

# China Bipolar Strategy: Power Projection and Strategic Interests in the Arctic and Antarctic.

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## Abstract

Since the beginning of the economic reform policy, China political, financial and military power projection has been increasing. As rising global power during this century China aims to restart its historical central place in global affairs and secure its territorial and maritime borders. For political leaders the most important challenges in the near future will come from USA apprehensions due to a rising Chinese military power in Asia Pacific, Chinese increasing power through economic interdependence in South East Asia and the way to secure logistical routes for food and oil supplies to its people. According to this, China's North and South Poles (Arctic and Antarctic) main interests includes free access to circumpolar facilities like ports, reduce freight transport costs, and ensure access to natural resources in order to sustain long term development strategy. In this regard, the paper emphasizes the relevance acquired by the Arctic and Antarctic areas through scientific, geological infrastructure facilities development.

**Key words:** power projection, cooperation, climate change, international regimes, trade, energy

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## Introduction

Under the guidelines of "peaceful development" strategic, China plays an increasing role in the international system. Since the beginning of an open door policy, the country implemented a foreign policy, that have enabled its increasing global influence in the international arena. As big player in global affairs, China growing capacities in financial, trade, military and scientific fields drive deeper changes in international balance of power.

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In a context of a strategic building capacity strategy, in the last ten years, China's foreign policy is focused avoiding challenges from extra regional actors like USA, fulfill growing interdependence patterns with South East Asian economies and secure food, raw materials and oil supplies from different markets, mainly in Africa and the Middle East. Also, thanks to its new global leverage, China's foreign policy showed country's role in interstate multilateral organizations sphere (for instance, the United Nations), pan-Pacific cooperation forums (like APEC) commitments, south-south dialogues promotion. As a result, after years of opening reforms policy enforce, China has built a positive international image as "emerging power".

However, Chinese long term foreign policy goals, not only take the preeminence of USA or Asian countries relationships, but also targeted other strategies areas assumed critical points to secure future economic development and its own security: the North Pole and the South Pole. For these reasons, permanent settlements (bases, outposts and scientific centers) deployment in both poles, research activities policies, and joining multilateral regimes in the Arctic and Antarctic, China not only shows its new international stature, but also pursue strategic goals concerning accesses to natural resources (particularly oil and gas) and minerals laying under both poles ice seabed. Also, expected Arctic melting process will shorten sea lines routes, and increase maritime vessels traffic enable much higher interconnections between East Asia (mainly China) and European markets.

As it seen, China's long term ambitions in the north pole are focused in new possibilities given by the empowerment of east-west national maritime services, infrastructure upgrade policies (charging and refueling facilities) across coastal areas, new business opportunities for logistic companies, and easier access to deeper waters energy resources and biodiversity. All those factor, are not minor issues for china eager to secure food and energy long term supplies for a huge population and, actually the second economy in the world and perhaps the first by the middle of this century.<sup>2</sup>

But if China takes economic interest first, military suspicion are also relevant. According to this, Chinese leaders, military planners and policy

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<sup>2</sup> China's great heroe Admiral Zheng He (1371 - 1433) overseas expeditions, encourages historic goals to restart its historical regional hegemonic power.

makers, take bipolar projection strategy as an opportunity to reduce country economic and military vulnerability. By these actions, China expects among others goals to achieve, avoid security challenges that could hinder goods and services supplies for their industries (production) and citizen consumption.

The interdiction of freights routes by military forces (i.e.: USA naval forces) in the South East Asia straits (Malacca y Makassar) and reduction of time and transport costs, ranks also as top priorities in mind of chine leaders to allocate financial and human resources targeting both Poles. For those reasons, in the last ten years, China has been built powerful *blue waters* maritime forces drafted to protect national interests near its coasts and beyond near coast, specifically in East China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Icebreaker ships, destroyers, coast guards units, and a new aircraft carrier (Liaoning, placed into operations in 2012) are empirical facts of said above. Many of this maritime power, will eventually be used to guarantee Chinese cargos free pass trough Arctic waters and protect Chinese interest in the South Pole.

In third place, scientific and research activities are also key tool for its bipolar ambitions. In scientific fields, traditional and incoming actors like China are playing a more important role in both poles. States with historical presence in the Arctic as Russia, USA, Finland, Denmark, Norway or Sweden, area seeing a more proactive China in the area, driven by environmental and climate change research interests. The same way could be seen in China's Antarctic approach at the beginning of 80's, when opened its first Antarctic facilities, the *Great Wall Base*. (See map below).<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, natural resources and minerals (will be analyzed further later) potentials in the area are the main objective of the Communist Party (CCP). Deployment of excommunication devices, facilities and equipments for environment measures purposes are also part of Chinese Antarctic policy agenda.

