

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FALKLANDS WAR<sup>1</sup>:  
POLITICS, STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS

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The Falklands War began on Friday 2 April 1982, when an amphibious landing in the very early hours of the morning (local time) by a marine brigade of the Argentinean Navy seized Port Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands (known to Argentina as the *Islas Malvinas*), forcing the surrender after a firefight of three hours of the small British garrison, which consisted chiefly of a force of about 75 Royal Marines known as Naval Party 8901. Despite the destruction of some buildings, there were no British casualties; but one Argentinean officer was killed and some Argentineans wounded. Argentina's attempts to present the invasion to the world as intentionally peaceful and bloodless were ruined almost at once, as photographs smuggled out of the islands showed the destruction of the British barracks, and the humiliation of the garrison. This was the first in a series of Argentinean failures to connect their political, propaganda and military strategies with their military operations, failures that contributed to their defeat in the war just over eleven weeks later.

In 1982 the Falkland Islands were classed as one of the self-governing British Dependent Territories. The British administration of the Falklands included the Falklands Islands Dependencies, some smaller islands several hundred kilometres to the south-east, of which the largest is South Georgia where a small British base was also seized by Argentinean forces on 3 April, together with the uninhabited South Sandwich Islands, and Southern Thule. Although Argentina had a historic claim to the Falkland Islands, which are over 13,000 kilometres from Britain but only 480 kilometres east of the southern tip of Argentina, the Falklands had been a British colonial possession since 1833. The inhabitants were in some cases descended from almost five generations of settlers, and they had no wish to become citizens of an Argentina that since 1976 had been governed by unstable military regimes (*junta* in Spanish) that had waged a notorious 'dirty war' of repression and counterterrorism against their own people. Often compared to the Outer Hebrides islands of

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northern Scotland in terrain and climate, the Falklands consist of the two main islands East and West Falkland, separated by the body of water known as Falkland Sound, together with several hundred smaller islands. The islands are approximately 260 kilometres from west to east and 140 kilometres from north to south, comparable to Wales or Northern Ireland in size. In 1982 the main industry was sheep farming, and the population was just over 1,800 people, more than half of them living in or near Port Stanley, which was (and still is) the only town, on the far eastern side of East Falkland.

In 1982 both Britain and Argentina maintained the legitimacy and legality of their actions; but in fact the international law of the long-standing dispute over the Falkland Islands is extremely complex. It was widely believed before 1982 that both countries were reluctant to submit their claims to arbitration or the judgement of international law, fearing that this process would expose the weaknesses in both their respective cases. To summarise the position as it was understood in 1982: the first European explorers found the islands uninhabited, and discovery was disputed between several countries. Before 1833 parties of sailors, including those of France, Spain, England and the United States briefly created and abandoned small settlements at various times. The Argentinean claim was based on geographical proximity, on rights inherited from the Spanish Empire from which Argentina became independent in 1816, and chiefly on a controversial historical claim over the removal in 1833 by the British of a small Argentinean garrison on the islands. The British claim in 1982 was based chiefly on the 'doctrine of prescription' in international law, meaning a long, open, continuous and peaceful residence since 1833. In effect, British policy was dictated by the wishes of the Falkland Islanders to remain British, and if Argentina had been a prosperous and stable democracy there would almost certainly have been no dispute. Since 1982 the status of the Falkland Islands has changed to that of a British Overseas Territory, and the British official position has increasingly emphasised the rights of the Falkland Islanders to self-determination.

The evidence available to historians to assess the origins, outbreak and conduct of the Falklands War is good, at least from the British side. In January 2013, under what is known as the 'thirty year rule' (established by the Public Records Act 1967), there will be a release into the public domain of classified official documents from 1982 at the National Archives in London, but it is unlikely that this will lead to any major revisions of present historical understanding of British policy and strategy. Between 1982 and 1987 the British government conducted a series of public parliamentary enquiries into the war, of which the

most important were the Franks Report on its origins and outbreak, and a report on the handling of the press and public information. Over the same period, several books of generally high quality about the war were published, some written with the co-operation of the Ministry of Defence, mostly concerned with naval and military operations.<sup>2</sup> More books have appeared co-inciding with the war's tenth and twentieth anniversaries, and the thirtieth anniversary in 2012. Several major British political and military figures of the war published their memoirs, including Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Secretary of Defence John Nott, and there have been conferences and 'witness seminars' on the experiences of the war at various levels. It has been British practice since 1945 for published official histories of wars to be written by an independent but trustworthy scholar who is allowed privileged access to secret documents before their release under the 'thirty year rule', and *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign* appeared in 2005, written by Sir Lawrence Freedman.<sup>3</sup> Even so, there are some aspects of the British conduct of the war that remain secret or officially unconfirmed, largely concerning intelligence matters. Many details of the naval war and the air war also remain obscure, as most accounts of operations have dealt chiefly with the land campaign to recapture East Falkland that formed the climax to the war. Some United States' diplomats published their own accounts, including Secretary of State Alexander Haig, but there is no authoritative account of the war from the perspective of the United States' government.<sup>4</sup> A reasonable picture of Argentinean naval and military operations has emerged, partly from the work of British authors visiting Argentina who have been able to confirm British assessments and statistics from comparison with Argentinean sources. But understandably there is no authoritative account of the politics and grand strategy of the war from the Argentinean perspective, and the story of the decision to invade the Falklands still includes some elements of conjecture.

The British response to the Argentinean invasion of 2 April was a combination of diplomatic action with the immediate despatch of a naval and amphibious task force consisting of almost their entire surface fleet, plus some attack submarines. This task force consisted of a carrier task group with two light aircraft carriers which reached the area of the Falklands by 28 April, and an amphibious task group with two assault landing ships carrying

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of books published on the war up to its tenth anniversary see Andrew Orgill, *The Falklands War: Background, Conflict, Aftermath: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Mansell, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, 2 Volumes (London: Routledge, 2005). See also Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), John Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow* (London: Politico, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Haig, *Caveat* (New York: MacMillan, 1984).

a reinforced amphibious brigade, later reinforced by a further light infantry brigade: more than 100 ships and 28,000 men were involved by the end of the conflict. No other countries took part as belligerents, but the United States became the third major participant in the war, first through its unsuccessful attempts to mediate between the two sides, and then from 30 April with its declared support for Britain, including the overt supply of military equipment and other resources. Important roles in the diplomacy of the conflict were also played by the United Nations (UN), and by countries of the Organisation of American States (OAS), which other than the United States generally supported the Argentinean position. The other great exception to this support for Argentina within the OAS was Chile, which had a number of territorial disputes with Argentina, and which provided the British with indirect support during the war. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the European Economic Community (the forerunner of the European Union) generally supported the British. The most consistent support for Britain came from France, which like the United States was (and is) a fellow permanent member of the UN Security Council, and had also supplied Argentina with some important weapons systems.

There was never a moment after 2 April when the British halted their military operations, which were given the name Operation Corporate, or a moment when diplomatic activity ceased while military action took place, so that the timetables of diplomacy, strategy and military operations interacted throughout the war. But after the initial Argentinean seizure of the islands there was a period of just over three weeks of intense diplomacy, before fighting resumed with the British recapture of South Georgia starting on 21 April. This was followed by naval engagements on the high seas of the South Atlantic in which both sides lost ships and the Argentinean fleet retreated to its harbours, then the British amphibious landing on the western side of East Falkland on 21 May and the land campaign, leading to the surrender of Argentinean forces on the Falklands on 14 June. As has been normal practice in conflicts since the end of the Second World War, there was no formal declaration of war on either side (the war is still known officially in Britain as the 'Falklands Conflict,') and no concluding announcements of peace, but the British announced an end to hostilities on 6 July. Argentina refused to announce an end to hostilities, but already on 17 June the Argentinean junta had fallen, leading in 1983 to the end of military rule in Argentina and the establishment of a civilian democracy. Argentinean casualties for the war are usually given as 649 killed and 1,068 wounded, together with about 13,000 surrendered, mostly from the garrison of the Falklands. British losses were recorded as 255 killed and 777 wounded, plus

three Falkland Islands civilians killed.

