territory in the context of extended continental shelf delimitation; and finally, the recent UK White Paper on Overseas Territories is noted insofar as it marks the most recent public assessment of how the coalition government is attempting to manage the most southerly portions of the British Overseas Territories portfolio. The article concludes with a warning that there is a danger that worsening UK-Argentine relations might begin to have more profound implications for the Antarctic Treaty System as resource, sovereignty and territorial issues acquire more piquancy.

Introduction

In the last 12 months, relations between the United Kingdom (UK) and Argentina have worsened and are arguably at their least cordial since the ending of the Falklands/Malvinas dispute in June 1982 (for a longer review with a particular focus on the disputed Falkland Islands and South Atlantic region, see Dodds 2012). There have been multiple manifestations of this deterioration, ranging from accusations of malfeasance to co-ordinated strategies designed either to bolster the maintenance of territorial/resource rights (the UK) or to highlight a mounting sense of grievance relating to an outstanding territorial dispute (Argentina). At the heart of this imbroglio lie the disputed Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) and wider connections to disputed territories north and south of the 60 degrees south latitude.

This article highlights four themes that should be of interest to *Polar Record* readers. First, some brief background is provided to the worsening state of affairs regarding UK-Argentine relations, encompassing the highly disputed Falklands/Malvinas and other South Atlantic territories including South Georgia. Second, the curious affair of Argentina's technical presentation to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) in August 2012 is explored and contextualised. Third, the article reflects on the recent Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) report *The overseas territories: security, success and sustainability* and what that might have to offer in terms of understanding how the present coalition government (involving the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats) is going to approach Britain's South Atlantic and Antarctic territories (FCO 2012). Finally, there is some analysis of the equally curious affair of the proposed merger of the British Antarctic

Survey (BAS) and the National Oceanography Centre (NOC). While the merger might appear to be a resolutely domestic issue involving a UK research council (the Natural Environment Research Council, NERC), the controversy surrounding this proposal highlighted how worsening geopolitical relations with Argentina were invoked by those hostile to any possibility of such a development, and more generally the political significance that continues to be attached to claimants' national Antarctic programmes (see the list of Antarctic facilities maintained by Argentina and the UK in Table 1). At the time of writing, all of these issues should be considered dynamic in nature. Thus, this paper is intended as an audit and thus a time-sensitive intervention.

UK-Argentine relations

UK-Argentine relations are in a parlous state. At the epicentre of this lie the highly disputed Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas). Notwithstanding thirty years of post-war British/Falkland Island settlement, investment and development (not least the construction of Mount Pleasant Airbase, a potentially dual-use facility), successive Argentine governments have shown no loss of interest in pursuing the 'recovery' of the islands for the Argentine Republic. The 1994 Argentine constitution commits administrations to such a task, and the improvement in UK-Argentine relations in the late 1990s proved to be short-lived (Dodds and Manóvil 2001; Dodds 2007). The UK and Argentina did cooperate on some issues (under the terms of the 14 July 1999 Joint Statement; Government of the United Kingdom and Government of the Argentine Republic 1999), such as fisheries management, visits of next of kin of Argentine military personnel buried on the islands, the removal of the British military from

Table 1. Argentine and United Kingdom 'main Antarctic facilities'

Facility name	Position	Opened	Type
<i>Argentina</i>			
1. Belgrano II	77°52.48'S, 34°37.62'W	1955	Station – Year-round
2. Brown	64°53'S, 62°53'W	1951	Station – Seasonal
3. Cámara	62°36'S, 59°56'W	1953	Station – Seasonal
4. Decepción	62°59'S, 60°42'W	1948	Station – Seasonal
5. Esperanza	63°23.70'S, 56°59.77'W	1952	Station – Year-round
6. Jubany	62°14.27'S, 58°39.87'W	1982	Station – Year-round
7. Marambio	64°14.70'S, 56°39.42'W	1969	Station – Year-round
8. Matienzo	64°58'S, 60°03'W	1961	Station – Seasonal
9. Melchior	64°20'S, 62°59'W	1947	Station – Seasonal
10. Orcadas	60°44.33'S, 44°44.28'W	1904	Station – Year-round
11. Petrel	63°28'S, 56°13'W	1967	Station – Seasonal
12. Primavera	64°09'S, 60°57'W	1977	Station – Seasonal
13. San Martín	68°07.78'S, 67°06.20'W	1951	Station – Year-round
14. Sobral	81°05'S, 40°39'W	1965	Station – Seasonal
<i>UK</i>			
1. Fossil Bluff	71°19.76'S, 68°16.02'W	1961	Refuge – Seasonal
2. Halley	75°34.90'S, 26°32.47'W	1956	Station – Year-round
3. Rothera	67°34.17'S, 68°07.20'W	1975	Station – Year-round
4. Rothera Skiway	67°32'S, 68°11'W	1975	Camp – Seasonal
5. Signy	60°43'S, 45°36'W	1947	Station – Seasonal
6. Sky Blu	74°51.38'S, 71°34.16'W	-	Camp – Seasonal

Source: Data summarised from COMNAP 2009.

