



WILLIAM J. PERRY CENTER
FOR HEMISPHERIC DEFENSE STUDIES
2013 EDITION, No. 2 (SEPTEMBER)

REGIONAL INSIGHTS

Border Disputes in Latin America

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The recent escalation of land and maritime border disputes in Latin America threatens to upset the fragile peace between nations that has characterized the region for years. Tensions over these territorial boundaries have festered since the era of Latin American independence. Some resulted in the mobilization of military forces, a dangerous escalation that can create combustible relations among countries. So far, none of the recent incidents have resulted in armed conflict. Nonetheless, this is a worrisome trend in a region in which such quarrels are responsible for the majority of the conflicts in the last two centuries. Coupled with bellicose language from national leaders, these confrontations could trigger a military response to interstate tensions.

In this essay, we examine a number of the current border disputes in Latin America that threaten to generate state-on-state violence. The analysis includes both land disputes as well as conflicts over territorial waters and maritime economic exclusion zones. We explore the historical roots associated with each one. We also appraise the macro-level international structure in Latin America to determine how conflict resolution issues are managed. Finally, we assess the larger political ramifications of the disagreements and attempt to determine why the Latin American countries behave the way they do.

The results show that contemporary Latin American nations are more likely to seek to resolve their issues in international legal institutions rather than resorting to military force. This occurs for two reasons. First, institutions like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provide an appealing alternative to military force.¹ International bodies like the United Nations (UN) are now widely accepted as legitimate and impartial adjudicators of justice. Second, the use of military force is considered a stigma among Latin American nations. In fact, a number of international treaties specifically prohibit the use of force among signatory parties and levy punishment on those nations that break from the accords. In sum, tensions are rising in Latin America over smoldering disagreements on international boundaries. For now, international structures, both legal institutions that resolve ongoing disputes and treaties that prevent nations from taking action, have deterred Latin American nations from fighting over territorial border disputes.

Origins and History of Border Disputes in Latin America

Since the era of independence in the early 1800s, the most violent conflicts in Latin America occurred over territorial discord in the region. In fact, wars initiated over border disputes caused more conflicts in Latin America in the 20th century than any other reason and caused thirty times as many casualties as all other interstate conflicts of the same period.²

The bloodiest confrontation in Latin American history occurred because of territorial tensions between Paraguay and the combined forces of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay from 1864 to 1870. The Paraguayan War—commonly referred to as the War of the Triple Alliance—

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Regional Insights is a publication of the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies. The views represented are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Perry Center, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. Copies of Perry Center publications can be obtained on the Perry Center website at <http://www.ndu.edu/chds>.

began over Paraguayan President Solano Lopez's expansionist policies in the strategically vital Rio de La Plata river basin. The ensuing six-year conflict claimed nearly 400,000 lives among the warring parties. In fact, according to one historical scholar, nearly 60 percent of the Paraguayan population died during the conflict, making the war the most destructive conflict in modern times.³

Another 19th century conflict during the same period also resulted from territorial aspirations. The Mexican-American War of 1846 broke out as a result of the annexation of Texas, an area claimed by both Mexico and the United States. Dispute over the territory began in the 1820s as Americans settled into the area and Mexico neglected to establish control of its remote and desolate northern territory. Mexican territorial control was reasserted in 1836 when the Mexican Army under General Santa Ana defeated the Texans at the Battle of the Alamo. The debate over sovereign control of the territory lingered until the U.S. Congress recognized Texas as a U.S. state in 1845. Both countries mobilized their military forces to the border, and the following year a violent confrontation between armed patrols roving through disputed territory along the Nueces River triggered the Mexican-American War. The conflict eventually caused nearly 30,000 casualties between the two armies.

The most violent of the 20th century Latin American conflicts was the 1932 war fought over the Gran Chaco region that Paraguay and Bolivia claimed as sovereign territory. Claims that the area was rich in petroleum reserves heightened the stakes and enmity between the competing factions. More than 100,000 Bolivians and Paraguayans lost their lives in the ensuing conflict. The border discord was so contentious that it wasn't officially solved until 2009 when both sides agreed on the demarcation of the international boundary between the two countries.⁴

In addition to the Chaco War, Peru and Ecuador fought over the Andean Ridge border on three separate occasions during the century—in 1941, in 1981, and most recently in 1995. Many other potential conflicts were resolved before they resulted in violence. In December 1978, Argentina and Chile seemed to be headed for a military confrontation over strategically located islands in the Beagle Channel that both countries claimed. Only a papal intervention prevented an outbreak of violence.

