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Assimilating martian atmospheric constituents using a global circulation model

Stephen R. Lewis, Liam J. Steele, James A. Horne, and Manish R. Patel
Department of Physical Sciences, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK (stephen.lewis@open.ac.uk)

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 interpollation to unobserved regions and, in principle, a useful a priori forecast for future missions. Furthermore, any consistent misfit 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) data, from NASA Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO), in MY28–31. Previous work has focused 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 visible dust total extinction. The data here are from [7], assimilation gives similar zonally- and diurnally-averaged results.

Ozone Assimilation
The Mars Color Imager (MARCI) [1] aboard MRO provides near-daily global mapping of ozone column concentration. These data were used alongside MCS temperature and dust opacity observations, which help to ensure a realistic atmospheric dynamical state. Ozone has been successfully assimilated into the MGSM and can be shown to improve the model’s predictive capability; although the system generally retains information from observation over only a short period. Due to rapid mixing with various photolysis of ozone 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: seasonal-mean water ice opacities from the assimilation procedure around northern hemisphere summer solstice and autumn equinoxes of MY30

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 tracers, 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 datasets 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 the 2016 ESA ExoMars Trace Gas Orbiter.

References

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