South Georgia, and air access (and the UK withdrew its objection to Argentina hosting the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat in 2001), but the knotty issue of sovereignty never diminished in salience. Arguably, the growth of the Falkland Islands economy (based on fishing licensing and tourism revenue in the main and now, even more controversially, oil/gas exploration, which might generate new revenue streams) highlighted a fundamental dilemma facing all Argentine governments. If Argentina helped to establish and maintain collaborative mechanisms for South Atlantic issues such as fisheries management, then it was arguably further cementing the prosperity of the 3000-strong Falkland Islands community. What possible incentive was there, as a consequence, for the British government, let alone the Falklands community, to ever contemplate (let alone agree to any implementation strategy for) a change in sovereignty arrangements?

Resource development remains deeply controversial. Since the mid 1980s, the Falkland Islands Government's (FIG) fisheries licensing regime has provided the lion's share of the community's GDP (circa 60%, around £15 million, in the 2009/2010 financial year (Falkland Islands 2012)). The income generated from licensing varies from year to year and depends on the state of fish (in particular, squid) stocks. In terms of oil and gas exploration, wells were drilled in February 2010 (16 wells) and there was a new round of exploratory activity in 2012 in the South Falklands Basin. There are a number of companies operating in the area, both north and south of the islands, including Rockhopper Exploration, Borders

and Southern Petroleum, Falklands Oil and Gas, Desire Petroleum and Argos Resources. While the actual results remain tentative, the spectre of the Falklands becoming a major oil and gas production zone is highly sensitive to Argentina because of fears that this would simply embolden further the Falklands community in their desire to self-determine a future never involving their nearest continental neighbour.

Since 1982, every British government (Conservative, Labour and now a coalition) has committed itself to respecting the rights of the Falkland Islanders to self-determination. Prime Minister David Cameron, in January 2012, even told his parliamentary colleagues that Argentina was behaving in a colonial-like manner by persistently and aggressively demanding negotiations over sovereignty. With the run-up to the 30th anniversary of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, both governments have been involved in a 'war of words' aided and abetted by national media organisations. There have been some 'deeds' as well. In the case of Argentina, President Cristina Kirchner (the self-styled Presidenta Malvinera) remains personally committed to the issue, and in a manner reminiscent of her late husband and former Argentine president, Nestor. Since her re-election in October 2011, she has devised a three-pronged strategy of co-option, disruption and promotion, while at the same time it is worth recognising that Argentina's military forces have not been modernised since the early 1980s (Jones 2011), so this strategy should not be seen as likely to lead to any kind of military invasion/confrontation (for a longer review, see Dodds 2012).

In terms of co-option, the Falklands situation has been raised continuously in every possible regional and international forum, including the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Summit of the Americas and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. No opportunity is missed to seek resolutions demanding that the UK negotiate with Argentina over the future sovereignty of the Falklands. For the UK, the attitude of the United States and powerful regional neighbours, such as Brazil, is always noted carefully. The aim is clearly to embarrass and pressurise the UK government to negotiate. With regard to disruption, the aim here is to interfere with the Falklands economy and potentially deter investment, especially in the highly emotive (and 'emotive' in the sense that if it proves 'lucrative' then Argentina fears that there will be even less hope of any change to the sovereignty equation) area of oil and gas development. In March 2012, Argentine Foreign Minister Hector Timerman wrote to the London Stock Exchange warning about the 'illegal activities' of five companies operating in the disputed South Atlantic waters around the Falklands. He stipulated that these companies should face punitive action against any assets held in Argentina if the current government succeeded in a prosecution case. Finally, promotion involves the manner in which public personalities, including Hollywood actors such as Sean Penn, are swiftly deployed to voice their support for Argentina's claim to the Falklands. Paradoxically, the dispatch of Prince William (the grandson of Queen Elizabeth II) as a helicopter search and rescue pilot to the Falklands in March 2012 (and explained at the time as a 'routine deployment' by the Ministry of Defence) was seen as deeply provocative in Argentina, and designed in part to raise the profile of the Falklands both within Britain and in the wider world. Prince William's deployment stands as a good example of how relations between the two countries have plummeted, and more broadly, reminds us that the Queen has never visited Argentina and is not likely to do so. In 1968, a proposed visit to Argentina was cancelled and she travelled to Brazil and Chile instead.

What has been underestimated by journalists and political commentators is that the Falklands dispute also has ramifications for other areas of South Atlantic/Antarctic diplomatic business. This dispute features as a regular item in the annual diplomatic meetings of the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) and thus contradicts earlier optimistic claims that Anglo-Argentine antagonism never 'reached' the meetings of the Antarctic Treaty consultative parties (ATCPs) (Beck 1986). This was never entirely true and the difficulties in agreeing to the establishment of an Antarctic Treaty Secretariat, for instance, were largely around Anglo-Argentine issues since the Falklands War, with the UK, in particular, objecting to the proposal to locate it in Argentina (Vigni 2007: 20). After consensus was finally reached in 2001 that it would indeed be located in Buenos Aires, tensions eased some-

what, although the UK delegation was in the vanguard of the very close scrutiny of the Secretariat's operation at each Antarctic Treaty consultative meeting (ATCM). The Secretariat commenced operations in September 2004.