Another long-term disagreement exists between Guyana and Venezuela. This dispute pertains to a 56,000-square-mile area of land in the Orinoco basin referred to as Guyana Esequiba. As in other regional boundary disagreements, the dispute spawned from the era of independence when disagreements over the borders between Venezuela and the former British Guiana remained unsettled. Venezuela claims all land west of the Essequibo River, an area that covers 5/8ths of the territory of modern Guyana.⁵

In 2007, the dispute nearly erupted into military conflict. According to Guyanese officials, Venezuelan military forces crossed the border into Guyana and destroyed two mining dredges. Guyanese military forces responded to the area but Venezuelan forces had already withdrawn, preventing an encounter that may have proven bloody and under circumstances similar to the event that ignited the Mexican-American War of 1846.

In sum, contentious and enduring disagreements over national boundaries triggered most military confrontations in Latin America. The following section will examine four of the most volatile border disputes in Latin America. Each has been addressed or is currently submitted to the International Court of



Note: The Guyana-Venezuela border dispute centers around the Essequibo River. The disagreement originates from the era of independence and almost resulted in a confrontation between Venezuelan and Guyanese military forces in 2007. Only the 1969 Honduras–El Salvador War was fought over something other than territorial disputes. Map compliments of the Library of Congress.

Justice. All four represent a threat to the stability of the countries involved and have potential to erupt into a violent conflict that could destabilize what until now has been the most peaceful region of the world.⁶

The Falklands Islands

The longest ongoing dispute in Latin America and the only one that involves a nation from outside the region is the quarrel over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean. The conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina—which calls the islands the Malvinas Islands—dates back to the early 1800s when the British first made a claim over the South Atlantic archipelago because of its strategic value as a naval base. The British have exercised de facto sovereignty over the islands ever since, with the exception of a short period of Argentine control during the 1820s and 1830s.

The two sides finally clashed following a 1982 attempt by Argentina to seize the islands. An Argentine task force landed 600 troops on the island, captured the small British contingent of soldiers stationed there, and declared the Malvinas Islands sovereign ground for Argentina.

A short but violent war ensued. Under great logistical challenges and facing the onset of an inhospitable South Atlantic winter, the British sailed a naval task force almost 8,000 miles to the islands to recapture the British territory. For the next 74 days, the two sides engaged in a modern war-at-sea conflict unlike anything seen since the end of World War II. A British nuclear submarine torpedoed an Argentine cruiser, sinking it and killing more than 300 crewmembers. Argentine aircraft sank

20th Century Interstate Wars among Latin American Nations

Year	Incident	States Involved	Outcome and Remarks
1902	Acre War	Brazil and Bolivia	Fought over control of rubber plantations in disputed territory in the state of Acre along the Bolivian-Brazilian border. Bolivia eventually ceded the territory to Brazil.
1932	Chaco War	Bolivia and Paraguay	One of the bloodiest wars in South American history. The war offered access to the sea to whichever could control the area near the Paraguay River. However, neither country benefited geographically from the conflict; both countries, the only land-locked nations on the continent, lost territory to neighboring countries.
1932	Leticia Incident	Colombia and Peru	Dispute over the Leticia region in southeastern Colombia.
1941	Ecuadorian-Peruvian War	Ecuador and Peru	Ecuador and Peru went to war over border disputes along the Andean Cordillera. Both sides claimed the other initiated the conflict.
1969	Soccer War	Honduras and El Salvador	Fought over immigration issues.
1981	Paquisha Incident	Ecuador and Peru	The Peruvian Army occupied three Ecuadorian military outposts along the Cordillera del Cóndor.
1982	Falklands War	Argentina and Britain	Argentina invaded the British-controlled Falkland Islands, long considered by Argentines as part of their sovereign territory.
1995	Cenepa War	Ecuador and Peru	War breaks out over the Cordillera del Cóndor near the headwaters of the Cenepa River, a 78-kilometer strip of territory claimed by both countries.

Note: Only the 1969 Honduras–El Salvador War was fought over something other than territorial disputes.

Source: Material drawn from various sources including Robert L. Scheina, *Latin American Wars* (Dulles, VA: Brassey Publishing, 2003).

seven British ships with Exocet missiles or bombs. Aircraft carriers from both sides nearly had a showdown at sea until the Argentine carrier aborted the attack because of inadequate deck winds. British Special Forces sabotaged Argentine aircraft at an airbase on the mainland, then escaped overland into Chile. British soldiers eventually conducted an amphibious assault on the islands and were forced to march over the rugged island terrain to liberate the capital, Stanley. Nearly 650 Argentines and 250 British died in the conflict.

