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After Thirty Years: The Falklands War of 1982

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AFTER THIRTY YEARS: THE FALKLANDS WAR OF 1982

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Katelyn Tietzen
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Accepted by:
Dr. Edwin Moïse, Committee Chair
Dr. Rod Andrew, Jr.
Dr. Michael Silvestri

ABSTRACT

By law, the British government seals all cabinet and other important government documents until after thirty years passes. In 2012, the “thirty-year rule” expired for all documents pertaining to the Falklands War of 1982. There is already an enormous amount of material written about the war but these released documents provide new insight. Lasting only one hundred days, the war was kicked off when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, or known in Argentina as *las Malvinas*, on 2 April 1982. Located in the very South Atlantic and four hundred miles east of Argentina, the British launched their largest naval task force since World War II to recover their colony. By 14 June 1982, the islands were back in British possession. Relying heavily on these new documents, this thesis analyzes the controversial sinking of the ARA *General Belgrano*. This examination demonstrates the British fear of the Argentine navy and the potentially catastrophic damage it could have inflicted on not only the two British carriers, the HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*, but also on the overall British campaign. The documents also highlight the British government’s efforts to control the media, albeit not all efforts were successful. This section relies heavily on the government documents but also journalistic accounts, British commander biographies, and newspapers written during the war and years later. Allowing the government documents to speak for themselves, this thesis will expand the historiography of the Falklands War of 1982.

DEDICATION

To my parents, John and Janet, and my sister, Rachel. Without all of your love, support, and guidance, I would not be where I am now. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

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First off, I need to thank Maggie Scull for trekking out to The National Archives, the Kew in London for me on multiple occasions to obtain the documents I used in this thesis. I especially want to thank my chair, Dr. Edwin Moïse, for his readings, edits and suggestions for all of my drafts. Without him, and his patience with me, this thesis would not exist. I also want to thank my other committee members, Dr. Rod Andrew Jr. and Dr. Michael Silvestri for their time and support.

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To my friends, Bri-Anne Kirnbauer, Anthony Padovano, Caroline Couch and Janet Marie Gunnels, who have all gone above and beyond for me throughout the many years. I am forever in debt to you for being there for me, whether it be listening to me vent, providing comedic relief, offering solid advice or pouring wine.

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CHAPTER I PROLOGUE

This is the story of a freak of history, almost certainly the last colonial war that Britain will ever fight. So extraordinary an event was it that, even after men began to die, many of those taking part felt as if they had been swept away into fantasy, that the ships sinking and the guns firing round them had somehow escaped from a television screen in the living room.¹

- Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins

Major-General Jeremy Moore of the Royal Marines woke up to a disturbing telephone call at 03:00 on 2 April 1982. The caller informed his staffer that the Argentines were in the midst of invading the Falkland Islands. In total disbelief, Moore demanded to be assured that this call was not a belated April Fool's joke.² By the time he reached his headquarters, the British government had already determined to deploy a task force to be sent to the South Atlantic. The Argentine invasion of the British colony triggered the largest British naval response since the Second World War. Located 400 miles east of the coast of Argentina in the very south of the Atlantic, the Falkland Islands are essentially rock covered in moss and sheep, and dominated by the cold Antarctic weather. They hold no real strategic or tactical advantage for either Argentina or Great Britain. Originally a whaling station and port, the islands have been a source of political tension between the Argentines and the British since 1765. However, the political dispute quickly escalated on 2 January 1833 when Captain John Onslow took possession of the islands on behalf of Britain. Argentine Captain Don Jose Maria Pinedo had already laid claim to the islands but Onslow's military might forced the Argentines off the islands.

¹ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), vii

² Ibid, 85

Thereafter, the British claimed sovereignty and placed the islands under British control; they were subsequently settled by Britons. However, this situation was never accepted by Argentina. The sovereignty dispute was brought to the United Nations after the Second World War and there were numerous, albeit failed, diplomatic attempts for a peaceful solution in the 1970's between the two countries.³ By this time, both countries suffered from internal economic and political difficulties. Ironically, the Falkland Islands provided a distraction for both British and Argentine citizens as patriotic sentiments were heightened throughout the two countries as result of the invasion.

The islands are located 8,000 miles from Britain and it took the British Task Force over three weeks to reach the area. Aerial combat began on 1 May and British forces landed on East Falkland on 21 May. By 14 June 1982, the British had recaptured Port Stanley, the capital of the Falklands. The war lasted only one hundred days but it resulted in the deaths of 253 British men: 85 from the Royal Navy, 26 from the Royal Marines, 123 Army, 1 Royal Air Force, and 18 British civilians deployed with the Task Force.⁴ 775 British troops were wounded, while 115 were prisoners of war (POWs). The Royal Navy suffered heavily, losing 2 destroyers (HMS *Coventry* and *Sheffield*), 2 frigates (HMS *Ardent* and *Antelope*), 1 landing ship logistics (*Sir Galahad*), 1 landing craft utility

³ For the best overview of the political negotiations and disputes leading up the 1982 invasion, see Max Hastings, and Simon Jenkins. *The Battle for the Falklands*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1983)

⁴ Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol. II, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 772-774 and Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 348

(LCU F4) and 1 container ship (*Atlantic Conveyor*). Argentine losses included 655 dead and a staggering 11,848 POWs.⁵

The historiography of the Falklands War is extensive. The political issues that have been considered include the effects of the Treaty of Utrecht, 1713, the debates over decolonization after World War II, Argentina's transformation into a military dictatorship in 1976, Thatcherism, American perception and involvement, the power of the United Nations, and post-war diplomatic and political lessons. Since the Soviets and the Americans were not directly involved, this war also prompted historians to look further into these types of marginal conflicts. Generally, the Falklands War is seen as a Cold War anomaly: a peripheral war involving a first world power and a third world country.

In terms of military significance, the Falklands War was the first to demonstrate the capabilities of nuclear-powered submarines (SSN). Military historians have also focused on the use of helicopters, the continuing advancement of field medicine and mobile hospitals, and the unimaginable 8,000 mile logistical system. The landing of British troops on East Falkland also prompted historians to continue examining maneuver warfare and landing doctrine. Naval and aerial aspects of the war are given a significant amount of attention by military historians. Debates and questions remain: did the British achieve command of the air? Command of the sea? What is command of the air and the sea? Does the definition change with different types of conflict? This thesis will examine some of these questions.

⁵ Martin Middlebrook, *Argentine Fight for the Falklands*. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009), 282-284 and Freedman, Vol. II, 658

While providing an outline, Chapter II traces the chronology of the war while simultaneously examining the broader historical issues. Admittedly, this chapter does not cover every political, diplomatic or military event; it focuses on the areas of heavy debate surrounding the war, largely between March 1982 and June 1982. The study includes contributing factors leading to the war including the political situations in Great Britain and Argentina, the South Georgia Island invasion, and the failure of British intelligence to predict the invasion. It examines the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, the British diplomatic and military response, the sinking of the *ARA General Belgrano*, British command of the air and sea, and British repossession of the islands. Finally, it includes a discussion of current debates surrounding the war and relations of the British government and military with British and American journalists. It also includes a general analysis of American, British and South American historiographies.

Chapter III examines the most controversial aspect of the Falklands War: the sinking of the Argentine cruiser *ARA General Belgrano* by a British SSN. The British decision to sink the cruiser outside the established total exclusion zone (TEZ) generated heavy criticism from international actors but also politicians and citizens within Britain. The controversy grew into conspiracy when allegations were made in the House of Commons that the Thatcher government, in spite of a peace deal on the table, deliberately ordered the sinking. These allegations charged the Thatcher government with unnecessarily escalating the war. However, recently released government documents demonstrate the fear of the Argentine navy and the potential it had for ending the British

campaign to recover the islands. This chapter uses the documents, recent biographies and other recent details to justify the British decision to sink the *Belgrano*.

Chapter IV also uses recently released documents to analyze the British assessment of potential foreign assistance and potential for foreign intervention. While a substantial amount of attention is given to the Cold War superpowers, the Americans and the Soviets, the British also examined the majority of Latin and South American countries and their potential for involvement. The documents also highlight the British attempts at controlling the media throughout the campaign. Although the media contributed to the rise in patriotism during the war, they also proved to be another thorn in the British military's and government's sides. This chapter examines many situations where British media contributed to Argentine intelligence by broadcasting sensitive information and in some cases, blatantly reported details that jeopardized the lives of servicemen. American newspapers are also used in the chapter; despite not being directly involved in the war, the Americans portrayed many instances of clashing between the British government and media.

This thesis uses the documents released following the expiration of "the thirty year rule." Using newspaper articles, The Official History of the Falklands Campaign, and autobiographies to bridge any gaps in material, this thesis allows the documents to settle questions and offer new interpretations for the Falklands War of 1982.

CHAPTER II

THE FALKLANDS WAR: A TIMELINE OF MAJOR HISTORIGRAPHICAL ISSUES

*When you stop a dictator there are always risks but there are great risks in not stopping a dictator. My generation learned that a long time ago.*⁶

- Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

*The British won't fight.*⁷

- Argentine Junta Dictator General Leopoldo Galtieri

The 1970's saw change in governments for both the Great Britain and Argentina. In 1976, Isabel Peron was deposed from the Argentine Presidency and was succeeded by a group of military officers simply called "the Junta," with General Jorge Rafael Videla serving as the President.⁸ Videla left office in March 1981 and Army Commander-in-Chief General Leopoldo Galtieri rose to the Presidency in December 1981. The Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher, won the 1979 election in Britain. The Conservatives did not view the South Atlantic as the main defense concern for their country; that continued to be the Soviet threat to Western Europe.⁹ By 1982, only 1,813

⁶Glyn Mathais. Interview with Margaret Thatcher. *Thatcher: Interview for ITN on the Falklands*. ITN, 5 April 1982

⁷ General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri responding to a warning from US Secretary of State Alexander Haig about the consequences of the invasion. 10 April 1982. Quoted in Alexander Haig, *Caveat* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 280 as cited in Keith B. Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 57

⁸ Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984), 15

⁹ Michael D. Kandiah, "Elite Oral History and the Global Implications Of the Falklands Conflict: British Perspectives" (paper was presented at the International Oral History Conference, Rome, Italy, 23-26 June 2004) as presented in "The Falklands War", seminar held 5 June 2002 (Centre for Contemporary British History, 2005, <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/witness/falklands/>), 76

inhabitants lived on the islands.¹⁰ Due to the economic recession, Parliament continuously debated on whether to minimize or terminate funding for defense for the islands. Needless to say, the Falkland Islands were insignificant in the grand scheme of British political affairs. However, this all changed when Argentina surprised the British by invading on 2 April 1982. The Falklands were so insignificant that even the then British Secretary of State for Defence John Nott conceded to having trouble identifying the islands' location on a map before the conflict.¹¹ Nevertheless, the British responded by sending their navy south to the Falkland Islands, resulting in the largest British naval engagement since World War II.

The Junta, frustrated with British delay in transfer of sovereignty negotiations, had faced severe internal political issues with a rapidly declining economy entailing an inflation rate over 100 percent, staggering unemployment rates, and falling wages.¹² Seeking a diversion, General Leopoldo Galtieri, the Junta's dictator, needed an outside conflict to deflect public criticism of the government. Las Malvinas (the Argentine name of the islands) provided this distraction. This was not surprising; since 6 March 1957, las Malvinas, through formal decree, had been declared part of Argentine territory. This same decree even proclaimed the islands' inhabitants as Argentine citizens.¹³ Karl von

¹⁰ 1980 census figures cited in Gordon Smith, *Battle Atlas of the Falklands War* (Denarth: Naval-History.Net, 2006), 11

¹¹ John Nott, "The Falklands War," seminar held 5 June 2002 (Centre for Contemporary British History, 2005, <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/witness/falklands/>), 18

¹² Arthur Gavshon and Barnett, Roger W., eds. *Seapower and Strategy* (Annapolis Naval Institute Press, 1989), 14-18 as cited in LCDR Edward B. Zelle., "Clausewitz and Sea Power: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War." (Maxwell AFB, Alabama Air Command and Staff College Air University, March 1999), 24

¹³ Peter Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis: The Rights and the Wrongs*, (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1982), 37

Clausewitz asserts in On War, in what probably his best known argument, that war is a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means.¹⁴ The decision to invade Malvinas provided the opportunity to divert internal political conflict and legitimize the Junta with a common cause. In essence, this was continuing politics through other means. It is also suggested that this invasion was intended to signal to Chile that Argentina was prepared to back up not only its claims to las Malvinas, but also other territorial claims, including the Beagle Channel, with force.¹⁵ In 1980, Pope John Paul II mediated Chilean and Argentine claims to the Beagle Channel and eventually ruled in Chile's favor. Admiral Jorge Anaya, overall commander of the navy, the extremely hawkish arm of the Argentine military, believed that control of the Cape Horn area could be established after control of the Falklands was achieved.¹⁶ The Argentine Junta also argued that Argentina's military operation was to "recover" the islands, not to invade; a draft plan prepared for the "recovery" of Argentine territory had existed in Argentine naval headquarters since 1960s.¹⁷ The military operation was to serve the political goal of sparking negotiations for transfer of sovereignty.¹⁸

¹⁴ Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 605

¹⁵ Peter Beck, *The Falkland Islands as an International Problem* (London: Routledge, 1988) 73, as cited in LCDR Edward B. Zelle, "Clausewitz and Sea Power: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War," 24

¹⁶ Sunday Times Insight Team, *The Falklands War: The Full Story*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), 27

¹⁷ Ironically, it was prepared by then Captain Jorge Anaya. Hastings and Jenkins, 31

¹⁸ Major Rodolfo Pereyra, "Clausewitz and the Falkland Islands Air War," *Air & Space Power Journal*, XX, no. 3 (2006), 113



Figure 1. South Atlantic



Figure 2. The Falkland Islands

Due to defense budget cuts, the icebreaker HMS *Endurance*, last British naval ship in the area, was to be pulled from the South Atlantic at the end of its 1981-1982 tour. An essential link between the Falkland Islands and South Georgia Island, another British claim, east of the Falklands, the *Endurance* was to be paid off and sold or scrapped after the conclusion of her final patrol. The ship's "premature retirement" was supposed to save the Ministry of Defense about £3 million a year.¹⁹ This withdrawal announcement was indeed public, even with Thatcher later describing *Endurance* as "a military irrelevance," suggesting that, "that it would neither deter nor repel an invasion."²⁰ While it lacked military capabilities, it was not the "toothless tiger" it was made out to be. Along with its' excellent communication facilities, it was able to carry twenty or so Royal Marines, launch two Wasp helicopters carrying air to surface missiles, and use her two twenty millimeter cannons.²¹ The plan to withdraw the *Endurance* triggered two reactions. First, the Falkland Islanders believed the British government was abandoning them. Second, it signaled to the Argentines that British influence and desire to remain in the region was waning.

The invasion of the Falkland Islands was two-fold. The conflict kicked off preemptively on 19 March 1982 when approximately thirty Argentine metal salvagers, led by Argentine businessman, Constantino Davidoff, illegally landed on South Georgia

¹⁹ Keith Speed, *Sea Change: The Battle for the Falklands and the Future of Britain's Navy* (Bath: Ashgrove Press Ltd, 1982), 111

²⁰ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, pg. 177 cited in Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol. I, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 224

²¹ Speed, 117

Island and raised the Argentine flag.²² Argentina sent one hundred troops to defend the salvagers after the British responded by sending the icebreaker HMS *Endurance* to South Georgia. Whether the Junta planned to include South Georgia in their invasion plans remains a matter of debate. The Official History of the Falklands Campaign cites several different sources that suggest the Junta did not initially plan the South Georgia invasion but it intended “to take advantage to press her claim, and that if any Argentine workmen resisting British attempts to move them were killed, a force would then be landed on the Falkland Islands.”²³ However, some sources argue that an Argentine naval special forces unit infiltrated Davidoff’s ship, posing as scientists.²⁴ This stems from the reported September 1981 Argentina plan “Operation Alpha,” in which the Argentine navy would use Davidoff’s business in South Georgia as a way to establish another base on the disputed territory.²⁵ Several former British commanders argue the Argentines were caught off guard by the metal salvagers and forced to invade the Falkland Islands earlier than intended. Nevertheless, by taking South Georgia, the Junta was forced to move their Falkland Islands invasion plans up to April from September, fearing the British increase in naval forces in the region.

²² The South Georgia Islands and the South Sandwich Island chain lay 900 miles east of the Falklands. While they are a British overseas territory, the Argentines also claim sovereignty over the islands.