Looking forward perhaps the hard challenges that China imposed will come from Arctic and Antarctic intra regimen disruptions. Until now, Arctic and Antarctic scenarios evolves within a cooperative framework provided by the Arctic Council (AC) and Antarctic Treaty (AT), state and

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<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of this century South Africa and South American countries, such as Venezuela and Uruguay, took first steps in the "white continent" helped by countries with "antarctic long historical presence" like Argentina.

non state actors consensus and multilateral rules preeminence in the sphere of diplomatic dealings. However, in the long term, clashes between scientific interest and economic needs could open a “Pandora box” followed by breaking consensus and perhaps, military confrontation between state members; aggressive unilateralism, lack of commitment and rules minimal enforcement by leaders countries, could lead a way to an open conflict in this century.

In both poles areas, sovereignty claims leads tensions between countries like USA and Russia; in the other side of the Earth, between Chile, Argentina, Great Britain, Australia, among others; until now this claims are constrains in the letter of Antarctic Treaty (TA) which regulate scientific and commercial activities. But the things could change before treaty expiration in 2041 when AT members should start negotiations to draw a new multilateral agreement. Antarctic current situation and future trends will imposed also, economic and strategic challenges due to remaining tensions in the South Atlantic surrounding area (i.e. Falkland Islands).

Taking the overview exposed above, the argument of this paper takes the "China factor" as key variable to understand current and evolving North and South Pole stability scenarios in the near future. Although China is not assumed as "rule breaker", its growing presence in both scenarios changes the balance of power; China's increasing economic, technological and military capabilities open the way to put more pressure into the AC and AT dynamics to seek its long terms pragmatic goals.

## **1. Arctic: current dynamic and future challenges**

The Arctic region comprises 21 million square kilometers; natural conditions and geographical location play a vital role in the global ecosystem and is crucial to understand climate changes tendencies, economic competition, east – west and north-south trade operations. On this particular point, the “dark side” of Arctic melting processes shows a reduction of polar ice cap (in 2010, the Arctic ice occupied 5, 95 million square kilometers, 22% less than the 1979-2000 period average) putting on risks the global ecosystem equilibrium, increasing water levels, changing biodiversity environment and menace coastal cities and people. But taking the positive side, Arctic melting processes can be taken as an opportunity

to bring more open access to strategic resources and trade corridors for Asia to Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Proved existence of energy reserves (oil and gas) lays in Arctic seabed, drives cooperative-competitive dynamics among AC members; in fact, turn of the century U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reports suggest in Arctic seabed lies 30% of gas and 13% of oil unexplored global reserves, mainly of these near Alaska and Greenland coasts. Regarding this, President Obama decision to lift off shore oil banned operations in front of Alaska coasts after 17 years, was based in the light of well awareness huge energy potential. Given those factors, China's entry to AC cooperative regime, could induce intra regime tensions.

## **1.2. Arctic system: states dynamics and regimes stability**

According to official statements, Russian geopolitical ambitions seeks to reaffirm sovereignty territorial claims in the region increasing scientific activities, human resources allocation and investment on facilities. Through political, scientific, economics and military actions taken by Russia the country try to reaffirm its Arctic rights based on Russian historical continuity in the area since Czarist Empire regime.

The second point to reaffirm its tough position consists in geological arguments, supporting Russian territorial projections through deep blue waters into the North Pole. Specifically, Russia sustain that Lomonosov Ridge (underwater mountain) is part of its own territory; argument rejected by AC members like Canada. From Russian military perspective, the Arctic regime also give a platform to contain territorial ambitions and maritime claims fulfilled by Russia's big contenders such as United States or NATO alliance members. In a wide perspective, Nordic countries agree to contain Russian ambitions and territorial claims; notably Denmark, pursuing integral territory principle first to applied to Greenland control. To this, for many AC members, strong European representation gives them capacities to ensure issues peacefully resolution, strengthen enforcement capacities into decision making process and ensure –the eventual- Russia (even China) military deterrence by NATO intervention.

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<sup>4</sup> See, Palacián de Inza, Blanca y García Sánchez, Ignacio, “Geopolítica del deshielo del Artico”, en *Revista Política Exterior*, Vol. XXVII, Julio/Agosto 2013, Número 154, pp.88-96.

Russian Arctic sector comprises 1.5% of total country's population, provides near 11% of national GDP and 22% of its total exports; country 'preferences to maintaining the Arctic as "economic cooperation zone" principle, go hand in hand with Russian interests in oil reserves, estimated - according to PP Shirshov Institute of Oceanology, Russian Academy of Sciences – in 51 billion tons. and 87 trillion cubic meters of gas. Despite the challenges exposed above, for Russia long term political ambitions, working within the Arctic regime will reaffirm its current leading position as one of top oil and gas global producers also. Furthermore, multi axis policy praxis (particularly under Putin rule) clearly shows Russia ambitions to be recognized as re emerging power. For Russian hard liners, Arctic strategy re-legitimizes national aspirations to restore Russian international status lost, after Soviet collapse.

