

The Waning Tide of Imperialism: The Falkland Islands War as a Microcosm of a Changing International Political Policy

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The Falkland Islands are an archipelago off the coast of Argentina consisting of roughly two hundred islands. There is nothing exemplary about them; the vast majority of the land is desolate, rocky or marshy. There is not an indigenous population. Prior to development, there were not any economically driven motives for colonization. However, this unknown region had been a source of contention between Argentina and the United Kingdom for over a century and a half prior to the eruption of conflict on 2 April 1982, when Argentina forced British settlers off the islands. Although the United Kingdom regained a tenuous hold on the area in less than two months, the conflict still has not died. Until the problem of sovereignty is resolved, Argentina and the United Kingdom will be at odds.

The Falklands War provided each nation with a way to hide its inadequacies. The 1970s saw fundamental changes in the politics of both Argentina and Britain. In 1975, Margaret Thatcher became the head of the Conservative Party in Great Britain. The Dirty War began in Argentina the following year. By the end of the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister of Great Britain and Argentina was in the throws of a bloody internal conflict with many Argentineans subject to incarceration, torture and secret murder. Britain had also begun a downward spiral on the political front. Although the nation still saw itself as an imperialist world force, other world leaders questioned its dominance. Robert Vansittart, a British politician, stated, "It would be rather fatal to let people in South America think

Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, School of Languages, Cultures, and World Affairs, College of Charleston
Volume 7, 2008: pp. 248-266

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that they can treat us with impunity. This would be really more important than the Islands themselves” (Beck 55). Vansittart believed that if Britain allowed a peripheral country to exert control, it would cease to exist as a superpower. Both countries had to divert attention away from their shortcomings. The diversion: a battle over the small conglomeration of islands off the coast of Argentina known as the Falkland Islands or *las Islas Malvinas*.

With a final gambit to solidify its place as a world superpower, Britain could deny that the age of imperialism had come to a close. Argentina could deny its political and economic crisis by launching a “David and Goliath” battle against Britain. But the ensuing war forced each nation to realize that a new international political policy would have to be adopted. Britain and Argentina battled precariously between the Old World Imperialism and the New World politics whereby the “David’s” of the world would have slightly more even footing.

Britain, unable to reconcile its slow fall from global dominion, sought to use the Falklands as a means to prolong the inevitable. If Britain were to secure the islands, the country could sustain its reputation as a key global actor. As such, Britain reverted to earlier imperialistic tactics. The Falklands would be claimed by the Crown and would serve the desires of the mother country.

Likewise, Argentina saw the Falklands as a way for the relatively new South American country to find a foothold in the international arena. Argentina had been categorized along with its South American neighbors as a “developing” nation. As such, Argentina could not participate on a level playing field with “developed” states. Remarkably enough, Argentina’s economic and social progress was strikingly similar to other European settler colonies such as Australia and Canada (Marchak 55). With the advent of the new millennium (1900), the Argentine per capita income rivaled that of Germany and most other western and northern European countries. This golden age of economic development reached its apex and began to decline during the 1930s when Britain entangled the new nation in trade agreements such as the Roca-Runciman Treaty, which were unfavorable to Argentina. These trade agreements had political consequences as well. Argentina’s “Napoleon complex” allowed the nation to rationalize its decision to hold on to the Falklands so ardently. To garner public

support, Argentina proclaimed that it was protecting the neighboring Falkland Islands from the scavengers of the Old World.

This paper will begin with a history of European claims based on the voyages of explorers during the Age of Discovery when European nations sent ships to the New World to colonize. It will then highlight Portuguese, French, British, and Spanish claims in the Falklands. There will then be an analysis of the complex issues surrounding the claim of legitimacy first by Spain and then Argentina against Great Britain, based on such documents as the 1604 Anglo-Spanish Peace Treaty and the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht (Calvert 408).

The paper will continue with an explanation of the views of Argentina and the United Kingdom following the conflict and the continuing question of sovereignty and potential solutions to the dispute. This foundation will progress to an analysis of the decade leading up to the Falkland Islands War with specific attention paid to British foreign policy and Argentinean internal agitation. These very particular preconditions will serve to prove that this event was pivotal in the transition between the former imperialistically driven world to a new world order dominated by international cooperation and global agendas.

