

Argentina Threatens to Involve US and China in Antarctic Dispute with Chile

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The agreement between Buenos Aires and Washington to install a logistics base in southern Argentina could involve the US and China and bring greater external influence to southern South America. This planned logistics base is worrying Chile, which plans a legislative session in Antarctica to strengthen its sovereignty on the isolated continent.

When Argentine president Javier Milei visited the southernmost city of his country, Ushuaia, to announce the United States' participation in an Antarctic logistics base, concerns were sparked in Santiago, whose claim of sovereignty over Antarctica partially overlaps with that of Argentina. Chilean concern was consolidated when Milei stated in an interview with the [Neura Media](#) that US support in the south not only strengthens, according to the president, the claim of sovereignty over the British-held Islas Malvinas, more commonly known as the Falkland Islands, but also "endorses the claim over Antarctica."

Based on these statements, the Defence Commission of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies decided to meet on May 21 in Antarctica, both to learn more about the current state of activities and to give a "sign of sovereignty to the national territory," said the president of the commission, deputy Francisco Undurraga, according to the Chilean [newspaper](#) La Tercera.

Also, a member of the commission, Andrés Jouannet, explained to the outlet that he requested that the session be held "in the context of the claims that Argentina and President Javier Milei have."

"For the first time in the history of the Republic and Antarctica, a Defence commission met at the three bases. It was an absolutely geopolitical and sovereignty action. So much so that at the Arturo Prat base, when we were meeting, an Argentine warship was

outside,” Jouannet said when recalling how, in January 2023, the body held meetings at Chilean naval bases in Antarctica.

The Chilean government seems to share the concerns of Congress members since the Minister of Defence, Maya Fernández, also extended the invitation to Antarctica to deputies and senators of the Defence Commission. Therefore, the upcoming session on the southernmost continent will involve the Executive.

Chile’s rights over Antarctica were established in 1554 on the concept of *uti possidetis*, which corresponds to the establishment of post-independence limits for Latin American countries. Chile claims its possession of Antarctica between the 53rd and 90th meridians, a portion of which overlaps with the Argentine claim between the 25th and 74th meridians. In that sense, although there was cooperation between both countries, there is a geopolitical competition that, for the moment, is contained by the Antarctic Treaty, which will be in force at least until 2048.

At stake between Argentina and Chile are the gateway cities to Antarctica, the locations from which the countries receive logistical assistance to send their contingents to the Antarctic, the southernmost continent in the world. The Argentine city of Ushuaia comes into direct competition with Chile’s Punta Arenas and Puerto Williams, the southernmost city in Chile.

The key to Chile’s concern lies in the fact that, within the competition both countries maintain for their strategic position over Antarctica, Argentina has tried to involve powers outside the region. The contacts between the government of Alberto Fernández (2019-2023) with China and those of Milei with the US to settle in Ushuaia are examples of this.

Bringing foreign competition between the US and China to the region only creates greater problems. Chile and Argentina have a history of cooperation on Antarctic matters, and it is better to maintain this bilaterally rather than incorporate other international actors such as the US and China.

It is worth noting that the agreement between Argentina and the US was agreed upon by the head of the Southern Command of the US Army, Laura Richardson, and not by the ambassador to the country, Marc Stanley, or any envoy from the commercial sector. This gives the agreement a very special character, considering that in its reports, the Southern Command sees China’s interference in the region as a great threat.

For this reason, the agreement enthusiastically presented by Milei constitutes more of a move by the US than by Argentina in its goal of keeping China at bay in the region. However, the Argentine president has a misguided position if he believes that Washington will favour Argentina in a sovereignty dispute with the United Kingdom, its greatest historical ally, over the Islas Malvinas.

Despite the reality that Washington will always favour London, Milei desperately wants Argentina to become a “global partner” of NATO. Although joining NATO would not force Argentina to open foreign military bases in its territory, a deepened involvement in the Alliance could pressure Congress to allow them particularly in Ushuaia which again, concerns Chile since NATO warships will be at the border of Chile and within easy sailing distance to Punta Arenas and Puerto Williams.

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