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The Falklands War: Did Britain invite a crisis?

Ostrander, Robert G., M.A.

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THE FALKLANDS WAR: DID BRITAIN INVITE A CRISIS?

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Political Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Robert G. Ostrander

May, 1989

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Dr. Alden Voth

Dr. Kent Schellenger

Dr. Charles Kunsman

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

THE FALKLANDS WAR: DID BRITAIN INVITE A CRISIS?

by Robert G. Ostrander

Taking into account Britain's present day political and defense commitments, this thesis argues that the decision to retain the Falkland Islands as a colony was a major foreign policy blunder. It was a blunder for two reasons. First, Britain's military capabilities were insufficient and not equal to the challenge of furnishing a viable defense for the islands (this would have led to the strategic overextension of the British navy). And second, Britain's economic woes put her in a precarious position to resuscitate a flagging Falklands economy.

The thesis also explores a secondary but related question pertaining to the warning evidence that indicated the Argentines were preparing to attack. It argues that not only did the government's decision not to transfer sovereignty to Argentina cause the crisis, but also, the ineptitude of Britain's defense establishment at trying to interpret Argentina's political discourse contributed greatly toward the makings of the invasion.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1946, in an instructive debate in the House of Commons, Winston Churchill said:

> Foreign policy in not a game, nor is it an academic question, and [it is] not an ideological question . . . . Foreign policy is in fact a method of protecting our own people from the threat of another war, and it is against that criterion that the foreign policy of any government is to be measured.[1]

With regard to the Falkland Islands War of 1982, it would be fatuous to take this insight out of context, for it was uttered at a time when the world had surfaced from under the rubble of a global war and was catapulted straightway into a tumultuous era of cold war replete with the consequences and responsibilities of nuclear weapons. Relative to these events then, the ephemeral nature of the Falklands War--approximately ten weeks, the resources committed to it, the number of participants involved, and the objectives sought--does not have the great standing of the momentous past.

But neither should the Falklands War between Great Britain and Argentina be fated to become just another historical curiosity. This is because Churchill's axiom, that a nation's first and foremost duty is to protect its

[1]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 427 (1946): 1706.

national interests and safeguard the lives of its people, highlights our core concern: whether or not the Falkland Islands War channeled Britain's resources away from their legitimate national interests.

Taking into account Britain's present day political and defense commitments, this thesis will argue that the decision to retain the Falkland Islands as a colony was a major foreign policy blunder. It was a blunder for two reasons. First, Britain's military capabilities were insufficient and not equal to the challenge of furnishing a viable defense for the islands. If the British decided to make the Falklands one of their defense priorities, they undoubtedly would have been faced with the strategic over-extension of their armed forces. And second, Britain's economic woes put her in a poor position to contribute much needed investment capital in order to develop and reinvigorate a depressed Falklands economy.

This thesis will also explore a secondary but related question pertaining to the warning evidence that indicated the Argentines were preparing to attack. It will argue that not only did the government's decision not to transfer sovereignty to Argentina cause the crisis, but also, the ineptitude of Britain's defense establishment at trying to interpret Argentina's political discourse in the three months prior to the invasion contributed greatly toward the makings of the invasion.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF THE BRITISH INVOLVEMENT

British and Argentine asseverations notwithstanding, it is not altogether clear who first discovered the Falkland Islands or precisely when. Located approximately four hundred miles from the Argentine mainland, the Falklands or Las Malvinas, have generated a great deal of controversy over which explorer actually sighted them first. Several nations have strong candidates for the honor. The Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci was given credit as the first to sight the islands in 1502 by the Frenchman Bougainville.[1] It is even possible that Magellen found them in the 1540's.[2] The Dutch complicate the matter further by claiming that van Weerdt reconnoitered the islands in 1598.[3] As for the British, the islands may have been sighted around 1592 by John Davis of the ship Desire when he reported that he had seen certain unfamiliar isles lying off the eastern shore of Argentina. Almost a full century expired before the crew of the British ship Welfare initiated the first recorded landing on 27 June 1690. On

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[1]Jeffrey D. Myhre, "Title to the Falkland-Malvinas Under International Law," Millennium 12 (Spring 1983): 29.

[2]Ibid., 29.

[3]Ibid., 29.

this occasion, John Strong named the islands after the then Treasurer of the Royal Navy, Viscount Falkland. The French conducted their own landing ceremony in 1701.

It was not until the close of the Seven Years War in 1763 that France and Britain made concerted efforts to colonize the islands. Recognizing their strategic value, Bougainville, acting under the authority of Louis XV, arrived at East Falkland on 31 January 1764, and took formal possession on 5 April 1764 on behalf of France. The French established Port Louis, the first settlement on either West or East Falkland. The tiny French enclave of twenty-eight people increased to eighty the following year when Bougainville returned with more settlers to what was known as the Falkland Islands in England, but which the French had named Iles Malouines after their port city in Brittany, St. Malo.

It seems though, that France had encroached upon Spanish territory. Pope Alexander VI's line of demarcation of 1493, which ran from north to south about 350 miles west of the Azores, allowed Spain to claim all undiscovered lands west of the line. As an ally, France was not predisposed to antagonize Spain and, in 1766, relinquished her claim for a nominal amount of cash. The French governor, de Nerville, was succeeded by the first Spanish governor, Felipe Ruiz Puente, the islands' name was Hispanicized into Islas Malvinas, and Port Louis was renamed Puerto Soledad.

Equally determined, and after an exhaustive expedition undertaken to try to find evidence of other inhabitants, Britain's John Byron of the HMS Dolphin planted the Union Jack on 12 January 1765 in the name of King George III. The settlement he founded, Port Egmont, on Saunders Island off West Falkland, which ran concurrent to the French-Spanish settlement, would soon become a major irritant between the two nations.

It was in 1770 that the Spanish decided to impress upon the British the gravity of their claim by dispatching a frigate and fourteen hundred men to Port Egmont to evacuate the British. With the bulldog spirit that is so characteristic of the Falklanders, Captain George Farmer of the Favorite, prepared the port for a seige on 4 June 1770. On 10 June, Spain's commander attacked and with superior force, compelled Farmer to surrender the settlement.

In pressing her claim, Spain nearly brought her country to the brink of war with Britain. After a stern diplomatic protest by Great Britain, and after arduous rounds of negotiations, two peace treaties were signed in London in 1771.

The Spanish disavowed the attack, agreed to restore the settlement at Port Egmont to Britain, but, most importantly, reaffirmed Spain's sovereignty over the islands. While Britain accepted the Spanish compensation for the destruction of Port Egmont, she remained silent on Spain's assertion of sovereignty.

Inexplicably, three years later, Britain evacuated Port Egmont. A plaque asserting Great Britain's claim was fashioned to the blockhouse, and by 20 May 1774, not a Briton remained on the Falklands. The Spanish remained on the islands throughout the eighteenth century, but their presence grew more precarious by the turn of the century.

By 1810 the Spanish empire was in full rebellion, and Spanish authority began to recede so that by 1811, one year after Buenos Aires had founded its own government, the Spanish garrison was recalled from Puerto Soledad and the islands were left uninhabited.

To the new United Provinces of Rio de la Plata, established in 1816, the void left by the two European powers was too tempting to pass up, and they eagerly filled it. The successful administration of these South Atlantic islands could help galvanize and solidify the new government in Buenos Aires if it proved capable of maintaining its authority. In any case, Buenos Aires took possession of the Falklands/Malvinas in a ceremony in 1820.

The 1820's were essentially the only decade in which Argentina exercised effective possession of the islands. Buenos Aires appointed a Governor of the Malvinas in 1829 with the expectation of exploiting the islands' resources, the chief attraction being sealing.

While Buenos Aires was earnestly pressing her claim to sovereignty at every opportunity, the military capabil-

ity needed to enforce her claim, often the final arbiter in such matters, was conspicuous by its absence.

The first of two hammerblows occurred in 1831 when the Captain of the USS Lexington obliterated Puerto de Soledad and deported the settlers, in reprisal for the capture of three U.S. fishing vessels, and the incarceration of their crews. At this juncture, the British government delievered the coup de grace by dispatching two frigates to reassert her claim to sovereignty--one that she had never relinquished. On 3 January 1833, in a civilized and peaceful procession, the British deported the fifty Argentineans. From that date, until 2 April 1982, the Falklands were continuously administered as a British colony.

Throughout the four hundred year history of the Falkland Islands, the year 1833 is the single most important date in a political dispute between the two countries, each of which purports to have the weighty principles of international law on its side. When the British quit the islands in 1774, they claimed to have preserved sovereignty. To Buenos Aires, this has always been an anomaly. Argentina reasoned that by Spanish discovery, prior occupation by France, Spanish acquisition of French rights, continuous Spanish control, and Argentine inheritance of its mother country's property, it should possess title. It is clear, then, that to get at the heart of the matter, the question of whether or how title passed from Spain to Argentina

must be investigated.

The question is asked,

> When Spain's governor left in 1810, could that be interpreted as a manifestation of the intent to quit the islands? If so, the territory became terra nullius [no man's land], and Argentina's occupation of 1820 was completely legal. If not, [and] Spain undertook no action to stop nor protest the Argentine occupation; was that tacit acquiescence? Whatever the case, Britain had no claim after 1774, and its protest in 1829 came too late to prevent Argentina from gaining title by uti possidetis [this holds that Latin American states succeed to Spanish territorial boundaries].[4]

The question of whether or not Spanish abandonment of the Falklands was ad hoc, done out of military expedience, and not with the intention of handing them over to Argentina is a matter of historical interpretation.[5]

> What is directly relevant is the question of whether the islands were res nullius. For this it would not in any way be sufficient to show that there had been an act of dereliction by Britain, which as we have seen cannot be proved, and which is denied by British publicists. It would also be necessary to prove an act of dereliction by Spain. There is no evidence that this is the case. Indeed, Spain's refusal to recognize the new state of affairs in the Americas, and in particular her attempts in the 1820's to reconquer the Rio de la Plata itself, is strong supporting evidence to the contrary. If therefore, Spain was the sovereign power in the Falklands in 1811, it was still the sovereign power in 1820, and for that matter in 1833, for the brief period of Argentine occupation was much too short to enable Argentina to gain a title by perscription, even in the absence of Spanish protests.[6]

In the early twentieth century Britain began to re-

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[4]Myhre, "Title to the Falklands/Malvinas Under International Law," p.33.

[5]Peter Calvert, "Sovereignty and the Falklands crisis," International Affairs 59 (Summer 1983): 411.

