

## **The Falkland Islands War: Diplomatic Failure in April 1982**

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The fate of over 1,000 souls was decided in April 1982. On April 2, Argentine Special Forces invaded and occupied the British Falkland Islands. For the next month, Britain and Argentina tried to resolve the conflict diplomatically. United States Secretary of State Alexander Haig served as mediator, shuttling multiple times between London and Buenos Aires. Haig and his team tried to develop a document to which both the Argentine military junta, led by President Leopoldo Galtieri, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher could agree. However, despite long hours in negotiations and a genuine desire of both sides to avoid war, agreement was never reached. The British counterattacked on May 1, and the fighting that resulted saw 1,054 soldiers and seamen die.<sup>1</sup>

Diplomacy in the Falkland Islands failed for a number of reasons. First, the negotiations were flawed, both in Haig's uneasy position as mediator and the junta's unreliable decision-making process. In addition, each side misunderstood the other. The Argentines never believed the British would counterattack and the British struggled to believe that Argentina wanted a peaceful solution. The possibility of oil under the islands also may have played a role. However, the most important impediment to diplomatic success was the fact that neither side was able to compromise enough to prevent war. The main reasons for this inflexibility were two-fold: both leaders needed to appear strong to remain in power, and the political climate at the time, especially in terms of diplomatic principles relating to the Cold War, prevented the British from yielding to the minimum Argentine demands. In this way, concern for political self-preservation and diplomatic principle combined with practical impediments to prevent a diplomatic solution from being reached in the Falklands in April 1982.

### **Background**

A brief overview of the territorial conflict will be instructive for understanding the arguments and tactics used during April 1982. Before being claimed by Britain or Argentina, the Falkland Islands – a small group of islands in the South Atlantic about 480 kilometers off the Argentine coast – were divided among the British, Spanish, and French. According to British accounts (the Argentines have no competing claim) the first people to set foot on the islands were Elizabethan navigators, who ran ashore in 1690. These men did not settle the islands, and it would be another 75 years before France established the first settlement in 1765. The French,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984); "Falklands War," in David Cristal (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 403. [I have found varying numbers for the death total, but I have decided to accept this encyclopedia's estimate because it is one of the latest of the sources I have found (allowing for counting to be rechecked) and it is more reputable than most. The number 1,054 comes from 254 British and 750 Argentine deaths.]

however, did not want to keep the colony, so they gave it to Spanish King Charles III in 1767. From this time forward, Spain claimed sovereignty over the islands. Argentina's claim rests on the fact that sovereignty passed from Spain to Argentina when the latter declared independence from the empire. However, the Falklands are composed of two large islands, western and eastern, and the Spanish only controlled the western half. By 1770, the British had begun a settlement on the eastern half. Neither the British nor the Spanish knew the other was on the islands until both colonies had been established.<sup>2</sup>

War almost broke out over the islands in 1770 when Spanish governor Juan Ignacio Madriarga attempted to expel the British settlement, which was led by George Farmer. Some British wanted war at the time, but King George III decided the islands were too expensive to keep, and the English abandoned the settlement in 1774. Some historians claim the British left with an oral agreement to cede sovereignty over the islands, but the British also left behind a plaque claiming ownership, which read: "His Britannic Majesty's colours left flying as a mark of possession." From the southern reaches of the New World in the eighteenth century, no document survives to describe exactly how the situation was left.<sup>3</sup>

Sovereignty over the islands changed hands several times in the early nineteenth century. The Spanish administered the islands until Argentina declared independence from Spain in 1810. The Argentines took control of the islands in 1811. In 1816, the forerunner of the Argentine government, the Government of Buenos Aires for the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata, established an administration on the islands, and by 1820 the Spanish had been driven out completely. Although the newly-created Argentina claimed sovereignty over the islands in 1829, the British never abandoned their claim of ownership. Just two years later, the British had the opportunity to reassert their claim. In 1831, the Argentine governor of the islands, Governor Vernet, seized a United States ship, which he claimed had been sailing too close to the islands. This so angered the Americans that the United States sent the USS Lexington to the islands in 1833, expelling everyone. The British took advantage of the resulting power vacuum and occupied the islands later that year.<sup>4</sup>

The British controlled the islands from 1833 until the Argentine invasion on April 2, 1982, but during that time Argentina never renounced its claim of sovereignty. In 1840, Britain formally declared that the islands were a colony and sent British citizens to live there. These were the first people to establish their livelihoods on the islands. Throughout the nineteenth century, no naval power in the world was strong enough to challenge the British, much less the fledgling Argentine fleet. Thus, Argentina never mounted a serious challenge to the British settlement. Argentina did continue to claim the islands, however, and in 1927 it also claimed South Georgia Island, an island about 1,200km southeast of the Falklands, first occupied by the British in 1909. Argentina continued to protest British control of the islands, frequently under

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<sup>2</sup> "Falklands," in *A Dictionary of World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), [Encyclopedia.org](http://Encyclopedia.org). (accessed November 2, 2007).; John Biggs-Davison, "Claim to the Falklands is Justified, Briton Says," *The Globe and Mail* (27 Apr. 1982).; Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell Inc., 1988), pp. 39-43.

<sup>3</sup> Laurent Belsie, "A 212-Year Tug of War over Falklands; Sovereignty vs. Self-Determination," *The Christian Science Monitor* 12 (9 Apr. 1982); Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War*, p.19-20; quote: David Tonge, "Never Has So Much Diplomacy been Expended for So Few," *The Financial Times* 1:2 (3 Apr. 1982)

<sup>4</sup> "212-Year Tug of War," *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 Apr. 1982); Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War*, p.19-20; "212-Year Tug of War," *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 Apr. 1982); "Claim to the Falklands is Justified," *The Globe and Mail* (27 Apr. 1982); Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War*, p. 19-20.

some governments and not at all under others, until it brought the question before the United Nations in 1965.

The next seventeen years would see negotiations that, while seeming to make progress, never solved the dispute. In 1967, the Labour Government in Britain said it would cede sovereignty given certain conditions. This claim angered the islanders because 97% of them were British and wanted to remain as such. They continued to voice their position in Parliament, and in 1973 they formed the UK Falkland Islands Committee, designed to protect the interest of the islanders. While it appears the British Foreign Office would have liked to give sovereignty to the Argentines, the committee and the powerful Falkland Islands Lobby successfully shot down every such proposal. For example, in 1980, Nicholas Ridley, the Foreign Office minister responsible for the islands, traveled to the Falklands' capital of Stanley and convinced many islanders of the value of a lease-back agreement, under which Argentine sovereignty would be recognized immediately but control would not pass to them for 99 years. However, even this proposal was beaten by the Falkland Islands Lobby in London. In this way, no meaningful progress was made.<sup>5</sup>

Probably in an attempt to unify its increasingly discontent populace and save its failing government, the military junta ruling Argentina invaded and occupied the islands on April 2, 1982. British resistance was so light that the Argentines did not even fire their guns. On April 3, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 502, which called for both sides to refrain from using military force and for Argentina to withdraw its forces. Argentina refused, and in the next three days Britain dispatched two carriers, eleven destroyers, an amphibious force, and a supply chain to the South Atlantic. Haig flew to Britain on April 8.<sup>6</sup> Thus began the month of crucial negotiations.