In 2010, tensions over the long-term dispute flared up again. That year London authorized oil prospecting around the islands. In October, Argentina lodged a formal protest to the United Nations denouncing a British military build-up and exercises around the islands, calling it a provocative action and adding that the British were “militarizing the South Atlantic.”⁷ Britain has a permanent military presence on the islands and maintains a force of 1,076 troops, four Typhoon strike fighters, and four ships in the region.

The confrontation is at risk of spreading beyond the two countries. In December 2011 members of the South American economic bloc known as the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) agreed not to permit British naval vessels or ships flying the Falklands flag from entering their ports. These countries—

Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile—decided to close their ports to British vessels to demonstrate their solidarity with neighboring Argentina. The following month, HMS *Clyde* was turned away from Rio de Janeiro. Peru also refused docking authority to British vessels.

In 2012, Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez and other members of the Bolivarian Alliances for the Americas (ALBA) coalition joined the debate.⁸ Chávez offered to side with Argentina in the event of a conflict. He announced, “If it occurs to the British Empire to attack Argentina, Argentina won’t be alone this time.”⁹ Such solidarity is shared by most South American nations. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa called for sanctions against Britain as an additional measure. At the 10th Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas in Punta Del Este, Uruguay, in October 2012, leaders of nearly every South American nation said they “back Argentina’s legitimate claim over the Malvinas, South Georgia and Sandwich islands” and expressed their “concern for the increasing militarization of the South Atlantic and the armed exercises being carried out on the Malvinas Islands.”¹⁰

For its part, Argentina claims that the Malvinas Islands are occupied national territory. Argentine President Cristina Kirchner said her country was forcibly stripped of the Falklands in “a blatant exercise of 19th-century colonialism.”¹¹ Furthermore, Kirchner



Zones of Maritime Jurisdiction around the Falkland Islands, highlighting area disputed between the UK and Argentina.

accused Britain of expelling the Argentines from the islands when it took control in 1833 and began a “population implantation process similar to that applied to other territories under colonial rule.”¹²

In response to the bellicose saber rattling by Argentina—including violent protests in which rioters threw Molotov cocktails at the British Embassy in Argentina—Prime Minister David Cameron convened the British National Security Council to examine contingencies for the defense of the island. Britain subsequently ordered one of its modern destroyers, HMS *Dauntless*, to the islands. As *Dauntless* sailed for the South Atlantic, Foreign Secretary William Hague added, “We will always be in a position to defend the Falklands if necessary.” When asked if Britain would fight to keep the islands, Prime Minister David Cameron responded, “Of course we would.” The Prime Minister’s policy reflects public opinion in Britain. A 2012 poll by the *Guardian* showed that 61 percent of respondents believe Britain should defend the islands “no matter what the cost.”¹³

Despite the national fervor associated with the Falkland Islands, Cameron’s and Hague’s declarations of certainty may not be grounded in the fiscal realities that England currently faces. Admiral Sandy Woodward, the commander of the naval task force that recaptured the islands in 1982, said the recent budget reductions of the British Armed Forces make the islands “perilously close to being indefensible.” He made those remarks during the decommissioning of HMS *Ark Royal*, the country’s last aircraft carrier, a class of vessel that played a critical role in achieving airspace domination and permitting an amphibious landing during the 1982 conflict. “The simple truth is that without aircraft carriers, we would not have any hope of doing the same again today,” he said.¹⁴ The head of the Royal Marines, who led the amphibious assault on the islands in 1982, shares Woodward’s bleak assessment. Retired Major General Julian Thompson stated that Britain would be unable to recapture the

islands again without the Royal Navy carriers to provide critical air support.¹⁵

For now, Argentina does not appear to have any intention of retaking the islands in a military operation. Instead, the South American nation is relying on diplomatic and economic pressure to bring Britain to the negotiating table over the sovereignty of the islands. Argentina even leveraged the new Pontiff in its diplomatic effort to reacquire the islands. Pope Francis, who hails from Argentina, stated the territory had been “usurped” and was “ours” [Argentina’s].¹⁶

The dangerous rhetoric and militarization of the island dispute drew attention from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The UN leader appealed to both sides to avoid an escalation of the situation and to try to reach a diplomatic accord over the disputed territory. However, numerous previous attempts by international courts have failed to resolve the sovereignty issue. The case was heard in the International Court of Justice three times: in 1947, 1948, and 1955. The ICJ denied Argentina sovereignty all three times. In 1964, the UN passed a resolution calling on the two nations to find a peaceful resolution to the problem. A series of talks took place over the next 17 years, none of which was able to satisfy Argentina.