Elsewhere, new life was seemingly given to UK-Argentine antipathies through the initiation by the UK of fisheries certification in the South Atlantic, around South Georgia (and a 2012 submission relating to the Falklands). There are currently 177 Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)-certified fisheries worldwide, including three Argentine fisheries (anchovy, hoki and Patagonian scallop) and a further Argentine fishery currently in assessment (southern red king crab) (MSC 2012a). Whilst the UK origins of the MSC may not be an entirely happy contingency for Argentina, plainly, submission of its own fisheries for certification precludes its repudiation of the scheme in general. The substantive problem for Argentina has been the MSC certification of two UK fisheries around South Georgia, for Patagonian toothfish (2004, renewed in 2009) and icefish (2010). In 2002, Argentina protested strongly at the annual Antarctic marine living resources meeting about what it termed the 'unilateral action' of the UK in seeking such certification (CCAMLR (Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) Commission 2002: paras 14.9–14.11). Perhaps Argentina read more into the commitment to 'co-ordinated programmes' in relation to fishing in Section III of the UK/Argentine Joint Statement (Government of the UK and Government of the Argentine Republic 1999) than the UK. Since the CCAMLR regulates marine harvesting south of the polar front, its area of application includes areas within and north of the Antarctic Treaty Area. Argentina, in this regulatory arena, has been able to contest UK sovereignty in relation to northerly territories, without needing to say anything explicitly about disputed areas within the Antarctic Treaty Area per se, which are anyway subject to the more general constraints under Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty.

Aside from rejecting the certification action, from 2002 Argentina insisted that the report of the commission include text in which 'The Government of Argentina reaffirms that the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands are an integral part of its national territory and that these islands and surrounding waters are the subject of a sovereignty dispute with the United Kingdom' (CCAMLR Commission 2002: para. 14.9). Whilst the triggering concern has changed over time – for example, in 2011 the focus was on 'incorrect references existing in CCAMLR documents related to the territorial status of the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands' (CCAMLR Commission 2011: para. 18.1) – the Argentine sovereignty position is now annually reaffirmed. In turn, since 2002 the UK has reiterated that 'it has no doubts about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and their surrounding maritime areas' (CCAMLR Commission 2002: para. 14.9). This

statement is now followed by an Argentine statement rejecting the UK statement and reiterating its legal position (CCAMLR Commission 2002: para. 14.11). This diplomatic/legal interchange now follows a pattern widely replicated in other international arenas including the United Nations. The UK decision to seek certification of a fishery in the contested waters off South Georgia was always likely to provoke Argentina regardless of the publicly articulated resource management/stewardship rationale. The August 2012 announcement that the Falkland Island toothfish fishery is under MSC assessment (MSC 2012b) may stimulate further exchanges.

A similar pattern of statements is found in the final reports of the ATCM since 2004 (Government of South Africa 2004: paras 236–238). In recent years Argentina has used the trigger of concerns about incorrect references ‘made in documents, cartography and publications available and presentations’ made at ATCMs (Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty 2012: paras 316–320) to lead into its statements on its unalienable sovereignty. The UK responds as in the CCAMLR case noted above. All of this adds grist to the mill in terms of expressions and practices of sovereignty vigilance, and offers further evidence for continued caution in accepting claims that the ATS and associated legal instruments do not face challenges in managing sovereignty, territory and resource-related issues (see Hemmings 2012a: 79–81). They do, and will continue to do so.

Mapping the ‘Argentine territory’

Antarctic territorial claims have been given a new profile in recent years as a consequence of coastal states’ (*sensu* UN Law of the Sea Convention) assertion of their rights in relation to the extended continental shelf. For the seven Antarctic claimant states, this has (in their estimation at least) required them to reserve coastal state rights in relation to their claimed Antarctic territories, without doing violence to their obligations under Article IV of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, whereby positions on territorial sovereignty are ‘frozen’, or overly irritating fellow consultative parties who do not recognise the territorial claims upon which the supposed coastal state rights rest. The manner in which claimant states have approached this has been summarised by Hemmings and Stephens (2010: 314–316).

