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Between extension, nationalization, and a ‘Southern Svalbard’? Futures of the ATS in the system of world politics

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After its 60th birthday, the future of the ATS is all but certain. This contribution argues that while simple extension and small-scale adaptations remain distinct possibilities, the ATS will probably not escape the reconfiguration of a range of global legal regimes that pertain to non-sovereign territories and spaces (including, most notably, the seabed and outer space). In order to explore these reconfigurations, the paper first offers a reading of the historical development of the system of world politics in terms of the simultaneous presence of forms of organizing political authority (through, for example, sovereignty, imperial hierarchy, global governance etc.). Based on such a reading it offers a spectrum of possible developments of the political and legal forms pertaining to the Antarctic: multilateral exclusive treaty, multilateral inclusive treaty, international authority (direct or trusteeship), realization of sovereignty claims (open contestation, new territorial delimitation), split sovereignty (the Svalbard model), Antarctic sovereignty. The purpose of this contribution is primarily to open thinking spaces on the future of the ATS and Antarctica based on recent historical-sociological research on forms of ordering in the system of world politics. It is an elaboration of a brief presentation originally delivered in a conference on the future of the ATS held in Buenos Aires in late 2019.

The role of Argentina and Australia in managing the geopolitical tensions within the ATS.

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The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) arose in response to particular historical contingencies and it has effectively managed geopolitical tensions in the region for nearly 60 years. Argentina and Australia are two of the seven sovereign states which have territorial claims in Antarctica and have played a significant role in the formation of the Antarctic Treaty. Coming from different parts of the world and cultural backgrounds, but with some similar interests, both states are key participants in the international treaties that constitute the ATS. In the early twenty-first century, the institutional and legal framework governing Antarctica is facing a new set of biophysical and political pressures which require innovative approaches to balance a variety of different interests. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyse how Argentina and Australia have approached geopolitical tensions during critical moments in the history of the ATS. The paper will highlight similarities and differences in the approach between the two states. In addition, the paper will discuss what lessons might be drawn on the possibilities for Argentina and Australia in managing current and future tensions in Antarctica.

On sovereignty: a view from Russia into the 2020s

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Moscow has played a significant role in the cohesive management of the Antarctic as an active ATS member. The latent question of sovereignty has remained at the forefront of Russian Antarctic strategy, with Moscow recognizing no existing territorial claims and reserving the right to assert a claim. Under Putin, Russia has reemerged as an assertive strategic player in the international arena. Antarctica is an historical feature of the Russian great polar power identity project - which continues today. Renewed great power politics, in particular, Moscow's position within the rising China and 'new great game' narratives are also evident in Russia's approach to Antarctic strategy. This paper examines the issue of Antarctic sovereignty through a Russian policy lens in order to elicit strategic scenarios for the future history of Antarctica. Can we expect Russia to remain a cooperative, collaborate Antarctic stakeholder? Will Moscow's great power ambitions under the Putin system shape a more assertive, perhaps aggressive, Antarctic strategy? Beyond unpacking the strategic implications of Russian Antarctic strategy, this paper asks the question: how will, how can, the ATS respond to and weather such pressures?

Using international guidelines to improve tourism management in Antarctica

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One of the primary challenges to Antarctic governance is the management of tourism, which could increase by as much as 40% in under a decade. Discussions of tourism at recent Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs) have focused on more abstract discussions that have little chance of resulting in concrete outcomes. In this presentation, we will examine a potential means for enhancing Antarctic governance of tourism by using the recently published Guidelines for Tourism and visitor management in protected areas from IUCN as a framework for analysis and discussions. IUCN is a well-respected authority on conservation, and these guidelines synthesize lessons learned from a diverse set of countries.

In our presentation, we will examine the current tourism management system in Antarctica in the context of the IUCN principles and guidelines and identify where it meets or exceeds international best practice and where it falls short. For example, there is a system of site guidelines to manage visits, but the selection of sites is largely opportunistic and reactive. Therefore, we offer suggestions for framing future ATCM discussions on tourism through the lens of implementing IUCN guidelines and filling gaps between the guidelines and the current system. We will also discuss how IUCN guidelines can be adapted for the unique governance system of Antarctica. This will help the ATCM move from conceptual to practical discussions on tourism regulation, and ensure continued protection of the Antarctic environment based on proven strategies.

Antarctic Hierarchies: Stratification, Status and Socialization

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Sixty years after the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, global power shifts and especially the growing influence of Asian actors are raising the question whether and how the status quo Antarctic order can be maintained. This paper engages with the most recent International Relations (IR) theory scholarship about hierarchies in world politics (Zarakol 2017; Zarakol and Bially Mattern 2015; Bukovansky et al. 2012; Lake 2009).

First, it argues that today's Antarctic order remains a stratified configuration of rights and privileges which centers/constitutes selected states as Antarctic actors with authoritative status. For example, original signatories cannot lose their consultative party status, and unlike any other state territorial claimant states have the right to maintain their claims.