History of Imperialism and Colonialism in the Falkland Islands

Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, international politics were dominated by the whims of imperial superpowers in Europe. Much of South and Central America succumbed to the imperialistic designs of European nations in the sixteenth century, although squabbles over the spoils continued.

Early colonizers had inevitably come into contact with the Falkland Islands. Even though the Falklands were in actuality little more than a heap of rocks, their location near the mainland made them strategically tempting. The debate over their ownership eventually included not only Spain and Portugal, but Britain and France as well. Amerigo Vespucci, an explorer sailing for Portugal, captained the first voyage that discovered the islands in 1502. Spain's Magellan and Camargo spotted the archipelago in 1520 and 1540, respectively. Britain entered the political scene in 1592 with John Davis. An Anglo-Spanish Peace treaty was drafted in 1604 to resolve contested claims.

This document voided the rights of sovereignty based on discovery while still leaving the issues of sovereignty and discovery unresolved (Kinney 38). The Treaty of Münster in 1648 gave legitimacy to the Spanish colonial systems and granted them a monopoly on trade with the colonists (Reisman 292). Spain further fought for control and achieved dominion over the navigation of the high seas off the coast of its colonies in the Second Treaty of Madrid in 1670, which was recognized by England. Despite this dense history of exploration and negotiation, it was not until John Strong, a British explorer, landed on one of the islands in 1690 that any European actually set foot on any of the Falklands (Kinney 38). This would later provide Britain one of the most important justifications for its sovereignty.

In 1765, Great Britain secured another precarious symbol of its dominion by founding Port Egmont (Reisman 294). When colonists abandoned this settlement later that same year, they left behind a watering place and vegetable garden as testament to British sovereignty and presence (Reisman 292). The British attempted to establish a holding again in 1766, when Captain John McBride secured Britain's claim by further developing Port Egmont and commanding a ship to remain behind. Over the next few years, debates raged involving French as well as Spanish claims to the islands. Britain stayed quiet during these arguments, maintaining its presence in Port Egmont. However, Britain could not stay shielded from the international dispute for long, and in 1770 Spanish commander Don Juan Ignacio de Madariaga evicted the British when he visited the settlement with five warships and roughly one thousand men (Reisman 293).

Still resolute on keeping its smallholding, Britain began to bully Spain with threats of war. Unable to maintain forces on the islands, Spain withdrew and Port Egmont was re-established by Captain Stott. But as international trade began to wane at the end of the eighteenth century, Britain too was forced to abandon the majority of its smaller overseas garrisons. By 1776, it had left the port, which was ultimately destroyed in 1780 under orders from Madrid (Reisman 294). After Spain abandoned the Falklands in 1811, the territory was again open to colonization. In 1820, Argentina officially claimed the Falkland Islands as its own territory by establishing its own colony on the islands (Hastings and Jenkins 6). But in 1833, Britain once more asserted its

claim, challenging the validity of ordinances made in favor of Spain by the Pope. Britain stressed that discovery alone was inadequate in securing a title to the islands, asserting instead that peaceful occupation was the guideline to the acquisition of territory. Thus, Britain established the Crown Colony in 1841.

Struggles Between Spain, Britain and Later Argentina

The Falklands have not been able to shirk their negative first impression as a wasteland. As recently as 18 May 1982, Lord Shackleton Chair of the Royal Geographical Society, confirmed that

People think of the islands as being bleak and barren ... Moving about in the 'camp' is either on horseback or by Land-Rover, on tracks, crossing streams, and it is difficult because the land is boggy ... and there are no roads ... There are no very high hills, and typically the hilltops are rocky. (1)

Despite the character of the islands, Shackleton emphasizes the potential economic benefits of British occupation. He observes, for example, that the Falklands might be used as a stopping point on the trade route between Britain and Australia. Additionally, South Georgia is positioned in the center of an important fishery (Shackleton 3). Such arguments have always been less important than the perspective of the islands as a strategic colonial outpost.

