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Assimilating martian atmospheric constituents using a global circulation model

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Introduction
The technique of data assimilation is employed in a novel way for a planetary atmosphere to perform a complete spatial and temporal analysis of martian atmospheric constituent data over periods of several Mars years. Observations of martian atmospheric constituents, generally made from orbiting spacecraft, are often sparse and incomplete. A global circulation model can be used to predict the transport, phase changes, and chemical reactions that these species undergo. If constrained by observations, it can then provide a consistent interpolation to unobserved regions and, in principle, a useful prior for future retrievals. Furthermore, any consistent mis-fit between the model predictions and new observations can be used to identify potentially important physical processes that are missing from the model, including inferring the presence and location of sources and sinks.

Data Assimilation
Data assimilation is the combination of observations and models, which provide physical constraints and propagate the observational information that is introduced. This offers some significant potential advantages for the analysis of atmospheric data from other planets [4]. Thermal and dust opacity observations have been successfully assimilated over a period of about eight Mars Years (MY), including data from the Thermal Emission Spectrometer (TES) aboard NASA Mars Global Surveyor [5, 6] in MY24–27 and Mars Climate Sounder (MCS) from NASA Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) in MY28–31. Previous work has focussed on assimilation of temperature and total column dust opacity into a Mars global circulation model (MGCM), which includes the option of a coupled photochemical model [2, 3]. We now add assimilation of water vapour, water cloud aerosol and chemical species. Results shown in this paper for water vapour are for MY24–25 and for water ice and ozone are for MY30.

Below: dust absorption optical depth at 9.3 μm, normalised to 810 Pa and averaged over longitude. This should be multiplied by about 2.6 to get a broadband viable dust total extinction. The data here are from [7], assimilation gives similar zonally- and diurnally-averaged results.

Water Vapour Assimilation
The MGCM can include a full water cycle, coupled to the model radiation scheme. Retrievals of water vapour column data from TES [6] were assimilated into the model [9], including the global water vapour column error in the MGCM to around 2–4 ppm depending on season.

Left: zonal-mean water vapour mixing ratios for the equator of the northern hemisphere (a) spring, (b) summer, (c) autumn, and (d) winter. Black contours show the mean differential circulation (10^7 kg/h) with solid, dashed lines representing clockwise, anticlockwise circulation. Dotted white lines show ice mean mixing ratios. Water transport by transient eddies is largest at northern midlatitudes close to equinox, with a net northward transport of water vapour toward the ice cap.

Below: water vapour column field in northern hemispheric summer (a) from (a) on an assimilation of TES water vapour, (b) a model with outlying ice deposits around the mean ice cap, and (c) a model with the main ice cap represented, revealing the impact of outlying ice deposits around the north polar ice cap (located between 70°–80° N and 120°–210° E).

Ozone Assimilation
The Mars Color Imager (MARCI) [1] aboard MRO provides near-deadly global mapping of ozone column concentration. These data were used alongside MGS temperature and dust opacity observations, which help to ensure a realistic atmospheric dynamical state. Ozone has been successfully assimilated into the MGCM and can be shown to improve the model’s predictive capability, although the system generally retains information from observations only over a short period. In recent years, with various measurements of ozone from the machine, in daylight. This is less of a problem in polar regions around winter, and assimilation of ozone is able to highlight differences in the structure of the martian polar vortex when compared to a control model run.

Right: zonal-mean water ice opacity field from the assimilation procedure around northern hemispheres summer solstice with a 3 km resolution. The model was run with sufficient vertical resolution to allow the model to resolve the horizontal circulation changes compared to the control run. The differences between the model output and the observations show the model’s ability to simulate the atmosphere on a realistic scale.

Water Ice Assimilation
We have assimilated MGCM ozone data which includes vertical profile information [10]. This can be challenging since the MGCM rapidly converts between water vapour and ice.

Conclusions
The data set resulting from a constituent assimilation allows a detailed study of the atmospheric state that is not possible using observations or models alone. The MGCM has the ability to transport many independent traces, so a wide variety of photochemical active and passive trace species can be assimilated simultaneously as observations become available.

Chemical data assimilation is a relatively new area of Mars research. Assimilation of even a single chemical species can provide constraints on other observed constituents and provide estimates for unobserved constituents. Chemical rate coefficients, primarily from laboratory experiments, can be tested by reconciling observational data and theoretical models. The assimilation of such observations should lead to improvements in martian chemical models and better use of present and future observations, such as those from 2016 ESA ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter.

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Background Image: Mars Exploration Rover Mission, Cornell, JPL, NASA.

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