

## Argentina Seizes Nine Soviet and Bulgarian Trawlers

The Argentine Navy seized seven Soviet and two Bulgarian stern factory trawlers fishing in Argentine-claimed waters last September and October. The seizures followed press reports in mid-September 1977 of unidentified foreign vessels—reports which were based on alleged sightings of such vessels by Argentine fishermen and merchant seamen. It is believed that as many as 30 foreign vessels, most of them Soviet, had been operating for at least 6 weeks prior to the September seizures along the Argentine coast within the 200-mile territorial sea.

### VESSELS SEIZED

Three Argentine destroyers, the *Rosales*, *Segui*, and *Py*, began operations against the foreign fishing vessels in the afternoon of 21 September 1977. The Argentine naval vessels found nine Soviet vessels fishing approximately 130 miles east of Cabo Dos Bahias (Fig. 1). The vessels had been located by the Argentine Naval Air Force. The destroyers signaled the Soviet vessels to stop and fired warning shots when the Soviet fishermen refused to do so. Argentine naval authorities report that the first warning shots were fired at a distance of 600 m, but that the Soviet vessels did not stop until the range was reduced to 20 m. Five Soviet trawlers managed to escape; the remaining four, *Bussol*, *Apatit*, *Teodor Nette*, and *Magnit*, were seized.

The Soviet masters refused to aid the Argentine prize crews in boarding their vessels and the Argentine sailors had difficulty boarding in the rough seas. Once on board the Soviet trawlers, the sailors were at first refused food and then given meals which Argentine press reports characterized as "inedible".

The four Soviet trawlers were es-

corted to Puerto Madryn, about 700 miles south of Buenos Aires, and arrived there on 22 September. The Soviet masters refused to bring their vessels into port and instead anchored them in Golfo Nuevo.

The Argentine Government submitted a formal protest to the Soviet Chargé d'Affairs in Buenos Aires, Genadii I. Sazhenev, on 23 September, stressing Argentina's surprise and annoyance at the activities of the Soviet fishing fleet. The note pointed out that Soviet fishermen violated Argentine sovereignty and its fishing regulations, both of which were previously made known to the Soviet Government. Later that same day, the Soviet Consul Constantin Verniskiy met with Argentine authorities in Puerto Madryn, and persuaded the Soviet masters to cooperate with local Argentine officials. The masters then made statements to the Argentine authorities in the presence of the Soviet Consul.

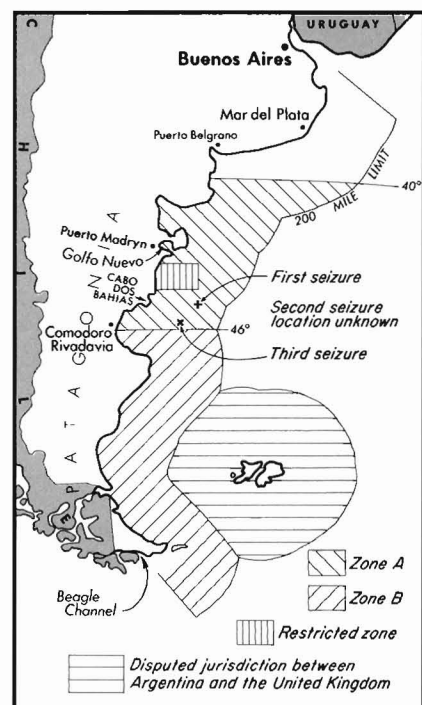
A fifth Soviet vessel, the *Nerey*, was seized by the Argentine destroyer *Ara Rosales* on 26 September. The following day the Argentine Foreign Ministry summoned Sazhenev again and gave him a second protest note. Despite these protests, the Soviet and Bulgarian vessels continued to fish in Argentine-claimed waters. On 1 October, the Argentine naval vessels *General Belgrano*, *Segui*, *Piedrabuena*, and *Py* seized another four stern factory trawlers (two Soviet and two Bulgarian reportedly 170 miles east of the Argentine port of Comodoro Rivadavia<sup>1</sup>, somewhat to the south of where the first four Soviet vessels were seized. The Argen-