Bolivia’s Access to the Sea

Almost as old as the Falklands dispute, Bolivia’s access to the Pacific Ocean has been a territorial issue among the Andean Ridge nations of South America since the middle of the 19th Century. As in the Falklands conflict, the border along the Atacama Desert between Chile and Bolivia was never clearly established during the period of Latin American independence. The issue became economically important when nitrates and minerals were discovered there in the middle of the 1800s. Control of the lucrative products from the region (important for the booming fertilizer and explosives industry of the period) proved a catalyst

for another violent episode in Latin American history. The 1879–1883 War of the Pacific took the lives of over 13,000 Chileans, Peruvians, and Bolivians. The subsequent truce in October 1883 and the 1904 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Chile and Bolivia deprived the latter nation of 250 miles of Pacific coastline.

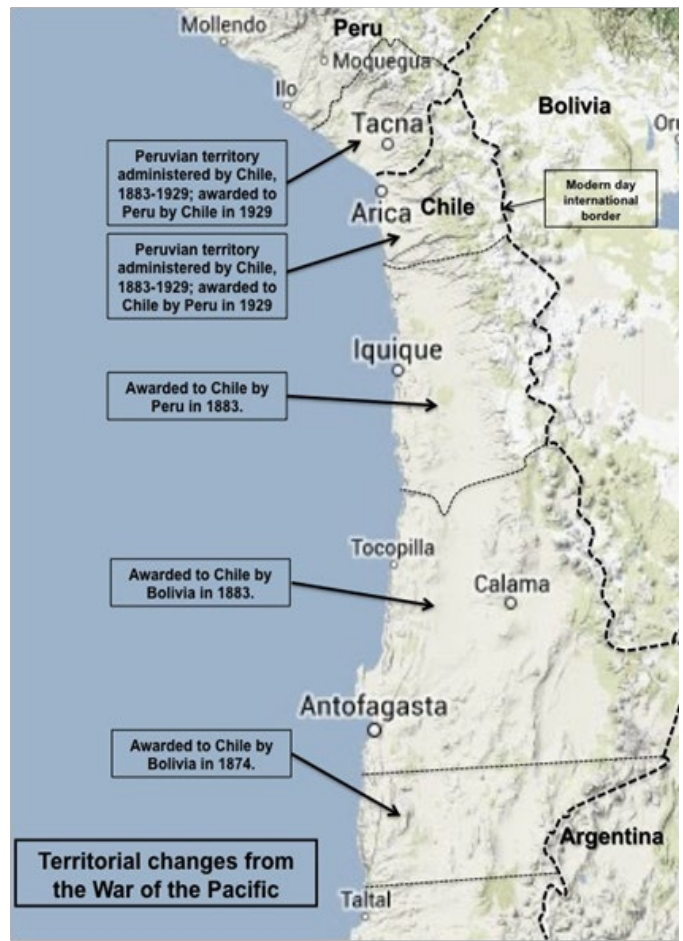
Chile considers the territory ceded by Bolivia and Peru in the war as the spoils of victory. Additionally, President Sebastian Piñera considers the 1904 Treaty to be a binding agreement on the borders between the two countries. “No one in the world will accept that a country unilaterally dismisses a treaty which is in full force,” Piñera stated in 2013.¹⁷ The territory Bolivia lost is the site of some of the world’s largest copper deposits, many operated by the Chilean state-owned National Cooper Corporation (CODELCO in Spanish), and is an important source of revenue for the country. At the same time, Chile recognizes Bolivia’s desire for access to the coast. As part of the 1904 Treaty, Chile agreed to permit Bolivia unrestricted transport of its commercial goods to the sea via road and rail, an arrangement that remains in place today.

Bolivia’s landlocked status has frequently created groundswells of national irredentism. In 1978, it resulted in a break in diplomatic relations with Chile. Popular sentiment rose on the 100-year anniversary of the 1904 treaty, and the issue has been a lightning rod for President Evo Morales, elected in 2006. In October 2012, Morales raised tensions between the two nations when he called Chile a threat to Bolivia.¹⁸ Relations further deteriorated later that month when Santiago, Chile, mayoral candidate Waldo Mora stated, “The only reason Bolivia wants a sovereign outlet to the sea is to ship drugs.” The remark was widely excoriated by the Bolivian press. Morales subsequently refused Chile’s offer for bilateral negotiations stating such talks would be a “waste of time.”¹⁹ In April 2013, Morales filed a suit at the International Court of Justice to reclaim access to the Pacific Ocean.