From the Argentinean invasion to their final surrender, the Falklands War lasted just over eleven weeks, ending with a complete victory for one side. It formed a contrast with a war with which it just overlapped, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, which after an initially successful conventional phase led to an unresolved and protracted conflict. It was fought by the armed forces of individual sovereign counties, almost without direct civilian involvement, or with the problems of alliance warfare. It was confined to a theatre of war imposed by the British upon themselves as a 'total exclusion zone' of radius 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) from the centre of the Falklands, with no attacks being made on the mainland of Argentina. It was the first – and so far the only – high seas naval war of the missile age, although developments in electronics and other technologies since 1982 have made many of its episodes increasingly less relevant to modern navies and airforces. It came at the height of the 'new cold war' of the early 1980s, but it took place largely outside the context of east-west tensions and rivalries. Consequently, at the time, it was a war that statesmen and conflict theorists found hard to categorise or fit within the framework of their thinking. Instead, parallels were drawn with the naval expeditions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the war was characterised as a freak of history, as Britain's very last colonial war.

From the perspective of the early 21st century the Falklands War has a rather different look. In the later 1980s this war became a model for the changes in limited war doctrines based on short and conventional campaigns, and it is now seen as an early example of the new wars of intervention and expeditionary wars that have characterised the post-cold war era. For the British it was an unexpected and improvised war, and a vindication of a defence policy and force structure that they began to adopt in 1959, based on small but all-volunteer and highly professional armed forces with the best technology that they could afford, capable of fighting at some distance from their home bases against enemies who were inferior in technology and training, and under a wide variety of circumstances. In a complete contrast to the Falklands War, the next British participation in a major war would be in the Gulf War of 1991, for which they sent a heavy armoured division to fight in the desert of southern Iraq as part of a large alliance; again a successful war from their perspective. Even so, British military victory in the Falklands War was probable rather than certain, and far from easy.

One view of the longer-term importance of the Falklands War put forward in the

1990s, including by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Secretary of State Alexander Haig, was that it marked the critical turning point in the new cold war. In this hypothesis, the British display of resolution in the face of aggression, and the unexpectedly strength of their armed forces, together with the willingness of the United States to accept short-term disadvantages to itself in order to support a major European ally, led the Soviet Union to re-evaluate the wisdom of challenging a NATO that up to that point had seemed politically and militarily too weak to defend western Europe if it was threatened or attacked.

The Falklands War was also a demonstration by the British of what has come to be called 'soft power'. Unlike Argentina, which was a member of the OAS, and the Rio Treaty or Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (IATRA), Britain had no treaties or formal agreements with any country in South America. But Britain still had a significant advantage over Argentina in shaping the political and military context of the war, through having the wider support of many other countries (and individuals within those countries) around the world, and the active hostility of none. This support came not because of specific reciprocal arrangements negotiated at the time, but through relationships that had matured over decades. In addition to the United States, the major states of Western Europe broadly supported Britain, including economic sanctions against Argentina agreed on 10 April by the European Economic Community, of which Britain was a member. Both the old and new Commonwealth countries also broadly supported the British position, with Australia offering a destroyer and delaying the recently-agreed purchase of a British aircraft carrier. Countries in South America were broadly opposed to British armed intervention, but also reluctant to side with Argentina too closely. Neither the Soviet Union with its satellite countries nor China saw their vital interests as threatened, and largely stood neutral. Many other countries, including Japan, adopted a position of cautious neutrality, respecting the economic sanctions regime against Argentina while not officially joining it.

The British understood that this support (or at least lack of opposition) was in each case conditional according to each country's judgement of its own best interests, including long-term interests, and acted accordingly, stressing the importance of the doctrine of prescription as a factor in international stability, and the consequences if an act of aggression to resolve a long-standing dispute was accepted as a precedent. The British did not actively seek war following the Argentinean invasion, but they were very concerned that if international opinion turned against them they could be obliged to accept a temporary cessation of hostilities leaving them in an impossible political and strategic position that

might last for decades. This was one reason why the British rejected any strategies of fighting a protracted war, such as using their surface fleet and submarines to impose a naval blockade of the Falklands, or making a landing first on the less well defended West Falkland, leaving East Falkland under Argentinean occupation. As would be expected, the idea of direct British attacks on the Argentinean mainland on any scale was rejected. Although Britain was a nuclear power, no evidence has ever been produced that the British even considered the threat or use of nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> The British also quickly concluded in April 1982 that there was no possibility of Argentina having or obtaining nuclear weapons.

The other chief reason for the British reluctance to fight a long war or delay their military operations, of which the civilian pundits who proposed such strategies were ignorant at the time, was the impossibility of maintaining the British surface fleet without proper harbour facilities for more than a few weeks until about mid-June in the face of the storms of the approaching South Atlantic winter; the electronic systems in particular would not last. This critical operational factor provided one of the British timetables for the war. While a delay of even a week would have allowed them to deploy significantly stronger and better equipped forces, their main strength lay in speed: a halt or delay in military operations might have provided the political context for the cease-fire that they hoped to avoid before they had achieved victory.

The Falklands War was also an early example not only of modern expeditionary war, but of an emerging phenomenon for which neither side was well prepared in 1982: the rising importance of public diplomacy. This was probably the last war of any size in which the media and public opinion were treated as matters that could be separated from traditional diplomacy, and from strategy and operations. The Falklands War was the first war of the photocopier age, and one of the first wars of the age of direct satellite broadcasting of commercial television news; although it took place a year before the internet appeared in any form, and a decade before the world-wide web. It was also a war fought in the shadow of the belief, which was then widespread, that the United States had lost the Vietnam War because of adverse reporting. In an improvised war, British politicians and military commanders followed their instincts rather than any plan. The world's media were excluded from the war zone, and only a small number of British newspaper, radio and television reporters were

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<sup>5</sup> It is standard British government policy never to comment on the deployment of its nuclear weapons. The public evidence and some conjectures regarding British nuclear weapons in the Falklands War is summarised in Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Volume 2, pp. 61-2.

allowed with the task force; while arbitrary and sometimes contradictory restrictions were imposed on security at home. The technical impossibility of beaming live television images from the war zone meant that this became a war dominated by radio reporting, with the pictures appearing only towards its end. The lack of prior understandings between the government and the media also produced some cases of security failure. The parliamentary investigation into the treatment of the media in the war highlighted issues that have grown considerably in importance into the 21st century.<sup>6</sup>

The most controversial episode of the Falklands War was the sinking by a British submarine on 2 May of the Argentinean light cruiser ARA *General Belgrano*, which at the time was outside their self-imposed 'total exclusion zone' around the Falklands. Through open diplomatic channels the British had made it clear that they had not relinquished the right to attack outside this zone if necessary; but they had failed to publicise this fact widely and clearly in the media. The sinking of the *General Belgrano* took place simultaneously with continuing attempts to produce a diplomatic formula to which Britain and Argentina could both agree, led at this date by the government of Peru. The public shock at the sinking, and the British failure to think in terms of co-ordinating public relations with diplomacy, produced one of the most persistent legends of the war: that the British had deliberately sought war by sinking the *General Belgrano* in order to wreck a viable Peruvian peace plan. This claim has been repeatedly investigated, and it does not accord with the available evidence; although the circumstances of the sinking of the *General Belgrano* do provide an illustration of how operational imperatives sometimes dominate over political ones.<sup>7</sup>