[6]Ibid.

examine the historical record of the Falklands vis-a-vis the conflicting claims to their title. In 1910, the Foreign Office prepared a forty-nine page memorandum which became "the accepted British government point of reference on the question."[7] After careful scrutiny of the findings, British officials began questioning the belief that Britain's claim was ironclad. "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Argentine Government's attitude is not altogether unjustified," said Gerald Spicer, the head of the Foreign Office's American department, and went on to state that, "our action has been somewhat high-handed."[8]

Sir Malcolm Robertson, the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires during the late 1920's highlighted this view when, after reading the 1910 memorandum, he wrote to Arnold Hodson, the Governor of the Falklands on 15 December 1927:

> . . . the Argentine attitude is neither "ridiculous" nor "childish". . . until I received that memorandum myself a few weeks ago I had no idea of the strength of the Argentine case nor the weakness of our. I had assumed that our right to the Falkland Islands was unassailable. This is very far from being the case.[9]

By 1933, the centennial of her settlement, Britain adjudged it more advantageous and prudent to ground her

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[7]Peter J. Beck, "The Anglo-Argentine Dispute Over Title to the Falkland Islands: Changing British Perceptions on Sovereignty Since 1910," Millennium 12 (Spring 1983): 12.

[8]Ibid., 13.

[9]Ibid.

legal title upon what is known as prescription--that is, by continuous occupation. The British, feeling the strength of an ill wind that would blow them no good, tacked, with the intention of changing course to the safer shores of post-1833 criteria--prescription--and not pre-1833 criteria--discovery and settlement.[10]

If it was the concomitant of naval power and the reliance on perscription that maintained British hegemony in the Falklands and her dependencies up until the Second World War, it was inescapable that a new era, the era of the United Nations, would redefine British diplomatic strategy vis-a-vis the Falklands. The British demarche would be based on the principle of self-determination. This invocation no doubt was designed to counteract the swelling popularity that decolonization and nationalistic expression was experiencing in places like Africa and the Middle East.

The British position regarding self-determination stood, and still stands, on the following affirmations. First is that self-determination is universally approved as an imperative. The many solemn mentions of the term in several U.N. documents and declarations are evidence of this. Second, self-determination means, "Let the people decide their destiny." Third, "the people" means the inhabitants. Fourth, the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands

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[10] Ibid., 15.

have declared their firm wish to remain under British sovereignty. And lastly, the world, and in particular the U.N. should approve the maintance of British authority over the islands.[11]

As redoubtable as this position might have been, the United Nations landmark 1960 "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" prompted the U.N. to subsume the dispute by bringing it under the jurisdiction of a sub-committee of a Special Committee empowered to help facilitate decolonization. The Special Committee's report, Resolution (No. 2065) of 16 December 1965, revealed that while Britain would not negotiate sovereignty, she would be amenable to discussions on measures that would improve the quality of life for the Falklanders.[12] The Committee also urged the two governments of Argentina and Britain to resolve their differences peacefully.[13]

While Britain defends her claim to sovereignty over the Falklands by appealing to either the fact of first discovery, or to prescription, or to self-determination: and while Argentina posits that the "Malvinas" are hers by right of her Spanish inheritance, it is only reasonable

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[11]Denzil Dunnett, "Self-determination and the Falklands," International Affairs 59 (Summer 1983): 416-418.

[12]Falkland Islands Review: Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, Chairman The Rt. Hon. The Lord Franks, Cmnd. 8787 (London: HNSO, 1983): p. 4.

[13]Ibid.

to concede that perhaps both cases have merit. Invariably though, this turbid, taxing, and chiefly legalistic debate over sovereignty obscured the real issue at hand for Britain. That issue was, how, in an era characterized by a shedding of imperial responsibilities, could Britain make an economic and military commitment to the South Atlantic region in general and the people of the Falkland Islands in particular.

CHAPTER II

EVALUATING THE BRITISH COMMITMENT TO THE ISLANDS

By almost any standards, the Falklands are a daunting place. Blessed with neither the fantastic material resources of an India, nor endowed with the sunny, salubrious climate of a Jamaica, nor even recognized as a strategic asset as is Gibralter, it is difficult to imagine how this colony could serve Britain except as the South Atlantic counterpart to Devil's Island. The surrounding ocean is icy and tumultuous, the soil unproductive, and the grassland that sustains the wool industry "has been in slow but steady decline since 1919."[1] This is one of several findings of the Shackelton Report of 1976, undertaken by a survey team headed by Lord Shackelton, son of the famous polar explorer. They were charged with the task of gathering an inventory of the islands' resources and ascertaining their potential for development. And although the report argues the case for investment, it offers-up, with perspicacity and frankness, the frightful spectacle of a completely arrested culture caused by years of neglect by London.

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[1]Lord Shackelton, Economic Survey of the Falkland Islands (London: HMSO, 1976), pp. 118-23.

Belying the earnest declarations made by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the Falklanders wishes were paramount is the reality that the Falklands, once the Falkland Islands Company had been given a monopoly over trade, had never been more than an afterthought in Parliament. In fact, Lord Carrington, the British Foreign Secretary until his resignation in April 1982, is supposed to have admitted that it rated number 242 on the Foreign Office's list of priorities.[2]

The decision by Britain to grant a virtual monopoly to the Falkland Islands Company (FIC), while providing the islanders with the sustenance for survival, has had important repercussions, economically, psychologically, and politically, that have no doubt contributed to the stagnation of their society.

The FIC owns 40 percent of the land, controls all shipping, runs the auctions at which the price of wool is decided, and serves as the leading financial institution in the islands.[3] In Port Stanley, "there is little choice of employers"[4] and the FIC-owned "West Store" dominates retailing with two-thirds of all sales in Stanley and half of the sales in the islands.[5] These circumstances have allowed the company to transfer five million pounds in prof-

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[2]Walter Little, "The Falklands Affair: a review of the literature, "Political Studies 32 (1984): 297.

[3]Lord Shackelton, Economic Survey, p. 19.

[4]Ibid., 79.

[5]Ibid., 243.

its to the United Kingdom between 1955 and 1975.[6] A prosperous era for the FIC indeed but at the rate of 250,000 pounds a year, it meant in 1974 the equivalent of more than 20 percent of the total income of all the inhabitants.

One possible source of relief for the islanders was the hope that Prime Minister Thatcher offered in 1979, that of privatization.

Now, in the strict sense of the word, privatization meant the liquidation or selling-off of the government's shares in corporations, especially those in which the government was the majority stockholder. This would not only provide the government with much needed revenue but would free the economy from many encumbering government regulations. Most important of all, though, it would give more Britons a stake in the economy by making them shareholders again. The strategy would reinvigorate a capitalist segment of the economy that had been allowed to atrophy for decades. However, in the case fo the Falklands, while the FIC was in private hands, few if any of those hands were native-born Falklanders. The Falklanders were "excluded" from becoming stockholders of the islands' most prosperous institution due mostly to a vicious cycle that perpetuated the islanders' financial plight. Beholden to FIC stores and landlords, the Falklanders found it extremely difficult to attain the level of financial well-being necessary in order to invest in the FIC.

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[6] Ibid., iv.

As the Shackelton Report points out about the eighteen hundred member enclave:

> Most native born islanders of what they themselves call "the working class" live in conditions of dependence, which are attractive in immediate and material terms but which offer no encouragement for engagement in economic, social or political development, since any [sic] of them have a stake in the place. This applies as much at the collective as at the individual level. Apart from the right to vote for the small group of people who make up the Legislative Council (dominated, at least numerically, by farm owners and managers) they have no real opportunity to influence decisions on public affairs . . . . It is clear that the distinctly low educational standards in the islands leave locally taught people at a disadvantage in dealing with farm managers/owners and UK recruited persons, heightened the sense of dependence and relative inferiority [sic].[7]

The ennui had to be countered by a strong stimulant in order to take advantage of the Falklanders' assets, The Shackelton Report enumerates several attributes: "honesty, versatility, physical hardiness and a capacity for sustained effort."[8] However, the report followed with a discouraging rejoinder:

> Yet there appears to be other less encouraging features, such as lack of confidence and enterprise at the individual and community level, and a degree of acceptance of their situation which verges on apathy.[9]

It is worth mentioning that on 3 April 1982, in a debate on the Falklands in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Thatcher said, "The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race.

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[7]Ibid., 81.

[8]Ibid., 74.

[9]Ibid.

Their way of life is British."[10] In part this was true, but with important differences. By no stretch of the imagination did the Falklanders enjoy the equality of opportunity and diversity that the British did since no islanders were represented as either shareholders or directors of the company which owns the FIC.

Another measure of the paucity of freedom pertains to the power structure of the islands. The colony is presided over by a Governor appointed from London. He is kept informed by a Legislative Council of eight, six of whom are elected by the islanders (the other two being ex officio). However, the true power seems to exist in a conciliabule called the Executive Council, a body of six, of which two members are appointed by the Governor, two ex officio selected from the judiciary, and the other two from the Legislative Council. This robbed the islanders of a majority that they originally enjoyed in their Legislative Council. The Stanley Town Council, which the Shackelton Report describes as "one of the very few potential counterweights to government" was inexplicably dissolved in the early 1970's.[11]

The absence of an authentic representative body, and the demise of that most direct and decidedly most responsive

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[10]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 6th series, 21 (1982): 638.

[11]Lord Shackelton, Economic Survey, pp. 74, 81.

political unit--the town council, seems to have had two causes. The first was the wealth of the FIC and the influence that this group exerted over the islands. It benefited by keeping public opinion from airing its views in organized governing bodies--like the Stanley Town Council. The FIC believed that a strident town council might voice collective dissatisfaction with the quality of life so loudly, that London would take notice. However, even had word of Falklander discontent reached politicians in London, it would have had to contend with a widespread case of apathy. In granting full internal self-government to the Falklanders in 1951, London should have assumed the responsibility that comes with ownership--of fashioning a structured, democratic, representative framework for the islanders. Instead, this deprivation of local power was especially demoralizing to the Falklanders when their appeal for full British citizenship was rejected in Parliament in the British Nationality Act of 1981. In the gloom of isolation, and with morale sagging, it is only understandable that the islanders might have felt a "loss of Britishness."[12]

This "loss of Britishness" though, was not strictly an intangible one, not just a diminution of the islanders' status, or a blow to their egos, although they complained that this would make them "Argentine passport-holders in all

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[12]Lawrence Freedman, "The War of the Falkland Islands," Foreign Affairs 61 (Fall 1982): 198.

but name."[13] The Thatcher government knew all along, even at the time the bill went to the floor for its first reading, that if they made a Kelper (a native of the Falklands) the political equal alongside any Cornishman or Highlander, for example, it would cause considerable angst in Buenos Aires and effectively undermine what common ground the two sides shared. The "loss" then, was a clarion call to the Falklanders that the Thatcher government, while it in no way would capriciously hand over the islands to the Argentines, it would at least be amenable to exploring the possibility of negotiating sovereignty. And for a majority of the Falklanders, the utterance of the word "sovereignty" drew them together like moths gathering at a light.

There is a consistent record of official British attempts in the last decade to negotiate sovereignty. Their major thrust was to arrive at a settlement that protected the lives of the residents while transferring formal soversignty of the terrain to Argentina. Pulling against this main current of British policy, though, was a Conservative backbench implacability that emphasized the islanders' wishes to remain "British". These MP's were constantly on guard against policy initiatives designed to transfer sovereignty to Argentina. Adding to Conservative opposition were left-wing Labor Party MP's who were opponents of Argentina's mil-

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[13] Economist, 19 June 1982.

itary regime.