Before examining the reasons for which negotiation failed, two questions must be addressed. The first involves the source material used for this paper. Given the limited availability of primary sources from Argentina, especially during the period of the junta, this investigation relies heavily on British and American sources. While such an imbalance necessarily creates some measure of bias, there are two ways in which this paper hopes to avoid a wholly unfair treatment of the issues. First, a large portion of the source material is comprised of periodical publications from various countries and of various political persuasions. While most of these periodicals are from the northern hemisphere, the nature of the press to be critical of its own government should help to guarantee that the facts and reasoning presented here are not unduly biased. Second, this paper does not seek to assign blame, but instead to track the various historical forces that led to the impasse. In this way, even biased sources which blame a certain party will be extracted and placed within the larger context of historical force. Combined with the fact that much of the paper centers on Haig, who was fiercely neutral even to the point of losing his job, one hopes that bias will be neutralized to a sufficient extent despite the imbalance in source material.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ian Davidson, "A Principle is a Principle," *Financial Times* 1:15 (7 Apr. 1982); *Britain and the Falklands Crisis: a documentary record*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1982), p. 19; Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 262; Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War*, p.27-28.; "212-Year Tug of War," *The Christian Science Monitor* (4 Apr. 1982).

<sup>6</sup> "Soviet Union Sways along Political Tightrope," *The Globe and Mail*, (15 Apr. 1982); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 199; Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 403.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 298

The second question involves the possibility of oil in the Falklands. If the islands or their surrounding waters were rich in oil, then that would have helped to explain why neither side was willing to yield in negotiations. After all, oil had become an even greater concern following the oil crises of 1973 and 1980-81. Furthermore, Argentina needed some form of revenue to help pay off its increasing foreign debt.

At the beginning of April 1982, many believed oil was the reason for the Argentinian invasion, and possibly also for Britain's unwillingness to compromise. According to articles written in the *Christian Science Monitor* on April 5 and 6, many believed that up to two million barrels of oil might be found under the islands. The Argentines had successfully extracted carbon fuels in the San Jorge Basin, thus making the whole area appear promising. Exxon and Arco, as well as other leading international corporations, had expressed interest in doing exploratory work in the area. Finally, the Falklands could serve as an important stepping stone to Antarctic bases, where prospects for oil were believed to be promising. Initially, it seemed that the thirst for oil was causing another territorial dispute which otherwise would have been unimportant.<sup>8</sup>

As time went on, however, the prospect of significant drilling in the area seemed to fade. The United States Department of Energy did a study which concluded that areas of drillable oil ended half way between the Argentinian coast and the islands. Since the Argentines already controlled their half of the water, this would not have given them reason to invade. Similarly, on April 12, the *Oil and Gas Journal* reported that it was uncertain whether oil would be found on or around the islands. The only meaningful evidence was a sedimentary rock pattern that may have indicated oil. As Chris Hedges argued in an April 8 editorial in the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, oil could not have been a reason for Argentina to invade because Argentina was already self-sufficient in oil and was occupied at the time with an expensive project to convert to nuclear power. Combined with international doubts about the area's oil prospects, Hedges' analysis seems to rule out oil as a meaningful impediment to compromise during April's negotiations.<sup>9</sup> While the importance of oil should never be discounted in international politics, other factors almost certainly played a larger role in hampering negotiations during that month.

### **Mutual Misunderstanding**

Alexander Haig characterized the Falklands Islands conflict as a clear example of two opponents who did not understand each other. As he says in his memoirs, it was "a case study in miscalculation."<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Argentina never believed the British would counterattack until British helicopters were bombarding the Argentine Navy off the coast of South Georgia Island. Similarly, Britain did not understand the nature of the military junta that ruled Argentina. Whereas the junta's inconsistent proposals were actually the result of a flawed decision-making procedure, the British government took them as evidence of malice. Reasons for mutual misunderstanding ranged from simple ignorance to intentionally misleading

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Harsch, "Why Argentina Invaded: Politics, Thirst for Oil," *Christian Science Monitor* 3 (5 Apr. 1982); Jonathan Harsch, "Falklands Dispute and Oil," *Oil and Gas Journal* 6 (6 Apr. 1982); John C. McCaslin, "Falklands Seen as Attractive Wildcat Target," *Oil and Gas Journal* (26 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "In the Falklands' Shadow: Claims to Antarctic," *Christian Science Monitor* 4 (7 Apr. 1982).

<sup>9</sup>"Falklands Dispute and Oil," *Oil and Gas Journal* 6 (6 Apr. 1982); "Falkland Islands Seized; Oil, Gas Potential Hazy," *Oil and Gas Journal* 63 (12 Apr. 1982); Chris Hedges, "Falklands Issue Exploited for Years by Argentines," *The Globe and Mail* (8 Apr. 1982).

<sup>10</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 262

statements.<sup>11</sup> No matter the cause, however, mutual misunderstanding was one of the most important practical impediments to effective negotiation.

In fact, Argentina misunderstood the United States' position as much as it did Great Britain's. According to Haig, Argentina had always believed the United States would be willing to trade acceptance of the invasion for Argentina's help in pressuring the new socialist Nicaraguan government, the Sandinistas. While it is true that President Reagan had been developing closer relations with the junta to help assure that its powerful sway in Latin America would be used against the Sandinistas, the United States could never have supported an armed takeover by an undemocratic government against its most important ally.<sup>12</sup> The reasons the United States had to side with Britain will be discussed at length with regard to the influence of the Cold War, but for now suffice it to say that Argentina's misunderstanding of the United States' allegiances contributed to its hubris in claiming and occupying the islands.

Argentina's most unfortunate misunderstanding, however, was its belief that the British would not counterattack. According to Haig's analysis, the Argentines believed that Great Britain was too weak to fight back. Since Britain had continued to lose parts of its empire throughout the twentieth century, Argentina considered the Falklands to be just another example of a British colony that the Royal Navy could no longer defend and which the British considered not worth their effort. As Haig puts it, this "xenophobic" attitude in Argentina also saw the up-and-coming Americas as rising in world stature, eventually overtaking the declining European powers. Here, Haig may be overstepping his knowledge. Whether the Argentines believed Latin America would become more prominent than Europe is not something Haig could have known with certainty. As with all memoirs, Haig's analysis is based on his limited perspective, and memoirs often frame events in a light favorable to the author. Still, whether Haig's larger claim about xenophobia is correct or not, it is undoubtedly true that Argentina did not think it would be attacked. Even when Haig told President Galtieri that Britain would fight and win and would have U.S. support, Galtieri responded by saying the British would never fight.<sup>13</sup> Because Argentina was convinced there would be no repercussions for taking a firm stance, it had no reason to compromise beyond the bare minimum during April's negotiations.

There are a number of possible reasons for Argentina's misunderstanding of its foe. First, the British government had for years been open to the idea of handing the islands back to Argentina, and Britain had made this openness known to the Argentinian government. As Anthony Sampson argued in an opinion piece in the April 19 edition of *Newsweek*, the British Foreign Office would not have been negotiating about the Falklands for the past two decades if it did not eventually want to rid itself of the islands, which were becoming a burden to govern and were realistically too distant to defend. Whereas the islanders vociferously clung to notions of the British Empire – being, as Sampson called them, "more British than the British" – Britain itself had abandoned notions of empire long ago.<sup>14</sup> In as much as the Argentines understood the British desire to shed the burdensome colony, they were less convinced of Thatcher's warnings about the use of force to defend the islands.

