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# Climbing the Mountain of Conflict: Margaret Thatcher's Falklands Crisis

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

'CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN OF CONFLICT'

MARGARET THATCHER'S FALKLANDS CRISIS

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR LILY GEISMER

AND

PROFESSOR ILAI SALTZMAN

AND

DEAN NICHOLAS WARNER

BY

BENJAMIN FINE WALDMAN

FOR

SENIOR THESIS

FALL 2014 & SPRING 2015

APRIL 27, 2015

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Finally, to Vladimir Malukoff, my high school history teacher at Brooklyn Friends School. Without the fascinating history classes at BFS or Model UN, I don't think I ever would have discovered a love for the political history that now dominates my life.

## *Abstract*

Early in her Prime Ministership, Margaret Thatcher fought an unlikely diversionary war far from home for the ownership of the Falkland Islands. The Islands lie off of Argentina's coast about 8,000 miles from London, but have been subject to Britain's rule since 1836. In April 1982, hoping to distract from domestic political and economic turmoil, Argentina's military dictatorship ordered a surprise invasion of the Islands. Thatcher, Britain's first female Prime Minister, responded in full force. By early May, a British fleet reached the Islands. By June, despite American efforts to stop a war between its allies, Britain launched an assault on the Islands and took them back by force. Thatcher's victory propelled her to immense popularity in late-1982 and 1983, and the Argentine dictatorship's defeat gave life to a people's revolt that quickly ended the regime and decades of military leadership.

This thesis examines Thatcher's leadership in April 1982, before Britain launched its retaliatory invasion of the Islands. It seeks to answer how Thatcher managed to make the war possible and popular in three key arenas: with her own cabinet and government, with the United States and the United Nations, and ultimately with the British public. This study operates on the idea that the war served as an intentional diversion for Thatcher, who had struggled domestically as Prime Minister up until the Falklands Crisis. Utilizing newly released archival documents from the Thatcher government, this study shows the Prime Minister never had any interest in avoiding war, undermining any potential for peace as it emerged.

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## *The Falkland Islands, far from home*



## Cast of Characters

### *Thatcher's Team*

**John Nott:** The Secretary of State for Defence during the Falklands Crisis. Nott was a member of the Thatcher's War Cabinet. He'd been a cabinet minister since the beginning of Thatcher's government and had, for the most part, been on her good side. He fought a high-profile battle with First Sea Lord Henry Leach and the Royal Navy over Defence cuts. He also approved the planned scrapping of HMS *Endurance*, the Falklands' last line of defense. Thatcher was, in a sense, stuck with Nott during the Crisis. Because they had disagreed the previous summer on further spending cuts at the Ministry of Defence—Thatcher supported them, Nott did not—two months before the Crisis, the Prime Minister's office began leaking that Nott would soon be on his way out of Thatcher's cabinet.<sup>1</sup>

**Peter Carrington:** The Foreign Secretary at the onset of the Crisis and a veteran Conservative politician. He felt his office was near a breakthrough on the Falklands; before the war, he desired to gradually let the Argentines take control. The Islanders put up a certain level of resistance, but Carrington was close to securing a "lease-back" deal on the Islands.

**Francys Pym:** The Secretary of State for the Foreign Office following Carrington's departure. Even before the Crisis, he did not have a terrific relationship with Nott or Thatcher.

**Anthony Parsons:** The United Kingdom's Ambassador to the United Nations. Parsons pulled off a number of impressive diplomatic feats in the first days of the conflict, proving himself Thatcher's most trusted asset at the Foreign Office.

**William Whitelaw:** The Home Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister during the Crisis, Whitelaw found himself closer to Thatcher heading into the war than most other cabinet members. He, too, was a member of the OD(SA)

**Clive Whitmore:** Thatcher's highest ranking private secretary. Although an unelected advisor, Whitmore was her closest confidant in government.

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<sup>1</sup> John Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 241.



**Admiral Terrance Lewin:** Chief of the Defence Staff during the Crisis. In a reworking of Britain's military structure in the years following the Falklands, this position would grow to have official authority over the branches of the military. Lewin, though, held power only as an advisor. Each branch chief, like Leach, reported directly to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister. Despite this restraint, Lewin was a key ally of Nott in his battles with Leach.

**Admiral Henry Leach:** The First Sea Lord—the Royal Navy's top admiral—Leach was the most important military figure during the conflict. He had spent two years vigorously fighting cuts to his service during Nott's Defence Review, and the Falklands was nearly as important an event to him as to his Argentine counterpart, Admiral Anaya.

**Admiral Fieldhouse:** The man Thatcher chose to lead Leach's fleet to the Falklands. Fieldhouse had been an ally of Nott and had been passed over by Leach for promotion. Together, though, they would cement their Navy legacies in the coming two months.

### *The Americans*

**Ronald Reagan:** The American president had a close personal relationship with Thatcher before the Crisis. They were bonded by their conservatism—they took power within two years of each other and both struggled, initially, to govern from the right. Reagan initially took a *laissez-faire* approach to the Crisis. He initially delegated handling of the Crisis to Alexander Haig, the American Secretary of State. Perhaps inspired by his own connections with Latin America—Argentina was an American ally in the region as the United States dramatically increased its covert presence.

**Alexander Haig:** Reagan's Secretary of State in April 1982. He had been an Army General and the NATO Supreme Allied Commander prior to taking charge of the State Department. His two years as Secretary of State had not gone smoothly.

And so Haig needed the Falklands. He vigorously pursued peace between the Galtieri and Thatcher governments, garnering controversy when he, at times, appeared to treat both parties as equals and portrayed the United States as a neutral arbiter.

**Jeane Kirkpatrick:** The United States Ambassador to the United Nations during the Falklands Crisis—Anthony Parsons's counterpart. She had a penchant for Latin

American states and was Argentina's strongest backer both at the UN and in the American government throughout the Crisis. Despite America's own proclivity for interfering with the affairs of Latin American governments during the 1980s, Kirkpatrick thought herself a strong opponent of colonialism, and did all in her power to frame the British claim to the Falklands within that lens.

**Caspar Weinberger:** The American Secretary of Defense during the Falklands War—John Nott's counterpart. Weinberger represented a contingent within the American government that backed the Argentines from the start. He was in a far stronger long-term political position than Kirkpatrick and Haig, creating during the Reagan administration the doctrine that would guide American foreign policy for decades to come. He was joined in his pro-Britain stance by the CIA and other corners of the American security structure.

## Glossary

**Defence versus Defense (and other British words):** Throughout, this study uses varied spelling of words—see defence and labour. These are British spellings, and this study employs them only when necessary.

**Falklands versus Malvinas:** Argentines refer to the Falklands as *Las Islas Malvinas*, or the Malvinas Islands. This terminological difference is a point of particular political contention between Britain and Argentina. As this study focuses on Thatcher, it uses ‘Falkland Islands’ or ‘Falklands’ throughout for simplicity’s sake.

**BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation.

**FCO:** Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

**MEZ:** Maritime Exclusion Zone—Thatcher’s first naval blockade of the Falklands.

**MOD:** Britain’s Ministry of Defence.

**MP:** Member of Parliament—generally refers to a member of the lower house, the Commons.

**Number Ten, No. 10, and Downing Street:** Three means this thesis employs to reference the Prime Minister’s residence and office. This includes Thatcher’s immediate staff as well.

**OD(SA):** Pronounced ‘Odza.’ The Overseas Policy Committee (OD) on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands (SA). The OD was a standing subcommittee in Thatcher’s government, and she created the OD(SA) to run the Falklands Crisis and Conflict. It is known as the ‘War Cabinet’ in British political nomenclature.

**TEZ:** Total Exclusion Zone—a more expansive naval siege of the Falkland Islands than the MEZ.

**UNSC:** United Nations Security Council.

**Westminster:** The home of both houses of Parliament. Generally refers to the House of Commons.

**Whitehall:** Used to reference the entire British Civil Service, which represents almost all of British government—including the MOD’s military leadership. Named after a road running through downtown London

## *1. Introduction*

London's Imperial War Museum devotes itself to capturing the British "experience" of modern war.<sup>3</sup> The entrance hall is adorned with Nazi V2 rockets that terrorized the city during the 1940s, a sculpture of a body destroyed by a nuclear blast, and British armored vehicles from the Second World War and Iraq. Yet, one war—Britain's 1982 battle for the Falklands with Argentina—isn't displayed in the main hall. In fact, the museum's only mention of the conflict is a small diorama filled with forgotten weaponry, tucked away in the dimly lit and obscure 'special forces' exhibit—a section dedicated to the memory of exciting but largely insignificant operations.<sup>4</sup> In 1982, though, the Falklands War seemed anything but insignificant to the British government and public.

Thatcher's Task Force—a fleet composed of nearly every viable Royal Navy vessel, resembling Dunkirk—departed Britain for the South Atlantic in the beginning of April. The bulk of it arrived near the Falklands one month later. In those thirty days, Thatcher needed to prepare her own cabinet, diplomatic partners, and the British public for war. This thesis examines how Thatcher brought her country to battle, and how she made the war popular enough to propel her to a massive electoral victory in 1983. This thesis identifies three 'audiences' Thatcher needed to win over to make the Falklands a

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<sup>3</sup> "About Us," Imperial War Museum. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/corporate>

<sup>4</sup> Author visit to the Imperial War Museum, London, 3 January 2015.

successful endeavor. She had to first convince a collapsing cabinet to go to war with her. Next, she had to bring about an end to an aggressive peace initiative from the United Nations and the United States—all the while needing to appear to favor peace herself. Finally, she needed to make the war domestically popular to secure her place in British politics.<sup>6</sup>

At first blush, the Falklands War was an incredibly unlikely fight. How could two western states, both American allies, come to blows over a pair of minimally inhabited, strategically unimportant islands? There has never been much doubt that the Argentine dictatorship required a diversion for its own survival.<sup>7</sup> But Britain's response—surprising to contemporary onlookers—can only be pinned on Margaret Thatcher's own need for a diversion. Thatcher was in dire political straits at the outset of the Crisis. The British economy remained in the tank, and members of her own Parliament had grown tired of her leadership style—by March 1982, they had already begun vying to replace her as Conservative Party leader.

Once the Argentines invaded the Falkland Islands, Thatcher never once considered seriously pursuing peace—there was too much potential good in British victory for her to pass up. There is no adequate comparison to Thatcher's predicament or situation in British history—the strongest parallel is, in fact, the Argentine *junta*'s own attempt at a diversionary war.

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<sup>6</sup> This work also views Thatcher's actions entirely within a British context: the functions of her cabinet and parliament, the history of wartime Conservative leadership, and the tendencies of her public audience were all unique to Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Oakes, "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands," *Security Studies*, 15:3, 2006, 433.

This thesis challenges popular and scholarly history on two separate issues. First, it refocuses study of the Falklands from the various military intricacies of the war itself to the diplomatic and political battles that preceded fighting on the Islands. Nearly every history of the War focuses on fighting at Goose Green or at Mount Tumbledown.<sup>8</sup> None focuses exclusively on the war in Westminster, at the UN, or on the British airways—where this thesis identifies more substantial political lessons.<sup>9</sup> Second, most British historical accounts of the Falklands Crisis depict Thatcher as weighing a peaceful solution to the conflict. This thesis dismisses that idea altogether, showing that Thatcher employed Downing Street’s full political and diplomatic arsenal to ensure Britain had a chance to fight a war over the Falkland Islands.

This study provides new perspective in the field by examining documents not available to the public until late-2012. Previously, the papers of Thatcher’s War Cabinet, the Foreign Office, and the committee tasked with investigating the Falklands first days remained off limits to journalists and scholars. Under Britain’s 30-year rule, “Cabinet conclusions and memoranda” are never released before three decades elapse.<sup>10</sup> These materials—primarily Thatcher’s papers, the minutes of War Cabinet meetings, and the

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<sup>8</sup> The two most famous battles of the Falklands War.

<sup>9</sup> On Amazon.com, only one of the top twenty books under a search for “Falklands War” contains a significant analytical section on the Falklands Crisis—this thesis relies on that work, *Battle for the Falklands*, extensively. The rest either don’t discuss the Crisis or employ it only as a means to set up colorful histories of the War itself. Problematically, most works written on the Falklands in the years after the war were authored by journalists who traveled with the British Task Force—they, of course, tended to write on the part of the War they were most intimately involved with.

<sup>10</sup> “Meetings and Papers,” <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/meetings-papers.htm>

private correspondence of the Prime Minister’s private secretaries—provide insight into the depth of Thatcher’s manipulation of the Falklands Crisis. Some have speculated on Thatcher’s pre-determined desire for a politically popular and beneficial shooting war—namely the journalist tandem of Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, as well as Thatcher’s contemporary Labour opponents—but until now it has been difficult to prove that Thatcher actively avoided peace with Argentina at every level and step of negotiations. The totality of archival evidence and a few specific, previously unknown instances where Thatcher directly and manipulatively interfered with the British media, the American peace negotiations, and the resistance to war within her own cabinet, prove this new assertion.

When the documents became available at the United Kingdom’s National Archive in late-2012, a few articles cropped up in various publications citing new material. These examinations never scraped past the surface—the *BBC*’s coverage was titled “Falklands invasion ‘surprised’ Thatcher,” and the *New York Times*’ article read “Papers show rare friction for Thatcher and Reagan”—neither of these are groundbreaking discoveries.<sup>11</sup> These reports commented only on the documents British governmental archives published online. Hidden in the annals of the National Archives in Kew and the Parliamentary Archives at Westminster are thousands of documents yet to be digitized. These documents reveal Thatcher’s willingness, and even her desire, to avoid any peace

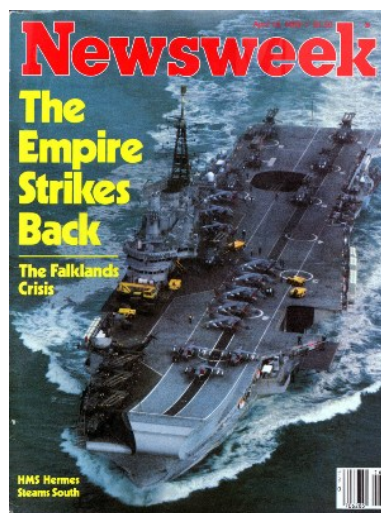
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<sup>11</sup> John F. Burns, “Papers show rare friction for Thatcher and Reagan,” *New York Times*, 28 December 2012. ;

Beter Biles, “Falklands invasion ‘surprised’ Thatcher,” *BBC*, 28 December 2012.

deal with Argentina during April 1982. This study crafts its narrative around this newly available material.

In addition to scholarly works and major histories, Britain's popular memory has captured a specific few moments from Thatcher's Falklands experience as the 'turning points' of the Crisis for Britain. In the *Iron Lady*, Thatcher—portrayed by Meryl Streep—gives a heralding speech before the House of Commons in the first days of the Crisis, rallying Parliament and the British public. In fact, the very speech depicted in the film marked a low-point for Thatcher in April 1982. She couldn't tell Parliament how her government had been so thrown off by the Argentine invasion in the first place, and left Westminster rattled. The most iconic image of the Falklands Crisis is the cover of *Newsweek* on 19 April. A British aircraft carrier graced the cover, headed towards the Falklands. "The Empire Strikes Back," read the headline. But on 19 April, Britain had yet to strike back. In fact, Thatcher had yet to build popular support for the war at home and was still in the midst of extinguishing American attempts at peace.



*19 April Newsweek cover. Courtesy of Newsweek.*



There's been no scholarly work on Thatcher using the entirety of the Falklands papers released in 2012—documents that depict Thatcher's own quest for a diversionary war, a concept yet unexplored in major research-based works. Though the Falklands War didn't bring down a British government, Thatcher certainly used her victory to bring British politics dramatically rightward over the next decade.

The Falklands War was of far greater consequence for Argentina than for Britain. Argentina's military dictatorship fell as a consequence of this embarrassing defeat, ending a 'dirty war' that had claimed tens of thousands of lives. Yet the Falklands War is confounding. The conflict's unlikelihood is equal parts curious and horrifying. Rather than stare and fail to examine fully the causes and processes of such a bizarre event, this thesis attempts to pull apart a specific element of it. Margaret Thatcher's April 1982 offers lessons in crisis leadership, even if they might only pertain to a British system.

This thesis' purpose is to methodically move with Thatcher through her mistakes and triumphs in three fields, working to understand her own assumptions and decisions, evaluating them accordingly. Such an approach makes Thatcher never really had an interest in peace with Argentina, and in fact worked aggressively to avoid it from the start of the Falklands Crisis. She saw too much value in a victory in the South Atlantic, and spent April 1982 working to bring it about. Through a month long diplomatic process, she consistently and deliberately undermined any feasible political solution to the Crisis. She relied almost exclusively on advisors who favored war and cut out those that opposed it. She directed diplomatic maneuvering at the United Nations that enabled her to frame the war as Britain's moral right, freeing Thatcher from the need to strike a deal. She took

a military-focused approach to suppressing Haig's diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> Finally, she saw the urgency in winning in these three arenas—her cabinet and parliament, the United States, and the British public—before she could win the war itself.

Of course, Thatcher would never herself own up to this reality. A leader in a democratic system needs to at least initially appear to demonstrate a will for peace in order to generate any sort of political gain from war. In her memoir, *The Downing Street Years*, Thatcher described the pressure to send British soldiers into combat as “crushing,” and claims that she never wanted to send British “young men and women” into combat.<sup>13</sup> But, even in that same work, Thatcher provided all the necessary underpinning for the diversion argument. She wrote disdainfully that during the Crisis she was “under an almost intolerable pressure to negotiate for the sake of negotiation.”<sup>14</sup>

A journalist traveling with the Task Force on 7 April as it set sail overheard a telling remark from a Royal Marine officer who would soon storm the Islands' rocky shores. “Now I know this is serious,” he said. “You can't let the nation see us go off to war with bands playing and then bring us back without doing anything.” This “ghastly political inevitability,” a self-propelled “great machine,” was anything but.<sup>15</sup> Once the fleet set sail, as this thesis shows, Thatcher prevented peace at every turn.

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<sup>12</sup> In terms of power in government, Kissinger represented the ideal modern Secretary of State for Haig. Kissinger had earned widespread acclaim for his shuttle diplomacy during the Yom Kippur War, and Haig saw the Falklands as his opportunity to replicate that success.

<sup>13</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

<sup>15</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 97.

This thesis borrows Thatcher's own structure for discussing the Falklands Crisis. In her memoirs, *The Downing Street years*, she breaks her first Falklands chapter down week-by-week. Rather than focusing thematically on different realms of conflict throughout April, Thatcher instead uses each week to show how much she had improved the diplomatic and military standing of Britain over time. For example, "Week One" begins on a dire note: Thatcher's government becomes "increasingly concerned" with events in the South Atlantic, and this period was filled with plenty of "dark moments."<sup>16</sup> By "Week Five," Thatcher's actions had led to a "substantial moral boost" for the Government and the British military, leaving them ready to confidently seize the Islands. Perhaps this portrayal isn't entirely unfair, but this thesis takes a different thematic approach to Thatcher's chronological structure.

If Thatcher provides the structure, then two other works provide the historical and theoretical underpinning for this examination. The first, Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins's *Battle for the Falklands*, is the only significant work on the Falklands to acknowledge Thatcher's lust for war. When examining the diplomatic events of April 1982, they correctly perceive British negotiating tactics as part of "an impressive demonstration of British will," rather than an attempt at peace. This thesis' underlying argument comes from that same place: with the Falklands Crisis, any peaceful motives Thatcher claimed are false. Hastings and Jenkins break up their evaluation of the Crisis and war differently than this study. They write of a "Politicians' War," a "Whitehall War" between members of the civil service, and a "Media War."<sup>17</sup> Margaret Thatcher

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<sup>16</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 179.

<sup>17</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 330.

was, of course, involved in each of these aspects of the Falklands, and Hastings and Jenkins acknowledge that. But this study relies on Thatcher's complete dominance of each "war" found within *Battle for the Falklands*. There was no separate media, political or Whitehall war; the entire war was Thatcher's, and she personally percolated or quelled any section of British fighting within the larger crisis and conflict.

The second work, Amy Oake's "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands" discusses the 1982 war, but looks at the Argentine *junta*'s decision to invade rather than Margaret Thatcher's choice to retaliate. She frames the Argentine invasion as a distraction from "domestic unrest," intended to save the Argentine dictatorship.<sup>18</sup> This is not a new notion. But Oakes's simple conditions for classifying a the beginnings diversionary war—spanning a leader's motivation, domestic constraints, opportunity, and outcome—apply remarkably well to Thatcher's actions in April 1982.<sup>19</sup> When applied to Thatcher, Oakes's framework helps prove this thesis' argument that Thatcher wanted a diversionary war herself, not peace. She faced domestic unrest and political turmoil too, perhaps not on the same level as the Argentines, but enough to end her own political career.

Before examining Thatcher's leadership, it best serves the reader to offer a theoretical framework for British wartime Prime Ministership. In *The Myth of the Strong Leader*, Archie Brown writes that, because most leadership studies in international relations emerge from the United States presidency, strong international relations

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<sup>18</sup> Oakes, "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands," *Security Studies*, 433.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 463.

leadership has been defined as “prevailing over opponents and ostensibly shaping the course of public policy; success or failure ‘is a matter of whether or not the president gets his way.’”<sup>21</sup> Brown argues for a sort of transformational leadership instead, where an effective leader can accomplish more through “collective leadership” than through strong-armed show-running.<sup>22</sup> Brown points to Clement Atlee’s six years as Prime Minister as the archetype for this sort of leadership. Of Thatcher, Brown writes that she was an unusual figure in British politics, subtly criticizing her for being “the driving force” between 1979 and 1990 in British foreign policy.<sup>23</sup> But because Thatcher was successful in strong-arming her way to foreign policy and domestic victory, this thesis will only hang on to a certain piece of Brown’s logic: a Prime Minister, even one as bold as Thatcher, needs to at least appear to rely upon “collective consideration by Cabinet members” in order to retain authority.<sup>24</sup> Brown argues that Thatcher was a transformational leader, contrary to popular opinion. However, he writes that the one occasion where Thatcher drifted from her normal set of actions was the Falklands War—the event that most dominated and shaped her Prime Ministerial career. Brown hopes that the reader will not allow her “willingness to use force” to “obscure her extreme reluctance” to rely on the military or to strong-arm within her cabinet.<sup>25</sup> As this thesis moves through April 1982, it proves Thatcher did little else but yearn for the use of military force and ‘strong-arm’ any politician or diplomat in her way. “Collective

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<sup>21</sup> Archie Brown, *The Myth of the Strong Leader: Political Leadership in Modern Politics*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 342.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 342-343.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 343.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 362.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

leadership” might suit peacetime British Prime Ministers like Atlee, but Thatcher moved as far away from it as possible in seeking the Falklands War. To make whatever sense one might of Thatcher’s crisis leadership in 1982, this study first must venture back several hundred years and identify how Britain came to possess the Falklands in the first place.

## ***2. The Isles, Thatcher's Failures, and Argentina's "Go" order***

The Falklands War emerged from a long-running pattern of events in the South Atlantic, Buenos Aires, and London. The Islands' colonial history was as complex as that of any other patch of land in the New World. Each party's claim to the Islands stretched back hundreds of years, creating a complicated web of memories, particularly in Argentina, where British presence remained an insulting eye-sore off its coast. Understanding the cultural context of the Falklands at the War's outset is necessary for this study of its beginnings, and that context stretches back to colonial discovery. First, this chapter locates the Islands. Next, it works to explain the complex geostrategic history of the Islands after their discovery. After introducing the Argentine dictatorship that initiated the Falklands Crisis, it brings Margaret Thatcher's full political history and standing as Prime Minister to bear. Seeing Thatcher's dire political straits is necessary for an understanding of her own motivation for a diversionary war.

### ***A Few Rocks in the South Atlantic***

The Falkland Islands, all 798 of them, rest in the South Atlantic, about 300 miles off the coast of modern-day Argentina. The Falklands counter the typical tropical associations with Southern hemispheric islands: they are not green or warm and do not

have sandy beaches along their edges. The Islands have experienced about as much geographic tumult as they have political, with some scientists suspecting they originated as a rock formation on the edge of southern Africa before drifting westward.<sup>26</sup> The Islands are covered and surrounded by especially jagged rock formations. Before human arrival, little growth existed beyond the common weed, and just one four legged creature, the fox, roamed the Islands. Penguins visit the islands' shores on occasion, and are joined by interesting sea life of all sorts. There was no native human population on the isles. The archipelago is cursed with particularly nasty winds. The surrounding waters are violent and in certain areas tower over the islands themselves. All of this built to a lethal crescendo of God's greatest obstacles, standing in the way of any poor colonial sailors to stumble upon them. These conditions also made it the worst sort of terrain to launch a modern military assault.

Most of the islands are miniscule in size, and just two present viability for long-term human habitation. European colonialists thus dubbed them East Falkland—the largest in the archipelago—and West Falkland. East Falkland itself appears to be split in two through its midsection, with one main body north and one south, but for a small sliver of land holding the two together. It is swamped with inlets that, at human arrival, likely presented the best locations in the entire archipelago for seaports. The island is less than two hundred miles in length from its furthest points, and less than forty miles across at its northern and southern coasts. West Falkland is slightly smaller than its partner, but similar in landscape but for a small mountain range. The two main islands are separated

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<sup>26</sup> Eddy, Linklater, and Gillman, *War in the Falklands*, 32.



by the Falklands Sound, ten miles in length, which cuts through the Falkland Islands at about a 20° heading.