Nevertheless, attempts have been made to identify and to evaluate the feasibility of several long-term solutions to transfer sovereignty to Argentina. The most frequently discussed option since 1979 has been leaseback.[14] The precedent for lease arrangements for the Falklands comes from Britain's negotiations with the People's Republic of China over Hong Kong. The Sino-British Agreement of 1984 showed some promise, prior to the 1982 war, of establishing a reference frame often called the "Hong Kong solution". The scheme seemed to offer a modus vivendi. The Argentine government would receive titular sovereignty and the islanders would remain under British administration and retain their own laws and customs for the duration of the lease. Above all, it offered a "mode of controlled change" with the purpose in mind of establishing one over-arching, fundamental accord, in order to be able to reconcile more minor differences.[15]

Initially, the leaseback option was only one of four alternatives handed down from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the summer of 1979 at the inception of the Thatcher administration. The other options were: first of all, to maintain a "Fortress Falklands." This policy envisaged the

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[14]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, pp. 17, 19, 23.

[15]Peter Beck, "The future of the Falkland Islands: a solution made in Hong Kong?" International Affairs 61 (Autumn 1985): 648.

deployment and maintenance of defensive forces in anticipation of a siege by Argentina. The second option was to relinquish the islands, offering to settle the islanders elsewhere. Another proposal suggested that the negotiations proceed, but in a desultory fashion.[16]

These were the four options that Nicholas Ridley, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, took with him on his visit to the Falklands on 12 June 1979 in order to discover which choice the islanders preferred. No sooner had Ridley met with the Falkland Island's Council, then it was made expressly clear to him that they were in favor of a lengthy freeze on negotiations or, in other words, the "Fortress Falklands" option. This was clearly not what the Foreign Office wanted to hear.

On the fact of it, it appeared that there was a unanimity of opinion regarding the wishes of the Falklanders. However, the British government's findings after the war indicated that "on leaseback Islander opinion appeared to be divided, with a substantial minority opposed to it and the majority undecided."[17] One unintimidated Falkland farmer, part of the "undecided", stated, "Most of the people on the islands believe that under the Argentine flag the islands can be developed and improved."[18] Similar was the

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[16]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 20.

[17]Ibid., 23.

[18]Guardian (London), 30 April 1982.

story of a sheep shearer who took out Argentine nationality in support of Argentina and Argentina's claim to the islands because "life there [in the Falklands] is so boring."[19] Indeed, the younger and more worldly islanders seemed to be more sympathetic to the idea of some accommodation or modus vivendi with Argentina; and it was estimated that between a third and a half of the eighteen hundred population might have supported leaseback.[20]

The prime force behind the leaseback strategy was the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington. Recognizing that the British "commitment" was diminishing year by year with alarming speed, he believed that leaseback would be in the best interests of the islanders as well as Great Britain. As far as the "wishes" of the islanders were concerned, he viewed the "Fortress Falklands" choice as tantamount to postponing a crisis.

A more inopportune time could not have been chosen, though, to take up the debate in the Defense Committee, let alone the House of Commons. At this particular time, the national political debate had been focused upon the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe initiative for complete national independence. The last thing the Government needed was some "agitating" minister of state proposing to "hand over" yet another overseas possession. For this reason, cabinet dis-

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[19] Times (London), 29 April 1982.

[20] Economist, 19 June 1982.

cussions were put off until the Rhodesian crisis had been dealt with.

In July 1980, the Defense Committee picked up where it had left off, with the intention of reviewing Lord Carrington's and Ridley's proposal of leaseback for the Falklands. Finding it an agreeable alternative, the proposal was approved, and Ridley was sent on his way to sound out the islanders' views.

Responding to Ridley's proposal with typical islander obstinacy, the Falkland Islands Joint Council passed a motion on 6 January 1981 that was tinged with hostility:

> While this House does not like any of the ideas put forward by Mr. Ridley for a possible settlement of the sovereignty dispute with Argentina, it agrees that Her Majesty's Government should hold further talks with the Argentines at which the British delegation should seek an agreement to freeze the dispute over sovereignty for a specified period of time.[21]

Suggestions as to how the islanders proposed to "freeze" a dispute between one country, whose imperial responsibilities had been in decline for several decades, and another country, whose irredentist designs on "Las Malvinas" were intensifying and gathering momentum in the U.N., would have been most welcome by Britain. To those who advocated a "freeze," it could only have meant two things: that they believed the conflict would miraculously vanish into thin air, or, that, that most interesting of international dip-

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[21] Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 23.

lomatic phenomena--Micawberism--the principle that something would turn up--would indeed turn up.

One of the few benefits that Britain could bestow upon the Falkland Islands was some form of deterrence under its naval umbrella. However, the islanders were ignorant of the fact that deterrence is a precarious framework whereby an opponent who aspires and who is continually frustrated in attempts to change the status quo, may very well become unpredictable.[22]

Equally important is that the only true blessing of successful deterrence is that it can buy time:

> . . . time in which some of the conflict-generating or conflict-exacerbating elements in a historical situation can abate, so that deterrence will no longer be necessary or is critical for the maintenance of peace.[23]

Decades of time, which should have shown the way to a policy of reconciliation with Argentina, had all but expired on the Falklanders.

Needless to say the refusal of the powers-that-be in the Falklands to go along with leaseback, was disheartening to Lord Carrington. Not only did he perceive the unacceptability of the freeze to Argentina (which Argentina did renounce in February 1981) but also predicted that Argentine bellicosity would grow in proportion to the intractability of the Falklanders, and that Britain would

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[22]George, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, p. 5.

[23]Ibid.

have to make contingency plans to fortify the islands' neglected defensive ramparts.[24]

In the meantime the leaseback idea had received a thumping by MP's of all political stripes back in London. Ridley's report back to the House of Commons on 2 December 1980, was greeted by derision and a fusillade of bombastic indignation. Most MP's attitudes were summed up by the comment of one member who asked, "Why can't the foreign office leave the matter alone."[25]

The highly critical and cynical position taken by the islanders and Parliament was abetted by the "absence of informed debate" on the merits of leaseback or any of the other prospective solutions.[26] It did not help matters when the Thatcher government made no effort to educate Conservative Party backbenchers on the international realities of the situation. Deprived of helpful information and the requisite time to give the matters at hand thoughtful judgement, compounded by the opposition of a lively "Keep the Falklands British" lobby, it was not suprising that the leaseback question was considered in an "emotive and myopic" manner.[27]

At this point in time, it seemed hopeless that Ridley and the Foreign Office could resuscitate such a flagging

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[24]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 23.

[25]Economist, 19 June 1982.

[26]Beck, "The future of the Falkland Islands," p. 648.

[27]Ibid.

policy. Given the apathy and ignorance of the British public, and the coolness of the Prime Minister toward leaseback, it is amazing that the cause was able to sustain any momentum at all. However, on 30 June 1981, an undaunted Ridley called for a major review of leaseback strategy by the Foreign Office. The centerpiece of the discussion was a paper submitted by the Assistant Under Secretary of State, J.B. Ure. It laid out his thoughts about trying to get the Falklanders to agree to some sort of accommodation with Argentina. His impression of the islanders, gathered while on a visit in early June, was that while there was not a uniform opinion dead set against leaseback, the Falklanders would have to be coaxed or educated about the merits of the idea. He included measures to reassure and entice them, including: assurances of access to the United Kingdom, a resettlement scheme for anyone dissatisfied with any aspects of an eventual accord with Argentina, further land distribution schemes, and a promise of economic development.[28]

Also not idle, and lending support to Ridley, was the British Ambassador in Buenos Aires, A.J. Williams. Annoyed by the "backsliding" of the Falklanders and wary of a restive Argentine military junta, he advocated a vigorous education campaign to inform Britons of the costs of defending the islands.

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[28] Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 25.

Bowing to pressure from the islanders, whose Governor, Rex Hunt, stated forthrightly that the Falklanders had washed their hands of the whole affair, Foreign Secretary Carrington denounced Ridley's and William's plans for a propaganda campaign directed at Falklanders and Britons alike. He declared:

> . . . domestic political constraints must at this stage continue to prevent us from taking any steps which might be interpreted either as putting pressure on the Islanders or as overruling their wishes.[29]

What then would replace the leaseback option--an option in itself not backed by Carrington or Thatcher with even a modicum of enthuasism or support. One option was to open negotiations on leaseback without islander support. This was quickly ruled out as unthinkable because of Britain's longstanding belief in the primacy of the wishes of the Falklanders. The other option was to brace themselves for an onslaught of aggressive actions by Argentina and prepare civil and military contingency plans to counter the consequences. This took the British all the way back to square one--the "Fortress Falklands" option.

In formulating contingency plans, the British government would be forced to overcome formidable logistical problems and confront the reality of a multi-million pound price tag for the whole operation--a commitment that in the past it had dismissed as unthinkable.

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[29]Ibid., 28.

In the event of a breakdown in relations between Great Britain and Argentina, it would be likely that Argentina would suspend air service delivery of food stuffs and other commodities like fuel. The Foreign Office relied on the Overseas Development Administration to supply recommendations. Ruling out long-haul jets originating from Britain as impractical, and discounting the use of runways from other Latin American nations, it was thought that the only alternative was to engage the South African government's cooperation in using their airports as stations. Britain's request to South Africa probably would have been granted, but it all became a moot point when it was discovered that it would cost sixteen million pounds to lengthen the Stanley airstrip from its original 4,000 feet to 10,000-12,000 feet to accommodate the larger aircraft.[30]

If it was thought that civilian contingency plans would pinch the British budget too tightly, then the military contingency plans would prove absolutely prohibitive. Such a budget-wrecking plan as the deployment of a carrier task force, was the only possible military solution in case of an Argentine invasion. The dreaded military commitment that Britain had tried to avoid for so many years by substituting bluff for a realistic goal of leaseback, was the one she finally saddled herself with by the time

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[30]Ibid., 31.

war came.[31]

From the German Agadir incident in 1911 to the American deployment of warships in the Persian Gulf in 1987, the dispatching of naval task forces to hot spots around the world has served to challenge, enforce, coerce, protect, or deny. It has no doubt become a highly standardized, "even slightly ritualized codebook for the demonstration of a commitment."[32] This was particularly true for Great Britain whose Royal navy was entrusted with the responsibility of fending off challenges to the most varied and far-flung empire in history.

It is certainly no revelation that since 1945, British puissance has diminished while the responsibilities of her alliance partner and new armiger, the United States, has continuously swelled. The postwar reformation thrust Britain into an assymetrical relationship with the United States, with Britain as a crucial but nevertheless junior partner in a regional defense pact. The success that Britain enjoyed and the measure of her worth as an ally to NATO would be dependent on how well she adapted to her new niche. So, with her divestment of empire and retreat east of Suez, Britain was no longer concerned with global commitments, but pledged to the duty of regional defense.