The position is plainly particularly complex in the Antarctic Peninsula, where Argentina, Chile and the UK claim essentially the same area, since here it was not just a matter of a claimant asserting rights which others did not recognise, but also a matter of mutually exclusive claims vis-à-vis other claimants (for a historical review, see Dodds 2002). Chile reserved its position without actually submitting data to the CLCS by submitting only ‘Preliminary Information’, and the UK merely reserved a right to make a submission of data at a later date. Argentina, by contrast, opted in 2009 to make what is termed a ‘full submission’, providing data for the exten-

ded continental shelf across all of the disputed territories in the Antarctic Peninsula, Scotia Arc islands and Malvinas/Falklands. It did so without apparent reservations and without explicitly identifying that the areas concerned were under dispute, as it is required to do under the rules of procedure of the CLCS. The commission will not ordinarily consider data for such areas, and as a non-legal technical advisory body (though see Kunoy 2012) it will not enter into debates about the legal standing of areas.

The Argentine ‘full submission’ led to notes in 2009 from not only the UK in relation to all the disputed areas, but also the United States, the Russian Federation, India, The Netherlands and Japan asking the CLCS not to consider data for the shelf within the Antarctic Treaty Area (CLCS 2012). In August 2012, Argentina made a technical presentation to CLCS on the outer limits of the Argentine continental shelf, including the disputed territories of the Falklands/Malvinas, South Georgia, South Sandwich and Argentine Antarctic Territory (Government of Argentina 2012a). Coincident with its August 2012 presentation to the CLCS, Argentina also sent a note to the Secretary General (Government of Argentina 2012b), with the declaratory purpose of responding to a UK note of 6 August 2009. A response that only occurs three years after the event, and is on entirely familiar sovereignty positions, rather than mustering arguments based upon some more recent events, is surely indicative of deliberative strategy designed to publicise and promote sovereignty/resource interests in the Antarctic and South Atlantic region.

The rationale for the Argentine submission and subsequent follow-up with the CLCS regarding the disputed South Atlantic and Antarctic territories should be seen for what it is: further evidence of Argentina’s determination to raise the domestic and international profile of these areas of ‘Argentine territory’. As the political scientist Carlos Escude has noted, on many occasions, the mapping and presenting of ‘Argentine territory’ has been a crucial element in a public culture that is eager to remind its citizens of Argentina’s territorial extent (see for example, Escude 1992). As Alec Murphy notes more generally, ‘territory retains its allure ... [and we need, as academics, to recognise] the extraordinary power of the state in the production of the types of knowledge that legitimate and substantiate particular territorial arrangements’ (Murphy 2012: 2 and 6). The Argentine state and, in particular, the Institute of Military Geography and the Argentine Antarctic Institute remain preminent in the generation and reproduction of maps, charts and statistics that contribute to the dominant state-territorial imaginary of a country that enjoys an extensive South Atlantic and Antarctic territorial portfolio.

This issue, it is worth clarifying, is not unique to Argentina. All the claimant states, including the UK, are behaving on the basis that they are coastal states in the Antarctic context. As noted earlier, another claimant state, Australia, is arguably in the

vanguard of this desire to identify outer continental shelves in and around the polar continent (Dodds and Hemmings 2009). In conjunction with controversies over marine protected areas (MPAs) and fisheries management (see, for example, *The New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), 2 November 2012 and Hemmings 2012b), what we are likely to witness is ever greater evidence of claimant/coastal states, non-claimants and semi-claimants jockeying for position or advantage against diverse other interests within the ATS. Without short-term prospects of positions on territorial claims being resolved the ATS may face increasing difficulties going beyond a *de minimis*, and often cosmetic, procedural 'management' of emerging issues.

The UK and overseas territories

In June 2012, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) released a White Paper on the British Overseas Territories with the subtitle of *Security, success and sustainability* (FCO 2012). This followed a request in June 2010 from the foreign secretary that relevant officials review UK policies pertaining to the overseas territories. Between June 2010 and August 2012, the FCO held consultations with political leaders of the British Overseas Territories, and the matter was considered by the National Security Council and, later, Parliament in September 2011. The White Paper was intended to update and supplant an earlier 1999 White Paper released under the Labour government, which spoke of a 'partnership for progress and prosperity'. In his foreword, Prime Minister David Cameron noted that, 'This White Paper sets out our commitment to work with the Territories to address the challenges we face together. This is a commitment across the UK government . . . 2012 is the Centenary of Scott's heroic journey to the South Pole. It is the 30th anniversary of the Falklands conflict when so many gave their lives to protect the islanders' right to chose their own future' (FCO 2012: 5).

The prime minister's assemblage of Scott and the Falkland Islands in the same proverbial breath is deeply intriguing. Leaving aside how particular anniversaries (such as 25th, 30th, 50th, 75th and 100th) are favoured by media and political commentators alike, we might ponder what is at stake here when such a connection is made. Scott's *Terra Nova* expedition to reach the South Pole left from New Zealand rather than the Falkland Islands. By contrast, the BAS conducts the vast majority of its scientific work in the British Antarctic Territory (BAT) and South Georgia and has a forward operating base in Stanley. Perhaps what the prime minister was attempting to string together was a rather vaguer notion of longer-term commitment to the South Atlantic and Antarctic region through the idea of sacrifice – the sense in which Scott and his party and then, later, in a more violent manner, over 250 British personnel perished in and around the Falkland Islands in 1982.