*The unforgiving terrain of West Falkland. Courtesy of Ian Strange.*

About 1,000 miles east of the Falklands lies another island, South Georgia. Here, too, humans did not reside before European discovery in the seventeenth century. Captain James Cook of the HMS *Resolution* stumbled upon the island in 1775, and Britain has claimed it ever since. Sometime after Captain Cook brought home news of the discovery, Britain brought South Georgia under the administrative auspices of the Falklands, and it has since been tied to its neighbors to the west.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “South Georgia Island,” NASA, [http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image\\_feature\\_569.html](http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/image_feature_569.html)



*South Georgia. Perhaps even less hospitable than the Falkland Islands. Courtesy of NASA.*<sup>28</sup>

The question of ownership of these islands stretches back to their discovery and several European countries claim it was their own. The Falklands story, of course, fits within a larger history of European ‘discovery’ in the New World. There was little real value to the Falklands, and similar circumstances played out across much of the Western hemisphere. Europe’s powers reached west across the ocean anyways, seeking the glory of the unknown. Of course, due to the treacherous navigational conditions explorers found themselves in around the Falklands, no one can say for sure that they were the ‘first’ to find the islands. The British claim it was John Davis who first spotted the islands in 1592, though he never set foot upon them himself. Non-anglo historians, though, look to Amerigo Vespucci. In 1502, nasty winds drove him far off his course until his ship

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

came upon a “wholly rough coast” at a 52° bearing from the South Pole, the location of the Falklands.<sup>29</sup> The British government, making the case for war in 1982, claimed that Sir Richard Hawkins had found the Falklands in 1594—this British claim is also highly suspect, as Hawkins described in his journal “goodly champion country and peopled” lands, as well as “many fires.”<sup>30</sup> Of course, it is now apparent that there were no natives on the Islands, so Hawkins was likely lost along the Patagonian coast. The claims do not end here. The Dutch claimed ownership, as in 1600 it was one of their own sailors who plotted the precise location of the Islands. A British naval captain, John Strong, was the first to set foot upon any of the Islands in 1690, and he provided their English name. All of these “discoveries” eventually cancelled each other out, yielding inevitable legal discussions. These negotiations were not of particular import or study until various Falklands crises erupted centuries later.

None of these discoveries much matter, as none of the explorers stayed on the Islands. In a decade-long period in the eighteenth century, though, nearly all of Europe’s powers—Britain, France, and Spain among others—converged on the Islands. Perhaps the most important lesson to draw is that the question of original ownership of the Islands was for a long time as irrelevant as the Islands themselves. The French first established a colony on the Islands in 1764, followed by the British a year later.<sup>31</sup> It took the two another full year to run into each other, and yet another—the year is now 1767—for the French to request the British depart. By this time, though, the French had sold the Islands

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<sup>29</sup> Eddy, Linklater, and Gillman, *War in the Falklands*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> The Argentines, as noted, call the islands *Las Malvinas*. This is actually a Spanish translation of the French name for the islands, *Isles Malouines*.

to the Spanish, who arrived in 1767 themselves. Thus two colonies came to exist, both under terrible conditions. The British remained in smaller numbers on less hospitable West Falkland, while the Spanish stayed in slightly larger numbers on East Falkland. In 1770, the Spanish had seen enough of the British presence, and sent five large vessels to pluck out the remaining baker's dozen of British Royal Marines.<sup>32</sup>

And thus began the first Falklands Crisis. While Parliament had shown little interest in the Falklands to this point, this show of force by the Spanish led to a rather large British response. Britain withdrew its ambassador from Spain, and war seemed on the horizon. France intervened, saving Europe from conflict over the isles. England and Spain signed a treaty in January of 1771, though different versions were published in each country. The Spanish claim part of the treaty was a secret, unwritten agreement on the part of the British to abandon the Islands and leave them in Spanish hands. Britain never recognized such a claim.

Thus, the Spanish remained in control of the Islands, until Argentina declared its independence from Spain in 1816 and claimed all Spanish territory in the region. An Argentine frigate seized the Islands in 1820 and for the next thirteen years the Islands belonged to Argentina. In 1833, amidst a diplomatic kerfuffle involving an improbable attempt at colonization from the United States, the British vessel *Clio* returned and took the Islands back, this time for good.<sup>33</sup> A small group of British colonialists arrived at the

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<sup>32</sup> These early events are remarkably similar to the diplomatic crisis that preceded the 1982 war. The peaceful removal of a single platoon of British Royal Marines is exactly how the 1982 crisis begins, as well.

<sup>33</sup> Eddy, Linklater and Gillman, *War in the Falklands*, 39.

Islands and remained there, their population growing at a lethargic pace, up until the war of 1982.

Argentina's own history from 1833 through 1982 outdoes any of the turmoil surrounding the Falklands. After over a century of revolution and dictatorship, Juan Perón, a military leader, took power after a massive popular movement on his behalf. Famously joined by his wife Eva, he brought prosperity, excellent employment figures, and a new nationalism to Argentina. Over time, Perón's economic initiatives began to falter, and he lost the military's support. A coup in 1955 forced Perón out of power. Six more coups would follow, each time with the overthrow of a newly elected government.<sup>34</sup> Even Perón found himself back in power again in the 1970s, only to die of a heart attack in 1974.<sup>35</sup> His wife, Isabel Perón, took over only to be overthrown herself in 1976. The military established control once more, this time deciding not to turn authority back over to elected leadership.<sup>36</sup> Instead, the military established a *junta*.<sup>37</sup>

The diplomatic squabbling over the Islands did not end in 1833, even if the practical matter of their inhabitants reached a conclusion. Though the Islands have never possessed any strategic import, they came to “embody the national pride of whoever

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<sup>34</sup> Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> A *Junta* is a governing military coup, usually, and in Argentina's case, led by a board of admirals and generals. In Argentina's governing *Junta*, there was always one president, but the president only governed with the consent of other top military commanders. This left that leader in a continually vulnerable position, entirely dependent on subordinates for their power.

holds them.”<sup>38</sup> So the Argentines kept pushing in different arenas. These efforts yielded very little until the mid-twentieth century. Juan Perón’s nationalism spurred a renewed desire for the Falklands in Argentina. The dictatorship in Buenos Aires forced teaching of the theft of the Falklands into the mandatory educational curriculum. In the aftermath of the Suez debacle of 1956, Britain’s remaining empire began to crumble. Argentines saw this as an opportunity, and in 1965 they finally experienced a diplomatic victory. The United Nations attempted to answer “The Question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)” with Resolution 2065. The General Assembly recognized the isles as a colonial holding that should be handed over eventually and requested the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland “to resume negotiations in order to find as soon as possible a peaceful, just and definitive solution to the sovereignty dispute relating to the question of the Falkland Islands.”<sup>39</sup>

The British Foreign office was a bit relieved by the resolution. The Falklands were an economic failure—the sheep residing on the Islands had been the greatest source of revenue there for over a century.<sup>40</sup> While Parliament went the route of nationalist rants decrying the resolution, and while the islanders themselves remained stubborn in their resolve to remain there and remain British, the Foreign Office began secret negotiations to “lease” the Islands back to Argentina. At the conclusion of the lease, ownership of the Islands would be fully granted to the local power. This agreement would, in turn, allow

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<sup>38</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> UN Resolution 2065. In chapter seven, this thesis discusses the British government’s attempts to demonstrate the revitalization of the Falkland Islands economy in the wake of the Falklands War.

<sup>40</sup> Eddy, Linklater, and Gillman, *War in the Falklands*, 42.

Britain to withdraw its sole naval vessel in the region, the aging *HMS Endurance*, which was due to be scrapped in short order anyways.

Such was the scene in the Falklands in the mid-to-late twentieth century, and the despair Britain felt abroad certainly originated at home. The Foreign Office continued to slowly prepare for a turnover of the Islands into the late 1970s. Margaret Thatcher, recently made Prime Minister, had enough domestic turmoil to occupy her before she could turn to the Falklands.

### *A Rocky Start for the Iron Lady*

Margaret Thatcher's rise and strong personality have been well documented.<sup>41</sup> Born on October 13, 1925 in Lincolnshire, far from the halls of Westminster, Thatcher was raised by grocery store owners and lived in a flat above one of their stores. She was clearly intellectually gifted, and eventually headed off to Oxford for university. At Oxford she broke through her first of many "glass ceilings," when she became president of the school's Conservative Association. After leaving university, she worked as a chemist for a short time before attending law school. She married into great industrial wealth along the way, further pushing her political tendencies rightward.

In 1959, on her second attempt, she was elected to Parliament. After two tours in the shadow cabinet, the Tories reclaimed power in 1970, and for the first time she was

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<sup>41</sup> For more on Margaret Thatcher's early years, see Charles Moore's *Margaret Thatcher: From Grantham to the Falklands*.

thrust into the national spotlight.<sup>42</sup> She became secretary for education and science, just the second female minister from the Conservative Party. She did not shy away from challenges, and amidst a larger austerity effort, she ended a program that provided free milk for all British school children.<sup>43</sup> Thus began a career defined as much by her polarizing nature as by her gender. Labour Members of Parliament (MPs) began calling her “Thatcher the Milk Snatcher,” but she pressed on undeterred. Perhaps by necessity, Thatcher defied all gender stereotypes pressed upon her as Britain’s only prominent female politician. Her Conservative contemporaries held certain preconceived notions about women in leadership. John Nott, later Thatcher’s Defence Secretary, wrote on the subject that “Men and women do behave differently.”<sup>44</sup> But the traits those in British politics expected women to exhibit—tempered, quiet, willing to give in—were entirely unrecognizable in Thatcher. She was quite the opposite, making men around her appear “timid” and offering “scathing” opinions of their policy ideas.<sup>45</sup> Thatcher didn’t change her personality to fit political demands. But because she was constantly pitted against other men, privately and publicly, those looking to taint her claim she only acted so harshly to move away from a perceived weakness.

In 1974, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath lost election. Britain was in poor economic shape, and the grand sense of empire and World War II victory had both slipped away. Britain, once a proud nation, had seemingly lost its way. The

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<sup>42</sup> Chapter three of this thesis explains the more precise definition of a ‘shadow government’ and other specific functions of British politics.

<sup>43</sup> Austerity means budget cuts in British political parlance.

<sup>44</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 202.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 202.



Conservatives turned to Thatcher for rejuvenation. After five years of Labour rule, the Conservatives won back power in 1979, and Margaret Thatcher became Britain's first female Prime Minister.

Thatcher entered Downing Street following what became known as the 'winter of discontent.' She later said that in 1979, "the forces of error, doubt and despair were so firmly entrenched in British society...that overcoming them would not be possible without some measure of discord."<sup>46</sup> For its first three years in power, Thatcher's government experienced significant conflict with the opposition party and its shadow cabinet, but the state of the country and the mindset and morale of the British people did not improve. While Thatcher was dealt a nasty economic hand, she did little to help herself early among members of the working and middle classes. *Time* magazine bestowed upon Thatcher the moniker "Fighting Lady," and she did her best to live up to it in her first days in office. Britain has a gargantuan public sector workforce, one that dominates a much larger segment of the population and political personality of Britain than in the United States. The Labour Party was, and still is, officially joined with public sector trade unions, which make up much of its political might and funding. Thus, before the Labour government was voted out in 1979, it promised new pay stability plans and better conditions for much of the public sector. In her memoir on her time in government, Thatcher called this plan, born of the Standing Commission on Pay Comparability, a "bribe" to Labour's surrogates.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

Thatcher's victory resulted, in part, from the public reaction to the 'winter of discontent.' This period immediately prior to Thatcher's election was dominated by public sector strikes and riots. The Labour government's Commission on Pay Comparability was intended to quiet and appease the public sector trade organizations. By undoing the policies which had resulted from that commission, which she claimed caused an up-tick in the inflation that the rest of the British public struggled with, Thatcher again opened the door for the same riots and strikes that swamped the country in the months leading up to her turn in government. Thatcher insisted, though, that the 25% overall increase in public sector wages was too high, and to her own political detriment—and arguably to the stability of the British economy—she removed the increase from the Public Sector Wage Bill.<sup>48</sup>

Thatcher continued to work on demonstrating toughness with her first budget as Prime Minister in 1979. She scaled back public expenditure sharply, with actions reminiscent of her time as Secretary for Education and Science. She cut the top rate of income tax by 23% and raised the Value Added Tax (VAT)—a sales tax that tends to hit lower classes harder—in order to make up for some of the lost income tax revenue. She slashed government offices and requirements like Office Development Permits and Industrial Development Certificates that she viewed as wasteful or roadblocks to economic growth. She encouraged the beginnings of a Defence Review that would lead to significant cuts across the entire military, with major personnel and hardware acquisition reductions at the Royal Navy. These cuts not only reduced government bureaucracy, but also government jobs. With such a large section of Britain's working

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<sup>48</sup> John Nott, *Here Today Gone Tomorrow*, 190/

population lying in the public sphere, the budget cuts did terrific damage to the country's unemployment problem.

Despite Thatcher's greatest early efforts, Britain's economic situation continued to deteriorate. From 1979 to 1980, Thatcher's first year at Downing Street, the nation found itself in its worst economic condition since before it entered the Second World War. Unemployment jumped 4%, from 6% to 10%, in that one year period. Jobless numbers would continue to rise through the Falklands War, hitting 11% in 1982.<sup>49</sup> Midway through 1979, three-month inflation figures remained at 13%, an extraordinarily high figure that caused the government to make further decisions that, in turn, led to higher unemployment.<sup>50</sup>

With these poor employment and growth statistics came bad poll numbers. As Thatcher stated herself, "to turn from the euphoria of election victory to the problems of the British economy was to confront the morning after the night before."<sup>51</sup> The morning lasted three years. When Thatcher came into office, she had support from nearly 50% of the British public. For the next three years, that number fell continuously. By 1982, the public had lost faith in not just the Conservative Party, but the entire British political establishment. Many polls found Thatcher's party running third, with the upstart Social Democratic Party in the lead.<sup>52</sup> In March of 1981, Thatcher's supporting numbers were a

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<sup>49</sup> Office for National Statistics, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/november-2014/statistical-bulletin.html>

<sup>50</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Jenkins, "How Margaret Thatcher's Falklands Gamble Paid Off," *The Guardian*, April 29, 2013.

whopping 58% below those who did not support her. In November 1981, a mere 19% of voters said they were “satisfied” with Thatcher’s government.<sup>53</sup>

Thatcher’s problems did not end with public perception. Always present in British politics when times are tough are acts of insubordination and threats of political coups from within the Prime Minister’s own party. Though Thatcher attempts to brush these off in her own memoir, they clearly altered her confidence levels and the public perception of her strength. Other cabinet memoirs openly discuss these events in their own memoirs. At one cabinet meeting in 1981, a majority of the members openly began to argue that the Prime Minister’s economic policies were ill conceived and failing. The cabinet members circulated a paper that originated with Geoffrey Howe at Treasury. It called for a new economic direction—which, in fact, very closely resembled the old one. The dissenting cabinet members criticized Thatcher’s use of “expressions” like ‘creative accounting,’ arguing that she demonstrated a lack of understanding of the actual workings of money and budgets.<sup>54</sup> Not all members of the cabinet backed the paper, but it signaled a very real lack of support for Thatcher amongst those she relied upon most for executing her wishes in government. It is just one example of the weakness of Thatcher’s cabinet in 1982, which is easily comparable to the lack of confidence the British public had in their once proud empire.

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<sup>53</sup> Ipsos MORI Polling, <http://www.slideshare.net/IpsosMORI/margaret-thatcher-poll-rating-trends>.

<sup>54</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 195-199.

Thatcher had an election coming before the end of 1984.<sup>55</sup> Without significant economic improvement or an uptick in national morale, her tenure as Great Britain's Prime Minister looked doomed to failure. In reality, Britain's economic woes were almost entirely a product of circumstance. Similar problems plagued the American economy. Regardless of external factors, without some sort of opportunity to prove herself as a leader, Thatcher would find herself out of office in a matter of months.

Thatcher's early initiatives were quite controversial, but they were almost entirely domestic. She had yet, in her career, to tackle a real security issue or to engage in high-stakes diplomacy. In her first years as Prime Minister, Thatcher writes, she "would never have thought that I would have to order British troops into combat."<sup>56</sup> Very suddenly, Thatcher's attention would turn from domestic battles to a foreign war, with greater political stakes than any previous experience of her career.

### ***Argentina's junta and its decision to invade the Falklands***

Argentina's president was in a remarkably similar political situation to Thatcher in 1982. Leopoldo Galtieri, the Argentine army's top general and the head of Argentina's military *junta* found himself on thin ice with the public and within his own government.

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<sup>55</sup> In Britain, Prime Ministers can call elections at any time they see fit. This usually occurs when a Prime Minister is in a place of particular political strength. However, Parliament cannot go more than five years without an election. Thatcher's five years were up in 1984.

<sup>56</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 173.

Argentine leaders had long used Malvinas rhetoric—making public proclamations about the Argentine right to the Islands or demanding the British turn them over—to court domestic political favor. British ownership of the Islands had been a depressing segment of the Argentine collective psyche, though it isn't clear whether a desire for the isles drove political ploys or politics drove desire. President Juan Perón, himself a former *junta* head, had been at the forefront of reviving Argentine claims to the Islands. A new *junta* took power again in Argentina in 1976, and after five disastrous years General Galtieri assumed its top posting.

Galtieri was born in 1926 to Italian immigrants.<sup>57</sup> He was the quintessential military dictator in twentieth century Latin America. As a young soldier, he gained the attention of American military “advisors” attached to the Argentine army.<sup>58</sup> They sent him to the American-run School of the Americas, famous for training more future dictators than “any other school in the history of the world”—namely unelected leaders from Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Peru.<sup>59</sup> He rose through the ranks, serving loyally as the Commander-in-Chief of the army until December 1981. Ronald Reagan, in Galtieri's first weeks in office, described him as a “magnificent general” for his relentless pursuit of leftists.<sup>60</sup>

But the newly minted President Galtieri did not come to power in a rosy position. He was instead faced with mountainous pressure for democratization and economic

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<sup>57</sup> “Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, a failed dictator, died on January 12th, aged 76,” *The Economist*, 16 January 2006.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Pilisuk and Roundtree, *Who Benefits from Global Violence and War*, 147.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

improvements from a weary citizenry. Inflation climbed at an unsustainable rate and the *junta* had secretly taken approximately 20,000 political prisoners.<sup>61</sup> The *junta* was weak, almost completely discredited, and naturally its leader was held in the same light. General Galtieri saw the Falklands as “a short-cut to popularity,” one where he could avoid addressing dissent in the armed forces and an economy “in serious disarray.”<sup>62</sup>

More than his urge to be domestically popular, Galtieri’s desperate need to take the Falklands might have resulted from pressure from a close personal friend of his, Argentine Navy chief Admiral Jorge Anaya. When Galtieri “began to maneuver for power,” Anaya saw an opportunity. Anaya always “dream[ed]” of retaking the Falklands.<sup>63</sup> Galtieri needed the Navy’s support in his bid for power. Anaya pledged to back him, leaving Galtieri with an enormous debt to repay in the form of an invasion of the Falklands. If Galtieri had not attempted to retake the Islands, Anaya likely would have found a new *junta* leader.<sup>64</sup>

Diplomacy might have been destined for failure from the start. Galtieri put Anaya, set on an invasion of the Falklands, in charge of negotiations during the Crisis. Anaya wanted the Falklands for strategic and military reasons. Specifically, Anaya was concerned about the rising naval capabilities of Argentina’s main regional foe, Chile.<sup>65</sup> The Falklands were outside the range of Chilean shore guns, making them a perfect

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis: The Rights and the Wrongs*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), pgs. 24-28

<sup>62</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1982), pgs. 28-30.

<sup>63</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

locale to disrupt Chile's trade shipments and naval activity.<sup>66</sup> For the Falklands to serve Anaya's desired military purpose, they would have to be taken without any sort of cooperative agreement with Great Britain. Even if Britain demonstrated a willingness to hand over the Islands peacefully, no diplomatic agreement could match the glory or diversion of a successful war.

The newly appointed British ambassador in Buenos Aires, Anthony Williams, sent a desperate warning to London of a pending Argentine invasion of the Falklands in late 1980.<sup>67</sup> In December 1981, the military removed President Viola as *Junta* leader, and Galtieri replaced him. Almost immediately, his subordinates began to draft far more detailed invasion and post-invasion plans for the Falklands.<sup>68</sup> One of these plans, detailing Anaya's preparation for sending a military ambassador to London, leaked to the press.<sup>69</sup> After both sides made little progress at final talks in New York, Galtieri privately committed to an invasion.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 307;

Hoffman and Hoffman, *Sovereignty in Dispute* p. 167.

<sup>68</sup> Kinney, *National Interest/National Honor*, pp. 307-8

<sup>69</sup> The British failure to recognize warning signals emerging from Buenos Aires, particularly failures occurring in the Foreign Office, are addressed in the next chapter.



## *Invasion*

The Argentine Navy's foray into the South Atlantic began with a bizarre seizure of South Georgia. On 19 March, a group of British scientists working near the island noticed the Argentine flag flying above their research headquarters.<sup>70</sup> A group of Argentine merchants—a few of whom were undercover Argentine special forces—were seen hunting around the island, firing at random. After some discussion, the Argentines refused to comply with British requests that they leave the island.<sup>71</sup> The next day, Falklands Governor Rex Hunt dispatched HMS *Endurance* and the Falklands' single Royal Marine platoon to South Georgia to boot the Argentines off. On 24 March, *Endurance* reached South Georgia but was ordered to remain offshore.<sup>72</sup> While she sat there, another Argentine vessel came up and unloaded over one hundred soldiers. Both parties sat there for a few days. The lead British and Argentine officers on scene even chatted about the situation. This stalemate, of sorts, continued through 31 March. When Argentina began its invasion preparations, *Endurance* was ordered back to Port Stanley.<sup>73</sup>

This was all Anaya's plan: draw *Endurance* away from the Falklands to allow for an easy invasion of the main pair of Islands. On 28 March, a three-pronged Argentine naval task force set to sea. While Argentina would later leave conscripts to defend the Falklands, Argentine military planners chose the nation's crack troops for the initial

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<sup>70</sup> Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

A full and altogether enthralling recounting of the South Georgia saga is available in Martin Middlebrook's *Operation Corporate*, 38-40.

invasion: the Argentine Navy's own marine commandos. Early on 2 April, Rex Hunt was told of the impending invasion, so he summoned the Falkland Islands militia: twenty-three men showed up. At 4:30 a.m., the first Argentine marines landed. By 8:00 a.m., heavy units came ashore, and thirty minutes later Hunt ordered his forces to surrender.<sup>74</sup> He was soon whisked away, and eventually was reunited with the Royal Marines who defended the Falklands—together they were flown back to Britain, the Falklands now in Argentine hands.<sup>75</sup>

As Galtieri announced victory in the South Atlantic, it appeared he had created the diversion he needed. Buenos Aires “erupted in a day of ecstasy.”<sup>76</sup> The mood in London was quite different. As the Royal Navy began to understand the totality of the invasion, the commander of the HMS *Endurance*, Captain Barker, made a report to London that might replicate the feelings of the Thatcher government: “This is the most humiliating day of my life.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This thesis retraces certain political and public relations elements of the British surrender in the next chapter.

<sup>75</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 70-75.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>77</sup> Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate*, 61.

### ***3. The First Week: Righting the Ship***

The first week of the Falklands Crisis proved crucial, and not solely because Thatcher made decisions of peace and war. The surprise Argentine invasion paralyzed the Foreign Ministry and brought to a head significant rivalries between civilian, political, and military leaders within the Ministry of Defence. Further tensions existed between the two departments, stemming from old political rivalries that often cause problems in parliamentary cabinets composed of competing politicians. Thus, Thatcher was left not only with British territory under attack, but with the two organizations meant to handle the situation, through diplomatic or military means, almost entirely inoperable. Before Thatcher could truly make the case for a war with Argentina to the Americans, the UN, and the British public, she had to get her own house in order. Within a week, Thatcher fired her Foreign Minister, formed the first British War Cabinet since World War II, and sent a taskforce containing Britain's full military might towards the Islands. But Thatcher's most important success of April's first week was securing her own position within her cabinet. Had she failed to respond well to the internal strife the Argentine invasion brought about, she would have been out of a job with the Task Force still in British territorial waters.

Perhaps this chapter's title is a misnomer. Though the Argentine invasion of the Falklands on 1 April increased the pace of the Crisis, Thatcher's government found itself in turmoil as it grew paralyzed in the face of potential external aggression. Popular

British histories of the Falklands War cast little suspicion upon the British response. *How dare Galtieri think he could mess with British might*, they imply. One account, *Operation Corporate: The Falklands War, 1982*, claims that any accounts arguing chaos reigned at Whitehall, Downing Street, or Westminster in April 1982 “had been overdone”—despite the fact that those accounts generally came from the memoirs of former cabinet members or other Conservative MPs. In *Operation Corporate*, Martin Middlebrook writes of a unified British government prepared to “take military action” against Argentina on 27 March, before the initial invasion even began. Middlebrook’s assessment is laughably far from Thatcher’s reality. So, too, is the most recent grand portrayal of the Falklands Crisis. In *The Iron Lady*, Meryl Streep delivers a rousing speech to her cabinet and leading military officials. Sitting in a throne, of sorts, she tells them that “The Argentinian [sic] *junta*, which is a fascist gang, has invaded our sovereign territory, this cannot be tolerated...The Falkland Islands belong to Britain! And I want them back. Gentlemen, I want you to tell me today if that is possible.”<sup>78</sup> A naval officer emerges from the unified group to provide the answer: a task force might be possible. Streep then insists the Navy begin preparations immediately.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the cabinet was neither unified on a response, nor did Thatcher give this rousing speech. Disarray and chaos reigned in Number Ten in early April.