<sup>1</sup>Bulgarian and Soviet news releases maintain that their vessels were seized more than 20 miles beyond the Argentine 200-mile zone.

tine Navy fired at the two Bulgarian vessels, the *Aurelia* and the *Ofelia*, when they refused orders to stop. The *Aurelia* was hit three times and it is believed that one crew member was killed and several others wounded. During the boarding, a small boat overturned and three Argentine sailors drowned. The *Ofelia* and the two Soviet trawlers, the *Franz Hals* and the *Prokopevsk*, arrived in Puerto Madryn on 2 October escorted by the Argentine Navy. The *Aurelia* was so badly damaged that it had to be towed to Puerto Madryn by the Argentine vessel *Gurruchaga*.

As a result of these incidents, a third protest note was delivered to the Soviet Embassy and a note was also delivered to the Bulgarian Embassy. The first secretaries of the Soviet and Bulgarian Embassies in Buenos Aires traveled to Puerto Madryn on 2 October to review the statements made by the masters and other officers of the four newly seized fishing vessels. On 4 October, accompanied by Argentine fishery officials, the two diplomats boarded the trawlers to inspect their catch.

Figure 1.—Argentina's foreign fishing zones, 1977.





The Bulgarian stern trawler *Ofelia*, when seized in 1976 for violation of the U.S. Contiguous Fishery Zone. In background are two Polish stern trawlers and a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter. See "Bulgarian Stern Trawler Seized off Oregon," *Mar. Fish. Rev.* 39(3):33.

The operations against the foreign trawlers were personally directed from a Buenos Aires command post by the Argentine Naval Commander and a member of the ruling military junta, Admiral Emilio Massera Padula. He issued the following communique on 2 October:

"I wish to congratulate the Navy Operations Command and, through it, subordinate commands and boarding parties, for their efficiency, swiftness and diligence in carrying out orders given for the defense of Argentine sovereignty and sea. The actions which were carried out decisively illustrate the unyielding determination of the Argentine Armed Forces to preserve to the ultimate consequences the integrity of the national heritage. The loss of sailors during this operation is new and painful testimony to the Argentine people that the security of the maritime fatherland is in the hands of Argentines who are willing to reassert, with their lives and through their actions, the unyielding defense of the Republic."

In a military ceremony at Puerto Belgrano, Argentina's major naval base, Admiral Massera further stated: "We will take similar actions as we did before against any intruder, under any flag, and on any grounds."

Argentine authorities confiscated the

catch of the seized vessels. The Spanish company Empressa Bajamar S.A. based in Barcelona bought the catch of the five Soviet trawlers at an auction and was to ship most of it to Spain aboard a Soviet refrigerated transport vessel. Initial reports had indicated that the Argentines wanted to sell the confiscated catch back to the Soviets owing to the limited cold storage capacity in Puerto Madryn. The disposition of the catch of the remaining two Soviet trawlers and the two damaged Bulgarian trawlers was unknown.

After unloading their catch, the Soviet trawlers were allowed to leave Puerto Madryn. The trawlers were re-supplied by a Soviet vessel on 3 November. The first Soviet vessel to be released was the *Nerey* which sailed on 9 November. The last of the seven seized Soviet trawlers, the *Franz Hals*, was allowed to leave on 23 November. The two Bulgarian trawlers were allowed to leave Puerto Madryn on 1 December after undergoing repairs. Argentine law reportedly provides for fines of as much as \$100,000, but no information is currently available on the amounts of the fines, if any, which were levied against the seized vessels.

Press reports indicated that Argentina conducted extensive naval exercises in early November. The exercises were carried out in Golfo Nuevo close

Table 1.—Fishery commodities aboard Argentine-seized Soviet vessels, 1977.

Vessel	Fishery commodities (t)	
	Frozen fish <sup>1</sup>	Fish meal
<i>Apatit</i>	722	70
<i>Bussol</i>	800	—
<i>Magnit</i>	450	15
<i>Teodor Nette</i>	280	—
Total	2,252	85

<sup>1</sup>Primarily frozen hake.  
Source: Buenos Aires Radio, 24 September 1977.

Table 2.—Soviet catch in the southwest Atlantic, 1965-75.