The United States and Canada (both partners in the NAFTA agreement) dispute the Northwest Passage corridor, which Americans currently ships can pass through. Disagreements appear in water disputes; under the UN Sea Convention (1982), United States, Canada, Denmark, Russia and Norway claims sovereignty rights over a continental shelf and territorial waters 350 miles away from their coast. However, United States has not signed the Convention and rejects Arctic waters "internationalization" process, arguing the need to ensure free and open navigation routes without any restrictions.

Despite intra regime political tensions, in 2010 Russia and Norway ended 40 years of bilateral discussions by signing an agreement on Barents Sea waters delimitation into equal parts. Russia made its first complaints over this region in 2001 and 2007, and "symbolically" reaffirmed their sovereign rights when in 2007 two mini subs planted a Russian flag 4.200 meters depth in the Arctic Ocean.

## **2. China into the Arctic: eager for resources and trade facilities access**

According to SIPRI reports, China's incoming is leading by two main purposes: secure oil resources access and maximizes east – west trade facilitation flows due to Arctic melting process. Also, China initiatives gives relevance to different issues such as Arctic climate change impacts on its national ecosystem.

Arctic gradual melting will ease trade flows between Europe and Asia; shipments and supertankers which at present day passes through

Suez Canal, shall be referred freight operations to ice free Northwest Passage during north hemisphere summer months. As result, Arctic melting could shorten 6,400 km from china's east ports like Shanghai to central Europe Hamburg port reducing transport time, freight costs and insurance services taxes. This hypothesis, went into reality when in 2009 Russian tanker, Baltika, successfully crossed over northeast line route through Siberia. (See Appendix map)

For China, alternative sea routes like this, also will reduce risks logistics operations through troubled waters i.e. in the Southeast Asia (SEA) like Malacca and Makassar straits and the Gulf of Aden, two maritime corridors which rank top among places under piracy menace. It is also interesting to note, how Chinese arctic interest is followed by other Asian countries like South Korea and Japan, interested also to get some benefits derived from new shipping routes to Western markets and natural resources.

For China, its growing interest in Arctic area increases "Nordic block" countries political relevance. Nordic countries, acting together may share interests, allow resources access, and open a "gateway" from China to Europe. Or, by contrary, contains China's ambitions and blockade peacefully or in much harder way, Chinese political and commercial movements.

In a general view, China has no Arctic coast therefore can not push forward with sovereign rights arguments over this area. However, China put on the table regarding future issues (worsening environment, melting process itself, access to biodiversity and deep sea waters exploration) shall require harmonizes, not only those bordering Arctic states namely Canada, USA, Russia, Norway, and Denmark (Greenland) preferences but also "all countries" needs and pretension over the area.<sup>5</sup> According to this, looking ahead suspicions arise if a more powerful China might question the status quo, trying to fix new rules.

China's pretension to reform existing multilateral regimes, such as IMF, WTO, or the UN system itself, may act spreading initiatives to meet this goals. Moreover, as permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) -itself or alongside with Russia- veto strategy against, for instance, U.S.A, France or UK (NATO allies) could be taken as intra

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<sup>5</sup> Jakobson, Linda (2010), *China Prepares for an Ice Free Arctic*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), No.2010 / 2, March 2010.

regime breaking consensus policy or shifts loyalties opening confidence gap between AC members.

Furthermore, Chinese interests in energy, natural resources access, bio diversity and free navigation routes, pushed ahead Chinese military modernization forces; Chinese naval new capacities added a powerful blue waters navy enable to project power and protect the vessels peaceful passage mainly through the Pacific and Indian Oceans but in Arctic waters too. Increase the use of military forces to solve inter estate disputes as first option, could lead a way to strengthen Arctic members military power to prevent clashes in Arctic area. In this regard, Chinese sensibility arises when chins experts express concern over USA ambitions to contain Chinese Arctic projections or Russia proposals to impose taxes for allow vessels free pass trough. Given that, for China Arctic “north corridor” not only provides an alternative pass for vital supplies access, but also will expand import – exports flows.

Despite that, in recent years China has moved in a wide more flexible position. Arctic (and Antarctic) issues have gained relevance within China’s government agenda. For instance, fulfilled new state agencies set up, i.e. China Administration for the Arctic and Antarctic (ACAA) in 1981. As the same, national or local research centers and universities encouraged polar studies and human resources training programs. As result, in less than two decades, China draw specific guidelines containing bipolar scientific purposes, explained bipolar ambitions in papers, technical reports and trough official statements; finally, setting up research facilities (bases) in the north and south pole.