²³ Freedman, Vol. I, 220

²⁴ Nick van de Bijl, *Nine Battles to Stanley*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 8 as reported in Freedman, Vol. I, 236

²⁵ In 1976, the Argentines landed on South Thule, another island in the South Sandwich chain, and built a small military base. The matter was never settled between Argentina and the British before the outbreak of the Falklands War. Freedman, Vol. I, 169-170

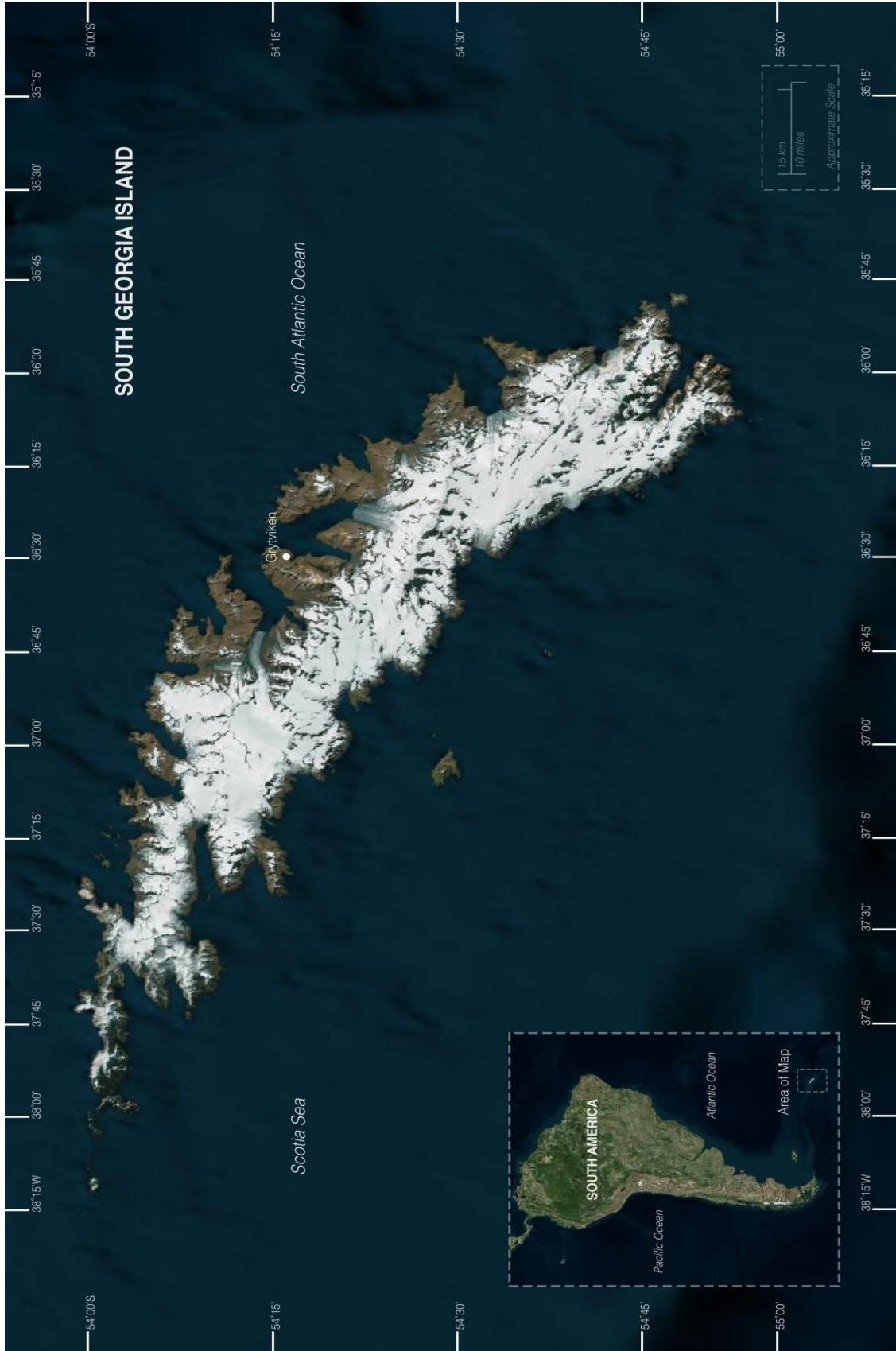


Figure 3. South Georgia Island

The South Georgia Island “incident”, as it is often referred to in British sources, perplexed the British government: was this a precursor for a Falkland Islands invasion or was this a minor diplomatic dispute? To add to the uncertainty, the annual Argentine naval exercises with Uruguay, already announced by Buenos Aires and Montevideo, caused even more confusion amongst the British. Prior to 31 March, the British did not possess any firm evidence of the Argentine intention to invade the Falklands.²⁶ However, by Saturday, 1 April 1982, the Argentine missile corvettes *Drummond* and *Granville* broke away from Uruguayan maneuvers and sailed south to join the *Bahia Paraiso* group farther south.²⁷ By then, it was far too late for the British to block the Argentine fleet’s movement. Falkland Islands Governor Rex Hunt observed: “it looks as if the buggers mean it.”²⁸

The actual invasion of the Falkland Islands, dubbed Operation ROSARIO, centered at the capital of Port Stanley, was highly anti-climactic. The British garrison was overwhelmed as it consisted of only two British Marine detachments, a total of 81 men, alongside what was supposed to be a territorial defense force of 120 to defend the islands. In fact only 23 showed up.²⁹ The Argentine landing force arrived at 04:30 AM and captured the Governor, who then ordered surrender of the British garrison. The Argentines had captured the Falklands by 08:30AM on 2 April. Unable to contain their

²⁶ Freedman, Vol. I, 216

²⁷ Hastings and Jenkins, 60

²⁸ Ibid, 72

²⁹ Usually there was only one detachment on the Falklands; however at the time of the invasion, there happened to be two detachments due to a scheduled rotation. The two detachments therefore consisted of 69 Royal Marines, 11 Royal Navy personnel from the HMS *Endurance* and one ex-Royal Marine then living on the Falklands who re-enlisted. See Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign* Vol. II, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 4

delight, the Junta announced the “recovery” of las Malvinas two hours before formal surrender.³⁰ In attempts to maintain good relations with the islanders and start political negotiations with the British, the Argentine rules of engagement (ROE) mandated for the occupation to be carried out without inflicting casualties and property destruction on the British soldiers and the islanders.

On 24 January 1982, the influential columnist Jesús Iglesias Ruoca, writing in Argentina’s leading paper, *La Prensa*, argued that “as far as the U.K. is concerned, there might be a freezing of relations for a while, but in the context of Western strategic interests it seems improbable that the situation would be prolonged.”³¹ He described the time for invasion as opportune for the recovery of the Malvinas, citing the presence of less than 80 armed men in Port Stanley. Despite Ruoca’s prophecy, the Argentine invasion of the Falklands caught the British intelligence and political community by surprise. Numbed by constant threats of invasion since the 1960’s, the British had simply grown accustomed to ignoring the Argentine rhetoric. Even when answering the House of Commons as to why Argentines were able to invade successfully, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared “it would have been absurd to dispatch the fleet every time there was bellicose talk in Buenos Aires.”³²

³⁰ Hastings and Jenkins, 75

³¹ Sunday Times Insight Team, 25

³² Hastings and Jenkins, 78. Thatcher and the British government did not, however, take into account that this was the approaching sesquicentennial anniversary of the British occupation of the islands. This certainly was another motivator for the Argentines. See Welch, David A. "Remember the Falklands? Missed Lessons of a Misunderstood War." *International Journal*. no. 3 (Summer 1997): 483-507

Although the Argentines succeeded in conquering the islands relatively easily, and despite the fact that they knew the British would eventually respond, they did nothing to take advantage of their surprise. For example, they did not control or sever communication lines between the islanders, a mistake soon made evident during the British counter-invasion. In another instance, the runway at Port Stanley was too short for many Argentine air force jets to land safely. Measuring 4,100 feet, the runway was just barely long enough for the Super Etendard to land. However, this landing had a very “small safety margin” when the runway was dry; when it was wet, landings would be impossible.³³ While they did build a system of lighting around the runway and taxiways, the Argentines did little to lengthen the runway. Even in the month before the British Task Force arrived in the South Atlantic, the Argentines had only managed to begin extending the runway.³⁴ According to Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, this wasn’t because of logistical issues. Instead, the issue was morale on the ground as they quote a soldier of the 7th Argentine Regiment saying that “until 1st of May [when the British bombed the runway at Port Stanley], no one had really believed that we were going to fight.”³⁵ The Argentines’ passive conduct of the campaign suggested that “when confronted with the devastating shock of a British military response that they had never reckoned with, they pinned all of their hopes upon holding their ground and seeking diplomatic, rather than military, deliverance.”³⁶

³³ Jeffery Ethell and Alfred Price, *Air War South Atlantic* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 28

³⁴ Army engineers had laid down steel plating to extend the runway by 200 feet. *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵ Hastings and Jenkins, 286

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 286

The theory that war is a continuation of politics by other means also applies to the British reaction to the invasion. Not only was British sovereignty at stake with this invasion but the British were worried that allowing the Argentines to seize the Falklands as they did would establish a precedent for other governments who wanted to “reclaim” British territory by force. Politically, to dissuade and discourage other nations from using armed invasions to achieve political solutions, the British also sought and received the United Nations Security Council condemnation of the Argentine invasion with the passing of Resolution 502. Adopted by the Security Council on 3 April, the resolution demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities and a complete withdrawal by Argentine Forces. It called for a diplomatic solution to the situation and it allowed the United Kingdom to invoke Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which allowed the British to claim the right of self-defense. As Gavshon and Rice argue, the British government now “had carte blanche to deal with Argentina, in the same way as a police force has carte blanche to deal with an armed man holding hostages in a stolen car.”³⁷ The British froze Argentine assets, banned imports and suspended export credit and it was not long before the United States and the European Economic Community (EEC) joined in these measures.³⁸ Further political and diplomatic negotiations through the Americans, Peruvians and other mediators were exhausted before the British used force. Charles Koburger Jr. sums up the British strategy in three steps: (1) diplomacy through the United Nations, (2) economic sanctions through the EEC and, (3) force, or blockade, with the

³⁷ Gavshon and Rice, 37

³⁸ The Americans waited to impose sanctions until after the Alexander Haig negotiations concluded. Realizing he was dealing with “a regime quite unable to take coherent decisions, let alone stick to them,” Haig returned to Washington D.C. on 19 April. Hastings and Jenkins, 112

option of a landing if necessary.³⁹ Clausewitz theory holds true in this analysis: the British threat of the use of force was a continuation of politics through other means.

Despite the failure to heed warning signs for the invasion, the British still heeded a vital Mahanian precept: “the influence of the government will be felt in its most legitimate manner in maintaining an armed navy.”⁴⁰ The submarine HMS *Conqueror* and Britain’s two aircraft carriers HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible* set out on 5 April while the rest of the surface Task Force was on its way between 7- 9 April. The British Task Force Fleet (CTF 137) fell under command of then Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward, a former submarine commander. Woodward was given command of the Task Force largely due to the fact that he was already with the majority of the British fleet in the Gibraltar area, which was participating in the annual spring naval exercises. Also, since he had served as assistant director of naval planning in the British Ministry of Defence, he was aware of the contingency plans to recapture the islands if invaded.⁴¹ Thus, the British were quickly able to launch Operation CORPORATE in response to the Argentine invasion.

While some ships departed from Great Britain and others from the Mediterranean area, the entire British fleet sailed toward Ascension Island, a tiny volcanic rock formation between Brazil and Africa. The fleet convened there to re-supply and organize before heading south on 16 April. The British government had already announced the

³⁹ Charles Koburger, Jr. *Sea Power in the Falklands*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 35

⁴⁰ Captain A.T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1894), 82

⁴¹ This commander was Admiral Sandy Woodward. See Adm Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1992), 88, 89 as cited in Major Rodolfo Pereyra, "Clausewitz and the Falkland Islands Air War," *Air & Space Power Journal*, XX, no. 3 (2006): 111-119

establishment of a Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ) on 12 April. The circular zone was centered on the Falklands and had a radius of 200 miles. Maintaining the same shape and size, this zone evolved into the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) on 30 April. Any Argentine warship or naval auxiliaries entering the MEZ could have been fired upon without warning while any Argentine sea vessel, including military and civil, or aircraft entering the TEZ was potentially subject to unannounced attack. Any foreign vessel or aircraft entering the TEZ without permission from the British government was also subject to attack. The MEZ was patrolled and enforced by British nuclear-powered submarines (SSN) until the Task Force arrived and they were still used to enforce the TEZ. While the MEZ and TEZ were not intended to strain the mainland Argentine economy directly, they were designed to interfere with Argentine naval movements as well as to starve the Argentine garrison on the Falklands. The British used the MEZ and TEZ to achieve command of the sea.

Unfortunately for the commanders, the British government had not made its intentions clear nor had it decided on a course to settle the dispute. Some politicians advocated a landing on West Falkland (a relatively uninhabited part of the Falkland Islands) so as to make a statement to Argentine dictator General Galtieri. However, Margaret Thatcher argued that the Argentines “need to be pushed off,” and advocated for planning that secured the recapture of Port Stanley on East Falkland.⁴² On 25 April, a detachment of the 3rd Commando Brigade, along with HMS *Endurance*, recaptured South Georgia Island, subsequently sinking one of Argentina’s three submarines, the *Santa*

⁴² Frank Uhlig, Jr. “Amphibious Lessons,” in *Military Lessons of the Falklands War: Views from the United States*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, 58-59

*Fe.*⁴³ The submarine was sunk by an air-to-surface anti ship missile launched from a British helicopter. The missile severely damaged the submarine, forcing the Argentine crew to abandon her when she started listing. The raid on South Georgia again echoed Clausewitz: the British government needed the bite of military action to convey a strong threat of force. On 1 May 1982, with the British fleet entering the TEZ, the British air force conducted raids on Port Stanley, targeting the airfield. While the runway was never put out of commission, the Argentines did little to protect and improve it nonetheless. The war in the Falklands was now underway.

The most controversial incident of the war occurred on 2 May when Admiral Woodward ordered the sinking of the Argentine cruiser ARA *General Belgrano*. The cruiser and her accompanying destroyers were located on the southwestern side of the TEZ, moving westward. With the Argentine carrier group, including the carrier *25th of May*, on the northern side of the TEZ, Woodward interpreted the *Belgrano* to be part of a pincer movement. There were two issues: the *Belgrano* was located outside the TEZ and thus fell outside of the Rules of Engagement (ROE), and her movements indicated the cruiser group was heading toward the Argentine coast, not the British fleet. However, as the British fleet only maintained two aircraft carriers; any damage to, or worse, the sinking of either one, would cripple and potentially end the British effort to recover the Falklands. Woodward concluded that “whether she is inside or outside the TEZ is

⁴³ 3rd Commando Brigade would be equivalent of a force in between the U.S. Marines and U.S Navy SEALs.

irrelevant. She will have to go.”⁴⁴ When Woodward ordered the *Conqueror* to sink the *Belgrano*, the order was immediately denied and sent straight to London because it blatantly violated the ROE.⁴⁵ Woodward maintains his order was intended to prompt London to change the ROE and allow the *Conqueror* to attack the *Belgrano* as soon as possible. Panic and consternation ensued in London when the signal reached Commander-in-Chief Sir John Fieldhouse and Admiral Terence Lewin. However, the message was received: Woodward needed the ROE changed and fast.

After a change in the ROE was issued from London, which allowed for the sinking of enemy ships outside the TEZ, the SSN HMS *Conqueror* was ordered to sink the ARA *General Belgrano*.⁴⁶ After the ship was hit, some of the *Belgrano*'s accompanying escorts gave chase to the *Conqueror*, while other ships such as the destroyer *Bouchard* did not know what had happened, adding that “we did not observe any explosions.”⁴⁷ Only recently has it emerged that the Argentine command learned of the sinking at midnight.⁴⁸ Sadly, this resulted in a delay for the search and rescue of

⁴⁴ Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 152

⁴⁵ Prior to the start of combat activities, the British military mandated that SSNs were to fall under command Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet. The head quarters were located in the town of Northwood and were often referred to as such. While Woodward was able to communicate with the SSNs, he could not send orders as ultimately Commander-in-Chief Fleet Sir John Fieldhouse commanded the SSNs.

⁴⁶ The attack was carried out at 18:57Z or GMT time. It would have been 16:57 ART in Buenos Aires and 15:57 FKT in Port Stanley. (On 2 May 1982, Buenos Aires was 1 hour ahead of Stanley time). As well, it would have been 21:57 BST in London.

⁴⁷ Freedman, Vol. II, 293. The *Bouchard* also felt impact of a third torpedo, suggesting that it might have fled the area. See Martin Middlebrook, *Argentine Fight for the Falklands*. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2009), 113-14

⁴⁸ Freedman, Vol. II, 293

survivors, only exacerbating the disaster. In total, 321 Argentine men lost their lives.⁴⁹ The consequences for the Argentines were much greater than just the lives lost. Admiral Anaya, the hawk of the Argentine Junta, was keen on using his carriers after the sinking of the *Belgrano* but because their fleet was deemed too much of a national asset to risk, he was held back by his Junta colleagues.⁵⁰ It was now evident that the Junta was not as unified as before. A single sinking by a British SSN sent the Argentine navy home for good as the British fleet never saw any of the large Argentine warships again. With the Junta's credibility severely damaged, the British SSNs were able to patrol the seas of the South Atlantic, virtually unopposed.

The sinking of the *Belgrano* erupted into controversy on 21 December 1982 when Labour Party MP Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) alleged that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government “coldly and deliberately gave the orders to sink the *Belgrano*, in the knowledge that an honorable peace was on offer and in the expectation--- all too justified—that the *Conqueror*'s torpedoes would torpedo the peace negotiations.”⁵¹ Mr. Dalyell was referring to the peace initiative the Peruvians had tried to push forward between 1 and 2 May. Since the *Belgrano* was sunk on 2 May, the timing of the situation suggested to many critics that the British chose to escalate the war deliberately. However, due to time zone changes and communication issues, questions remained as to whether the British government was aware of the peace plan. The controversy only continued to grow as “government versions of the sinking have been

⁴⁹ Freedman, Vol. II, 293

⁵⁰ Norman Friedman, “Surface Combatant Lessons,” in *Military Lessons of the Falklands War: Views from the United States*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, 23

⁵¹ Freedman, Vol. II, 736

inconsistent both in the factual details and in the military and political reasoning put forward.⁵² The debate over the known intelligence and justification of the sinking continues today.

However, the Junta did attempt to save face. On 4 May, in retaliation for the *Belgrano* sinking, the Argentine Fleet Air Arm Command ordered two Super Etendards, armed with Exocet missiles, to attack the British Task Force. Largely due to deteriorating weather conditions, no Argentine aircraft came within 200 nautical miles (nm) of the British Task force between 2 and 3 May. To conduct further air raids on the islands, the British Task Force maneuvered within located 40-55nm south-east of the Falklands.⁵³ Three Type 42 destroyers were occupying air defense stations some 18nm west in front of the main body of the task force: the HMS *Glasgow*, the HMS *Sheffield* and the HMS *Coventry*. Unfortunately, the Task Force was without Airborne Early Warning (AEW) upgrades due to the 1981 navy cuts, and the new Nimrod 3 AEW aircraft were not due to enter service until 1983.⁵⁴ The two Super Etendards were able to avoid outdated British radar and launch two Exocet missiles. A single Exocet hit the *Sheffield* on the starboard side, killing 20 men and injuring 26.

The loss of the *Sheffield* shocked both the military and London: the *Sheffield* was the first British ship loss by direct hostile action since the Second World War. The Junta was able to restore faith in campaign back at home, diverting attention from the *Belgrano* sinking; however it would be short lived. For the British, the *Sheffield* sinking forced the

⁵² Gavshon and Rice, xv

⁵³ Freedman, Vol. II, 298

⁵⁴ Speed, 135-136

country and government to realize the seriousness of the situation and the meaning of the war.⁵⁵ The sinking of the *Sheffield* served as a reminder that in the nuclear age, a third world country was still able to inflict damage on a first world military.⁵⁶ The Task Force was lucky: the Super Etendards were originally intended to find and attack either one of the British aircraft carriers, the HMS *Hermes* or *Invincible*. The Argentines had control of the early warning and fighter control radars at Port Stanley. These radars provided information on positions of patrolling Sea Harriers and tracked aircraft moving to and from the carriers, giving an indication of the whereabouts of the Task Group.⁵⁷ However, poor combat tactics and lack of training hampered the Argentine air force. Instead of properly identifying the Type 42 frigates for what they were, the Argentine pilots simply fired upon the first ships they spotted. Throughout the course of the war, the Argentine air force developed a reputation for this; it was notorious for firing on the first ship detected.