While Great Britain based its claim to the islands on the history of its settlements, Argentina relied on the historic Spanish claims. Spain, the recognized colonial power of Argentina, pulled out of the Falklands in 1811 and left the islands under the control of the Argentine Vice-Royalty. This figurehead ceded control to the new Argentine government known as the United Provinces of Argentina. Thus, power was transferred from the Spanish colonial powers to the new Argentinean government (Kinney 40). Political historian Jorge A. Fraga argued:

The simple geographical, historical, and legal truths, without any exaggeration, constitute the best defense of our rights of sovereignty ... the Malvinas are Argentine—for historical

reasons they were Spanish by inheritance until 1833, when they were usurped by Great Britain. For geographic reasons, because they lie within the Argentine continental shelf, only 346 kilometers away ... For reasons of international law, as from Tordesillas and successive treaties through to Nootkas Sound—1790, they were always Spanish and Argentina inherited them, occupied them, and exercised sovereignty over them... And lastly because, from 1833 onwards, which was the year in which we were attacked, we have never given them up, nor will we ever do so! (qtd. in Beck 73)

According to Fraga, the British invasion of 1833 illegally ended Argentinean governance of the Falklands. His series of arguments reflects the justifications on which Argentina relied as it began to assert its own right to re-establish its possession of the islands. The stage was set for an imperial struggle between the Old World Empire of Britain and the New World Argentinean upstart.

Argentina: The Development of the “Dirty War”

In the early 20th century, Argentina had far surpassed its neighbouring countries and had attained the economic status of several European countries. Still, the United Kingdom and other trading partners treated Argentina in the same manner as other South American countries. An example of this injustice is with the 1933 Roca-Runciman Treaty, which “applied to Argentina a theory of underdevelopment” (Marchak 45). Although applicable to the majority of other Latin American countries, Roca-Runciman did not suit the Argentine economic situation. This Treaty, a byproduct of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, was a means for Britain to protect the meat supply market in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the imperial power did not consider the affects such an agreement would have on its economic partner. This preferential treatment of Britain was further continued with the Eden-Malbrán Treaty of 1936. Although Argentina certainly should not have been categorized with the other nations of South America initially, after being viewed as “developing” and being treated as such on the international scene, it was only a matter of time before the assumptions became reality.

Economic instability translated to political instability. Prior to 1930, government leaders in Argentina had all been elected. In the mid-1930s, Argentina resorted to a different trend of military-style governments: leaders came to power via military coup d' états and proceeded to restrict and rig elections (Marchak 48-49). “[Another] deep shift in Argentina’s political culture seems to have occurred around 1970. While occasional outbreaks of violence had been known earlier, they were not typical” (Collier 478). During the Dirty War (1976-1983), the military regime worked tirelessly to root out subversives and radicals.

Reminiscent of a Holocaust-style mentality, General Ibérico Saint Jean wrote during the height of the Dirty War:

Primero mataremos a todos los subversivos, luego mataremos a sus colaboradores, después ... a sus simpatizantes, en seguida ... a aquellos que permanecen indiferentes, y finalmente mataremos a los tímidos.

First we kill all of the subversives, then we will kill those who collaborate with them, then ... their sympathizers, next ... those who remain undecided, and finally we will kill the timid ones. (qtd. in Potash 93; my translation)

In *War in the Falklands*, David Feldman suggests that in just over two years upwards of 18,000 Argentineans disappeared (17). *Los desaparecidos* (the disappeared) of the 1970s included any person forcibly taken by the government, whose whereabouts remain unknown, and who were likely victims of torture and murder. It is improbable that any truly accurate numbers will ever be gathered.

In the “Dirty War,” the government targeted mostly the young, the radical and the middle-class. Additionally, Argentina witnessed “the most severe onslaught against the press by any government in hemispheric history, with 84 journalists among the 8,960 persons originally documented as killed or missing in 1983 after the military left power” (Knudson 93).

Those in power saw the media as a way to cloak their failures and to bolster and promote their successes. Meanwhile, Argentina was crumbling under a devastating economic crisis and large-scale civil

unrest against the military regime. News of horrendous human rights violations became a daily occurrence. The capitalist ventures of the 1970s were being thwarted and companies were being driven out of Argentina. There had also been a dramatic decrease in imports because of the lack of faith in the Argentinean economy (Saloman). All of these events led to the deterioration in value of the peso, which inevitably led to a stricter bank policy and widespread unemployment. As a result, new social groups began to rise up in protest against the military junta in control.

With a growing resentment about to bubble over, those in power had to bring the focus of the nation away from their internal economic and political situations. General Leopoldo Galtieri sought to do this by contesting British control of the Falklands. In 1982, the Argentinean government thus occupied the Falklands. Knowing that surrendering these islands would once again harm the morale of the Argentinean people, Galtieri fought back. He demonized the British government and reassured his people with the promise of United States support. These manipulations masked the crumbling economic situation and the brewing turmoil over human rights abuses, if only for a short time.