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[31]Gerald W. Happle, "Intelligence and Warning Lessons," in Military Lessons of the Falkland Islands War: Views from the United States, ed. Bruce W. Watson and Peter Dunn (Boulder Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), p. 111.

[32]George, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, p. 16.

Like the house of cards which is vulnerable to the slightest disturbance, the British defense policy of Margaret Thatcher was built around a given budget and given tasks, and was susceptible to untimely added expenditures. Nowhere, from 1979 until the Falklands War, "did a viable contingency plan refer to the possibility of conflict in South America," simply because this overseas defense commitment would have led to the strategic overextension of British resources.[33]

The defense program of Great Britain can be compartmentalized into four main areas of responsibility, each of which has been sedulously cultivated by every prime minister since the inception of NATO in 1949.[34] Once these areas are more meticulously defined, it becomes even more clear that Britain had wedded herself to a strategic defense policy that could only have been depleted and deranged by the addition of an extra-hemispheric conflict like the Falkland Islands dispute.

As one of the five known members in the nuclear club, Britain has an arsenal, albeit a tiny one, of strategic weapons in the form of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM's) and theater nuclear weapons committed to NATO. Britain's nuclear commitment is one of her most vital tasks.

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[33] Virginia Gamba, The Falklands/Malvinas War. A Model for North-South Crisis Prevention. (Boston: Allen and Unwin Inc., 1987), : 59.

[34] The United Kingdom Defense Programme: The Way Forward. Cmnd. 8288 (London: HMSO, 1981): p. 2.

Second, there is the defense of the homeland. The next pledge is to the defense of the European mainland. And last, Britain is responsible for maintaining security in the Eastern Atlantic.[35]

Margaret Thatcher was no less committed to the defense of Western Europe than her predecessors. Indeed, from the very beginning, she sought to improve the quality and quantity of the British contribution in two important ways: a conversion of her aging nuclear strategic deterrent--the Polaris--to the new Trident system, and an upgrading of Britain's home defenses. However, if the two programs were to be implemented, the government would have to make major cuts in those aspects of the military budget which it believed had no credible role in British or European defense.[36] The Trident missle system, improved air defense ground radar and communications systems, more air-to-air and surface-to-air missles, and the increase of U.K. based fighters by one third by 1986, meant that the cost-cutting axe would have to fall on the Royal Navy's surface fleet--namely the carriers.

The carriers were chosen for what seemed like sound reasons because the other significant part of the Royal Navy was its anti-submarine function. It would have been unthinkable and contrary to Thatcher's European plan to

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[35]Ibid., 1, 2.

[36]Gamba, The Falklands/Malvians War, p. 66.

force cuts in a part of the fleet that provided 70 percent of the anti-submarine coverage in the Eastern Atlantic.[37] Also out of the question was reducing British representation on the Central Front in Europe. The British saw the defense of the Federal Republic of Germany as being synonymous with their own security.[38] Fifty-five thousand British soldiers (out of only 180,000 in the whole army) constituted the British Army on the Rhine, and Thatcher was prepared to maintain but not increase that number for the sake of European unity.[39] Also sacrosanct was the Royal Air Force in Germany, which accounted for 4 percent of NATO's air power in the early 1950's, but which swelled to 10 percent in the 1980's.[40]

The very instrument that could deal with overseas crises like the Falklands--the aircraft carrier--not only seemed the logical choice, but the only choice left to a government determined to increase or hold the line on other expensive projects. The carrier groups were chosen because of their high overhead due to continuous refitting of parts and sophisticated equipment, and also because without the several big carriers, many ships that supported them could

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[37]Robin Laird, and David Robertson, "'Grenades From the Candy Store': British Defense Policy in the 1990's?," Orbis 31 (Summer 1987): 199.

[38]The Way Forward, p. 3.

[39]Laird, "'Grenades From the Candy Store'," p. 199.

[40]Ibid.

be mothballed as well. To this end, the bulk of the Royal Navy's surface fleet was to be sold off or scrapped between December 1981 and December 1982. To be sold to Australia were the carriers Invincible and Hermes; the assault ships Fearless and Intrepid were to be scrapped, and the carriers Illustrious and Ark Royal were to be placed in reserve.[41]

The historic decision to shrink the size of the Royal Navy's surface fleet had special ramifications for the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands. For other observers of the international scene, like the Argentine junta, it seemed to foreshadow a further retreat from the dehabilitating costs of empire. Even before these economies of expenditure were even discussed, the fact remained that Britain could scrape together the requisite naval and amphibious forces needed to recapture the Falklands only by exhausting the Royal Navy's strength in home waters.[42] As an illustration of the magnitude of the Falklands task force, in the course of the war the Royal Navy deployed both of its operational carriers along with both of its large assault ships, four nuclear powered and one diesel powered submarine, and twenty-three destroyers and frigates. Supporting this flotilla was a contingent of fifty civilian ships engaged for different purposes--including the luxury liners Canberra and Queen

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[41]Ibid.

[42]John Henry Maurer, "Sea Power and Crisis Diplomacy," Orbis 26 (Fall 1982): 571.

Elizabeth 2--which proved indispensable for logistical support. It was only the combined power of the Atlantic Alliance that afforded Britain the seeming luxury of being able to be in two places at once. This was an illusion.

The naval slight of hand played out between Britain and her alliance partners not only failed to conceal the fact that they were covering for Britain's absence, but made it obvious that Britain could not maintain her customary heavy concentration of naval power in the North and Eastern Atlantic while simultaneously sending a powerful armada on a distant operation.[43] It is important to note that this is an assessment of a Royal Navy prior to the austerity measures outlined by the then Secretary of State for Defense John Nott in his 1981 Defense White Paper. The Argentine invasion on 2 April 1982, though, forced the Thatcher government to at least forestall, if not abandon altogether, the idea of a light surface fleet. Had Argentina postponed its invasion of the Falklands for another eighteen months, they would have confronted a British navy bereft of any sea-based air power.[44]

If the Falklanders were blind to the overall strategic consequences of the British revisions, it was only because something of more immediate and tangible concern occupied their minds. The source of their consternation was the re-

[43] Ibid.

[44] Jeffrey Record, "The War of the Falkland Islands," Washington Quarterly 5 (Autumn 1982): 44.

call to Britain of the ice patrol vessel HMS Endurance. Though lightly armed, it was a highly visible and tangible symbol of British authority. As the only British warship assigned to the Falklands and the dependencies, the islanders valued the commitment for the reassurance it gave them that London had not forgotten them. Unfortunately for the islanders, the Endurance was one of the ships that was to be mustered out of the Royal Navy as part of the fleet cutbacks. Falklander opinion was moving from suspicion to truculence at the increasing British insouciance regarding their security and safety.

Turning a deaf ear to the islander's ululations over the region's defense has been part of the historical record in relations between colony and mother country for several decades. The estrangement was only magnified by the most recent case of the Endurance although it extended back to 1967 with the decision to withdraw the Commander-in-Chief of the South Atlantic as well as the only frigate stationed in the area.

The importance of the proposed withdrawal of the Endurance turns not so much on its military significance as a deterrent to Argentine aggression (its two 20mm guns were no match for Exocet-laden Argentine destroyers and frigates) but on the perceived message it sent to both the Falklanders and the Argentines. The Argentine response is best left for discussion later. The islander response,

though, was predictable and swift. In June 1981, the Falkland Islands Council sent Lord Carrington a message protesting the Endurance's withdrawal. In its words, they wished to:

> . . . express extreme concern that Britain appears to be abandoning its defense of British interests in the South Atlantic and Antarctic at a time when other powers are strengthening their position in these areas.[45]

It was not until nine months later, one week before the actual invasion, that this wave of protest was able to make any ripples in London, and only then in response to a crisis taking place on South Georgia Island which was to lead directly to war.

Members of the House of Commons who had never given a pound or pence of support to the Falklanders in the past now staged an eleventh hour display of solidarity with them. Sir Bernard Braine, a Conservative backbencher pointed out:

> It is pointless to go on asserting that the islanders will remain British as long as the inhabitants wish to remain there while withdrawing signs of tangible support like the survey vessel. Will the Government give tangible support to the islanders in this time of some anxiety?[46]

To this, Richard Luce, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Nicholas Ridley's replacement, could only make a feeble and vague promise that the Govern-

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[45]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 33.

[46]Times (London), 24 March 1982.

ment would "support and defend the islands and their dependencies to the best of its abilities."[47] The full import of the South Georgia crisis will be considered in a later chapter, but for now it will suffice to say that Lord Carrington was only able to postpone the withdrawal of the *Endurance* after two weeks of departmental pressure and personal supplicating to the treasury and defense ministries.

The condition of the relationship that now existed between Britain and the Falkland Islands could only be described as stagnant. The Thatcher government remained unmoved by the islanders' requests for economic investments and security arrangements beyond a token warship. Yet Thatcher was adamant in retaining sovereignty. This put Britain in a dilemma. Britain could not signal to Argentina the "sincerity" and the "meaningfulness" of her relationship with the Falklands because she refused for economic and political reasons to elevate or enhance the bonds existing between them.

Hovering over this scene, absorbing the information gleaned from British past actions and current pronouncements over the islands were the members of the Argentine junta. Their belief that the risks of initiating a change in the status quo were controllable was confirmed by the failure of the British to make a genuine show of support to the islanders. Chapter Three will explore the motives behind the Argentine invasion of the Falklands.

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[47]Ibid.

CHAPTER III

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS BEHIND THE JUNTA'S AGGRESSION

For better or for worse, the appearance of the military junta has been a leitmotif in South American politics ever since the Latin American Wars of Independence (1810-1824). Yet in its nascence, the Argentine nation-state existed for a period of seventy years without being interrupted by a military coup. From 1854, one year after the new constitution was adopted, until 1930, the Argentine military lay dormant as a visible and relevant political actor. The answer as to why the military has enjoyed such a preponderance of power and maintained such a high profile since 1930, derives from the political, economic, and social collision between an oligarchical nineteenth century, and a demotic and industrialized twentieth century. Bringing the crisis to a head, was the liberal-progressives, the Radical Party, who agitated for extending sufferage to include immigrants. This antagonized and transformed the military into energetic participants. This industrious immigrant class, comprised primarily of Italians, Spaniards, and Germans, were a critical factor, first in the success of the exports of the pampas, and then in establishing a mercantile middle class. These new immigrants helped to create a cosmo-

politan, urbane and affluent society.

Military interventions in 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, and 1976, all took place at a time when a few issues were enough to spark the military to take a stand in direct opposition to the prevailing civilian government.[1]

The 1976 putsch though, the sixth in Argentine history, was, in the main, part of an habitual, cyclical pattern established by the armed forces in order to reassert the state as the regnant power. The military junta that assumed power in 1976 under General J.R. Videla was brought out of the barracks by a paternalistic urge to "protect" the motherland and the national interests at a time when Argentina was plagued by social unrest and insurgency.[2] The repression that engulfed Argentina from 1976 until December 1981, when General Leopoldo Galtieri headed the junta, turned particularly vicious as a messianic and temerarious military cracked down on those whom they believed flaunted the values of Christian morality or embraced "dangerous" ideologies.