The Falklands presented a common, but difficult situation for both the Argentine and British fleets. The Argentine air force mainland base was over 450 miles away from the islands, while the British carriers provided the only means to launch British air strikes. Therefore, the military historiographical issues pertaining to the Falklands War focus on the British command of the sea and air. This is not unexpected especially given the distance the British fleet had to travel to project power. As argued by Charles Koburger Jr. in Sea Power in the Falklands, sea power's form has continued to adjust to

⁵⁵ Freedman, Vol. II, 302

⁵⁶ Norman Friedman, "Surface Combatant Lessons," in *Military Lessons of the Falklands War: Views from the United States*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, 23

⁵⁷ Ethell and Price, 221-22

new weapons and tactics; however, the command of the sea is the most important fact for a navy. Sea power, however gained and exercised, is defined as the ability to use the sea as one likes, and to deny the use of the sea to the enemy.⁵⁸ While he argues that overall command of the sea was not achieved by the British, Koburger further suggests that the proper application of tools—whatever tools, whether the tools are above, on, or below the surface—to accomplish command *is* sea power. This conflict was the first to utilize nuclear-powered submarines (SSN) and they became the favorite tool of the British navy. As demonstrated above, the sinking of the *General Belgrano* by the HMS *Conqueror* had a profound effect on the Argentine navy. SSNs patrolled off the Argentine coast to ward off any potential ships and to pick up any radar signals transmitted by the Argentines. The Argentine navy possessed only three conventional submarines prior to the start of the conflict but besides the *Santa Fe* at South Georgia, they never significantly contributed to the Argentine campaign. The *Santa Fe* was sunk on 25 April, the *San Luis* was in service until 17 May and the *Salta* was never detected near the Falklands. Due to the numbers of British ships lost, politicians and public interpretation often view the British attempts to command the sea as failure. However, digressing from Koburger's assessment, the British did maintain command of the sea: the carriers were never threatened after the *Belgrano* sinking as the Argentine navy remained close to home throughout the remainder of the war.

The command of the sea and air are intertwined in naval wars. However, the historiography regarding the British command of the air is much more critical than it is of

⁵⁸ Koburger, Jr. 67

the command of the sea. A frequent argument is that because the Royal Navy never gained superiority in the air, it could not claim command of the sea.⁵⁹ Anthony Cordesman suggests that the “Argentines did a highly credible job opposing the first major British landing...they forced the two British carriers to operate outside the range of the Argentine air force...”⁶⁰ He also suggests that despite turning back 261 out of 505 Argentine sorties and killing 140 of those aircraft that did enter the exclusion zone, the British did not maintain command of the air because the Argentines were able to evacuate their wounded with Hercules C-130s on the last day of fighting around Port Stanley.⁶¹ In this instance, Cordesman is correct: Woodward did not have command of the air before he arrived to the area. Although they were able to support the fleet and ground troops from afar, Woodward had to keep his carriers as far east as possible as even damage to one carrier would have crippled the entire British campaign. Max Hastings and others argued in joust that the Admiral should have been awarded the South Africa Star for positioning the Task Force so far east.⁶²

⁵⁹ LTC James R. McDonough, “War in the Falklands: The Use and Disuse of Military Theory.” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1987), 18

⁶⁰Anthony H Cordesman, “The Falklands Crisis: Emerging Lessons for Power Projection and Force Planning,” *Armed Forces Journal International*, (September 1982): 33,

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 32

⁶² Woodward, xvi

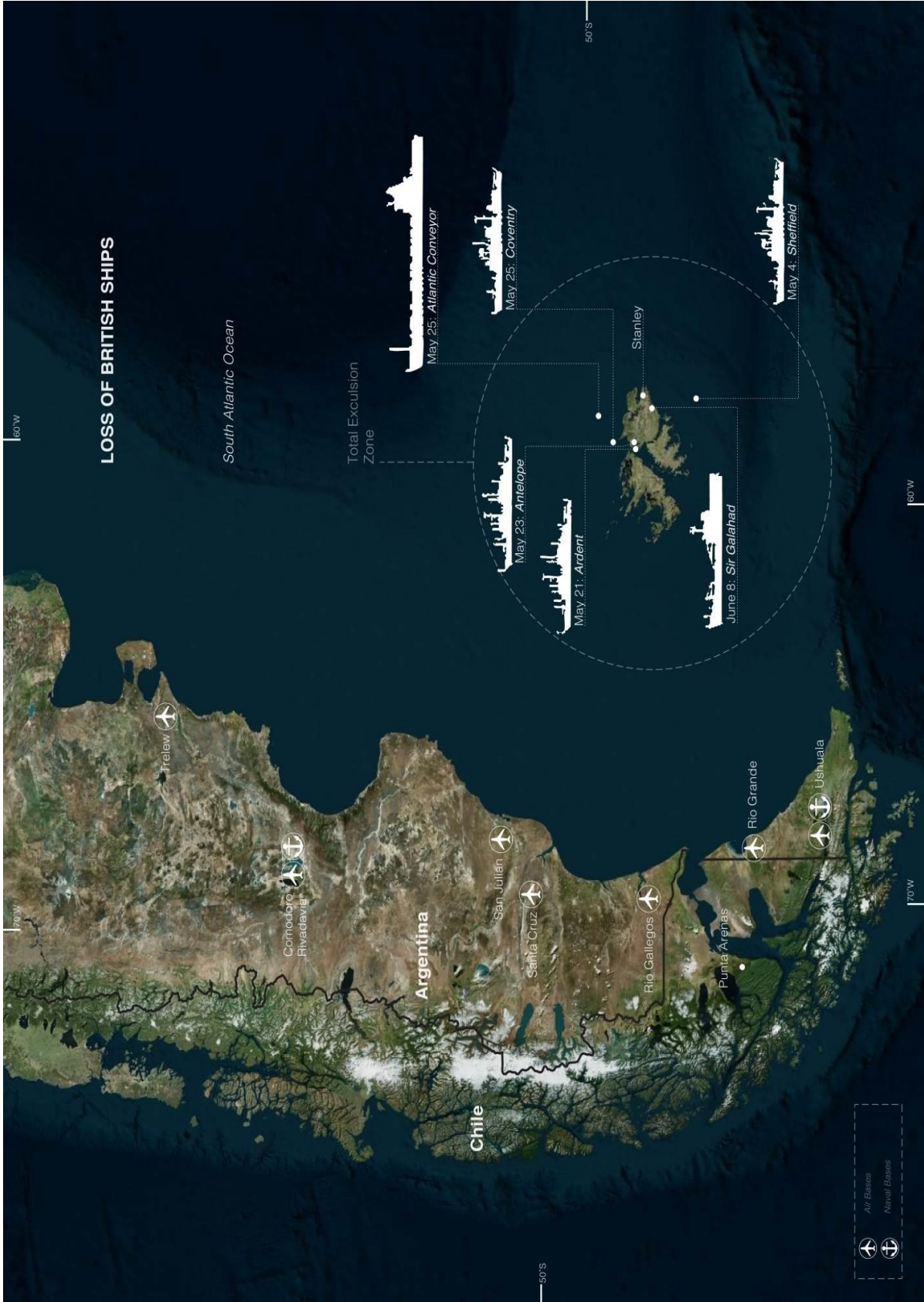


Figure 4. Loss of British ships

Admiral Woodward's immediate superior, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach, echoed Koburger's assessment of the sea power, agreeing that air superiority for the region as a whole was never achieved by British forces for the entire duration of the war.⁶³ Leach points out that because the Argentine air force never flew out in full force, total air supremacy could never be achieved. Rather, he offers a very different interpretation of air command suggesting that British air power was instead "locally superior" during the war. Leach's phrase requires further analysis. He is suggesting that command of the air need not be defined geographically, whereas, it should be defined by mission accomplishment. In this instance, British forces only needed superior air power when defending their carriers or protecting ground forces during the invasion of East Falkland. The carriers were never seriously threatened throughout the war by the Argentine air force. As well, while ships were lost, including the HMS *Ardent*, *Antelope*, *Coventry*, *Atlantic Conveyor* and *Sir Galahad*, disembarking troops and subsequent movement on East Falkland towards Port Stanley were never adequately threatened by the Argentine air force. If the *Belgrano* and *25th of May* had carried out their pincer movement on the carriers, the British campaign to recover the islands would have been severely crippled, if not destroyed. No further potential catastrophe involving the British navy and army and the Argentine air force ever materialized during the Falklands War.

The British were able to ensure mission accomplishment with the Sea Harriers, as they were critical in the landing on East Falkland so "that logistics could move forward

⁶³ Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach, "The Falklands War," seminar held 5 June 2002, 47

prior to the establishment of an air defense umbrella.”⁶⁴ Since many British ships lacked airborne early warning systems (AEW) and because the British carriers were not suited for larger aircraft, the Sea Harriers’ role in the war was crucial. Jeffrey Ethell and Alfred Price argue in Air War South Atlantic that the Sea Harrier’s reputation as an effective plane rose after the war. During combat, the loss ratio of Argentine aircraft to Sea Harriers was 23:1, despite Argentina possessing three times as many jets and aircraft.⁶⁵ Despite having home-field, with multiple bases along the Argentine coast and even with Port Stanley airfield, the Argentine air force still suffered high attrition rates while two British aircraft carriers provide suffice to support and maintain the entire operation. The air war in the South Atlantic exhibited “both the power of the defense and the continuing need for an articulate strategy.”⁶⁶

Regardless of the debates over command of the sea and air, the amphibious invasion of the Falklands commenced with Operation SUTTON when 5,000 men of the 3rd Commando Brigade landed at San Carlos, East Falkland, on 21 May. Seeking a quick and decisive victory, British politicians pressured the British military to decide on an invasion point rather quickly.⁶⁷ Both Port Stanley and Berkley Sound were too heavily defended with over 10,000 Argentines. Reluctantly, the Commando Brigade chose San Carlos water with the goal of capturing the Goose Green settlement. Of course

⁶⁴ Major Carol D. Clair, “Lessons in combat services support tactical mobility: the Afghanistan conflict, Falklands War and Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm.” (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College 1993), 25

⁶⁵ Ethell and Price, 216

⁶⁶ Earl T. Tilford, Jr. “Air Power Lessons,” in *Military Lessons of the Falklands War: Views from the United States*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, 46

⁶⁷ Hastings and Jenkins, 231

the ground commanders were worried about their own men, but the failure to capture Goose Green would have been a political blow, not a military blow. Since the ground combat stage of the war was marred by the sinking of several British transport ships, historians argue that the British began their ground assault with neither control of the sea nor air, a consequence of “politics driving the campaign.”⁶⁸ The Argentines could have targeted Goose Green but because of command, morale and intelligence issues within their own military, did not. Therefore, the Argentines allowed the British to come to them in Port Stanley, failing to shape the war for themselves.

Operation SUTTON, the British amphibious invasion, was a two pronged attack: 2nd Para were to head to Goose Green while 45 Commando and 3rd Para were to hike towards Port Stanley.⁶⁹ A major setback for the British invasion occurred when the transport ship *Atlantic Conveyer*, carrying vital Chinook helicopters, was hit. It sunk, taking down all but one Chinook. The Commando units were then forced to “yom” their way through peat bog, stone and mountains towards their objectives.⁷⁰ Air superiority was accomplished as the Sea Harriers were able to maintain local superiority against 200 Argentine land based aircraft.⁷¹ The British were surprised to discover that the Argentines had not established control of civilian communications, allowing British soldiers to call other units via telephones in settlers’ homes in different villages to trade intelligence.

⁶⁸ McDonough, 18

⁶⁹ Colloquially known as the Paras, The Parachute Regiment, is the equivalent of the 82nd or 101st Airborne Brigade in the U.S. Army. They are the British Army’s airborne unit, and generally considered, like the 82nd and 101st, an elite force.

⁷⁰ Commando jargon for marching from San Carlos to Port Stanley. Harry G. Summers, Jr. “Ground Warfare Lessons,” in *Military Lessons of the Falklands War: Views from the United States*, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, 72

⁷¹ Clair, 25

By 11 June, supported by naval gunfire from the British navy, which had moved from San Carlos, British soldiers captured the mountain tops surrounding Port Stanley. By the night of 13 June, the British were advancing on Port Stanley, encircling Argentine forces. The Argentines formally surrendered on 14 June 1982, marking the end of the war. The occupation of the Falklands by the Argentines was over in less than one hundred days. Over 11,848 Argentine prisoners were sent home and the British flag was raised once again at the Governor's mansion. Admiral Woodward refused to meet with Argentine ground commander General Mario Benjamin Menéndez, claiming his anger with the General was so great that "I could not trust myself to observe the full requirements of the Geneva Convention."⁷² Woodward believed that "the man should have packed it in the day he found out the British had landed" and that the General's "incompetence of his defense, along with his lack of perseverance" had delayed the inevitable and resulted in more deaths than necessary.⁷³

After the conclusion of the war, questions arose in Parliament regarding danger signs of an impending Argentine invasion and how they had been apparent for some time. Parliamentary debates also argued that prudent government "would have acted accordingly."⁷⁴ However, The Official History of the Falklands Campaign would later determine that the British had no firm evidence of Argentine intention to invade prior to 31 March.⁷⁵ Overall, British power was applied to the Falklands problem in six graduated phases, each signaling resolve, blending into the next phase: (1) advance into the South

⁷² Woodward, 336

⁷³ Ibid, 336

⁷⁴ Freedman, Vol. I, 217

⁷⁵ Ibid, 216

Atlantic (2) blockade and isolation (3) reconnaissance; (4) recapture of South Georgia; (5) raids on the Falklands by commandos and aircraft; (6) recapture of the Falklands.⁷⁶

Hindered by the political wrangling back in London, the British military was able to achieve the near- impossible: travel over 8,000 nautical miles from home base, repossess the Falkland Islands in less than one hundred days, and still survive with fewer casualties than predicted.

As the Americans discovered in Vietnam, the British military quickly realized the media could be both friend and foe. Like American General George Patton, Admiral Woodward was extremely vocal and critical regarding many politicians and political decisions. British media were especially captivated by him, capitalizing on his outbursts and outspokenness with headlines including “Woodward Forecasts a Long and Bloody War” and “Walkover Woodward.”⁷⁷ Woodward also expressed his distaste for the information the BBC World Service inadvertently provided for the Argentine military, supplying almost all of their intelligence about British activities.⁷⁸ For example, the BBC announced the rendezvous point for Battle and Amphibious groups who were to lead the landing invasion. The Commanding Officer of 2 Para, Lieutenant Colonel H. Jones, wanted to sue John Nott, the Prime Minister, the Defense Secretary and the BBC, charging them with manslaughter.⁷⁹ Sadly, Colonel Jones was killed when leading 2 Para towards Goose Green and in that case, the BBC again prematurely announced that the

⁷⁶ Koburger, Jr., 28

⁷⁷ Woodward, 109,111

⁷⁸ Ibid, 112

⁷⁹ Ibid, 239

“PARAS ARE MOVING TOWARDS DARWIN.”⁸⁰ The headline resulted in Argentine forces reinforcing the area, forcing the British to encounter more unexpected resistance. According to Woodward, there are still some who believe that the BBC report was directly responsible for the Argentine “ambush” that resulted in Colonel Jones’ death.

While the Americans desired to remain neutral, there was undoubtedly an interest in the war as well. However, Woodward would have most likely expressed similar distaste for the American media as some reports published echoed the BBC’s reporting style. *The New York Times* published headlines including “Ships said to move to a new formation” and “Likely Moves in an Attack.”⁸¹ Even the British *Economist* and the *Washington Post* published extremely detailed reports from British sources stating that Argentine bombs were not fused properly, thus lowering the chance of detonation.⁸² It is therefore evident that the British and American media showed little to no restraint when publishing privileged information. British journalists even turned to the American media to complain of their treatment and handling by the British government. For example, Brian Hanrahan of the BBC complained to *The New York Times* that Woodward’s intention was to “cause as much confusion to the enemy as possible, and if there any way he could use us as part of the attempt, he intended to do so.”⁸³ As British Secretary of State for Defence John Nott described the media: “...you are taught that you have to love

⁸⁰ 2 Para was within 5 miles of Darwin settlement when the report was announced. Only 2 miles separates Darwin from the Goose Green settlement.

⁸¹ Apple, Jr., R.W. "Crisis in the Falklands: The British Fleet is Grouping for Battle." *The New York Times*, May 19, 1982. Middleton, Drew. "Special to the New York Times: Likely Moves in An Attack." *The New York Times*, April 28, 1982

⁸² Cordesman, 36

⁸³ *The New York Times*, “Misled on Falklands, British Press Says.” July 29, 1982

and co-operate with the press....the press are nothing but a pain in the arse! Whatever the circumstance, they will do their very utmost to make a military operation almost impossible.”⁸⁴

Despite the small size of the war, and its limited relevance for world affairs, the historiography surrounding the Falklands War is extensive. American historians and sources tend to be extremely critical of the Falklands War, with some arguing that “it did not provide a long list of general lessons for future wars.”⁸⁵ Even American military members were skeptical of the Falklands War lessons. For example, U.S. Admiral Harry Train, then the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, told Admiral Woodward in September of 1982 that “there [were] no lessons to be learnt from your little war. Well no new ones anyway.”⁸⁶ While important, Argentine sources are problematic as many demonstrate a propagandistic nature. This issue will likely continue until Las Malvinas are an Argentine possession. Generally, South Americans show solidarity with their Argentine neighbors who, in their view, have been “wronged”. These South American sources need to be treated with caution as support for Argentina’s claims before, during, and decades after the war are still overwhelmingly unified in the continent.

British accounts often focus on certain areas of the war: the British campaign, Argentine campaign, Ministry of Defence issues, the media and the politicians’ war.⁸⁷ However, some works were published before government inquiries or reports were concluded. Therefore, much of the earlier historiographical content consisted of

⁸⁴ John Nott, “The Falklands War,” seminar held 5 June 2002, 66

⁸⁵ Cordesman, 29

⁸⁶ Sandy Woodward, “The Falklands War,” seminar held 5 June 2002, 78

⁸⁷ Hastings and Jenkins, 316-340

journalistic narratives and is often lacking in critical analysis. For example, Dr. Peter Calvert's work heavily relies on *The Times* and *The Guardian* for sources and materials. Overall, works published by journalists, including those of Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins and *The Sunday Times* Insight Team, are extremely insightful. Notably, Hastings, who was a BBC war correspondent during the war, is especially critical of the military brass he worked with.⁸⁸ Within the political historiography, readers need to assess the author's political bias as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government were either loved or hated. There really was, and still is, no in between, even to this day.

The historiography will only continue to grow as government documents from The British National Archives (TNA) have just been released, in accordance with protocol to withhold documents until after the thirty year mark passes. These new documents shed light on the extensive diplomatic and political affairs of the war and detail the extensive military planning for the Task Force. The documents give further insight for the media-government relations as well as foreign implications before and during the war. More importantly, the documents give substantial justification for the British government's decision to sink the *Belgrano*, giving further reason to discard the escalation-of-war conspiracies.

⁸⁸ He was indeed dubbed "Lord Hastings" by the military and other journalists for his perceived pompous attitude and sense of entitlement when it came to joining units on patrols and operations. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, 218

CHAPTER III

THE SINKING OF THE ARA *GENERAL BELGRANO*

A man does what he must - in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures - and that is the basis of all human morality.