United States Political Inconsistencies in the Falklands War

In the 1980s, power conflicts tended to revolve around the desires of super powers. In the Western Hemisphere, this meant the United States. As early as the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the United States declared that it would protect all American countries – in South, Central, and North America – from European colonizing and imperialistic forces. President Andrew Jackson supported a strong foreign policy consisting of a “conciliatory approach with a willingness to accept practical solutions to problems in foreign affairs, but always ready to act with ‘promptness and energy’ to make foreign nations ‘sorely feel’ the consequences of treating the United States contumaciously” (Remini qtd. in Klafter 407).

The United States had flexed its political muscles concerning the Falkland Islands long before the Argentinean aggression of 1982. Towards the end of the 1970s, incidents in the Falkland Islands nearly brought the United States to the brink of war with Argentina and resulted in a cessation of diplomatic relations between the two nations.

By the 1980s, peaceful diplomatic relations had resumed (Klafter 395).

With this in mind, the United States seemed pledged to use its “big stick” policy to prevent a European power from gaining control in Latin America. However, the situation in 1982 presented the United States with a dilemma. Argentina’s reputation as a country plagued by human rights violations placed the United States in a compromising position. Instead of focusing on Argentina’s past human rights violations, President Ronald Reagan developed a geopolitical doctrine of South Atlantic security in order to justify strengthening relations between the two countries. However, this policy was prevented from coming into fruition until the election of a strong, anti-Communist official, who did not come to power until 1981 with General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (Feldman 2). Galtieri began his rule by imposing an anti-Communist policy. The praise he received from the United States encouraged him to take a hardline position on the Falkland Islands situation (Feldman 7). He therefore adopted a “force-if-necessary” policy in taking control of the Falklands from the United Kingdom and worked to further gain United States’ support by freeing human rights victims.

Argentina placed a great deal of faith in the belief that the United States would come to its aid when the nation began its attack on the Falkland Islands. According to political journalist David Lewis Feldman, Argentina acted with such abruptness because it was

conditioned by the Reagan administration overtures towards a grand ‘anti-Communist’ alliance; an increase in the frequency and prestige of high-level contacts between the U.S. and Argentina between 1980-1982; the cultivation of official links between Galtieri (Argentine Army Chief-of-Staff) and high-ranking U.S. national security officials; the intense, personal diplomacy of the former Secretary; and by covert efforts by Argentina to extend and strengthen U.S.-Argentine ties. (1)

When Argentina failed to receive the anticipated aid from the United States, its chances of resolving the Falkland Islands dispute in its favor declined precipitously.

The United States decided to adopt a policy of neutrality in the

conflict. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick stated that the United States would continue its policy of neutrality on the issue of sovereignty and that this “should preclude Washington from viewing Argentina’s actions as armed aggression” (Hastings and Jenkins 103). Argentina took this inaction as a form of undeclared support and advanced with plans for a forceful invasion of the Falkland Islands.

Despite this decision, the US voted to pass Resolution 502 in April of 1982 at the United Nations Security Council that discussed the Falklands conflict. This Resolution essentially demanded the withdrawal of Argentinean forces from the Falkland Islands. It should not be surprising that the United States would vacillate between neutrality and action. The United States, with its tangled alliances, was constantly trying to keep its promises. In this scenario, it had pledged to aid both Britain and Argentina. To protect itself, Kirkpatrick suggested that the US would remain neutral until aggressive actions had indeed occurred. The Monroe Doctrine, which might have justified U.S. protection for Argentina, was considered inapplicable, since the “unlawful resort to force did not originate outside the hemisphere” (U.S. House in Feldman 13). Thus, Argentina was left without an international ally in its fight for control over the Falkland Islands.

Likewise, the United Kingdom was left baffled by the indecision of the United States many times over the course of the Falklands debacle. Regardless of her interestingly close bond with President Ronald Reagan, Thatcher was blindsided by Reagan’s response when the Falkland Islands conflict came to a head. She had expected support for her invasion while Reagan sought to act as more of a mediator between the two countries. Reagan was uncomfortable with displeasing the Argentinean junta, since he saw this Latin American dictator as a “bulwark against communism” (Reitan 47). He did not want the Galtieri regime to fall.