Year	Catch (1,000 t)	Year	Catch (1,000 t)
1965	—	1971	26.2
1966	73.3	1972	4.6
1967	677.7	1973	6.1
1968	189.8	1974	12.9
1969	92.9	1975	8.9
1970	420.6	1976	n.a.

Sources:  
TsNIITEIRKh, Moscow 1971, for 1965-70 and FAO, "Yearbook of Fisheries Statistics" for 1971-75.

to where the Soviet and Bulgarian vessels were being held.

## VESSELS AND CATCHES

The four Soviet trawlers seized on 21 September held 2,252 metric tons (t) of frozen fish, primarily hake<sup>2</sup>, and 85 t of fish meal (Table 1). Each vessel had a crew of about 100, including 9 women. The quantity of fish and/or fish meal confiscated from the other five Soviet and Bulgarian trawlers is not yet known. Whatever the total amount, however, the known quantity of frozen fish seized from the first four Soviet vessels is a significant percentage of the total Soviet catch in the southwest Atlantic in recent years (Table 2).

The general specifications of the captured vessels are given in Table 3. Most of the Soviet vessels are of the *Skryplev* and the related *Rembrant* classes. The *Skryplev*-class vessels were constructed in Denmark during the 1960's and early 1970's. The *Franz Hals* (*Rembrant* class) was constructed in the Netherlands in the early 1970's and its design is basically the same as that of the *Skryplev* class. The *Nerey* is one of a

<sup>2</sup>Patagonian hake, *Merluccius hubbsi*.

Table 3.—Specifications of seized Soviet and Bulgarian vessels.

Name	Country	Class	GRT	Length (m)	Beam (m)	Speed Knots	Cargo capacity (t)
<i>Apatit</i>	USSR	Skryplev	4,700	103	16	14	1,700
<i>Bussol</i>	USSR	Skryplev	4,700	103	16	14	1,700
<i>Franz Hals</i>	USSR	Rembrant	4,700	103	16	14	1,700
<i>Magnit</i>	USSR	Skryplev	4,700	103	16	14	1,700
<i>Nerey</i>	USSR	Atlantik III	3,930	102	15	15	1,000
<i>Prokopevsk</i>	USSR	Skryplev	4,700	103	16	14	1,700
<i>Teodor Nette</i>	USSR	Mayakovskiy	3,170	85	14	14	900
<i>Aurelia</i>	Bulgaria	B-418 (II)	2,470	89	15	15	3,990 <sup>1</sup>
<i>Ofelia</i>	Bulgaria	B-418 (II)	2,470	89	15	15	3,990 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Not available in metric tons, figures are in cubic meters.

Source: Files of the Branch of International Fisheries Analysis, NMFS, NOAA.

series of *Atlantik III* class vessels constructed in the German Democratic Republic within the last decade. The other Soviet vessel, the *Teodor Nette*, is Soviet-built and belongs to the *Mayakovskiy* class. The two Bulgarian vessels, the *Aurelia* and the *Ofelia*, are Polish-built B-418(II)-class trawlers.

### SOVIET FISHING IN THE SOUTHWEST ATLANTIC

The expansion of Soviet fishing into the southwest Atlantic had its beginnings in 1962 when the Soviet Ministry of Fisheries secured a fishing base in Cuba. During the next 3 years, the Soviet Union assisted Cuba in the construction of a large, modern fishing port in Havana. Once it was completed, the Soviet Union was logistically able to expand its fishing southward into the waters of the Patagonian Shelf, where large, unexploited fishery resources were available.

The Soviet Union began to fish off Argentina in the summer of 1966 and during that first year caught 73,300 t, mainly Patagonian hake. In 1966, Argentina had only a 3-mile territorial sea and the Soviets could fish in a large area without restrictions. According to Argentine press reports, more than 200 Soviet trawlers were sighted off Argentina and Uruguay in 1966.

The presence of Soviet fishing vessels off their coast angered many Argentines. One reason was that Soviet vessels often did not respect Argentina's 3-mile territorial limit. Soviet violations eventually became so numerous that in December 1966 the Argentine Foreign Ministry made a formal protest to the Soviet Ambassador concerning Soviet fishing in Argentine waters. At

the same time informed sources let it be known that Argentina was planning to extend its territorial sea jurisdiction from 3 to 6 miles and its exclusive fishing zone to 12 miles in the near future.