Peru-Chile Maritime Dispute

The International Court of Justice is reviewing another maritime dispute between two Pacific nations in South America. Like Bolivia, Peru lost a section of its territory to Chile as a result of the War of the Pacific. Five years of bloody warfare took the lives of nearly 11,000 Peruvians. After two years of fighting for sea control, Chilean soldiers reached Peru’s capital city, Lima, and proceeded to sack and loot the city. Peruvian resistance forces in the Andean Cordillera continued fighting using guerilla warfare tactics for nearly three more years. When both countries finally agreed to truce terms in the 1883 Treaty of Ancón, Peru surrendered the provinces of Tarapacá and Arica to Chile. The province of Tacna was also under Chilean control until 1929.

While the two countries already resolved their land border issues, the current disagreement rests with the boundaries of the maritime domains between Chile and Peru. Chile considers its northern maritime border to be drawn due west of its land border with Peru. Peru, on the other hand, considers the maritime border to be drawn perpendicular to the coast. This difference in border concepts results in nearly 15,000 square miles of ocean being claimed by both countries. Peru claims that the maritime line drawn by Chile cuts into its territory and inhibits its commercial fleets from operating in lucrative fishing areas in its economic exclusion zone.



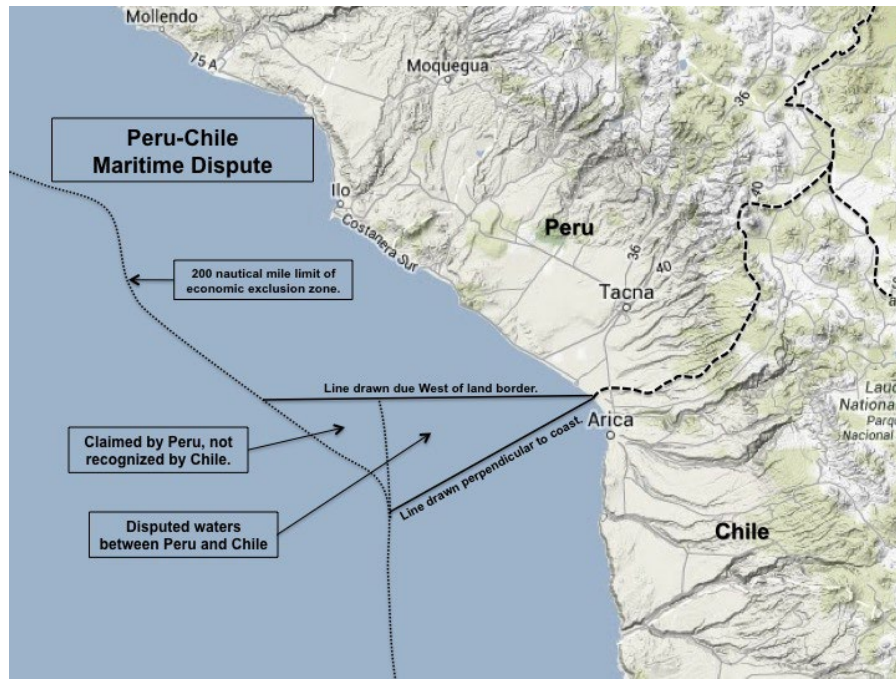
Results of the territorial changes from the War of the Pacific including subsequent treaties. Map information drawn from U.S. Library of Congress Country Studies.

The two nations previously tried to resolve the dispute. In 1952, Peru and Chile signed the Treaty of Santiago to divide the sea territory into exclusive fishing zones. Peru considered the treaty to be only a temporary accord, and in 1986 sent an envoy to Santiago to negotiate a definitive maritime border. Chile believed that the 1952 Treaty of Santiago had already established those maritime limits, however, and refused to negotiate further on the issue. Additional attempts to resolve the issue bilaterally were unsuccessful.

On January 16, 2008, Peru introduced the case to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The action proved to be an extremely popular move for President Ollanta Humala; presidential approval ratings jumped 6 percentage points from 44 percent to 50 percent following the announcement of the legal actions. Some estimates indicate that an ICJ decision in Peru’s favor could generate \$800–\$900 million in local revenues. About two-thirds of Peruvians polled in a recent survey indicate they expect a ruling in Peru’s favor.²⁰ Almost the same number believe that Chile will ignore any ICJ decisions unfavorable to them. A court decision is expected in late 2013.

The San Andres–Providencia Archipelago

While Peru and Chile wait for the ICJ judgment on their maritime borders, another recent ICJ decision had significant consequences



The International Court of Justice will judge on a dispute between Peru and Chile regarding maritime borders. A decision is expected in late 2013.

further north. In a November 2012 decision, the International Court of Justice declared that the waters surrounding the San Andres and Providencia Islands, a cluster of small islands off the Central American coast, belonged to Nicaragua rather than Colombia. The court decision left the islands under Colombian control, but drew a demarcation line in favor of Nicaragua in the nearby waters.