Remarkable achievements have been made since 90’s; in 1995 Chinese scientists went to the North Pole in a context a planned strategy to increase China’s leverage within Arctic institutions. Target reached in 1997, when China joined the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC), a non-governmental regulatory body. Scientific missions were sended for meteorological, geological, and glaciological studies; by constructing new facilities, government eased service companies access to technical support, granted Chinese telecommunications satellites network and China’s own global positioning system (GPS) devices operations also.

In this context, Chinese first Arctic expedition took place in 1999; Chinese scientists team embarked Snow Dragon (Xue Long) icebreaker ship, adapted for scentific purposes. The expedition tasks covered a wide menu on seabed, biological, atmospheric, geological and glaciological



environment. In 2001 - in a joint expedition with Norwegian Polar Institute – Chinese Scientifics explored arctic soil to find a better place to set up China's first arctic scientific station; finally, in 2004 research station Huanghe (Yellow River) started operations in the North Pole.

After that, scientific missions were sent for meteorological, geological, and glaciological studies; by constructing new facilities, government eased service companies access to technical support, granted Chinese telecommunications satellites network and China's own global positioning system (GPS) devices operations also. Thanks to those initiatives, scientific arctic record and technological capabilities, allowed China to join AC as Observer Member.<sup>6</sup>

Although China shall be perceived as newcomer country within AC dynamics, undoubtedly has stepped up efforts in recent years to up grade its technological levels and submit multilateral regulations. Consistently with that, scientific expeditions were sent to the North Pole during 2004 – 2012 period. In 2009 China approved a new high-tech icebreaker construction which went into service in 2013. Furthermore, although United States remains the leading country in polar research programs with an annual budget of U \$ S 640 million, China has tripled its investment since the beginning of this century spent U\$S 14 millions in 2012.

All these territorial and scientific targets in both poles were pushed ahead at the same time in the same way to others high tech scientific fields: space and seabed exploration. At present day, China has know how to build mini submarines, i.e.: Jiaolong (mythical dragon ) which - according to China's Ministry of Science and Technology - can reach more than 3,000 meters deep oceanic waters, placing China among top five countries which held same capacity: USA, Russia, Japan and France. Thus, once technological evolution enables reaching 7,000 meters deep over the next decade such knowledge shall enable China to explore whole deep sea waters around the globe, searching for mineral and energy resources.

In the same line, last year (2013) the China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) Cooperation Agreement signed in Shanghai city between China Polar Research Institute (PRIC) and six Nordic country's institutes as well three other Chinese research centers, formally started CNARC joint

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, op. Cit, *China Prepares for an Ice Free Arctic*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), No.2010 / 2, March 2010.

activities.<sup>7</sup> This center has been designed as platform to promote joint academic cooperation programs, better arctic challenges awareness, and promote Nordic Arctic area sustainable development.<sup>8</sup>

China's concerns over climate changes, should be mentioned too. China ranks in the second place in the world in greenhouse gas emission. Given that, bipolar studies comprise climate change data collection, not only regarding global ecosystem challenges but also get useful information to manage domestic climate changes, agricultural development future dilemmas and natural resource management. According to that, Arctic environment degradation has big influence on China's climate and seasonal changes, i.e.: droughts cycles, floods intensity, natural disasters frequency and wind intensity trough country rural and urban areas. Moreover, empirical data collected from deployed Arctic monitoring systems provides quantitative magnitudes be used to mitigate natural disasters, prevent Northeastern provinces desertification and early warning systems input information.

From Chinese perspective, Arctic climate changes also have to be assumed under their negative impacts has in its coastal areas. China's east coast fertile lands and surrounding waters annually produce 500,000 tons of fish and seafood. Regarding this, Chinese commitment to preserve Arctic resources, make more sustainable national security food policy and protect "traditional" economic activities like fisheries.

Finally, China's interests in Arctic cooperative and –current and future- issues peacefully resolution, remains in the general context of its national defense and security policies. For many Chinese policy planners, In the near future Arctic melting process shall have hard effects throughout all country because the expected coasts waters increase levels that will put under dangerous situation industrial areas and densely populated eastern areas.

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<sup>7</sup> As Chinese initiative, in 2013 during the first China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium meeting in Shanghai, PRIC Institute proposed CNARC establishment.

<sup>8</sup> CNARC's focus tasks on Northern Arctic and global Arctic issues like climate change, Arctic resources, shipping and economic cooperation and intra regime policy-making process.

### 3. China in Antarctica: visions from the south

Even before starting Arctic operations in the 90's, China took first steps to the Antarctic early in the 80's. Although, China first interests signals in this continent were made public in the 50's, the government suddenly stop because, at the end of this decade, the Maoist China went into political turmoil. As result was nor until the 80's when China turn again its gaze to the white Continent becoming the Antarctic Treaty (AT) as Consultative Advisory member in 1983.