A second reason for Argentine displeasure over Soviet fishing activities was the use of explosives by the Soviets to kill large quantities of fish. Argentine fishermen were so infuriated that they threatened to strike against the government for its apparent lack of concern and began to speak out in favor of a 200-mile limit.

### A 200-MILE ZONE

The Soviet Union continued to fish off Argentina in 1967. In fact, Soviet fishing activities in the southwest Atlantic were more intense than during the previous year in spite of the issuance of a decree by Argentina extending its territorial sea and maritime jurisdiction to 200 miles in early January 1967. The decree required foreign vessels to obtain temporary permits to fish within 12-200 miles from shore and to pay inspection fees. In late January, the Soviet Union obtained permission to operate 40 fishing vessels within the 200-mile limit through 31 March and paid the required fees.

Although the Soviet Union generally complied with the initial temporary regulations, neither the Soviets nor the Argentines were satisfied with the situation. On 2 February, the Soviet Embassy in Buenos Aires issued a statement disputing Argentina's, or any other nation's, right to extend its territorial jurisdiction to 200 miles and called upon Argentina to reconsider its position. Argentine fishermen, for their

part, kept up their protests over the presence of Soviet fishing vessels off the Argentine coast.

### FISHING LAW ADOPTED

The Soviets, as well as other foreigners, continued to fish intensively throughout the year and as they did so, the Argentine government placed additional restrictions on foreign fishing off its coasts. On 24 September, fishing fees were increased for all foreign vessels operating within Argentine territorial waters. One month later, a fishing law, based on the January decree, was drawn up which established Argentine jurisdiction over the sea to 200 miles from straight baselines enclosing large bays. The resources in these waters were declared to be the property of the National Government which would henceforth grant concessions for their development.

In November 1967, Argentina announced its foreign fishing regulations which included license fees (US\$10 per registered ton of fishing vessels every 120 days, double for fishery support vessels, processing factory vessels, and refrigerated fish carriers) and severe sanctions for violations of the 200-mile territorial sea. The fishing law became effective on 24 December, though enforcement was deferred until 1 April 1968. In December, about 70 Soviet vessels were still fishing off the Argentine coast. The total Soviet catch in the southwest Atlantic during 1967 was 677,700 t, more than a ninefold increase over the previous year. Most of the fish was harvested on the Patagonian Shelf off Argentina.

Early in 1968, talks on fishing rights began between Argentina and the Soviet Union, but broke down when the Soviets refused to pay license fees. When Argentina began to enforce its fishing law on 1 April, the Soviet fleet seemingly withdrew beyond the 200-mile limit.

### SOVIET FISHING OFF ARGENTINA ENDS

Soviet vessels continued to fish in the area, however, and in June 1968 two Soviet trawlers were intercepted within

Argentina's 200-mile territorial sea. The vessels were fired upon and after one was hit amidships, both surrendered and were escorted into an Argentine port. After weeks of negotiations for the release of the vessels, the Soviet fleet finally left the Patagonian Shelf.

The Soviet catch in the southwest Atlantic declined precipitously and then remained at low levels in subsequent years (Table 2). The Soviet fishermen in the area made a brief recovery in 1970 when their fishing effort was intensified off the coasts of Uruguay and Brazil. This recovery was short-lived, however, because both Uruguay and Brazil soon extended their maritime jurisdictions to 200 miles.

At the end of 1972, only 14-16 foreign vessels were allowed to fish within Argentina's 200-mile limit. Fees had been increased to US\$200 per dead-weight ton; quantity (70,000 t) and species restrictions were also placed on foreign fishing operations. Foreign fishing was finally prohibited altogether in February 1973. If a foreign vessel were caught fishing illegally, it could be fined and have its catch confiscated.