- Winston Churchill

*War cannot be a game of chess, with absolute rules of play. It is a paradox that even a just war can never be moral, but the overall good resulting from success can exceed the total sum of the evils.*⁸⁹

- Mr. Colin Croskin

Although they were surprised by the invasion, the British immediately determined that the Argentine navy posed the greatest threat towards the recovery of the Falklands. The British Chiefs of Staff correctly concluded that “the Argentine navy would probably put to sea in order not to lose face.”⁹⁰ To combat this, the British established a circular 200 mile maritime exclusion zone (MEZ) centered around the islands on 12 April, which would “[demonstrate] our political will and could result in the sinking of major Argentinian warships.”⁹¹ Centered at latitude 51° 41’ South and longitude 59° 31’ West, the advantage of a circle was its precision, leaving no room for ambiguities in interpretation as the awkward shape of a territorial zone would have.⁹² The size was judged sufficient to provide enough room to be able to signal to a ship to stop, give chase

⁸⁹ *The Times Saturday*, Letters to the Editor, 16 October 1982

⁹⁰ The National Archives, Kew (hereafter ‘TNA’): FCO 7/4472, Minutes of Chiefs of Staffs Meetings, Part A, 8 April 1982

⁹¹ 174 nautical miles= 200 miles. TNA: FCO 7/4566, Military Planning Falkland Islands, Military Appreciation for meeting, 5 April 1982

⁹² Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol. II, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 86

if it did not and if need be, fire a shot across the bow if it continued forward.⁹³ The MEZ stated that any Argentine warship or naval auxiliary inside the MEZ was subject to attack by British nuclear-powered submarines (SSN).⁹⁴ The majority of the British Task Force, including the carrier and amphibious groups, set sail for the Falklands on 5 April, while the rest of the fleet set sail between 7-9 April. Due to distance, it would require over three weeks travel for the surface vessels to reach the islands. Due to the SSN's faster travel speed, the MEZ announcement emphasized the threat of the SSN. When the rest of the Task Force neared the Falklands, including the aircraft carriers, the MEZ was enhanced. On 30 April, the same circular boundary was upgraded to the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) in which any Argentine ship, including naval, merchant and civil ships, or aircraft that was assessed to be a threat to the British Task Force was subject to unannounced attack. The TEZ also stated that any foreign vessel or aircraft entering the zone was subject to attack. Argentine ships outside the MEZ and TEZ were not covered by those rules and thus outside the rules of engagement (ROE) for the British. The MEZ and TEZ were incentives for Argentine units not to try to reach the Falklands, thus cutting off supplies for the Argentine garrison stationed there.⁹⁵ Overall, the Argentines abided by the British MEZ and TEZ. Although some ships were able to skirt around the boundary before entering the zone and drop off supplies, no major component of the Argentine navy ever made it to the Falkland Islands. Clearly, the Argentine navy feared the SSNs and wisely chose not to test British patience.

⁹³ Freedman, Vol. II, 86

⁹⁴ The British SSNs deployed between 1 and 2 April once it was determined that the Argentines were going to invade the islands. The HMS *Spartan* reached the area by 11 April.

⁹⁵ Freedman, Vol. II, 86

The Argentine military Junta was dominated by the hawkish navy but in spite of its efforts to present an image of power and prowess, the navy had only one aircraft carrier, the *Veinticinco de Mayo* or the *25th of May*. The pride of Admiral Anaya's fleet, she was named after Argentina's 25 May 1810 revolution. She was an "old aircraft carrier," but was still a respectable threat as she was able to "carry 7 to 9 A4 Skyhawk and, possibly, up to 5 Super Etendard aircraft."⁹⁶ The British aircraft carrier situation was not much better than the Argentines, as only two aircraft carriers remained in the British fleet, the HMS *Hermes* and the HMS *Invincible*. Damage or loss of either carrier would threaten the entire British campaign to recover the islands and even with only *25th of May*, the "Argentines are thus able to threaten our forces from the air at a great distance from the Argentine mainland."⁹⁷ The British were especially worried about the carrier threatening the main amphibious task force, supply vessels and operations aircraft traveling to and from Ascension Island.⁹⁸ The Skyhawks' and Super Etendards' combat radius of 500 nautical miles posed a serious and immediate threat to "to all ships engaged in operations in the Falklands area but particularly to those ships on passage to and from Ascension Island."⁹⁹ For the overall campaign, the British sought similar action against the Argentine air force but "with limitations on mainland airfields, such action will be restricted to air engagements and attacks on the ground in the Falklands."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ TNA: FCO 7/4609, Military Threat Posed to British Forces by the Argentine Aircraft Carrier "25th of May" Note by MOD

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ TNA: FCO 7/4609, Attachment to COS (Misc) 153/742/1

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FCO 7/4565, Military Planning: Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy Committee: Sub Committee on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands: Force Levels: Reinforcement Memorandum by Secretary of State for Defense. Annex A

Subsequently, the British determined that the destruction of the *25th of May* would be a way to establish sea control given their own air force restrictions. It was then declared that “the best defense, therefore, would be to neutralize the carrier itself.”¹⁰¹

The Ministry of Defense (MoD) considered five options for dealing with the *25th of May*:

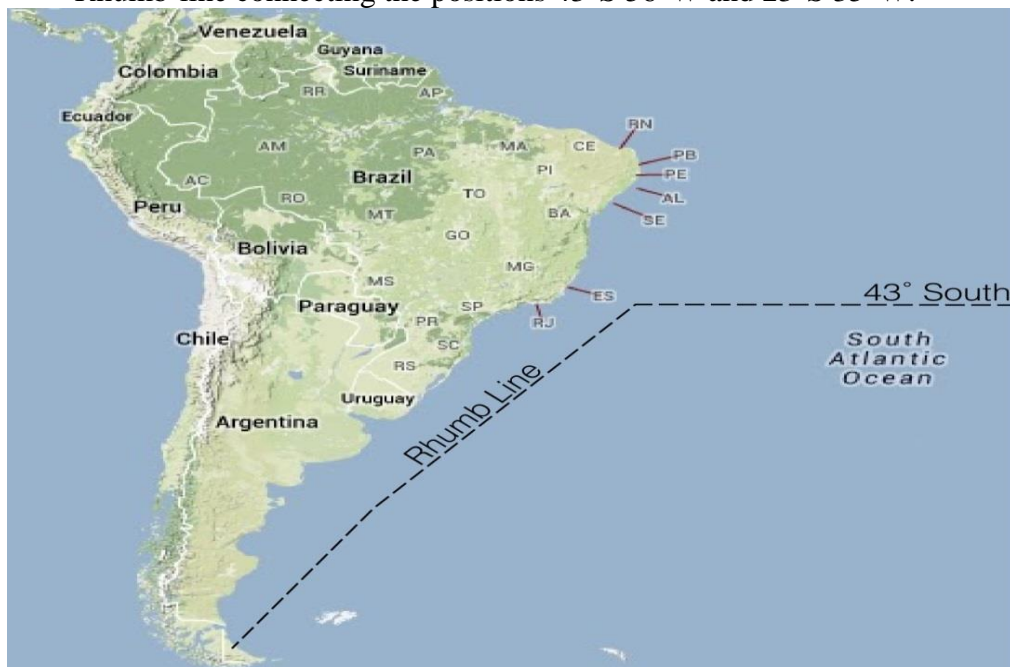
- a. To sink the carrier as soon as possible, wherever she is;
- b. To sink the carrier if any attack was made on our Naval or Air Forces by any Argentine Unit;
- c. To induce the “*25th of May*” to return to port and stay there;
- d. To induce the “*25th of May*” to stay within the Argentina internationally recognized territorial waters of 12 nautical miles offshore and north of 43°S;



525 nautical miles separated the Falkland Islands from 43°S

¹⁰¹TNA:FCO 7/4609, Military Threat Posed to British Forces by the Argentine Aircraft Carrier “*25th of May*” Note by MoD

e. To confine the “25th of May” within an area bounded by the parallel 43°S and the Rhumb-line connecting the positions 43°S 56°W and 23°S 35°W.¹⁰²



Option e would have kept the 25th of May North and West of the indicated lines.

Recognizing the carrier could also threaten travel to and from Ascension Island, Option e was drawn up.¹⁰³ The Rhumb-line would have forced the Argentine carrier to travel a considerable and ill-advised distance before attacking the island. Any attack at this range would have been inconceivable. Options c, d, e were contingent on the British issuing a warning for the 25th of May to return to port within 48 hours and the Argentines doing so. Militarily, these options were “less attractive” than Options a or b because the British were not sure they could actually enforce them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²TNA: FCO 7/4609, Military Threat Posed to British Forces by the Argentine Aircraft Carrier “25th of May” Note by MoD

¹⁰³ Ascension Island is located at 8°S 14°W

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

Following the Argentine invasion, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher established a small War Cabinet, which was to take charge of the conduct of the war, called the Overseas and Defense Committee, South Atlantic (ODSA). ODSA was comprised of Foreign Secretary Francis Pym, Secretary for Defense John Nott, Home Secretary Willie Whitelaw and Tory Party Chairman Cecil Parkinson. Like the MoD, they listed five possible options for neutralizing the aircraft carrier:

- a. To sink the carrier as soon as possible wherever she is on the high seas. No warning;
- b. To sink the carrier immediately if our own naval/air forces were attacked by Argentine forces, regardless of whether or not the carrier was involved in the attack. A prior warning of our intention to adopt a generalized retaliatory posture of this kind could be given. The CNS [Chiefs of Staff Committee] would like the ROEs for the submarine outside the TEZ to be changed (at present it can only attack other conventional submarines) in order that the submarines could carry out this task ;
- c. To issue a warning to the Argentines that the carrier should be returned a port and remain there. If they did not do this, the carrier would be sunk;
- d. To issue a warning that the carrier should remain within the Argentine internationally recognized territorial waters (ie. 12 miles) and north of 43°S;
- e. To issue a warning that the carrier should be kept within a demarcated sea boundary for which co-ordinates would be given. This would keep its aircraft out of range of the British task force both in transit on the high seas and within the TEZ.¹⁰⁵

Since the Argentine navy only possessed conventional submarines, it is important to note the word “conventional” in Option b. There were concerns about Soviet SSNs in the area and it was highly unlikely the Soviets would send a conventional submarine in the region.

It was vital that the British did not fire upon any other SSN: it would most likely be a

¹⁰⁵ TNA: FCO 7/4566, Military Planning: Measures to neutralize Argentine Aircraft Carrier: Essential Facts

Soviet submarine.¹⁰⁶ The British were exceptionally concerned about international reaction to any potential sinking. Particularly, they were worried about tipping the Cold War superpowers, the Americans and Soviets, who were maintaining neutral stances, towards the Argentine cause. Contingency plans for unrestricted attacks against Argentine naval units and military aircraft more than 12 miles from the Argentine coast were wisely disregarded. Since the British navy was that much more capable than the Argentine navy, this option was given a “high visibility of success.”¹⁰⁷ However, unrestricted warfare could “engender Organization of American States (OAS) world reaction against the UK; could alienate our friends and engender increasing political pressures at home.”¹⁰⁸ Worse, it could “spread the conflict area, arouse adverse international reaction,” and allow for “possible reprisals, or unrestricted mob attacks against UK civilians on [the Argentine] mainland.”¹⁰⁹ Instead, the British asserted that it was “entitled, in the exercise of its inherent right of self-defense as recognized in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, to take appropriate measures to protect its forces as well as its territory.”¹¹⁰

Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) Legal Adviser Sir Ian Sinclair and his deputy J.R. Freeland led the British consideration of the potential legal ramifications of any potential sinking. Some diplomats, such as Sir Antony Acland, advocated surprise

¹⁰⁶ There was no mention of any American SSNs in the FCO government documents.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations: Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units . Annex A to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255742/1. Option 5

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ TNA: FCO 7/4565, Military Planning : Draft Statement Following Crippling or Sinking of Argentine Aircraft Carrier

SSN attacks, with a self-defense cover story, to announce “in unmistakable fashion that British submarines had arrived in the area.”¹¹¹ Determining that “the Legal Adviser would be unhappy about [this],” the MoD opted for and backed the less contentious Option b.¹¹² While the Legal Advisers determined that the MoD Option e was the most defensible course in a legal point of view, they eventually conceded and agreed with the MoD on Option b. The Legal Advisers attached conditions to their decision, stating that “a carrier remaining sufficiently far North and West of the TEZ and the supply route would not pose an immediate threat to the British forces, and since we are relying on our right of self defense, it should not be attacked in a place where it does not constitute such a threat.”¹¹³ ODSA also concluded their own Option b was “tantamount to challenge the Argentines” and added that “it is not a strict interpretation of self-defense, in a sense that the sinking of the carrier eg. by a SSN could well occur in circumstances wholly removed in time and place from the Argentine action regarded as precipitating it. A prior warning of our general intention to act in this way could only partially mitigate the difficulty.”¹¹⁴

Both the MoD and ODSA agreed that a pre-emptive warning to the Argentines was needed to satisfy both internal and external political figures and likely criticisms. On 23 April, the British passed a warning via the Swiss to the Argentines and in turn, the Argentines promptly responded with their own communique declaring “that it would treat as hostile all British shipping within 200 miles of the Argentine coast and within a 200

¹¹¹ TNA:FCO 7/4565, Falklands: Military Plan from Antony Acland on 6 April 1982

¹¹² TNA:FCO 7/4565, Falklands: Military Plan from Antony Acland on 6 April 1982

¹¹³ TNA:FCO 7/4609, UK Task Force: Measure to neutralize Argentine Aircraft Carrier: Additional points to make, J R Freeland, Second Legal Adviser 30 April 1982

¹¹⁴TNA: FCO 7/4566, Military Planning: Measures to neutralize Argentine Aircraft Carrier: Essential Facts

mile radius of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands.”¹¹⁵ To cover their bases and appease the Opposition¹¹⁶ and anti-war pundits, the ODSA concluded that before “an incident occurs requiring public comment to pre-empt or rebut Argentine criticism, we should publish the terms of the warning immediately from News Department, adding that it was conveyed formally to the Argentines before the incident in question took place.”¹¹⁷ By 30 April, the British had prepared a draft statement to be issued if the aircraft carrier was to be crippled or sunk without warning.¹¹⁸

The British government was fully prepared, politically, legally and militarily, to sink the Argentine carrier inside the TEZ. While the argument could be made that the TEZ was a political cover or ploy for further escalation by the British government, the government documents clearly signal a fear that the Argentine carrier might damage or even sink one of the British carriers. The main objective was to retrieve the Falkland Islands, and the loss of either the HMS *Hermes* or *Invincible*, or worse, both, “would adversely affect command and control. It could give the Argentines local air superiority, if not over the Force, then over the Falkland Islands. Support for our land operations would be limited.”¹¹⁹ Not only was the Task Force at sea threatened, but “as a condition for landing operations, early action needs to be taken to nullify Argentine naval forces,

¹¹⁵ TNA:FCO 7/4566, Military Planning: Draft Statement crippling or sinking of Argentine Aircraft Carrier, from DH Gilmore, Emergency Unit, 30 April 1982

¹¹⁶ In Parliamentary systems, the Opposition is the largest party not within the government. In 1982, the Opposition was the Labour Party and other MPs not affiliated with the Margaret Thatcher’s government, the Conservatives.

¹¹⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4565, Military Planning : Publication of warning to Argentines about protection of the fleet, 24 April 1982.

¹¹⁸ See Appendix A.

¹¹⁹ TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations; Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units; Annex A to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255742/. 21 May 1982

particularly the carrier and submarines.”¹²⁰ To protect the Task Force, to prevent unnecessary loss of life and to launch a landing operation to recover the islands, the British government decided that if the *25th of May* entered the TEZ, it had to be sunk.

By the end of April 1982, the preparation and decision to sink the Argentine carrier was completed. Although both the MoD and ODSA agreed that the Task Force should only sink the carrier within the TEZ, there was considerable gray area in regards to the carrier’s assessed threat level. The MoD was especially concerned that the carrier might move into position outside the TEZ and then attack forward into the TEZ, quickly threatening the British Task Force. This worry suggests the question: why would any Argentine ship enter the TEZ, fully knowing they increased their chances for detection and potential attack due to the higher number of British patrols in the area? If the British were not to attack outside the TEZ, wouldn’t the Argentine navy then maneuver to attack the outside the TEZ? The British did not want to take chances losing contact with any Argentine ship, fearing it would then be able to take a direct or quicker approach to the British Task Force by entering the TEZ. An example of this would be for the British to lose contact of any Argentine ship passing over the Burdwood Bank. Located at the edge of the South American continental shelf, it runs about 200 hundred miles from east west. South of the Falklands, the Atlantic is more than two miles deep, however, the slopes leading up to the continental shelf reach a general depth of about 300 hundred feet. In the bank, the depth climbs to a shallow 150 feet. This area is particularly dangerous for a

¹²⁰ TNA: FCO 7/4565, Military Planning: Cabinet Defense and Oversea Policy Committee: Sub Committee on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands: Force Levels: Reinforcement Memorandum by Secretary of State for Defense. Annex A

submerged submarine trying to stay with a ship travelling at more than twenty-five knots.¹²¹ To avoid leaving a “clear wake of disturbed water” on the surface, a submarine needs to travel at a minimum of 200 hundred feet.¹²² Anything higher than that and the Argentines would have been alerted to the submarine’s presence. If any Argentine ship cut across the Burdwood Bank, the British submarine would be forced to break contact and swing around the bank. By then, the Argentine ship would be long gone.

Therefore, the British ROE for the use of the SSNs *outside* the TEZ was altered. In the early stages of planning the ROE for the SSNs outside the TEZ was confined to “SSN Rule One —covert surveillance only—and the SSN may only take offensive action in self defense or against conventional submarines it may detect (Rule five).”¹²³ However, amending the ROE for SSNs was advocated by the MoD to include “for the possibility of submarine attack on the aircraft carrier” outside the TEZ.¹²⁴ On 1 May, ODSA decided to authorize an attack “without warning on the Argentine aircraft carrier outside our exclusion zone” and a new notification to the Argentine government was prepared.¹²⁵ The MoD also assessed that the “SSN would give the greatest chance of success with the least prejudice to other operations.”¹²⁶ Clearly, the SSN was the favorite option by the British government: it could operate both covertly and quickly and the

¹²¹ Woodward, 151

¹²² Ibid, 151-152

¹²³ Again, this is out of concern of Soviet SSN in the area. TNA:FCO 7/4609, Cos (Misc) 172/742/1 29 April 1982

¹²⁴ TNA: FCO 7/4565, Military Planning “Measure to Neutralize the Argentine Aircraft Carrier.” Points to make.