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<sup>78</sup> *The Iron Lady*, directed by Phyllida Lloyd, 2012.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

### *A primer on the workings of British parliamentary government*

Britain operates on a parliamentary system, made up of two houses. The upper house, the House of Lords, serves a largely ceremonial purpose and is composed almost entirely of unelected members. The lower house, the House of Commons, has 650 members elected based on geographic districts and provides Britain's national government. Each party's members vote on a leader, and whichever party receives more votes forms a government with its leader as the Prime Minister.<sup>80</sup> In 1982, two parties dominated the political scene: the Conservative Party—whose members are often called 'Tories'—and the Labour Party. The Conservative Party is roughly equivalent to the American Republican Party, and Labour mirrors the American Democratic Party.<sup>81</sup>

Cabinet departments in the British system are headed by other senior members of parliament, chosen by the Prime Minister. Unlike the United States, where the President chooses subject-matter experts to lead significant elements of government, cabinet heads in Britain often rotate through different cabinets and are not expected to hold experience in the field they enter. For example, Thatcher herself was not an education expert, but made her bones as the Education Secretary. In the United States, the decision-makers in

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<sup>80</sup> The Labour party's voting system is actually a bit more complicated. Because the Labour Party is tied in with British trade organizations, unions in the United Kingdom actually play a significant role in deciding the party's leader. This played out in 2010, when Ed Miliband defeated his brother David Miliband for the party's leadership. David had more support from Members of Parliament, but Ed had strong union backing. No such system exists in the Conservative Party. This voting system played a significant role in the battle over wage increases in Thatcher's first year in office—see the previous chapter.

<sup>81</sup> Today in British politics, the Liberal Democrats are a major third party. They are not aligned, though, with American liberals or Democrats, and instead fall towards the center of the British political spectrum.

various cabinet departments are ‘political appointees’—unelected aides put in the job only for the duration of the president’s term. In Britain, various departments have always been dominated by the powerful Civil Service—headquartered at Whitehall. Only the Cabinet Secretary and a few deputies at cabinet departments come from the party in government—the deputies are also members of Parliament for the party in power—change based on the political situation.

This structure creates internal tension in the cabinet. First, cabinet secretaries are the most prominent politicians in the majority party other than the Prime Minister. Many might have challenged the Prime Minister for party leadership in the past, and a few—like Francis Pym—have their eyes on challenging the Prime Minister for the top job in the near future. Additionally, internal political rivalries can alter a government’s ability to function. In the days before the Falklands Crisis officially kicked off, an existing rivalry between the heads of the Foreign and Defence Ministries led to poor working relations between the two key departments and each was often left in the dark on important matters.

When a Prime Minister feels the government is not performing well or appears stale, he or she initiates a ‘reshuffle’—a reshuffle followed the Falklands Crisis in November 1982, just ahead of the election in the summer of 1983. This is a mad sort of activity, when the Prime Minister handpicks Members of Parliament for leadership off the ‘back benches’—holding a seat in the House of Commons without cabinet position—to fill various roles, and with different cabinet secretaries swapping places. John Nott—the man tasked with running the Ministry of Defence during the Falklands War—held the post of Trade Secretary for the first two years of Thatcher’s government. In a reshuffle in

January, 1981, though, he was made to run the Government's biggest department with no real experience in the field.

While the majority party forms a government, the main minority party—called the Opposition—forms a Shadow Cabinet. For every main posting in the Government—Prime Minister, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, etc.—there is a member of the opposition who focuses on the area of responsibility for the department they shadow. When an opposition wins an election and forms a government, the first cabinet closely resembles the shadow cabinet that party operated with when out of power.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps the most significant and subtle difference between the American and British systems is the constant vulnerability of the British Prime Minister. In the United States, no matter how unpopular a president is, simple politics can never force him out of office ahead of the conclusion of his four year-term. In Britain, a party in majority can, without the need for an election, force out the Head of Government through political means. Just as a Prime Minister can 'reshuffle' the cabinet and change around ministers on a whim, the cabinet itself—composed of the leadership of a party—can ditch its Prime Minister at any time. On at least two occasions in April 1982, Thatcher faced that possibility. In order to achieve political success in the Falklands, she first had to secure her leadership within her own cabinet while simultaneously preparing it for war.

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<sup>82</sup> "Shadow Cabinet," *Parliamentary Glossary*, <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/shadow-cabinet/>.

### ***March 20-April 1: Surprise, Confusion, and Chaos at Whitehall***

In the aftermath of the Falklands War, the Franks Committee—tasked with investigating the war and primarily the reasons for the Argentine invasion—focused heavily on information coming into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on March 28, 1982. However, news of a potential Argentine invasion of the Falklands actually permeated Thatcher’s cabinet twelve days before the seizure of the Government House at Port Stanley. On March 20, a group of “fishermen” violently raised the Argentine flag on the Island of South Georgia, an uninhabited British property south of the Falklands. South Georgia was maintained by Port Stanley and considered a member of the Falklands by the Argentines.

A pattern emerged early in the Crisis. Miscommunication and a lack of a clear plan and foresight from No. 10 led to several key mistakes by multiple elements of British government in this twelve day period. The first came when Rex Hunt, the Falkland Islands governor, and Peter Carrington, the Foreign Minister, made an almost unilateral decision to dispatch HMS *Endurance* from the Falklands to South Georgia. John Nott, the Defence Minister, later wrote in his memoirs that he was distracted by parliamentary debate over Trident II, the British nuclear deterrent, throughout this period. Were he in full control of his navy, he hinted that he would not have sent *Endurance* south, a decision Thatcher approved fleetingly.<sup>83</sup> Of course, *Endurance*, an aging arctic vessel, would not have fought off an Argentine invasion alone. But part of the early shock in Britain in the days after the invasion was the incredible vulnerability of the Islands. The Argentines walked ashore practically untouched, and Her Majesty’s Navy

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<sup>83</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 250.



was nowhere to be seen. Nott, responsible for the plan to scrap *Endurance*, even acknowledged in his recounting the potentially “symbolic importance” of the vessel if it were to have been near its nest.<sup>84</sup>

At 10:15 PM on March 31, Carrington informed Government House of the potential invasion. “In the next two or three days,” Carrington wrote, “Argentina will complete preparations for the assembling of a seaborne force which could be used to invade the Falklands.”<sup>85</sup> The next morning, Rex Hunt, governor of the Falkland Islands, responded. He informed Carrington that he had ordered the “rounding up” of Argentines on East Falkland and told Carrington, not the Ministry of Defence—which at this point Carrington was keeping out of the loop—of the Royal Marine platoon defense plan for the Islands.<sup>86</sup> It became quickly apparent to the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that his agency “occupied the worst of all possible worlds.”<sup>87</sup>

Just as Carrington began to grasp that his trust of the Argentines and his diplomatic efforts might have failed, the Ministry of Defence initiated planning on contingencies. Nott concluded that, in the case of a full scale Argentine invasion of the Islands, there was no possible British response. His attempt at planning relied heavily on the Air Force, not the Navy—his least favorite service—and included a massive British

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Carrington, letter to Lord Hunt, 31 Mar. 1982, FCO/050, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>86</sup> Rex Hunt, letter to Peter Carrington, 1 April 1982, FCO/050, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>87</sup> Barnett, *Iron Britannia*, 74.

airlift to Ascension Island, about half way to the Falklands. However, his team concluded this wasn't an option.<sup>88</sup>

Nott had actually proposed the deployment of a British nuclear submarine, RFA *Austin*, to the vicinity of the Falklands on 29 March in the wake of the South Georgia incident. Carrington, though traveling with the Prime Minister, had not yet shared with her or the Defence Minister the severity of the situation in the South Atlantic. Together, the three decided to send the *Austin*, but not to send her sister submarine and not to fully fit her for a fight.<sup>89</sup>

### ***April 2-April 7: A War Cabinet, a Task Force, and a Sacking***

#### **Phase One: Emerge from the fog of invasion.**

At 10:05 PM on 2 April, Thatcher received a telegram from Port Stanley. It confirmed an Argentine invasion had taken place at East Falkland. “Large heavy amphibious vehicles have been seen in the streets,” and “Islanders [were] trying to move their children away” from Port Stanley.<sup>90</sup> She described this news as “terrifying.”<sup>91</sup> Nott, in opposition to the view of his First Sea Lord, argued that retaking the Falklands with Britain's lacking naval capacity—after three years of cuts imposed by Thatcher's

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<sup>88</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falkalnds*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 252.

<sup>90</sup> Williams, telegram to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 01 April 1982, ALQ 050, Kew, UK National Archives (London, England).

<sup>91</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 179

government—would be impossible.<sup>92</sup> This is the point when Thatcher lost confidence in Nott’s ability to run the war himself. Given that he had some military background and was new to the post, Thatcher gave the MOD head a few days to prove himself—Nott failed. Thatcher was, throughout her Prime Ministership, hands on, to say the least. She essentially took over the wartime planning process, and though Nott sat on the War Cabinet, Thatcher worked directly with the Defence Chiefs during the next two months—circumventing, too, any notion of “collective leadership.” Leach, seizing his moment, raced to No. 10 in civilian attire from the House of Commons and delivered an ambitious proposal: “I can put together a task force of destroyers, frigates, landing craft, support vessels. It will be led by the aircraft carriers HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*. It can be ready to leave in forty-eight hours.”<sup>93</sup> Thatcher bought in immediately, and in ordering the formation of the fleet to proceed, essentially cast the Minister of Defence and Admiral Terrance Lewin, Chief of the Defence Staff—who backed Nott and his pessimistic conclusions—aside.

On 3 April, Parliament met news of the invasion with jeers. The house, Labour MPs and Tories together, “rose almost as one voice to speak the collective shame of the nation” during the Commons’ first Saturday session since the Suez Crisis in 1956.<sup>94</sup> Even Conservative MPs, Thatcher’s backers, had been quoted in the day’s papers discussing

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 179. The bizarre nature of Leach’s arrival doesn’t end here. He was even detained in the bowels of Westminster before reaching Thatcher because he did not carry his identification card and was not recognizable in civilian clothes.

<sup>94</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 78; The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, *War in the Falklands*, 98. This is significant not only because of the rarity of a Saturday session but also because of the comparisons between the Falklands Crisis and the Suez Crisis.

the Government's "humiliation" (*Daily Telegraph*) and its "shame" (*Daily Mail*).<sup>95</sup>

Thatcher rose to speak, appearing "tired." She claimed there was never an opportunity to place a permanent deterrent on the islands. The cost, she said, would have been "enormous...no government could have done that."<sup>96</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Thatcher's political position was perilous even before the conflict. The opposition leader, Labour MP Michael Foot, a self-proclaimed "peacemonger" called upon government to cease its game of "words" and proceed to "actions."<sup>97</sup> Curiously, Thatcher chose not to throw Carrington to the Parliamentary wolves who reside in the House of Commons. She spared him the greatest of embarrassments and allowed him to handle the questions of the far more collegial and less observed House of Lords. Still a very nasty set of feelings, from both parties, emerged from the 3 April Commons session. The "wolves" required a head on a platter, and soon Thatcher would reluctantly provide it.

Notable at this session too was the announcement of Leach's Task Force.

Dramatic films and popular documentaries on the Falklands War often portray this as a key moment: Thatcher standing resolute before the Commons, telling the Argentines she would not back down. In reality, though, the announcement was almost overlooked outside of cabinet. The government was in such disarray and the Navy so publicly underfunded that no MP really believed the United Kingdom could expedite the launch of a massive naval fleet. So, while the Prime Minister in *The Iron Lady* wins the day on 3

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<sup>95</sup> The *Sunday Times* Insight Team, *War in the Falklands*, 98.

<sup>96</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 78.

For a full description of the scene in the House of Commons on 3 April, see Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 78-80.

<sup>97</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 78.

April, Thatcher's turnaround did not truly begin until Londoners woke up to see a departing Royal Navy armada days later.

A photograph originating in Argentine newspapers fueled Parliament's strong reaction. It showed the platoon of British Royal Marines assigned to Government House in the Falklands as a protective force. The Marines were face down, and Argentine soldiers held them at gunpoint. The Argentines meant the image to show that the Argentines hadn't killed any British service members in the invasion. In reality, however, the photograph—which the British government later used as propaganda in support of the war—fueled the notion that Thatcher's government had failed to defend British land.



*British Marines captured at Government House at Port Stanley on 2 April, 1982. Courtesy of Hastings and Jenkins.*

With this pressure, Thatcher ordered the preparation of Leach's Task Force. In turn, Leach handed off direct control of the fleet to Admiral John Fieldhouse. Two

aircraft carriers led the Task Force—HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes*.<sup>98</sup> Their main weapon: the Sea Harrier, an untested fighter capable of taking off from Britain’s small carriers but incapable of meeting the supersonic speeds of the Argentine jets.<sup>99</sup>

Destroyers, air defense ships, civilian vessels and cargo ships, and several other sorts of boats prepared to set off with the Task Force.<sup>100</sup> Leach managed to commandeer the civilian cruise liner *Canberra*, and used it to transport the fleet’s most precious cargo: the planned ‘tip of the spear’ in case of an amphibious invasion, 3 Commando Brigade.<sup>101</sup> Despite the importance of the present mission, the Ministry of Defence appeared incapable of escaping internal politics in this three day period. That the Task Force set sail appears something close to a miracle.

Thatcher later proved herself a master of conflict and chaos. But the early response to the Crisis, bungled by every agency involved, was indicative of the culture she had established in her cabinet, and in turn, in her cabinet agencies. Thatcher made excuses for communication lapses in her own memoirs. The Governor of the Falklands, responsible to Carrington but practically, in a wartime situation, to the Minister of Defence, often had “Communications...interrupted due to atmospheric conditions.”<sup>102</sup> After Thatcher left power, a litany of former cabinet members offered their take on the

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<sup>98</sup> The British aircraft carriers—the only two the United Kingdom possessed—were not the sort common to American televisions today. American carriers are far larger. They rely on a sophisticated catapult launching system and large wires to allow for the takeoff and landing of powerful supersonic jets. These British carriers were far smaller and only capable of carrying Short Takeoff, Vertical Landing jets like the Harrier. They propelled planes into the air with a large ramp, a rather rudimentary and scary process.

<sup>99</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 83.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 97;

<sup>102</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 180.

causes of the miscommunication at the start of the conflict. They instead blamed Thatcher's managerial style and personality. Carrington later called her a "f\*\*\*ing stupid, petit bourgeois woman."<sup>103</sup> Nott described at length the culture of gossip and leaking that permeated government. He writes that Thatcher "had an insatiable urge to gossip...about her ministers'...failings." "Bad blood" spread quickly through background press briefings. If a minister was forced out of government, he or she could expect to be the victim of "personalized" attacks in the media.<sup>104</sup> Thatcher led several cabinet sub-committees, one of which, titled the Overseas Policy Committee (OD), would later become the 'War Cabinet.' Nott called Thatcher "an absolutely rotten chairman."<sup>105</sup>

Thatcher's gender clearly played a role in her subordinates' perception of her. Nott, one of her bigger critics, noted that possibility. He argued, as many of his disillusioned colleagues may have felt, that Thatcher was tougher than necessary because she was a woman. Acknowledging his own views as politically incorrect, Nott asserted in his memoir that "her sex was the key to everything."<sup>106</sup> Essentially, Nott and Thatcher's other critics argue that her gender caused her to act in a rough and unfriendly manner—hence obvious the duality of the 'Iron Lady' nickname. Perhaps even that perception, though, fed the necessity for Thatcher to 'act tough.' Thatcher fought an uphill battle

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<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Watt and Patrick Wintour, "Thatcher biography reveals adviser's early warnings: Late PM's official biography, published on Tuesday, reveals she was accused of 'breaking every rule of man-management'" *The Guardian*, April 22, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/23/margaret-thatcher-biography-adviser-early-warning>

<sup>104</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 184.

<sup>105</sup> Robin Renwick, *A Journey with Margaret Thatcher: Foreign Policy Under the Iron Lady*, (London: Biteback Publishing, 2014), 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

against perception and stereotypes, and while her unpleasant demeanor may not have made her many friends in a peacetime cabinet, her ruthlessness and willingness to cut out those she deemed unhelpful proved important during April's first week.

The toxic culture of leaking and personal attacks, precipitated by Thatcher or by sexism, reached beyond Number Ten and into the Government's key departments. By the onset of the Falklands War, representatives of the Foreign Office were referring to Nott as "John Nitt" at press briefings. More importantly, Nott was not on speaking terms with his own Naval chief, who was bringing his own ideas straight to the Prime Minister. The two branches of the government most involved in the impending conflict were not functioning or communicating with each other, and much of this resulted from Thatcher's leadership.<sup>107</sup>

Perhaps Thatcher's leadership style created dysfunctional government. But more importantly, in these early days, she offered no clear guidance to her cabinet. Peter Carrington, seemingly blind in his desire to resolve the situation peacefully, oversaw vast discussion within the Foreign Office on the possibility of dispatching special "emissaries" to Buenos Aires. He returned from a 30 March trip to Israel—a trip Thatcher implied he should have cancelled when troubles began at South Georgia—with little grasp of the situation or of Thatcher's intentions.<sup>108</sup> The Foreign Office, without effective leadership, began preparing its own assessment of the potential for a military response. This proved redundant and a waste of limited diplomatic resources, for the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>108</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 178.



Ministry of Defence was of course conducting its own such examination.<sup>109</sup> Carrington did not have ‘friends’ in Parliament. Even as he had his ministry conduct various nonsensical diplomatic tasks in the first days of the Crisis, he appeared “mortally wounded,” incapable of effective leadership.<sup>110</sup>

Leadership problems exceeded the boundaries of the Foreign Office. Nott and Leach—the naval service chief—had several run-ins with each other before the Falklands Crisis kicked off, rendering the normal operations of the Ministry of Defence at Whitehall practically nonfunctioning.<sup>111</sup> Nott was an Army veteran—he had been an officer with the elite Gurkha Rifles.<sup>112</sup> Leach, apparently unaware that Nott had stood up for the entire Defence budget in July 1981, to Nott’s detriment, viewed the minister as out to gut the Navy’s fleet, if only because of Nott’s service in the rival branch.<sup>113</sup> Fitting the British cabinet structure, Leach felt he could circumvent Nott, who sat in a temporary post, and save the Navy’s budget. Keith Speed was a low-ranking MP who held an undersecretary position in the Ministry of Defence. He made a speech publicly resigning in opposition to Nott’s cuts to the Royal Navy. As he left the building, a pack of uniformed naval officers cheered him on—an act Nott described later as “near to

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>110</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 265.

<sup>111</sup> Both Leach and Nott wrote memoirs on their time at the helm of the British military. Reading both, it seems the authors wrote down their life experiences solely for the opportunity of launching personal attacks at the other.

<sup>112</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 49.

<sup>113</sup> Indeed, Nott did agree to the sale of the Navy’s most prized vessel, the aircraft carrier HMS *Invincible*, to the Australian Royal Navy for £200 million. The deal was to go through in 1983, but the Chancellor and the Treasury were already depending on that money to meet a budget shortfall the following year. (Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 242.)

mutiny—a capital offence!”<sup>114</sup> When Francis Pym departed the role of Defence Secretary the year prior, Leach was asked what he thought of Nott, his incoming boss. Leach replied, Pym is “a charming man but one to whom decision-making does not seem to come easy...[Nott] must be a change for the better.” In his memoirs, Leach commented “How wrong I was.”<sup>115</sup> So, with Leach going around Nott to offer the idea of the Task Force, animosity built up to unforeseen levels between the Minister and the service chief. Such was the state of Thatcher’s Ministry of Defence during the early days of the Crisis.<sup>116</sup>

### **Phase Two: Sort out who stays, who goes, and who remains somewhere in between:**

Nott’s role faded quickly in this first week of crisis. Rather than falling to the service chiefs, Thatcher sucked up Nott’s authority herself.<sup>117</sup> Nott works to explain his insignificance away in his memoirs:

“In time of war there is no room for the post of Defence Secretary; that role must necessarily be performed by the Prime Minister of the day. I found it difficult, because I knew that I would be the first scapegoat for

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<sup>114</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 233.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 204.

<sup>116</sup> The Navy was heralded as the hero-service of the Falklands War, but Nott concludes in his memoirs that the naval battles of 1982 demonstrate that the service was, essentially, obsolete as an asset in conventional warfare. Though it felt “inappropriate to say so publicly...the fact was that the Navy lost six ships in the Falklands...against an opponent possessing fewer than ten...missiles...The Falklands showed the sever vulnerability of the surface ship against a sophisticated and modern enemy.” Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 205.

<sup>117</sup> The Service Chiefs are the military officers—generals for the Royal Air Force and the Army, an admiral for the Navy—who are the equivalent to the various Chiefs of Staff, Commandants, and the Chief of Naval Operations who run American defense services. They are, in practice, the senior-most civil servants at the Ministry of Defence.

any military failure. Truly, I had responsibility without power. I participated in, and I hope influenced, all the *key* decisions in the War Cabinet—but it was a very different set of circumstances from when I had been very much in charge of my own patch in the Ministry of Defence. I tried, and I believe succeeded, in redefining my own role within the Mod [during the war], questioning but not overly influencing the decisions of the military.”<sup>118</sup>

Clearly, though, his fall had much more to do with the Crisis than with practical wartime leadership. Thatcher almost fired Nott in this first week of April. Nott had recommended, he claims at the behest of his rival Leach, the scrapping of the HMS *Endurance*—the very vessel tasked with guarding the Falklands. And he had told Thatcher that there was no possible military action to recover the Islands, only to be outdone by his own subordinate admiral.

The sacking of Peter Carrington constituted a key leadership decision for the Prime Minister. Thatcher already was faced with chaos within her government. Agencies weren't talking and ministers already had begun to play the 'blame game.' Firing him, of course, would show strength and leave him with some of the blame. He had, after all, spearheaded London's recent 'peace' agenda with the Argentines over the Falklands, which had clearly failed. However, replacing a Foreign Minister at a time of crisis was a perilous business, and as Thatcher pondered on replacements, she found few options that wouldn't themselves create more upheaval at various key cabinet agencies. Facing this prospect, Thatcher initially desired to spare Carrington; she did not dismiss him on 2 April and kept him away from the House of Commons the next day. At that session of Parliament, though, Thatcher very quickly realized that Carrington had to go.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 246.

Of course, Thatcher claimed Carrington insisted on resigning amid “crisis in government.”<sup>119</sup> Thatcher’s calculus, it seems, was that either Nott or Carrington had to go. Thatcher admits in her memoir that Carrington did not have Nott’s political “friendships.” She continues on to claim that she “did all [I] could to persuade him to stay...But there seems always to be a visceral desire that a disaster should be paid for by a scapegoat. There is no doubt that [Carrington’s] resignation ultimately made it easier to unite the Party and concentrate on recovering the Falklands.”<sup>120</sup>

On April 5, Carrington delivered his letter of resignation to Thatcher. He wrote that the criticism of his ministry was “unfounded,” but that he was “responsible for the conduct of [the criticized] policy” and should resign. Calling the invasion a “humiliating affront” to the United Kingdom, the letter, personal and not released to the press, implores Thatcher to find a way for the Falkland Islanders to “live in peace.” This, not necessarily war, was the “right course.”<sup>121</sup> There is no question: Carrington failed as a Foreign Minister in these early hours, and he certainly hadn’t succeeded in any attempt to “lease” the Islands back to Argentina before the April invasion. Perhaps the only area he was right was in his initial dealings with the American Department of State—the only entity to bungle the Argentine invasion worse than its British counterpart.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Letter of Resignation Submitted by Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 5 April 1982.” Accessed in the Imperial War Museum Photography Archives, London, January 6, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 185-186.

<sup>121</sup> “Letter of Resignation Submitted by Lord Carrington, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 5 April 1982.” Imperial War Museum Photography Archives, London.

<sup>122</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 65.

Thatcher did not have, at this moment of crisis, a plethora of choices to replace Carrington. Additionally complicating matters were the new roles to be taken on by the Foreign Secretary: lead negotiator with the United States and membership in the War Cabinet. Thatcher decided on Francis Pym. Pym was the only candidate “that could be moved without a major reshuffle.” Thatcher was not happy with the choice. She had already fired Pym once, back when he held Nott’s post for the first years of her Prime Ministership. He was always of “indefinite point of view”—exactly the opposite approach Thatcher needed at this moment. In their definitive history, Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, journalists covering the war at the time, write that “Pym’s promotion was the true price Mrs Thatcher had to pay for the Falklands fiasco. She felt she paid for it dearly over the coming weeks.”<sup>123</sup> Pym, a veteran of the Second World War, would do all he could to keep Britain out of the shooting war that Thatcher desired.<sup>124</sup>

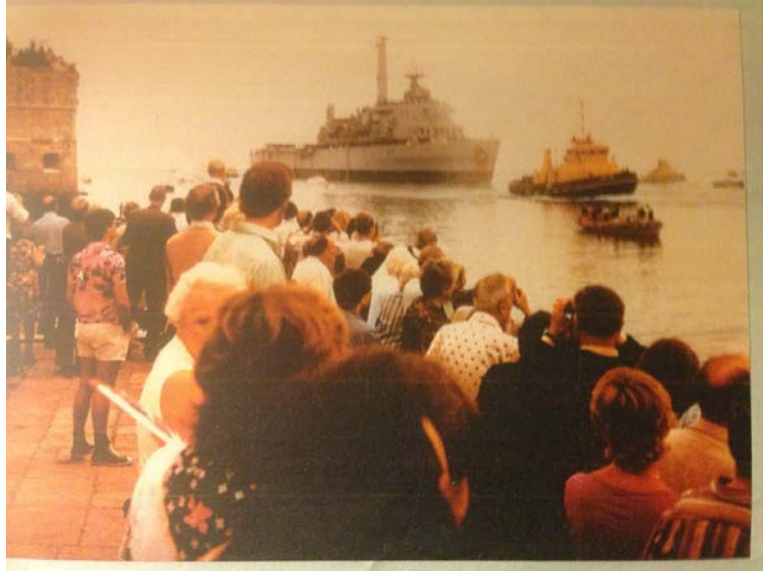
If Thatcher’s rehabilitation from the Falklands invasion occurred in phases, the second is now complete. Thatcher had fed the desires of her Parliament and sacked Carrington. More importantly, though, the Task Force was now at sea—surprising Thatcher’s cabinet as much as the British public. The images of these first days paints an excellent picture of the turnaround Thatcher had begun to engineer: when the photograph of Royal Marines face down as prisoners of war hit the press, Thatcher and Britain had hit a new low. But with the launch of the Task Force—a surprising demonstration of British might and ingenuity that thousands of British subjects flocked to witness—Thatcher gained room to operate again in government. No longer would the House of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>124</sup> Young, *Them and Us*, 268.