Another explanation of why the Argentines miscalculated British resolve is that, at least as late as April 14, they had reason to believe that Britain was not unified enough to mount a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 275-276

<sup>13</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 267, 280

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Sampson, "Of Principle and Power," *Newsweek* 47 (19 Apr. 1982)

serious counterattack. On April 14, the *Financial Times* reported that the Labour Party had organized a meeting to discuss opposing Thatcher's decision to send the naval force, called the Task Force, to the South Atlantic. Tam Dalyell, one of the meeting's organizers, said that the meeting was designed to show the Argentines that Great Britain was not the united front that Thatcher and the Foreign Office were claiming it was. Probably as part of an effort to mar the Conservative government, Dalyell and other Labour MPs hoped to show the Argentines that Britain was a "deeply divided country." Although the Labour Party would eventually come to support the military mission, such a vocal expression of disunity early on must have contributed to Argentina's belief that Britain was not willing to defend its distant territory.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the causes of the misunderstanding, there is no doubt that Argentina believed Britain was weak and divided. Although the *Financial Times* reported on April 17 that there was some disagreement within the junta as to how wise it would be to engage the British Navy, the prevailing opinion in Argentina was still that Britain would not fight back. Even later in the month, as the British rallied behind Thatcher's mission, Argentina still clung to its belief in British weakness. Haig reports that as late as April 27, one day after Britain recaptured South Georgia and when its intention to attack the Falklands was clear, Galtieri lamented to him on the phone, "I do not understand why the United States government, with all its resources, cannot stop Mrs. Thatcher from launching this attack." British resolve was too strong and the United States too strongly aligned with NATO for either party to stop the counterattack.<sup>16</sup>

Britain also misunderstood the Argentinian position, which prevented it from negotiating more effectively. Many in Britain overestimated Argentina's military capabilities, which made them more fearful than they should have been, thus making Argentina too confident. Especially after Bolivia offered its air force to Argentina, many in Britain worried about their ability to beat Argentina in an all-out war. In reality, Argentina's support within Latin America was shaky at best, as demonstrated by the resolution passed at the Organization of American States, which was carefully worded to support Argentina's claim but not its invasion. However, the British overestimated Latin American unity. The possibility of a united South America fighting a stranded British force in the South Atlantic frightened them. British worries about their chances of success, from opinion pieces in periodicals to statements by government officials, contributed to Argentinian resolve and encouraged the British to send more forces to the South Atlantic.<sup>17</sup> Both of these results probably contributed to the outbreak of fighting, for Argentina continued to be inflexible in negotiations and the British were more invested with each ship that sailed south, making withdrawal that much more embarrassing for the government.

The most important way in which the British misunderstood the Argentines, however, was with regard to the junta's position in its own country. On April 5, British Defense Secretary John Nott stated that a good British strategy would be to sink Argentinian ships until public opinion in Argentina turned against the ruling junta. What Nott failed to understand was that the Argentinian people already did not support their own government. Oakland Ross, a Canadian journalist stationed in Buenos Aires, reported that most people with whom he spoke on the street supported Argentina's claim to the islands and approved of the takeover, but they made certain to point out that they were unhappy being ruled by a military dictatorship and that their support of

<sup>15</sup> Elinor Goodman, "Misgivings Grow in Tory Ranks," *Financial Times* 1:4 (14 Apr. 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Jimmy Burns and Andrew Whitley, "Hope for Falklands Peace Efforts Improve," *Financial Times* 1:1 (17 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 292.

<sup>17</sup> "Bolivia Would Fight for Argentina, Haig Returns to Washington as Peace Talks Break Down," *The Globe and Mail* (14 Apr. 1982); Davidson, Ian, "A Principle is a Principle," *Financial Times* 1:15 (7 Apr. 1982).

Argentina's claim to the islands was not to be misunderstood as support for the ruling government. A military junta is not a democratic government and is not concerned with public opinion except in as much as it fears being sacked. In fact, if anything, the more Britain turned Argentine public opinion against the junta, the more strongly the junta would claim sovereignty over the islands, because the invasion itself was almost certainly an attempt to use patriotism to distract the people from the country's political and economic troubles. If the junta had been able to keep the islands, it would certainly have helped its position domestically, which helps explain why the Argentines were so unwilling to yield in negotiations.<sup>18</sup> The British also misunderstood the junta's diffuse and unreliable decision-making process. This important misunderstanding will be discussed at length when analyzing Argentina's inability to negotiate effectively, but for now it is safe to say that each side misunderstood the other and thus did not employ the most effective kinds of diplomacy. In this way, mutual misunderstanding was an important impediment to effective negotiation and one of the most important reasons that war in the Falklands was not avoided.

### **Difficulties for Haig's Mission**

United States Secretary of State Alexander Haig faced a number of obstacles as he tried to arbitrate for Argentina and Britain. In a sense, every obstacle for negotiations in general was an obstacle for Haig, but among these were specific problems with his mission which prevented him from being as effective as he could have been. The most important of these problems include the sheer distance between Argentina and Britain, the unsteady support that Haig received in the United States, the fact that Argentina grew increasingly distrustful of Haig's neutrality, the Argentine's belief that they would receive international support for the invasion, and the difficulty Haig experienced working with an indecisive junta.

An editorial in the *Christian Science Monitor* on April 15 suggested that Haig had not been successful because he had too far to travel between Buenos Aires and London. According to the editorial, Haig was attempting to follow the example of Henry Kissinger, who had successfully negotiated peace settlements in the Middle East. The difference being, while Kissinger spent only a few hours on each flight, Haig spent eighteen hours in the air each time he traveled between the two capitals. Indeed, Haig arrived for the second time in Buenos Aires on April 16, and when he got there, he was told by Argentinian Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez that no progress had been made over the past few days while he had been absent.<sup>19</sup> One of the advantages a negotiator can possess is to apply constant pressure on a government to continue thinking about acceptable proposals. However, Haig could not apply constant pressure on the junta because, when he was gone, he was so far away that the military leaders could disregard him.

Haig also suffered from less-than-perfect support in his own country. Jean Kirkpatrick, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, was his most vocal opponent. She consistently and publicly opposed the official U.S. stance, which demanded that the Argentines withdraw their forces, although the U.S. position aligned with U.N. Resolution 502. Kirkpatrick feared that the U.S. would garner too much resentment in Latin America. According to Haig, her vocal protests would not have had much effect if she had not been a cabinet member in Reagan's government. However, because she was a member of the president's inner circle, Britain had to

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<sup>18</sup> David K. Willis, "Diplomats Race Clock in Falklands Showdown," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (5 Apr. 1982); Oakland Ross, "A Mixture of Contradiction and Pride," *The Globe and Mail* (22 Apr. 1982); Chris Hedges, "Latin Regimes Face Dread Possibility of Argentine Defeat," *The Globe and Mail* (16 Apr. 1982).

<sup>19</sup> "Falklands: A Better Way?" *Christian Science Monitor* 24 (15 Apr. 1982); Jimmy Burns and Andrew Whitley, "Haig Back to Buenos Aires for 'Decisive' Peace Talks," *Financial Times* 1:1 (16 Apr. 1982).

take her seriously every time she said Haig's position was incorrect. Thus, Haig was hampered every time he dealt with Britain because Britain doubted that his statements could be taken as representative of the official U.S. position. In addition, ABC's "Nightline" aired a false story which claimed the U.S. was offering Great Britain secret military intelligence about the Argentines, an incident that nearly prevented Haig from returning to Buenos Aires. With such unsteady support at home, it is not surprising that Haig had trouble earning confidence abroad.<sup>20</sup>

If Haig was somewhat doubted in Britain, then he was severely mistrusted in Argentina. As April progressed, the junta became increasingly convinced that he was supplying Britain with information and could not be trusted. Haig admits in his memoirs that his sympathies lay with the British, but he affirms that he decided to stay neutral in order to negotiate as effectively as possible. Still, his nation's position suggested that he could not have been completely neutral. After all, Reagan and Thatcher were great friends while Reagan and Galtieri were tense allies at best, and U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told Thatcher that he would never put a NATO ally on the same level as Argentina. Indeed, Haig was chosen for the mission over Kirkpatrick because he was the one who supported Britain's claim.<sup>21</sup> Hence, this implicit bias was probably evident at negotiations in Buenos Aires, thus hampering his ability to negotiate effectively.