Second, it explores stratified processes, dynamics, and forms of power that shed light on socialization dynamics which are crucial for the accommodation of new status aspirations by actors like China or South Korea: are states buying into the stratified Antarctic order for functional bargains, or because of meaningful social relations that constrain or influence agent choices and behavior, and/or because established Antarctic practices are "cultures-in-action" that produce Antarctic players as such as well as their repertoires for action?

Understanding how socialization works for established as well as emerging actors within this stratified system, is crucial to political analyses of the future of the Antarctic order for scholars and decision makers alike.

The response of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to emerging and projected impacts of climate change

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Human activities in the Southern Ocean are managed through the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). CCAMLR is a multinational consensus-based Convention and meets annually to determine management decisions relating to fishing activities and conservation in the delivery of its objective. The CCAMLR Convention requires its Members to base its management decisions on a precautionary, ecosystem-based and scientific approach. In recent years, emerging rapid environmental changes likely to be associated with the impact of climatic change have been reported in parts of the Antarctic region, and research suggests ongoing changes and direct impacts on species and habitats of interest to CCAMLR. Such changes are likely to influence CCAMLR's capacity to deliver its objective, particularly concerning the maintenance of healthy ecological relationships between harvested species and those that are dependent or associated, and with respect to minimising or preventing the risk of long-term fishing impacts on the Southern Ocean ecosystem. This paper reviews CCAMLR's management response to this problem thus far, and provides suggestions on possible responses into the future.

Does the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) use 'Best available science'?

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Human activities in the Southern Ocean are managed through the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). CCAMLR is a multinational consensus-based Convention and meets annually to determine management decisions relating to fishing activities and conservation in the delivery of its objective. The CCAMLR Convention requires its Members to base its management decisions on the 'best available scientific advice', and CCAMLR prides itself on taking such a precautionary approach. But is that true? The current stalemate in the adoption and implementation of a network of marine protected areas, the failure to include the possible impacts of rapidly changing environments when assessing management measures for fisheries, and the failure to take the advice of the Scientific Committee on specific fishery proposals raises questions about the Commission's interpretation and acceptance of the advice from its Scientific Committee as well as the basis of that advice. This paper tracks proposals from consideration by the Scientific Committee, the Committee's advice to the Commission and the Commission's response to review this claim. It analyses instances where Scientific Committee advice is not accepted and identifies trends across categories of decisions, Members' positions and the arguments used. The analysis identifies that 'best available science' is least accepted in proposals concerning issues that extend beyond directed fisheries management, and that particular Members question the basis of the scientific advice more frequently than others. The paper concludes that the Commission of CAMLR is not consistent in its approach to the application of 'best available science'.

Antarctic Protected Areas and Climate Change

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Antarctica, and particularly the Peninsula region, is increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as ice retreat and changing species distribution, while human activity is putting increasing pressure on marine and terrestrial environments. Under the Antarctic Treaty System, protected areas can be designated to protect locations of scientific, environmental, historic and intrinsic value (Antarctic Specially Protected Areas; ASPAs) or to encourage operational coordination to minimise environmental impact (Antarctic Specially Managed Areas; ASMAs). We evaluated the effectiveness of current policy and environmental management practices for addressing climate change within the Antarctic Protected Areas System. In general, climate change has been little considered in guidelines for designation and management of the region's protected areas. Climate change impacts are discussed in only 17% of ASPA management plans, with those ASPAs located on the Antarctic Peninsula and Scotia Arc generally referring to climate change impacts more than those for areas located on continental Antarctica. Despite rapid climate change having occurred over most of the Antarctic Peninsula, less than 6% of ASPA management plans detail how climate change has affected the management of the area. We recommend greater consideration of climate change within the Antarctic Protected Areas System and suggest designation of new protected areas to mitigate climate change impacts across the continent.

Latin American theories in International Relations looks to Antarctica (and vice versa)

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The Antarctic Treaty System is dealing with several threats, such as the impacts of climate change, pollution, biopiracy, biological invasions, the increasing footprint of human activity, and the global power shifts. Within this context, it is worth reflecting on the contributions of the social science theories to the comprehension of such contemporary dilemmas for Antarctic policy-makers. Assuming that the production of knowledge is always situated, this paper explores Latin American theories in International Relations (IR) on Antarctica. The results show their view about the role that Latin America plays in the world politics, and concerning Antarctica, different views about the demands for the exploitation of resources, the question of the sovereignty, the future of the White Continent, and the Antarctic Treaty System. This paper concludes with some remarks about the contribution of such theories to the comprehension of the politics of Antarctica and highlights how these theories are elaborated in the context of new Antarctic dilemmas.

'Logrolling' across Treaties of the Antarctic Treaty System: A Path to Pragmatic Compromise or Loss of Legitimacy in Antarctic Governance?