The Antarctic area covers 14 million square kilometers, almost tripled than Aortic surface. Interstate cooperation framework is given by the Antarctic Treaty signed in 1959 and entered into force since 1961. As time went by, and only with the main objective to reinforce states scientific purposes and avoid any military activities commitments in the area, the TA was enriched later with multilateral agreements on environment, biodiversity management, ecosystem protection and permanent settlements regime; thus why, in the last forty years the has TA evolved itself comprising a wider legal framework named Antarctic Treaty System (ATS).<sup>9</sup>

In the last twenty years, the increasing number of TA members and a more complex set of rules derived from the emergence of new multilateral issues, shows the emergence of political pressures and how the TA is put under pressure to introduce amendments. In this regard, ATS regulates States actions and enforce commitments, under the following principles: i) is open to all individual states or others international actors like regional agreements (i.e. the EU), ii) political units can enrich the STA framework, by proposing new legal tools or enforcing multilateral practices, and iii) provides flexible and adaptable approach for internal/external debates among members over new emerging issues, mainly related with scientific activities.

According that, in the last years the STA displays a broad menu of new agreements over tourism, environmental conservation, regional transport and logistics supplies operations (for bases and crews), and natural disasters joint responses; all multilateral agreements been reached under the primacy of "conduct code" designed to prevent and ensure any state involvement in military practices.

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<sup>9</sup> Due to its over time evolution, in many ways TA legal corpus is considered a "living law".

In fact, the TA does not resolve current states territorial claims, but declared "inadmissible" any future dispute that may arise due to treaty new incoming members. Territorial disputes and claims exists and involves many states such as among others, Argentina<sup>10</sup>, Australia, Chile, France, Norway, New Zealand and United Kingdom. Beyond that, to the present the STA regime try to contain all parts interests in a wide set of rules. While states sovereignty rights in Antarctic area are still "frozen" within AT (Article IV), since the beginning of this century, states full members and newcomers have been very active (namely China) opening bases, outposts and settled monitoring stations in the continent.

In short, the TA provides a multilateral legal corpus which enables exert controls over states behavior and enforce them to meet their commitments (policy power), introducing multilateral checks mechanisms, try to avoid actions no linked with scientific purposes (i.e., commercial or military).

### 3.1 China: pilgrim to the south

Taking a different route and a final outpost destination respect of described in famous Chinese literary classic "Journey to the West", since the 80's China's has been pursuing an active strategic policy to the south pole and specifically to reach Antarctic's ice. Once launched the Open Door policy in 1978, China renewed its interest in Antarctica and took specifics measures that –step by step- would allow meet national long term goals in the white continent.

At a first glance, Chinese government assumed the need to joint efforts with friendly countries that have historical records in Antarctic operations. To seek this purpose, Argentina and China signed an agreement for joint scientific programs which -as first step- enable the transfer of *know how* from Argentina's team to Chinese counterparts. Result of a tight political confidence between both countries, this agreement was followed by others, mainly related with logistical support; by this time, Argentina had its own icebreaker (Gen. San Martin, later replaced by Alte. Irizar) for Antarctic purposes and an efficient "air bridge" between mainland and the continent (I.e., Vcom. Marambio, Air Force

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<sup>10</sup> Chile and Argentina recognize each other's sovereign rights, only in those Antarctic sectors in which their territorial claims do not overlap.

Base opened in 1969 and other permanent navy and army settlements) enabled ships refueling as well as personal and supplies transport to the bases. Later in 1981, China organized its first national Antarctic expedition committee. After that, (and having joined TA a year earlier) in 1984 the first Chinese national expedition to the South Pole was ready to depart from Shanghai.

A year later (1985), in 25 de Mayo island China opened its first Antarctic Base; named Great Wall (*Chang Cheng*) was integrated into a global meteorological observatories system network. That is how, early in the 80's, China was the last top five UN Security Council Permanent Members to possess its foots in the Antarctic continent. Thereafter, the dragon has shown an increasing influence within AT regime.

This initiative was followed by opening a second Antarctic facility in 1989, Zhongshan research base. That year, China scientific team reached other milestone when Qin Dahe, became the first Chinese citizen to cross the continent on foot. By the nineties, thanks to new scientific and technical capabilities acquired, human resources skills, Antarctic record experience and its own icebreaker (Xuelong or Snow Dragon) built in national shipyards, China took a more autonomous path in Antarctic activities.

China's big step in its Antarctic strategy was given in 2004 when a Chinese scientific mission reached for first time the South Pole, climbed and reached the highest peak top in that area, Mount Argus. Years later, under Hu Jintao presidency (2009) China opened its third base, Kunlun, in the South Pole highest point (4.093 meters).<sup>11</sup> Future China plans shows Chinese intention to open a fourth base, Taishan, will feature twenty eight scientists and technicians working there; located 2.600 meters high, would began operations early in 2015.