In fact, Argentina had good reason to suspect that he was secretly informing the British, although by all accounts he was not. In a desperate moment on April 18, he pretended, in a wire-tapped conversation in Buenos Aires, that he had secret military information about an imminent British attack. He was trying to scare the Argentines and make them more willing to consider his proposals, but his plan backfired. The next day, he and his aides were treated like enemies. They were escorted by armed guards everywhere they went and were deprived of food for twelve hours. That day, Argentinian Admiral Jorge Anaya told Haig that he doubted his neutrality, and he was never allowed to return to Buenos Aires again. On the other side, Thatcher called Haig's mission "misguided."<sup>22</sup> Neither Argentina nor Britain respected or trusted Haig enough for his mission to be successful.

Another impediment to Haig's mission was the international support that Argentina received. Although the Latin American countries would eventually withdraw support for the invasion, their initial support added to the junta's confidence during April's negotiations. This added confidence made the junta less willing to yield to Britain's minimum demands, which were to remove its occupying forces before talks about the future of the islands could continue. In this way, Argentina's confidence in receiving international support made it more difficult for Haig to negotiate.

Initially, it seemed that Argentina would receive widespread support from Latin America. On April 3, the U.N. Security Council voted on Resolution 502, which ordered Argentina to remove its troops, and Panama, the only Latin American country on the Security Council, voted against the resolution. Also, on April 6, Nicaragua expressed support for Argentina, which had

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 269, 285

<sup>21</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 266, 270; Jimmy Burns and Andrew Whitley, "Haig Tries to Save Peace Mission as Attitudes Harden," *Financial Times* 1:1 (19 Apr. 1982)

<sup>22</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 266, 270; Andrew Whitley and Jimmy Burns, "Buenos Aires Rejects New Visit by Haig," *Financial Times* 1:1 (28 Apr. 1982); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 200, 204, 210, quote: 190.



important consequences for U.S. policy as well because Reagan had befriended the junta to receive its support against Nicaragua's Socialist government. On April 14, Bolivia publicly offered its air force to fight for Argentina, and on April 21 the Organization of American States (OAS), against the request of the United States, agreed to meet to discuss the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, a treaty from 1947 which called for all American countries to view an attack against one of their members as an attack against every member. If invoked, this treaty could have required every Latin American country to support Argentina in every way except militarily. Spain, currently in a dispute with Britain over Gibraltar, even voiced its support for Argentina's claim.<sup>23</sup> In general, it seemed that Argentina was going to receive substantial support from its neighbors and allies, which gave the junta the confidence to be inflexible in negotiations.

In the end, however, this confidence was misplaced. Far from uniting the continent to oppose Britain, the resolution passed by the OAS actually called for Argentina to respect the interests of the islanders, who would never have agreed to become Argentine. The resolution also failed to impose sanctions against Britain, which Argentina desired. It did condemn the economic sanctions that Britain's European allies had imposed on Argentina, and it called for Britain not to counterattack, but this was nowhere near the statement of Argentina's "undeniable right" to the islands that the Argentines had hoped for. Finally, some of most influential OAS nations, including Colombia and Chile, abstained from the vote. Argentina had counted on strong support from its neighbors and had negotiated assuming it would receive this. By April 16, Argentina had even sent additional ships to the South Atlantic and added troops to the southern bases of Ushuaia and Puerto Belgrano.<sup>24</sup> It seems that the junta was focused on military preparations, having taken diplomacy for granted. If Argentina had not been so sure of receiving international support, perhaps it would have more willing to negotiate. As it was, however, the junta's belief in international support made Haig's job even more difficult.

As April drew to a close, the junta began to realize that Britain was going to counterattack and that Argentina's forces would probably be overcome. Some members of the ruling government, probably including Galtieri himself, would have preferred a peaceful solution to war. However, as Haig explains in his memoirs, the junta was unsure about every position upon which it hesitantly agreed, which made negotiating basically impossible. Argentina's flawed decision-making procedure impaired its ability to negotiate, which was another serious impediment to Haig's diplomatic mission.

One explanation for Argentina's inability to negotiate was the disunity of the junta. For example, Haig recounts in his memoirs that four out of five army commanders did not know the April 2 invasion was going to happen until Argentine troops were already storming the islands. He also mentions that there were divisions among the three branches of the military about the wisdom of going to war with Britain: the navy and some elements of the army supported war, but the air force was resolutely against it. In fact, the head of the Air Force, Brigadier General

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<sup>23</sup> "Mixed Reaction Among Latin American Countries," *Financial Times* 1:2 (5 Apr. 1982); Chris Hedges, "Latin regimes face dread possibility of Argentine defeat," *Globe and Mail* (16 Apr. 1982); "Argentina Receives Guarded Support," *Globe and Mail* (14 Apr. 1982); "Bolivia Would Fight for Argentina, Haig Returns to Washington as Peace Talks Break Down," *Globe and Mail* (14 Apr. 1982); Harry B. Ellis, "OAS Says 'Yea' to Process that could Help Argentina," *Christian Science Monitor* 13 (21 Apr. 1982); John King, "Argentina Still Talking of Peace," *Globe and Mail* (29 Apr. 1982); Robert Graham, "Spain Gives Veiled Backing to Argentina," *Financial Times* 1:2 (5 Apr. 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Her Majesty's Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis*, p. 6; "Argentina Still Talking of Peace," *Globe and Mail* (29 Apr. 1982).

Basilio Lami Dozo, expressed his desire to withdraw all Argentinian forces from the islands, which was the one requirement upon which the British were insisting before continuing peaceful negotiations.<sup>25</sup>

However, peace proved unattainable because the junta could never agree on what to compromise. Even when President Galtieri or the three leading members of the junta agreed to a workable compromise, their word could not be trusted. As more members of the military found out about a compromise, one member would inevitably reject it and call for war, which forced the other members to affirm their patriotism by calling for war as well. In this way, Haig was fooled twice by the junta. After reaching what seemed like a promising compromise during negotiations, he was twice handed a letter the next morning, both times while boarding the plane for London, which erased the progress made the night before. The letters expressed the junta's unwillingness to compromise on Britain's minimum demands, which included lowering the Argentine flag on the islands before negotiations could continue and leaving the door open for the islanders to have some say in their future.<sup>26</sup> The junta's disunity and diffuse decision-making process made negotiations with Haig nearly impossible, which was just another obstacle among the many that he had to face on his diplomatic mission.

### **Political Self-Preservation**

When Haig first met Thatcher after the Argentine invasion, he told her that President Galtieri would not survive in office if the British Task Force made it all the way to the Falkland Islands. Thatcher responded by saying that she would not survive if the force were stopped. While Galtieri did, in fact, survive in office until Argentina was defeated, Haig's point about his precarious political position was still true. The desire for political self-preservation greatly influenced not only Thatcher and Galtieri, but also other political actors who played a role in the negotiations, including British Defense Secretary John Nott, British Foreign Secretary Francis Pym, and even Haig himself.<sup>27</sup> Most often, these actors took tougher positions than they otherwise might have because their superiors, colleagues, or constituents were pressuring them to stand up to the enemy. In the end, the need for political self-preservation probably played as large a role as any other factor in hampering effective negotiations.