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The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is viewed as a successful example of international governance. This is due to the way the ATS has governed international tension over sovereignty claims and adapted to new issues, including marine resource management and environmental protection. However, over the last decade, two issues stand out as key geopolitical pressure points in Antarctic governance. First, in the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), several proposals to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the Southern Ocean have failed to achieve consensus. It is well known that China and Russia are key states who remain unconvinced of these proposals. Second, in the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, China has proposed special management arrangements for the area around the Kunlun research station located on the Dome A area of East Antarctica. Australia is one of several countries that remain unconvinced of the necessity for these special management arrangements. General theories of negotiation and international diplomacy suggests that 'logrolling' (i.e. issue linkage in negotiation) can be an effective strategy for states avoid gridlock and achieve joint gains from cooperation. This paper analyses the risks and opportunities for states in adopting a 'logrolling' strategy considering the above issues. We find that while logrolling may have the capacity to facilitate short-term diplomatic success, this would need to be weighed against a significant risk of weakening other rules and principles within the ATS, particularly in the context of a shifting global geopolitical order.

The implementation of the Antarctic Treaty System by Latin American countries: a comparative case study

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Although the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is recognized as a good example of international cooperation, it is prone to interferences arising from member states' national interests. Historically, Latin American countries have been quite active within Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs), ATS' main decision making forum. Within these countries we can highlight Chile and Argentina, original members of the Antarctic Treaty who have requested territorial sovereignty in the region. Thus, based on the idea that each country's position on Antarctic issues results from the sum of domestic and international bureaucratic processes, combined with other forces (such as national geopolitical and economic interests), this study aims to answer the following question: do structural and political differences between Latin American Antarctic Programs influence the way their agents implement the norms established by the ATS? To approach this question we will observe the historical narrative about the construction of each country's Antarctic policy and national Antarctic program. We will also compare the characteristics of territorialist and nonterritorialist countries' programs. Methodologically, a comparative case study will be carried out using the process tracing technique, based on qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews with key actors, official documents and relevant literature.

Could climate change melt the foundations of the ATS?

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Participation as a consultative party to the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is largely dependent upon scientific activity – the “science criterion”. In this paper I argue that the science criterion developed from a historically specific conception of Antarctica as a laboratory in which to study phenomena with both local and global significance, rooted in the International Geophysical Year (1957-58). But anthropogenic climate change has altered the continent’s status from a somewhat abstract laboratory to a potentially existential threat to millions of people around the world. Should authority over Antarctica instead be invested in states most affected by physical geographical processes in Antarctica rather than the states that do most to investigate them? I conclude that the science criterion can remain viable, but that its legitimacy may be undermined unless a stronger case is made for the privileged association between science in Antarctica and positive outcomes for the world at large.

Mapping conservation and rational use of the Southern Ocean: The CCAMLR system at a glance

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Different interpretations of the roles of conservation and rational use influence spatial uses of the Southern Ocean. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has the primary (but not exclusive) responsibility for managing the activities that impact on marine life in the Southern Ocean, in accordance to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAMLRL Convention). The objective of the CAMLR Convention is the conservation of marine living resources, including rational use subject to key principles of conservation that protect the ability of marine life to regenerate and thrive. A complex tapestry of Conservation Measures adopted by CCAMLR applies to different spatial and temporal scales, and for different fishing activities. Marine spatial protection is one of the tools used to achieve the Convention objectives. Non-spatial forms of management cover certain activities or practices as well as specific target species. The effectiveness of this system is influenced by the politics of CCAMLR and of the Antarctic Treaty System at large. Climate change and other stressors are an additional challenge to the longer term effectiveness of this regime. Based on the analysis of fishing and other records, in this presentation we map – both conceptually and in actual maps – the interaction between conservation and rational use in the Southern Ocean. Our purpose is to show how the CCAMLR system works at a glance, identify spatially defined conservation highs and lows, and make recommendations for improvement.

Assessing National Antarctic Science Program: A Case Study of China

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China has become a significant and influential member of the Antarctic Treaty, following its accession to the treaty in 1983. China also met the requirements for consultative party status and China became an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Party (ATCP) in 1985. China has also acceded to other components of the Antarctic Treaty System: The Protocol on Environmental Protection in 1994 and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources in 2006. Although China's Antarctic activities started very late, its engagement as an active ATCP has attracted increasing attention. China's participation in Antarctic matters in general and Antarctic science, in particular, is of great significance. The primary objective of this paper is to analyse China's Antarctic science program and its engagement and participation in international cooperative science and evaluate its achievements. The paper examines, first, the requirements for China achieving consultative party status. It then examines China's performance as an ATCP through the history of China's activities in Antarctica and its commitment to logistics and infrastructure to support science in Antarctica. Finally, the paper examines the evolution of China's Antarctic science over the past four decades and considers key metrics to assess the quality and quantity of China's Antarctic science programs.

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