The foreign secretary, William Hague, in his own foreword commented that the UK should be aware of the 'vast and pristine environments' of the territories and the need to be seen as 'stewards of these assets for future generations'. Between the prime minister's and the foreign secretary's forewords, the rationale for and logic of the White Paper are established. The UK's commitment to the fourteen overseas territories is premised on the need to protect their security, to act as environmental stewards and to recognise that the sovereignty of the territories will be strongly shaped by the wishes of the inhabitants. In the 'Executive Summary', this three-pronged commitment is reiterated again with reference to words such as 'choice', 'external threats', 'rich environmental heritage' and 'challenges'. What is also striking is the emphasis placed on 'our shared history', and the value of the British Overseas Territories in terms of their connections to broader global concerns. So, for example, the BAT is not only significant in its own terms (size and historical association with the UK) but also 'highly prized as a global laboratory' (FCO 2012: 12). Thus, the UK is being positioned (in a highly opportune manner, critics would contend) as a national and global guardian of this particular part of the polar continent and maritime areas.

The timing of this White Paper on the overseas territories is noteworthy in the context of the BAT. While the Falklands dispute has grabbed the headlines, especially in a 30th anniversary year (2012), it is also worth remembering that a UK universities and science minister, David Willetts, visited the Falklands and the Antarctic Peninsula in February 2012. He spent time at the BAS office in Stanley and then travelled to Rothera Research Station where he learnt more about the work undertaken by BAS scientists. The ministerial visit to the Antarctic Peninsula was surely opportune in promoting the BAS's scientific and strategic role in the region (but see below with reference to the BAS/NERC/NOC merger affair).

What can be taken from all of these developments thus far, however, is that Britain's South Atlantic and Antarctic overseas territories are proving to be both-ersome in terms of their diplomatic-political-scientific management. Hydrocarbon exploration off the Falklands (regardless of the scale, Argentina regards continuing oil exploration as deeply provocative), fisheries certification off the waters off South Georgia and uncertainty regarding the future of the BAS, including its funding and senior management, all contribute to a sense that the UK government will have to devote greater resources to managing this highly contested portfolio of territories. Depending on the funding settlement for the BAS, in the post-2015 era, this might entail some fundamental re-examination of where British Antarctic science is undertaken in the Antarctic Peninsula region. Uncomfortable as it may be, counter-claimants such as Argentina and Chile have lower operating and logistical costs and Argentina has a president who is determined to pursue her agenda of pressuring the UK on all the disputed South Atlantic and Antarctic territories.

To merge or not to merge? The British Antarctic Survey and The National Oceanography Centre

In June 2012, the NERC announced that it was contemplating the merger of the BAS and the NOC. In September, a document was released setting out the case for a proposed merger and invoking a number of factors including research synergies, logistical rationalisation and cost-cutting (NERC 2012). As a House of Commons Science and Technology Report later concluded, the consultation document did not establish whether the proposed merger was either ‘appropriate or desirable’ or whether alternatives existed (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2012: 8). There was no business case offered apart from the suggestion that a more nuanced evaluation would be offered to the NERC in December 2012. It was also not clear from the consultation document whether the merger would actually achieve the stated goals. While the consultation document purported to invite interested stakeholders to submit their views, a number of staff attached to the BAS feared a *fait accompli*. Strikingly, the director, the deputy director and the head of corporate services of the BAS resigned.

Within days of the consultation document being released, it became clear that this proposed merger was deeply contested. For critics of the merger, including a number of parliamentarians in both the Houses of Commons and Lords, it was judged unnecessary and insufficiently attentive to both the ‘brand power’ of the BAS and the contested geopolitics of the Antarctic. The BAS operates in the most contested part of the Antarctic and the BAT remains counter-claimed by both Argentina and Chile. Notwithstanding Article IV of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, critics were not persuaded that NERC senior management had been sufficiently attentive to this geopolitical/scientific dimension. For another group of critics, including former BAS scientists and environmental groups, the proposed merger of the BAS and the NOC was seen as retrogressive and alarming in the sense that the profile of polar science in both the Antarctic and Arctic was likely to be diminished. At the same time it was noted that the NERC was also mentioning a possible role for the BAS as a knowledge-producing agent for those wishing to work in ‘frontier environments’, leading to speculation that the BAS’s scientific outputs might be directed towards those intent on resource exploitation in the Arctic region in particular.