Still, having a strong ally in the Western hemisphere was one of the chief strategies of the Thatcher administration. Placing so much faith in the United States superpower would either win the Falklands for Britain or essentially remove them from Western politics. Even as Thatcher placed the majority of her eggs in the proverbial American basket, the Argentinean military junta also believed they had amassed

a measure of American support. The military regime in Argentina calculated that, with the support of the Reagan administration in Washington and with the earned endorsement by the Non-Aligned Movement of the Argentine claim to sovereignty, Britain would hesitate to attack its troops (Kavanagh 157). Britain, the Argentine government hoped, would find that she had no support from other international backers and would thus reason that unilateral military action would be too much of a risk.

In June 1882, when British victory appeared to be all but certain, Spain and Panama suggested Resolution 502. This Resolution called for an immediate cease-fire by both sides and a withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falklands. Much to the chagrin of Argentina, this Resolution, which appeared to favor the United Kingdom, was supported by the United States (Feldman 12). Until this point, the United States had been going back and forth which policy it would adopt regarding this altercation. At some points, based on previous alliances and promises, the United States looked to be inclined to support Argentina. Conversely, in several cryptic press conferences, the United States successfully led the United Kingdom to believe that support was on their side. Ultimately, the United States told Argentina that it wished to remain neutral while at the same time supported the United Kingdom's initiative for "liberating" the Falklands.

A Brief Discourse on British Foreign Policy During the 1980s

To understand why the Falklands War of 1982 was inevitable from a British perspective, it is imperative to have a basic comprehension of British foreign policy in the years leading up to this conflict. At the advent of the 1980s, the British political situation was rapidly approaching a crossroads. The leaders charged with governing the nation were being replaced and the platforms of these new leaders drastically differed from those of the Labour Party that had dominated post-war governments in the 1960s and 1970s.

The desire for change sizzled in the air during the months leading up to the elections for a new prime minister, who would begin his or her tenure in office in the spring of 1979. Britain was on the decline and only a strong and charismatic public figure would allow for the once-noble country to reassert its influence on a world-wide scale. As

Energy Secretary Nigel Lawson suggested at the Patrick Hutber Memorial Lecture in London:

It became the accepted wisdom, not merely that we were as a nation, in a phase of relative decline which might soon become absolute, not to say terminal; but that our social cohesion, our political institutions, our very governability and even national integrity were in an advanced and probably irreversible state of decay. (Riddell 6)

The new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, sought to make a sharp break from her predecessors by adopting a strictly pro-Britain perspective even at the cost of diplomatic relations (Peele 191). In this, Thatcher solidified her growing public persona as an adamant advocate for the promotion of British interests. In the final broadcast before the May 1979 election Margaret Thatcher's voice sounded across the airwaves:

Somewhere ahead lies greatness for our country again. This I know in my heart. Look at Britain today and you may think that an impossible dream. But there is another Britain of thoughtful people, tantalizingly slow to act, yet marvelously determined when they do. At the heart of a new mood in the nation must be a recovery of our self-confidence and our self-respect. Nothing is beyond us ... It is given to us to demand an end to decline and to make a stand against what Churchill described as the long dismal drawling tides of drift and surrender, of wrong measurements and feeble impulses. (Riddell 184)

Margaret Thatcher, with her foreign policy, strove "to put the *Great* back into Britain" (Ungar 181).

The Thatcher Conservative Party also sought to break from its predecessor with respect to Britain's role on the international scale. While the Labour Party maintained an essentially inwardly focusing platform for its governmental policies, Thatcher began an aggressive international assault, striving to place Britain on a level playing ground

with the United States and other major world powers. Thatcher did not sow her imperialistic seeds solely in the South Atlantic. Rather, she spread her influence to other fledgling areas around the world. A prime example of Thatcher's growing interest in imperialism is evidenced in the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia conflict. What the Prime Minister had hoped to be a quick boost in public opinion ended up becoming a political quagmire. British control was seeping away from the Prime Minister and she needed to reinvigorate the country with regard to this cause. On 6 August 1979 Thatcher agreed to a radio interview with Justin Phillips of the Central Office of Information (COI). When asked what the Prime Minister and Britain had accomplished in the few days leading up to 6 August 1979, Thatcher responded:

A tremendous amount . . . First, a recognition that only Britain can give Rhodesia back legality. Second, total confidence in Britain to do that. Third, realisation that we have not only got to find the right constitution which cures defects in the existing one, but also we have got to find a way by doing that of ending the hostilities. (qtd. in Phillips 1979)

This was a courageous move for the Prime Minister because it once again reaffirmed British dominance in the region and gave responsibility for this accomplishment to Britain via Margaret Thatcher.

