

= Argentine ? Chilean naval arms race =

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries , the South American nations of Argentina and Chile engaged in an expensive naval arms race to ensure the other would not gain supremacy in the Southern Cone .

Although the Argentine and Chilean navies possessed insignificant naval forces in the 1860s , with zero and five warships , respectively , Argentina 's concern over a strong Brazilian Navy and the Chilean war against Spain caused them to add capable warships to their fleets in the 1870s . During this time , diplomatic relations between Argentina and Chile soured due to conflicting boundary claims , particularly in Patagonia . By the beginning of the 1880s , after the War of the Pacific , the Chilean government possessed possibly the strongest navy in the Americas . They planned to add to it with an 1887 appropriation for one battleship , two protected cruisers , and two torpedo gunboats . Argentina responded a year later with an order for two battleships of its own . The naval arms race unfolded over the next several years , with each country buying and ordering vessels that were slightly better than the previous ship , but the Argentines eventually pulled ahead with the acquisition of multiple Garibaldi @-@ class cruisers .

The race ended in 1902 with the British @-@ arbitrated Pacts of May , which contained a binding naval @-@ limiting agreement . Both governments sold or canceled the ships they had ordered , and three major warships were mostly disarmed to balance the fleets . The pacts proved to be the answer to the Argentine and Chilean disputes , as the countries enjoyed a period of warm relations . This did not last , though , as the Brazilian government 's attempt to rebuild its own naval forces sparked another naval arms race , involving all three countries ' orders for revolutionary new " dreadnoughts " , powerful battleships whose capabilities far outstripped older vessels in the world 's navies .

= = Background = =

Conflicting Argentine and Chilean claims to Patagonia , the southernmost region in South America , had been causing tension between the two countries since the 1840s . Both countries were incapable of enforcing these claims with a seaborne force , though : in 1860 , the Chileans had only five small vessels , while the Argentine Navy had no seagoing ships . These attitudes quickly changed when the circumstances warranted ; when Chile joined Peru against Spain in the Chincha Islands War , the Spaniards blockaded and bombarded Valparaíso , leading the Chilean government to strengthen the navy . The Argentine government , under President Domingo Sarmiento , decided to build a navy in the 1870s to counter Brazilian naval acquisitions . Two large monitors , Los Andes and El Plata , were ordered from Laird Brothers , a British company , along with two gunboats . They were delivered in 1874 and 1875 .

The Patagonian tensions heightened in 1872 and 1878 , when Chilean warships seized merchant ships which had been licensed to operate in the disputed area by the Argentine government . An Argentine warship did the same to a Chilean @-@ licensed American ship in 1877 . This action nearly led to war in November 1878 , when the Argentines dispatched a squadron of warships to the Santa Cruz River . The Chilean Navy responded in kind , and war was only avoided by a hastily signed treaty .

Both countries were incapable of enforcing these claims with a seaborne force in the next few years , as the Argentines were occupied with internal military operations against the indigenous population (1870 ? 84) , and the Chileans involved in the War of the Pacific (Guerra del Pacífico , 1879 ? 83) against Bolivia and Peru . Still , several warships were ordered by both nations : the Argentines commissioned a central battery ironclad , Almirante Brown , and a protected cruiser , Patagonia , in 1880 and 1885 , respectively . For their part , the Chileans ordered a protected cruiser , Esmeralda , to bolster its fleet , which was centered on two central battery ironclads , Almirante Cochrane and Blanco Encalada . With these ships , the Chilean Navy emerged from the War of the Pacific as the preeminent navy in the Americas , surpassing even the navy of the United States , which had fallen into steep decline after the American Civil War . The Chilean government utilized this advantage

when it deployed Esmeralda to Panama in 1885 to block the U.S. from attempting to annex the region .

= = Arms race = =

The Chilean government moved first to begin the naval arms race when it ordered a modern ironclad battleship , Capitán Prat , two protected cruisers , and two torpedo boats from France and the United Kingdom . Bought with a £ 3 @, @ 129 @, @ 500 appropriation in the 1887 budget , the ships would have upset the balance of naval power in Latin America ? while the Argentines had more vessels , the Chileans had larger warships with far more experienced crewmen . This purchase was made worse , from the Argentine perspective , by a large order for rifles , field guns , sabers , and carbines , enough to arm an 80 @, @ 000 @-@ strong army . The Argentine government responded with two battleships ? Independencia and Libertad , though they were individually smaller than their Chilean counterpart ? and two protected cruisers , one purchased on the stocks in 1890 (Veinticinco de Mayo) and a new @-@ build of the same design in 1891 (Nueve de Julio) . The purchases were funded largely through export @-@ related windfall , Chile through nitrates and Argentina through grain and cattle .