The islands in question lie 125 miles off the eastern Nicaraguan coast but almost 450 miles north of Colombia. The court said the territorial waters extending out from the seven islets should not cut into Nicaragua’s continental shelf. The decision by the 15-judge panel greatly expanded Nicaragua’s economic exclusion zone (EEZ) by granting it a large horseshoe-shaped area of the sea and seabed stretching from its mainland coast around the Colombian islands. The decision, which has substantial prospects for offshore oil, gas deposits, and lucrative fishing grounds, reduced the expanse of ocean controlled by Colombia. Colombia maintained control of the territorial waters and seabed immediately surrounding its islands and cays, but the court decision jeopardized the livelihoods of thousands of Colombian fisherman who live on the islands and rely on fishing as their primary source of income.

The dispute over the islands has long created a volatile atmosphere between the two nations. The month before the court decision, Nicaragua provocatively ordered one of its research vessels, the *Mede-Pesca III*, into the disputed zone. The captain of the ship said he received, “clear instructions from the government of Nicaragua to continue his navigation.” In an incident with potentially violent consequences, Colombian warships and a C-130 Hercules aircraft allegedly harassed the vessel to prevent it from conducting research in Colombian-claimed waters.²¹ In turn, Nicaragua complained that Colombia assumed a “hostile posture” toward its civilian research ship.²²

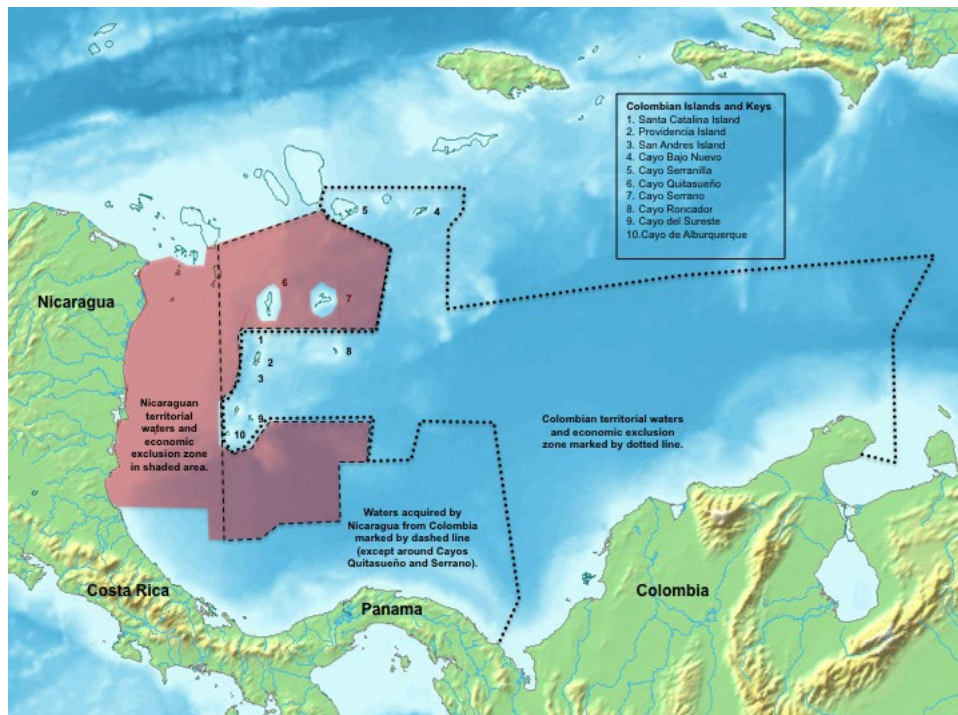
Both President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua and President

Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia said they hoped to avoid war over the contentious decision. Despite that, the situation immediately grew testy in the disputed waters following the ICJ decision. Nicaraguan fishermen claimed that Colombian military warships and helicopters harassed them in the waters awarded to Nicaragua. In response, Nicaragua deployed Coast Guard ships to the waters to protect its fishing interests. In an indication of a potentially explosive confrontation, Colombia announced it would maintain sea and air patrols of the region despite the ICJ decision. One Colombian Navy commander said he received instructions from the government to “maintain the sovereignty of Colombia’s maritime jurisdiction as it has historically been known.”²³ In a survey that shows the level of resistance in Colombia to the court decision, 85 percent of Colombians believe their government should ignore the ruling even if means war with Nicaragua.²⁴

Faced with few alternatives—the court decision is considered binding and not subject to appeal—Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced Colombia would remove itself from the 1948 Bogota Pact, which recognizes the court’s jurisdiction to resolve international disputes.²⁵ The decision to quit the international treaty does not provide Colombia any new options with regard to the decision about the islands. The country had agreed to abide by the court’s arbitration before the decision was made.