Always a metropolis of cultural plentitude, Buenos Aires became a symbol to the generals of all that was depraved. They saw themselves as strict ascetics--almost seraphic in nature--and it was incumbent upon them to make society atone for its transgressions. As one writer has ob-

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[1]Guillermo Makin, "The Military in Argentine Politics," Millennium 12 (Spring 1983): 59.

[2]Gamba, The Falklands/Malvinas War, p. 74.

served:

> Believing that subversion is also "cultural and psychological" the military measured freedom of thought by the yardstick of their own vision of the world. They considered contrary to the "Argentine way of life" which they had set themselves the task of defining and defending, everything which departed, however slightly, from a narrow moralism and a conformist religiosity. In a society of immigrants without a past, these cold war crusaders could be seen defending the values of "tradition"; in the cosmopolitan metropolis, one of the capitals of the world's artistic avant guarde, the milliary regime used "fire and the sword" to compel the preservation of a "national essence" considered as identical to its own rhetoric. In this way, not only was all opposition considered criminal, but also the most recent products of Western culture: non-figurative art, psychoanalysis, sociology and modern mathematics were officially banned.[3]

This may very well have provided the British with a clue concerning the junta's "operational code". This code is a way of evaluating the values, beliefs, and attitudes of an opponent--discovering their modus operandi.[4] Often times, this involves trying to deter "relevant individuals" in "decision-making circles within that nation."[5] And by December 1981, there were several conditions that had a strong leverage effect upon Argentina's decision to invade: Argentina's view of the precise nature of Britain's defense commitment to the Falklands; Argentina's perception of Britain's will to fight; the Argentine strength of feeling towards regaining "Las Malvians"; the state of the Argentine

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[3]Alain Rouquie, "Argentina: the departure of the military--end of a political cycle or just another episode?," International Affairs 59 (Autumn 1983): 577-78.

[4]George, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, p. 50.

[5]Ibid., 72.

economy: and last but very importantly, the pressure of time that Argentina felt for achieving the desired change. Each one of these factors is worth a close look.

In contradistinction to the low priority given the Falkland Islands by a succession of British governments, governments in Buenos Aires, civilian and military, have always made the issue of "Las Malvinas" their chief foreign policy concern. Perhaps the only exception to this was the Beagle Channel Islands dispute with Chile. Unimportant in themselves, the islands located south of Tierra del Fuego, are surrounded by waters believed to be rich in fish, oil, and minerals. Chile's rights to the islands were upheld in international arbitration in 1977 and more recently won the support of a Papal mediator. This is important in that it illustrates how much more focused the scope of a Third World country's foreign policy really is. In the absence of global responsibilities, countries like Argentina pay greater attention to their borders, and perhaps are more keenly sensitive to perceived infringements upon their territory since they make this their prime concern. In this particular instance, the loss of the Beagle Channel Islands arbitration case, even though the judgement was spurned by Argentina, may have led the junta to redouble its efforts at reversing the "intolerable occupation" by the British of Las Malvinas.

Based upon testimony in their post-war trials, author Virginia Gamba reveals the rationale behind the junta's moves:

> With the Beagle Channel dispute and the assignment of those territories to Chile, military strategists in Argentina felt that their Antarctic claims and the Argentinian presence in the sub-Antarctic needed to be reinforced by a final negotiation with the United Kingdom over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. The logic behind this implied that if Argentina was definitly going to lose the islands within the Beagle Channel, then that loss of ground would be balanced by a formal and definitive negotiation with the United Kingdom over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands.[6]

In advance of the invasion, Argentina felt much more intense about the conflict than the British. Even on the eve of the defeat of Argentine forces, Foreign Minister Costa-Mendez, in an attempt to court the sympathy of several "nonaligned" nations, likened the struggle for the Falklands to the liberation movements of Algeria, India, Cuba, Vietnam, and the Palestinian people.[7] While the Argentines believed that the British lacked the wherewithal to retake the islands militarily, the sheer intensity of their grievance compared to Britain's halfhearted and ambivalent commitment, no doubt played a role in the junta's decision to invade.[8]

The absence of a deterrent force on the spot was undeniably one of the reasons why the junta adjudged it safe to go ahead with the invasion. President/General Galtieri's gamble rested on two premises. The first premise was that Britain lacked the requisite naval power to retake the islands. The symbol of British power in the South Atlantic,

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[6]Gamba, The Falklands/Malvinas War, p. 110.

[7]Rouquie, "Argentina: the departure of the military," p. 582.

[8]Happle, "Intelligence and Warning Lessons," p. 104.

the HMS Endurance, had been slated to return to Britain, and this Argentina saw as a "political gesture, reducing support for the principle of sovereignty."[9] In fact, the morale of the junta was so supercharged by this time, that they did not even wait for Britain to discharge her aircraft carriers from service--the most menacing threat to the success of Argentina's invasion plans. This argument forms part of the second premise--that Argentina believed that Britain would not fight. There is ample evidence to support this. First of all, the timing of the invasion by Argentina showed a blatant disregard for the ability of Britain to respond, and underlined the credibility of the argument that the junta assumed Britain would not go to war.[10] Argentina ignored the fact that a large part of the British fleet was in port for Easter holiday when they invaded. This was a fact that greatly facilitated the swift assembly of the British task force. Furthermore, Argentina failed to capitalize on the strategic windfall of capturing the islands by not taking advantage of the airstrip at Port Stanley. The failure to move its air power from the mainland to the islands cancelled out any advantage that might have been gained.[11] The only possible explanation for this is that the junta believed that the transfer would be unnecessary because no military challenge would be forthcomming.

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[9]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 72.

[10]Freedman, "The War of the Falkland Islands," p. 199.

[11]Record, "The War of the Falkland Islands," pp. 44-45.

Even as a carrier task force steamed across the ocean, the junta was confident that London had no intention of actually using it as an instrument of force, but rather as a power projection designed to strengthen Britain's hand in exerting pressure on the Argentines to withdraw as negotiations between London, Washington, and Buenos Aires progressed. There was another purpose behind the dispatch of the task force. If it could demonstrate its resolve in a small way, it might convince the junta that it was perilously close to actual war.[12] The British decision to recapture South Georgia before attempting to invade the Falklands, was expressly designed to drive home Britain's willingness to fight.

The British hope that a symbolic battle might induce a quick settlement elided two considerations. The first was that Argentina actually believed that she could successfully engage the British fleet. That is, if the British were indeed willing to fight. The second consideration overlooked, was that the British recapture of South Georgia Island sent a signal to the junta that Britain had neither the resources nor the will to attempt a full-scale invasion.[13] This second miscalculation was a cardinal mistake.

The parochial natures of General Galtieri, and the second most important person the junta, Admiral Anaya, encouraged them to expect that the British would make an

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[12] Philip Windsor, "Diplomatic Dimensions of the Falklands Crisis," Millennium 12 (Spring 1983): 90.

[13] Ibid., 91.

immediate and direct assault on the Falklands, assuming that the British would go to war at all. But because the British task force was eight thousand miles and three to four weeks away, and when on arrival it chose to apply its energy to wresting away a non-entity of an island like South Georgia, the military government in Buenos Aires simply arrived at the conclusion that Britain was an inferior opponent. Lobbying the United Nations for support for a resolution demanding a parallel withdrawal from the impending war, also made Britain appear weak in the eyes of the junta. No other reading of British intentions could have been further from the mark.

Unskilled, unsophisticated, and untested as diplomats, the members of the junta could not see that the British were giving them every opportunity to reconcile the conflict before the shooting war began. For the Argentines, the strategy was reduced to a pitched battle. For them, nothing could be resolved without a fight. For the British it was a field of maneuver utilizing a wide array of means to resolve the quarrel. The decision, then, to combine different means such as the military "show of force" with diplomatic negotiations, was tragically mistaken by Argentina for military weakness and irresolution

The military government in Buenos Aires was not unmindful of the international political consequences that her unprovoked aggression might generate. In fact, Argentina had reason to be optimistic that the international

community might lean to her side--although after the "dirty war" and subsequent cover-up, the members of the Argentine junta were not going to lose any sleep if they suddenly found themselves in disfavor with world public opinion.

The deftness with which the military government of Argentina confronted the country's insurgent activity may have made it a parish nation to a large segment of the inter-American community, but, to the new Reagan administration, the junta was a potential ally in the administration's fight against communist insurgency in Central America. The Argentines had already demonstrated their capacity to shape the political landscape of other countries by forestalling a contumacious left-wing party from gaining power in Bolivia. Thus, in early 1982 General Vernon Walters visited Buenos Aires for the espress purpose of courting Argentine support against Nicaragua. Whether Argentina was given carte blanche over the Falklands is not known. The real bottom line turned out to be that in exchange for her commitment to combat left-wing insurgency in Central America, the Galtieri government was encouraged and reassured that Washington valued her cooperation, and that this type of mutually beneficial relationship would continue.

As for the other superpower, Argentina could not hope for any diplomatic achievements on a scale such as the understanding which they had reached with Washington. Here, the junta's expectations were more modest. The relationship

between the USSR and Argentina revolved around trade, specifically wheat and beef. The Argentines had it, and the Soviets wanted it. Ideologically, the two countries were poles apart; however the Soviet demand for food stuffs, and the Argentine need for hard currency, forged an unusual union of dependency, even if it was just one of expediency. The USSR's reliance on Argentine grain exports became even more pronounced when the Carter administration placed an embargo on wheat exports in retaliation for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As bizarre a spectacle as it might seem, the junta was optimistic that it could secure not overt Soviet support for an invasion, but at least an acquiescence to the act. The unpalatable and awkward support of Argentina would be more than offset for the Soviets by the chance to lead a Third World crusade under the anti-imperialist banner, so the junta thought.

Argentine reckoning was wrong on each count. At the beginning of the war, the Reagan administration had adopted a position of neutrality in its eagerness to play the part of the "honest broker" in the dispute. This posture, needless to say, ended up pleasing neither side. The United States was faced with the novel situation of a war between two of its allies. At first, the ambigious nature of the American response to the invasion seemed to encourage the Argentine opinion that Britain would not be able to obtain unequivocal U.S. support and therefore would not go to war.

The fact that Prime Minister Thatcher requested President Reagan to appeal directly to General Galtieri for a deescalation of the crisis, made it boldly evident to the junta that Britain was incapable of acting unilaterally. The American emphasis on "even-handedness," while fortifying and emboldening the junta, was no small source of consternation to the British. On 28 March 1982 for example, Lord Carrington notified Secretary of State Alexander Haig that Argentine warships were clustering around South Georgia and that there was an increasing possibility of a confrontation. Lord Carrington requested Haig's intercession with the junta. The same day he received a message from Haig's deputy, Walter Stoessel, pointing out that both Great Britain and Argentina were "good friends" of the United States, and advising Carrington to proceed with caution. Lord Carrington was so angered at this response that he summoned U.S. ambassador John Lewis to his office. Finding him away, he vented his anger at the number two man at the embassy, Ed Streator. He was told to inform Secretary Haig that it was Argentina that was the aggressor, and advised the U.S. that she had better decide which side she was on.