The Argentine invasion was an attempt at political self-preservation by the ruling junta. The government was trying to deal with an increasingly discontented populace. On March 30, 1982, a number of Argentinian unions called a general strike. The resulting marches quickly turned into a mass demonstration by various leftist groups demanding information about members of their ranks who had "disappeared," that is, been arrested and never heard from again. The demonstrations became so large that the police opened fire into the crowd in downtown Buenos Aires. More than 2,000 people were arrested and six were wounded. The junta had been growing increasingly unpopular and was in danger of being overthrown, but on the Friday after the invasion, various leftist leaders who had been arrested at the protest were shown on television

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 277-289; "Maj. Gen. Cristino Nicolliades....," *New York Times* (19 Jun. 1982); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 194.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 282, 283, 286, 290.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 197; Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 274.

publicly supporting the junta's decision to invade. In fact, the leaders of all thirteen major Argentine political parties met with the junta's interior minister a few days after the invasion and officially offered their support.<sup>28</sup> From the very beginning, the invasion was an attempt to patch over divisions in Argentinian society. The result, however, was that the junta's survival came to depend entirely on success in the Falklands. This tight situation certainly affected its ability to compromise.

The patriotic frenzy created by the invasion grew so large that the military leaders had to take a hard line on the Falklands even after they realized their forces would probably be defeated. Newspapers in Buenos Aires became increasingly militaristic and anti-British during April. For example, one paper commented on Spain's dispute with Britain over Gibraltar with the headline, "What are you waiting for? Throw out the English!" The junta was clearly concerned with public opinion during this period, for instead of evaluating Haig's proposal that Britain and Argentina share administration of the islands until sovereignty could be worked out, the junta printed the proposal in the newspapers to gauge public opinion.<sup>29</sup> Public opinion had become one of the most important considerations for the junta, and the public was clamoring for war.

Haig describes Galtieri's manner as being full of patriotic bravado, but says this was merely a pretense of strength when weakness was the reality. Were the Falklands to be abandoned, the Argentine public would soon remember the injustice of its military government and the economic woes of the country. Thus, Haig argues that Galtieri was not a malicious backstabber but simply a leader who could not compromise without losing his job. Given its domestic position, it is not surprising that the junta continued to refuse to meet Britain's minimum requirements for continuing negotiations, even after South Georgia had been retaken and when most observers knew that Argentina would probably lose to the British.<sup>30</sup>

This refusal might even suggest that the junta's primary goal was not actually to win the islands, but was, in fact, to show the populace that it could stand up to Britain. If the military leaders truly wished to get the islands, it seems they would have avoided a battle that was sure to spell defeat and would have instead continued negotiating with Britain, which had already expressed openness to a lease-back agreement. Argentina's actions, however, were domestically focused.

Britain played a role in exacerbating the junta's weak position – and thus its inflexibility in negotiations – by severely weakening the already suffering Argentine economy. Britain boycotted all Argentine products and persuaded the European Economic Community to do the same. The result was that Argentina lost 20% of its export profits during the month of April, a loss which hurt all areas of the already-struggling economy. On April 26, *Business Week* reported that Argentine industry was operating at 55% capacity, its unemployment stood at 13%, underemployment was at 40%, and the peso had inflated nearly eight-fold in just the past year, from 2,000 pesos/dollar in 1981 to 15,000 pesos/dollar by the time of the article's publication. Export earnings had fallen to \$9 billion/year, and annual interest on Argentina's foreign debt was

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<sup>28</sup> Jimmy Burns and Andrew Whitley, "Argentina Seeks to Consolidate its Popular Support," *Financial Times* 1:4 (7 Apr. 1982); Chris Hedges, "Latin Regimes Face Dread Possibility of Argentine Defeat," *Globe and Mail* (16 Apr. 1982); Her Majesty's Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis, 1982* Statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Lord Carrington, in the House of Lords on 30 March 1982, p. 18, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Hedges, "Falklands Issue Exploited for Years by Argentines," *The Globe and Mail* (8 Apr. 1982); quote: Charles Kaiser, "Behind 'Enemy' Lines," *Newsweek* 57 (26 Apr. 1982)

<sup>30</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 280, 286, 287, 288; Oakland Ross, "Haig Returns to U.S., U.K. Has Doubt on Peace Plans from Argentina," *The Globe and Mail* (20 Apr. 1982); Tim McGirk, "New British Ultimatum," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (29 Apr. 1982).

a staggering \$7.2 billion. Although Argentina's economy had been declining for years, the sanctions imposed by the Europeans exacerbated the situation and put the country in a state of crisis. While one could not reasonably have expected the British government to act in a way that would have strengthened a government that had just invaded its territory, the negative effect of the economic sanctions actually made the Argentines less able to compromise. As economic woes worsened, the junta became even more unpopular and thus needed to be more inflexible in negotiations just to hang on to its last thread of credibility with the people.<sup>31</sup>

Even knowing that the economic sanctions were ruining the country, the junta was so weak politically that it had to reject the one proposal that would have lifted the crippling sanctions. While Haig was in Buenos Aires, he worked out an agreement with the junta that allowed for restoration of British administration of the islands, under the flags of six observer nations that were to monitor until sovereignty had been negotiated. This proposal would finally lift all economic sanctions. However, early the next morning he was told by Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez that the junta had changed its mind and rejected the proposal. As previously mentioned, the diffuse decision-making process of the junta was unreliable, but now one can perceive the reasons behind its inflexibility. While the leaders must have known that compromise was the only way to save their country from economic ruin, they also knew that withdrawing Argentine forces from the islands would have meant their immediate overthrow. Thatcher argues in her memoirs that any military junta, simply because of its nature, will never withdraw military forces, no matter the situation.<sup>32</sup> Whether she is correct or not, political pressure certainly prevented Argentina from withdrawing its forces in April 1982, even though keeping the troops stationed there was sure to bring defeat.

Political self-preservation, although not on such a large scale as in Argentina, had important effects in Britain as well. Whereas much of the pressure on the Argentine junta came from the nationalistic populace as a whole, Thatcher and important members of her government were pressured by specific groups. Still, whether it was the small but vocal Falkland Islands Lobby or the hawkish backbenchers of the Conservative Party, the effect of political pressure was the same in Britain as in Argentina. As British leaders came to worry about their own political survival, they became increasingly unwilling to compromise with the junta, which made it that much more difficult to avoid war.

Much of the pressure on British leaders came from the islanders and their supporters. The Falkland Islands Lobby grew increasingly powerful during the month of April. It came to include nine Members of Parliament from the Conservative, Liberal, and other parties. Largely due to their vocal expression of British nationalism, British public opinion changed from mainly pacifism to a willingness to make the military sacrifices necessary to win back the islands. On April 11, the exiled British governor of the islands, Rex Hunt, said the islanders wanted to remain British at all costs. However, a poll on April 12 showed that 60% of British people were not willing to sacrifice lives for the islands. The islanders very much wanted to remain British, but the government's initial response to this desire seemed to be the pacifist route, with the Home Office offering mainland residency to all islanders on April 15. However, as headlines like "Under the thumb of the Aliens" continued to sprout up in British newspapers, public

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<sup>31</sup> "Hard Lines Must Soften," *Globe and Mail*, (8 Apr. 1982); "A Shaky Economy Comes Under More Pressure," *Business Week* 48 (26 Apr. 1982); Chris Hedges, "Latin Regimes Face Dread Possibility of Defeat," *Globe and Mail* (16 Apr. 1982).