In October the NERC announced that the decision over the proposed merger would be brought forward to October in light of public and parliamentary opposition. A ‘Save BAS’ petition, organised by the veteran environmental campaigner Tony Juniper, was another indication of this disquiet. It attracted thousands of signatures and generated much online activity (including tweeting) as well. As the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee’s report made clear, the membership thought that this proposed merger deserved further parliamentary scrutiny (House of Commons Science and Technology

Committee 2012: 11). The science minister (David Willetts) and chair of the NERC (Edmund Wallis), the interim director of the BAS and director of the NOC (Ed Hill) and the chief executive of the NERC (Duncan Wingham) were invited to give evidence to the committee. The minister’s evidence was striking for a number of reasons – first, he spoke about the importance of the BAS and explicitly recognised that the BAS had a ‘strategic presence’ in the Antarctic and South Atlantic. Indeed, in the report it is noted that ‘During oral evidence, the Science Minister and NERC Chair conceded that there are lessons to be learned from how the geopolitical aspect of this matter has been handled during the consultation’ (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2012: 12). Second, the minister acknowledged that funding for polar logistics (including ship-related costs) should be considered to be a distinct budget line for future NERC financial planning.

The senior management team responsible for the proposed merger was questioned by committee members and a figure of around £500,000 per year was eventually offered as a possible benefit following merger. Noticeably, the committee appeared sceptical of the manner in which the merger process had been organised. In their published report, the committee declared that ‘the consultation has been confused and lacks transparency’ and that senior management ‘did not take seriously the loss of several senior staff at the British Antarctic Survey’. More generally, the conclusion of the report reiterates ‘geopolitical considerations’ and, although it does not cite the contested nature of the BAT explicitly, it seems clear that the committee was mindful of this prevailing context (House of Commons Science and Technology Committee 2012: 13).

The following day, 1 November, the NERC announced that the proposed merger had been abandoned. A ministerial statement issued by David Willetts had the following to note:

The British Antarctic Survey is a national and international asset that delivers world-class environmental science, and this country’s strategic presence in Antarctica and the South Atlantic. The UK’s commitment to continuing this dual mission in the region is as strong as ever.

NERC has already committed to maintain the funding of the British Antarctic Survey at £42m a year for the rest of this spending review period.

Looking to the future – though without pre-empting the timing and size of the next spending review settlement – I consider that NERC should have a discrete funding line for Antarctic infrastructure and logistics from within the ring-fenced science budget to ensure a visible UK commitment to maintaining Antarctic science and presence.

Having completed its consultation, NERC agreed that it will not proceed with the proposal for merger. The British Antarctic Survey and National

Oceanography Centre will remain as NERC's centres (Willets 2012).

Rarely has there been a more explicit statement that the BAS is a vital element in the protection and promotion of UK interests in the South Atlantic and Antarctic region. While the BAS enjoys a flat-line cash settlement until 2015, it is unclear whether the BAS 'will remain [a] NERC centre' in the longer term. There may be some pressure to extract the BAS from the NERC and recognise that its dual mission (science and geopolitics) means that it might be better managed by an organisation other than a research council.

There is a danger, however, that this shambolic-looking process has seen the UK squander a key card in relation to its position and influence in the Antarctic Peninsula. The strength of its scientific activity there, alongside the international standing of the BAS, has given the UK a powerful instrument of power within the ATS. Whilst the UK's (and others') claims to territory, and the countervailing positions of semi-claimants and non-claimants, are an undeniable fact of life within Antarctic geopolitics generally and the ATS specifically, territorial positions have not been an acceptable overt basis for power-projection. The instrument for that, at least at the scientific-technocratic level at which much ATS management occurs, has been the power of the BAS itself. Indeed, so strong an instrument has the BAS been that it was possible to see the UK's less assertive public position on Antarctic sovereignty (the Falklands is another matter) compared with that of some other claimants (not just Argentina, but also Australia) as a reflection of this (Hemmings 2012a: 90). That has all changed. The defence of an autonomous BAS has seen public declarations that part of its imperative justification is its delivery of benefits in relation to the UK's territorial claim ('strategic presence', BBC News 2012). It remains to be seen whether its scientific capacity has been damaged, but its soft power (Nye 2004) has certainly been compromised, even tainted. Taking the long view, therefore, will mean coming to terms with this uncomfortable revelation.

Conclusion

This article has sought to offer a concise overview of the worsening state of UK-Argentine relations throughout the disputed South Atlantic and Antarctic territories. Since the early 2000s, signs of rapprochement under the Menem/Blair era have disappeared. Moreover, in the last two years, the situation has worsened further and continuing oil and gas exploration off the Falklands is only likely to worsen matters. Even in the ATS there is evidence of discord. The Antarctic Secretariat issue provided some clues to that unease, as the UK was reluctant to hand Argentina a propaganda victory in terms of having it located in Buenos Aires. After the decision to locate it in Argentina was approved, there was some hope that the issue had been neutralised. Tensions remain and it is important here to distinguish between expressions

of goodwill that exist within the Antarctic field and what transpires in international meetings, ranging from sharply worded statements to networking with allies and taking opportunities to quite literally 'flag up' one's territorial/sovereignty interests within officials' meetings. The use of a mini-flag and accompanying flagpole should be not underestimated as a banal yet significant reminder of those aforementioned behaviours (see Billig 1995 for theorising banal nationalism). It is worth noting in this regard that the Conservative MP Andrew Rosindell has campaigned for the official display of all the British Overseas Territories flags during official events such as the Trooping of the Colour parade and more generally in Parliament Square.