Analysis

There are a number of important takeaways from the contemporary territorial disputes in Latin America. First, all the interstate wars in the 20th century involved territorial disagreements with the exception of the 1969 Honduras–El Salvador Soccer War. Latin America is not unique in this regard. According to Vasquez and Henehan, territorial disputes are a common underlying cause of interstate wars.²⁶ Studies of modern wars indicate that issues



A November 2012 decision by the International Court of Justice awarded a sizable portion of Colombian waters to Nicaragua.

related to territory complicated over half of all conflicts.²⁷

Second, poorly demarcated international boundaries following the era of Latin American independence compounded all the border conflicts of the 20th century. The Center of Systemic Peace indicates that nearly all of the armed conflicts that occurred across the globe in the 1990s and 2000s involved an escalation in a long-standing dispute rather than an outbreak of a new conflict.²⁸ Moreover, such territorial disputes frequently endured for long periods because they involved profitable natural resources. Other scholarly studies support the fact that border disputes are recidivist. In a 1994 study, Paul Hensel determined that militarized confrontation followed more than 85 percent of interstate disputes in Latin America. In other words, the majority of all armed conflicts do not successfully alleviate the tensions between the participants. Furthermore, territorial disputes were more likely to generate greater resentment, produce more hostility, and prove more intractable than any other type of dispute.²⁹

Third, since the conclusion of the 1995 Cenepa War, nearly every nation involved in a contemporary border dispute has sought arbitration from an international legal institution rather than resorting to unilateral action. Likewise, despite often inflammatory rhetoric and some limited military mobilization, no country has resorted to military force. This is remarkable in a region historically dominated by war-prone military regimes. In the past, even mobilization of forces by a potential opponent was enough to trigger a spiraling escalation of force. As Robert Jervis noted in his classic *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, military buildups by adversaries are often misconstrued by their opponents as not only a potential threat but preparation for hostile action.³⁰

Last, the actions of the Latin American nations demonstrate a due regard for an international system that rejects the fundamental precepts of realism. Classical realism, long rejected

by political scholars because of its lack of explanatory power, proposes that the international system is anarchic. That is, no international community or government dictates actions of sovereign nations. Rather, states—unitary, rational actors, according to classical realists—tend to pursue goals that satisfy their own interests. Foremost among those interests are to attain as much territory—especially resource-rich territory—as possible. Consequently, military power is considered critical to project power. At the same time, international bodies such as collective government institutions and non-governmental organizations have little influence on sovereign behavior.

However, in the case of the contemporary Latin American border disputes, no nations have resorted to military power when at variance with another country. Instead, the accepted custom has evolved to include international arbitration from a collective body, a precept that realists have long dismissed as inadequate. This is a structural change in the international system that constrains the ability of sovereign nations to act unilaterally. The international system is now characterized by the opposite of what classical realists called structural anarchy—the lack of a powerful world governing body to punish perpetrators and maintain international order. Just the opposite, international norms and treaty obligations determine nations' actions. Latin American countries' acceptance of international legal institutions like the ICJ as legitimate represents a tectonic shift in sovereign relations, one that discourages military confrontation and instead accepts international arbitration to resolve disputes. Even when a nation is ordered to surrender its territory—normally an unthinkable concept for a realist sovereign entity—not one resorted to force to preserve its territory.

Certainly it is true that military power remains a deterrent. In two of the four case studies in this essay—the Bolivia-Chile feud over Bolivia's access to the sea and the Nicaragua-Colombia

dispute over the Caribbean islands—one of the participants has a decisive military advantage over the other. In the other cases, Peru and Chile, for example, the military capabilities of the participants are relatively equal. Even with a rapidly shifting situation in the South Atlantic (Britain's diminishing ability to project power at long distances), no nation has resorted to military action. Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, an accomplished military leader with decades of combat experience, said, "We are totally discarding the use of force," and stated that he hoped to avoid a military confrontation with Colombia and instead to rely on diplomacy to solve the territorial dispute.³¹

In the classical realist theory that militarily advantageous nations use their power to protect their own interests, Colombia would have rejected the ICJ decision on the waters surrounding the San Andres–Providencia archipelago and maintained control of their economic exclusion zone, something they could easily have done with the Colombian Navy's substantial advantage over that of the Nicaraguan Navy.