<sup>32</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 282-283, 287, 288, 294; Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 208

opinion was turned more in favor of the islanders' call for a military response. Thatcher also helped bring about the change in opinion, continually stating in public speeches that the laws of the United Nations gave Britain the right to use whatever measures were necessary for self defense, including military action. By April 17, one in four Britons favored bombing the islands and 67% wanted to land troops.<sup>33</sup> As the British public rallied behind the cause for war, Thatcher was pushed in that direction as well.

Calls for war first appeared not among the populace, however, but within Thatcher's own party, the Conservatives. According to the *Financial Times*, a London-based paper, the government was in especially great danger politically because the Conservatives, more than any other party, had historically prided themselves on defending the country. Having failed to protect the country from Argentine invasion, the Conservative government was in danger of falling out of power. An editorial in the *Financial Times* argued that Conservatives were so afraid of being sacked that they were not thinking clearly, asserting that a fight for survival "does not make for rational action." Regardless of whether their actions were rational, members of the Conservative Party were worried about political self-preservation, which in turn compelled them to make stronger statements regarding defense than they otherwise might have made. For example, Thatcher's backbenchers, who could force her to resign if they believed she was not adequately representing the party, openly criticized her in the days following the invasion for not having sent a fleet to the islands a month earlier, when Argentina had begun to make aggressive statements about the Falklands. Although Thatcher defended herself by arguing that the fleet would not have made it in time and that airplanes would have had nowhere to refuel, the pressure to make a strong military response was obvious.<sup>34</sup> It would have been impossible for this pressure not to have affected her negotiations with the Argentine junta.

The pressure on Thatcher to maintain a strong diplomatic position, combined with her personal convictions and Argentina's inflexibility, ultimately resulted in a diplomatic standstill that was never overcome. As early as April 10, when British public opinion had not yet turned toward war, the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* reported that Thatcher's career depended on restoring the islands to British control. The Labour Party had called for her resignation following the invasion, and Conservatives were known to quickly remove leaders that did not perform well. On April 21, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that Thatcher's backbenchers would settle for nothing less than the British flag flying over the islands, and even Haig admits in his memoirs that her government could not have survived unless Argentine troops were removed. Unfortunately, the sticking point in negotiations came down to this requirement, for Britain refused to talk about sovereignty until Argentine troops left the islands, but Argentina refused to remove its troops until the British fleet left the area, and Thatcher said that removing

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<sup>33</sup> "Lobby power," *Financial Times* 1:14 (19 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "Falklands: British Resolve, US Diplomacy; Thatcher Sizes Up Her Options," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (8 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "Britain: Pressure for Diplomacy Builds," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (12 Apr. 1982); Jack Epstein and James Evans, "Falklanders Feel Betrayed by British Protectors," *The Globe and Mail* 12 (15 Apr. 1982); "1 Briton in 4 Favors Bombing Argentina," *The Globe and Mail* (17 Apr. 1982); "Haig Set for Talks, Argentine Junta Tightens its Grip on the Falklands," *The Globe and Mail* (16 Apr. 1982); "Firmer Trend Continues as Market Pins Hopes on a Peaceful Solution to Falkland Islands Crisis," *Financial Times* 2:34 (22 Apr. 1982); Charles Kaiser, "Behind 'Enemy' Lines," *Newsweek* 57 (26 Apr. 1982);

<sup>34</sup> Elinor Goodman, "Britain: 'Now it is the Time for Action,'" *Financial Times* 1:14 (5 Apr. 1982); "Jingoism is Not the Way," *Financial Times* 1:14 (5 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "Diplomats Race Clock in Falkland Showdown," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (5 Apr. 1982); Her Majesty's Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis*, 1982, p. 26, 29.

the fleet would have immediately ended her career. In this way, the need to preserve her career prevented Thatcher from negotiating a diplomatic solution to the crisis.<sup>35</sup>

Still, political pressure on British leaders after the Argentine invasion did cause some British leaders to resign, the most prominent of whom was Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington. Carrington resigned on April 3, citing his failure to protect the islands while in office. Because he failed to prevent the invasion, he felt that British policy after the invasion could best be pursued without him. Other resignations included Richard Luce, one of Carrington's colleagues, and Humphrey Atkins, Chief Whip and an important player in foreign affairs. Defense Secretary John Nott offered his resignation, although Thatcher convinced him to remain, and Francis Pym resigned from the Defense Ministry, although Thatcher made him her Foreign Secretary to replace Carrington. Embarrassment for not having protected the islands affected leaders besides Thatcher, and this sentiment surely drove the administration toward a harder line against Argentina. Indeed, *The Globe and Mail* interpreted Carrington's resignation as a sure sign that the administration was going to take a tough stance against Argentina, a prediction that was correct in the end.<sup>36</sup>

Specifically, John Nott and Francis Pym were constantly affected by concerns about political self-preservation during April's negotiations. Being so pressured, they were pushed away from compromise and toward a tougher stance against Argentina. On April 5, the *Financial Times* reported that Conservative backbenchers had walked out on Nott while he was speaking to the House of Commons. Some even shouted, "Resign! Resign!" Concern about a reaction from the powerful backbenchers – some of whom went so far as to advocate bombing the Argentine mainland – even forced Nott to change a report that showed a drop in fleet numbers for fear of being shouted out of Parliament. Pym, too, struggled to satisfy the bloodthirsty backbenchers. The *Financial Times* argued on April 8 that Pym had only earned the political leeway to consider a peaceful resolution because he had emphasized the economic sanctions against Argentina, which, as previously discussed, actually hampered negotiations by further weakening the junta. Thatcher even had to save Pym from the backbenchers when he used the word "administration" to describe what Britain would win back from the invaders. She quickly stepped in and assured the backbenchers that "sovereignty" was what Mr. Pym had meant to say.<sup>37</sup> In such a tense environment, meaningful discussions about transferring sovereignty were nearly impossible.

Finally, concerns about self-preservation hampered even Alexander Haig, the supposedly neutral and freely-negotiating American Secretary of State. *The Globe and Mail* reported that Haig's aids worried that he would be removed as Secretary of State if he could not solve the crisis. Perhaps one reason for this concern was Reagan's friendship with Thatcher and his lack of patience with the Argentines. Once, Reagan specifically instructed Haig to tell the junta that

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<sup>35</sup> Barry May, "Iron Lady's Career Rides with the Royal Armada," *Globe and Mail* (10 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "Britain Maintains its Options – both Diplomacy and Force," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (21 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 272 ; "Bolivia would Fight for Argentina, Haig Returns to Washington as Peace Talks Break Down," *Globe and Mail* (14 Apr. 1982).