During the war, U.S. State Department infighting became well publicized. The debate over whom to support in the war could be heard all the way across the Atlantic. Thomas Enders, assistant secretary of state for Inter-American affairs, and Lawrence Eagleburger, assistant secretary for

European affairs, were the two most vocal participants. Enders did not want the issue of the Falklands to jeopardize America's position in South America. Eagleburger, like Haig, was an unswerving supporter of NATO.

Perhaps the most embarrassing moment for the United States came at the close of the war. On 4 June 1982, ten days before the Argentine surrender, a Security Council resolution sponsored by Spain and Panama was submitted for approval. In short, it called for a U.N. peacekeeping force, U.N. administration, and an immediate cease fire. There was no mention, however, of an Argentine withdrawal. This was a proviso that Britain viewed as a necessity before any type of negotiations over the islands could proceed. Predictably, Britain vetoed the resolution. The United States decided to reinforce Britain's veto with its own, a sort of display of solidarity. Under the influence of U.N. ambassador Kirkpatrick and Enders, Secretary of State Haig authorized Kirkpatrick to abstain from the vote so as not to alienate any further the Latin American delegation. The communication telling her to change the vote came too late, the U.S. veto had already been recorded. However, said Kirkpatrick, were it possible to change their vote, the U.S. would like to change it from a veto to an abstention. This left the British stunned.

It was in times of crisis like this, that the British had hoped to draw on that special reserve of support unique

to Great Britain. That boost of support was forthcoming, mainly in the sale of much needed weapons and ammunition with which to carry on the war. However, the public declarations made by the U.S. that it was an ally of both disputants, incited and hardened Argentina to the point of calculating that Britain would not get American support if war came.[14]

Similarly, Argentina was facing another diplomatic setback, this time in the U.N. Predictably, the family of Latin American nations championed the return of Las Malvinas to Argentina, though few of them could condone the means used to effect the change. The countries of Latin America had always been committed to the Argentine position on sovereignty. Yet most had a strong aversion to the use of force to settle political disputes. This was a characteristic shared by almost all of the nonaligned members of the U.N. and it worked in favor of the British.

On 3 April, one day after the Argentines had invaded, the British delegation to the U.N. headed by Ambassador Anthony Parsons, drafted the text of what was to become Security Council Resolution No. 502. The resolution made it clear in its central paragraph, that Britain would accept no less than a total Argentine withdrawal before contemplating a definitive negotiated settlement of the conflict. It also reaffirmed Britain's right to self-defense under Ar-

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[14]Windsor, "Diplomatic Dimensions of the Falklands Crisis," pp. 91-92.

ticle 51 of the Charter.

The composition of the Security Council for that month gave rise to some intriguing possibilities regarding the combination of nations that Britain could count on to secure adoption of SCR 502. There were of course the permanent members: the U.S., USSR, China, the U.K., and France. The ten temporary members were: Ireland, Japan, Panama, Poland, Spain, Guyana, Jordan, Togo, Uganda, and Zaire. It would take ten in favor in order to adopt the resolution. Of course, the Soviet Union or China could veto the measure outright. Even if they did not, it would be nearly impossible to get the necessary number of votes. Panama could be counted out. The Panamanian delegation was implacable and particularly militant in its support of Argentina. Spain was not regarded as reliable as she had coveted Gibralter--a British possession. Six votes were assured: that of the U.S., France, Ireland, Japan, Guyana, and Britain. The four nonaligned nations: Jordan, Togo, Uganda, and Zaire, were considered to be free agents in the matter. Had it not been for two remarkable happenings, the resolution might never have seen the light of day. The first could only be described as a coup for the British. All four uncommited countries voted for the resolution--an incredible windfall for the British! The second was that the USSR and China not only decided not to veto the resolution but abstained from the vote! The final result was that the

British garnered ten out of fifteen votes, enough to adopt the resolution.[15]

Argentina's Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa-Mendez had fully expected a victory in the U.N. Damage done to the probity of Argentina's claim to Las Malvinas caused by the use of armed force to settle the dispute, was supposed to be mitigated by depicting Britain as an "imperial miscreant" who was being evicted after one hundred and fifty years of illegal occupation. Even if Costa-Mendez had persuaded the Security Council's nonaligned members to reject the British resolution, or had Argentina become the beneficiary of a Soviet veto, the resulting victory would have been strictly for external political consumption--a propaganda bonus. Argentina did not need the backing of the international community in order to keep Las Malvinas. The obverse also held true for Britain. Had SCR 502 been thwarted, nothing short of U.S. intervention would have deterred her from attempting to retake the Falklands.

Of all the components that comprised the junta's decision to invade the Falklands, none was more decisive or weighty than the condition of the national economy. For Argentina, the years between 1976 and 1982 were ones of unyielding national self-absorbtion in an experiment with mon-

[15]The final tally in the voting was: ten in favor (U.K., U.S., France, Guyana, Ireland, Japan, Togo, Zaire, Uganda, and Jordan); one against (Panama); and four abstentions (China, USSR, Poland, and Spain).

etarism. The root of the economic calamity of 1980 was the feverish manner in which Argentine financial institutions and private citizens engaged in currency speculation. Discouraged from expanding their own industries because of exorbitant interest rates, and inundated with foreign imports, Argentine investors liquidated their holdings in their nation's industries in order to buy cheap dollars. The denoument was as predictable as it was unforgiving. The world recession that temporarily incapacitated the western industrialized nations, left Argentina in a state of woeful penury, gloom and anguish.

That Argentina's foreign debt swelled from $7 billion in 1975, to $40 billion in 1982 illustrates the magnitude of the crisis.[16] Gross domestic product plummeted by more than 10 percent between the end of 1980 and the beginning of 1983.[17] Hyper-inflation at the rate of 200 percent evaporated people's savings and created want in a country that is a major exporter of food.[18] Between 1976 and 1980, industrial production fell by 25 percent, and the labor force by 26 percent.[19] This was evidence that the junta's unrestricted free market dogmatism favored imports to the detriment of home industries. And with more of the labor force

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[16]Rouquie, "Argentina: the departure of the military," p. 579.

[17]Ibid., 578.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

unemployed, the market for goods and services also shrank.

Unrest and dissatisfaction with the military government's antipathy and sloth in alleviating the symptoms of the economic crisis set in. Peronist sentiment, once subdued, now became irrepressible.

The military junta saw that the only way to extricate itself from this national emergency was to devise a scheme equally dramatic and overwhelmingly popular in order to channel the people's energies away from internal dissent and redirect them outwards. Britain the "imperialist interloper" was to become the focal point, the junta's "great Satan," in its desperate attempt to administer a much needed restorative to their flagging popularity. Already, in the final two weeks before the invasion, the junta had set out to achieve just this kind of result by making its boldest move to date--establishing a military presence on South Georgia Island, a U.K. dependency. Time was of the essence as protests were becoming more frequent and more militant. However, giant protest rallies such as the one by the Peronist General Confederation of Labor were not influenced by what observers in Buenos Aires believed was just a tactic to divert attention from the country's growing labor strife.[20] People were reacting separately to the issue of the economy and the traditional grievance over Las Malvinas. The Argentine populace was infused with enthuasism as they

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[20]Times (London), 30 March 1982.

shouted, "We support the Malvinas, " but quickly added the rejoinder, "but not the dictatorship."[21]

The South Georgia incident, the intricacies of which will follow, was not the only warning of Argentine intentions. It was merely one in a succession of alarming and unprecedented tactical and strategic danger signals that were suggestive of an Argentine invasion. In the three month span from January until March 1982, Argentine sources offered a plentiful amount of hard and compelling evidence of a military attack. The fact that the usually conscientious British intelligence establishment declined to issue a warning based on these signals illustrates its self-deceptive attitude. Seeking to put the best possible face on an increasingly intolerable situation, Britain reasoned that, while Anglo-Argentine relations had taken a turn for the worse, Britain still had time on her side to be able to gage, according to a graduated level of belligerency, the Argentine threat. The British defense and foreign ministries believed that any real dissatisfaction with the progress of negotiations over the Falklands would start with the abandonment of several trade agreements. It might then escalate to the withdrawal of ambassadors, followed by diplomatic posturing in the United Nations. This approach assumed that Argentina would conform to the predictable model of the traditional adversary. This was another British miscalcu-

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[21] Economist, 1 May 1982.

lation. The hope that Britain could escape the consequences of her poor judgement and analysis would prove illusory. Was the crisis foreseeable? By uncoiling the chain of evidence link by link in the three months prior to the invasion, and by examining the significance of this evidence, we will perhaps be better able to answer this question.

CHAPTER IV

SIGNALS READ AND MISREAD

The fact that the Argentine attack was the culmination of several weeks of tension and not a "bolt from the blue" that waylaid British officials back in London, leads straightway to one question. What did British intelligence discover about Argentina's intentions in the few months preceeding the war? As is so often the case in diplomatic crises, the font of information collected by a country's intelligence apparatus, even if it is plentiful and consistent, rarely prevails by itself in terms of successful conflict avoidance. The British handling of the Falklands affair is no less of an example of this. More to the point though, it underscores that what is needed is not copious amounts of information, but rather, better analysis and interpretation. The mere ability of the British intelligence establishment to take cognizance of the string of warnings was far outweighed by the Foreign Office's astonishingly sluggish response to the unprecedented scope of events that sounded from Buenos Aires with stacatto-like clarity between January and March 1982. Naturally, the bland nature of the Argentine threat as interpreted by British intelligence sources, hindered the Foreign Office's

ability to assess the severity of the crisis. This is a crucial point. It deceived them about the likelihood of the junta's willingness to use military means to achieve its goal.[1] Thus, while British vulnerability was not wholly due to neglect of the warning evidence, it can be mostly attributed to the dismal understanding that British policy-makers and intelligence experts had of Argentine politics and political discourse.[2]

Initial suspicion that the junta had officially taken a more militant and aggressive posture toward recovering the islands came to the fore in early January 1982. Rear Admiral Jorge Fraga issued a statement requesting that the "endless rounds of negotiations be ended."[3] What made this such a convincing and authoritative source was that Admiral Fraga was the chairman of the "Islas Malvinas Institute", a quasi-military agency.

Further evidence that January was definitely the turning point with regard to the junta's strategy appeared in the form of a bout de papier (a paper stating certain goals or objectives). At long last, the Argentine Ministry for Foreign Affairs demanded a one year timetable for the purpose of settling the dispute once and for all. Argentina preferred, she said, to resolve the dispute "peacefully, de-

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[1]Economist, 19 June 1982.

[2]Guillermo Makin, "Argentine approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas: was the resort to violence foreseeable?," International Affairs 59 (Summer 1983): 402.