Commons dictate her actions. Thatcher's next phase of rehabilitation, forming a War Cabinet, would help her consolidate political power in a manner unseen since Winston Churchill. Perhaps Thatcher had Henry Leach's ambitious planning to thank for it.



*Courtesy of The Imperial War Museum Photography Archive, London, UK.<sup>125</sup>*

### **Phase Three: Solidify power, control the message, and go on the offensive.**

Thatcher did not model her War Cabinet after Churchill's. The OD(SA) did not include members of the opposition, who might have derailed a war of choice. More importantly, it did not include the second most powerful member of a typical British cabinet: the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nott claimed Thatcher made this choice to make sure that "money was never mentioned and the institutionalized negativism of the

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<sup>125</sup> This photograph actually depicts the British Task Force returning to the Royal Navy docks at Portsmouth from the Falklands in June. The scene would be similar at Portsmouth in the first week of April, though there are no photographs. Londoners describe shock and awe at the size of the Task Force as it departed, perhaps the first positive event in a tumultuous week for Thatcher's government.

Treasury was avoided.”<sup>126</sup> Truly, Thatcher wanted to avoid having around committee members in places of particular strength. For example, she chose Admiral Terry Lewin to sit on the committee rather than Henry Leach. Lewin technically outranked Leach, but Leach had invented and organized the Task Force. No individual, soldier or civilian, could wrestle away from Thatcher any glory resulting from the impending war.<sup>127</sup>

At 9:00 AM 7 April, after over a week of turmoil and with the Navy already at sea, Thatcher convened the first meeting of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee: Sub-Committee on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands, or the OD(SA). Present was the team that she narrowed down as political ‘winners’, a team that she would closely monitor and direct over the next three weeks of the crisis: Nott, the now incapacitated Defence minister; Whitelaw, the home secretary clinging to his job while subtly pushing an ignored peace agenda; Pym, Thatcher’s least favorite hire; Admiral Lewin, the benevolent military voice on the committee who had, to a point, been usurped by Leach and his fleet; and, finally, a team of three private secretaries.<sup>128</sup> Nott described the scene: “There was a remarkable sense of unity....There was no hectoring or personal antipathy.”<sup>129</sup> The team, nevertheless, had different ideas on how to proceed. Perhaps the only thing they held in common, though, was their relatively weak standing in government.

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<sup>126</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 246.

<sup>127</sup> This approach worked. After the crisis, Nott lauded the “handling of the Falklands crisis” as a “personal triumph for Margaret Thatcher and for Terry Lewin—both of them deserve their high place in military history.” Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 246.

<sup>128</sup> Private Secretaries are senior unelected advisers in British government..

<sup>129</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 246.

Thatcher recognized the vulnerabilities of the parliamentary system. She also recognized the failures of her own government and her precarious political situation. Rather than surround herself with potential political rivals or even members of the opposition, as did Churchill with his War Cabinet, Thatcher closed out the rest of Whitehall and Westminster. She took into the room with her no politician powerful enough to effectively oppose her and no military commander capable of dissuading Thatcher from following Leach's plan. Each member of the OD(SA) later wrote about the power wielded by the committee and the immense feeling of responsibility felt by every man in the room. Truly, though, the only woman present dominated the agenda.<sup>130</sup>

Thatcher came into her own in the 7 April meeting. She guided the conversation away from the past two weeks; no meeting of the sixty-seven OD(SA) discussions to follow would devote time to Carrington or the intelligence blunder that preceded the crisis. This is unexpected, given the War Cabinet's usual tendency to drift towards matters of public relations.<sup>131</sup> Instead, Thatcher quickly turned to the issue of American consent to an armed response. She also insisted her private secretaries, not the Defence Chief or Nott, to draft the "possible form of words" for a maritime exclusion zone (MEZ), perhaps the first step towards a shooting war with Argentina.<sup>132</sup> Ten hours later at the second meeting of the OD(SA), Thatcher approved a 200 mile MEZ around the Islands, a remarkable turnaround time. Setting the tone for the next two weeks, the decision came *before* notifying or consulting with the United States.

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<sup>130</sup> "OD(SA) First Meeting," CAB 148/211, April 7, 1982, UK National Archives, Kew. (London, England)

<sup>131</sup> CAB 148/211.

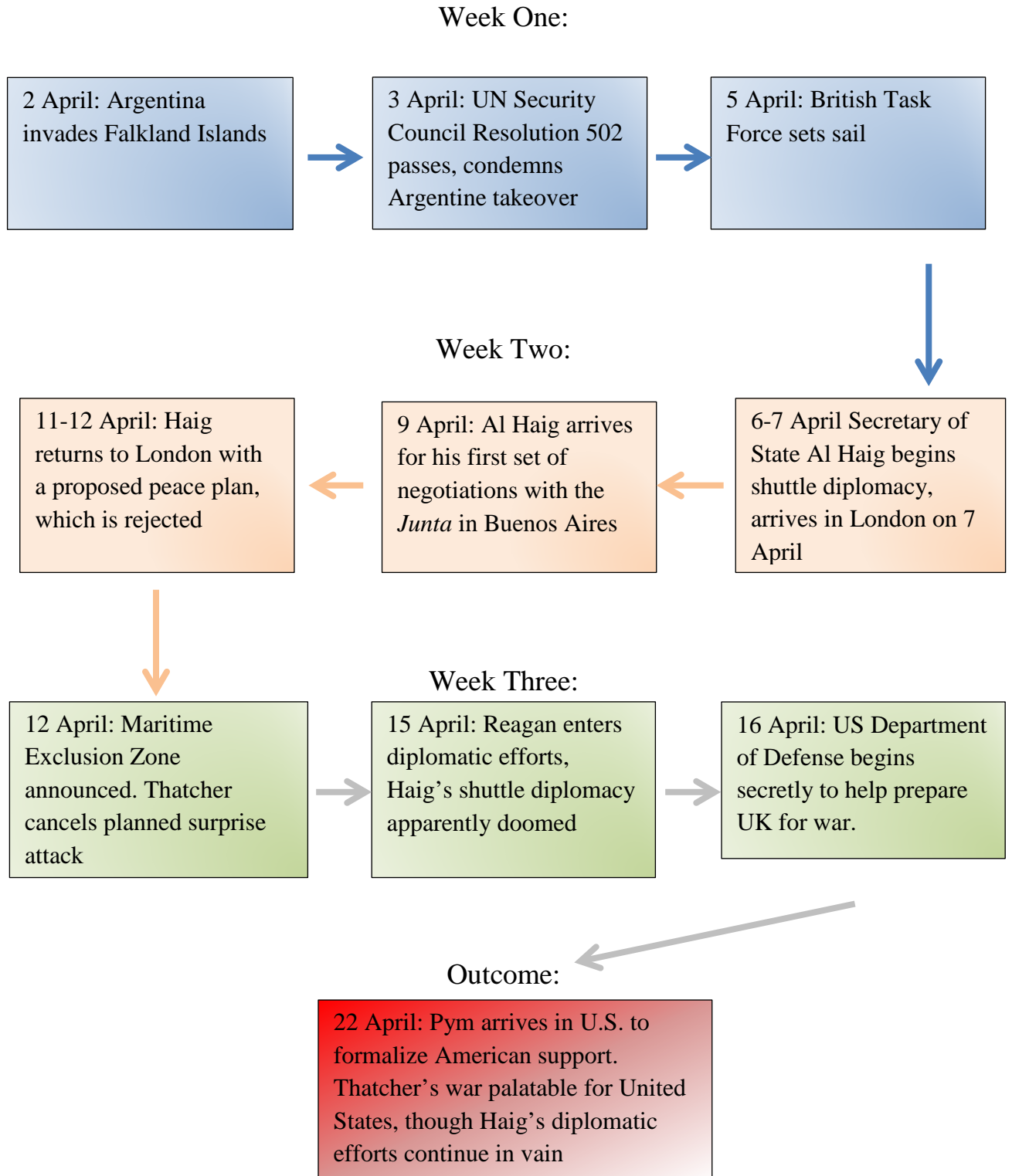
<sup>132</sup> "OD(SA) First Meeting," CAB 148/211.



### *Thatcher's First Week*

Thatcher started the week of 2 April very distant from the Falkland Islands. She faced an internal crisis: how would she reign in control of her government before she could take on the Argentines? In a matter of hours, though, she shoved aside her Defence Minister and began coordinating directly with military commanders. She formed a War Cabinet to solidify control and communications that had broken down, in part because of an organizational culture she established. She met face to face with the British marines and governor who experienced the brunt of the Argentine invasion, in a sense granting her equal credibility on all Falklands matters to other members of her team. Perhaps most importantly, she continued her ruthless leadership style, inefficient and problematic in peace, but perhaps effective and necessary in war and crisis. She picked 'winners': Leach, Williams and Whitelaw all were granted far greater power than they held previously. She made Sir Anthony Parsons, the UK's Ambassador to the United Nations, the most important man at the Foreign Office. She cast aside losers: Nott was to play no major role in the military operation soon to come, she fired her foreign secretary and replaced him with a man she granted little authority, and she kept the Chancellor out of the all-powerful OD(SA). Fundamentally, she took an approach entirely opposite Clement Attlee's "collective leadership" at every turn. The Task Force set sail on 5 April, but not until 7 April was Thatcher ready to adjust in her effort to create a viable Falklands War. Next, she turned to the United Nations and the United States.

## Key Diplomatic Events of the Falklands Crisis:



#### ***4. Weeks Two and Three: Ending the Peace*** *Thatcher's Attempt at a Palatable War Abroad*

*“If a sinking took place when it is widely known that a peace effort is underway, we would lose much of the support we had enjoyed so far from the allies”*

-Margaret Thatcher, 8 April, 1982.

Foreign reluctance to allow a war between Britain and Argentina posed the most formidable obstacle to Thatcher's quest for the conflict. By April 7, the Prime Minister had consolidated power within her cabinet and prepared it for war. She next turned to the international stage. There she faced a United Nations wary of European imperialism and a reluctant Reagan administration. She calculated that she had less than a month to secure her own position within government, and she needed a war to do it.

This chapter focuses on the diplomatic battlefield, but with notably little discussion of the Argentine government or position. Thatcher didn't seek to negotiate with Argentina, even if the Americans and the United Nations were under the impression that they were simply stewarding discussions between the cross-Atlantic rivals who would, in an ideal world, choose to avoid war. Instead, Thatcher fought against the possibility of peace using cloak and dagger diplomacy.

At the United Nations, Thatcher relied on Anthony Parsons, the British Ambassador, to navigate through a complicated diplomatic scene. Thatcher needed Parsons to create the parameters for a tolerable war while appearing to seek a peaceful solution. In her own cabinet, Thatcher rejected the idea of delegation; she seized control of the military herself and did not seek counsel of her Defence Minister or Chancellor.

With Parsons, though, Thatcher chose to delegate. This is perhaps the only time in the month of April—other than Leech’s formation of the Task Force—where Thatcher embraced the tactic, and likely the realm in which it was most necessary.

As the American Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, invested time and political capital in creating a peaceful solution to the Crisis, he created a problem for Thatcher. Just as the Prime Minister’s political career rested, at this point, on a successful and strong—and by necessity, military—retaking of the Falkland Islands, Haig now needed to bring about the peaceful solution he had promised Reagan and the world in order to save his own job.<sup>133</sup> He isolated his own government with this mission. Caspar Weinberger, the U.S. Defense Secretary, complained openly to British private secretaries that he desired a different course than Haig—a much more aggressive, pro-Thatcher stance.<sup>134</sup> Of course, Thatcher didn’t want a quiet end to the Falklands Crisis. She desired to kick off the shooting war in mid-April, only to cancel a planned attack at the last minute with Haig in town relentlessly pushing a peace agenda.

Thatcher also used her personal relationship with the American president to open up another channel with the United States. Reagan generally seemed to be simply putting up with Haig’s shuttle diplomacy antics rather than backing them, and Thatcher took advantage of this. Thatcher understood the role she played in Reagan’s political rise. Upon her election in 1979, the American Right had greeted her as a “heroine.” Her victory preceded the President’s by eighteen months.<sup>135</sup> Thatcher, quite famously, also

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<sup>133</sup> See “The Americans” section at the opening to this thesis for more on Haig’s early pitfalls as Secretary of State.

<sup>134</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 188.

<sup>135</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 250.

had “few illusions about Reagan’s personal limitations.”<sup>136</sup> While this posed problems for Thatcher in their shared disdain for the Soviet Union, she understood that his “mental slowness” might play to her advantage here.<sup>137</sup> Her path with the Americans was to appeal to Haig’s vulnerable nature and seize on her advantage with Reagan to drive the two apart and further reduce Haig’s already diminished power.

Thatcher didn’t trust her new Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym. One FCO official later remarked that “she doesn’t think in the supple way” of any members of the Foreign Office. She viewed events in foreign policy as “a set of finite, set piece problems.”<sup>138</sup> These were not the ways of Pym or the majority of his colleagues at the FCO. She instead grew to rely on her private secretaries, her UN ambassador, and her own diplomatic skills to maneuver Britain into a place where war no longer appeared a choice and instead seemed a necessity.

While Thatcher worked to convince the outside world that she hoped for a peaceful resolution, Pym challenged her—and in effect, put her leadership in peril—when he argued to the OD(SA) that they should vote to accept an Argentine peace proposal delivered in the second week of the conflict by Haig. Though the first week of the Crisis was dominated by cabinet turmoil, Thatcher later called this duel, of sorts, the key moment in cabinet. It becomes quite obvious when studying this episode that Thatcher’s entire cabinet was not aware of her intention to bring about a war. Thatcher

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 253. Thatcher famously found herself ideologically paired with Reagan, while simultaneously possessing much higher intelligence than the American president.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 248.

persuaded the cabinet, though, that the deal offered would leave Britain weakened, and the government rejected Haig's offer and Pym's coup together.

On 24 April, Francis Pym returned from two final days of meetings in the United States with Haig. Haig, quite desperate, realized, by this point, that the deal offered to the British on 22 April would be a "the last chance to reach a political solution."<sup>139</sup> When those discussions yielded no agreement—an outcome Thatcher desired—Haig's fate was sealed and Thatcher's war grew more possible.

Thatcher's problems during these two weeks were vast. She encountered little support at the United Nations for a robust resolution favoring the United Kingdom; she found the United States initially unwilling to accept a war between her allies; and she faced opposition to her course of action, again, in her own cabinet. Thatcher overcame these problems by again empowering a select few aides—Anthony Parsons and her private secretaries in particular—and by isolating those who stood in the way of war from positions of power. She led Haig to believe that she was on his side, when in fact she viewed him as an adversary and used him to create a palatable war. She used Reagan and other key figures to ensure Haig's peace was not achieved. And, finally, she demonstrated a deep understanding of the international system. She knew that 12 April was too early to begin the war, and utilized those she trusted most to create the necessary situation for the beginnings of armed conflict.

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<sup>139</sup> Francis Pym, "Falkland Islands: Washington Discussions with Mr Haig: Memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary," 24 April 1982, CAB 148/212, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

### ***Anthony Parsons: An unlikely hero at the United Nations***

Thatcher had few allies in Francis Pym's Foreign Office. She began to rely heavily on two diplomats in particular, who she later described as "key" to Britain's diplomatic achievements in 1982: Nicholas Henderson, the Ambassador to the United States, and, more importantly, Anthony Parsons, Britain's UN Ambassador.<sup>140</sup> Journalist Max Hastings, who traveled with the British Task Force, later described Parsons as a "gregarious diplomat of liberal inclinations."<sup>141</sup> Of course, Thatcher had unhealthy relationships with both diplomats and liberals, so their partnership was quite unlikely.<sup>142</sup> When they first met, and Thatcher was in her first days in government and Parsons was the Ambassador to Iran, the Prime Minister asked the diplomat astoundingly if he knew "that there are still people in my party who believe in consensus politics?" Parsons was taken aback. "I think most people in the country, including me, believe in consensus politics." Thatcher, 'iron' as per usual, responded insultingly that she regarded Parsons and those like him "as traitors."<sup>143</sup>

Despite the cold beginning of their relationship, Parsons's achievements brought about initial success during the rocky first days of the Falkland Crisis. He succeeded because he followed Thatcher's guidance rather than his immediate superiors Carrington

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<sup>140</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 182.

<sup>141</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 98.

<sup>142</sup> Liberal means something far different in Britain than it does in America, but Thatcher still disapproved of the ideology.

<sup>143</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 223.

and Pym.<sup>144</sup> His performance from 3 April through the end of the month demonstrated unexpected loyalty to the Conservative Prime Minister. Thatcher was impressed, and the events of April 1982 eventually lead her to conduct a massive overhaul of the foreign office that centered on Parsons.<sup>145</sup>

The “storm” that struck the British public on 2 April actually arrived at the United Nations one day earlier, before the Argentine invasion.<sup>146</sup> Parsons’s task was clear: secure the passage of a UN resolution that fully condemned the Argentine aggression, call for Argentina to leave the Islands (quite obviously they would not capitulate to this requirement,) and provide the necessary justification for Thatcher’s Task Force and any military action that might follow. Next, he had to ensure that as Britain built up its military response, the UN didn’t revoke its support for Britain in the conflict.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> This examination looks at Parsons’s actions, decisions, and impact as an extension of Thatcher’s leadership. She empowered him, and as he was an ocean away, he often acted without speaking to her. The decision to rely on Parsons, though, rather than the FCO’s new chief, is where Thatcher should be credited.

<sup>145</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 379.

<sup>146</sup> Anthony Parsons, “The Falklands crisis in the United Nations, 31 March-14 June 1982 (First Draft),” “Falkland Islands at the UN,” 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England). This document, an early draft of an article later published in *Foreign Affairs*, provides crucial insight in the next chapter of this examination. No. 10’s editing of the article before its publication is one piece of the overwhelming press effort conducted by Thatcher in the weeks and months after the war to ensure the Government was viewed as successful in its aftermath. There is a similarly titled document, cited below, that was an internal report to the Foreign Officer and No. 10. There is a significant difference in content between the two.

<sup>147</sup> Of course, the sinking of the ARA *Belgrano* marked a low-point for UN support for Britain, as it appeared unprovoked and in violation of UNSC Resolution 502 itself. Up until that point, even as Thatcher established the Total Exclusion Zone and appeared resistant to negotiations, the Security Council remained behind Britain.



Parsons operated under the assumption that developing countries would come to Britain's aid at the UN when he called upon them. However, there remained certain facts of the Falklands Crisis that understandably made it difficult for various states to support the United Kingdom. Particularly in the wake of the Suez Crisis, Britain's self-proclaimed right to islands a world away had clear traces of colonialism. Thatcher, with a lasting contempt for the UN, had been sure the vote would fail because "of the old anti-colonialist bias" of the Security Council's members.<sup>148</sup> The non-aligned movement's reluctance to back Britain represents that settlement—they were wary of backing a colonial power over one of their own, Argentina. Parsons, though, looked to "moderate" developing countries for support in April 1982. He wrote that they "tend to look to us, the British, to help deliver them from their evils. They have a perhaps exaggerated regard for our diplomatic skill and political wisdom and...for our influence over United States policy."<sup>149</sup> Costa Mendes, representing Argentina, appealed to these smaller countries. He argued that "Argentina had done nothing more than recover national territory which had been seized by the British by an illegitimate act of force in 1833."<sup>150</sup> Certainly this argument appealed to former European colonies. Regardless, Parsons made early efforts with smaller, less powerful nations to win their support. He even found time to discuss

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<sup>148</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 182.

<sup>149</sup> Anthony Parsons, "Britain at the United Nations: A Valedictory Despatch," 7 July 1982, UNPO22/22, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>150</sup> Anthony Parsons, "The Falklands crisis in the United Nations, 31 March-14 June 1982 (First Draft)," "Falkland Islands at the UN," 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

the matter with Zaire's UN representative, Ambassador Kamanda, on 1 April, before Argentina had even taken the Falklands.<sup>151</sup>

On 1 April, Parsons worked through opposition to gain the nine votes necessary to call the Security Council in from recess. There it waited expectantly for the Argentine invasion, which came twenty-four hours later.<sup>152</sup> The American delegation caused quite the uproar in London on 2 April when, just hours after news of the Argentine invasion reached New York, the United States' Ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, attended a gala in her honor given by the Argentinian Ambassador. Perhaps an early indicator of Haig's later balancing efforts, the news was not received well in London. Parsons later asked Kirkpatrick "How would Americans have felt if [I] had dined at the Iranian embassy the night that the American hostages were seized in Tehran?"<sup>153</sup>

After convincing Kamanda to support a British effort at the Security Council, and recognizing the necessity of rapid action to quell the uprising in London, Parsons made a bold decision: he used a Security Council maneuver called 'black-drafting' to expedite the vote on a resolution. This technique, designed to allow the Security Council to handle urgent international security matters, requires a vote on a resolution within twenty-four hours without the possibility of amendments or other parliamentary maneuvers. Parsons later described vividly in a secret report to Thatcher that while the Argentine ambassador was left stunned by this move, "Mrs. Kirkpatrick made an astonishing but unsuccessful

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<sup>151</sup> Zaire was not a run of the mill Third World country at this point. It had a seat on the Security Council during the crisis and Ambassador Kamanda was president.

<sup>152</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 99.

<sup>153</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 180.

attempt to block the Council from meeting.”<sup>154</sup> A Security Council resolution requires two-thirds vote and no vetoes for passage—China, France, Russia, the UK, and the U.S. all hold veto power. The other members of the Security Council in 1982 were Poland, Panama, Jordan, Togo, Zaire [already in Parsons’s pocket], Uganda and Guyana.<sup>155</sup> Parsons promised Guyana support in the face of a border dispute with Venezuela and France delivered Togo’s vote. Parsons, the deft statesman, used his personal relationship with Uganda’s Ambassador Olara Otunnu, even volunteering to “get onto Kampala” and speak with the Ugandan government himself. Otunnu, a fan of Parsons’s, supported the British effort while his government did not. He replied that he would convince his government himself, and he delivered.<sup>156</sup>

With China, Russia, and Poland falling in the eastern camp, Jordan remained Parsons’s sole hope to push his resolution over the two-thirds threshold. Given his sour relations with the American ambassador, Parsons turned to Thatcher for assistance. Parsons had a strong personal relationship with the Jordanian Ambassador—they often conversed in Arabic. Jordan had no business backing a Western power in a conflict with a fellow non-aligned state. The Jordanian Ambassador, Hazem Nuseibeh, had already voiced support for the resolution. When Amman forced him to revoke it, Nuseibeh suggested London contact King Hussein.<sup>157</sup> Thatcher told Parsons to give her an hour—

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<sup>154</sup> Anthony Parsons, “The Falklands Crisis at the United Nations: United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations at New York to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,” 2 July 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, London, England.

<sup>155</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 100.

<sup>156</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 112.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

this with Parsons's twenty-four hours nearly elapsed. Parsons "ingeniously" bought her more time, even recommending "a retying of the resolution to include the word 'Malvinas'."<sup>158</sup> Parsons had even engineered the defeat of an Argentine parliamentary tactic moments earlier to delay the vote by three hours, and now he found the need to stall himself.<sup>159</sup> Thatcher spoke with King Hussein for thirty minutes and delivered Jordan's vote herself.<sup>160</sup>

Even with ten votes secured, there was still a chance of a Communist veto. Costa Mendes, the Argentine Foreign Minister sent on a rescue mission, of sorts, spent the entire twenty-four hour period throwing as many cliché anti-imperialist reasons as was possible at Moscow in an effort to convince the Soviet delegate to use his veto. He used "non-alignment, anti-imperialism," and even Argentine agricultural imports to Russia as potential justifications. But Russia didn't budge. Parsons deserves the credit here again, this time for a more subtle set of actions. By distancing himself from the American delegation and refusing to seek American support in gathering Security Council votes, Parsons made the British climb to ten votes—the necessary number for the resolution's passage—far more difficult. He simply didn't have as much political capital to work with as he would have had if he made amends with Kirkpatrick. However, Parsons knew that

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<sup>158</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 100.

<sup>159</sup> Anthony Parsons, "The Falklands crisis in the United Nations, 31 March-14 June 1982 (First Draft)," "Falkland Islands at the UN," 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>160</sup> Thatcher makes no mention of this rather important telephone call in her most detailed recollection of the Falklands events, found in *The Downing Street Years*. This is peculiar, given her propensity to find glory. She instead attributes full credit to Parsons, perhaps because the nitty gritty of parliamentary politics—even away from the Commons—is unflattering for the type of stoic leader she fashioned herself.

the more involved the U.S. became, the more likely the Soviet delegation was to use its veto power out of spite. Parsons denied the Soviets this opportunity, and—along with the Chinese—the Russians abstained. Parsons’s emergency resolution passed with no margin for error.