Other than the long-lasting dispute over the Falklands, relations between Argentina and Britain in the years up to 1982 were distant but generally good. The Falkland Islands had been of some strategic value to the British Empire, including as a naval base in the First and Second World Wars, but since then there had been no British defence interests in the region. Even the considerable British economic investment in Argentina of the earlier 20th century had been much reduced, although like several other countries Britain had made some arms sales to Argentina. Critics from other countries, who understood how important the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 had been to the United States, or the Golan Heights to

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<sup>6</sup> See Robert Harris, *Gocha! The Media, The Government and the Falklands Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), Valerie Adams, *The Media and the Falklands Campaign* (London: MacMillan, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> (Before being sold to Argentina and renamed in 1951, the *General Belgrano* had been the USS *Phoenix*, which survived the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941).



Israel, were unable to grasp that in 1982 what President Ronald Reagan famously called 'that ice-cold bunch of land' could be so important to Argentina and Britain. This contributed to problems in finding a diplomatic solution following the Argentinean invasion, through assumptions that there must be other hidden motives on both sides, such as the oil reserves of Antarctica, or that neither country would really let what seemed a minor dispute become a major war. For Argentina, sovereignty over the Falklands mattered in a way that it did not for Britain, where before 1982 few ordinary people could have located the islands on a map. What was important to the British government and public opinion was the violation of their territory by an act of unprovoked aggression. This hinged less on the respective claims to the islands than on wider notions of international law and behaviour between states.

In 1965 the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 2065, placing the Falklands dispute in the context of the broad UN commitment to decolonisation; Britain abstained from this vote, and as a general policy the British would have welcomed a transfer of the Falklands to Argentina if this had been politically possible, but protracted negotiations remained unsuccessful. Starting in 1976, a frustrated Argentina staged a number of incidents, including establishing a small base flying the Argentinean flag on the otherwise uninhabited Southern Thule. The British chose to ignore this base, which was still there in 1982, but they were sufficiently concerned to secretly order a nuclear-powered attack submarine and two frigates temporarily to the South Atlantic in 1977, calculating that either the United States or the Soviet Union would detect this move and inform Argentina, so deterring any Argentinean idea of invading the Falklands. In 1979 a new British Conservative government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried again to negotiate a transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. The British failure by the end of 1980 to get either the islanders or their own parliament to agree to any formula at all for such a transfer convinced Argentina that diplomacy would not succeed.

As with many cases of strategic surprise attack, there were warnings from 1980 onwards that Argentina might invade the Falklands, but nothing in military terms that the British could do unless it actually happened. For them to establish major land or naval forces in the Falklands would have been financially impossible, as well as diplomatically provocative. In another familiar theme of strategic surprise, to some extent the British mirror-imaged their thinking, believing that the Argentinean military junta would view international norms, and respond to domestic discontent, in the same way as a democratic government. A controversial hypothesis in conflict studies is that governments in crisis will seek to appease or deflect

widespread domestic opposition by military adventurism abroad. The behaviour of the Argentinean government in 1982 may constitute one of the few genuine cases of this. The British also expected that the United States would act as a restraint on Argentina, particularly with the coming to power in 1981 of President Reagan, of whose policies Prime Minister Thatcher was perhaps the world's strongest supporter.

In the new cold war, including the Solidarity crisis in Poland in 1981, Britain's main defence concern was the weakness of NATO. Since 1959, British defence policy had sought to balance the main role of their army and air force in what was then West Germany, together with the main role of their navy in antisubmarine warfare in the North Atlantic, to help deter a potentially nuclear third world war, against the smaller wars that they had to fight around the globe as they managed their retreat from empire. In 1981 a new Defence Review placed much greater emphasis on the NATO role, intending to reduce expeditionary or 'out of NATO area' capabilities, chiefly those of the Royal Navy. It is often suggested that had Argentina waited another two years before invading the Falklands, the British would by then no longer have had the ships or forces to recapture them. In another familiar theme of strategic surprise, what were small and almost inconsequential actions to the British were taken as important signals in Argentina. These included the announcement in the 1981 Defence Review that the ice patrol vessel HMS *Endurance*, responsible for the Falklands and its dependencies, would be withdrawn and not replaced. It was also announced that (along with many other citizens of self governing territories) from 1981 Falkland Islanders would no longer have automatic full British citizenship rights.

In Argentina, a new military junta came to power in December 1981, headed by General Leopoldo Galtieri for the army as president, with Admiral Jorge Anaya for the navy, and Brigadier General Basilio Lami Dozo for the air force, facing the political and social turmoil of the recent 'dirty war,' and a weak and crisis-ridden economy. It is often suggested that Admiral Anaya's price for supporting General Galtieri was a commitment to recover the Falklands, and as far as can be told, it was in December 1981 that the Argentinean Navy began drawing up plans. Advised by their foreign minister Dr Nicanor Costa Mendez, the junta decided that a successful resolution of the Falklands dispute would be a top priority for the next twelve months, in time for the 150th anniversary of the 1833 British seizure of the islands. The ideal date for an invasion would be 9 July 1982, Argentina's independence day.

Since at least 1945, international opinion has been firmly against forcible territorial annexations, but there have been a few exceptions. The Argentinean government

took as a precedent for a seizure of the Falklands the failure of the United States to support Britain and France in the Suez Crisis of 1956, and the Indian annexation of Goa from Portugal in 1961. They believed that the ground could be prepared diplomatically, that the strength of their claim to the Falklands was so obvious that there would be little international condemnation; and that the British would accept reality, showing the same pragmatism as they had over the Rhodesia settlement in 1981. Ronald Reagan's new government was also a strong supporter of some repressive Central and South American regimes, including Argentina, which it saw principally as anti-communist allies in the new cold war. If the British assumed that the United States would restrain Argentina from military adventurism, President Galtieri's government believed that on the issue of the Falklands the United States would see support for Argentina rather than Britain as being in its own best interests. As was apparent after 2 April, Argentina did not expect a British military response, and had no plans to deal with or deflect such a response, other than by assuming that international opinion would be against the British. In the three weeks between the seizure of the Falklands and the arrival of the British task force Argentina made preparations for defence, but there was nothing resembling a coherent Argentinean political and military strategy. The British were surprised that – as far as is known – Argentina never even considered covert action in Britain itself, or action against the task force outside the immediate area of the South Atlantic.

The timetable for an Argentinean diplomatic campaign of preparation leading to a forcible annexation of the islands, conducted principally at the United Nations headquarters in New York, was upset by a series of events that are still not entirely clear, known as the Davidoff Affair. In January 1982 Argentina initiated a new round of negotiations with Britain at UN headquarters. But already in December 1981 British officials on South Georgia had discovered that the Argentinean Navy had transported a group of civilian contractors (led by a man called Constantino Davidoff) to the island, which had then later withdrawn. The Argentinean government was certainly aware of this move, and it appears to have been the start of an attempt, known as Plan *Alpha*, to establish a presence on South Georgia similar to that on Southern Thule. On 19 March, the British found that Davidoff and his men had returned, again in an Argentinean Navy ship, and had raised the Argentinean flag; the British did not know at this stage that the Davidoff party included an armed detachment of marines. As these events appeared in the international media and were debated in the British parliament, the Argentinean junta met on 26 March. Facing widespread national

unrest, the junta misinterpreted the well-publicised sailing of the British nuclear-powered submarine HMS *Superb* from Gibraltar, believing that the British were already sending their submarines to the South Atlantic as they had in 1977. They advanced their military timetable and ordered the invasion of the Falklands, under the name of Operation *Azul* (blue), changed as the plan was altered to Operation *Rosario* (rosary).