¹²⁵ See Appendix B. TNA: FCO 7/4610: UK Task Force, Attack on Argentine Aircraft Carrier, To Prime Minister from Secretary of State, 1 May 1982

¹²⁶ TNA:FCO 7/4609, Military Threat Posed to British Forces by the Argentine Aircraft Carrier “25th of May” Note by MoD

Argentines could not easily counter the SSN since their own fleet did not possess any SSNs.¹²⁷ However, assessing the carrier's threat and deciding whether to use SSNs outside the TEZ were ultimately left by both the MoD and ODSA to the Task Force Commander, Rear-Admiral John Forster "Sandy" Woodward. It was determined that Woodward was "to have the same flexibility in using SSNs as he already has for surface ships and aircraft...or the decision made on the neutralizing of the carrier."¹²⁸ In an effort to excuse themselves from any wartime decisions, the MoD placed responsibility on Woodward to decide which of *their* five proposed options to use to neutralize the carrier. Politely, they stated that "[whichever] option is preferred, it would be for the Task Group Commander to decide how to enforce it."¹²⁹ However, little did they, or Woodward know, that his assessment and decision would ultimately change the course of the campaign. It also produced the most controversial incident of the entire Falklands War.

¹²⁷ British intelligence knew of only three old, conventional submarines within the Argentine fleet. The *Santa Fe* was sunk in the British recapture of South Georgia on 25 April, the *San Luis* was in service until 17 May and the *Salta* was never detected near the Falklands. British intelligence suggests the *Salta* either remained in port or only in shallow water off the coast throughout the war. The Argentines had started building another submarine, *Santiago del Estero*, but the economic crisis of the 1980's halted the project. She was permanently non-operational.

¹²⁸ TNA:FCO 7/4609, UK Task Force Handwritten note to Mr. Gillmore from PJ Weston (Defence Department)

¹²⁹ TNA:FCO 7/4609, Military Threat Posed to British Forces by the Argentine Aircraft Carrier "25th of May" Note by MOD

To me an unnecessary action, or shot, or casualty, was not only waste but sin.

- T. E. Lawrence

1 May marked the start of combat operations in the Falklands War with the British bombing the Port Stanley airfield. The British Task Force was approximately 140 nautical miles (160 miles) east south east from Port Stanley or 70 nautical miles (81 miles) from the center of the TEZ. Since Sea Harriers were participating in the raid, the carriers were located well within the TEZ. On the afternoon of 1 May, Commander Christopher Wreford-Brown of the HMS *Conqueror* informed his superiors that he had spotted the cruiser ARA *General Belgrano* and her escorting destroyers.¹³⁰ She was located on the southwestern edge, thirty miles outside the TEZ and travelling eastward in between Isla de los Estados and Burdwood Bank. The *Belgrano's* speed was 32 knots (60km/h) while her two destroyers, the *Piedra Buena* and *Hipólito Bouchard* had a speed of 34 knots (63 km/h).¹³¹ By early morning of 2 May, Sea Harriers also made contact on the north-western side of the TEZ, detecting the Argentinian Carrier Battle Group: the 25th of May and her escort of five ships. However, the Sea Harriers had been “illuminated” by Argentine Sea Dart tracking radar and were forced to quickly peel away.¹³² Because the Sea Harriers were forced to peel away, they were unable to pinpoint the location of the carrier group. All that was known about the location of the

¹³⁰ Max, Hastings and Simon, Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 333

¹³¹ Interestingly, all three ships in the *Belgrano* group were ex-US naval vessels sold to the Argentines after World War II.

¹³² Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 147

Argentine carrier group was that it was outside the TEZ, about 200 miles to the north-west of the British Task Force, which was on the TEZ boundary due east of the Falklands. The *Belgrano* group was also 200 miles away to the south-west from the Task Force. However, what made the groups extremely dangerous was that both carried Exocet missiles. The missiles contained a 364-pound warhead and had a 650 knot impact velocity. Their range when launched from Super Etendard aircraft was 50-70km (30-45 miles) and launched from a ship, the range was around 42 km (26 miles).

1 May Intelligence reports did not ease British concerns. The British intercepted a signal from Admiral Lombardo to all Argentine units, urging an early reconnaissance followed by a massive attack on the British fleet before any units had a chance to withdraw.¹³³ Another intercepted message from Admiral Lombardo to Rear-Admiral Gualter Allara, the Argentine Commander at Sea, detailed orders for the carrier group to find British units and launch air attacks against them at first light on of 2 May.¹³⁴ For the British, their worst fear was materializing: the carrier was in position and attempting to launch an air strike on the British Task Force. However, the Argentine carrier group's location could not be accurately pin-pointed and even the SSNs, HMS *Spartan* and *Superb*, both of which were in the area, had no luck finding the exact location of the carrier. Woodward assessed that Rear-Admiral Allara was attempting a classic pincer movement on the British Task Force with the carrier group descending from the north and the *Belgrano* group moving from the south. Therefore, Woodward cautiously moved

¹³³ Freedman, Vol. II, 285

¹³⁴ Ibid, 285

his carriers to within 29 nautical miles (26 miles) of the eastern boundary of the TEZ as to lengthen the distance for the Argentines to travel.¹³⁵

Woodward's assessment stemmed from a joint naval training exercise in November 1981 with Greek, French, American and Omani navies in the Persian Gulf. A particular exercise called for Woodward to give chase, detect and attack the carrier USS *Coral Sea*. The carrier's radar systems were able to detect an enemy surface ship more than 200 miles away and launch six missile-launching aircraft. Woodward's destroyer did not have these capabilities; however he did not need modern technology to carry out the mission. He split his forces, sending the frigates towards the carrier on one side of the exclusion zone. He then maneuvered his destroyer, the *Glamorgan*, away from the Americans who were centered in a well-defended exclusion zone. Since Woodward feinted movement away from the carrier, the Americans lost contact with the *Glamorgan*. Instead, the Americans shifted focus on finding and "destroying" the frigates, which they successfully did. While the Americans were chasing the frigates, Woodward reversed course, turned toward the carrier, swinging around the opposite side of the exclusion zone. The Americans were never able to find the destroyer and Woodward was able to move the undetected *Glamorgan* into firing position, just eleven miles away (17.7km) from the carrier, and "fire" four Exocet missiles. Completely catching the Americans by surprise, the *Glamorgan* was so close that the *Coral Sea* could not "chaff up," or launch counter measures. In war, the USS *Coral Sea* would have been another ship at the bottom of the

¹³⁵ The British rationalized that if the Argentine navy was to attack through the TEZ, they would want to take the most direct route. Since the Argentine carrier group was north of the Falklands, moving the Task Force east, but staying within the TEZ, would have most likely forced the Argentines to travel along the border of the TEZ, thus delaying the attack.

sea. Despite losing one claw of the pincer, the other part of the pincer was able to accomplish the mission. Woodward summarized lessons of the exercise:

The first was to beware of becoming over-engrossed in one area of operations at the risk of ignoring another. The second was that, in a limited war, in perfect weather, under the cover of the darkness, one fairly old destroyer or cruiser, or whatever, *is* capable of getting right up to within eleven miles of a modern strike carrier in a full battle group. We had just done so from over two hundred miles away even in the face of Airborne Early Warning Aircraft up over the top and an armada of strike aircraft against us. We had proved that it could be done.¹³⁶

What was materializing in the South Atlantic on 2 May 1982 was exactly what had happened in November 1981, and Woodward immediately recognized this. The *Belgrano* group needed to be within 42km of the Task Force to launch the Exocet missiles since the group did not possess aircraft. However, this distance did not ease Woodward's mind. If the British lost contact with her, she could emerge just as Woodward did against the Americans and by then, it would have been too late for defensive measures. Woodward concluded: "I cannot let that cruiser even stay where she is, regardless of her present course or speed. Whether she is inside or outside the TEZ is irrelevant. She will have to go."¹³⁷

The ROE were clear: no Argentine ship was to be attacked without provocation outside the TEZ. To protect his own carriers, the HMS *Invincible* and *Hermes*, Woodward needed the ROE changed immediately because he couldn't locate the 25th of *May*. Therefore, it was necessary to "take out one claw of the pincer."¹³⁸ However, by 2

¹³⁶ Woodward, 66

¹³⁷ Woodward, 152

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 149

May 0811Z, the *Belgrano* changed course and started travelling *westward*, outside the TEZ.¹³⁹ This did not change Woodward's interpretation of the unfolding events as he knew that "speed and direction of an enemy ship can be irrelevant, because both can *change* quickly. What counts is his position, his capability and what I believe to be his intention."¹⁴⁰ Woodward deduced that the *Belgrano* was just feinting a move away from the TEZ. Instead, the Admiral thought the *Belgrano*'s Captain Hector Bonzo was biding time and waiting for the command to enter the TEZ, travel across the shallow Burdwood Bank and attack the bulk of the British Task Force.

Woodward ordered Commander Wreford-Brown to attack the *Belgrano*, but as expected, the order was immediately rejected as it clearly violated the ROE.¹⁴¹ The issue was relayed up to Commander-in-Chief Sir John Fieldhouse and Admiral of the Fleet Lord Terence Lewin. After consultation with the Prime Minister and the War Cabinet, who agreed with Woodward's assessment of the situation, the ROE were amended. Once the order came through, Commander Wreford-Brown needed to make a decision and quickly. The *HMS Conqueror* carried two types of torpedoes: the newly developed and wire-guided Tigerfish torpedo, a single shot weapon that required a longer range to activate, and the older, short-range Mark 8** torpedo. The dilemma the Commander faced was either to use the new but somewhat unreliable torpedo from a safer distance or

¹³⁹ Zulu time is used by the British military to coordinate action across multiple time zones. Other wise known as GMT or UTC. In this instance, 0811Z = 0411 FKT.

¹⁴⁰ Woodward, 156

¹⁴¹ During the Falklands War, the use of submarines was determined by Northwood, the Headquarters for the British Armed Forces. (The Headquarters are located in the town of Northwood.) Command of the SSNs ultimately fell to Commander in Chief Fleet Sir John Fieldhouse. While Woodward would have been in communication with the SSNs, any order issued to the SSNs must have come through Northwood first.

the older and reliable torpedo that required a shorter range. He decided to use the Mark 8** torpedo, as despite its shorter range, which increased the chances of his submarine being detected, its consistent reliability left it favored by submarine commanders. 1380 yards away, the commander gave the order to his Fire Controller to shoot at the target: the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano*. Three torpedoes were launched, resulting in large, fireball producing explosions. There was no time for the *Conqueror* to hang around and assess the aftermath once the hits had been confirmed, as she needed to avoid the *Belgrano*'s accompanying destroyers and their revenge-seeking depth-charges. With her rudder hard over, the submarine dove deep into the South Atlantic. As for the *Belgrano*, a fireball consumed a large portion of the ship; she rolled over and sank. Since her destroyers were giving chase to the *Conqueror*, and because the other Argentine escort ships fled the area, rescue efforts were severely delayed. In total, 321 Argentine men perished, resulting in the largest loss of life in the Falklands War. By 22:45Z on 2 May, the British Armed Forces Headquarters in Northwood confirmed to the rest of the British Task Force that the HMS *Conqueror* had sunk the *General Belgrano*.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The attack was carried out at 18:57Z or GMT time. It would have been 16:57 ART in Buenos Aires and 15:57 FKT in Port Stanley. (On 2 May 1982, Buenos Aires was 1 hour ahead of Stanley time). As well, it would have been 21:57 BST in London.

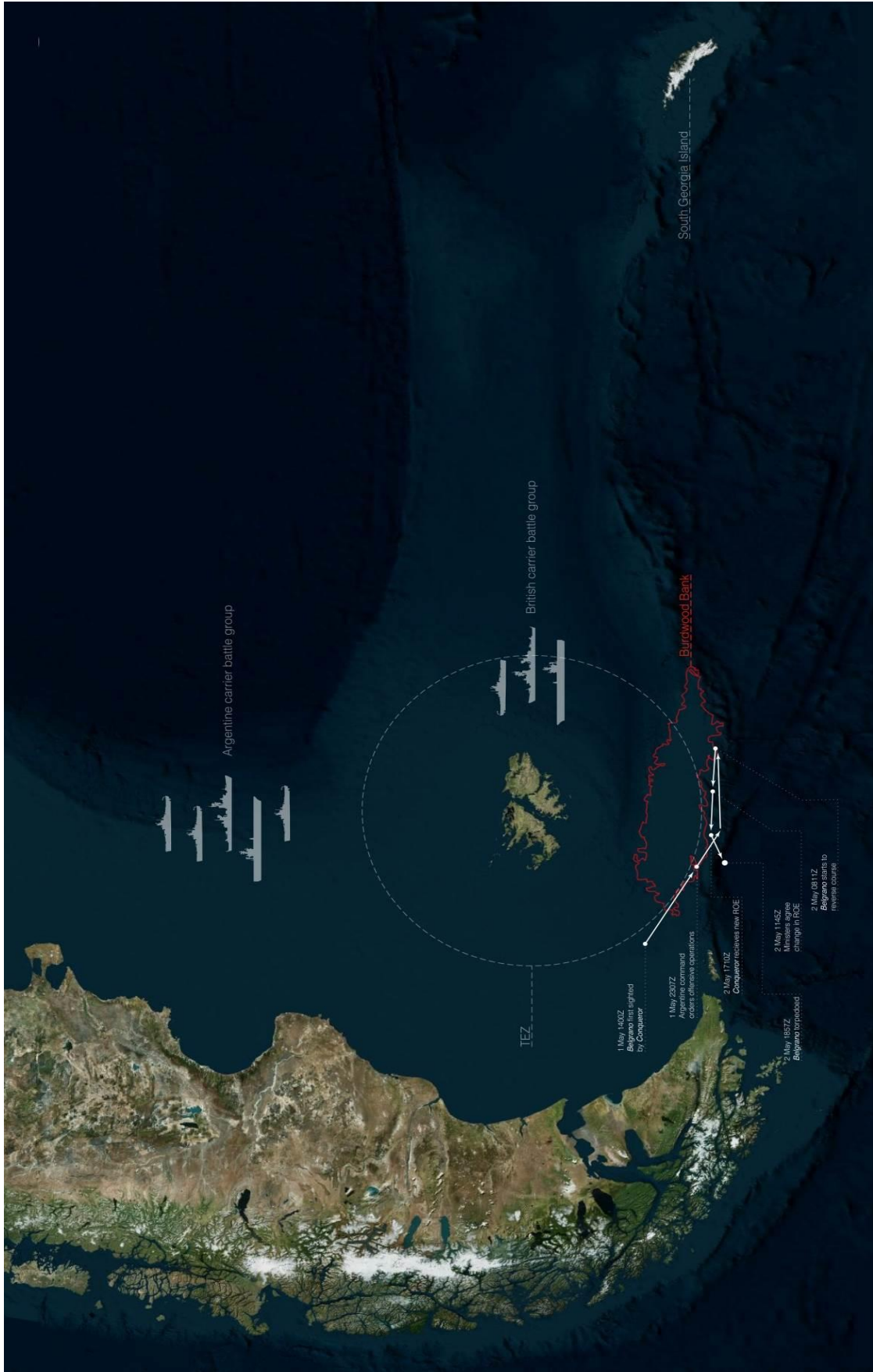


Figure 5. The sinking of the *General Belgrano*

The sinking of the *General Belgrano* forced the retreat of and confined the Argentine navy within twelve miles off the Argentine coast. Immediately after the sinking it was reported that “Argentine aircraft carrier group was in-shore of area Oscar, within 50 fathoms and enjoying close air cover from the mainland...The frigate group north of Puerto Deseado had also drawn in closer to the coast. As for the BELGRANO group, there had been no report of destroyer activity since yesterday morning. .”¹⁴³ Admiral Anaya wanted the remaining part of the pincer to continue on its mission but the *25th of May* “commander had apparently questioned his order to move forward and launch air attack and had pulled back for reasons of weather and military prudence.”¹⁴⁴ The *Belgrano* sinking shattered the Junta’s confidence in the navy and Admiral Anaya’s navy was never the same. The British backed off too as the “Attorney-General had discussed the matter with the Prime Minister and had concluded that another attack against the Argentine carrier in current circumstances was unlikely to happen in circumstances which would leave us exposed to legal or military reproach.”¹⁴⁵ Unless the Argentine carrier group moved to attack, it was to be left alone. However, the objective was already achieved: the Argentine navy was successful neutralized.

The sinking of the *General Belgrano* occurred outside the TEZ, which made it the most contentious action of the entire Falklands War. The situation, the location of the *Belgrano* before and after, and the change of the ROE added to the controversy and

¹⁴³ TNA:FCO 7/4474, Chief of staff Minutes Part C (File No AL Q 050/1), 4 May 1982 meeting with Chief of Staff Committee

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ TNA: FCO 7/4474, Chief of staff Minutes Part C (File No AL Q 050/1), Chief of Staff Minutes: 2 May

confusion. Even two days after the sinking the British government was still confused on the *Belgrano*'s course stating that "no-one present could state whether the BELGRANO had in fact entered the TEZ before the attack."¹⁴⁶ The British intelligence did not help the government's justification claims for sinking the ship either:

"Bearing in mind the earlier intelligence that the *Belgrano* was likely to make a brief incursion into the Total Exclusion Zone, I asked whether we had any intelligence to show whether such an incursion had already been made when the *Belgrano* was torpedoed. I was told that there was no such intelligence, and in reply to my further question was told that the *Belgrano* had been travelling at 280 (i.e. virtually due west) when the engagement took place."¹⁴⁷

However, the British did know that "at the time she was hit she was heading West at 280."¹⁴⁸ Therefore, it was no surprise that controversy continued to grow when the location and travelling direction of the *Belgrano* were made public. The House of Commons demanded answers. Member of Parliament (MP) Mr. Denis Healey suggested that the sinking of the *Belgrano* might have "[weakened] or even [destroyed] the possibility of negotiations for a long-term solution."¹⁴⁹ MP Dr. John Gilbert was more critical of the government and questioned the motives behind the attack: "was it not aimed at using the minimum force to achieve the maximum military advantage, but that, on the contrary, it was aimed at producing the maximum casualties and psychological

¹⁴⁶ TNA:FCO 7/4474, Chief of staff Minutes Part C (File No AL Q 050/1), 4 May 1982 meeting with Chief of Staff Committee

¹⁴⁷ TNA:FCO 7/4566, Military Planning 4 May 1982 from P.R.H Wright Falklands: Military Decision

¹⁴⁸ TNA:FCO 7/4474, Chief of staff Minutes Part C (File No AL Q 050/1), 4 May 1982 meeting with Chief of Staff Committee

¹⁴⁹ *The Falklands Campaign: a digest of debates in the House of Commons, 2 April to [15] June 1982*. Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1982. 4 May 1982 Debate, 186

shock to the Argentines?”¹⁵⁰ MP William Hamilton was worried about who was making the important decisions: “in other words, it was made by either the Prime Minister or [John Nott], or both of them together? Or was it made by the admiral on the spot? It is extremely important that the country should know who is making decisions to kill in the South Atlantic.”¹⁵¹

However, the controversy did not erupt into major conspiracy theories until December 1982. An Official Dispatch regarding the Falklands was released to the London Gazette on 14 December and detailed the sinking of the *Belgrano*:

On 2 May, the Argentinian cruiser the GENERAL BELGRANO, with two destroyers, was detected south of the Falklands by the H.M.S. CONQUEROR. The enemy force was in a position where it posed a serious threat to a number of our ships engaged in operations off the Falklands while other Argentinian surface units were poised to the north. It was a threat that could not be ignored and therefore H.M.S. CONQUEROR was ordered to attack the GENERAL BELGRANO with torpedoes. Two struck the cruiser which sank some hours later. For over two hours Argentinian destroyer carried out several unsuccessful depth charge attacks against H.M.S. CONQUEROR and then retired. Later they returned to rescue survivors. Through the campaign, the cost in human lives was my constant concern and in consequence, I [Commander-in-Chief Fleet Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse] ordered H.M.S. CONQUEROR not to attack ships in rescue operations.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, this was not a sufficient answer for many in the Opposition or public. On 21 December 1982 when MP Tam Dalyell alleged in Parliament that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher “coldly and deliberately gave the orders to sink the *Belgrano*, in the

¹⁵⁰ Secretary of State for Defense John Nott “rejected the charge utterly.” *The Falklands Campaign: a digest of debates in the House of Commons, 2 April to [15] June 1982*. Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1982. 4 May 1982 Debate, 197

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 199

¹⁵² TNA: FCO 7/4379, Official Dispatch on the Falklands, final draft. Interesting amendments made to a 6 September 1982 draft included the removal of the phrase “emphasis on naval operations.”

knowledge that an honorable peace was on the offer and in the expectation --- all too justified----that the *Conqueror's* torpedoes would torpedo the peace negotiations.”¹⁵³ In 1984, Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice fueled the debate even further with the publication of *The Sinking of the Belgrano*.¹⁵⁴ Mr. Dalyell and the authors argued that the British government deliberately sabotaged the Peruvian peace initiative that Peruvian President Fernando Belaúnde Terry had proposed on 2 May.¹⁵⁵ According to the authors, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her war cabinet knew of the peace proposal but were “never really seriously interested in negotiating.” The authors contend that it is “hard to avoid suspicions that the crews of both ships, the *Conqueror* as well as the *General Belgrano*, were used in a cynical politico-military machination which most Britons would want to see exposed.”¹⁵⁶ Citing an interview with Captain Hector Bonzo, the authors also insisted the *Belgrano* was not part of a pincer movement as that was just “another speculation by the British government.”¹⁵⁷ The sinking of the *Belgrano* spiraled into an angry debate: a war crime or a justified act of war?