Parsons’s resolution, officially UN Security Council Resolution 502, demanded “an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands” and called upon the UK and Argentina to “seek a diplomatic solution to their differences.”<sup>161</sup> This resolution proved double-edged, and after its passage on 3 April, would make Parsons’s next month at the UN rather difficult: while it opened the door to a legitimized British Task Force, it also made starting the eventual shooting war an act not in keeping with London’s own resolution. In his own retrospective, Parsons laid out this balancing act, writing that he “made our position crystal clear... We would obviously prefer the peaceful implementation of the central paragraph of SCR 502—total Argentine withdrawal—but we would not in the meantime allow anything to inhibit us from exercising our inherent right to self-defence under Article 51 of the [United Nations] Charter.”<sup>162</sup> Article 51 provides member states the “inherent right of individual and collective self-defence if armed attack occurs...until the Security Council” brings an end to the conflict. Ironically, Thatcher was known to privately despise Article 51, calling it “the belligerent’s charter,” suddenly it was her ticket to legal military reprisal. Problematically, the third paragraph of UNSC Resolution 502, demanding negotiations between the states, seemed to inhibit

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<sup>161</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 502, S/RES/502, (April 3, 1982), available from <http://www.un.org/docs/scres/try/scres82.htm>

<sup>162</sup> Anthony Parsons, “The Falklands crisis in the United Nations, 31 March-14 June 1982 (First Draft),” “Falkland Islands at the UN,” 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

Britain's ability to immediately and fully invoke Article 51. As Britain resisted a "diplomatic solution," Parsons's diplomatic challenge grew.

Parsons had conducted a "blitzkrieg" on the Security Council. He recognized that he could not carry out "another coup of this" type, especially as international sympathy for Britain dissipated and Britain's military response quickened.<sup>163</sup> His tactic of choice was now to "go on the defensive" and "resist attempts to tie our hands militarily."<sup>164</sup> He faced his first defensive challenge when British allies—namely Ireland and Japan—came out strongly in support of a peace plan. Again he chose to distract his opponents. While Argentina focused on gathering a traditional coalition of non-aligned nations, Parsons charmed Japan and Ireland, nations first and foremost in the peace business, with "powerful speeches" on the Celebration of the International Day of Peace and at the Committee on the Non Use of Force.<sup>165</sup> These speeches represented an attempt to buy time for Thatcher to order the preparation of the Task Force.

Parsons's next hurdle came when the Task Force set sail. The deployment of such a large military force appeared, on its surface, a breach of Britain's own UNSC Resolution 502. The event prompted Haig's 'shuttle diplomacy', but it also convinced the UN Secretary General to establish his own diplomatic task force to work towards successful negotiations. Parsons decided the best way to avoid a UN imposed peace—one which might have been unfavorable toward Britain and one which certainly would have

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<sup>163</sup> Anthony Parsons, "The Falklands Crisis at the United Nations: United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations at New York to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs," 2 July 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, London, England.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

denied, by its very nature, Thatcher her war of glory—was to create as much noise and ‘unintentional’ obstruction as possible in “various UN bodies.” Argentina began to round up support from the delegations representing members of the Organization of American States and other non-aligned nations. In turn, Parsons turned to Britain’s own traditional, if outdated, alliance network: the Commonwealth delegations. Panama, Argentina’s voice on the Security Council, began distributing hundreds of “Notes” to the Security Council on the intransigence of the British position and Britain’s apparent desire to use force. Britain had its allies then follow suit, distributing their own authentic intelligence reports to the Security Council. These documents described “various” Argentine military moves towards an enhanced defense of the Falkland Islands. Argentina found it impossible to break through Parsons’s manufactured fog until Britain committed its first real military act of the war, the retaking of South Georgia on 25 April.<sup>166</sup> By that point, Parsons had successfully stalled through twenty-two days of harrowing peace efforts and numerous Argentine attempted subversions of Britain’s place on the moral high ground. The closest the UN came to brokering a peace deal in the conflict was on 19 April, when the Secretary-General gave the American, Argentine, and British parties “a list” of possible solutions to the Crisis. Of course—thanks to Parsons and Thatcher—this did nothing at all.<sup>167</sup> Once the shooting began and the *ARA Belgrano* lay on the bottom of the ocean, Parsons no longer could play the “peace” card. He announced on 2 May that Britain was no longer willing to “exercise restraint”—meaning Britain would now initiate an

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<sup>166</sup> Anthony Parsons, “The Falklands crisis in the United Nations, 31 March-14 June 1982 (First Draft),” “Falkland Islands at the UN,” 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

amphibious invasion of the Islands. Parsons's job became to present Britain as a strong actor with "crystal clear" goals, rather than to obfuscate those goals as he had for the month prior.<sup>168</sup>

Hastings and Jenkins's study attributed the successes of the April turnaround almost entirely to Parsons. One American diplomat remarked at the time that his performance was "a stunning example of sheer diplomatic professionalism."<sup>169</sup> Perhaps this is fair. He certainly is due praise for the passage of UNSC Resolution 502 and many of his actions demonstrated initiative that could not have come directly from Thatcher at Downing Street. But Thatcher empowered him, and her guidance trumped that of the doves Carrington and Pym. Despite all the rancor surrounding Thatcher's managerial style—feelings which emerged during and after her Prime Ministership—she took a remarkably effective and unexpectedly hands-off approach with Parsons. While Parsons executed Thatcher's intent at the UN, the American State Department began gearing up for a diplomatic process that Haig hoped would bring peace.

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<sup>168</sup> Anthony Parsons, "The Falklands Crisis at the United Nations: United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations at New York to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs," 2 July 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, London, England.

<sup>169</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 98-102.



### ***Happenings in the United States***

*Reagan had a “stinking choice—between the old ally across the water and the new ally at the toe of the Americas”  
-The Guardian<sup>170</sup>*

The United States had a very strong interest in avoiding a war between Britain and Argentina. By 1982, The Reagan government was already deeply embroiled in Latin America’s never-ending political unrest. The *junta* was a significant ally in this struggle. The *New York Times* described the Argentine government in mid-April as “one of the most conspicuously anti-communist regimes on the [South American] continent.”<sup>171</sup> The *junta* had even diverted entire regiments from defending the Falklands to standing guard on the Argentine-Chilean border to guard against communist guerillas. In the days before the full Argentine invasion when the fate of South Georgia was unknown, a good portion of State Department memos had begun referring to the Islands by their Argentine name, the Malvinas.<sup>172</sup> Caspar Weinberger later wrote in his memoirs that “Some” of the American leadership—him included—felt that “if the British were going to...try to retake the Islands, we should, without any question, help them to the utmost of our ability.”<sup>173</sup> This contingent, however real or large, did not successfully voice Weinberger’s opinion in the first weeks of the Falklands Crisis. Weinberger claims he argued that Reagan’s main fear—potential support for Britain alienating America’s Latin American partners—was invalid. In several National Security Council meetings, Weinberger “vigorously expressed [his] view” that “there would be no adverse reaction” were Reagan to

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<sup>170</sup> William Borders, “Britons Show Gratitude for American Support,” 2 May 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>171</sup> James M. Markham, “Haig’s Weak Cards: U.S. Now Appears to Have Little Leverage To Move Argentina Towards a Compromise,” 19 April 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>172</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 132.

<sup>173</sup> Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 204.

immediately back Thatcher.<sup>174</sup> He claims in his memoirs that this argument eventually won Reagan over—truly, though, Reagan cautiously sided with Haig at the start of the Crisis. He only came around to support Thatcher when negotiations failed because of her own efforts.

While Britain prepared for talks with American emissaries, Argentina wasted no time working to portray the Falklands as similar to the Suez Crisis in 1956. A group calling itself “Citizens of Argentina”—a covert arm of the Argentine government—bought a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* on 6 April. It read “Malvinas Islands: Let the American People be the judge.”<sup>175</sup> Portraying the balance of history—and less subjectively, geography—on the Argentine side, the advertisement informed the reader that, “After 149 years of Argentina’s claim of sovereignty...Argentina has recovered the Malvinas without casualties to a single British Inhabitant or soldier.”<sup>176</sup> Invoking memories of the American Revolution, the ad encouraged *Times* readers to support Argentina in its fight against “A naval fleet belonging to an colonialistic [sic] country sent to attack an American country in an effort to re-establish colonization...a spectacle seemingly out of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>177</sup> The advertisement met alarm in Thatcher’s War Cabinet and led to significant discussion at War Cabinet meetings the next day, when time was still a valuable commodity for Thatcher and her team.<sup>178</sup>

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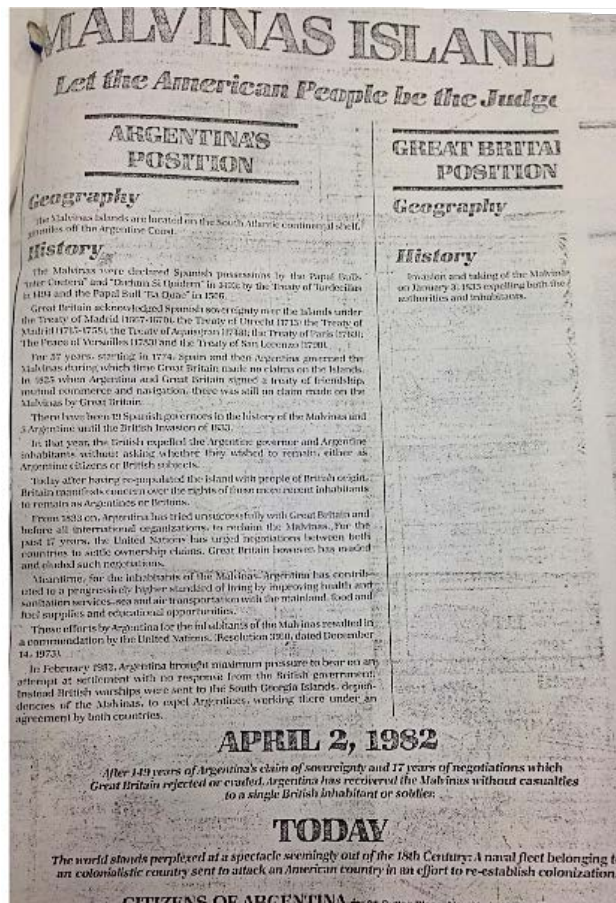
<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>175</sup> “Malvinas Islands,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



Argentine advertisement in the *New York Times*, 6 April 1982. “Malvinas Islands: Let the American People be the Judge.” Image courtesy UK National Archives.

Following the Argentine advertisement appearing in the *Times*, Thatcher ordered the British Ambassador to the United States to reprioritize his agenda. No longer would Ambassador Nicholas Henderson’s primary mission be discussing the Falklands with the American government. Instead, he set out to devise an “extraordinary British propaganda campaign” that highlighted Thatcher’s conservatism and framed the Argentine invasion as an act of unprovoked aggression.<sup>179</sup> The effort was, according to one British official, “the biggest single [public relations] operation we had mounted since World War

<sup>179</sup> Eddy, Linklater and Gillman, *War in the Falklands*, 114-115.

Two.”<sup>180</sup> Henderson held daily strategy meetings to coordinate interviews. While Henderson almost entirely ceased dealings with the State Department, he significantly stepped up Britain’s lobbying of another American branch of government: Congress. Henderson called two friends, Senators John Tower and Charles Percy, asking them to lead the media charge. They agreed, giving “pro-British interviews” and imploring their colleagues to do the same.<sup>181</sup> By mid-April, American support for Britain’s war was, inconceivably, higher than support for war in the United Kingdom, depending on the poll. Two-thirds of the Americans sided with Thatcher in public opinion polls.<sup>182</sup> Just as with Parsons, Henderson’s victory was also Thatcher’s, for she gave him the task of refocussing on the American media and public. She then gave Henderson the leeway to accomplish the mission himself.

Under these crude and difficult circumstances, Haig jetted off on his highly ambitious adventure. And perhaps he never had a chance, for in any disagreement between him and Margaret Thatcher, Reagan was sure to side with his ideological soul mate, the Prime Minister. Thatcher had spent the last two years developing an unforeseen relationship with the American president. Reagan was the only foreign leader Thatcher always greeted with a kiss.<sup>183</sup> Reagan spoke incredibly highly of Thatcher, saying later of disagreements that they resolved themselves once Thatcher spoke to him. She always

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 115. See Jennet Conant’s *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington* for a description of how this sort of activity might play out. In that work, Conant discusses British political espionage and attempts at making American government embrace World War II, but the intent and even methods are similar to Thatcher’s during the Falklands Crisis.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>183</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 257.

managed to convince him, it seems, that they were usually “the result of distance and not having hear the entire story.”<sup>184</sup> Thatcher thought quite a bit less of Reagan’s intellect, and she used her relationship with the president deftly in this two week period. But Reagan certainly proved willing to give Haig a chance, forcing Thatcher to engage in two weeks of negotiations.

### *7-15 April:*

#### *Al Haig, Henry Kissinger not*

The most significant single revelation in the 2012 Falklands document dump that this thesis brings to light is an event that almost took place in mid-April. In the days before Haig’s arrival, Thatcher and the War Cabinet set a date for launching initial strikes against Argentine naval vessels and, in turn, ending any chance at a diplomatic solution: 12 April. The private minutes of the critical 11 April meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 2:30 PM, include the following: “The instructions to the submarine now approaching to zone of exclusion around the Falkland Islands: Before midnight last night orders were sent placing the submarine on Rule of Engagement Number 2. Under this rule the submarine operates on patrol and will fire merely in self-defence if attacked.” This section of the mission isn’t particularly noteworthy. Additionally, though, “unless ministers decide [at this meeting] a submarine will be given instructions at 1600 GMT [4:00 PM] today ordering it to return to operations under rules 4, 10 and 13 (ie it will attack any Argentine naval vessels or naval auxillaries [sic] found in the zone of

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 257.

exclusion from 0400 hours GMT [4:00 AM] on 12 April.)”<sup>185</sup> Thatcher concluded in the 11 April meeting that:

If a sinking took place when it is widely known that a peace effort is underway, we would certainly lose much of the support we have enjoyed so far...Argentina would certainly bring the issue back to the United Nations where we could expect to be virtually isolated and probably obliged to use our veto. This could therefore at a stroke unravel the remarkable political support we have had.<sup>186</sup>

The planned preemptive strike demonstrates that Thatcher and her cabinet planned on ending the diplomatic process by 12 April. Thatcher had to approve of it in the first place, and her reasoning during the 11 April meeting would have applied as well. Bringing Haig gently into a state of disillusion with the talks, though, simply took Thatcher a few visits longer than expected. The eventual sinking of the *Belgrano*, discussed in a later chapter, closely resembles the canceled orders given as part of Rules of Engagement 2, 4, 10 and 13. Thatcher’s rationale, though, on why Britain could not yet strike in the Falklands is more telling. Her thought process on how to begin the war was clearly rational and deliberative. She demonstrated a full understanding of what an effective diversionary war would require. Neither her own public recollection of the Crisis nor previously released documents or scholarly treatments of the Crisis provide this: Thatcher’ clear and calculated Falklands principle, used throughout April 1982.

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<sup>185</sup> Gillmore, “Notes on meeting: Falkland Islands: Prime Minister’s Meeting at 1430 on 11 April,” 11 April 1982, Visit to London of U.S. Secretary of State Mr. Haig, FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

Thatcher's briefing prior to Haig's first visit, crafted by her private secretary CSR Giffard, noted a comment Haig had made off the record in Washington. Haig indicated that he "intends to bring... a flavor of arbitration" to London. London, just like Parsons in New York, began a careful balancing act: Thatcher had to ensure Britain never eased up on its demands in a manner that might create the expectation of a military stand-down while simultaneously appearing to partake benevolently in negotiations that needed to conclude for a clean and beneficial war to commence. Haig, unsuspecting of Britain's intention to undermine the process, provided further comment that jeopardized his operation: "the Argentines must be got out before the British could enter negotiation." Though this comment came in private, Thatcher's private secretaries suspected that if they could tease out this line of reasoning into Haig's public presentation of the negotiations, Britain would be able to "re-establish a concept of pressure" that would lead to either surprising success in the negotiations or broken down talks that would leave Thatcher looking the moral superior to Galtieri—again, another helpful precondition for a preemptive war.<sup>187</sup>

### ***Diplomat or Child?***

While Haig thought he was an intermediary between the British and the Argentines, it is clear that No. 10 never viewed an agreement with Argentina as the endgame in its dealings with the American Secretary of State. Instead, Thatcher clearly

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<sup>187</sup> CSR Giffard, "United States Tactics," 7 April 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

set out to stall and, eventually, terminate negotiations with Haig rather than approach a potential end to the conflict with Argentina. During Haig's shuttle visit to London on 13 April, telegrams from the Falklands Emergency Unit duty officer I Knight Smith—a military man working as part of a military operation—track Haig's movement as if he was an Argentine naval vessel. "Nothing is apparently being said at this stage about Mr. Haig's future movements." Typically, the foreign office would handle a visit like Haig's, but Thatcher both didn't trust the FCO and had already entered a military mindset on the Falklands question. Military officers now filled the role instead.<sup>188</sup> Even when the Foreign Office discussed Haig's intentions, private secretaries reporting directly to Number 10 discussed their desire to "prevail" over him in the days of negotiations to come.<sup>189</sup>

Thatcher's take on Haig's role was perhaps different from this. In her memoirs, she wrote that Haig viewed himself as a "mediator," but that she viewed him instead as a "friend and ally," here to "discuss" the issue and nothing more.<sup>190</sup> (This begs the question, of course, what sort of person uses a military emergency unit to track the

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<sup>188</sup> I Knight Smith, "Emergency Unit Telegram to No. 10," 13 April, 1982, FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>189</sup> CSR Giffard, "United States Tactics," 7 April 1982, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>190</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 192.

The Falklands Emergency Unit was technically run out of the Foreign Office, making it a relevant entity in this period on paper. It was staffed, though, by military officers, and did *not* report to Francis Pym. All of its communications of import, recently released (and generally unviewed) at the UK National Archives at Kew, were sent directly to Thatcher's private secretaries at No. 10 or to Thatcher herself. See Hastings and Jenkins p. 100-102 for an in-depth discussion of the structural changes at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that Thatcher implemented for the duration of the Falklands Crisis (without the new Foreign Minister's blessing.)



movements of political friends?) Thatcher later wrote that she was armed with only a “concise” preparatory memo from a private secretary in the lead-up to Haig’s first visit to London.<sup>191</sup> In fact, in addition to the emergency unit’s reports, the War Cabinet’s meetings in the two days leading up to Haig’s visit focused almost entirely on his diplomatic effort and issues relating to it, like the implementation of the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ).



*Haig arrives in London on 8 April for the first London leg of his shuttle diplomacy. Courtesy: Imperial War Museum Photography Archives*

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<sup>191</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 191.

Even before Haig's first visit to London as part of his shuttle diplomacy, Thatcher viewed him as a lightweight. Thatcher and members of the War Cabinet described Haig's emotions early on as if they discussed a child's: "shattered," "heartbroken," and "depressed." After his return from his first trip to Argentina, Thatcher writes he was guilty of portraying a "very anxious" demeanor and of engaging often in "wishful thinking."<sup>192</sup> Later, as Thatcher made her final push with Haig to alienate him from the Argentines and accept the necessity of war, she continued to coddle him. He felt "insulted" by the Argentines who told him not to return without a better British offer. Clive Whitmore, the Prime Minister's private secretary, took notes on a 12 April meeting with Haig. He wrote that Thatcher "said that she was very sorry [for Haig] about this turn of events, especially after all the efforts Mr. Haig had been making to find a solution."<sup>193</sup> Perhaps Thatcher learned this tactic for dealing with Haig from Reagan himself, who utilized it as a tool as well. In the midst of Haig's shuttle diplomacy, as the Secretary sent the President a letter complaining about the problems of the negotiations, Reagan responded that it was clear how "difficult" compromise would be and that "Maggie" had the Secretary's best interest at heart. Reagan comforted Haig by telling him he, too, was "conscious of the enormity of the task."<sup>194</sup>

Haig appeared somewhat won over by these gestures. In a letter to Reagan summarizing the difficulty of the British position, Haig still praised the Prime Minister.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 198-199.

<sup>193</sup> Clive Whitmore, "Notes on 12 April Meeting with Secretary of State Haig," 12 April, 1982, FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>194</sup> President Reagan telegram to Haig, 9 April 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, [margaretthatcher.org](http://margaretthatcher.org).

“There was no trace of anything but gratitude for the role we are playing...She said...the discussion reflected the strength of our relationship.”<sup>195</sup>

Just before Haig departed Argentina for his first “shuttle” to the United Kingdom, he exchanged a pair of telegrams with Thatcher that set the tone for their coming negotiations. Haig wrote that he had crafted a “draft proposal” with the Argentines and that he was “sure [she] would agree that any military confrontation must be avoided at all costs.”<sup>196</sup> Thatcher shared little of his hopeful tone, for she required military confrontation for self-preservation. She replied that she “should certainly prefer to avoid military confrontation,” but that “Argentina is the aggressor” and that the “right way” to prevent war was for the Royal Navy to take an aggressive stance. Thatcher would spend the next six days convincing—or maybe forcing—Haig to support this course of action.<sup>197</sup>

### *Shuttle Diplomacy Begins: Haig’s 8 April Arrival*

In Haig’s first meeting with Thatcher in London, he reinforced the need for the British government to bring the entire diplomatic process to a quick conclusion—at the

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<sup>195</sup> Al Haig telegram to President Reagan, “Discussions in London,” 9 April 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, [margaretthatcher.org](http://margaretthatcher.org)

<sup>196</sup> Al Haig telegram to Margaret Thatcher, 09 April 1982 “Visit to London of U.S. Secretary of State Mr. Haig,” FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England.)

<sup>197</sup> “Message from the Prime Minister to Mr. Haig,” 08 April 1982, “Visit to London of U.S. Secretary of State Mr. Haig,” FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

very least, peace needed to be abandoned by the time the full British armada reached the South Atlantic. Haig informed the War Cabinet in the meeting's first moments that "America would only become involved if it was fully understood" that military force was the only remaining option. When Thatcher quizzed Haig on his ability to bring about a change in Argentine decision-making, he responded weakly that the best hope was to appeal to Galtieri's religious nature—the Secretary of State noted that Galtieri "was very religious and went to mass every day." After that revelation, Thatcher ceased to press on and the first meeting ended unspectacularly. Haig brought up creative idea after idea—international observers on the Islands to monitor Argentine withdrawal, sanctions, speaking with other members of the Argentine *junta*—and Thatcher and her cabinet politely and kindly shot down each with the retort that no such agreements would be possible as British sovereignty had been violated.<sup>198</sup> The first visit yielded no other major meetings of note. The British proved utterly unwilling to consider crafting a peace deal with Argentina.

Thatcher had done her best to demoralize Haig while presenting an empathetic image. As he departed for Argentina, it appears she succeeded. In Pym's post-meeting report to the British embassy in Washington, he wrote that Haig left having "been made well aware of the strength of the British Government's feelings on the issue."<sup>199</sup> Haig wrote in a summary to Reagan that he could not "presently offer my optimism...This is

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<sup>198</sup> Minutes of 8 April meeting with Al Haig and the war cabinet, 8 April 1982, CAB 292/23, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>199</sup> Francis Pym, telegram to British Embassy in Washington, D.C. and the UK Mission to the UN, "Falkland Islands—Visit by Mr. Haig," 9 April 1982, CAB 292/23, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

clearly a very steep uphill struggle.”<sup>200</sup> Clearly Haig had not counted on Thatcher’s resolute resistance to his negotiations, perhaps due to Parsons’s efforts to obfuscate the British position at the United Nations. Thatcher was careful in these first two days, though, to never totally deny the possibility of fruitful peace talks. By allowing them only on conditions she knew the Argentines would never meet, she made the situation appear to Haig as though the Argentines were the party blocking negotiations. When Haig set off for Latin America, he would meet resistance when presenting Thatcher’s demand that any negotiations begin with unconditional Argentine withdrawal from the Islands. Thus, she helped disrupt Haig’s attempts at diplomacy even in Buenos Aires.

How Thatcher managed to fool Haig—a former four-star general—with personality tricks is a point worth discussing. Perhaps Haig compared Thatcher’s behavior to Galtieri’s. The minutes of Haig’s informal dinner meeting with Thatcher on 8 April reveal Argentina’s treacherous handling of the interpersonal issues their invasion caused between the Argentine *junta* and Haig’s State Department. On 2 April, with the invasion imminent, the American Ambassador to Buenos Aires sought an “urgent appointment” with any high ranking member of the Argentine government. When Haig’s diplomats couldn’t get through to the *junta*, Reagan called himself. Galtieri “delayed” for three hours. The *junta* boss later claimed the delay was “to find out whether it was possible to reverse the [Argentine] military operation.” Haig knew the excuse was “hogwash,” and Thatcher capitalized on his distrust of the Argentines.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Al Haig telegram to President Reagan, “Discussions in London,” 9 April 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, [margaretthatcher.org](http://margaretthatcher.org)

<sup>201</sup> “Record of a discussion over dinner on Thursday, 8 April 1982 at 10 Downing Street,” 9 April 1982, CAB 292/23, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

Thatcher's ploy worked. Haig endorsed the British position with confidence as he left Number Ten. The United States' "longstanding obligations to Great Britain," Haig said, trumped any other motivation in stewarding the negotiations as they proceeded.<sup>202</sup> When he reached Buenos Aires, Haig presented Thatcher's starting point as his own. It appeared reasonable to him to open the diplomatic dialogue with the calmest possible situation. According to British intelligence, he viewed the most stable situation as the one in place before the Argentine invasion. Of course, this position was unacceptable for Galtieri, who faced a potential coup in mid-April himself. Thus, Thatcher appeared reasonable and Galtieri intransigent.

### *Cabinet discussion prior to second Haig visit*

On 11 April, the Task Force—or at least the submarines that had already arrived on station near the Falklands—were still tracking a British surprise attack on 12 April.