Already alerted, the British started to pick up indicators of the Argentinean naval movements, and by 31 March they were certain that an invasion of the Falklands would take place on 2 April. There was no defensive action that they could take other than alerting the tiny Falklands garrison, but they began to prepare for possible military options. Part of their fleet was on NATO exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, other ships were in British harbours or could return quickly. The only remaining way of restraining an Argentinean invasion was through diplomatic pressure from the United States. The British had long identified a division within United States' foreign policy between those who were broadly 'Atlanticists', headed by US Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, who they expected to support their position with the sympathy of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and those who were broadly American 'regionalists', headed by the US Ambassador to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who was seen as particularly supportive of Argentina. It is a reflection of the United States' position that on the evening of 1 April President Reagan, after repeated attempts, at last got through to speak to President Galtieri by telephone, but was unable to prevent the invasion from taking place; but on the evening of 2 April, after the invasion, Jeanne Kirkpatrick was hosted at the Argentinean embassy in Washington with a dinner in her honour. The first United States' response to the invasion was an offer to mediate that was accepted by both sides, led by Secretary of State Haig, who first arrived in London on 8 April and then flew on to Buenos Aires next day.

The British response to the invasion of the Falklands startled Argentina both in its effectiveness and its speed. Britain could have relied on Article 51 of the UN Charter, giving countries the right of territorial self-defence against aggression, but whether the Falklands were British territory was exactly the point at issue. Instead, considerable British diplomatic skill produced the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 502 on 3 April, with the required two-thirds majority. This resolution determined that a breach of the peace had occurred, and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, a withdrawal of Argentinean forces from the islands, and for the two governments to seek a diplomatic solution. Of the five permanent members, Britain, the United States and France voted in favour, while the Soviet

Union and China abstained; of the 10 rotating members, seven voted in favour including Japan; Spain and Poland abstained; and Panama voted against. This display of international legitimacy was crucial to the British.

Simultaneously with this diplomatic initiative, on the evening of 31 March in London the British Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, advised Prime Minister Thatcher that precautionary deployments had already begun, that a naval and amphibious task force was being assembled, and that the main sailings could start within 48 hours. Advised by Admiral Leach that the islands could be recovered by military means, Prime Minister Thatcher ordered Operation Corporate to commence. The very public departure of warships from British ports in the following days coincided with the arrival in London of Secretary of State Haig, who was impressed by British public support for the task force, just as he was shortly afterwards impressed by public support for the invasion in Buenos Aires when he arrived there. On 7 April, a day before Haig's arrival in London, the British announced what was at first a 'maritime exclusion zone' around the Falklands, within which Argentinean warships and military transports would be attacked, to commence on 12 April. This was a signal that the first British nuclear-powered attack submarines, which it was believed that the Argentineans could not detect underwater, were coming on station close to the islands. In calling this an 'exclusion zone', the British deliberately avoided the use of the provocative term 'blockade', which could have been interpreted as an act of war.

In London, the Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington had resigned following the invasion, in keeping with the British constitutional doctrine of ministerial responsibility. After taking advice, Prime Minister Thatcher formed a small committee of senior cabinet ministers to direct the war's grand strategy. Officially known as the special ministerial sub-committee of the Overseas and Defence Policy Committee on the South Atlantic and Falkland Islands, or OD(SA), and informally known as the 'war cabinet', this consisted of Prime Minister Thatcher, the new Foreign Secretary Francis Pym, Home Secretary Sir William Whitelaw, Defence Secretary John Nott, and one of her closest political allies Cecil Parkinson, with Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Terrence Lewin as its military adviser.

In addition to co-ordinating their grand strategy with their military strategy, building up political, economic and military pressure on Argentina, the British faced two major military strategic problems. It was crucial to their improvised strategy that they should be seen to respond at once to the invasion, but this meant that the warships of their task force were heading southwards unprepared to fight this particular war, although this problem was

lessened by the Royal Navy's habitual high standards of general readiness. The task force also included many British merchant marine vessels used for transport, under regulations known as 'ships taken up from trade' or STUFT, and most of these needed time to join the warships. At this time there was a widespread belief within the task force that it would probably not have to fight, because a diplomatic solution would be reached first. But meanwhile it needed a location away from the world's media and from political intrusion, to assemble, to plan its actions, and to redistribute its forces and their equipment and supplies into proper tactical loading packages. The suitable location was Ascension Island, a small rocky atoll with no indigenous population just over half way from Britain to the Falklands; another old British relic of empire acquired in 1815, on which in the Second World War the United States had built a transit airfield called Wideawake Field as a joint facility. From the start of the war, while seeking to negotiate a diplomatic solution from a position of even-handedness, the United States gave full logistical support to the British as they assembled at Ascension, including in the use of Wideawake airfield and the release of NATO stores enabling the British to equip themselves more rapidly. Most important of these were replacements for the AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missiles used by British aircraft, together with AGM-45 Shrike anti-radar missiles. When on 13 April the international media found out this was happening, Secretary of State Haig considered announcing publicly that British use of American facilities at Ascension would be restricted, but the British convinced him not to take this action. The British operational plan for the campaign was finalised at Ascension on 17 April, with their main carrier task group resuming its journey southwards next day.

The second major military strategic problem faced by the British was that once their task force arrived near the Falklands, they would be operating without adequate air cover. The British had retired their last fleet aircraft carrier in 1978, in the belief that any future naval or amphibious operations would take place either with allies who had such carriers, or under cover of land-based aviation. Their two carriers, HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*, were of 28,000 and 20,000 tons displacement; they flew light and medium helicopters together with short-range Sea Harrier 'jump jet' aircraft (they were widely known as 'Harrier carriers'), and they had no long-range airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft. The British assessment was that if one of their two carriers was sunk or disabled, they would not be able to recapture the Falklands. Threats to the carriers and the rest of the task force came from Argentina's small fleet of four diesel submarines, from attack aircraft, and particularly from the French-built sea-skimming MBDA Exocet anti-shiping missile, which could be launched from some

Argentinean warships and from their French-made Dassault Super Etendard naval attack aircraft, and against which the British at the start of the fighting had no adequate defence. (The Argentinean garrison defending the Falklands also adapted one Exocet to fire from land, and on 12 June this hit and damaged the British destroyer HMS *Glamorgan*.) The Falkland Islands were at the very limit of range from southern Argentina for their land-based attack aircraft, except for the Super Etendards, which had air-to-air refuelling capability. Five Super Etendards were also on board the Argentinean Navy's flagship, the elderly fleet carrier ARA *Veinticinco de Mayo* (also of about 20,000 tons, originally launched in 1942 as the British HMS *Venerable* and sold to Argentina in 1968).