The debate over the sinking continued to grow and change in the decades after the war. However, new evidence and interpretations have come to light. Commissioned by

¹⁵³ Freedman, Vol. II, 736

¹⁵⁴ Mr. Gavshon was a former Associated Press journalist while Mr. Rice was an oil executive who had worked in Argentina. The authors contend that Mr. Rice’s connections in Argentina allowed him access to key military and political figures and “sometimes at considerable personal risk,” was allowed access to confidential official papers including transcripts of important Presidential telephone conversations. See Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984), xi.

¹⁵⁵ For more information on the Peruvian Initiative see *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign, Vols. I and II* and Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*.

¹⁵⁶ Gavshon and Rice, 177

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 111

British government, two volumes of The Official History of the Falklands Campaign composed by Sir Lawrence Freedman were published in 2005. Freedman determined the controversy had grown because of confusion over time zones and when intelligence reached London. He also cited discrepancies in reports, both official and unofficial, that fueled the controversy. For example, there was confusion whether two or three torpedoes were fired (it was three) and if the *Conqueror* detected the *Belgrano* on 1 May or 2 May (it was 1 May). Interestingly, Freedman states: “there is no evidence that the cruiser’s change of course was well known in MoD and Navy circles in May 1982.”¹⁵⁸ However, documents obtained for this thesis illustrate that on 4 May 1982 the Chiefs of Staff Committee did know that “at the time she was hit she was heading West at 280°.”¹⁵⁹ Freedman’s choice of “well known” is merely a disclaimer in that not everyone in the MoD or navy knew of the course at the time of the attack. Indeed, an examination of the *Conqueror*’s war diary confirmed that it had been expecting the *Belgrano* to turn into the TEZ. Freedman criticized Gavshon and Rice’s work, citing their lack of evidence and impossible assumptions about what the British could have known and the speed with which the senior politicians might have known about the Peruvian peace initiative.¹⁶⁰ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins also brush aside the conspiracy theories regarding the Peruvian peace initiative. They argue that it would be hard to believe that the Junta might have been on the “brink of conceding a virtually identical peace formula to that so

¹⁵⁸ Freedman, Vol. II, 739

¹⁵⁹ TNA:FCO 7/4474, Chief of staff Minutes Part C (File No AL Q 050/1), 4 May 1982 meeting with Chief of Staff Committee

¹⁶⁰ Freedman, Vol. II, 745

recently and comprehensively rejected from Haig.”¹⁶¹ After consulting his own Argentine sources, both Freedman and the sources became convinced that Gavshon and Rice’s conspiracy did not hold up. In particular, Freedman and his sources analyzed Argentine signals that might have indicated British knowledge of the Argentine withdrawal as early as 2007Z on 1 May.¹⁶² However, it was determined this was confusion caused by Admiral Anaya who had actually initiated offensive operations.

Witness statements changed as well. Just before his death in 2009, Captain Bonzo publicly stated that the sinking “was absolutely not a war crime. It was an act of war, lamentably legal.”¹⁶³ He also stated that “when they gave us the authorization to use our weapons, if necessary, we knew we had to be prepared to attack, as well as be attacked. Our people were completely trained. I would even say we were anxious to pull the trigger.”¹⁶⁴ According to Bonzo’s interview, “the Argentine navy had changed its rules of engagement, and he was under orders to fire on any British warships that came within range of his guns.”¹⁶⁵ Other British sources cite Argentine Admiral Enrique Molina Pico’s admission that the *Belgrano* was “heading away from the enemy fleet only momentarily, as the commander saw fit to wait for a more convenient time (to attack).”

¹⁶⁶ In 2011, Major David Thorp published his findings regarding the sinking of the *Belgrano* in The Silent Listener. As a former British intelligence officer, he was tasked

¹⁶¹ The authors also suggested that Admiral Anaya persuaded the rest of the Junta to reject the peace offering; instead, Anaya thought “he was going to win his campaign of attrition against the British fleet.” Hastings and Jenkins, 166

¹⁶² Part of the Peruvian plan called for Argentine naval ships to withdraw from the area while negotiations were ongoing. Freedman, Vol. II, 746

¹⁶³ *Daily Mail*, “Britain WAS right to sink the *Belgrano*” 30 December 2011

¹⁶⁴ *The Guardian*, “Belgrano crew ‘trigger happy,’” 24 May 2013

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁶ *Daily Mail*, “Britain WAS right to sink the *Belgrano*” 30 December 2011

by Prime Minister Thatcher to collect all data and intelligence regarding the sinking. He concluded that “the destination of the vessel was not to her home port as the Argentine Junta had stated but the objective of the ship was to relocate to a prearranged rendezvous point (RZ) within the exclusion zone.”¹⁶⁷ His report also determined that:

Shortly after the UK’s announcement of an exclusion zone, the Argentinian Navy HQ notified its warships, possibly for the purpose of regrouping, of a pre-arranged rendezvous point (RZ). When the coordinate for this RV were plotted on a map, the actual location, though east of the Falkland Islands, was nevertheless inside the 200 nautical miles exclusion zone. Some considerable time prior to *Conqueror* firing its torpedoes, my analysis revealed that the *Belgrano* had been instructed to alter course and head in the direction of the RV inside the exclusion zone.¹⁶⁸

However, Major Thorp’s work should be treated with caution. While he cites secret papers, no record of this investigation, or request of an investigation, were found in the Foreign and Commonwealth office documents released in 2012. As well, there is no mention of any “rendezvous” point in Admiral Woodward’s biography, Freedman’s official history, or any other major works referring to the Falklands War.

The controversy surrounding the sinking of the *General Belgrano* has died down significantly. Recent admissions by former Argentine military and officials along with analysis of both Argentine and British intelligence have rightly so silenced many “Belgranauts.”¹⁶⁹ However, the recently released government documents offer a new interpretation about the sinking of the ARA *General Belgrano*. The main concern and real target of the British Task Force was the Argentine aircraft carrier, the 25th of May.

¹⁶⁷ David Thorp, *The Silent Listener: British Surveillance Falklands 1982*, (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Spellmout. 2011), 170-171

¹⁶⁸ Thorp, 170

¹⁶⁹ Freedman’s slang for those who supported and still support the conspiracy theories.

Before any landing operation commenced, the British needed to neutralize the Argentine navy, and to achieve that, the target became the carrier. All legal and political preparations were made and ready by 30 April for this sinking. However, the events that occurred between 1 and 2 May called for changes in the plan. The British knew the carrier group was to the north but they did not know where exactly. Nevertheless, they did know exactly where the *General Belgrano* group was located. With intelligence and Admiral Woodward's training experience, the decision was made: the *Belgrano*, not the carrier, was to be sunk. This was not a simple decision as the cruiser was located outside the TEZ, and thus not covered by the ROE. However, government planning had allowed for SSNs to engage outside the TEZ, under the discretion of the Task Force Commander. The British government knew this would not be received well by the Opposition, the Argentines, other countries and anti-war advocates but the decision to change the ROE was carried out of necessity for the campaign. For the overall British success in the Falklands War, the sinking of the *Belgrano* was crucial. Not only did the Argentine navy remain close to the mainland for the duration of the war, but the British Task Force, and more importantly, the carriers, were never seriously threatened during the war. Unfortunately after the war, confusion over time zones and what was known when only compounded the fury over the decision. The Belgranauts' adverse reactions and anger with the British government in the 1980's were certainly justified at the basis of the information available at that time. But with the recently released government documents, their anger needs to be re-directed. Perhaps they can conjure conspiracies regarding the government's concern for and the plan to sink the Argentine carrier.

CHAPTER IV

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND THE MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

*I am told that nowadays in these great establishments you are all taught that you have to love the press and co-operate with the press. I hope you are also taught, outside the meetings that the press are nothing but a pain in the arse! Whatever the circumstances, they will do their very utmost to make a military operation almost impossible.*¹⁷⁰

- Secretary of State for Defense John Nott

While caught off guard by the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, the British certainly, albeit unintentionally, contributed to the chaos and confusion months, and even years, before the conflict. Despite repeated warnings from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) of a possible military threat, dating back to November 1978, the British had sold more than £ 200 million worth of naval, aerial and electronic equipment, missiles and other weapons to Argentina.¹⁷¹ In 1981, Secretary of State for Defense John Nott's Defense Review, in an effort to slash budgets and focus on NATO commitments, proposed reductions for the British military, cuts which primarily affected the naval forces. These cuts called for the Royal Navy to lose one fifth of its 60 Destroyers and Frigates, the HMS *Invincible* to be sold to the Australians, the HMS *Hermes* to be decommissioned, landing platform dock (LPD) class ships HMS *Intrepid* and *Fearless* to be scrapped and the icebreaker HMS *Endurance* to be pulled from the South Atlantic.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ John Nott, in "The Falklands War," seminar held 5 June 2002 (Centre for Contemporary British History, 2005, <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/witness/falklands/>), 59

¹⁷¹ Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1984), 17

¹⁷² Many Members of Parliament (MP) believed pulling the HMS *Endurance* out of the region was a "striking example of the low priority attached to the Falklands question by the

While the Defense Review's plan and all sales were immediately scrapped when the Argentines invaded, the British military had already faced cancellations for technological upgrades, and major reductions in logistical units and supplies in the years before. The British had plenty of men but they desperately needed any support in these areas. To further exacerbate the situation, the British government was not only worried about its own military's capability, but it was also concerned about other countries, such as Brazil and Venezuela, that supported Argentine claims to the islands. There were worries that they might back the Argentine cause with sizeable force and supplies.¹⁷³ The Government assessed Argentina's neighbors, other Latin American countries, the Americans, and the Soviets for military capabilities and potential assistance.

Throughout the Falklands War, the Americans sought to maintain a publicly neutral stance due to their "reservations about the broad strategic consequences of the campaign."¹⁷⁴ These "reservations" were based on the fear that joint British-American action could lead to Soviet involvement in the conflict and worse, involvement in the Western hemisphere, America's backyard.¹⁷⁵ The Americans were trying to gather support for their proposed South Atlantic Treaty Organization (SATO), including South

Conservative Government." Between summer 1981-March 1982, the British government allowed potential buyers, including the Argentines and Brazilians, to inspect various ships and components of the British navy. See Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol. I, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 143-152

¹⁷³ Brazil had considered purchasing HMS *Endurance* and two Wasp helicopters from the British in September 1981. However, the sale was always highly doubtful because Brazil publicly supported Argentina's claim for the Falklands. Freedman, Vol. I, 146

¹⁷⁴ The National Archives, Kew (hereafter 'TNA') FCO 7/4500: Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British Forces—military operations. 30 June 1982 Letter to Rotrin (British embassy) from Thomas Hefresgate Oslo, Norway. Falklands: Interview by SACLANT

¹⁷⁵ Julian Borger, "U.S. feared Falklands war would be 'close-run thing', documents reveal," *The Guardian*, 1 April 2012

Africa, Uruguay and Argentina. The aim was to block Soviet influence in the region. With the Panama Canal and South Atlantic in their control, the Americans were seeking more control of the linking points of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.¹⁷⁶ Joint British-Allied actions in the Falklands would jeopardize this mission and the American efforts between June 1981 and February 1982 would have been in vain.¹⁷⁷

Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) American Admiral Harry Train offered another explanation for the American stance. He argued that since the United States projected substantial power in the Organization of American States (OAS), the credibility of the organization would be severely reduced if “potential aggressors believed that the OAS had no effective arrangements for collective security.”¹⁷⁸ Train rationalized that because the OAS did not collectively support action on the behalf of Argentina, the Americans could lose face with other OAS members if they involved themselves on either side without authorization. Albeit overreaching in concern, he worried that American action on British behalf could call into question the overall strength of the alliance. Train wanted to avoid the question of: how could one state say they support and belong to an organization and yet partake in unauthorized action that said organization does not endorse? However, Admiral Train’s fears are exaggerated: the

¹⁷⁶ Gavshon and Rice, 17-18

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 17-18

¹⁷⁸ Admiral Harry Train was also very pro-Argentina, as he had family connections with members of Argentine Admiral Jorge Anaya’s family. TNA: FCO 7/4500, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British Forces—military operations. 30 June 1982 Letter to Rotrin (British embassy) from Thomas Hefresgate Oslo, Norway. Falklands: Interview by SACLANT

Americans were (and still are) the most influential member of the OAS. They certainly did not fear any damaging repercussions from the organization.¹⁷⁹

However, the Americans were actually more concerned with NATO commitments. They were also extremely apprehensive about helping the British, let alone being associated with their actions; they feared British association could jeopardize American relations with regional allies as well as political, economic and influence within Latin America and South America.¹⁸⁰ Ultimately for the Americans, the cost of publicly alienating Britain outweighed the cost of potentially damaging pro-American sentiments within those countries.

However, despite uneasiness about assisting the British campaign, and even while Secretary of State Alexander Haig's negotiations were ongoing, the Americans were covertly "prepared to offer increased assistance to the UK should the Haig negotiations fail."¹⁸¹ Accordingly, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher asked her aides to examine whether American assistance would be accepted by the rest of Her Majesty's Government.¹⁸² While negotiations were ongoing, Thatcher instructed that a preliminary study be made into the "areas in which the UK would benefit from increased U.S. support

¹⁷⁹ For example, while the British maintained control of Ascension Island, the base itself was built by the Americans, with permission from the British. While arguably some OAS members would interpret this action as helping the British, the Americans did not object to the British using their base for the Falklands campaign.

¹⁸⁰ Many of these countries had publicly voiced solidarity for the Argentine "cause" in "recovering" rightful territory.

¹⁸¹ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Attachment to COS (His) 161/742/1 Operation Corporate: U.S. Assistance. Notes: 1. BDS Washington AA/A2D 200100Z April 82 WASDO 08

¹⁸² There are no records in the FCO collection of the findings of this request. One has to assume, therefore, that she was asking to hedge any bets against the Opposition and anti-war opponents.

for OPERATION CORPORATE.”¹⁸³ Assumptions were immediately made in regards to the level of commitment the Americans were willing to give: the U.S. would not commit forces to hostilities and base facilities in South America would not be available to the U.S. for overt support of UK operations.¹⁸⁴ Instead, the British government sought logistical and technological military assistance from the Americans. At the top of the list were intelligence capabilities including amplified satellite and meteorological coverage, increased surveillance and information on the South Atlantic surface and sub-surface plots, U2 planes and long range Maritime Radar Recon and Air-to-Air refueling operations. The British also needed increased access and priority in U.S. Defense Satellite Communications systems. For transporting any subsequent reinforcements to and from Ascension Island, the British considered asking for American amphibious shipping support. Finally, the British asked the Americans for logistics support, weapons, equipment and material supplies.¹⁸⁵ However, all of the requested items and materials were not considered crucial to the success of OPERATION CORPORATE while requirements “would need to be reviewed in the event of intensive hostilities.”¹⁸⁶

The other Cold War superpower created a sticky situation for the British. Intelligence reports indicated that a Soviet Krivak class destroyer and an Alligator Landing Ship, Tank (LST) had left Luanda, Angola heading towards the Falklands as early as 14 April. There were also worries about the capability of Soviet satellites to

¹⁸³ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Attachment to COS (His) 161/742/1 Operation Corporate: U.S. Assistance_Notes 2. MOS/21 dated 23 April 1982 3. CDS 2036/1 dated 23 April 1982

¹⁸⁴ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Attachment to COS (His) 161/742/1, Assumptions

¹⁸⁵ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Attachment to COS (His) 161/742/1 Potential Areas of U.S. Military Assistance.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid

track the British fleet's movements. To combat this, when satellites were known to be overhead, the Task Force was forced to maintain electronic silence to avoid detection. A major concern for the British was the amount of activity near or surrounding Ascension Island. The island was located 4,200 miles from Britain and 3,800 miles from the Falklands and served as the halfway point from the British Task Force. The one airfield on the island was extremely critical for the mission; furthermore the island provided the last stopping point before the Task Force set out for the Falklands. Any threat to the island would serve as a threat to the entire campaign. Soviet BearD Aircraft were carrying out reconnaissance sorties within 50 miles of the island and an AGI ship had been shadowing the British troop transit ship SS *Canberra* since it left the Mediterranean for Ascension Island.¹⁸⁷ On 29 April, a Soviet intelligence gathering vessel, the *Primorye*, approached Ascension Island from the north.¹⁸⁸ This was especially alarming for the British. Although the Soviets never directly threatened Ascension Island, and there was never indication that they were going to, the British knew they were gathering intelligence. What remained to be seen was if the Soviets were providing the Argentines with any of that intelligence.¹⁸⁹ Throughout the campaign, the British fears of Soviets supporting the Argentines never subsided.