In addition to the decision to hold the surprise attack on Argentine vessels, and perhaps to supplement Britain's apparent peace efforts, Thatcher had her private secretary JP Fall write up a possible agreement that Britain might be amenable to. Of course, there existed a mutual understanding between Fall and Thatcher that Argentina would never accept such an agreement. Their proposal was for full "Argentine withdrawal; re-establishment of British administration; reference to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion about sovereignty." Thatcher and Fall concluded that even this, the

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<sup>202</sup> Edward Schumacher, "Haig, in Argentina, cites obligations of U.S. to Britain: Falkland Talks Stalled, Junta is Reportedly Resentful of What It Sees as Growing Tilt Toward the British," 19 April 1982, *New York Times*.

best possible diplomatic outcome for London that would never be accepted by Buenos Aires, “would be risky for the UK.”<sup>203</sup> The War Cabinet wanted war, and as these terms were not acceptable even in London, Thatcher decided to present an even more farfetched peace plan to Haig when he returned that evening. Then, after an Argentine rejection, Britain would have ‘exhausted’ diplomatic means of reprisal.

### *Haig’s Second Visit: 11 April*

12 April was perhaps Haig’s low point. Haig optimistically presented Thatcher with the potential peace deal he had worked out with the *junta* days earlier. It contained seven convoluted points, none particularly beneficial to the British even if Thatcher truly *did* seek peace. First, both nations would withdraw from the Falklands within two weeks.<sup>204</sup> Second, no “further forces” could be “introduced” into the conflict.<sup>205</sup> Third, a three-state “Commission,” made up of the United States, Britain, and Argentina, to build an agreement.<sup>206</sup> Fourth, Britain would agree to immediately lift all economic sanctions on Argentina. Fifth, the agreement would create new legislative bodies on the Islands with disproportionate Argentine membership. Sixth, Argentines would be able to travel to

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<sup>203</sup> JP Fall memo to Clive Whitmore, “The Falkland Islands: Mr. Haig’s Visit of 12 April” 11 April 1982, FCO 7/4537, Kew, United Kingdom National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>204</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 194.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 194. This point was especially convoluted and vague. There was no stipulation on majority or unanimity as necessary for decisions. All three flags would fly on the Islands simultaneously and each nation could maintain an armed compound. (Thatcher, 194)

the Falklands and utilize them economically. Finally, Haig insisted on a clause urging the United Nations to act by the date when the agreement would go into full effect: 31 December 1982.<sup>207</sup>

This is one of the only moments where Thatcher's own account, the War Cabinet's records, and popular histories all agree: Thatcher—after a short ninety minute discussion amongst her colleagues simply to humor the American Secretary of State—rejected the entire proposal, refusing to “reply to Al Haig's proposals point by point.”<sup>208</sup> And, regardless of any desire for war, she was right to: the plan was fundamentally unacceptable for Britain in British eyes.

Later on 12 April, Haig, still in London, phoned Thatcher at 10:55 PM in a frantic state. He told her that, after hours of phone calls with Argentina—and after Thatcher's outright denial of Haig and Galtieri's terms—the situation was “grim.”<sup>209</sup> Thatcher's cabinet had a problem here: the Prime Minister's refusal to take part in talks with Argentina in the meeting earlier that day left the impression that Thatcher's government was providing Haig instructions. While Thatcher wished the negotiations would fail, it could not appear that the responsibility for the failure rested with the British. Thatcher told Haig to leak to the media that “complications” had arisen on the Argentine side.<sup>210</sup>

At 2:00 AM on 13 April, the Emergency Unit—still tracking Haig's movements with military precision—reported that Haig, upset still at the continued falling through of

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 194-196.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>209</sup> Clive Whitmore, Memo to Brian Fall on Thatcher's Telephone Conversation with Haig on 13 April, 13 April 1982, ALQ 050/304/4, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.



his peace plan, would not speak with Downing Street himself—here he earned any childish portrayal. The American Secretary of State had decided to remain in London, rather than leave for Argentina, and continue to work Costa Mendes by telephone. With Thatcher refusing to budge on the peace proposal, “a complication” had arisen: now the Argentines did not wish Haig to return to Buenos Aires, and Britain was spared the public blame for slowing negotiations.<sup>211</sup>

On 14 April, after returning to the United States, a tired Haig tripped up and offered Thatcher’s cabinet ammunition. He said that “The United States had not acceded to requests that would go beyond the customary patterns of cooperation based on bilateral agreements.” The British used that “verbal mess,” as Casper Weinberger calls it later in his memoirs, to argue that “Haig was trying to keep the United States neutral in a war between an aggressor and America’s closest friend.” The Secretary of Defense believed Thatcher’s government was genuinely hurt by the statement, but the tone of internal British communications indicates otherwise. Instead, like other elements of Haig’s mood and personality, Britain seized on the misstep. On 15 April, with Haig still blindly pursuing shuttle diplomacy, the rest of the U.S. government—Weinberger and Reagan included—accepted the failure of his mission and began backing Britain militarily. Haig continued on to Argentina again, and left on 18 April optimistic about the possibility of an agreement on Thatcher’s seemingly unreasonable terms. But the Argentines played a similar game to Thatcher, not desiring to be the state bringing about death. By the night of 19 April, Haig, still in Buenos Aires, finally “realized” that he was dealing with two

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<sup>211</sup> I Knight Smith, “Emergency Unit Telegram to No. 10,” 13 April, 1982, FCO 7/4537, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

regimes incapable of agreement.<sup>212</sup> Weinberger later attributed the failure of Haig's mission to British leaders who morally could accept no other outcome than a full return of the Islands. Thatcher was "acting for [British] citizens...who wanted British" forces to return to the Islands. Poll numbers, though, don't reflect that reality in mid-April.<sup>213</sup> Instead, Thatcher and key allies in her government deftly outmaneuvered Haig to manufacture the failure of his diplomatic mission and the necessity of war.<sup>214</sup>

### ***22 April: The Pym Show***

*"Last week I came here to see Mr. Haig in his role as a mediator. Today I have come back to consult with him as an ally."*-Francis Pym, 22 April 1982<sup>215</sup>

On 21 April, Thatcher dispatched Francis Pym to the United States to meet with Haig. This achieved two outcomes for Thatcher: first, she sent away the greatest internal threat from her cabinet as she prepared for military action; next, she was able to maintain

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<sup>212</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 112. There is obviously more to the story of Haig's shuttle diplomacy, particularly in its later stages. But his circumstances tend to repeat, and the lessons one can draw from his third and fourth rounds of negotiations—which primarily took place with the *Junta*, are few.

<sup>213</sup> One poll in late April 1982 showed 44% support in the United Kingdom for a shooting war to retake the Falklands. That poll was taken *after* the failure of Haig's mission and UN diplomacy, when—with alternatives present—presumably support for war was lower.

<sup>214</sup> Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 207. For a full account of Caspar Weinberger's experience of the Falklands Crisis, see his own memoir *Fighting for Peace*, 203-217. He demonstrates the differences between Haig and the rest of the government and the way Haig alienated himself from Reagan and the rest of the cabinet. Weinberger claims to have had a different view throughout the crisis, arguing in cabinet against the importance of preserving American relations with Latin American states that backed Argentina's claims and invasion.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

the façade of a diplomatic effort and a reluctance to use military force by sending her Foreign Secretary to, once again, spend time meandering around Britain’s diplomatic reality with the Secretary of State. The War Cabinet discussed Pym’s journey only briefly in his absence, a subtle acknowledgement of the trip’s irrelevance. Even Weinberger, not read in to Thatcher’s intentions, writes of Pym’s late April visit with a certain understanding of its intended futility.<sup>216</sup>

In their reconstruction of events, Hastings and Jenkins—who generally see through Thatcher’s diplomatic schemes—still write of this trip as a “last attempt at marriage” between Britain and Argentina.<sup>217</sup> Thatcher then must have persuaded the two journalists as well of her false intentions. If anything, the meeting in Washington served to massage the egos of each nation’s respective foreign affairs chief. Pym and Haig met alone for four hours to discuss the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict—a conclusion, of course, that accomplished nothing.<sup>218</sup> They did manage to craft another peace proposal—this one titled “Haig Two”—that changed little from Haig’s first proposal to Britain. Again, Pym returned to Britain backing the solution in front of cabinet—another attempt at a coup, of sorts, though this time with less gusto—and again Pym found himself alone in the cabinet’s minority.<sup>219</sup>

By having Pym conduct the final meeting with Haig, Thatcher manufactured the appearance that she did not personally end his diplomatic gestures. Instead, she used Francis Pym to end diplomacy—when he had publicly backed it so strongly himself.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>217</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 139.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 139.

Diplomacy was dead. Thatcher had killed it. It took three weeks, but the public blame for diplomacy's failure now lay not with Thatcher—its 'murderer'. Instead, she successfully framed Haig and the Argentines.

On 24 April, just as Pym departed Washington, the White House leaked to the *New York Times* that Haig's "failure to make real progress" had led to White House discussions of how to best support Britain in a coming shooting war with Argentina.<sup>220</sup> While Haig had continued pressing for a deal after 19 April, the Reagan administration began preparing a sanctions package against Argentina strong enough to draw the ire of several Latin American governments.<sup>221</sup> Haig announced on the sanctions, as well as an American promise to deliver whatever "material support" Britain needed to fight in the Falklands, on 30 April.<sup>222</sup> Here, again, Ambassador Nicholas Henderson—not Pym—played a key role. Thatcher had effectively isolated the two largest threats to the Falklands War—the senior foreign relations officials in the British and American governments, Pym and Haig—ensuring the United States ceased negotiations and removed itself as a threat to Thatcher's plans.

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<sup>220</sup> Bernard Gwertzman, "Haig and His Aides Knew on April 19 That Peace Efforts Seemed Doomed," 2 May 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>221</sup> Warren Hoge, "U.S. Strategy Irks Latins: Falklands Sanctions Viewed as Harsh," 4 May 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>222</sup> Alexander Haig, "Transcript of Remarks By Haig on Falklands," 1 May 1982, *New York Times*.

### *Thatcher's Second and Third Weeks*

Thatcher's careful manipulation of Haig and desire to create the right diplomatic underpinnings to justify a war with Argentina demonstrate both her desire to take Britain to war and her understanding that such a war needed to appear one of last resort. She withstood a political coup from her own Foreign Secretary and ruthlessly ended the career of Pym's American counterpart.

Unclear in these two weeks is Reagan's understanding of events. Thatcher seems to think she manipulated him along with Haig. The only real insight into Reagan and Thatcher's shared conversations in April isn't real at all: a recording emerged in July 1983 of their alleged April 1982 conversations. Though accepted as real at the time, these recordings, according to declassified British records, were a forgery.<sup>223</sup> Given Haig's fate, though, and Casper Weinberger's hints on the matter, it seems Reagan might have been willing to allow Thatcher to open up a conflict in the Falklands after all.

With America's diplomatic quest dead in the water and blame shifted towards Argentina, Thatcher could finally turn to the third audience necessary to achieve her beneficial war: the British public.

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<sup>223</sup> "SECURITY. Forged Recording of a Telephone Conversation between the Prime Minister and President Reagan during the Falklands Campaign," 25 May 1983, PREM 19/1380, UK National Archives, (London, England).

## ***5. Week Four and War:***

***April 22-14 June***

*The government founded on opinion and imagination reigns for some time, and this government is pleasant and voluntary; that founded on might lasts for ever. Thus opinion is the queen of the world, but might is its tyrant.*

-Blaise Pascal<sup>224</sup>

After finally quelling American stabs at diplomacy, Thatcher turned her attention to the British public during April's final days. The Task Force now neared the Islands and, thanks to Thatcher's efforts, peace in the South Atlantic was finally off the table. Thatcher had committed to war; she just needed to make it a popular one. Here, more than in any other area or period of time during the Falklands Crisis or War, she would fail. Her campaign was lackluster. She conducted a few interviews, sent the Royal Marines and Rex Hunt—who had been on the Falklands when the Argentines siezed them—around Britain on a public relations trip, and ensured the *BBC* and Fleet Street dispatched countless journalists to the fleet. Downing Street pressed newspapers that favored Thatcher to call for war and laud her April efforts. These unoriginal initiatives did not create widespread public support for war, which was low, with a slight majority of Britons against a kinetic first strike. Worse, these numbers had actually deteriorated through the month of April as the embarrassment Britons felt at the initial Argentine invasion dissipated. Furthermore, Thatcher made a series of significant missteps in this area in the final week of April. After so deftly appearing to seek peace for three weeks

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<sup>224</sup> Lukacs, *Five Days in London*, 29.

with the United Nations and the United States, she declared her joy at the first British use of retaliatory force on 25 April—the retaking of South Georgia.<sup>225</sup> She tried to gradually scale British military actions up, but the British public didn't take note of the Task Force's early small and insignificant victories. Observers closely monitoring the Task Force's actions wouldn't have been all too surprised by the sinking of the ARA *Belgrano*, but unfortunately for Thatcher, those observers were few and far between. This chapter examines the highly anticipated ground conflict itself. First, though, it looks at Thatcher's final pitch for war to the British public.

### ***Thatcher: Not the “Great Communicator”***

Thatcher's poll numbers heading into the final week of the Falklands Crisis were not in good shape. The British public felt that Thatcher hadn't handled the Crisis well enough and didn't particularly care about the war to come. On 14 April a majority of Britons favored the sacking of two more cabinet secretaries—including Nott, who Thatcher had decided to hold on to. Worst of all, the public seemed reluctant to support military action, the very event that Thatcher hoped would win them over. Only 33% of Britons supported “Bomb[ing] Argentine bases” in preparation for war.<sup>226</sup> Thatcher set out to convince the British public that the war was important *and* good, and she had just one week before the Task Force reached the exclusion zone around the Islands.

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<sup>225</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 130.

<sup>226</sup> “Falklands War-Panel Survey,” 14 April-32 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>.

Thatcher didn't form a cohesive or well-coordinated approach to this public opinion crisis. Instead, the Prime Minister and her cabinet engineered several different attempts at winning popular support for war. Thatcher's two largest initiatives in this field were altogether predictable and, frankly, not up to her usual levels of color. She offered interviews to the *BBC* and other broadcasting outlets. She also sent Falkland Islands Governor Rex Hunt and the Royal Marine platoon that had 'protected' Government House out on an interview tour. 'Fleet Street,' the British newspaper cabal, did not turn out in support of Thatcher as one might have expected. Generally British tabloids jump at war mongering or anything close to it—and in this case, the *Daily Mail* and a handful of others did—but there was criticism of the Prime Minister there as well.

Truly, public relations mishaps marred Thatcher's final week in April more than any domestic political victory buffered it. On 25 April, after Royal Marines took the Island of South Georgia in the first real fighting of the war—discussed below—Thatcher and John Nott stepped outside of Downing Street to make a statement. Thatcher appeared quite thrilled:

**Press:** *What happens next Mr Nott ? What's your reaction ... ?*

**Thatcher:** *Just rejoice at that news and congratulate our forces and the Marines. Goodnight.*

**Press:** *Are we going to war with Argentina Mrs Thatcher?*

**Thatcher:** *Rejoice.*<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Remarks on the recapture of South Georgia," 25 April, 1982, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*,

<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104923>.

After Thatcher died, many left-leaning Britons emerged to celebrate in a relatively unappealing show of joy. Many of them donned signs and held up posters. A good number of those read something to the effect of "Rejoice, Thatcher is Dead." Though she would recover from the press conference and emerge from the war a popular figure, the



Thatcher, of course, later claimed the comments were only about “the bloodless capture of South Georgia,” not the upcoming war itself.<sup>228</sup> In a certain sense, she must have been right. But the capture of South Georgia meant war was near, and Thatcher clearly desired it. Fleet Street took notice. “The joys of war will end if bloodshed begins,” wrote Jeffrey Simpson in the *Globe and Anchor*.<sup>229</sup> Thatcher writes in her memoirs that “I meant that they should rejoice in the bloodless recapture of South Georgia, not in the war itself. To me war is not a matter for rejoicing. But some pretend otherwise.”<sup>230</sup> Yet, one could hardly blame the media for their take on her statement. Luckily for Thatcher, the ‘Rejoice’ fiasco came about just as the British media began another barrage against Haig. Headlines varied from “Stick it up Your Junta” to “Let’s End the War of Politics.” In fact, Fleet Street’s “yearning for an old-fashioned sea battle” and its “suspicion that the Foreign Office might be conspiring to cheat it out of one” kept the tabloids from crushing Thatcher, and likely saved her war in the process.<sup>231</sup>

On 26 April, Thatcher took to the floor of Commons for Prime Minister’s Questions.<sup>232</sup> She needed to recover from her 25 April blunder, while simultaneously

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25 April blunder was likely the most embarrassing single moment of her Prime Ministerial career.

<sup>228</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 209.

<sup>229</sup> Jeffrey Simpson, “The joys of war will end if bloodshed begins,” *Globe and Anchor*, 27 April 1982. The *Globe and Anchor* is a prominent Canadian tabloid, but it had significant circulation in Britain and resembled the ‘Fleet Street’ perspective throughout the crisis.

<sup>230</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 208-209.

<sup>231</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 135.

<sup>232</sup> Prime Minister’s Question time (PMQs) was a twice-weekly (now once per week) raucous session of the House of Commons. Commons pits the Government party against the Opposition, with them facing each other in a cramped room. PMQs pits the Prime Minister against the opposition leader, with both ostensibly speaking to Parliament’s

announcing the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) that Britain had informed Argentina of three days prior. Thatcher needed to accomplish all of this, of course, while facing down Labour leader Michael Foot. The reaction from her 25 April press conference, specifically from certain MPs who Thatcher felt “seemed to want negotiations to continue indefinitely,” furthered Thatcher’s view that it was finally time to make clear the “imminence of full-scale military conflict.”<sup>233</sup> She told Parliament that Britain needed to begin striking almost immediately—though the first use of kinetic power in the vicinity of the Islands would come early on 1 May—due to “wild and stormy weathers of that area.”<sup>234</sup> Later on 26 April, Thatcher switched messages again during an interview with the evening television program *Panorama*. Britain needed to strike now, she argued, not because of atmospheric conditions. Instead, late April was “the best possible time” with “minimum risk” to “our boys who are on those warships.” With “the safety of their lives” her priority, the time was now to strike.<sup>235</sup>

Ironically, President Reagan stepped in on 30 April as Thatcher’s political failures in Britain appeared on the verge of derailing the Task Force’s military efforts. Reagan told American reporters in a press conference that the Argentines were at fault in the Falklands and that the United States fully supported Britain’s right to the Islands and Thatcher’s right to wage a war over them. He also forced Haig at the State Department to release his own statement, ensuring the world and the British public that the United States

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“speaker” but very clearly hurling insults at each other. Particularly in past governments, it is a focus of Britain’s weekly political schedule.

<sup>233</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 208-210.

<sup>234</sup> “Questions for the Prime Minister, 26 April 1982,” 26 April, 1982, UK Parliamentary Archives, (London, England.)

<sup>235</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 208-210.

would, at long last, fully back Thatcher's efforts. This slight public relations bump allowed Thatcher to green-light bombings of Argentine positions.

Thatcher needed a popular war. As of 30 April, the Falklands didn't look to be one. When asked whether their opinion of her had gone up or down during the Crisis, 27% of Britons responded that the Crisis had lowered their opinion of the Prime Minister. Only 12 % responded that their opinion of Thatcher had improved.<sup>236</sup> She failed to fully win support of the British public in April, meaning she would again have to turn to them in the war's aftermath—assuming she won victory—to win support for her own government in the wake of conflict.

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<sup>236</sup> “Falklands War-Panel Survey,” 14 April-23 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>. For more public opinion data from 14 April-23 June—all from *The Economist*—see Annex A.

**“It’s War!”<sup>237</sup>**

*“The South Atlantic crisis is about to enter a new and dangerous stage”*  
-Alexander Haig, 30 April.<sup>238</sup>

Popular histories of the Falklands use the sinking of the ARA *Belgrano* to mark the end of the Crisis and the beginning of the War. In reality, the British entrance into the use-of-force environment that culminated with the sinking of the Argentine vessel was a week-long process with several gradual steps towards war. This late-April increase in military and kinetic action was brought about by two factors: Thatcher’s eventual success in bringing about an end to Al Haig’s peace mission after weeks of effort, and the long awaited arrival of the full might of the British Task Force at the edge of the Falkland Islands TEZ.<sup>239</sup> Thatcher, in order to appear strong, could not delay her plans further. As noted earlier, the British public did not overwhelmingly favor all-out war at this point—in fact, they opposed it by a narrow margin. But Thatcher still believed a successful war would bring with it popular support—Thatcher’s ultimate motivation—and the longer British forces hovered about the edge of Argentine waters the less decisive any victory would appear. Because of the timing of the end of Haig’s mission and the arrival of the Task Force, Thatcher’s attempts to create popular support for the war in Britain were fundamentally intertwined with early British military action near the Falklands, much like the diplomatic campaign.

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<sup>237</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 135.

<sup>238</sup> Alexander Haig, “Transcript of Remarks By Haig on the Falklands,” 30 April 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>239</sup> British submarines had been “on station” for weeks, as they would have been the sole strike element against Argentine warships in the canceled strike on 14 April.

The first use of British forces involved retaking a piece of unimportant land 925 miles from the Falkland Islands. From 21-22 April, British special forces had reconnoitered South Georgia. After poor weather conditions scuttled an initial landing force—perhaps to be expected within the borders of the Antarctic—Royal Marines finally took back South Georgia on 25 April, a victory which precipitated Thatcher’s nightmarish “rejoice” press conference.<sup>240</sup>

Throughout the secret South Georgia operation, Britain continued to act more aggressively elsewhere. On 23 April, Thatcher’s government sent a warning to the Argentine *junta* notifying them of a change in the Exclusion Zone rules. What had been the Maritime Exclusion Zone was now the Total Exclusion Zone. Previously, Argentine vessels “might” have been liable to attack if British forces perceived them as a threat. Now, with the full fleet on station, “any approach on the part of their warships, submarines or aircraft” would be “regarded as hostile and dealt with accordingly.

On 24 April, Francis Pym returned from Washington with Al Haig’s final peace plan. By this point the rest of the Reagan administration had left Haig behind—there was no longer a need to humor the Secretary of State. Thatcher deemed this final proposal worse than even the first brought to her government and later said the document could only be described as “conditional surrender.”<sup>241</sup> More proposals would find their way through No. 10 during the next two months, and Thatcher would reject each with the same veracity.

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<sup>240</sup> For a full and detailed account of the treacherous South Georgia landing and its bizarre interplay with Francis Pym’s journey to the United States, see either John Nott’s *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, Hastings and Jenkins’s *Battle for the Falklands*, Chapter 7.

<sup>241</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 205.

On 26 April, the same day Thatcher announced the TEZ in Parliament, the full British Task Force arrived at the zone's perimeter. After days of waiting approximately 200 miles from the Islands, Britain launched its first strike on 1 May. A Vulcan bomber departed Ascension Island—another island speck in the Atlantic, this one owned by the United States and lent to the RAF for the duration of the war—and dropped its payload on Port Stanley's airfield.<sup>242</sup> Twelve Harriers took off from HMS *Invincible*, an aircraft carrier now in range of the Falklands, and began a ground attack mission against Argentine defensive positions on the Islands. The strike group found itself entangled in arial combat with Argentine Mirage fighter jets. Truly, the war began on 1 May.<sup>243</sup>

As British aircraft struck Argentine positions late on 1 May, the submarine HMS *Conqueror* had been tasked to probe the perimeter of the TEZ—now expanded to 300 miles—for an Argentine aircraft carrier and its adjoining 'carrier group.' Chris Wreford-Brow commander of *Conqueror*, reported to the Task Force's leadership that he had his sights on the ARA *General Belgrano* and two smaller vessels, all carrying the Exocet antiship missile. The Exocet was considered the largest military threat to the Task Force, capable of taking out British vessels from beyond the range of their conventional shipboard defense systems. The *Belgrano*, though, still sat some 40 miles outside of the TEZ and hadn't yet violated Britain's announced rules.<sup>244</sup> The Task Force sent a request to Downing Street to torpedo the *Belgrano*. It presented no clear threat to the Task Force,

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<sup>242</sup> While the need to maintain American support was paramount for a positive perception of the Falklands War, Thatcher also needed American military support in the form of Ascension Island—without it, Leech's Task Force would not have been militarily successful.

<sup>243</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 143.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

and the request *did not* include torpedoing the adjoining vessels. The greatest threat came from those smaller vessels, because they carried the Excocet. The question of whether to torpedo the *Belgrano* was now with Thatcher and her cabinet.

The cabinet debated the question over night. The Navy, eager for a fight, pushed for a torpedo strike. Pym dissented, but having lost his miniature coup a week earlier, no other major official sided with him. Thatcher, eager to strike, gave the green light to the *Conqueror* herself. The fact that the War Cabinet had time to debate the issue at length indicates that the *Belgrano* did not present much of an urgent threat. The fleet made other tactical decisions by itself, particularly those requiring rapid and urgent decisions. In the War Cabinet papers, there is virtually no mention of other tactical decisions made at the Prime Ministerial level in the days before or after 2 May.<sup>245</sup> The attack on the *Belgrano* had dramatic strategic implications, but establishing the TEZ and approving the Royal Navy's rules of engagement normally would have been the limit of a Prime Minister's military decision-making. When the *New York Times* later reported on the ship's sinking, it quoted an "expert" as saying "No task force commander could risk seeing a hostile force that close to any of his ships."<sup>246</sup> Admiral Fieldhouse, not Thatcher, commanded the Task Force, demonstrating Thatcher's atypical involvement in the decision. Late in the evening on 2 May, with all but Pym in agreement, Thatcher ordered the *Conqueror* to initiate its torpedo strike. The *Belgrano* sank "at a point located 55 degrees 24 minutes

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<sup>245</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 148.; Young, *One of Us*, 277.