This meant that before launching an amphibious landing, the British would have a considerable problem with the air war and the war at sea. The carrier task group sailed south from Ascension with the chief intentions of maintaining visible British momentum and political pressure on Argentina, of engaging and defeating the Argentinean fleet, of gaining intelligence on Argentinean defences on the Falklands, and of doing as much as possible to remove the Argentinean submarine and air threat before the amphibious task group sailed south to join it. A further reason for delaying the sailing of the amphibious task group was that one of its two assault landing ships HMS *Intrepid* had been decommissioned under the 1981 Defence Review, and had to be brought back into service to join its sister ship HMS *Fearless* (both of 12,000 tons). This naval battle lasted broadly from 21 April, with the start of the British Operation Paraquet to recapture South Georgia, to 7 May when the amphibious task group left Ascension. As part of this, on 1 May the British made their first air and naval attacks on the Argentinean garrison of the Falklands, and landed their first Special Forces troops on the islands to carry out reconnaissance. This phase of the war was a limited British victory which removed any serious possibility of Argentinean surface vessels opposing the amphibious landing, but the landing and the land campaign still began under conditions of no more than air parity for the British.

The remarkable British ability in an improvised war to co-ordinate their larger political and grand strategic objectives, their military strategy, and their military operations has led to many analysts describing the Falklands War from the 'top downwards,' tracing how political decisions were translated into military strategic objectives, with operations being carried out accordingly. While this model is broadly correct, there were also several occasions in which operational and even tactical needs and decisions shaped British strategy, in which political decisions had direct tactical consequences, and in which events were

outside the control of anyone. The simple 'top down' model suggests a coherence and an inevitability to events, and a level of control by London, which is not well supported by the evidence.

As has been already described, the top of the British command pyramid was the small 'war cabinet' of senior ministers chaired by the prime minister, which was advised on military strategic issues by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Lewin. Operation Corporate, the military campaign, was the responsibility of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, from his headquarters at Northwood on the north side of London. It was below this, at the operational level, that the British chain of command had structural problems that in turn produced real problems in fighting the war. In 1982, the formal concept of an 'operational level' of war, connecting strategy with tactics, was still relative new to the British, and it was not officially adopted into British military doctrine until 1989. The British also did not have the command structures for expeditionary war, integrating their three armed services closely, that they would later develop. Although these problems were reduced by the high calibre of the officers who dealt with them, they were never entirely solved. To use modern NATO (and broadly internationally accepted) terminology, Admiral Fieldhouse at Northwood was of four-star rank; but there was no British theatre commander (or operational level commander), of three-star rank with the task force. Rear Admiral John 'Sandy' Woodward, of two-star rank, commanded the carrier task group, which at the start of the fighting consisted of two aircraft carriers, his flagship HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*, four destroyers and four frigates, and several logistics and support ships. The amphibious task group came under Commodore Michael Clapp (one-star), with the assault ships HMS *Fearless* and HMS *Intrepid*, three frigates, and twelve auxiliary and merchant ships; working in co-operation with the commander of the accompanying landing brigade, Brigadier Julian Thompson of the Royal Marines (also one-star). While these ships, troops and aircraft assembled at Ascension Island, a single frigate continued southwards for political reasons, to provide the British with a visible presence as close to the Falklands as possible if negotiations led to an agreement that they should not advance further south. This frigate eventually became part of a small advanced task group, at its strongest two destroyers and three frigates, intended to recapture South Georgia. Whether the British chain of command ran through Rear Admiral Woodward as commander of the carrier task group to the other task groups was not clear at the time, and is not clear now. In the intense atmosphere of the time it was accepted that as a two-star and the senior officer Rear Admiral Woodward was in overall



charge, but once the carrier task group left Ascension Island for the South Atlantic on 18 April, and at other critical times particularly after the landing on East Falkland on 21 May, Commodore Clapp and Brigadier Thompson as one-stars in the South Atlantic were dealing directly with Northwood and with Admiral Fieldhouse.

For the duration of the war, there was a stream of British warships, merchant ships, aircraft, troops and equipment being sent southwards, and this makes it difficult to describe the British organisation and order of battle on any given day. It has also led to most attention being paid to the first sea and land battles of the campaign, when the British were weaker and less well equipped than they were at its end. The war also occurred during a reorganisation of the British armed forces following the 1981 Defence Review, which particularly affected its expeditionary forces. Simplifying a very complex chain of events, the landing brigade group under Brigadier Thompson consisted of his own 3 Commando Brigade, which ordinarily had three light infantry battalions of Royal Marines (both the battalions and the individual marines being known as 'commandos') plus artillery and supporting troops some of which were Royal Marines and some from the Army, including a few light helicopters (there were no attack helicopters comparable to the American AH-1 HueyCobra on either side). For Operation Corporate this brigade was reinforced by the addition of more troops from the Army, chiefly by two battalions from the Parachute Regiment (who were trained in much the same light infantry role as the commandos, but not in amphibious operations), by a squadron of light tanks, by logistics and air defence units, and by medium lift helicopters. Royal Marine and Army raiding and reconnaissance troops, including two squadrons of the Special Air Service (SAS), were also attached to the brigade. This put Brigadier Thompson as the brigade commander after the landings in the position of commanding more than six major sub-units, and facing the logistics problems more often associated with a divisional command, while at the same time dealing directly with the British military strategic authorities at Northwood and with political issues. This had a direct impact on the first and most controversial of the land engagements of the war, the battle of Goose Green on 28 May, a politically important British victory which might easily have been a defeat.

The British decision to send a second light infantry brigade to the Falklands, 5 Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Anthony 'Tony' Wilson, was made, after some deliberation, on 2 May. Part of the deliberation was that the British commercial cruise liner *Canberra* was already in service transporting part of 3 Commando Brigade to the Falklands, but 5 Infantry Brigade would be sent in the much more famous cruise liner *Queen Elizabeth 2*, with more serious

implications if this were sunk. The organisation of 5 Infantry Brigade is another complex story, but briefly it was sent out with one of its original battalions, the 1st/7th Gurkha Rifles, plus a battalion each of the Scots Guards and Welsh Guards, who were trained as mechanised infantry but were intended to act in a light infantry role. Once it was clear that both brigades would be in action, a two-star commander, Major General Jeremy Moore of the Royal Marines, was sent to the Falklands to take overall command from Brigadier Thompson, arriving on 30 May. The other main issue of service integration for the British was that, since the Royal Navy's Sea Harriers were configured for air defence, the Royal Air Force (RAF) also supplied Harrier GR3 ground attack aircraft to fly off the carriers. These and most of the British medium and heavy lift helicopters were transported from Ascension to the South Atlantic by merchant ships, notably by the large container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*.

A further issue raised by the absence of a British theatre commander was that of submarines. Rear Admiral Woodward was deeply concerned about the threat to his carriers from the four Argentinean diesel submarines, although in the event this threat did not materialise, with at most only one of these submarines still being seaworthy by the later stages of the campaign. Throughout the war, the British continued their normal practice of tasking their own attack submarines from the strategic level at Northwood, which was appropriate for the North Atlantic and a NATO scenario. Rear Admiral Woodward repeatedly but unsuccessfully pressed for these submarines to be put under his command. This dispute reached its height during the biggest Argentinean Navy attack on the British carrier task group. This was a pincer attack on 2 May, with one Argentinean task group led by the aircraft carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* approaching from the north, and a second task group, with the light cruiser *General Belgrano* and two accompanying destroyers approaching from the south, not realising that they had been shadowed by the British attack submarine HMS *Conqueror* since 1 May. In the face of this threat, Rear Admiral Woodward issued orders by radio to HMS *Conqueror* to attack and sink the *General Belgrano*, knowing that he had no authority to do so and that Northwood would immediately cancel his order, as a way of conveying the strength of his view that this action must be taken at once. Within four hours of this signal being sent, in an atmosphere of considerable urgency, Prime Minister Thatcher and her war cabinet agreed to change HMS *Conqueror*'s rules of engagement to make the attack, and the *General Belgrano* was torpedoed and sunk by HMS *Conqueror* later that day, with the loss of

321 out of 1,091 crew, and two civilians.<sup>8</sup> By that time, the *General Belgrano* and its escorts were returning to their base, since the planned attack by the *Veinticinco de Mayo* had been cancelled. This was not known in London, where Secretary of Defence John Nott announced that when sunk the *General Belgrano* was closing on the task force and posed a direct threat, an error that was not officially corrected for several years.