In the Antarctic context, moreover, this interest in polar-related nationalism is made all the more interesting in an organisation (the ATS) that is predicated on the construction and reproduction of consensus. The appearance of consensus is labour-intensive. Delegates, documents and declarations have to be enrolled into this project but evidence abounds that it not always so easy to secure. The MSC certification is a good example of how 'environmental stewardship' can be put to work in facilitating a geopolitical agenda, and thus making self-serving claims to be acting on behalf of fish and other non-human objects. Whaling, of course, would be another example and one could examine with interest the behaviour of another polar claimant state, namely Australia, and accompanying state-sanctioned authorities. The Secretariat issue rumbled on until 2004 and unquestionably played a part in damaging UK-Argentine relations, in part because both sides were eager to 'protect' their national sovereignty interests within and beyond the Antarctic region. Argentina and the UK's disagreements over the extended continental shelves of South Atlantic and Antarctic territories are indicative of this continuing tension. Regardless of whether there is ever any agreement over delimitation in the Antarctic region (presently highly unlikely), there is clearly some synergy here with Argentine frustration over oil and gas exploration around the Falklands. One way to express that frustration is to engage in some cartographic expressionism with regard to another disputed area (the Antarctic Peninsula region).

We shall be in a better position to assess this in another decade, but perhaps the 1990s were a novel period in post-Falklands/Malvinas UK-Argentine relations. In other words, the promise of rapprochement was never likely to be sustainable (Dodds 1998). As with New Labour-like claims to have dismissed the boom-and-bust era of neoliberal capitalism, the territorial disputes between the two countries appear to defy resolution as long as both sides regard their territories as either inalienable or subject, in the case of the Falklands, to the veto of the residing population. From the British perspective, perhaps, the UK government's interest in encouraging resource options makes perfect sense in an 'age of austerity'; if public finance is tight for defence and science investment then drilling and catching-related

activities (with associated infrastructural investment) are likely to be favoured, especially if they can enhance the economic sustainability of the South Atlantic portfolio.

However, such a strategy always carries dangers. The Assange/Ecuadorian Embassy affair in London reminds us that UK-Latin American relations are never straightforward and 'issues' can rapidly be regionalised (Porter 2012). Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has sought refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy since June 2012. In August of the same year, it was suggested that the UK authorities might arrest Assange (who faces charges of sexual assault in Sweden) even though he was residing in Ecuador's London-based embassy. Such speculation caused immense resentment in the wider Latin American region because it was widely interpreted as an attempt by the British to violate the territorial integrity of Ecuador.

In terms of the South Atlantic and Antarctic, the UK's relationships with Brazil, Chile and the United States are always likely to be critical. The consequences for the ATS, for example, are intriguing. Do these lingering tensions over sovereignty, resources and territory help to explain the lack of desire on the part of ATCPs to further institutionally develop the ATS so that it might address sensitive topics such as biological prospecting? In other words, are the provisions of Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty beginning to appear somewhat threadbare? Resource questions, allied with territorial-sovereignty anxieties, were always likely to stress-test the ATS and perhaps the prohibition on mining (under the terms of the protocol) indirectly contributed to institutional inertia and even complacency. Neither the UK nor Argentina is willing to relinquish its sovereign interests in and claims to those South Atlantic and Antarctic territories. The BAS/NOC merger affair led to an explicit recognition that the UK, like Argentina and Chile, views the Antarctic region in explicitly geopolitical strategic terms. Will other states, such as the semi-claimants United States and Russia, and non-claimants, such as India, China and Brazil, increasingly feel compelled to act to restrain and regulate the competitive behaviour of claimant states in the Antarctic Peninsula and other parts of the polar continent and Southern Ocean?

Acknowledgement

Our thanks to the referees for their helpful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