Those initiatives were hand in hand with national agencies settlement to manage Antarctic initiatives. As consequence, in 2006 Chinese government establish a Polar Expeditions Coordination Base in Shanghai (Pudong District); icebreakers docks, oceanographic ships, laboratories, places for special materials stocks, and a bench for samples obtained by scientific expeditions, were just some of the new facilities provided by the government to support and carrying on bipolar strategy.

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that two of China three bases (Zhongshan and Kunlun) are located in a territory which is currently claimed by Australia, China's important trading partner in Asia and close ally to USA and UK, NATO members.

Thanks to that, by now, Chinese scientists in Antarctic bases main tasks are related with glaciological, meteorological, polar upper atmosphere physical studies, telecommunications engineering, geo spatial, physics and geomagnetic experiments. Looking forward, Chinese government is going to take a more proactive approach on Antarctic matters, for instance, developing a modern fleet capable for polar research operations. For this, the national plan 2011-2015, among others targets, includes a new icebreaker construction by 2016 (see chart).<sup>12</sup>

Table 1: *China's Antarctic involvement in Antarctica*

### **China's Antarctic Involvement in 5 Stages**

- 1955-1978 Early interest thwarted by politics and economics
  - 1978-1984 Cooperation with other Antarctic powers
- 1985-1989 China develops its own Antarctic programme, set up bases
  - 1989-2004 China focuses on improving the quality of its Antarctic science
- 2005-present China upgraded its Antarctic activities: increasing spend, facilities, and research.

Since 2005 China has been upgrading its Antarctic presence and seeking to increase its level of engagement in Antarctic governance.

### **China's key Antarctic tasks 2011-2016 are as follows:**

- Build a new ice breaker by 2016
- Two new bases: Taishan, Ross Sea.
  - Basler airplane by 2014.
- Set up air fields at Kunlun, Zhongshan, and Taishan bases
- Develop an international polar affairs campus in Shanghai
- Project to assess polar governance and resources (2012-2016)

*Source: Wilson Center, Kissinger Institute on China and the United States, USA, May 2014.*

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<sup>12</sup> Although China has become an active state actor in the Antarctic continent, other asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, and India, followed its pass. In this regard, India founded a National Centre for Ocean and Antarctic Research (NCAOR) to manage anctartic Maitri base research programs on meteorology, human physiology, geology and marine biology.

### 3.2 Looking ahead.

In the last twenty years, China has been steadily increased its involvement in Antarctica matters, both throughout joined AT regime as in real field settle permanent bases. With and ambitious schedule for the years to come, China will increase budget allocation that could triple the actual amount (around 300 million dollars). Its interests will go beyond scientific purposes to put focus on natural resources and energy sources, laying both in surrounding waters, sea bed and under ice cape.

To the present, concerning economic activities allowed to be done in the area (i.e.: limited tourist operations or low intensity resource exploitation) China is working under AT parameters. However, China has enough technological capabilities in offshore exploitation that in the future could change the status quo in the Antarctic surrounding waters. Comparative better weather conditions in the area than in Arctic Ocean or North Sea to find energy resources, have to be taken to analyzes this point. In this regard, Chinese interests projections to the South Atlantic, was remarkable when in 2010 the state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) purchased (U\$S 3,100 million) 50% of Bridas Corporation, largest argentine private oil exporter which has operations in the so called “Austral Basin”, near Malvinas/Falkland Islands.

**Table 2:** *China bipolar strategy, comparative perspectives*

	<b>Arctic</b>	<b>Antarctic</b>
<b>Timing</b>	Post economic reform activism, with increasing intensity from the nineties.	Conceive in the 50’s, activism from the eighties.
<b>State partners role</b>	Relies on cooperation agreements and friendly states helps, mainly Norway and Denmark.	Supported by states with historical presence and logistical support capacities: Argentina
<b>Multilateral commitments.</b>	Adherence to cooperative arrangements by existing multilateral agreements; AC regimen commitments.	Joining Antarctic Treaty (AT) made commitments and adopted international standards and regulations.

<b>Key interest</b>	Economic advantages in natural resources and oil sources accessiveness first; supported by scientific initiatives.	Scientific initiatives first; eventually long term access to natural resources (water) and oil reserves.
<b>Economic relevance.</b>	Low freights cost due to shorten shipping lines routes.	Less relevant economic purposes; set of biodiversity issues take first place.
<b>Global power and power projection</b>	Into North Arctic scenarios; active posture.	To South Atlantic Ocean area; cautious approach.
<b>China´s role perception</b>	Growing suspicion by Arctic members, USA and NATO members.	In the near future China could impose new set of rules within AT regime due to its political, economic, scientific and military power. As extra regional actor, my rise tensions with NATO allies or even south American countries.
<b>NGO´s role.</b>	NGOs provide accountability on sustainable resources management.	NGOs less relevant role.
<b>Environment preservation.</b>	Under AC regimen.	Antarctic resources are protected from commercial exploitation; the white continent remains an "mankind natural reserve".
<b>Sovereignty issues or territorial claims</b>	Have to be solved through diplomatic negotiations within AC frame.	Territorial claims within AT member´s states still remain unsolved; challenges ahead until AT expires in 2041.