[3]Ibid., 399.

finitively, and rapidly," and proposed the establishment of a permanent negotiating commission that would meet in the first week of every month. Meetings would alternate between Buenos Aires and London.[4]

Never before had Argentina set a deadline for the resolution of the sovereignty dispute. While the British would not give an explicit confirmation that sovereignty would be the prime topic of discussion (Britain had always been inclined to make lesser short-term concessions in order to skirt the issue of sovereignty) in agreeing to the talks she tacitly acknowledged that it would be one of many items on the agenda. Also, in the eyes of the Argentines, the successful attempt to regularize the rounds of negotiations lent the proceedings a new air of prestige, a feeling that they had upgraded the level of the talks. Clearly, though, the most astonishing feature under the new agreement was the ultimatum of one year for the return of the islands to Argentina.

Three days before the ultimatum, a journalist for the Buenos Aires newspaper, La Prensa, wrote that Argentina would present a deadline for the recovery of the Malvinas, and that unless the timetable was met, Argentina would seize the islands by force.[5] The author of the La Prensa article,

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[4]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, pp. 36-37.

[5]Makin, "Argentine approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas," p. 399.

Jesus Iglesias Rouco, obviously had close connections with members of the Argentine Foreign Ministry which allowed him to disclose, with perfect accuracy, the bout de papier three days ahead of time.

In yet another article by Rouco in La Prensa on 7 February, he reiterated the willingness of the junta to use force if Britain failed to satisfy its demand of establishing a firm date for the transfer of the islands. Argentina, he said, "would reserve the right to take other action, which might by no means exclude the recovery of the Islands by military means."[6]

The demands itemized in the bout de papier were formally discussed in New York on 26 and 27 of February. After the meetings between Richard Luce, Minister of State from the Foreign Office in charge of the Falklands, and Enrique Ros, the second in command at the Argentine Foreign Office, a joint communique was issued. The communique described the meetings as "cordial" and "positive", which seemed to indicate that the talks were fruitful and satisfactory. The fact that a commission was created to find a solution to all elements of the dispute seemed to bear out this conclusion.

However, a few days later, on 1 March, the Argentine Foreign Ministry in Buenos Aires, in an unexpected cadenza to the joint communique, issued a grave and uncompromisingly

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[6]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 38.

worded statement decrying the lack of progress in the fifteen years of negotiations. It stated that unless this new accord bore early fruit, "Argentina reserves [the right] to terminate the working of this mechanism and to choose freely the procedure which best accords with her interests."[7] The junta in Buenos Aires was contemplating,

> . . . a wide range of options for "unilateral action". . . if Britain fails to make concessions. These included initiatives in the U.N., a break of diplomatic relations and, in the final analysis, an invasion of the islands.[8]

Accompanying these warnings, was a bizarre incident that took place on East Falkland. An Argentine Air Force Hercules made an unscheduled and unauthorized landing at the Port Stanley airfield:

> [There was a] strange landing in Port Stanley of an Argentine Air Force Hercules C-130, allegedly due to an emergency. Buenos Aires observers said it was planned. . . [as] rumors of invasion of the islands [persists]. . . [the exercise was ordered for the purpose of] testing the probability of landing troops . . . Alejandro Orfila ([an] Argentine career diplomat, [who's] presently Secretary General of the Organization of American States, [and] with good connections with the military and with Peronism, [and who is] rumored to be the presidential candidate favored by the military regime) said that "the Argentine flag will soon fly over the Malvinas."[9]

The Argentine <u>bout de papier</u> of January, which exacted a one year timetable from the British, and the March unilateral communique that officially broached the military op-

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[7]Ibid., 40.

[8]Makin, "Argentine approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas," p. 401.

[9]Ibid.

tion, were important strategic warnings. Strategic warnings comprise the longer range indications that an adversary may be preparing to attack.

On 2 March 1982, just one day after the Argentine Foreign Ministry issued the momentous unilateral communique, the British Defense Attache in Buenos Aires evaluated, in a letter to the British Foreign Office and the Defense Ministry, the likelihood of an invasion given these new strategic developments.[10] In it, he deduced that a junta that had been stifled in its attempts to regain the Falklands by negotiations, would not hesitate in resorting to armed force--but not until the latter half of the year. Still others provided contradictory conclusions. An officer in the Defense Intelligence Staff of the Defense Ministry concluded his assessment by stating that as the head of the ruling triad, General Galtieri would be able to check the militarist ambitions of the Navy, led by Admiral Anaya. Galtieri, he said, prized a diplomatic resolution of the conflict above all others.[11] Such was the confusion and division of opinion among observers of the scene.

The organization charged with the responsibility for processing the raw intelligence data received from Buenos

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[10]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review," p. 44.

[11]Ibid., pp. 44-45.

Aires, was the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).

The JIC consists of a committee of officials within the cabinet office. While the JIC is independent of the Foreign Office, it is always chaired by one of its senior ministers. It is the decisive filter of intelligence information for ministers on the Overseas Defense Committee. The JIC is divided into subcommittees called current intelligence groups (CIG's) which assemble to evaluate information gathered from their particular area of responsibility. There is a Latin American CIG that is responsible for covering Argentina. The CIG's in turn, report back to the full JIC which meets in the cabinet office to put the finishing touches on a document known as the "Red Book." The "Red Book" provides a summary of the world's current hot spots and goes on to interpret and elucidate the raw intelligence data that figured in the writing of the assessment. This final report is passed on to several ministers for them to act upon.[12]

The last full assessment of the Falklands by the JIC, the final report before the invasion, was made on 9 July 1981. As an appraisal of Argentine ambitions, the review became the prototype on which all further JIC reports were based. Between July 1981 and March 1982, the JIC's conclusions rarely wavered and are remarkable for their sim-

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[12] Economist, 19 June 1982.

ilarities. One particular theme that was entwined throughout the entire length of the ongoing assessments, was the JIC's unshakeable belief that Argentina would pursue a gradual, progressive, escalatory course towards war. The only proviso in this hypothesis was that, if Argentina came to the conclusion that negotiations were futile and had reached an impasse, there would be a high risk of the junta acting swiftly and without warning.[13] The Foreign Office had certainly never thought that it had closed off any avenues or channels for negotiations, thus they never seriously pondered this last eventuality.

It was thought that the orderly progression of measures would begin with the withdrawal of Argentine services from the islands. Under a 1971 communications agreement signed by Britain and Argentina, Buenos Aires ran the only regular air service linking the islanders to the outside world. The accord also governed educational, medical, and customs laws for Argentines and Falklanders traveling to and from the mainland. The other important agreement between Britain and Argentina allowed the Argentines to supply oil and aviation fuel to the Falklanders. If the crisis escalated, the JIC predicted it would begin with the abrogation of these agreements.[14]

The long-range warnings were succeeded by a more

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[13]Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, p. 26.

[14]Ibid.

immediate indication that Argentina was about to attack. The origins of the South Georgia incident extend back in time to December 1981. The unsuspicious nature of the South Georgia incident though, belies the truly opportunistic and desperate straits of the junta, that frames the larger picture of the crisis.

In the beginning, there was not a tincture of suspicion, nor hint of subterfuge attached to Constantino Davidoff's excursion to South Georgia. Davidoff, an Argentine scrap merchant, had negotiated a contract with the British government and a British company for the purpose of dismantling an old, decrepid whaling station. Davidoff departed Argentina on 16 December 1981 on the Argentine naval icebreaker <u>Almirante Irizar</u> and arrived on South Georgia Island on 20 December. Under the terms of their agreement, Davidoff was required to submit, in advance, a written request to the British Embassy in Buenos Aires for permission to make the trip. Davidoff was also obliged to register at Grytviken, a port just north of Leith Harbor, where the actual job was located. Davidoff complied with the first condition, although by the time the letter was received by the British Embassy in Buenos Aires, he had already set sail. Of the second requirement, detailing Davidoff to obtain clearance at Grytviken, he was clearly remiss.

The outraged Governor of the Falklands, Rex Hunt, concerned with the erosion of British authority, sent a

protest note to the British Foreign Office on 31 December. The Foreign Office, not wishing to enlarge what it saw as a minor incident, instructed Hunt to leave the matter to them.

When inquiries were made, the Argentine Foreign Minister denied having any knowledge of the whole affair. On 3 February, the British government discharged a formal letter of protest. A few weeks later, the Argentine Ministry for Foreign Affairs rejected the protest note.

Even when Davidoff requested another expedition for the month of March, the level of suspicion in the British Embassy was low. Davidoff had "notified," not asked permission of, the British Embassy on 9 March that he and forty-one workmen were going to South Georgia for a period of four months. The salvage party was to leave on 11 March. In the intervening forty-eight hours, the British Embassy neither granted nor rejected the Argentine "request."

The annoying and by now old hat habit of flouting British authority by bypassing the Grytviken registration checkpoint was exceeded by a rather more inflammatory and portentous act. On 20 March, the British Antarctic Survey vessel the HMS Endurance had spied a contingent of soldiers engaged in hoisting the Argentine flag at Leith Harbor. A British ultimatum via her embassy in Buenos Aires, delivered to the Argentine Foreign Ministry, warned that Britain would meet this breach of the law with any measures thought

necessary in order to evict the landing party. An unruffled Argentine government, obviously probing the limits of British tolerance, responded by reassuring the British in soothing diplomatic parlance that the expedition was not hostile nor did the landing party include members of the Argentine armed forces. On 22 March it looked as if the crisis would abate when the _Bahia Buen Suceso_, the naval support vessel that brought Davidoff and his men from Argentina, departed for the mainland. Instead, ten Argentines were left behind. This, coupled with the fact that the _Bahia Buen Suceso_ had observed strict radio silence while at Leith Harbor, convinced the British that it was the militant faction of the Junta--the Navy--that was sponsoring this provocation.

The ten Argentines deposited on South Georgia were, in effect, the bait in an elaborate trap set by the junta and Foreign Minister Costa-Mendez. Under the threat of forcible eviction by HMS _Endurance_, the Argentines could set in motion several events each one of which would provide momentum for the larger objective--the capture of the Falklands.

First of all, on 25 March, Argentine warships, which had been on "maneuvers" with the fleets, positioned themselves to intercept the _Endurance_ even though the _Endurance_ was held up at Grytviken in order to give the Argentines every chance to evacuate their own men. Second, two Exocet-

laden Argentine frigates took up positions between the Falklands and South Georgia. And last, on the same day, the Argentine scientific research vessel the Bahia Paraiso arrived at Leith Harbor flying the pennant of the Argentine Navy's Senior Officer, Antarctic Squadron. Argentina, still perpetrating the myth of British coercion, for Foreign Minister Costa-Mendez had intimated as much when he made a public statement saying that Argentina would take whatever steps necessary to "protect" the ten men, had the Bahia Paraiso leave provisions for the men, who evidently were in for an extended stay.