References

- BBC News 2012. 2 November 2012 URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-20178510> (accessed 10 November 2012).
- Beck, P. 1986. *The international politics of Antarctica*. London: Croom Helm.
- Billig, M. 1995. *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.
- CCAMLR (Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) Commission. 2002. Report of the twenty-first meeting of the commission. URL: <http://www.ccamlr.org/en/meetings/26> (accessed 27 August 2012).
- CCAMLR Commission. 2012. Preliminary Report of the Thirty-First meeting of the commission as adopted on Thursday 1 November 2012.
- CLCS (Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf). 2012. Executive summary and notes in relation to Argentina's submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. URL: http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_arg_25_2009.htm (accessed 27 August 2012).
- COMNAP (Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs). 2009. Antarctica and the Southern Ocean: main Antarctic facilities operated by the national Antarctic programs in the Antarctic Treaty Area (south of 60° latitude south). Edition 5. URL: https://www.comnap.aq/Publications/_layouts/listform.aspx?PageType=4&ListId={E746B4E3-4C0A-493E-8DFD-3DDA97B47123}&ID=18 (accessed 12 November 2012).
- Dodds, K. 1998. Towards rapprochement? Anglo-Argentine relations and the Falklands/Malvinas in the late 1990s. *International Affairs* 74: 617–630.
- Dodds, K. 2002. *Pink ice: Britain and the south Atlantic empire*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Dodds, K. 2007. 'Falklands 25': the Falkland Islands and the 1982 South Atlantic Campaign. *RUSI Journal* 152: 82–87.
- Dodds, K. 2012. Stormy waters: Britain, the Falkland Islands and UK-Argentine relations. *International Affairs* 88: 683–700.
- Dodds, K., and A.D. Hemmings. 2009. Frontier vigilantism? Australia and contemporary representations of Australian Antarctic Territory. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 55: 513–529.
- Dodds, K., and L. Manovil. 2001. Back to the future? Implementing the Anglo-Argentine 14th July 1999 Joint Statement. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33: 777–806.
- Escude, C. 1992. *Education, political culture and foreign policy: the case of Argentina*. Chapel Hill: Duke University Program in Latin American Studies.
- Falkland Islands. 2012. Government URL: <http://www.falklands.gov.fk/> (accessed 10 November 2012).
- FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office). 2012. *White Paper on overseas territories. Security, success and sustainability*. London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- Government of Argentina. 2012a. Comienza el análisis de la información científica presentada por la Argentina como fundamento del límite exterior de su plataforma continental. La Argentina protégé su soberanía y sus recursos. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Buenos Aires, 13 August 2012. URL: http://www.mrecic.gov.ar/portal/ver_adjunto.php?id=4313 (accessed 23 August 2012).
- Government of Argentina. 2012b. Note N.U. No. 336/2012, Permanent Mission of the Argentine Republic to the United Nations, New York to the Secretary General, 8 August 2012. URL: http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/arg25_09/arg25_arg_2012e.pdf (accessed 23 August 2012).
- Government of South Africa. 2004. Final report of the twenty-seventh Antarctic Treaty consultative meeting. URL: http://www.ats.aq/devAS/ats_meetings_meeting.aspx?lang=en (accessed 27 August 2012).
- Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Government of the Argentine Republic. 1999. UK/Argentine joint statement. URL: <http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front%3Fpagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KArticle&aid=1078995295947> (accessed 29 August 2012).

- Hemmings, A.D. 2012a. Security beyond claims. In: Hemmings, A.D., D.R. Rothwell and K.N. Scott (editors). *Antarctic security in the twenty-first century*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hemmings, A.D. 2012b. Global insider: marine reserves failure undermines Antarctic Treaty states' credibility. *World Politics Review*, 7 November 2012. URL: <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/12483/global-insider-marine-reserve-failure-undermines-antarctic-treaty-states-credibility> (accessed 11 November 2012).
- Hemmings, A.D., and T. Stephens. 2010. The extended continental shelves of the sub-Antarctic Islands: implications for Antarctic governance. *Polar Record* 46: 312–327.
- House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. 2012. *Proposed merger of British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre*. Sixth report of session 2012–2013. London: House of Commons.
- Jones, M.P. 2011. Strategic posture review: Argentina. *World Politics Review*, 15 March 2011. URL: http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/document/download/494/WPR_Argentina_03152011.pdf (accessed 11 November 2012).
- Kunoy, B. 2012. The terms of reference of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf: a creeping legal mandate. *Leiden Journal of International Law* 25: 109–130.
- MSC (Marine Stewardship Council). 2012a. Website. URL: <http://www.msc.org/> (accessed 23 August 2012).
- MSC. 2012b. Falkland Island toothfish. URL: http://www.msc.org/track-a-fishery/in-assessment/south-atlantic/falkland_island_toothfish (accessed 23 August 2012).
- Murphy, A. 2012. Territory's continuing allure. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (doi:10.1080/00045608.2012.696232).
- NERC (National Environment Research Council). 2012. Consultation on proposal to merger BAS and NOC. URL: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc.asp> (accessed 15 October 2012).
- Nye, J.S. 2004. *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Porter, B. 2012. The Assange affair continues. *London Review of Books* website, 20 August. URL: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2012/08/20/bernard-porter/the-assange-affair-continues/> (accessed 14 October 2012).
- Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty. 2012. Draft final report of the thirty-fifth consultative meeting. Buenos Aires: Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty.
- Vigni, P. 2007. The Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty: achievements and weaknesses three years after its establishment. In: Triggs, G., and A. Riddell (editors). *Antarctica: legal and environmental challenges for the future*. London: British Institute of International and Comparative Law.
- Willetts, D. 2012. Ministerial statement on the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre, 2 November. URL: http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/November_2012/02-11-12/1.BIS-British-Antarctic-Survey-and-National-Oceanography-Centre.pdf (accessed 3 November 2012).