*Source: SIPRI, Argentina National Antarctic Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, Argentina.*



Present day, China is not a "sovereignty claimant" country over the Antarctic territory but gradually expand its influence within the STA. Similar to the strategy of "wait and see" described for Arctic interactions (SIPRI, 2010), China patiently awaits the expected Antarctic regime changes after AT expiration in 2041. In the coming years, a more powerful economic, scientific and military China will increase its leverage within the treaty and will impose hard negotiations conditions to other states, at the middle of this century.

On the other hand, South American countries perceive emerging risks as long as the Antarctica will continue be seen as an important mineralogical reserve, full of bio-energy, food and water. Also, from the standpoint of taking positions against possible claims sovereignty, South American nations area seeing how European nations (and by extension NATO powers ) have already taken positions in Antarctic areas within and around the South Atlantic Ocean (SAO).<sup>13</sup>

Regarding to this, as negative precedent European Union (EU) Constitution put under NATO defensive umbrella "overseas territories" in SAO, including the Falkland Islands claimed by Argentine. NATO defensives mechanism, could also put into actions initiatives form extra European allies like USA. Thus, although is not directly posted within Antarctic soil, deployment of military devices in SOA waters have increased risk levels and undermine regional stability.

Preminent unilateral behaviors could break cooperative disciplines drives towards a competitive logics, which involves extra and intra regional actors; changes in regional scenario which comprises, SOA waters access, resources management, Antarctic claims related issues, will affect not only Argentina but also Chile, Uruguay and Brazil geopolitical interests.

In that sense, guided by a long term perspective future SOA – Antarctic scenarios have been draw to take measures over South America regional common defense policies. Related to this, the South American Defense Council (CDS) born under the South American Nations Union (UNASUR) political consensus, could be considered a key body to meet this challenges. Assumption shifts from, an "stable equilibrium" scenario to "unstable equilibrium" by mid-century in Antarctica, leads politicians

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<sup>13</sup> See: Sersale, José Luis y Ditunno Florencia, "La construcción de una agenda regional de defensa", en *Consejo de Defensa Suramericano. Una mirada desde la Argentina. Cuadernos de actualidad en defensa y estrategia*, No.4, Ministerio de Defensa de la República Argentina, 2009: 31-46.

and think tanks reflexions over the need to consolidate South American multilateral agreements and cooperation in security and defense.

In the line to have been explained, Chile and Argentina filed a complaint against British claims in the UN; to protect their own rights in the Antarctic, both countries pushed ahead a new doctrinarian principle related with a concept of "South American Antarctica", meaning the future territory status quo is not only linked with both countries interests but also with regional nations at all. Doctrinal and operational principle to preserve South America (including SOA-Antarctic area) as "free nuclear weapons zone", reaffirm regional commitments to maintaining peace and stability in the coming decades.

As in the Arctic, strategic views on Antarctic matters highlights the importance on accessing natural resources but to a lesser extent, on the needs of granted inter-oceanic free pass routes. Until now there is no big challenges ahead on security constraints given by free navigability Atlantic-Pacific routes through Drake Strait. By contrary, more risks shows the eventual political or physical Panama Canal blockades, other reason for USA-China mutual concerns and suspicions.<sup>14</sup>

To conclude, "extra-regional powers" like Great Britain, China or even USA, having more influence over SOA-Antarctic matters; AT regime expected changes and North Atlantic Organization (NATO) military power projection to South American Cone, have introduced complex dilemmas on how to maintain peace and stability in the years to come.

## **Final remarks**

China's national ambitions in both poles will continue its fast track in the coming years. In line with their economic, financial, scientific, military and technological capabilities, China is deploying a bipolar strategy targeting both, the North and the South Pole to ensure granted access to natural and energy sources.

Regarding the Arctic melting process, China seeks to get benefits given by a new north corridor sea route, lowering transport freight costs to increase trade flows to European markets. Looking forward south and as a member of the Antarctic Treaty, China is showing strong interests to play a key role as great power in South Atlantic region. In both scenarios

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<sup>14</sup> Issue also related with Chinese interests to develop a dry channel project across Nicaragua.

emerging tensions derived from territorial claims, and regime changes may go further given China's presence.