<sup>246</sup> Steven Rattner, "Mrs. Thatcher Under Attack at Home Over Cruiser," 5 May 1982, *New York Times*.

south and 61 degrees 32 minutes west”—over twenty miles from the edge of the recently expanded exclusion zone—with 362 crewmembers dead.<sup>247</sup>

The global reaction was overwhelmingly negative. Thatcher appeared at risk of losing the diplomatic victory she had worked so hard to secure since the initial Argentine invasion. The UN, in particular, was in uproar. Anthony Parsons had to, again, calm the fears of Latin American states and personally report to the Secretary General on the subject. Not helping matters was Thatcher’s initial unwillingness to share the details of the strike with the media. Rumors flew rampant. Argentina, though, was not so quiet. Their UN mission spoke of fast-attack “Linx helicopters,” which have far more situational awareness than a submarine, sinking the *Belgrano* and her two sister vessels.<sup>248</sup>

Popular histories tell readers that when Thatcher ordered the sinking of the *Belgrano*, she ordered the beginning of the war. Given the array of fighting taking place elsewhere in the South Atlantic, this argument holds little water. It is nearly impossible to imagine a peace deal, even if Thatcher had desired one, by 2 May. But perhaps by ordering the destruction of the Argentine vessel, Thatcher ordered the beginning of the public war. This public opening of the war and the worldwide outrage that followed represents another Thatcher public relations failure in the first thirty days of the Crisis. After the announcement in Parliament of the TEZ on 26 April, the Prime Minister never delivered a speech outlining her plans for the use of military force or her goals in its use.

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<sup>247</sup> Martyn Warr, “General Belgrano: Argentinian Comunique No. 16,” 3 May 1982, ALQ 050/25, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

<sup>248</sup> I Knight Smith, “Reported Sinking of General Belgrano and Second Argentine Patrol/Naval Auxiliary Vessel,” 3 May 1982, ALQ 050/25, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).



She never gave a specific, time-bound ultimatum to the Argentines in public—obviously, they would not have complied, but such a demand would certainly have made initial kinetic action more powerful and palatable.

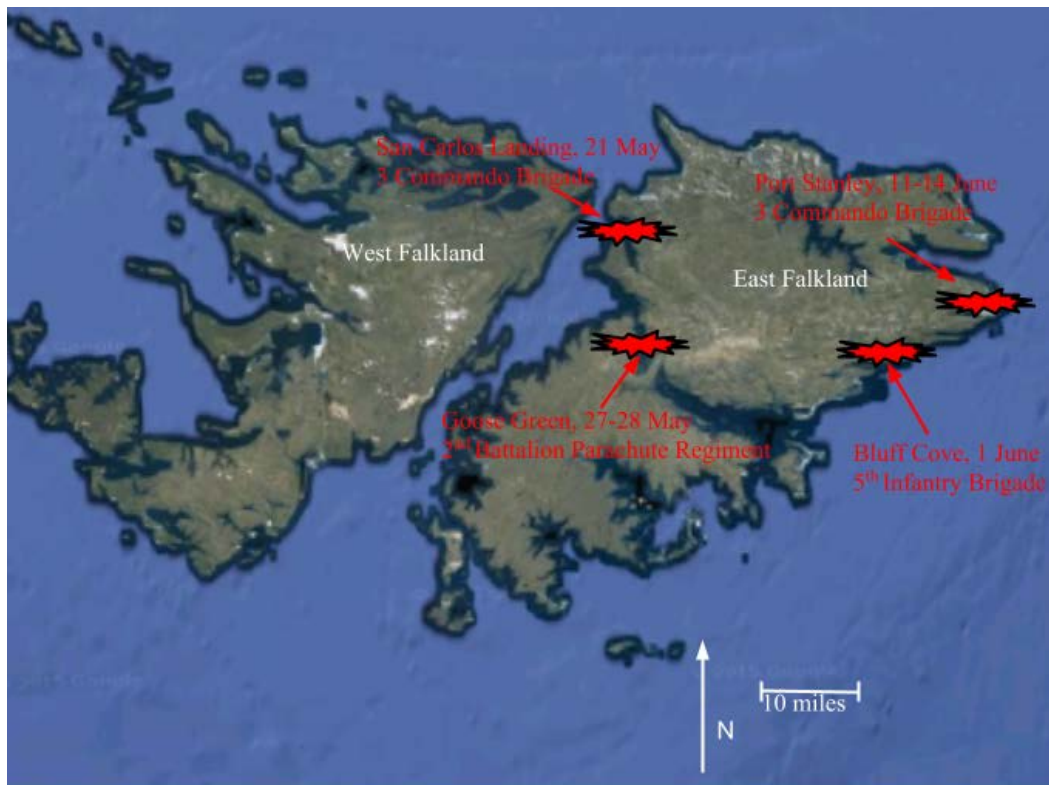
The *Belgrano* sinking shocked the world and was met with condemnation abroad.<sup>249</sup> Two days later, Argentina struck HMS *Sheffield* with an Exocet missile and killed the first Task Force members. An observer might have expected a negative reaction in the United Kingdom. After all, the *Sheffield* had only been sunk in retaliations for the unnecessary destruction of the *Belgrano*. But Britons did not reject the war after the attack on the *Sheffield*. Instead, they finally began to embrace it. Poll numbers from early May show a tremendous increase in support for Thatcher and the war. While the percentage of Britons favoring the war remained stagnant during the month of April—general hovering below 50%—by May 79% of Britons supported “sinking Argentinian ships in Falkland waters”—ironic, given that was the very action that brought about a ‘hot’ war to begin with.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> The United States was already displeased with Thatcher’s early running of the war, because Thatcher hadn’t informed Reagan or any element of his government that Britain planned on beginning its Vulcan bomb runs on the Islands days earlier. Bernard Weinraubs, “Reagan Says Britain’s Move Came as Complete Surprise,” 2 May 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>250</sup> “Falklands War-Panel Survey,” 14 April-32 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>.

## *By Air, Sea, and Land*



*The ground war for the Falkland Islands, from the invasion at San Carlos to victory at Port Stanley.*

By 21 May, after weeks of naval preparation and aerial bombardment, Britain was finally ready to send ground forces towards Port Stanley. In the first days of May—even before the sinking of the *Belgrano*—British commandos had begun secretly probing East Falkland’s beaches for a landing area. Ironically, though Britain had possessed the isles, the Royal Navy knew surprisingly little about where its terrain might best support an invasion. One Special Air Service (SAS) member commented that the British “started out with a blank map...and fired special forces like a shotgun across the Islands to see

what they found.”<sup>251</sup> After several reconnaissance missions, the British command settled on San Carlos, towards the northwestern tip of East Falkland, as the location of main British amphibious landing.<sup>252</sup>

Early on 21 May, the might of the British Task Force sailed into San Carlos cove. Argentine exorcets had crippled much of the original force, leaving the Royal Navy weakened and without the assets it deemed necessary in its initial invasion plans. More destruction would follow during daytime preparations for the assault. Several Royal Navy vessels sustained direct hits to bombs or exorcet missiles.<sup>253</sup>

The fleet’s saving grace on 21 May was the air superiority its Harrier pilots achieved. The jump-jet pilots had trained for weeks against French Aircraft before joining the fleet—like Acsension Island, another case where diplomatic victory translated directly to military benefits. The Argentine Air Force flew the French-built Mirage—a superior aircraft to the Harrier. The French also possessed the same Exorcet missiles that posed a tremendous threat to the Task Force. After gaining French support for the overall mission, the Ministry of Defense organized a set of arial war games, where British pilots learned the capabilities firsthand of the Mirage and the Exorcet. This experience proved valuable at San Carlos and averted utter disaster for the Task Force in the early stages of the invasion.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falkland Islands*, 177.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>253</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 212.

<sup>254</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 304.

While it is clear that this idea originated somewhere in the Ministry of Defense, given the fractious nature of the department and rivalries between Nott and his Naval Chief, multiple parties claim credit for the idea and its execution.

During the evening of 21 May, 3 Commando Brigade made landfall at San Carlos and set up camp on the beach. There, unlike their brethren at sea, they met little Argentine resistance. The SAS had already conducted preliminary security operations in the area. Once soldiers were safely ashore, the military effort halted temporary to meet London's insistence on the building of public relations and media infrastructure. PR experts sent videos back from the beach. Live video was deemed "impossible," and the sound produced wasn't nearly exciting enough for the British public. Instead, the British viewing public was soon treated to videos of the landings with voice overs of excited servicemembers celebrating. Otherwise, as one reporter noted, articles critical of the British effort were sent back to Britain "at twenty knots."<sup>255</sup>

After initial British forces had unloaded and landed on the beach, the Royal Navy remained in San Carlos, now deemed 'Bomb Alley,' to drop off remaining soldiers and stage for follow on operations. On 24 May, disaster struck. Argentine warplanes armed with Exorcet missiles destroyed two more British vessels, the *Antelope* and the *Atlantic Conveyor*. The entire British fleet of troop-carrying *Chinook* helicopters, necessary to ferry British troops from the beachhead to an assault of Port Stanley—went down with *Atlantic Conveyor*. Now, British troops would have to make the long and arduous trek to Port Stanley on foot.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 224-228.

<sup>256</sup> Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 312; Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 212. The British government had, to this point, joyfully shared all of the news coming from the Task Force—it all had improved their image, of course. But on 24 May came the first potential for mission failure, and that fear is reflected in Thatcher's silence. Nott was equally ambiguous, saying only that "it would be unwise to give details of what was contained in the *Atlantic Conveyor*." Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 212.

The most ferocious ground fighting of the Falklands War took place on 27 and 28 May. Because British forces now had to march on Port Stanley, it would have to move all of its force through a small strip of land, called an isthmus, that connected the northern and southern halves of East Falkland. Argentine commanders had focused their defenses on this position, for here they could bottleneck the British attackers. Though they would make a ‘last stand’ by Port Stanley, Goose Green, as the battle would become known, represented the last Argentine hope of victory. 2 Para, a batallion of the elite British Parachute Regiment, was given the job of breaking through Argentine lines. Outnumbered and pinned down, 2 Para’s commander, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Jones, heroically charged Argentine defensive positions. He was gunned down, but as British accounts tell us, his actions inspired his batallion to move forward and defeat the larger Argentine force. Britain still would have won the Falklands War without Jones’s actions at Goose Green or 2 Para’s victory. In the weeks and months after the war, however, Thatcher would rely on Jones’s heroism above all other talking points in selling British victory to the public.<sup>257</sup>

British forces continued their sloth-like movement towards Port Stanley into June. After further political squabbling in the Ministry of Defense, 5 Brigade, a conventional unit, was given the task of the final assault on Port Stanley. The marines—a naval service—found themselves on the sidelines. After a hiccup at Bluff Cove—British lives were again lost at sea, the source of most British deaths during the conflict—British forces began a final three-pronged assault on Port Stanley on 11 June. Three days later,

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<sup>257</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 233-247; Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 233-250; Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 313.

after meeting little resistance, British commandos raised the Union Jack on Government House at the center of the Islands' capital.<sup>258</sup> Almost in unison, "the white flags of surrender went up all over Argentine military positions around Port Stanley." The *Times* implied that it was the "spirit of the country" that compelled the Argentines to such a hasty surrender.<sup>259</sup> There was to be no epic final battle for the Falklands. The war was won.

At war's end, Britain had suffered 260 combat casualties. Argentina lost nearly 650 sailors and soldiers. The remaining Argentine conscripts were rounded up as prisoners of war and eventually shipped back to Argentina.

### ***Live to PR another day***

The final week of the Falklands Crisis shows that wars, when they begin to cause deaths upon a nation with nationalistic tendencies or one that's eager for a fight, can become temporarily popular on their own. *The Guardian's* editorial board noticed this trend from its beginnings, writing on 2 May 1982 that "when shooting starts in earnest, it develops a momentum of its own."<sup>260</sup> Asked on 14 April whether "retaining British sovereignty over the Falklands is important enough to justify the loss of British service men's lives," a majority of British respondents replied with a 'no'. By 25 May, after over

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<sup>258</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 259-281; Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 320; Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow*, 321. The official Argentine surrender until the evening of 14 June. The remaining Argentines had been ordered southeast of Port Stanley to prepare for a counterattack. Upon seeing the British flag rise above Government House, the conscripts dropped their weapons and moved back to Port Stanley through a minefield they had laid in surrender.

<sup>259</sup> "The Truce," *Times* (London, England) 15 June 1982.

<sup>260</sup> "Fighting develops a momentum of its own," *Guardian Weekly*, 2 May 1982, Pg. 1.

one hundred British servicemembers had died, 62 % of Britons replied to the same question with a 'yes'.<sup>261</sup> Thatcher deftly worked her way through her own cabinet, parliament, and the international community in April 1982 to make war possible. She bungled, though, her efforts to make the war popular in the final week of April. Now in June and in the wake of an independently popular war, Thatcher needed to reattempt to ensure the support for the war transferred over to her in the political world in the months and years to follow.

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<sup>261</sup> "Falklands War-Panel Survey," 14 April-32 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>.

## 6. *Cementing Gains: The Permanency of Falklands Glory*

On 14 July, the British Task Force began arriving back in the United Kingdom. HMS *Intrepid* returned first, and was met by about 100 Britons in Portsmouth harbor. The onlookers didn't wildly scream or cheer. Instead, they watched curiously and silently with hands in pockets. A few carried the Union Jack, but in photographs of the occasion none of the observers seem to wave their flags.<sup>262</sup> The British public did not immediately rejoice in the aftermath of victory. Yes, Thatcher's popularity shot up significantly. Britons describe, in the days following victory, a "reassured...national pride."<sup>263</sup> But from London to Scotland there was no exuberant outpouring of visible support for Thatcher and her war. People did not "fill Trafalgar Square with the hysterical chants of victory."<sup>264</sup> The *Times* attributed this to a level of post-war dignity only found in a populous as esteemed and superior as the British public.<sup>265</sup> Popular memories and histories of the Falklands War don't contain this gap. The "Falklands factor" buoyed the Prime Minister through political hardship in the summer of 1982, according to popular memory.<sup>266</sup> But reality differs here from the public memory. The "Falklands factor"

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<sup>262</sup> Royal Navy Official Photographers, "HMS *Intrepid* Returns to Portsmouth," 14 July 1982, FKD 2084, Photography Archives, Imperial War Museum, (London, England).

<sup>263</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, 340.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 340.

<sup>265</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 282.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, 283.



existed in July and August, but not as a pure political mechanism. As Falklands stories faded from the national media landscape, so did the “factor.”

There is no significant example in the past century of a public viewing a national leader negatively in the wake of a decisive—and generally harmless—military victory. Margaret Thatcher’s experience in the days after the Falklands War was no different. But inevitably, questions arose about Number Ten’s inability to predict the war and its continued ruthless domestic policies—specifically Thatcher’s handling of the National Rail Strike—in the wake of the conflict. Thatcher needed to engineer a memory of and lust for victory that—to her surprise—hadn’t occurred naturally. By playing the media better than she had before the war, and by reaching beyond traditional communications methods, she managed to transform an odd victory in the South Atlantic from near-forgotten to a heroic period of military and political leadership.

### *Temporary Bliss*

The weeks following the Falklands victory were not without benefits for Thatcher. First, the British system does no favors for Prime Ministers who lose wars. In fact, military defeat generally spells the end of a Prime Minister’s career. Thatcher acknowledged that potential throughout the Crisis, and now that Britain had secured victory her job, if nothing else, was safe until the next election. Second, Thatcher’s own confidence—which had appeared shaken tremendously in her early public appearances in April, maybe never to return—was back in full force.

In a speech on 3 July to a conservative rally at Cheltenham Race Course, Thatcher introduced the concept of the “Falklands Factor.” She defined it as the newfound understanding that, when Britain would face a new challenge, “We know we can do it—we haven’t lost the ability....We have proved ourselves to ourselves. It is a lesson we must not now forget...Indeed it is a lesson which we must apply to peace just as we have learned it in war...We have the confidence and we must use it.”<sup>267</sup>

Initially, the ‘Falklands Factor’ was self-perpetuating. According to polling conducted from 21-23 June, a whopping 45% of Britons opinion of Thatcher had “gone up.”<sup>268</sup> Thatcher described the period that follows as “back to normalcy.”<sup>269</sup> But that popular sentiment began to wither and fade.

### ***Reality’s Return: The National Rail Strike and “that question” of beginnings***<sup>270</sup>

Domestic issues—particularly labor disputes and arguments over wages and pensions—had the British public angry with the Prime Minister before Argentina invaded the Falklands. April brought with it the Crisis, May the naval war, and June the ground battle and victory. Naturally, most Britons were ready to move back to issues that impacted their daily lives. The first major domestic matter to emerge in the war’s wake

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<sup>267</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham,” 3 July 1982, CCOPR 486/82, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, margareththatcher.org.

<sup>268</sup> “Falklands War-Panel Survey,” 14 April-32 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>.

<sup>269</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 319.

<sup>270</sup> Young, *One of US*, 283.

was the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen’s (ASLEF) strike. The work stoppage began in the first days of July.<sup>271</sup> Train engineers desired—in a battle, now culminating, that had gone on since 1979—better wages and fixed work schedules. Thatcher, wanting British Rail to impose a “flexible workday” standard, forced British Rail to effectively shut down for a two week period.<sup>272</sup>

Contemporary accounts credited Thatcher with another “major victory” in ending the rail strike, but it still brought back the disunity of Thatcher’s leadership and reopened wounds of skirmishes fought before the Falklands War.<sup>273</sup> Thatcher resorted to vicious means to end the strike. Nicholas Ridley, one of Thatcher’s most trusted ministers and a man who executed her intent to the letter—carried out a plan to entirely “cut off the money supply to the strikers” and use “strong, mobile police reinforcements” at protests to incentivize unions cutting unfavorable deals with the government.<sup>274</sup>

It was during this crisis, and perhaps because of it, that Thatcher delivered her Cheltenham address. The speech attempted to quickly transfer over the ‘Falklands Factor’

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<sup>271</sup> The ASLEF strike is particularly interesting because of its timing and the intricacies of the British system. ASLEF’s parent group, the Trades Union Congress, was and is an umbrella for organized labor in Britain. The Labour Party has quite an odd setup. Its charter ties it directly to the Trades Union Congress, giving labor groups—hence the name of the party—significant voting power in Labour’s leadership elections. Though there is no evidence to support this idea, it seems unlikely that the Labour Party was not involved in attempting to derail Thatcher’s victory lap.

<sup>272</sup> The details of the strike are not relevant to the argument here, but the strikers desired an eight hour work day while British Rail and the government wanted a system where train engineers would be required to work anywhere from seven to nine hours, depending on the day.

<sup>273</sup> “British Railway strike ended as engineers Acquiesce,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1982. This study refrains from comparisons between Thatcher’s transportation work stoppage and Reagan’s Air Traffic Controller strike one year prior.

<sup>274</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 358-359.

to her domestic battles. She claimed the “mood of Britain” was now the “determination to overcome” obstacles like the *junta* and ASLEF. “And that's why the rail strike won't do,” Thatcher proclaimed. “We are no longer prepared to jeopardize our future just to defend manning practices agreed in 1919 when steam engines plied the tracks of the Grand Central Railway and the motor car had not yet taken over from the horse. What has indeed happened is that now once again Britain is not prepared to be pushed around.”<sup>275</sup> Thatcher was, in the short term, effective. She ended the strike that had served as a sore, of sorts, on her domestic agenda. She remained relatively popular. But she, quite clearly, was the most excited one in the room about Britain’s victory. Beneath the surface, large segments of Britain were still unsure why the war was fought and whether they should rejoice in the outcome—over 40% of Britons still did not support Thatcher.<sup>276</sup> In one summer poll, nearly half of the British public still felt that a UN “trusteeship” of the Islands was the best possible option—an alternative that might have been on the table without war.<sup>277</sup> Thatcher saw danger here: the more the public might have come to know about her rejection of peaceful solutions, the greater the possibility that the war would cease to be such a political asset.

Even as Thatcher worked to transition to a domestic conservative unity, of sorts, there was still the potential that new evidence would emerge casting Thatcher’s handling

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<sup>275</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham,” 3 July 1982, CCOPR 486/82, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, [margaretthatcher.org](http://margaretthatcher.org).

<sup>276</sup> “British Railway strike ended as engineers Acquiesce,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1982.

<sup>277</sup> “Falklands War-Panel Survey,” 14 April-32 June 1982, Market & Opinion Research International poll for *The Economist*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/49/The-Falklands-War-Panel-Survey.aspx>.

of the Falklands in a rather negative light. Just as Thatcher was time-bound during the April crisis to the arrival of the Task Force at the Islands, she was now in a race against the completion of the Franks Report, which would explore why exactly Britain had been so unprepared for the initial Argentine invasion. Thatcher, facing public pressure, had established a Committee of Inquiry, assigned with “review[ing] the way in which the responsibilities of Government in relation to the Falkland Islands and their Dependencies were discharged in the period leading up to the Argentine invasion.”<sup>278</sup> Lord Oliver Shewell Franks, a former diplomat and civil servant, was brought back from retirement to lead the investigation.<sup>279</sup> The committee was made up of equal parts Labour and Conservative members, and with full subpoena power, presented a real threat to Thatcher’s narrative. Problematic, too, was the committee’s plan to interview Francis Pym and Peter Carrington—the former an internal political rival of Thatcher’s who disagreed with her handling of the war, and the latter sacrificed in the Crisis’ early days to sustain Thatcher’s own leadership. Archival records of the OD(SA)’s final meetings show that Franks’s interviews caused more anguish for Thatcher and the War Cabinet than any other issue—even decisions on how to return Argentine prisoners or what to do with the Islands in the long run—in the aftermath of the war.<sup>280</sup>

Labour, incensed with Thatcher’s handling of the British Rail strike and galvanized by the potential of the Franks Report, finally began to fight back. Not only did the Left resist Thatcher’s domestic agenda, but they sensed an opening to attack Thatcher

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<sup>278</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 283.

<sup>279</sup> Keith Middlemas, “Obituary: Lord Franks,” *The Independent*, 17 October 1992.

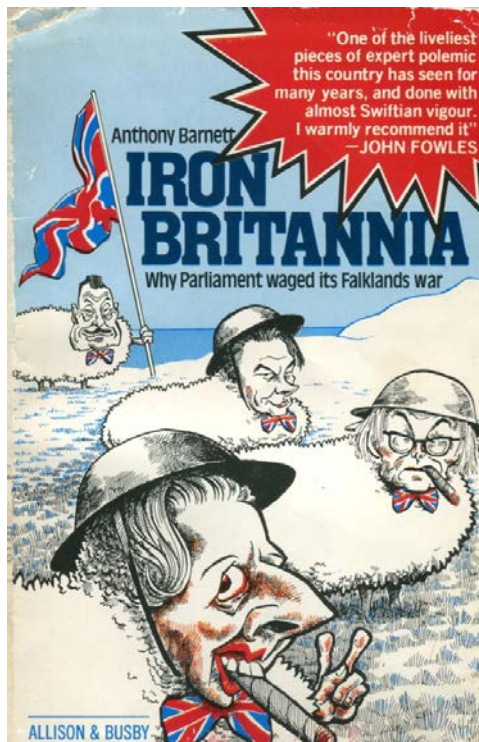
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-lord-franks-1557796.html>

<sup>280</sup> “Franks Report,” Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

on the decision to fight in the South Atlantic. On 21 August, Anthony Barnett completed *Iron Britannia: Why Parliament waged its Falklands war* [sic]. Selling at under £2, the book was first printed in left-leaning publications during August, and it was joined there by similar grumblings and misgivings from the Labour Party about Thatcher's war.<sup>281</sup> Though it didn't capture a large portion of the national conversation, its writing and publication alone demonstrate that Thatcher had not yet fully unified the nation or the political body behind Conservative policies or even the Falklands War. The cover openly mocks Thatcher, Nott, and other Conservative leaders, presenting them as Falklands sheep. Thatcher smokes a cigar—yet again, Churchill-lite. Perhaps most telling of all, the Prime Minister ironically flashes a peace sign, having just fought a bloody war, it seems, to save countless four-legged animals.

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<sup>281</sup> Barnett, *Iron Britannia*, 9.



*The cover of Anthony Barnett's Iron Britannia. (London: Allison and Busby, 1982) Cover illustration and design by John Minnion.*

Anonymous letters from service members began to surface in various left-leaning publications, with one recently returned sailor writing that “it seemed totally idiotic for two distant groups of men to be thrust at each other, on a politician’s say-so, and then go hell for leather...All this just didn’t make sense at all...Perhaps...somebody can tell me why!”<sup>282</sup> Thatcher realized sometime in late summer that she had begun too early to capitalize on a Falklands narrative that she had yet to fully establish. Britain had achieved a great and necessary victory, and as summer ended, it came time to sell it.

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<sup>282</sup> Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate*, 385.

## *Institutionalizing Victory*

Downing Street went to tremendous lengths in autumn 1982—particularly in the wake of books like Barnett’s—to frame the Falklands as a moral war, and Thatcher as the savior of the Islanders. The *Falklands Briefing* in particular demonstrates the propagandistic lengths Thatcher was willing to go to in order to sell the war in its aftermath. The series never made it to air—no reason is given in archival documents, but presumably the *BBC* was reluctant to broadcast such shameless bolstering—but it still paints a picture of the government’s intent. Each episode was short—about eleven or twelve minutes each—but the series’ message comes through clear.

Written by the Central Office of Information “on behalf of the British Government,” the series’ fourth episode outlines the Falklanders’ “long history of self-rule under the protection of the British Government.”<sup>283</sup> It describes Britons benevolently discovering the Islands aboard the HMS *Clio*. The documentary teaches viewers that “there are some 1,800 Islanders, practically all of them of British descent,” while showing generic clips of sheep or Islanders on horseback. The documentary describes Britain bringing “help with projects like the electric power station, the water purification plant, Stanley Airport, new equipment for the hospital, and new buildings for the schools.”<sup>284</sup> The documentary treats the viewers to a recounting of the diplomatic drama surrounding UNSC Resolution 502, which it, of course, sugarcoated. With a shot of Thatcher and Haig flashing across the screen, the documentary tells the viewer that “the

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<sup>283</sup> Central Office of Information, “Falklands Briefing No. 4 (Negotiations),” 27 August 1982, INF6/2158, UK Parliamentary Archives, (London, England).