Since 1973, Argentina and the Soviet Union have met on several occasions to discuss fisheries cooperation and aid programs. In 1974, for example, Soviet and Argentine fishery experts prepared a draft agreement on fisheries cooperation which included the following items: 1) Joint research, 2) Soviet training of Argentine fishery personnel, 3) construction of a fishing port, and 4) establishment of a joint fishing company.

In terms of increasing Soviet access to Argentine waters, however, discussions such as those in 1974 and others tied into more general trade negotiations produced few results. Soviet catches off Argentina continue to remain at low levels.

With respect to the latest seizures, the Soviet press has been relatively silent. A Tass news agency article in *Izvestiya* on 7 October gave a brief description of the incidents and protested the innocence of the Soviet vessel captains. The unnamed author of the article maintained that the Soviet vessels were outside Argentina's 200-mile limit

when boarded and seized, but failed to mention that the Argentine navy had to give chase (under the "hot pursuit" doctrine) to effect the seizures. The article also intimated that the seizures of Soviet vessels were politically motivated<sup>3</sup>.

### FOREIGN FISHING AUTHORIZED

The Argentine Government has indicated increasing interest in developing the rich fishery resources of the Patagonian Shelf. Argentine fishermen, primarily from the northern port of Mar del Plata, have traditionally been hampered by limited domestic markets for fish. Argentine consumers prefer beef. A growing demand in Japan and Europe for cod-like species, such as hake, has focused considerable attention on the utilization of groundfish resources along Argentina's sparsely populated southern coast.

The Argentine Government granted the Federal Republic of Germany and Japanese companies permission (on 16 June 1977), to fish experimentally for hake off Argentina's coast south of lat. 40°S. The Soviet and Bulgarian vessels were seized within the zone where the West Germans and the Japanese have been authorized to fish. South Korean fishermen may also obtain an authorization to fish further south along the coast<sup>4</sup>.

### SEIZURES MAY INDICATE NEW POLICY

Press reports indicate that the recent seizures may represent an aggressive new foreign policy by the country's 18-month-old military junta aimed at asserting Argentine interests. The Navy Commander recently referred to Argen-

tina's failure to live up to its potential and stated: "We have lost too much to be satisfied with ties, this time we are going to be the winners."

Press reports have also suggested that Argentine and South African officials have held discussions on security matters in the South Atlantic. The Argentine Foreign Minister, Vice Admiral Oscar Antonio Montes, has denied, however, that such discussions have taken place. The South Africans, unlike the Argentines, have allowed extensive foreign fishing off their coast and have only recently declared a 200-mile fishing zone which they implemented on 1 November 1977.

### BOUNDARY DISPUTES

Two marine boundary disputes, one with the United Kingdom, the other with Chile, have increased Argentine sensitivities to any foreign intrusions on the Patagonian Shelf. Talks with the United Kingdom over the future of the Falkland or Malvinas Islands were held in Rome during July 1977, but reportedly failed to achieve a breakthrough. Further talks were held in December. The islands are a British Crown Colony, situated about 480 miles northeast of Cape Horn on the Patagonian Shelf, and their 3,000 residents, almost entirely of British ancestry, oppose transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. The Argentines have disputed United Kingdom sovereignty over the islands for more than a century and this issue has increasingly troubled relations with the British.

A second dispute with Chile has developed over the three small islands of Picton, Nueva, and Lennox in the Beagle Channel near Cape Horn. In May, the British government announced that an arbitration panel of International Court of Justice (ICJ) had awarded the three islands to Chile. The islands themselves reportedly have little intrinsic value, but may significantly affect marine boundaries and thus potential claims to the mineral, oil, and fishery resources of Antarctica. While Chile has accepted the decision, Argentina has not yet ratified the ICJ ruling. The two countries have held talks on this issue. (Source: IFR-77/269.)

<sup>3</sup>"One can only regret the fact that some forces in Argentina would like to use international fishing to undermine our trade, scientific, technical, and cultural links. Fishing is an absolutely peaceful business. That is why attempts to make it an object of aggravating relations between the Soviet Union and Argentina look so 'clumsy'." *Izvestiya*, 7 October 1977.

<sup>4</sup>A complete report on the Argentine authorization of foreign fishing can be obtained by requesting IFR-77/141R from NMFS Statistics and Market News Offices.