¹⁸⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Confidential Annex to COS 19th Meeting/82 Held on Wednesday 14 April 1982 at 10:00AM

¹⁸⁸ Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol. II, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 65

¹⁸⁹ During the Alexander Haig peace negotiations, there was evidence that the Soviet fishing boats were providing intelligence to the Argentines. Just like the U.S., the Soviets never openly supported either side. However, the Soviets did help the Argentines with intelligence, just as the Americans did with the British. See Freedman, Volume II, 152, 155. General Galtieri told Haig that the Soviets had offered to help sink a British ship. However, Haig did not believe this threat

Of greater concern to the British was the potential for an accident or unintentional escalation of war to include the Soviets. For example, the implementation of the Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ) and then the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ), immediately raised alarms about potential Soviet involvement. Though the British nuclear powered submarines (SSN) were able to make distinctions between nuclear and conventional submarines, British surface ships lacked the capability to make a highly accurate assessment of the type of detected submarine. The Argentine naval fleet had only conventional submarines; however, any SSN operating on less than “its full capability” could have been interpreted to be a conventional submarine.¹⁹⁰ Consequently, there was a risk of a Soviet SSN entering the zone and being mistaken for an Argentine conventional submarine and attacked. British military and intelligence officials determined that the “Ministers should be aware of this possibility.”¹⁹¹ While the British sought logistical and technological support from the Americans, they feared any unfortunate encounter with the Soviets or any accidental escalation of war with Argentine allies.

Potential Argentine allies included Latin American and South American countries that harbored sympathies for the Argentine invasion. The British government listed Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Uruguay and other

to be credible: Moscow would be well aware of the “dreadful international consequences of such a move.” Freedman, Vol. II, 140

¹⁹⁰ If a SSN is not running on “full capability,” its pattern of activity (ex. how it is interpreted in radar systems) is similar to that of a conventional submarine. FCO 7/4473 COS 20th Meeting held 15 April 1982 5:00PM

¹⁹¹ TNA: FCO 7/4473, COS 20th Meeting held 15 April 1982 5:00PM

Caribbean countries as potential Argentine allies. However, they were determined not to be threats as they had “nothing significant to contribute” due to their lack of military capabilities.¹⁹² Columbian intervention was ruled out because of “[wariness] of Venezuela” and Ecuador was ruled out because of “[wariness] with Peru.”¹⁹³ Brazil, Cuba, Peru and Venezuela were determined to be possible candidates for intervention on behalf of Argentina.¹⁹⁴ However, these fears were quickly dismissed. Reports surfaced that the Brazilian navy was out to sea, including a carrier, but it was assessed to part of a naval exercise which had been planned for some months before and unrelated to the crisis. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that 6 Peruvian FBA Aircraft had been deployed with Argentine units. This report was discounted because the “Rio Treaty had not been invoked and the Peruvian government had denied alerting her force.”¹⁹⁵ Otherwise known as the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Rio Treaty called for agreeing nations to support each other against military threat from outside the continent. The Rio Treaty was never invoked during the Falklands War: two thirds majority was needed for joint action against the British and although a member, Argentina “traditionally stood aloof from the organization.”¹⁹⁶ There was only one instance that concerned the British in regards to Bolivians. A report surfaced that the Bolivian Air Force had been put at the disposal of Argentina. Oddly, the British easily

¹⁹²TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations. Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units. Annex D to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255/742/1

¹⁹³ Ibid

¹⁹⁴ It is odd that the British considered Cuba as a potential Argentine ally when Cuba despised military Junta government.

¹⁹⁵ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Chief of Staff Minutes. Confidential Annex to COS 19th Meeting/82 Held on Wednesday 14 April 1982 at 10:00AM

¹⁹⁶ Hastings and Jenkins, 139

disregarded this report because it “did not reflect official Bolivian government policy.”¹⁹⁷

There was no further mention of potential Bolivian involvement.

The British did consider bringing the fight to the Argentine mainland. The military considered landing in Southern Argentina (Tierra del Fuego) at the end of May at the earliest. Politically, this would have been a severe blow to the military Junta and would have provided a “bargaining counter for withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands.”¹⁹⁸ The military was optimistic that it was able to “demonstrate the capability to extend the conflict.”¹⁹⁹ However, as a member of the United Nations and the Security Council, the British needed to abide by the UN Charter. In particular, the British government was especially concerned with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It stated:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.²⁰⁰

Under the pretenses of self-defense of British territory, the British could have argued that invading the Argentine mainland would have stopped supplies from reaching the Argentine garrison and as well as preventing aerial raids and bombings of the Task Force.

¹⁹⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4473, Chief of Staff Minutes. Confidential Annex to COS 19th Meeting/82 Held on Wednesday 14 April 1982 at 10:00AM

¹⁹⁸ TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations. Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units. Annex A to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255/742/1

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

²⁰⁰ This article was issued on 24 October 1945.

However, the Government concluded that it would face severe repercussions internationally and domestically as the “legitimacy under Article 51 of [United Nations Charter] would be challenged.”²⁰¹ Since there was no declaration of war by either side, the British determined that “self-defense” for the Falklands would not be a sufficient excuse for invading mainland Argentina under the terms of Article 51. While the military believed they could extend their current capabilities onto the mainland, the government also determined that any mainland invasion would invalidate the TEZ, thus opening the waters surrounding the Falklands. Ultimately, an Argentine mainland invasion would “greatly reduce capacity for subsequent operations against Argentine Forces on the Falkland Islands, which is the UK aim.”²⁰²

However, the British did conclude that the feasibility of landing in south Argentina rested on the use of appropriate Chilean airfields or the full co-operation of the Chilean air force. Such contingency plans included increased military co-operation between the British and Chileans, involving the possibility for a formal military alliance. Cooperation with Chile would divide Argentine forces and compel Argentina to meet threats on two fronts. The British hoped by drawing Argentine forces away from the Falkland Islands they could relieve pressure on air cover operations over the islands. Full cooperation with Chileans would give the British access to Chilean bases which would

²⁰¹ TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations. Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units. Annex A to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255/742/1

²⁰² Ibid

“offset the Argentine geographical advantage.”²⁰³ However, while the military advantages were tempting, the political disadvantages completely overrode these military considerations. It was determined that politicians in both Chile and the United Kingdom would never accept this and it would “remove possibility of all-party political support in the UK.”²⁰⁴ Overall, Chilean-British cooperation would likely draw in Latin American and possibly other nations “and engender strong adverse international reaction.”²⁰⁵ The “feasibility” of Chilean-British military cooperation was determined to be “doubtful.”²⁰⁶

Despite the assistance, the Americans were adamant that the extent of their involvement and assistance remain undisclosed. Since the U.S. Administration was divided on supporting the British during the war, “sensitivities” remained within the American government even months after the war.²⁰⁷ To combat rumors and speculation in the media, the British decided to acknowledge what was being reported yet deny any further information: “The fact that we had the STINGER air defense weapon (and that it scored one kill) is already acknowledged by us, but not when or how it was acquired. We are currently using AM2 matting at Port Stanley airfield, but neither this nor the supply of other U.S. material should be specifically acknowledged.”²⁰⁸ When “pressed on details on U.S. supply of equipment and the assistance provided by the U.S. to the UK during the conflict,” the government chose “[not to go] into details about the scale and nature of the

²⁰³ TNA: FCO 7/4499, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British forces: Military operations. Contingency 1: Potential Effects on Overall operations of the loss of key units. Annex A to Attachment to COS (Misc) 255/742/1

²⁰⁴ Ibid

²⁰⁵ Ibid

²⁰⁶ Ibid

²⁰⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4425, Performance of Men and Equipment, 30 September 1982 D/DS11/10/6/16 from JM Stewart ,Re: U.S. assistance during OPERATION CORPORATE

²⁰⁸ Ibid

assistance provided during the campaign.”²⁰⁹ The British determined that any matter of that sort, including to what extent the Americans assisted, would be left for the U.S. Government to comment on.²¹⁰ Instead, the standard British government response was to be: “the assistance provided by the U.S. to the UK during the conflict was based on the wide-ranging pattern of peacetime defense collaboration between our two countries....For our part, we have expressed our thanks to the U.S. for the support they provided.”²¹¹

The degree of acknowledgement of American assistance exemplified the dilemma the British government faced with the media. The British faced a double edged sword: the media, including British, American, Argentine and other foreign sources, needed to be kept at arm’s length but not too far away. Friction between the media and authorities immediately began when many British media members wanted to report the war as “dispassionately as possible.”²¹² Citing fears of media relations similar to those the Americans faced during the Vietnam War, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) initially resisted allowing journalists and news correspondents to sail down with the Task Force. However editors who “had the ear” of the Prime Minister persuaded her to allow their correspondents to travel with the Task Force.²¹³ In Vietnam, correspondents and journalists had been granted extraordinary freedoms to go anywhere, see everything and

²⁰⁹ TNA: FCO 7/4425, Performance of Men and Equipment, 30 September 1982 D/DS11/10/6/16 from JM Stewart ,Re: U.S. assistance during OPERATION CORPORATE

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² Nicholas John Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media: The Official History of the United Kingdom's D-Notice System*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 393

²¹³ Wilkinson, 393

write relatively censor-free.²¹⁴ In general, the American media in Vietnam showed restraint in reporting and publishing sensitive details and was much more likely to cooperate with military officials. In complete contrast, the British government feared the lack of control by the British media to self-censor or honor agreements with military officials. To minimize the publishing of sensitive information, this became one aspect of the war the MoD fully controlled: only British correspondents were allowed to accompany the Task Force and to do so, they had to sign forms agreeing to censorship. Foreign journalists were forced to pursue other alternatives. ABC television even considered chartering a tramp steamer, offering space to other American television networks and newspapers. However, since the British threat to sink any ship in the TEZ did not make exemptions for American press boats, the tramp steamer never set sail.²¹⁵

For the journalists who remained in London, anger grew when all background briefings were stopped when the Task Force set sail. They were later resumed under pressure from the Downing Street press officer, Bernard Ingham, who ill concealed his contempt for the [Ministry of Defense's] information performance.²¹⁶ Friction was also created between the British government and Reuters, the international news agency, when the latter refused to be bound by D-Notices.²¹⁷ Short for Defense Notice, D-Notices were official requests from the British government to news editors not to publish

²¹⁴ In many cases, the American military would brief journalists about an upcoming mission and asking the media not to report it until the mission was underway. The American media was consistently good at obeying requests and cooperating with the military, just as long as the military continued giving them access.

²¹⁵ Phillip Knightley, "The Falklands: How Britannia ruled the news." 51-53 as cited in TNA: FCO 7/4461, Media Coverage

²¹⁶ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 332

²¹⁷ Since 1993, D-Notes are now referred to DA-Notice, or Defense Advisory Notice.

news items on specified subjects for reasons of national security. When the British government sent a D-notice to Reuters not to report the location of the British fleet in relation to Ascension Island, the editor was not concerned for the security of “our forces,” since Reuters was not a British news agency.²¹⁸ British news agencies also resisted the D-notices. Peter Hennessy, writing for both *The Times* and *Economist* in 1982, argued with officials over the MoD’s heavy-handed re-vetting of already vetted copy from the Task Force.²¹⁹ Throughout the entire campaign, there was a constant tug of war between the British government and the media: when the MoD complained of speculation about operational plans and reporting of assistance from third countries, arguing that such reporting jeopardized any help, editors countered with complaints of “paucity of information,” delay in announcing operations which were already over, and the MoD’s inability to confirm or deny information obtained from other sources.²²⁰ At a typical MoD press conference, a spokesman would have issued a statement as follows: “We have no reports of any major Argentine warships or auxiliaries having penetrated the maritime exclusion zone.”²²¹ After a few seconds, the press corps “would be on its feet trying to pin him down,”: “what do you mean by ‘reports?’”, “why ‘major ships?’”, “Did ‘penetrate’ mean from the mainland to the islands or from the islands to the mainland as

²¹⁸ Wilkinson, 393

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 395

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 395

²²¹ This was the only specific British article included within the FCO Falklands collection. The British were very happy with this article and how it portrayed the British media during the war. See Phillip Knightley, "The Falklands: How Britannia ruled the news," *Columbia Journalism Review*, 21, no. 3 (Sep/Oct 1982): 51-53, as cited in TNA: FCO 7/4461, Media Coverage

well?”²²² The debate between the MoD and the media boiled down to the conflict between the protection of servicemen’s lives and the “public’s right to know.”²²³ To exemplify this, the MoD lied when denying reports that HMS *Invincible* had suffered a breakdown in one of the engines soon after it departed from Portsmouth.²²⁴ Since the carrier was vital to the entire campaign, the MoD wished to keep the information confidential, not just from the press but more importantly, from the Argentines.

Friction between military personnel and journalists sailing with the Task Force continued to grow after the Task Force departed from Ascension Island. Satellite communications on HMS *Hermes* were limited, restrictions set in place to limit the number of journalists allowed on ship, and military unhappiness over breaches of security, including reports of departures of ships from Ascension Island, continued to add fuel to the fire. A particular battle between the BBC and Task Force Commander Rear Admiral John “Sandy” Woodward emerged while the Task Force was en route to the Falklands. Brian Hanrahan of the BBC alleged that Admiral Woodward told reporters that “it was his intention to cause as much confusion to the enemy as possible, and if there was any way he could use us as part of the attempt, he intended to do so.”²²⁵ An extremely vocal and opinionated officer, Admiral Woodward gave an interview regarding the South Georgia Island recapture in which he was quoted as saying “South Georgia was

²²² Phillip Knightley, "The Falklands: How Britannia ruled the news," 51-53, as cited in TNA FCO 7/4461: Media Coverage

²²³ Wilkinson, 397

²²⁴ Phillip Knightley, "The Falklands: How Britannia ruled the news," 51-53, as cited in TNA FCO 7/4461: Media Coverage

²²⁵ *The New York Times* (hereafter “NYT”), “Misled on Falklands, British Press Says.” 29 July 1982

the appetizer, now this is the heavy punch coming up behind. My Battle Group is properly formed and ready to strike. This is the big-run up to the Big Match which my view should be a walkover. I'd give odds of 20 to 1 on, to win."²²⁶ The headline for the article, "WALKOVER WOODWARD", produced a strong reprimand from both the British government and higher military officials but it also prompted Woodward to hold back information from the media: "Personally, I found myself tempted to use this modern communication tool which might just have had enough effect on world opinion to cause the Argentines to think again; hence my much published interview after South Georgia while my personal views were much less sanguine."²²⁷ While safety measures were taken to prevent security breaches, the Task Force quickly learned that the "information to the Press cannot be confined to formal briefings and while dispatches to newsdesks can be vetted, it is infinitely more difficult to censor the telephone conversations conducted over modern satellite systems."²²⁸ New technologies presented new challenges for control of the press. From sailing to Ascension Island to the conclusion of the campaign, the relationship between the war correspondents and military officials remained acrimonious.

The British and American media were keen on creating headlines and selling newspapers. As they turned to consulting retired admirals and generals for 'expert' commentary, there was constant speculation about British movements and intentions. In

²²⁶ Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 109

²²⁷ Rear Admiral Woodward as quoted in Admiral Sir James Eberle, Major General Jeremy Moore, and Rear Admiral Sir John Woodward, "The Falklands Experience," *RUSI*, 128, no. 1 (1993): 28,

²²⁸ Woodward argued that because "ships' companies had to be debriefed, and this [was] often done over the main broadcasts for all to hear." Rear Admiral Woodward as quoted in "The Falklands Experience," 28,

many cases, what the BBC and other media outlets were reporting was accurate. For example, the British air support difficulties and disadvantages were listed just as the Task Force arrived within the TEZ: “The 10 Harrier jump jets with the lead ships in the fleet may soon be reinforced by another 10, an authoritative source said.”²²⁹ Just before the mainland invasion of the Falklands, *The New York Times* accurately reported that “Rear Admiral John F. Woodward, the task force commander, was gathering his vessels into one group, with the amphibious assault ships Fearless and Intrepid and smaller logistical landing craft positioned for an attack on the Falklands.”²³⁰ There were of course inaccurate reports as well. For example, the media often and incorrectly announced Special Air Service (SAS) and Special Boat Service (SBS) patrols had landed on the islands²³¹. These claims were based on “unreliable American ‘sources’.”²³² However, while the British officials were not keen on the media speculating and reporting accurate and detailed information, many of these reports actually harmed the Argentines. The inaccurate SAS and SBS reports kept Argentine forces on high alert, only to fatigue them for the actual invasion. Reports of Task Force movement and capabilities certainly hurt Argentine morale as many Argentines soldiers were conscripted as well as ill-equipped and ill-prepared for combat. Knowing a powerful military was on its way to recapture its territory would have undoubtedly scared these soldiers.

²²⁹ *NYT* “Likely moves in an attack” 28 April 1982

²³⁰ *NYT* “Ships said to move to new formation.” 18 May 1982

²³¹ The only SAS and SBS landings involved the recapture of South Georgia, which the MoD acknowledged, on 25 April and on Pebble Island on 14 May. SAS and SBS troops never landed on West or East Falkland until the 21 May invasion.