On the Argentinean side, President Galtieri was head of the junta and the government, but within the junta Admiral Anaya was the main instigator of the decision to invade, while Brigadier General Lami Dozo for the air force was the least supportive of the policy. This had implications after the sinking of the *General Belgrano* on 2 May, when the Argentinean fleet withdrew to its home ports, while the air force pilots continued to fly missions out to sea at the very limit of their range, taking heavy losses. There were also strong beliefs, shared by Secretary of State Haig during his shuttle diplomacy, that even if the members of the junta could reach a consensus, other senior Argentinean officers would need to agree to any decisions: and that having captured the islands President Galtieri could not for his own political survival accept any negotiated agreement other than the visible transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. This meant that there was almost certainly no realistic chance of a negotiated settlement, and the possibility became even more remote when major military operations started after 28 April and deaths occurred on both sides.

The Argentineans were regarded as being among the better armed forces in South America. But Argentina had not fought against an external enemy since the 1870s, and before 1982 both the army and the air force saw the main threat as coming from neighbouring Chile. There is evidence that no real Argentinean planning took place to defend against a possible British counter-attack before 9 April at the earliest. In military technology the two sides were about equal on land, with very similar rifles and machineguns, artillery pieces, helicopters, and other weapons and equipment. In the air, the Argentinean French-built Mirage III fighter and Mirage 5 ground attack aircraft, and its Israeli-built copy the IAI Dagger (*Nesher* in Hebrew), were not obviously inferior to the British Harrier. At sea, an important part of British strategy was that Argentina was believed to be unable to detect British attack submarines underwater. While Argentina's aircraft carrier and cruiser were both elderly, its fleet included some more modern warships, along them Type 42 destroyers

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<sup>8</sup> Rear Admiral Woodward's own account of his actions may be found in Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days* (London: HarperCollins, 1992) pp. 149-63.

sold to Argentina by the British, and of the same design as those with the British task force, plus the Exocet sea-skimming missile as the biggest threat. It is widely accepted that the British mounted covert intelligence operations around the world after 2 April to prevent or restrict Argentina from obtaining further military supplies. The principal strength of the Argentinean Army was ten infantry brigades, composed chiefly of one-year conscripts. These men were inducted at age 19 in January, so that the most recent class was barely trained by April, and the previous year's class had to be recalled once it became clear that the British were going to fight. The army's three brigades with mountain and cold-weather training, and two brigades of marines, were kept in Argentina throughout the war because of a possible threat from Chile. Those troops that were sent to the Falklands were mostly unacclimatised to the conditions, and had been trained as mechanised infantry.

The Argentinean command structure on the Falklands was far from straightforward; but again a complex situation may be summarised briefly. Brigadier-General Mario Menendez (one-star) arrived at Port Stanley on 3 April as governor, with troops originally from 9 Mechanised Brigade under Brigadier-General Americo Dahler. Reinforcements arrived from 10 Mechanised Brigade under Brigadier-General Oscar Jofre, and eventually this brigade took over all troops on the islands. Despite its title, the infantry battalions (or regiments in Argentinean military terminology) of 10 Mechanised Brigade were dismounted infantry without their armoured personnel carriers, although the brigade did have a few armoured cars, motor transport, and helicopters. Unusually, Brigadier-General Daher was after a brief hiatus made chief of staff to Brigadier-General Menendez, with whom he was equal in rank. President Galtieri visited Port Stanley (renamed *Puerto Argentino*) on 22 April and ordered a second brigade for the defending garrison: 3 Brigade under Brigadier-General Omar Parada; there were also two independent battalions in the garrison, one of them of marines.

On 28 April, the British announced that their maritime exclusion zone around the Falklands was now a 'total exclusion zone,' meaning that with the arrival of their aircraft carriers all Argentinean ships and aircraft could be attacked without warning. By this date the Argentinean brigade command structure on the islands had been largely abandoned, in favour of dividing the forces on the islands into two 'groups' under Brigadier-General Mendendez as land commander. The Port Stanley Group (*Agrupacion Puerto Argentino*) under Brigadier-General Jofre, responsible for defending Port Stanley and its approaches, included five infantry battalions and a marine battalion, plus an artillery battalion with 105mm and 155mm guns. The Coastal Group (*Agrupacion Litoral*) under Brigadier-General

Parada was responsible for the rest of the islands, with one battalion defending the small airfield at Goose Green on the western side of East Falkland, and two battalions on West Falkland. Brigadier-General Parada and his headquarters remained at Port Stanley rather than on West Falkland, meaning that there were four equal-ranking one-star army officers in the little town. The Argentinean forces on the Falklands experienced great difficulty in logistics, chiefly in keeping their troops on the hills to the west of Port Stanley supplied and protected from the Falklands weather. This lack of logistical support and organisation, together with lack of experience and training, forms part of the explanation of their passivity after the British landings, waiting to be attacked despite their considerable numerical superiority.

The Argentinean Air Force had also been structured to fight a war against its neighbours, and had no previous training in operations out at sea. It was organised into eight 'groups' of variable size, including reconnaissance and transport aircraft, and helicopters. The biggest threat to the British came from the two groups of American-built A-4 Skyhawks, and the two groups of Mirages and Daggers, or approximately 64 aircraft able to face the British Harriers. No attempt was made to lengthen the runway at Port Stanley, and the only jet aircraft based there were a few Italian-built Aermacchi MB339 light attack aircraft. Argentina also had about six elderly British-built English Electric Canberra light bombers with a longer range, and adapted some of their American-built C-130 Hercules transport aircraft as bombers in the course of the war. Over 40 Argentinean light propeller-driven aircraft and helicopters were based on the islands, chiefly at Port Stanley, at Goose Green, and at Pebble Island to the north of West Falkland, including Argentinean-built Pucara close support aircraft.

As described, the Argentinean Navy's main strength lay in the aircraft carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* with 12 A-4Q Skyhawks, and five Super Etendards carrying Exocet missiles, the light cruiser *General Belgrano* with 15 guns of 6-inch (152mm) calibre, and six destroyers and three frigates, all equipped with Exocets, plus four diesel submarines. Although outnumbered, these ships and aircraft were fully capable of defeating the British task force by sinking its carriers; and as the British approached they left their home ports to take up stations at sea or to unidentified locations. But, although unlike the British the Argentineans did have a few long-range land based reconnaissance aircraft, they had no access to satellite detection systems. Their major problem, and the British major fear, was to locate the task force and mount a successful airstrike from the land or from their carrier.

A big problem for both sides was obtaining detailed military intelligence about each

other. Much information of a general nature was readily available from open sources, and the British had actively publicised the departure of much of their forces. The British also obtained help about Argentinean weapons systems from the French, and from the United States. Argentina assumed that the United States was supplying the British with critical intelligence including extended imagery coverage, certainly after 30 April. But whatever may have been supplied, little reached the British operational commanders, especially in the land war. An important part of the British operational plan for the interval between the arrival of the carrier task group in the South Atlantic on 28 April and the arrival of the amphibious task group on 17 May was to develop an intelligence picture, including information from Special Forces placed on the islands. The British also put Special Forces reconnaissance parties onto the Argentinean mainland to provide intelligence on air bases, and as the air war intensified they drew up a plan for a raid on the main air base at Rio Grande if necessary.