The Chilean Civil War (1891) , rather than calming the naval ambitions of Chile , escalated them . In that conflict , the Chilean Navy played a significant role on the congressional side against the president and the army . The resulting victory of the congressional side and subsequent presidency of Admiral Jorge Montt led to a large increase in prestige and consequent funding for the navy . Argentine naval units assisted failed revolts in Argentina , but the continuing acrimony with and naval acquisitions of Chile meant this had little effect .

The Chilean government purchased a protected cruiser , Blanco Encalada , on the stocks in 1892 , while the Argentines purchased one , Buenos Aires , being built for the British in late 1893 . The Chileans sold their oldest protected cruiser , Esmeralda , in late 1894 to finance the order of an armored cruiser . This materialized in May 1895 with a new Esmeralda , along with four torpedo boats ; a Brazilian protected cruiser , Ministro Zenteno , was purchased while under construction in August 1895 . The Argentines purchased an Italian armored cruiser , Garibaldi , on the stocks on 14 July 1895 .

In April 1896 , Chile ordered another armored cruiser , O 'Higgins , and six torpedo boats . Naval historian Robert Scheina states that Argentina replied in the same month with San Martín , a near @-@ sister ship to Garibaldi which was under construction in Italy . However , he notes that the small time lapse between the orders makes it difficult or impossible to know if this , the opposite , or either are true . As historian Jonathan Grant writes , the Argentines may have moved first to secure a definite , if momentarily tenuous , advantage over the Chilean Navy . In May 1898 , the Chilean government found that the Argentines were planning on acquiring one , then two , Garibaldi @-@ class cruisers . With tensions extremely high and war seemingly imminent , the two countries agreed to submit their boundary disputes to the British , which led to the Cordillera of the Andes Boundary Case 1902 (Argentina , Chile) . They also signed pacts which led to the resolution of the Puna de Atacama dispute . As the former arbitration took much time , the naval arms race , though it slackened during the time of eased tension which came with the agreements , continued .

The Argentines did acquire the two additional armored cruisers , which were named Pueyrredón and General Belgrano , that were more powerful than the previous two . To counter them , the Chilean government ordered two new battleships , Constitución and Libertad , using its gold reserve to pay for them . These battleships ' fast speed would make them suitable for opposing the new Argentine armored cruisers . The Chileans also purchased the protected cruiser Chacabuco , which had been built on speculation , on the stocks in late 1901 . The Argentines responded in May 1901 with an inquiry , possibly a full order , to Ansaldo for a new 15 @, @ 000 @-@ long @-@ ton (15 @, @ 000 t) battleship design . This would mount a 305 mm (12 in) main battery and be capable of steaming at 20 knots (23 mph ; 37 km / h) .

The increased tensions and near state of war between Argentina and Chile caused the British to intervene , lest their economic interests in the region , which included the export of British goods and

the import of Latin American raw materials , be disrupted . Talks were held in the Chilean capital , Santiago , between the British ambassador to Chile , the Argentine ambassador to Chile , and the Chilean foreign minister and President Germán Riesco . This led to the three Pacts of May on 28 May 1902 , which ended the dispute . The third limited the naval armaments of both countries . Argentina and Chile were barred from acquiring any further warships for five years , unless they gave the other eighteen months of advance notice . The warships under construction were sold to the United Kingdom , with Chile 's battleships becoming the Swiftsure class , and Japan , with Argentina 's armored cruisers becoming the Kasuga class . The two planned Argentine battleships were never ordered , and Garibaldi and Pueyrredón , along with Chile 's Capitán Prat , were disarmed with the exception of their main batteries , as the Argentine Navy had no crane capable of removing the armored cruiser 's gun turrets .

= = Aftermath = =

The Argentine ? Chilean naval arms race was extremely expensive for both countries . The Argentine government was able to purchase £ 4 @, @ 534 @, @ 800 worth of ships between 1890 and 1898 with large foreign loans , which were given to them despite the country 's role in the Baring crisis of 1890 . The government 's total foreign debt reached 421 million gold pesos by 1896 . As for Chile , it was forced to take out a £ 2 million pound loan in order to purchase Krupp weaponry , and this combined with its other loans led the banking industry to suspend loans to Chile until the diplomatic crisis with Argentina was solved . Both the Argentine President Julio Argentino Roca and American ambassador to Argentina William Paine Lord ascribed the ending of the arms race to the diminished credit of Argentina and Chile .

By all measures , the Pacts of May were an unmitigated success . Both Argentina and Chile enjoyed a period of lessened tensions , leaving the near state of war they were in , and the pacts ended their expensive naval buildups . However , the third major country in South America , Brazil , brought this to a crashing halt in 1904 , when its congress passed a large naval construction plan . This culminated in 1907 with a Brazilian order for three " dreadnoughts " , a new form of warship whose advanced armament and propulsion capabilities far outstripped older vessels in the world 's navies . Two would be laid down immediately , with a third to follow . The Argentine and Chilean governments quickly moved to cancel the remaining months of the naval @-@ limiting Pacts of May , and both eventually responded with orders for their own dreadnoughts .

= = Endnotes = =