²³² Interestingly, the authors claim it was “American” sources that contributed to these reports. It should be noted that likelihood that British sources also contributed to these reports is high as well. Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, 333

There were instances, however, when the media's drive to be the first to report also immensely helped the Argentines, who would come to rely on the media, most often the BBC, for a majority of their intelligence about British activities. During the mainland invasion of East Falkland, several bombs dropped on British ships did not detonate, thus saving countless lives. Partially this was because they were being dropped at too low an altitude, but the primary reason was because the fuses were set incorrectly. Luckily, the Americans, who had supplied the Argentines with bomb fuses before the invasion, were aware that the fuses were not being set correctly. They never got in touch with the Argentineans to alert them to the incorrect fusing.²³³ However, after being briefed by the MoD, the BBC reported the failure of the bombs to detonate and thus alerted the Argentines to the issue. The MoD's worst fears materialized as these reports were published "without thought for the operational risks."²³⁴ The Ministry complained that not only did the BBC broadcast the information in London, "for the ears of any Argentinian diplomat or military attaché, they actually put it out on the World Service for the entire South Atlantic to hear."²³⁵ As British troops were advancing in the San Carlos Water area after the landing on 21 May, the BBC again prematurely announced that "the Paras are moving towards Darwin." With the element of surprise gone, not surprisingly, the Paras met strong Argentine resistance in Darwin. Paras" is short for Parachute Regiment, the Airborne Infantry of the British Army similar to the 82nd and 101st Airborne of the US Army. After the BBC announced the movement, Argentine forces

²³³ John Nott, in "The Falklands War," seminar held 5 June 2002, 58

²³⁴ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, 333

²³⁵ Woodward, 298-299

were reinforced in the area. Admiral Woodward doubted that the Para Regiment would ever be able to entirely forgive the BBC for this.²³⁶

The British also had to counter Argentinian information that was being picked up by the BBC. Although much of the information the Argentinians were reporting was incorrect, there were instances when Argentine reports were correct and even contradicted British reports. An example of this was especially evident with the British bombing of Port Stanley airfield on 1 May. The Argentines reported that the bombings had had no significant effect on the runway and therefore, they were still able to resupply the garrison. This was indeed true; the runway was never properly put out of commission throughout the entire war. The British did know that the 1 May raid did not put the runway out of commission but were eager to save public face because they had boasted of the success of the run. They insisted the runway was out of commission and “confidently discounted [the Argentine report regarding the runway] throughout the campaign as just more of many wild boasts coming from Buenos Aires.”²³⁷ Since the Argentines were notorious for reporting multiple “sinkings” of ships, (and these ships were never actually sunk, nor properly attacked), the British counters to “wild boasts” from Argentina were believable. For example, on 30 May, the Argentinians reported they had attacked and sunk the HMS *Invincible* with an Exocet missile. The Argentine pilots claimed to have seen the ship hit as smoke was billowing from below. Argentine newspapers even published photos of the *Invincible* burning. In reality, the Exocet missile

²³⁶ Woodward, 304

²³⁷ Peter Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis: The Rights and the Wrongs* (St. Martin's Press, New York), 111-112

missed two frigates, the HMS *Exter* and *Avenger*. The smoke the pilots reported was actually from the *Avenger*'s 4.5 inch anti-aircraft gun while the *Invincible* was twenty miles away. Admiral Woodward called this Argentine report "the least accurate story of the whole war."²³⁸

Even then, and because the Argentines had come to rely on British sources for intelligence, there were instances when the British government was able to prevent the Argentines from gaining valuable intelligence. Nevertheless, the British faced a double-edged sword with this ability: attention had to be paid both to the sensitivities of next of kin and the intelligence value of disclosure to Argentina.²³⁹ On 25 May, the Type 42 destroyer HMS *Coventry* was sunk and the *Atlantic Conveyor*, a transport ship, was severely damaged by the Argentines and eventually sunk. The Argentines had wasted two of their five Exocet missiles on the *Atlantic Conveyor* as they believed her to be a frigate or destroyer. The Argentine navy pilots had to wait for the BBC bulletin to learn what they hit. The news was released at 10:20pm London time, 7:20pm Falklands and Argentina time:

During the last hours we have heard of further attacks on our ships. One of our ships of the Task Force has been badly damaged and early reports are that she is in difficulty. Rescue operations are in progress. I have no further details at present.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Woodward, 304

²³⁹ Freedman, Vol. II, 483

²⁴⁰ Secretary of the State for Defense John Nott had been asked by First Sea Lord Admiral Henry Leach and Admiral of the Fleet Lord Terence Lewin not to identify the ship before his "News at Ten" interview. See Freedman, Vol. II, 293 and Jeffery Ethell and Alfred Price, *Air War South Atlantic* (Macmillan Publishing Company: New York 1983), 151

In fact, the report was only referring to the loss of *Coventry*. The vagueness of the report led the Argentine air force to believe they had hit a major ship, perhaps even one of the carriers.²⁴¹ Knowing the Argentines would likely be listening to the BBC, the British kept their report deliberately vague as they did not want to fully disclose what had been hit and sunk. However, when news of the hit on the *Atlantic Conveyor* emerged, the anxieties of family and next of kin from both ships prompted the British government to clarify the very next morning at 11:45AM:

HMS *Coventry*, a destroyer, was hit and has been lost. The *Atlantic Conveyor*, a merchant ship requisitioned to support the fleet, was also hit and has had to be abandoned. The Harrier reinforcements she was carrying for the Task Force had already been disembarked. Rescue operations to recover the crews of these two ships have continued throughout the night.²⁴²

When British reporters who entered Port Stanley after the Argentine surrender on 14 June learned that the Argentine Hercules transports were still using the runway up to the last day of the war, British reporters were none too enthused with this discovery.²⁴³ For the British government, this did not matter and there were no attempts to apologize. If the raid on the Port Stanley runway had been reported as unsuccessful, combined with the controversial sinking of the *General Belgrano* the very next day on 2 May, the British government would have faced severe backlash from anti-war proponents and the Opposition, who most likely would have accused the British government of unnecessarily escalating the conflict. In this instance, the British government chose to lie to save face;

²⁴¹ Ethell and Price, 151

²⁴² Ibid, 151

²⁴³ Calvert, 112

the real objective of fabrication was to ensure that the overall mission continued. At the time, the lie calmed the “pain in the arse” journalists.

As it became evident the British were going to take Port Stanley, the government decided that the “the best publicity for the UK would be obtained by allowing journalists early access, while evidence of the Argentine occupation and fighting was still available and while the Task Force’s morale was still at its peak.”²⁴⁴ The British government was also especially concerned with Latin American and American media interpretations and reports following the conclusion of the war. Subsequently, the British government deemed that “it was important that Latin American journalists, who seldom did so, should visit the Falkland Islands and obtain the views of the Islanders at first hand.”²⁴⁵ The hope was that these Latin American journalists would not only portray the British in a positive light but also counter Argentine media and propaganda. The British especially wanted these journalists to see and report that the Falkland Islanders were ecstatic to see the British soldiers and the return to British rule. Typically very anti-Argentine, some Chilean journalists were “robustly pro-British in tone, at times so embarrassingly so as to run the risk of being counter-productive.”²⁴⁶ The British were relying on the Latin American perspective so much that when an exiled Chilean journalist “[lost] no opportunity to portray the British in a bad light”, and wrote a “jaundiced” piece on the

²⁴⁴ TNA: FCO 7/4475, Chief of Staff Minutes Part D. COS 75th Meeting Tuesday 15 June 1982 at 3:30pm

²⁴⁵ Ibid

²⁴⁶ TNA: FCO 7/4461, Media Coverage. 30 September 1982 from British Embassy in Santiago

British campaign, there were immediate attempts to discredit him.²⁴⁷ The journalist in question, Raul Sohr Jr., was very anti-British and very anti-colonial. Headlines for his work included “The Argentine soldiers fought for the Malvinas; the British soldiers fought to win this war,” while he claimed that:

The MoD official (who told me with more than a hint of satisfaction that I would need a passport because I would not be leaving British territory)...knew that I was going to be the first Latin Americans to visit the Malvinas since the British recapture. I could have reminded him that the Malvinanses need special permission to enter Great Britain. But no. I was not interested in restarting the polemic, only in beginning a journey to witness for myself what had happened in the Malvinas.

A crew member told me it cost the British government \$1,250,000 to bring us to the Falklands by DC10 and Hercules...I remembered that the total British aid to the Islands between 1976 and 1980 had been \$12 million.

Mr. Hunt [Governor of the Falklands] liked the idea of converting the archipelago into a multinational base led by the United States. But he did not wish to enter into details.²⁴⁸

He also argued that:

The ex-Governor, currently Civil Commissioner of the Falklands confesses, with certain candor, what London tries to deny: that the Malvinas are subjected to a colonial regime. The attitude of the British Government is explicable by their fear of stepping on to a slippery slope; if they admit that this is a colony they will lend credence to the Argentine thesis that the 1,800 inhabitants do not constitute a people but a form part of a colonial apparatus.²⁴⁹

The British wanted to maintain good public relations with Latin American countries and it did not help that Sr. Sohr was the first Latin American journalist to visit the islands after the war. He was well known in Latin America, and his work was published in

²⁴⁷ TNA: FCO 7/4461, Media Coverage. 30 September 1982 from British Embassy in Santiago

²⁴⁸ Ibid

²⁴⁹ Ibid

Chile's widest read paper La Tercera and in many other Latin American papers. Despite all of the hullabaloo about his articles, however, the efforts to discredit him were weak. The British tried to discredit his work by highlighting his exile from Chile and living and working situation in Mexico. The British asserted that Sr. Sohr, like other Latin American critics, was "politically motivated" and that his "anti-colonialist" stance was dictated by Moscow's allies.²⁵⁰ The British also cited his influence from Chilean and Mexican socialist parties as reasons for his stance. No other Latin American journalist was given as much attention in the British government as Sr. Sohr was. It appears he struck a major nerve.

At the start of the campaign, the former head of the CIA, Admiral Stansfield Turner, suggested on television that the British could face defeat.²⁵¹ It was no secret for the British that many high ranking American military officials viewed this war as peripheral and irrelevant in the Cold War. While the Americans did not want to see action and Soviet influence spread into their backyard, there was still an American sense of arrogance towards the conflict. In September 1982, Admiral Harry Train, then Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) privately told Admiral Woodward, "well there are no lessons to be learnt from your little war. Well no new ones anyway."²⁵² Publicly, Admiral Train rebuffed the suggestions that the Falklands War demonstrated that surface

²⁵⁰ TNA FCO 7/4461, Media Coverage. 30 September 1982 from British Embassy in Santiago

²⁵¹ Hastings and Jenkins, 126

²⁵² Obviously not impressed, Woodward called this the "most succinct briefing I had from an American ever! Down to 3 sentences and it told you exactly about the split. Here was the [SACLANT], who was pro-Argentine and not pro-British. However interesting is the fact that Admiral Jorge Anaya, the Argentine Naval Commander's was also Admiral Train's son's godfather. See Admiral Sandy Woodward, in "The Falklands War," seminar held 5 June 2002, 27

ships were still unacceptably vulnerable. Instead, he stated that if the British had had “proper carriers” from which Airborne Early Warning aircraft (AEW) could operate, ships like the HMS *Sheffield* would not have been lost.²⁵³ Moreover, he insisted that the large carriers, not missing the chance to emphasize the battleships being reactivated by the US Navy, were “designed and armored to enable them to remain operational despite receiving hits off the front [of the ship] which had sunk British destroyers and frigates in the South Atlantic.”²⁵⁴ Publicly and privately, the Americans were not enthusiastic about the British campaign as they feared too much praise would trigger negative reactions in Latin and South America. The Americans really did not think the Falklands War was that big a deal.

In December 1982, the government acknowledged the tensions between the media and government, which were fueled by “the absence on some occasions of sufficiently detailed and up to date situation reports from the task force.”²⁵⁵ Limitations imposed on communication systems, such as radio and electronic surveillance, caused tension between military and press personnel. However, they did blame press speculation and false Argentine propaganda as reasons why the British had to release information about

²⁵³ The HMS *Sheffield*, a Type 42 Destroyer, was sunk on 4 May in retaliation for the *General Belgrano* sinking. Part of the British defense budget was to stop the acquisition and revamping of AEW systems. Unfortunately, the *Sheffield* lacked this capability and was hit by an Exocet missile with little to no warning. Over 20 crewmen were lost.

²⁵⁴ TNA: FCO 7/4500, Re-capture of the Falkland Islands by British Forces—military operations. 30 June 1982 Letter to Rotrin (British embassy) from Thomas Hefresgate Oslo, Norway. Falklands: Interview by SACLANT

²⁵⁵ *The Falkland Campaign: The Lessons*. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty, December 1982, London Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. Point 257, 29

the operation before family notifications were completed.²⁵⁶ The debate between the media and government was never settled during the Falklands War. The British feared press speculation or leaks regarding foreign assistance as they could jeopardize those options. They were especially concerned with the Americans backing out, taking with them needed intelligence and logistical capabilities. Contingency plans for a British-Chilean coalition were not implemented; however they were also never fully dismissed. The British were again fearful of the speculating press blowing the cover on any potential covert operations or worse, isolating Chile from other Latin and South American countries. It was not just the British press that was speculating on future British combat action. It was also the Americans, Argentines, Germans and other Europeans who were all looking to sell newspapers. Learning from the American military-media debacle in Vietnam and with increasing technological capabilities for reporters to send news back home, from a military perspective, the British were more than justified in isolating the journalists travelling with the Task Force and limiting the details and briefings for the journalists in London. Although the Argentines were able to catch the British off-guard with the invasion, the British certainly did not want to lose any chances for foreign cooperation or opportunities to gain the upper hand over the Argentine military. While the press continued to speculate and sometimes report sensitive information, the British government was able to either counter or use the media to their advantage when need be. Even though the press thought they were being oppressed and censored, the British

²⁵⁶*The Falkland Campaign: The Lessons*. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence by Command of Her Majesty, December 1982, London Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Point 257, 29

government was able to secure sensitive intelligence, minimize the number of lives lost and recapture the Falkland Islands.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

*Since then, Britain, the colonial power, has refused to return the territories to the Argentine Republic, thus preventing it from restoring its territorial integrity.*²⁵⁷

- Argentina President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

*Britain will always be ready to defend the Falkland Islands.*²⁵⁸

- UK Prime Minister David Cameron

The Falklands War of 1982 did not alter the Cold War environment. In fact, it is often referred to as a “little war.” However, Admiral Sandy Woodward reminds us that “[the] only thing ‘little’ about our war was the total number of British servicemen directly involved, some twenty-five thousand, and of course, the time span of the fighting, only six weeks. But those had days, and occasionally hours, which seemed like eternity itself to those who fought there.”²⁵⁹ This war was neither irrelevant nor insignificant in the grand scheme of world affairs. It will also not be last time conflict arises over the Falkland Islands, largely thanks to the recent discovery of oil beds in the South Atlantic. In March 2013, the Falklands held a referendum in which 98.8% of the 92% turnout voted to remain British.²⁶⁰ As expected, the Argentines decried this referendum, attributing it to British propaganda. No one could have predicted Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s determination to recover the islands. The question remains: has she

²⁵⁷ “Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's letter to David Cameron,” *The Guardian*, 2 January 2013

²⁵⁸ “David Cameron promises to defend Falklands”, *The Telegraph*, 20 December 2013

²⁵⁹ Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis: Bluejacket Books, 1997), 348

²⁶⁰ BBC, "Falklands referendum: Voters choose to remain UK territory." *BBC News UK*, March 12, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21750909> (accessed December 12, 2013).

set a precedent for future British governments to respond with military force? Will the British always defend the Falklands? The British went to great lengths to protect their colony in 1982, sending a Task Force over 8,000 miles away to the South Atlantic. Will they do it again?

The documents challenge popular assumptions and interpretations about the war. The first interpretation is that British media stoked patriotism back home; while this is correct, the documents and other sources demonstrate the lengths the British government had to go to control the ever eager media. No doubt frustrated by the lack of information and length of travel, British journalists sometimes jeopardized the lives of servicemen in their attempts to sell newspapers. A second assumption is that the British and Argentines were alone in this war. Again, the documents reveal that British were covertly aided by the Americans, they considered asking Chile to join in operations and that they knew the Soviets were patrolling the South Atlantic. Lastly, controversy remains whether the sinking of the ARA *General Belgrano* was justified or a war crime. The British justifiably feared the Argentine navy. Serious consideration was given to sinking the Argentine carrier, *25th of May*, as she could seriously cripple or even halt the British campaign to recover the islands. Along with the documents, recent admissions by the *Belgrano*'s captain, analysis of the events on 2 May 1982 and breaking down the factors which stoked controversy only uphold the British decision to sink the *Belgrano*. It is time for those conspiracy theories to finally disappear.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Draft Statement Following Crippling or Sinking of Argentine Aircraft Carrier, 30 April 1982

1. The United Kingdom is entitled, in the exercise of its inherent right of self-defense as recognized in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, to take appropriate measures to protect its forces as well as its territory.
2. The Argentine carrier, the 25th May, when at large in the South Atlantic and operating within imminent striking range of our naval units, was a dangerous threat to those units—not only those in the TEZ itself but also to those in our vital sea lines of communication on which the Task Force is dependent.
3. On 23 April we gave a warning to the Argentine Government that any approach by Argentine warships or military aircraft which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of British forces in the South Atlantic would encounter the appropriate response. Subsequently, on 28 April, the Government declared a Total Exclusion Zone in the area of 200 nautical miles around the Falkland Islands.
4. The Argentine Government chose to ignore these warnings. On 29 April the Argentine Military Junta issued a communique declaring that it would treat as hostile all British shipping within 200 miles of the Argentine coast and within a 200 miles radius of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. Moreover, Argentine naval vessels, including the carrier, have been maneuvering at sea for several days.
5. The range of carrier-borne aircraft and their ability to launch stand-off weapons meant that the capacity of this carrier to make an effective strike against our units operated over a distance many times greater than in the case of an ordinary vessel. In addition, the speed and mobility of the carrier itself meant that it could, if it escaped surveillance even for a short period, bring itself within much closer launch range of our units without their having any effective warning. In these

- circumstances, the operation of the carrier at large in the area in which it was encountered in itself constituted a threat to our vessels of the kind against which they were warned in our notification of 23 April.
6. In the face of this threat, and of Argentina's declared intention to submit British forces to attack, the Government's duty was clear as it was right to act as it did. We are entitled and obliged to protect the lives and safety of our officers and men on the Task Force, which is there in defense of our rights and our people in the Falkland Islands. We are not prepared to tolerate hostile actions by the Argentine forces directed against our legitimate response to attempts by the Junta to perpetuate its armed aggression against the Falkland Islands while it continues the build-up of its forces there in flagrant defiance of Security Council Resolution 502.
 7. The Junta should be in no doubt that we do not, and will not, shirk our responsibilities.²⁶¹

²⁶¹ TNA:FCO 7/4566, Military Planning: Draft Statement crippling or sinking of Argentine Aircraft Carrier, from DH Gilmore, Emergency Unit, 30 April 1982

Appendix B

Notification to the Argentine Government, 1 May 1982

In announcing a Total Exclusion zone around the Falklands on 28 April, HMG made it clear that these measures are without prejudice to the right of the UK to take whatever additional measures may be needed in exercise of its right of self-defense, under Article 51 of the UN Charter. In light of the Argentine statement of 30 April of an intention to consider hostile British vessels within 200 miles of the Argentine mainland, the Falklands and their dependencies, the British government has decided on the following measures. The Argentine carrier *THE 25TH OF MAY* is hereby warned not to move East of a line 45° West or South of a line 38° South. If the *25TH OF MAY* moves beyond this area she will be regarded as constituting an immediate threat to British forces in the South Atlantic and will be liable to be dealt with accordingly. Further, if any attack anywhere in the South Atlantic is made upon British naval or air forces by an Argentine unit, all other Argentine naval units, including the carrier *THE 25TH OF MAY*, even if she is still within the area defined in this communication, and all Argentine military operation at sea in the South Atlantic or in air space over the South Atlantic will be regarded as hostile and are liable to be dealt with accordingly.²⁶²

²⁶² TNA: FCO 7/4610: UK Task Force, Attack on Argentine Aircraft Carrier, To Prime Minister from Secretary of State, 1 May 1982

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