The Argentineans expected the British amphibious assault to be made close to Port Stanley, probably from the south in the area of Bluff Cove. With greater knowledge of British political considerations and amphibious doctrine, they would have understood that such an attack, with potentially heavy casualties including to the civilian population, was not British style. The British plan was to sail the amphibious task group and many of its support ships into Falkland Sound between the two islands, and land on the far west side of East Falkland at Port San Carlos and Ajax Bay. It is a reflection of their problems with intelligence that the British verified that no Argentinean sea mines had been laid in the northern approaches into Falkland Sound by simply sailing a frigate into the landing area repeatedly at night, to see if it hit a mine and sank. Once 3 Commando Brigade was ashore at San Carlos, the British planned to establish a temporary airfield, and helicopter their troops and equipment eastwards across the north of East Falkland, transferring their forward logistics base to Teal Inlet, just to the north of Port Stanley, as they did so; and then assault the main defensive positions of the Port Stanley Group.<sup>9</sup> What was critical for the British was that enough of their ships should survive off the beachhead while they unloaded, and that they should have enough control of the air to use their transport helicopters to advance from San Carlos across East Falklands.

The British view of international support for their actions once the fighting resumed with their attack on South Georgia was very much based on the 'sandcastle model' in international

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<sup>9</sup> British Royal Navy practice was – and is – to name shore stations as if they are ships, and shore airbases after wading birds; the temporary airstrip at San Carlos was officially named HMS *Sheathbill*.

relations, of support declining over time. The more militarily successful the British were, the more they faced international pressure to end the war, in the belief that by following their own national interests so strongly they were damaging long-term western interests, including placing a strain on NATO and weakening support for the United States in South America. Particularly after the British landing on East Falkland on 21 May it was assumed (although incorrectly) in London and in other capitals that a crushing British victory was inevitable, and strong diplomatic attempts were made to limit the extent of that victory. The close association that developed between the timetables of diplomacy and military operations created the impression that they were opposites – a choice between peace and war – whereas in reality they were, for both Britain and Argentina, part of the same grand strategy.

This close connection was first apparent with the British decision to begin their recapture of the Falklands dependencies with South Georgia. This decision was based on a sense of urgency, given that they expected international support to decline, and on the need for a safe harbour in the appalling weather conditions of the South Atlantic. On 20 April, while Secretary of State Haig's diplomatic shuttle was still in progress, Argentina invoked the Rio Treaty, which had 21 signatory states in 1982, including most of the countries Central and South America plus the United States. A preliminary vote to discuss British actions as constituting a security threat to the region was held on 22 April, and a resolution was passed on 26 April generally supporting Argentina and urging Britain to cease hostilities, with four abstentions including the United States. This display of regional support for Argentina coincided almost exactly with the British recapture of South Georgia, where on 26 April the Argentinean force of 150 troops and 40 civilians surrendered after one of Argentina's four submarines, the *Santa Fé*, had been incapacitated on the surface.

On 28 April the British announced their 'total exclusion zone' around the Falklands, and on 30 April the United States declared its support for the British. Continuing efforts to reach a diplomatic settlement were continued by Peru (a plan known to diplomats at the time as 'Haig in a poncho'), with the backing of the UN Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, himself a Peruvian. Early on 1 May the British began their attack on the Argentinean garrison of the Falklands with a spectacular surprise. A single RAF Avro Vulcan heavy bomber (just coming out of service from their previous nuclear deterrent role), took off from Wideawake airfield on Ascension Island, was refuelled in the air by a fleet of 13 Handley-Page Victor tanker aircraft, travelled 6,500 kilometres beyond its normal maximum range, and dropped 21 bombs of 1,000 pound (500 kilogram) size on Port Stanley airfield and

runway. This was the first of seven raids by single Vulcan aircraft up to 12 June under the name Operation Black Buck, three of them by aircraft carrying Shrike anti-radar missiles instead of bombs. The damage done was less important than the demonstration that the British could readily bomb the Argentinean mainland by the same method if they chose. On the sixth Black Buck raid on 3 June the returning Vulcan developed engine trouble and was forced to land at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil; the Brazilians later released the aircraft and crew but kept a Shrike missile that it was still carrying.

The first Black Buck raid was followed immediately in the early hours of on 1 May by raids on the Argentinean garrison by Harrier aircraft flown from the British carriers, and by shore bombardment from a destroyer and two frigates moving close in to the Falklands. This prompted the largest Argentinean naval counterattack, the pincer move with the *Veinticinco de Mayo* task group from the north and the *General Belgrano* group from the south, which led to the sinking of the *General Belgrano* on 2 May. Two days later on 4 May, Argentinean reconnaissance aircraft briefly located the British carrier task group, and an attack by land-based Super Etendards hit the British destroyer HMS *Sheffield* with an Exocet missile. Like almost all the British ships lost to air attacks, the destroyer did not sink at once, but was abandoned and burnt out; it was later scuttled by the British themselves. These actions marked the start of major military operations, and while it was well understood in international law that fighting could not simply be stopped by an abrupt ceasefire, the loss of one ship from each side both shocked international public opinion and promoted the belief that the war should be ended.

For the next 17 days, the British mostly successfully avoided Argentinean detection of their carrier task group, while sending destroyers and frigates closer to the Falklands to provoke Argentinean air attacks on them, in a war of attrition against the Argentinean Air Force. On 7 May they announced the extension of their 'total exclusion zone' up to within 12 nautical miles (20 kilometres) of the Argentinean mainland, the internationally recognised limit of territorial waters. On 15 May, in addition to the bombing raids by Vulcans and Harriers, the Special Air Service carried out a night assault on the Argentinean airfield on Pebble Island, destroying the aircraft there. This period of attrition warfare before the arrival of the British amphibious task group occurred in conjunction with another round of diplomatic mediation, by UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, starting on 8 May. Once again the British outmanoeuvred Argentina diplomatically, producing a carefully concessionary offer, while Argentina after some internal debates reverted to its original



position of demanding the firm transfer of sovereignty, and eventually failed to respond to the UN's efforts. It is probable that, faced with an imminent British landing on the Falklands, Argentina's leaders were no longer able to make clear political or military decisions. On 20 May, Secretary General Perez de Cuellar announced that his mediation efforts had failed.

Early next day, 21 May, the British began their landing on the west side of East Falkland under the name Operation Sutton. The British did not have air superiority, but they had achieved their other objectives in driving the Argentinean Navy back to its home waters, and destroying or damaging most of the Argentinean aircraft and anti-aircraft weapons on the Falklands. The landings were largely unopposed, with only a few Argentinean troops in the landing area. Argentinean strategy at this stage seems to have been based not on preventing or defeating the landings, but on inflicting heavy losses on the British as they advanced, hoping that international opinion, and public opinion in Britain, would force a ceasefire. For the next six days the British sailed their ships into Falkland Sound to unload, under repeated attack from Argentinean aircraft flying from the mainland, in what was called the 'Battle of Bomb Alley'. By the time the landings were complete on 27 May the British had lost a destroyer and two frigates sunk, and several more ships damaged. But Argentinean aircraft losses were also high: 34 aircraft including 19 Daggers and Skyhawks; and the British had established a degree of air superiority. The effort and high losses of the Argentinean Air Force when compared to the lack of activity by the Argentinean Navy (other than naval aviation) also strengthened the position of Brigadier General Lami Dozo within the junta in relation to Admiral Anaya and others who had originally pushed for the invasion of the Falklands. On 26 May, Brigadier General Lami Dozo's personal representative contacted US Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick in New York, exploring the possibility of further United States' mediation to end the war.