<sup>36</sup> "Thatcher Reaffirms Confidence in Nott," *Financial Times* 1:6 (6 Apr. 1982); Ivor Owen, "Backbenchers Tighten Noose round Nott in Commons Debate," *Globe and Mail* 1:2 (5 Apr. 1982); "Choice for Mr. Reagan," *Globe and Mail* (6 Apr. 1982); Elinor Goodman, "Tories Divided by Carrington's Resignation," *Financial Times*, 1:6 (6 Apr. 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Ivor Owen, "Backbenchers Tighten Noose Round Nott in Commons Debate," *Financial Times* 1:2 (5 Apr. 1982); Jeffery Simpson, "Britons Voice Support for Thatcher's Policy," *Globe and Mail* (23 Apr. 1982); Peter Riddell, "Pym Wins Backing on Falklands Diplomacy," *Financial Times* 1:18 (8 Apr. 1982).

continuing to be inflexible would cause the U.S. to blame the failed negotiations on Argentina and side with Britain. Indeed, *Newsweek* reported on April 26 that Haig was worried that Reagan had already arranged for Treasury Secretary George Schultz to replace him. In the end, Haig did lose his job as a result of the crisis, being forced to resign soon after the outbreak of war. Worry about such a result must have affected his ability to arbitrate, although his memoirs give the impression that he was more than willing to sacrifice his position in the government to try to prevent bloodshed up to the very last moment.<sup>38</sup>

### **Ideological Principle and the Cold War Context**

One of Haig's most significant problems was the United States' need to appear strong before the Soviet Union. The Soviets had been flexing their muscles in areas like Afghanistan and had made significant inroads in Latin America, especially in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas. The West was worried that a poor performance in the Falklands would affect the international balance of power. To prevent this from happening, Western leaders felt the need to appear strong, which they did by upholding two principles in the Falklands: self-determination and the condemnation of aggression. Although it appears that the West neutralized the Soviet threat in the Falklands, the need to appear ideologically strong hampered negotiations.

Dissent within the West was perceived as a threat to the Cold War balance of power. From the beginning of the conflict, the Soviets had decried Britain's "colonialism," and some in the West latched on to this argument as well. On April 5, an editorial in the *Financial Times* called it an "anachronism" for Britain to try to regain a territory 8,000 miles away. Even Michael Foot, leader of Britain's Labour Party, argued at one point that Britain would violate UN Resolution 502 by counterattacking. He and Tory backbencher Sir Anthony Meyer said on April 15 that they would not support war, no matter the final outcome of negotiations. Although they would change their stance as negotiations continued, dissent such as theirs in the face of an ideologically aggressive Soviet Union was seen as dangerous, especially since the absence of the British fleet from the North Atlantic altered the military balance of power. In addition, one commentator remarked that the inability of the United States to prevent war in the Falkland Islands demonstrated its decline as a world superpower.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the Soviet threat was a significant concern.

Appearing weak in the balance of power was especially troubling for the West because the Soviet Union had begun to make ties with Argentina. Connections between the Soviets and the Argentines began in 1979, when the United States stopped selling grain to the Soviet Union in protest of its invasion of Afghanistan. Argentina, in dire need of export profits, quickly made up the difference. In 1982, many feared that this economic connection would become political, especially if leftist groups overthrew the junta. Argentina was surprised at the lack of international support for its invasion, especially after the United States voted for UN Resolution 502. Lacking support in the West, many worried that the Argentines would seek help from the

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<sup>38</sup>John King, "Falklands Fuzz Puts Washington on the Spot," *Globe and Mail* (23 Apr. 1982); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 202; Elizabeth Peer, "Haig's Stake in the Falklands," *Newsweek* 19 (26 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 298

<sup>39</sup>"Jingoism is Not the Way," *Financial Times* 1:14 (5 Apr. 1982); Joseph C. Harsch, "Falklands: So Much for the Superpowers," *Christian Science Monitor* 23 (9 Apr. 1982); David K. Willis, "Tough Thatcher Line on Falklands Faces Severest Test," *Christian Science Monitor* 13 (15 Apr. 1982); Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 210

Soviets if war should result. As one author remarked, Argentina would be much more dangerous as a communist ally than Cuba or Nicaragua had been.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps in an effort to make such an alliance with Argentina, the Soviet Union initially supported the Argentine position. As early as April 3, the Soviets abstained from voting on Resolution 502 and openly condemned the British Task Force as colonial aggression. *Pravda*, the leading Russian state-controlled newspaper, even argued that British attempts to retake the islands would go against United Nations rulings on decolonization. Argentina seems to have adopted this way of thinking, claiming at the Organization of American States that the British recapture of South Georgia Island was colonialism. To add to the West's worries, there was strong anti-American sentiment in Argentina, and the Soviet Union, while not sending arms directly to Argentina, did instruct Cuba to offer aircraft, pilots, and arms to the junta.<sup>41</sup> It seems that the Soviets saw the war as an opportunity to gain advantage in Latin America.

The Western Powers felt they could counter the Soviet threat only by firmly defending their ideological tenets, one of the most important of which was self-determination. In a speech to the House of Commons on April 3, Thatcher strongly condemned the Argentine invasion as an affront to the principle of self-determination. She mentioned that the British Governor of the Falklands, Rex Hunt, had observed the patriotic islanders literally "in tears" for having been taken over by a foreign power. Her stance was that the islanders must determine their own future, and she stood by that belief throughout the conflict. Although there were significant contradictions within her unequivocal defense of self-determination – a British government committee determined after the war that her stance had been in error – the right of the islanders to maintain their way of life became a rallying cry for the British people and an important ideological weapon with which to counter Soviet arguments.<sup>42</sup>

Even more important as an ideological tenet for the West was the condemnation of aggression. The Western Powers had been checking Soviet aggression for decades, and they would have appeared inconsistent if they did not condemn Argentina's aggressive takeover in the Falklands. Thatcher publicly declared that the "rule of law will triumph," and the United States supported her. Also playing into the British mindset was the national memory of the Munich Conference of 1938, where Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had appeased Hitler's aggression in Czechoslovakia and failed to prevent the Second World War. *The Globe and Mail* called Thatcher's way of thinking a "Munich psychology." In this way, concerns about appeasement encouraged Britain and the NATO allies never to tolerate aggression again. Indeed, as Haig recounts, Thatcher compared the situation in the Falklands to the Munich Conference, angrily shouting down Pym when he suggested that Britain should ask the islanders how they felt about a war before counterattacking.<sup>43</sup> For Thatcher, it was most important to make sure

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph C. Harsch, "Falklands Fallout," *Christian Science Monitor* 23 (13 Apr. 1982); Daniel Southerland, "Global Isolation Prods Argentina Closer to USSR," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (13 Apr. 1982).

<sup>41</sup>David K. Willis, "Britain: Pressure for Diplomacy Builds," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (12 Apr. 1982); Daniel Southerland, "Global Isolation Prods Argentina Closer to USSR," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (13 Apr. 1982); John King, "Argentina Denounces Invasion by British," *Globe and Mail* (27 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 278.

<sup>42</sup>Her Majesty's Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis, 1982*, Speech by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Opening an Emergency Debate on the Falklands Crisis in the House of Commons on 3 April 1982, pp. 26, 39; Minutes of Proceedings of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and Chairman's Draft Report on a Policy for the Falklands Islands. Read 27 April 1983, House of Commons, WFU ZSR Library British Government Documents, p. xxv

<sup>43</sup>David K. Willis, "British Resolve, US Diplomacy, Thatcher Sizes Up Her Options," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (8 Apr. 1982); quote: David K. Willis, "Tough Thatcher Line on Falklands Faces Severest Test," *Christian Science*



Argentina did not benefit from the invasion. Not surprisingly, this became a sticking point in peace talks.

The need to condemn aggression pushed Thatcher to maintain a hard line in negotiations. She recounts in her memoirs one instance when Haig had convinced Pym that Britain would lose international support if the two sides came to blows. For this reason, Pym believed that conflict had to be avoided. When Pym showed her these arguments, however, she called them “conditional surrender” and rejected them out of hand. In this instance, the “Munich psychology” seems to have played a role in her considerations. Thatcher’s tough stance turned into an aggressive condemnation of Argentina. In speeches to the House of Commons, she used incendiary language like “rape of the islands” to characterize the invasion. Her tough stance also influenced others within her government like Nikko Henderson, the British ambassador to the United States, who told Haig that Britain not only wanted to remove the Argentines from the islands, but also “wouldn’t mind sinking the Argentine fleet.” Perhaps Thatcher’s strong stance had gotten out of hand, making the British too eager to avenge the islands with blood. However, Haig offers a different interpretation, saying that Britain’s unyielding insistence not to appease the aggressors marked a turning point in East-West relations. He believes the West had been declining into passivity, and that Britain’s tough stance reversed the dangerous trend.<sup>44</sup> Either way, Britain’s strong resolve against appeasement pushed its leaders into a hard stance in negotiations, making a peaceful solution even harder to come by.