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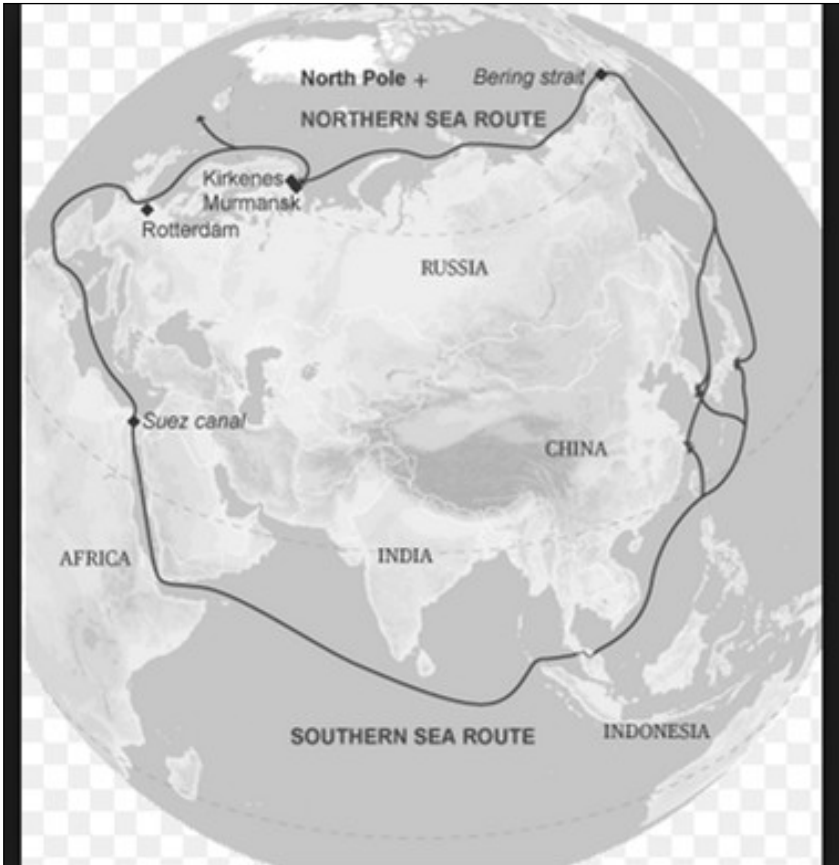
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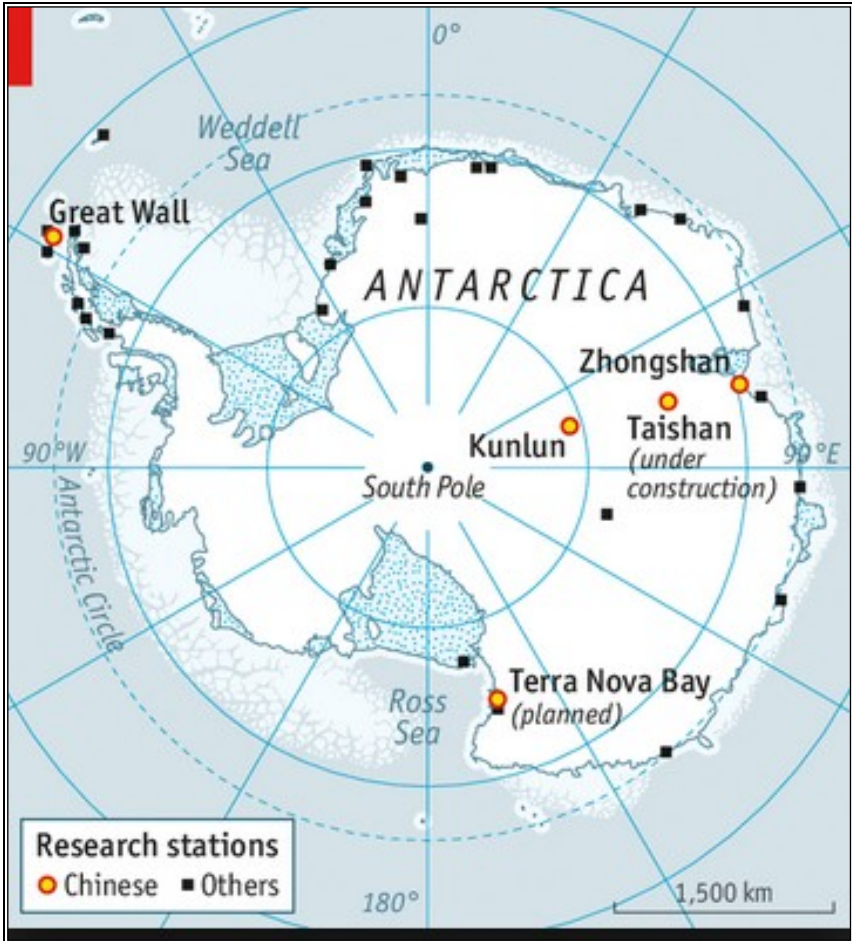
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## APENDIX

**Map 1:** *Arctic Northern sea route*



Map 2: China's Antarctic bases location



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