The most significant loss at sea for the British came on 25 May, when an Exocet missile attack by land-based Super Etendards hit the large container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*, in the belief that it was an aircraft carrier. The Harriers originally carried by *Atlantic Conveyor* had all left the ship, but out of 10 medium or heavy lift helicopters only one heavy lift Chinook (which was not on the *Atlantic Conveyor* at the time) escaped, without its spares, tools or maintenance manuals. This loss made a great difference to the British plans. They had enough helicopters and small seagoing vessels to move their heavy weapons, ammunition and stores across or around East Falkland; but their leading infantry battalions would have to move by foot, distances of up to 80 kilometres across the difficult terrain, often

in bad weather, carrying much of their own personal equipment. Only the very high levels of fitness and training of their commandos and paratroopers, and their familiarity with fighting in extremely adverse conditions, made this a practical possibility.

The loss of so many helicopters inevitably imposed a delay on 3 Commando Brigade as it sorted out its logistics before breaking out of the beachhead. This was not well understood in London, where there was a strong political demand from Prime Minister Thatcher's war cabinet for the land campaign to begin, as it became apparent that international support for Britain was crumbling. This political pressure led to the major British operational error of the land campaign. The obvious British first move as they broke out of their beachhead was to attack and capture the Argentinean position at the airfield at Goose Green, which would otherwise be on their southern flank as they advanced eastward. In fact it was too obvious: the British expected Goose Green to be well defended, and the Argentineans showed no signs of attacking, so they could have safely by-passed the position. But under too many conflicting pressures, including political demands that the fighting should start, Brigadier Thompson reluctantly ordered one of his battalions (2nd Battalion of Parachute Regiment or 2 Para) towards Goose Green, where it obtained permission to attack. The battle of Goose Green on 28 May was a British victory, but 2 Para were shocked when it was over to find that they had captured 1,300 Argentineans. A light infantry battalion attacking over open ground, and largely unsupported by artillery or airpower for most of the battle, had defeated a much larger number of enemy, although the Argentinean total did include many aircraftsmen rather than combat troops. The psychological effect of this victory on both sides was considerable, but it could very easily have been a British defeat with very significant political consequences.

As with the first major losses of the war at sea on 2 May, the battle of Goose Green and the start of the British land campaign produced strong international political responses. On 29 May, a Rio Treaty resolution condemned British aggression by 19 votes to four, with the United States and Chile among those countries voting against; although the British believed that only if they were to attack the mainland would any other country actively support Argentina. On 4 June, the UN Security Council voted on a resolution introduced by Spain and Panama, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the war. This resolution would not have passed with the required majority, had it not been for a decision by Japan to vote in favour rather than abstain, which made it necessary for Britain and the United States to veto. Following this, in an illustration of the continuing tensions within United States' policy,

Jeanne Kirkpatrick as the United States' representative announced that she had received instructions to abstain rather than to veto but that these had arrived too late, and wished this fact recorded. Also on 4 June a summit meeting of the 'Group of Seven' or G7 (later renamed the G8), convened at Versailles in France, and brought more diplomatic pressure on the British.

However, by this date any realistic chance of diplomatic mediation was largely over. The British were well ashore, they had demonstrated their superiority over their enemies, and they had no remaining motive for stopping before they had reoccupied the islands. On 30 May, Major General Moore arrived at San Carlos to take over command of the land battle from Brigadier Thompson, followed on 1 June by the first troops of 5 Infantry Brigade, which had reorganised while at anchorage at South Georgia. Four battalions of 3 Commando Brigade had advanced across East Falkland, securing Teal Inlet, and their patrols were within close distance of the main Argentinean defensive positions, on the ring of hills to the west and north-west of Port Stanley. Given the perceived ability of British troops to out-fight more than their own number of Argentineans, it was decided that 5 Infantry Brigade should join 3 Commando Brigade in the battle for Port Stanley rather than remaining in defence of the beachhead, in order to keep the war as short as possible, moving across East Falkland by a southerly route. On 8 June, one of the last successful Argentinean air attacks sank one British logistics ship, RFA *Sir Galahad* carrying Welsh Guards troops anchored off Bluff Cove on the south side of East Falkland, and damaged another, causing heavy casualties to the battalion and preventing its taking part in the final attacks. But as the temporary airfield was established in the landing area at San Carlos, more helicopters became available for the British to airlift most of their troops forward, and with improved air cover they could make greater use of sea transport close to the islands. The carrier and amphibious task groups withdrew eastwards, out of range of the threat from Argentinean air attacks.

On the night of 11 June the first British attacks on the Argentinean hill positions began. In three separate battles for the positions known as Mount Longdon, Two Sisters, and Mount Harriet, three British battalions supported by artillery and naval gunnery attacked against two Argentinean battalions, also supported by artillery, driving the Argentineans from their positions by daybreak. Like Goose Green, these were predominantly infantry battles, fought in darkness and bad weather on difficult terrain, with no armoured vehicles involved on either side. The ability of the British to attack and manoeuvre under these conditions was a reflection of their very high levels of training and motivation. After a pause

of a day to reorganise and resupply, on the night of 13 June the British attacked again with two more battalions, again driving the Argentinean defenders from their positions on Mount Tumbledown and Wireless Ridge. The battle for Wireless Ridge was fought by 2 Para, the same paratrooper battalion that had fought at Goose Green only 15 days before, and in marked contrast to the earlier battle as more resources became available, the attack was supported by artillery and naval gunfire, and by light armoured vehicles. The 1st/7th Gurkhas occupied Mount William unopposed as the Argentineans retreated.

By dawn on Monday 14 June, as their battalions closed on Port Stanley, the British were anxious to avoid the civilian casualties and damage that fighting in the town would cause; they instituted an unofficial ceasefire and signalled their willingness to talk. After negotiations, the Argentinean garrison on the Falkland Islands including West Falkland surrendered that evening. As a final touch, on 20 June the British obtained the surrender of the small Argentinean meteorological party on Southern Thule, ending the presence that went back to 1976.

Since 1982, the British have kept a garrison of about 1,200 troops on what has become familiarly known as ‘fortress Falklands,’ including a new airbase at Mount Pleasant on the southern side of East Falkland. The Falklands War prompted much investigation into the cultural aspects of national identity and power. Its consequences appear to support the hypothesis that democratic governments benefit politically from fighting an expeditionary war only when two factors coincide: that the war is clearly successful, and that it is opposed at the time by the main opposition party; in 1982 the British opposition Labour Party was at best reluctant to support the war. But the extent to which what became known as the ‘Falklands factor’ led to the Thatcher government’s domination of British politics for the rest of the 1980s is disputed.

Britain and Argentina re-established normal relations remarkably quickly after 1982, and the present Argentinean government maintains that it has no enemies, regional or international. But with the 30th anniversary of the war and the 180th anniversary of British settlement approaching, Argentinean diplomatic initiatives about the Falklands revived. In 2010 and again in June 2011, the UN Special Committee on Decolonization called for direct negotiations between Argentina and the United Kingdom on the Falklands, with the support of the United States. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron reaffirmed in parliament on 15 June 2011 that, ‘as long as the Falkland Islands want to be sovereign British territory, they should remain sovereign British territory – full stop, end of story’.

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