Even though the denouement of the crisis was the capture of South Georgia, the Latin American CIG's assessment of Argentine aspirations remained restrained and passive. At the end of March, the CIG's updated forecast hinted at the possibility of a direct attack on the Falklands but believed that Argentina's main aim was to induce Britain to negotiate sovereignty and was using South Georgia to open the talks.[15] Because of the non-alarmist nature of the CIG's evaluations, there were no meetings of the cabinet's Defense Committee until 1 April, and no discussions in cabinet until the South Georgia situation became untenable.

One explanation as to why British intelligence analysts in the JIC and decision-makers in the Defense and Foreign Ministries down-played the abundance of unprecedented

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[15]Ibid., 66.

information, including the South Georgia incident, was the number of past false alarms. The routinization of tension desensitized them to the point of being unable to distinguish between past false alarms and threatening Argentine actions in 1982.

Uppermost in the minds of the British was the 1976 Shackelton incident. The Shackelton, a British research ship on a UNESCO-sponsored exploration of the Antarctic Ocean, was advised by the Argentine government that the ship would be subject to boarding and inspection if she ventured into Argentine waters. When in February, the Argentine destroyer Almirante Storni fired a shot across the bow of the Shackelton, the unarmed research ship was only 78 miles south of Port Stanley--well beyond the 200 mile zone which Argentina claims for herself. Unlike the warlike signals enshrouding the Falklands crisis, this episode was devoid of any declarations of hostile intent. In fact, the presidency of Mrs. Peron prohibited an impulsive Navy from taking a more extreme course of action.[16] Thus, the Peron administration, unpopular and inept though it was, never played the part of opportunist and never sought to capitalize on the issue to boost its popularity.[17]

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[16]Makin, "Argentine approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas," p. 397.

[17]One month later, on 24 March 1976 a military triumvirate of General Videla, General Viola, and Admiral Massera, supplanted the civilian government of Mrs. Peron.

Ten years earlier, two events took place which Britain interpreted as a prelude to war. In 1966, a military left-wing agitator belonging to a guerilla group called the Montoneros, led a band of fellow revolutionaries in a plot to land on the Falklands. He and his accomplices were arrested before they could carry out their plans. In the other incident, terrorists raked the British Embassy in Buenos Aires with machine gun fire during Prince Philip's stay on 29 September 1966. The possibility of collusion between the Montoneros and General J.C. Ongania, who had instigated a military coup earlier in the year, could not really be thought of as plausible. The Ongania regime wished to foster the image of a dependable and serious negotiating partner, in contrast to the adventurism and rashness of the Montoneros.[18] Germane to this, was the fact that the Ongania regime was in no danger of collapse.

Underscoring how different the circumstances were in 1966 from those of 1981-82, was the public statement made by Costa-Mendez in 1966 that promise that Argentina would place its faith in a "peaceful solution through negotiations."[19] This was in sharp contrast to the more strident and hawkish line that Costa-Mendez took in 1981-82.[20]

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[18] Makin, "Argentine approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas," p. 395.

[19] Ibid., 395-96.

[20] Ironically, Costa-Mendez served as Foreign Minister during both crises.

The three months preceeding the invasion, then, were far from being a featureless and dormant stage in the development of the crisis. As the early weeks of 1982 progressed, the Argentine junta came to revile the endless rounds of negotiations until they had come to regard them as unavailing and counterproductive. For the first time in the long history of the dispute, schedules were being mentioned; there were pronouncements by the Argentine Foreign Ministry threatening to terminate negotiations; ultimatums were unhesitatingly given, and most importantly, the previously unthinkable military solution was surfacing as an increasingly attractive alternative.

The torrent of evidence incriminating the junta did not escape British intelligence gatherers. In fact, the marshalling of the intelligence data was fairly complete and thorough. At the heart of the British failing was the underestimation of Argentina's motivation for the return of the islands. The British Foreign Office simply did not take into account the possibility of an opportunistic junta acting solely for the purpose of improving its position. This factor, in addition to the financial costs that Britain would incur if she responded to these warnings, plainly establishes that the failure to anticipate an invasion lay squarely on the shoulders of the British political intelligence community and ultimately on the Foreign Office.

At the outset, the Argentine invasion of 2 April pro-

duced only one casualty, and that was back in London.
In the aftermath of such a political disaster, Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington thought it only appropriate, as the person in charge of Britain's foreign policy, to tender his resignation. Prime Minister Thatcher reluctantly accepted it on 6 April, knowing that she was losing her closest and most able minister.

One day before his departure, amid much confusion and anger in the House of Commons, Lord Carrington attempted to justify the government's insistance that very little if anything could have been done to prevent the invasion. His vindication began by noting the encouraging progress that was being made in negotiations, mentioning specifically the New York conference of 26 and 27 of February. Even though the Argentine position hardened after the New York talks, Carrington was convinced that the military option would be counterproductive:

> I have no doubt that had we responded to these statements by moving ships towards the area, we would have strengthened the hand of the extremists and increased the very risk we were trying to avoid.[21]

He continued:

> Nothing would have been more likely to turn the Argentine away from the path of negotiation and towards that of military force than ship deployments on our part at that stage.[22]

Lord Carrington's resignation contained a curious mix-

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[21]*Times* (London), 5 April 1982.

[22]Ibid.

ture of confession and self-vindication. He admitted to underestimating the Argentine threat, especially during the Grytviken incident. With great humility, he also conceded that his interpretation of the warning evidence was skewed. The vindication of his conduct though, came with his rationalization that, presented with the same evidence, any other foreign secretary would have acted in much the same way.[23]

Nevertheless, it was the Foreign Office that committed the blunder of not pushing through some sort of arrangement with Argentina for the transfer of sovereignty of the Falklands. This was an imperative, given the international realities of the situation. In particular, it was Lord Carrington's fault for backing away from an idea that he originally supported.

Sharing the blame for the invasion is the British political intelligence community, specifically the JIC. It made the junta out to be the inscrutable political actor that it was not, for in not perceiving the desperate straits of the junta and for not subjecting their intelligence assessments to constant revisions, it confirmed that this failure was not one of insufficient information, but rather, one of poor interpretation.[24] It was from beginning to end, a political catastrophe.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Lord Franks, Falkland Islands Review, pp. 81, 85.

AFTERWORD

What vital national interests did the British think they were preserving when they went to war? They can be simply stated, and they have nothing to do with the Falklands--except in so far as protecting the lives of British subjects is an interest. Britain had no real interest in the Falklands themselves. They had been a liability in relations with the potentially profitable trading partnership with Argentina. The real national interests which Britain attached to the Falklands lay in wider considerations. Two things come immediately to mind. First, challenging the Argentine incursion was a means of buttressing the British claim to a share in the rewards of Antarctic research and the possible future mineral exploitation of the continent. The terms of an international agreement which provides for stability in Antarctica expires in 1992. Among these terms is the suspension of all territorial disputes. Britain and Argentina do have conflicting claims in the region (including South Georgia, by the invasion of which Argentina violated a standing international agreement) and not to have reacted with force over the invasion of the Falklands would have meant forfeiting any future claims in the Antarctic. Second, Britain also felt that by making an example of Ar-

gentina, which the Royal Navy certainly did, she could force other adversaries around the world with like-minded ambitions to rethink their adventurist aspirations with regard to seizing British territory, Belize and Gibralter are obvious cases in point. These were important reasons as to why the British went to war. Yet, they are not the only explanations as to why the British risked a budgetary crisis and the derangement of NATO sea power in order to defeat Argentina.

For Britain, the questions surrounding the conflict and the vexing prewar negotiations hinged more on the irrepressible and inescapable issue of human rights. Britain's new foreign secretary, Francis Pym, suggested as much when he said, "The Falkland Islanders have thus become the victims of the unprincipled opportunism of a morally bankrupt regime. Our purpose is to restore their rights."[1] Prime Minister Thatcher and her foreign secretary were insistent that realpolitik take a backseat to restoring the islander's freedom.

Supporting this viewpoint--that the restoration of the Falklanders' rights was Britain's supreme mission--was the Labor Party spokesman on foreign affairs, Denis Healey. Healey, though, attempted to broaden the base of support for the islanders by saying, "The _right_ of self-determina-

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[1]Great Britain, Parliament. _Parliamentary Debates_ (Commons), 6th series, vol. 21 (1982): 959.

tion is a fundamental human right . . ."[2]

One of the most outspoken proponents of the rights of the islanders was Labor MP Michael Foot. In some of the strongest language heard in the House of Commons in the days immediately following the invasion, Foot reminded the government of its real duty:

> The rights and the circumstances of the people in the Falkland Islnds must be uppermost in our minds . . . . We have a moral duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty to ensure that that is sustained.[3]

No matter what type of accommodation might have been reached for the transfer of sovereignty from Great Britain over to Argentina, the one persistent and nagging problem for British governments was the central question of how to guarantee the islanders' existing rights and privileges as British subjects once the islands had been handed over. The Falklanders were always diligent in reminding London of the cyclical appearance of the Argentine military in national affairs, and of their authoritarian, repressive, and undemocratic traits as political actors. Given the volatility of Argentine politics, no Labor or Conservative government could satisfy islander demands by giving an unconditional guarantee.

The upshot of the whole dilemma was that the foreign policy for a nation of 55 million Britons was being determined by 1800 Falklanders. Successive British govern-

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[2]Ibid., 966

[3]Ibid.,638.

ments subordinated and temporarily sacrificed several supremely vital national interests--vital to millions--in favor of a much less important concern, namely the rights of a few.

It is certainly fair to say that Britain must have felt the pull of a deep-seated commitment to defend the rights of the Falklanders even to the extent of foresaking greater responsibilities. As one writer points out:

> . . . you cannot pursue human rights without taking into consideration other aspects of your relations with other nations, which may be more important than those connected with human rights.[4]

Quite forgotten by Britain after the Falklands war, was the U.N. framework that encouraged the two disputants to seek a peaceful resolution to the problem of sovereignty. This was forgotten simply because Argentina breached the time-honored principle of not resorting to the use of armed force to settle a political dispute, and because the death of 250 British soldiers must count for something.

As for Argentina, the election of Raul Alfonsin as president on 30 October 1983, marked the restoration of democracy. The new government has forsworn violence as a means of recovering Las Malvinas. Indeed, the strategy has changed but the intensity remains the same. Who is to

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[4]Morgenthau, Hans J., "Human Rights and American Foreign Policy." in Moral Dimensions of American Foreign Policy, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984), p. 347.

say when, or if the British will ever again be receptive or sensitive to Argentine aspirations. Certainly, Britain has shown no signs of forgiveness or forgetfulness. The future is uncertain. A contented Britain may do well to ponder in the afterglow of her victory, whether or not she has really seen the last of the Argentines. Perhaps Britain is merely in the eye of the storm, a resting place in history. Perhaps she should think ahead to the future, to a time when neither the might or the right is on her side. In any case, we are reminded once again of the words of Winston Churchill:

> Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong--these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.[5]

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[5]Great Britain, Parliament. <u>Parliamentary Debates</u> (Commons), 5th series, 301 (1935): 602.

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