The NATO countries joined Britain in its strong condemnation of aggression. Immediately following the invasion, the European Community condemned the invasion and called for Argentina to remove its forces from the islands. By April 12, these countries had imposed their toughest economic sanctions ever, denying Argentina of \$2 billion in export profits. As both the *Financial Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* point out, these sanctions were a striking display of unity for the European Community. Never before had the group taken such drastic measures. The EC’s partial sanctions on the Soviet Union, in response to its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, had cut Soviet exports by a mere 1.5%. The EC even failed to impose meaningful sanctions on Iran during the hostage crisis in 1980, only enacting a partial ban on Iranian exports. Given the unprecedented sanctions against Argentina, it seems that Western Europe was just as in favor of condemning aggression as Britain was, at least in an effort to support a fellow EC member. As Haig said, had the West abandoned the principle that the status quo must not be changed by force, it would have shown itself to be corrupt, which was just what the Soviet Union had been claiming since the outbreak of the Cold War.<sup>45</sup> By not

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*Monitor* 13 (15 Apr. 1982); Jeffery Simpson, “Falklands: Test for British Honor Despite the High Cost for a Small Prize, No Risk Seems too Great,” *Globe and Mail* (8 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 272-273

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), p. 206; Joseph C. Harsch, “Britain and Argentina Find Who Their (Very Different) Friends Are,” *Christian Science Monitor* 3 (16 Apr. 1982); Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis*, 1982, Speech by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mr Francis Pym, Opening the House of Commons’ Second Debate on the Falklands Crisis on 7 Apr. 1982, p. 37 ; Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 272

<sup>45</sup> Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, *Britain and the Falklands Crisis*, 1982, Introduction, p. 6; Gary Yerkey, “EC Takes Toughest Economic Sanction Ever; W. Europe Stands with Britain,” *Christian Science Monitor* 12 (12 Apr. 1982); John Wyles and Paul Cheesright, “Falklands: Britain Seeks Backing From Europe,” *Financial Times* 1:1 (7 Apr. 1982); Alexander M. Haig, Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 265

allowing the precedent of aggression to stand, the West took the moral high ground, remaining consistent in the never-ending ideological battle with the Soviets.

Whether caused by Western ideological steadfastness or not, it seems that the Soviets were prevented from siding too strongly with the Argentines. On April 28, Lev Tolkunov, chairman of Moscow's Novosti press agency, declared that the Soviet Union would not necessarily fight for Argentina. Indeed, although the Soviet Union consistently condemned the British for failing to give up their colony, it never officially supported the Argentine invasion. Daniel Southerland of the *Christian Science Monitor* argues that the communists could not get too close to the Argentines for ideological reasons. After all, the junta's ideology was vehemently anti-communist.<sup>46</sup> However, the economic collaboration between the two countries demonstrates that the junta was happy to receive support from whomever it could. In light of this collaboration, Haig's interpretation seems to have merit. If not for the show of Western unity and strength, the Soviets might have been bolder in making ties with Argentina. The only problem was that, in order to show unity and strength, the West had to take a hard line in negotiations with the junta, and this prevented a peaceful solution from being reached in the Falklands.

Nations outside of NATO had reason to condemn the invasion as well. If Argentina could establish the precedent of solving territorial disputes with force, then any country with disputed territory would be in danger of an attack. In the end, this explained why Argentina did not receive the support it expected from its Latin American neighbors. As articulated by a high Brazilian official, if Latin American countries learned that Argentina could get away with simply occupying the territory it claimed, then nearly every country in Latin America would be at risk, for in 1982 there were over 20 active border disputes in Latin America alone. Establishing a precedent of aggression would have had worldwide implications as well, such as encouraging China to attack Taiwan or Turkey to occupy Rhodes. Even without the context of the Cold War, most nations condemned the Argentine invasion because allowing it to last would have set a dangerous precedent of aggression for the whole world.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusions

It was very unfortunate that war finally broke out in the Falkland Islands. Both sides genuinely wanted to avoid war, a fact they demonstrated by participating in a month of frustrating negotiations. Why, then, did fighting begin? Why did 1,054 soldiers have to die for these remote and sparsely populated islands? It would be irresponsible not to assign responsibility for an outcome as drastic as the outbreak of war. Who or what was responsible for the Falkland Islands War?

In considering such a question, it is important to distinguish between moral responsibility and historical responsibility. The question of moral responsibility assigns blame. Whoever is morally responsible for the war is guilty of starting the fight and causing the deaths. Not surprisingly, this question is very difficult to answer. As this paper has shown, numerous historical forces led to the outbreak of war, none of which is easily attributable to one person or group. Diplomatic principles relating to the Cold War, the precedent of aggression, difficulties

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<sup>46</sup> Ned Tomko, "Soviets Shy of Slipping onto Falklands Swamp," *Christian Science Monitor* 13 (28 Apr. 1982); David Buchan, "Moscow Backs Away from Openly Siding with Junta," *Financial Times* 1:4 (8 Apr. 1982); Daniel Southerland, "Global Isolation Prods Argentina Closer to USSR," *Christian Science Monitor* 1 (13 Apr. 1982).

<sup>47</sup> Lucia Mouat, "Former UN Ambassador McHenry: US Should Back British on Falklands," *Christian Science Monitor* 10 (22 Apr. 1982); Joseph C. Harsch, "The Argentina Case," *Christian Science Monitor* 23 (15 Apr. 1982); James Nelson Goodsell, "Argentina: Neighbors Hold Back Latin America Unity Masks Deep Hostility," *Christian Science Monitor* (27 Apr. 1982); "Argentina Receives Guarded Support," *The Globe and Mail* (7 Apr. 1982).

in negotiation, and the need to remain in power are the main historical forces that hampered negotiations and led to war, but none of these issues implicates a particular person or group. Thus, the question of historical responsibility is more instructive than the question of moral responsibility, for historical responsibility is concerned not with who is to blame, but with what historical forces finally caused the outcome in question.

Some actors in the conflict probably deserve some measure of blame. Perhaps the junta made the wrong decision by invading the islands, and it could have stepped down instead of sending soldiers to die against a much stronger opponent. Perhaps the British should have been more patient, for the Argentine economy was plummeting with each day that passed, becoming increasingly less able to fight a war. However, these are merely speculations. To assign moral responsibility would require a definition of moral obligation that would be very difficult to establish in such a complicated situation. More importantly, whatever personal responsibility can be assigned seems less important than the larger historical forces at play. After all, given the many reasons for the failure of negotiations, would other actors really have been able to avoid war? Although one can never predict an unlikely feat of heroism, it is improbable that anyone would have been able to overcome the many impediments to negotiation that have been discussed in this paper. In the end, responsibility for the Falkland Islands War lays with the numerous historical forces that made diplomacy impossible. If there are lessons to be learned from this conflict, they would seem to relate to how similar impediments to negotiation might be overcome in the future. What more could be done and what might be done differently are questions that will always be worthy of further research.

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