Conclusion

The recent escalation of border disputes represents the most significant risk of breaking the decades-long peace among nations in Latin America. Furthermore, the historical trends in the region—territorial disagreements caused nearly all recent conflicts—indicate that such discord could be a catalyst for armed conflict. At the same time, Latin American nations seem to accept arbitration by international legal institutions such as the International Court of Justice in place of unilateral action. For now, regional state actors choose to use international structures that promote peace rather than resorting to previous historical trends of aggression and conflict.

Notes

1 The International Court of Justice, commonly referred to as the World Court, is the primary tribunal of the United Nations. It is based in The Hague, Netherlands. All UN members are automatically parties to the Court's statute.

2 See the Center for Systemic Peace report on "Major Episodes of Political Violence," <http://www.systemicpeace.org/warlist.htm>.

3 Steven Pinker, *Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, October 4, 2011).

4 "Bolivia, Paraguay Settle Border Conflict from Chaco War," *Latin American Herald Tribune*, April 28, 2009.

5 In 1895, the two sides sought international arbitration to settle the matter. The international commission awarded the majority of the mineral-rich disputed territory to British Guiana in 1899. In 1962, two years before Guyana attained its independence from Britain, Venezuela declared that it would no longer abide by the arbitration decision in the wake of allegations that the decision was tainted by political backroom deals.

6 According to the Center for Systemic Peace (CSP), Latin America has experienced fewer interstate conflicts than any other region of the world. See CSP's report on "Regional Trends in Armed Conflict and Governance, 1946-2010," <http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflict.htm>.

7 "Argentina in UN Protest over British Falklands Moves," Agence France-Presse (AFP), October 11, 2010.

8 ALBA was initially proposed by Venezuela and then-President Hugo Chávez in 2004 as an alternative to the U.S.-proposed Free Trade Area

of the Americas. It is designed to serve as an international cooperation organization based on the idea of the social, political, and economic integration of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of its policies are contrary to U.S. preferences in the region. As of this writing, it has eight members.

9 "Chávez and Allies Back Argentina on Falklands," Associated Press, February 5, 2012.

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12 "British PM Dismisses Argentina's Falklands Demands," Agence France-Presse (AFP), January 3, 2013.

13 Juan Forero and Anthony Faiola, "Argentina Grasps Again for Archipelago," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2012, p. A12.

14 "Britain Cannot Defend Falklands: 1982 Task Force Chief," Agence France-Presse (AFP), June 14, 2011.

15 Ian MacKenzie, "New Falklands War Unlikely Says Former Commander," Reuters, April 13, 2012.

16 "Britain's Cameron Says Pope Is Wrong on the Falklands," Reuters, March 15, 2013.

17 "Bolivia to Take Chile Sea Dispute to International Court," BBC, April 24, 2013.

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19 "Bolivia Vows to Take Chile Border Dispute to Hague," Agence France-Presse (AFP), March 23, 2013.

20 John Quigley, "Humala Approval Jumps on Chile Maritime Dispute, Peru Poll Shows," Bloomberg, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-12-06/humala-approval-jumps-on-chile-maritime-dispute-peru-poll-shows.html>.

21 Ivan Castro, "Nicaragua's Ortega Expects Colombia to Respect Border Ruling," Reuters, November 23, 2012.

22 "UPDATE: Managua Blasts Colombia for Intercepting Nicaraguan Boat," EFE (Spain), October 11, 2012.

23 "Colombia Continues to Protest ICJ Ruling," Xinhua (China), November 26, 2012.

24 Michael Shifter and Cameron Combs, "Colombia-Nicaragua ICJ Case Tests Region's Crisis Resolution Mechanisms," *World Politics Review*, December 5, 2012.

25 In the Western Hemisphere, nearly all nations are participants in the Bogotá Pact, also referred to as the American Treaty on Pacific Settlement. Argentina, Cuba, Guatemala, the United States, and Venezuela signed but did not ratify the treaty. Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana have neither signed nor ratified the Pact.

26 John Vasquez and Marie Henehan, "Territorial Disputes and the Probability of War, 1816-1992," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2001), 123.

27 See John Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

28 See the Center for Systemic Peace's report on "Regional Trends in Armed Conflict and Governance, 1946-2010," <http://www.systemicpeace.org/conflict.htm>.

29 Robert Hensel, "One Thing Leads to Another: Recurrent, Militarized Disputes in Latin America, 1816-1986," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1994), 290.

30 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

31 Ivan Castro, "Nicaragua Won't Grant Underwater Drilling Rights in Contested Waters," Reuters, December 6, 2012; Alexandra Alper, "Colombia, Nicaragua Want to Avoid War over Water Rights Dispute," Reuters, December 1, 2012.