

Bolivia vs. Chile: The Regional Consequences of Liberalism vs. Realism

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Bolivia's efforts to reverse the geopolitical results of the 1879-1883 War of the Pacific with Chile are couched in the liberal naiveté that moral arguments in and of themselves can bring about tangible change in the contemporary Neo-Realist international system.

Chile's conquest of Bolivia's Pacific coastline following the now-landlocked state's utter defeat in the [1879-1883 War of the Pacific](#) was psychologically traumatizing for the entire nation and played a key role in shaping its identity in the present day. La Paz has always insisted that the territorial concession agreement was signed by a quisling government under duress, and that Santiago's annexation of what the victor now refers to as the Antofagasta Region was illegal under international law. Chile also took over a sliver of southern Peruvian territory too, but Lima hasn't followed in La Paz's footsteps by agitating for more than the past century for its return, though to be fair, Peru wasn't left landlocked after this loss and therefore suffered comparatively less than Bolivia did in the many decades since.

This long-dormant dispute is once again at the fore of continental geopolitics because Bolivia has [succeeded in getting its case heard](#) at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which has thus brought renewed media attention to its claims. Although the energy- and mineral-rich Heartland state has preferential access to the sea via subsequent agreements that it reached with Chile, it wants to regain administrative-political sovereignty over its lost territory and kick the former conquerors out. Bolivia has an wide array of moral and ethical arguments in support of its case, but at the end of the day, none of them matter much even if the World Court rules in its favor since the globalist body has no enforcement mechanisms for guaranteeing Chile's compliance.



Liberal Dreams...

It'll still be a few months before the International Court of Justice makes a decision on this case, so there's a chance that it will decide to retain the status quo after taking into consideration that Bolivia nevertheless still has unhindered access to the sea via what is now internationally recognized as Chilean territory. Even in the unexpected event that it decides to reverse the geopolitical state of affairs in this part of the world, there's nothing of tangible consequence that it can do to change the fact that Chile exercises sovereignty over this disputed region. Bolivia is banking on its neighbor adhering to international law despite accusing it of flouting as much for over the past 100 years, which is the epitome of liberal naiveté.

No ruling halfway across the world by a powerless body of unelected and therefore unaccountable bureaucrats is going to get Chile to voluntarily withdraw from the territory that it believes it rightfully received after its victory in the late-19th-century War of the Pacific. Furthermore, no matter how much “international pressure” Bolivia will try to put on Chile regardless of whatever the World Court’s ruling ends up being, it’s extremely doubtful that it will succeed in getting neighboring Peru – which also lost territory to Chile after that conflict – to formally side with it due to that country’s inclusion in the [Pacific Alliance](#) alongside Santiago and a few other Latin American states.

Peru does, however, have ancient civilizational connections with Bolivia and its port of Ilo is the terminal location for the [Transoceanic Railroad](#) (TORR) that China is constructing across South America in connecting Brazil to the Pacific via the landlocked state, but this promising Silk Road integrational prospect might not be enough to convince the country to abandon its win-win relationship with Chile out of any potential “zero-sum” pressure that La Paz might put it under. In addition, the reversing of one century-old wartime territorial gain by the International Court of Justice could dangerously open up the Pandora’s Box of drawing into question every other geopolitical change anywhere else in the world since that time, or in its most extreme manifestation, even beforehand as well.



...Are Ruined By Reality

The Neo-Realist school of thought that dominates global geostrategic behavior nowadays, especially in the context of the “[19th-Century Great Power Chessboard](#)” paradigm, teaches that controversial territorial changes of significance are unlikely to occur voluntarily and are more often than not preceded by the use of force. In this instance, Chile won’t give Antofagasta to Bolivia no matter what the World Court rules, meaning that the landlocked state will either have to resort to the unilateral use of conventional force, assemble a “Coalition of the Willing” to assist it, and/or employ [Hybrid War](#) tactics to get what it wants, none of which are realistic or viable options at the moment (or ever really have been in this situation).

In the grand sense of how the world actually works, it’s not important whether Bolivia is “right” and Chile is “wrong” – that alone, in spite of whichever globalist body or other third-party entity feels the same way, isn’t going to convince Santiago to surrender the disputed territory. The only thing that can accomplish that in this case is force, which is beyond La Paz’s capabilities and will remain so for the foreseeable future. It’s improbable that Bolivian President Evo Morales doesn’t realize this, which suggests that he might have other reasons beside soft power prestige and international attention for focusing so much on this sensitive issue at this point in time.

Morales’ Electioneering Magic

The country’s first-ever indigenous leader just won a [Supreme Court ruling](#) allowing him to run for an unprecedented fourth term in office next year following the [narrow defeat](#) of a recent referendum on this issue, which he blamed on his right-wing foes in Bolivia’s resource-rich “Media Luna” region of the east. Morales’ opponents have been fiercely against him for over a decade now, sometimes even [resorting to violence](#) in a desperate bid to provoke the security services into an overreaction that could then be decontextualized

and disseminated to “delegitimize” his government. These forces want to “federalize” the country and thereby allow their hoped-for autonomous regions to retain control over their finances, which would in turn be deprived from the majority indigenous-inhabited mountainous western part of the country.

The end result of this plan would be the collapse of Morales’ leftist-socialist welfare programs that have made enormous progress in bettering the living conditions of Bolivia’s native people but which are considered to be financially dependent on the oil and gas resources extracted from the “[Media Luna](#)”. That said, the country’s strategic [lithium reserves](#) are located mainly in the western half of the state that would be under mostly indigenous control in any prospective “federalization” scenario, but even so, the TORR would still run completely through the “Media Luna”. In order to prevent the “[Bosnification](#)” of his country and the very likely re-impoverishment of its majority-indigenous population after they’re cut off from energy revenues and the TORR trade, Morales must win re-election next year, and he’s hoping that his renewed focus on what Chile describes as its Antofagasta Region will help him at the upcoming polls.

It’s not to suggest that Morales is entirely cynical and doesn’t care about returning this lost territory to Bolivia – he does, and he’s totally serious about it – but that he’s wise enough to realize that it won’t happen just because a globalist body might rule in his country’s favor sometime in the coming months. Instead, the contemporary value in reviving this dispute relevantly resides in him being able to galvanize the masses under a patriotic pretext that he could then redirect towards a resounding electoral victory that he absolutely needs to be achieved by a wide enough margin to avoid any external (US) accusations of “fraud”, which will predictably be leveled by the opposition anyhow despite the ultimate results (so long as they’re in his favor).

Concluding Thoughts

Fearful for his political future and that of his country after narrowly losing the 2016 referendum over changing the presidency’s term limits, Morales knows that it’s now or never and that he absolutely must pull off an electoral victory next year. To that end, he’s poised to ride the patriotic wave that will crest later this year regardless of the World Court’s decision, but he must simultaneously take care to not fall for any of the opposition’s [Hybrid War provocations](#) in the meantime as they seek to turn Bolivia into the “New Venezuela” of American-backed destabilization, which in this instance would be indirectly focused on disrupting, controlling, and/or influencing China’s TORR Silk Road megaproject in South America. As such, **Bolivia’s international liberal plea for sovereign access to the Pacific is interestingly a realist ploy for domestic political purposes that will have [profound geostrategic consequences](#) in the [New Cold War](#).**

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