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*



British Government pursued every possible means of achieving a negotiated peaceful settlement” before turning to war.<sup>285</sup>

But the documentary’s most emotional pitch comes towards the end of the episode—similar endings are found in nearly every other edition of *Falklands Briefing*—as the narrator tells the audience how “The [Falklands] episode has shown clearly why the Islanders were so reluctant to submit to Argentine sovereignty, and why it is so important that they should retain their freedom of choice.”<sup>286</sup> Throughout the concluding monologue, Number Ten wanted an “Aerial view of Islands, ‘We are British’ carved in field...Islanders holding a British flag...Children with small British flags, poster of the Queen on a doorway...Islanders wearing T shirt with ‘Falklands are British’ lettering; pan to close up of child’s face.”<sup>287</sup> These clips distorted reality. Reporters visiting the Islands in the wake of the Argentine departure found the Islanders “attitude to the British is a mixture of...deep mistrust, disappointment, and a sullen acceptance of the new occupying army amongst them...[They are] profoundly disillusioned.”<sup>288</sup> Such an image, though, would not lead Britons to believe the ‘Falklands Factor.’<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Eddy and Linklater, *War in the Falklands*, 283.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 282.



*A photograph meant to accompany an unproduced documentary on the Falklands after war's end. The sign reads "Keep the Falklands British." Courtesy: Fleet Photographic Unit, HMS Excellent.<sup>290</sup>*

Falklands Briefing Number 13, ostensibly educating the public on "UK Investment in Latin America" and how "it was British money which enabled the continent to develop," instead focuses *again* on why it was necessary to save the Islanders: they're just as British as Londoners.<sup>291</sup> While the narrator discusses Britain's positive economic impact on Argentina's neighbors, viewers are instead treated to an

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<sup>290</sup> Royal Navy, "Falkland Islands Children," FKD 2050, Photography Archives, Imperial War Museum, (London, England).

<sup>291</sup> Central Office of Information, "Falklands Briefing Number 13 UK Investment in Latin America," INF6/2158, UK Parliamentary Archives, (London, England).

establishing shot of the “Coastline of the Islands.”<sup>292</sup> Next, the script calls for shots of “Shops,” Churches,” a “Cricket match, Drinking in pub,” and “Snooker [pool] in pub.”<sup>293</sup> These are all, of course, intrinsically British activities. Thatcher feared the perception that she lacked morality and that she had mishandled the Falklands Crisis. The *Falklands Briefing* series was just a piece of a larger blitz to demonstrate her role in the war, that the war was a success, and that the war was worthwhile.<sup>294</sup>

Thatcher still wasn't content, though. She felt a Saint Paul's memorial service in the weeks after the war had been too somber an affair. Blasphemously, it contained a prayer for the Argentine war dead. Thatcher, irate and seeking a more glorious affair, decided to hold in October a victory celebration that had never materialized naturally in June or July.<sup>295</sup> And “what a wonderful parade” it was, according to Thatcher, who had much of the Task Force marching proudly through London as if they had returned home from the Falklands the previous week.<sup>296</sup> Vulcan bombers—which had played a limited role in the campaign—flew almost defiantly above Saint Paul with unnoticed symbolism. The parade was the perfect moment to mark the end of a “glorious chapter in the history of liberty.”<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Thatcher even reached out to the Falkland Island newspaper, *Penguin News*, hoping that—if it gained some notoriety—her friendly gesture might be noted in the British press at-large. Margaret Thatcher, Letter to Graham L. Bound, 29 July 1982, Edward Furdson, *The Falklands Aftermath: Picking up the pieces*, 312.

<sup>295</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 281.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 282.

<sup>297</sup> Margaret Thatcher, “Speech at the *Salute to the Task Force* lunch,” 12 October 1982, *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105034>



*“Vulcan bombers flying over the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral,” FKD 815(C), 12 October 1982, Imperial War Museum Photography Archives, (London, England).*

One particular moment from the 12 October parade stands out. The celebration was meant to mirror the British victory parade at the end of World War II in 1945—the procession even followed a similar route. When Churchill was Prime Minister, however, he placed himself well out of sight of the ‘saluting base’, where service members rendered salutes while passing in review. The monarch received and returned that honor instead. After her own parade, Thatcher held a lunch with its own ‘saluting base’. She didn’t invite a single member of the Royal Family to the publicized and photographed gathering, instead accepting the salutes herself while a military band played “Rule Britannia.”<sup>298</sup> The patriotic song has particular significance for the Falklands War—it

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<sup>298</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 281-283.

concludes with “Brittania rule the wave, Britons never, never, never will be slaves”—  
where a fallen colonial power defiantly defeated an enemy at sea.<sup>299</sup>



*“The Royal Navy contingent marching in parade.” FKD 817(C), 12 October 1982  
Imperial War Museum Photography Archives, (London, England).*

### *Applying lessons from the War’s beginnings*

In the final week of April, as Thatcher devoted herself to popularizing the war amongst the British public, she made crucial mistakes—remember “Rejoice!”—that derailed the effort. Determined not to allow anything similar to happen during the autumn

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<sup>299</sup> Percy A Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 2002. There are several different versions of the song, but this is the edition most commonly sung, so one can assume it was the rendition performed at the October gathering.

public relations campaign, Thatcher sent her private secretaries on a mission, of sorts, to quiet any potentially harmful accounts of the war or crisis from those involved. We also remember Anthony Parsons account of the war published in late 1982 in *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>300</sup> Parsons, as required by law, submitted his article for review on 21 October. In a handwritten letter to Nigel Williams attached to his draft, Parsons tells Number Ten that there is no “need to immaculate—the opinions are my own and the narrative reveals nothing which is not either public knowledge or well known in the UN.” Parsons asks Williams to correct any small “errors of fact” or typos that “may have crept in.” Parsons wrote in an informal tone to a friend, even signing the letter “Tony.”<sup>301</sup>

Williams responded in greater length than Parsons’s letter suggests he expected, and with a formal and stern voice. He spoke not for “Nigel,” but for “No. 10.” Thatcher had “no objection to the publication of this article”—done right, it would help build up her mystique—“but would like to see some changes to the text.” Williams goes on to outline several structural and argumentative alterations Number Ten required. He instructed Parsons that:

The sentence ‘Meanwhile I had been warned by London that an invasion of the Falkland Islands might be imminent’ be deleted. As you know, there is great interest at present in the sequence of events which led to the invasion. This is bound to be revived when the Franks Report is published... On page 3, [we] would like the words ‘tactical’ and ‘avoid involvement in the merits of the dispute over sovereignty on which we could not expect to secure majority support’ to be deleted.

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<sup>300</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>301</sup> Anthony Parsons, Note to ‘Nigel’, 21 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England).

Both of these could...lead to unfavourable comment by people who are inclined to argue that the Government's attitude on sovereignty has not always been sufficiently robust. Finally, on page 9, No. 10 ask that the reference to 'the Inner Cabinet' should be deleted. The sentence could simply read 'That weekend in London and at Chequers our final detailed position on the draft Agreement was worked out.'<sup>302</sup>

Besides the obvious stylistic weakness of Williams's edits—for example, in the final sentence removing a compelling subject in favor of the passive voice favored by Thatcher's American counterpart—the edits demonstrate a real fear of a delegitimization of Thatcher's hawkish appearance. If evidence came to light showing her reacting dovish to news of the initial Argentine invasion plans, the "Falklands factor" would work against Thatcher, rather than for her. Simultaneously, Williams demonstrates Number Ten's desire to make the war as apolitical as possible. Any mention of an "inner cabinet" takes away from the unity or necessity Thatcher wanted to have associated with the Falklands War.

The Parsons article was not the only occasion on which Thatcher or her private secretaries intervened in representations of the Crisis' early days—when Thatcher was at her weakest—to stop negative portrayals of the Prime Minister from entering the national dialogue. Thatcher planned on calling an election in the coming months, and when Number Ten got word of *The Falklands Play*—a *BBC* production initiated in October 1982, the name explains the contents—the Prime Minister's private secretaries went to work ensuring the potentially damaging production wasn't broadcast before the general

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<sup>302</sup> Nigel Williams, Response to Anthony Parsons on *International Affairs* article, 23 October 1982, FCO 58/2846, Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England); Chequers is the country retreat used by the Prime Minister—the British equivalent of Camp David.

election, if at all. The play—produced two decades later—did not present an overwhelmingly negative view of Thatcher. Instead, it showed her political leadership at its grittiest, a reality that still would not have aided in the sense of unity she strived to create around victory. Her private secretaries managed to halt production in 1982.

As the new year rolled around, Thatcher’s tremendous achievement in preventing any damage that might have come from the Franks Report became apparent. Presented to Parliament on 18 January, former Labour leader and Thatcher-rival James Callaghan commented that for the first 338 paragraphs, Franks “painted a picture” of Thatcher and her cabinet’s failures in the run-up to the Falklands War. The evidence—like the planned removal of HMS *Endurance* from the South Atlantic—overwhelmingly favors Thatcher critics. But in his concluding paragraph—after private, unrecorded meetings with the Prime Minister who handed him the job—Franks “chucked a bucket of whitewash” over the whole report and relieved Thatcher of any potential blame.<sup>303</sup> Writing that “we would not be justified in attaching any criticism or blame to the present Government for the Argentine *junta*’s decision to commit its act of unprovoked aggression,” Franks—who Hugo Young points out was known to have been impacted by his old age—absolved Thatcher of any blame.<sup>304</sup> As the *New York Times* noted after Franks’s committee published the report, Thatcher concentrated on “only three sentences—those concluding that the Government could have neither predicted nor prevented the Argentine attack on

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<sup>303</sup> Adrian Hamilton, “The one thing Chilcot won’t reveal is the truth: Those who think the establishment a myth should look to the inquiry’s membership,” *The Independent*, 26 November 2009.

<sup>304</sup> “Franks Report,” Kew, UK National Archives, (London, England); Young, *One of Us*, 283.



April 2,” rather than the 338 paragraphs that came first.<sup>305</sup> Had the British public had the time to pour over the entire document, they would have found “the large conclusions implicit in its detailed findings” that indicated Thatcher had indeed failed.<sup>306</sup> Of course, Britons had no interest in exploring the document itself, and Thatcher succeeded in stopping the final potential strike against her Falklands leadership.

### *Conclusion*

If Thatcher failed to capitalize on the Falklands War in the week before it began or in the weeks after it concluded, she engineered a tremendous turnaround in the autumn of 1982. The effectiveness of this campaign can be seen in poll numbers—Thatcher’s electoral triumph soon to come certainly reflects October and November’s efforts as much as April, May, and June’s. It is better measured, though, in the popular memory of the Falklands War and its aftermath. David Miliband, a major Labour politician and Britain’s foreign secretary under Tony Blair—party and title identifiers that indicate he should have a strong distaste for all things Margaret Thatcher—called the Franks Report the “gold standard” of investigative committees<sup>307</sup>. Truly, Thatcher had succeeded in

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<sup>305</sup> R.W. Apple, “Falkland Political Battle Far From Over in Britain,” 24 January 1983, *New York Times*.

<sup>306</sup> Young, *One of Us*, 284.

<sup>307</sup> Adrian Hamilton, “The one thing Chilcot won’t reveal is the truth: Those who think the establishment a myth should look to the inquiry’s membership,” *The Independent*, 26 November 2009.

making the Falklands War popular, even if it took six months from the final shot to fully institutionalize the victory.

## ***7. Epilogue***

### ***A Reminder: The War in Westminster***

*“When the Argentine troops invaded, Parliament suffered a rush of blood to the head.”  
-Alexander Chancellor, writing in the New York Times, 22 June 1982.<sup>308</sup>*

It is easy to forget the state of Thatcher’s government at the outset of the Falklands Crisis. By the end of 1982, Thatcher had manufactured terrific success. She had saved her own government from collapse and had outmaneuvered the American government to allow for a British invasion of the Falkland Islands. By October, she had magnificently used the war to build up her public persona and, eventually, to win her reelection. It is difficult to imagine that the Falklands Crisis almost brought down Thatcher. Perhaps there is no greater reminder, then, of Thatcher’s condition than the agenda she set for her Parliament in the first days of April.

When exactly Thatcher realized the Falklands Crisis might benefit her isn’t clear, though it likely came at outpouring of public support for the Task Force as it departed for the South Atlantic. No matter their views on a potential war, Londoners seem to have been blown away by Fieldhouse’s fleet. “For the first five days, everyone was depressed,” a London cab driver said retrospectively. “But then we all saw the fleet and were blown away. We had no idea we could raise such a navy! And let me tell you, we certainly couldn’t now.”<sup>309</sup> Parliament sets its agenda weeks out, so in this first perilous

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<sup>308</sup> Alexander Chancellor, “Victory’s Other Gains,” 22 June 1982, *New York Times*.

<sup>309</sup> Interview with London taxi driver, January 7, 2015.

week where Thatcher lost her foreign minister and appeared doomed to the Prime Ministerial scrap heap, she chose to direct the House of Commons' business away from the South Atlantic. Perhaps this was possible because Britain in April 1982 was not a fully mobilized nation. The government and citizenry had not yet devoted their attention from regular business. The lower house conducted almost exclusively 'non-Falklands' business.

On 7 April, just Al Haig's shuttle diplomacy kicked into gear, Parliament debated the "European Communities Order of 1982. The order itself, a subject of disagreement, read as follows: "This order designates the commissioners of Customs and Excise to exercise powers to make regulations conferred by section 2(2) of the European Communities Act of 1972, in relation to the Payment of excise duty." On 20 April, Parliament debated and passed the "Hovercraft Act," as ridiculous as it sounds. The act adjusted the "1981 regulations to United Kingdom registered hovercraft to all other hovercraft within UK territorial waters."

The Ministry of Defense had bills and debates over the 'controversial' pay of the Royal Air Force's reservists—of all the services, the RAF was the only one without a critical role in the Task Force. From 20 through 23 April, Parliament debated bills ranging from the Sea Fisheries Act to the Home Insulation Act—none of which had much to do with the Falklands.<sup>310</sup>

Clearly there was tremendous discussion of trade regulation in April 1982. About two-thousand pages of official parliamentary papers resulted from 31 March through 23

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<sup>310</sup> "Debate on the Sea Fisheries, Boats and Methods of Fishing Act," 23 April 1982, HC/CL/JO/10/1650, Parliamentary Archives, (London, England).

April. Only in the last week of that period is the Crisis mentioned at all in the Commons' official agenda. There were no discussions in Parliament of trade sanctions against Latin American countries aiding the Argentines. In fact, the only mention of Latin America in trade came in the first days of the crisis when the Treasury discussed the finances of an obscure group called the Belize Public Officers' Widows' and Children's pension fund. Clearly the Falklands Crisis alone, without a shooting war, wasn't forming into much of a crisis at all. Perhaps early on, as the government fell into chaos, Thatcher desired such a perception. In a meeting on 7 April, there was even discussion on how to answer questions in Parliamentary debate on the payload of the British Task Force. The conclusion, before Thatcher realized the war's full potential, was that the armament of the Task Force should be downplayed and cabinet members should instead highlight the diplomatic attachments—of which there were few—to the fleet.<sup>311</sup> But as she formed a Churchillian War Cabinet, she desired to make the Crisis a real crisis, which required, in turn, a real war. After the war, and after Thatcher convinced the British public that victory in the Falklands was a good thing for Britain, she finally sought pay dirt at the voting booth.

### *The Election of '83*

In the summer of 1983, Thatcher won reelection overwhelmingly. The Labour leader and Thatcher's primary opponent, Michael Foot, had released his party's pre-

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<sup>311</sup> "OD(SA) First Meeting," CAB 148/211, April 7, 1982, UK National Archives, Kew. (London, England)

election manifesto and titled it *The New Hope for Britain*. Foot's party was clearly doomed to defeat—one Labour MP called the document the “longest suicide note in history.”<sup>312</sup> Thatcher was so confident in her public opinion figures that, she disclosed in her memoir, she decided to use the election as an opportunity to make Geoffrey Howe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and second most powerful man in Britain, feel better for having been “excluded...from the Falklands War Cabinet...Naturally,” she later wrote, “he welcomed the chance is chance to widen his role.”<sup>313</sup> Thatcher's confident streak did not end here.

In Britain, the House of Commons holds a general election every five years. If the government crumbles, or if the Prime Minister feels her or she is in a position of terrific strength, the Prime Minister can call an early election. This carries with it great risks, especially in the latter case—it obviously presents the appearance of a Prime Minister thinking only on political questions, rather than those of governance. Thatcher had even promised that she would not “go to the country”—call an early election—before the end of her fourth year.<sup>314</sup> She planned on an election in October, but because of her manufactured Falklands momentum, Thatcher took the risk and called the early election.<sup>315</sup> She had unofficially been campaigning by propping up the Falklands since October 1982, so no significant amount of planning was necessary. The Conservative

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<sup>312</sup> Nyta Mann, “Foot's message of hope to left,” 14 July 2003, *BBC*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/3059773.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3059773.stm).

<sup>313</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 281. This thesis discusses Howe's purview during the Falklands Crisis in Chapter 3. Specifically, Thatcher excluded Howe from the War Cabinet in an attempt to consolidate power.

<sup>314</sup> Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 281.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, 288.

Party won 397 seats to Labour's 209, giving Margaret Thatcher the largest parliamentary majority since 1945. The Guardian—a left-leaning publication—provided a defeatist account that summed up Labour's misery: “the overwhelming Conservative victory which had seemed inevitable from the start of the campaign steadily came to pass.”<sup>316</sup>

The new year and reelection also brought along key cabinet changes. By the end of summer 1983, Thatcher had entirely revamped the structure of British parliamentary government to best suit her style, based on her experiences during the Falklands Crisis. Her cabinet at the outset of the Falklands Crisis looked entirely different one year later. John Nott had resigned, ostensibly for personal reasons. Truly, he had been forced towards the door by Thatcher and claims to have jumped himself due to a distaste for her leadership style. Carrington, of course, was gone in the first days of the Crisis. Thatcher also excitedly dismissed his successor, Pym, immediately after securing victory in the summer of 1983.

### ***A Mission Continued: Reinforcing a legacy after electoral victory***

Having gone through the trouble of engineering the ‘Falklands Factor,’ Thatcher continued to strengthen it—and perhaps over-rely on it yet again—even after election victory in 1983. Perhaps the most lasting physical reminder of the ‘Falklands Factor’ is found at Britain's most holy site: the Crypt at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. There, in

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<sup>316</sup> “Tories hail a massive majority,” *The Guardian*, 10 June 1983, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/1983/jun/10/conservatives.electionspast?redirection=guardian>

June 1985, Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth enshrined a memorial plaque, ostensibly to honor the British service members who died during the Falklands War.<sup>317</sup> As noted, 255 Britons died in the fighting. A tragic figure, yes, but nowhere near the gargantuan death totals British forces sustained during the First and Second World Wars. Those conflicts, though, have memorial plaques no more than one-fifth the size of the Falklands War. The Falklands plaque also occupies a piece of prime real estate: on the map of the crypt, there are over sixty numbered memorials to various British wars or political figures. The main staircase is labeled ‘1’. ‘2’—facing directly towards you as you enter the crypt—is the South Atlantic Task Force memorial plaque.<sup>318</sup> Still, nobody seems to notice its presence—a full slate of employees working the help desk at St. Paul’s entrance, when asked by the author, were not aware there even was a Falklands memorial plaque in crypt.<sup>319</sup> Still, the construction of such a large plaque, seemingly based on the Vietnam Memorial, demonstrates the Prime Minister’s continued desire after her 1983 election to remind Britons of their greatest victory since the end of the Second World War.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> “Unveiled in Crypt of St. Paul’s in London,” *Associated Press*, 14 June 1985, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1985/Unveiled-in-Crypt-of-St-Paul-s-in-London/id-6e23dfbefedc5039bdc8f97941d174db>;

Furdson, *Falklands Aftermath*, 212.

<sup>318</sup> Author visit to St. Paul’s Cathedral.

<sup>319</sup> Author interview with St Paul’s Cathedral welcome desk staff, St. Paul’s Cathedral, 5 January 2015.

<sup>320</sup> The Vietnam Memorial opened in March 1982, just days before the onset of the Falklands Crisis. Though a war of greater significance, death, and sadness, the physical resemblance the Vietnam Memorial wall bares to the South Atlantic Task Force plaque is striking.





*The Falklands War memorial plaque at St. Paul's Cathedral. It reads: "In honour of the South Atlantic Task Force and to the abiding memory of all those who gave their lives." Photograph taken by the author.*

The Falklands 'campaigns'—from the landing at San Carlos to the parade in London—ensured Thatcher's place in British politics for nearly a decade. Only after her personality wore thin on the rest of her party—"collective leadership" truly not her style—did the Conservatives decide to replace her with John Major, possibly the blandest politician in British politics in the late-twentieth century and most definitely Thatcher's opposite in personality and leadership style. Even years after the 'Iron Lady' took her leave from Britain's political stage, though, the Islands that provided her greatest moments in leadership would remain the most significant issue in Argentine-British relations.

### *Falklands today—still in dispute*

Argentina may have lost the Falklands under its *junta*, but new democratically elected leadership eventually reignited the nationalistic Argentine drive for the archipelago.<sup>321</sup> As Argentina struggles through protests, recession, political scandals—and possibly a return to political assassinations—President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has, like Galtieri, tried to use the Falklands as a diversion. In 2013 she penned an open letter to Prime Minister David Cameron, demanding the United Kingdom “abide by the resolutions of the United Nations” and “return the territories to the Argentine Republic.”<sup>322</sup>

Arguments over who rightfully owns the Islands have not changed much over the years. Britain still clings to self-determination. The Islanders are, after all, almost entirely British descendants. In March 2013, 99.9% of the Islands voted to remain a British territory.<sup>323</sup> In the wake of war, just as it had before Argentine aggression superseded any peaceful handover of the Islands, the United Nations has again coalesced around the idea

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<sup>321</sup> On 14 June 1982, massive protests broke out across Buenos Aires, contesting the state of the Argentine Economy, the ‘Dirty War,’ and the *junta*’s strategic mismanagement of the Falklands. On 18 June, Galtieri was deposed, and by October a popular uprising threw out the government for good.

<sup>322</sup> Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, “Letter to David Cameron,” 3 January 2013. [http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02441/argentina-letter\\_2441510a.png](http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02441/argentina-letter_2441510a.png)

<sup>323</sup> Steve Wilson, “Argentina President Cristina Kirchner renews Falkland Islands claim at UN meeting,” *The Telegraph*, 07 August 2013.

of Britain and Argentina negotiating an eventual handover of the Islands, “essentially favouring Argentina.”<sup>324</sup>

British military defenses on the Islands today prevent the breakout of hostilities in the South Atlantic. Whereas in 1982 only the aging HMS *Endurance* patrolled the South Atlantic, Britain now garrisons over 1,000 troops on East Falkland. Built one month before the memorial opening at St. Paul’s crypt, the Royal Air Force base at Mount Pleasant essentially ensures that no conventional military attack on the Falklands could succeed.<sup>325</sup> Of course, British indifference is now a far greater threat to the Islands than a surprise invasion.

Britain is again behind in keeping its population interested in the Falklands. The Government has resorted to a series of odd and unsuccessful measures to buffer the importance of the Islands in the British political imagination. *Falkland Focus*, a self-described “quarterly digest compiled by the Falkland Islands Government, London Office,” has for over twenty years published articles meant to buffer Britons’ perception of the practical value of the Islands. Article headlines like “Oil in the Falklands?” don’t inspire confidence when they’ve been recycled for two decades.<sup>326</sup> Parliament distributed a pamphlet several years ago called “Why the Falklands Matter.” While its first page details the “Islanders wish for nothing more than the right to live in freedom in the country of their birth,” the rest of the pamphlet shows Britons all there is to do in the

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<sup>324</sup> Alexandra Olsen, “UN committee backs Argentina over Falkland Islands,” *The Independent*, 26 June 2014.

<sup>325</sup> <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/rafhistorytimeline198089.cfm>

<sup>326</sup> “Falkland Focus: A Quarterly digest compiled by the Falkland Islands Government, London Office,” December 1993, UK Parliamentary Archives, (London, England).

Falklands, or, in other words, why the British public should care about the Islands at all.<sup>327</sup>



*A pamphlet, printed by the British Government during the 2000s, showing the value present in the Falkland Islands. Also present are blurbs on Education, Oil, Science, Agriculture, Fishing and Economy. Courtesy UK Parliamentary Archive, (London, England).*

The path forward is unclear. Without the threat of an invasion, it is difficult to imagine any more than continued squabbling over the Islands from the Argentines and anything other than casual indifference from the British. Either way, the Falkland Islands do continue to play an incredibly disproportionate role in cross-Atlantic relations.

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While Thatcher may have made an unlikely war popular in 1983, it's made little more than a superficial impact on Britain's memory of the Iron Lady. The Imperial War Museum in London has several gift shops, one of which is entirely devoted to printing

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<sup>327</sup> "Why the Falklands Matter," UK Parliamentary Archive, (London, England).

photographs and posters from the high points of Britain’s military experience in the twentieth century. The search computer in the shop reveals 356 photographs of Winston Churchill, in all his glory, available for purchase. A search for Thatcher: ‘No results found.’<sup>328</sup> In the research for this study, Thatcher weighed one unlikely policy option again and again: a possible invasion of mainland Argentina. The mission undoubtedly would have failed, with Britain losing any respect internationally—it would’ve been Suez on steroids. But Thatcher, the opposite of a “collective leader,” pondered the unthinkable anyways.

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<sup>328</sup> Author visit to Imperial War Museum, London on 6 January 2015.

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