After continued attempts to retain British control over Zimbabwe, Britain was forced to reassess its role in this region. Although initially Thatcher encouraged a "European minority to remain and to continue to play a useful part in the life of the community," Britain eventually relinquished its imperialistic holdings in the region ("Speech at Lusaka"). The signing of the Lancaster House Agreement by Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo and Abel Muzorewa on 21 December 1979 allowed for the transference of power from the British colony of Rhodesia to the independent state of Zimbabwe (Byrd 96-97). Had the Rhodesian problem remained unresolved, Britain would have been unable to garner the amount of support it actually did in the United Nations when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands at the beginning of April 1982 (Kavanagh 157).

Aggressive Acts in the Falkland Islands from 1976 to 1982

On 4 February 1976, the RRS *Shackleton*, an unarmed British research ship, was stopped in the Falklands by an Argentinean destroyer, the *Almirante Storni* (Beck 4). This encounter occurred during the period of Argentinean domestic instability and strained Anglo-Argentine relations in general. The *Shackleton* had refused to recognize waters more than four hundred miles off the coast of Argentina as territorial waters (Beck 39).

On 4 April 1982 General Mario Menendez, the governor of Argentina, placed a flag in *Las Malvinas* to boost national morale (Beck 7). In an interview with BBC correspondent Maximiliano Seitz, Menendez recalled the arrival:

Llegué el 4 de abril. Fue una emoción muy grande cuando desde el aire vimos las Malvinas ... Cuando el avión tocó las islas, antes de bajar cantamos el Himno Nacional. Después pisamos las Malvinas también con una emoción muy grande, porque para los argentinos es un sentimiento que nace de muy pequeño. Recuerdo que las revistas infantiles que leía a los siete años tenían tiras cómicas donde alguien escribía el graffiti: "Las Malvinas son argentines."

"I arrived on the fourth of April. It was very emotional when our plane landed on the Falkland Islands ... when the plane landed on the islands, before exiting we sang the National Anthem. After, we walked on the soil with another feeling of strong emotion, because for Argentines, there is a sense of nationalism from a very young age. I remember comic magazines that I used to read when I was seven years old where someone wrote in graffiti: "The Falklands are Argentine." (Seitz *BBC Mundo*; my translation)

The Argentineans had always believed that the islands were theirs by right, and this act met with approval in a society dominated by political and social hardships. Galtieri ordered the invasion of the Falkland Islands in April 1982 when his popularity was alarmingly low in an attempt to improve his public image. As a result, the anti-junta demonstrations were replaced by patriotic demonstrations in his

support (Beck 13).

On 19 March 1982 Galtieri ordered the landing of fifty Argentines on the island of South Georgia, which the British considered part of their holdings. This was seen as one of the first offensive actions of the war. Almost immediately, Britain responded by launching a naval task force to combat the Argentine navy and air force. British Foreign Secretary Francis Pym argued that, “Her Majesty’s government is not in any doubt about [Great Britain’s] title to the islands and [it] never has been” (Hastings and Jenkins 6). Such remarks, made by officials of both countries, served to rally support at home and anger the citizens of the opposing nation.

The initial invasion of the Falklands occurred on 19 March 1982 when Argentina occupied South Georgia. This trigger was considered by the Argentine junta as the re-occupation of its own territory. The British, however, considered Argentine advancement towards the islands as an invasion of a British overseas territory. Galtieri, knowing that Britain would be quick to respond, brought forward the order of the invasion of the Falkland Islands to 2 April. Britain launched a naval task force to engage the Argentine Navy and Argentine Air Force, and retake the islands by amphibious assault. The expeditionary force sent by Britain, Argentina argued, was reasonable cause for an aggressive response. After roughly two months of fighting, however, there were nearly one thousand casualties. Reports suggest that roughly 650 Argentines died during the hostilities while there were only 260 British casualties (Reisman 288). On 14 June, the Argentine forces surrendered to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Task Force (Evans 473). The Falklands were once again under the jurisdiction of Great Britain’s rule.

The Falklands in the Aftermath of the 1982 Conflict

After the 1982 conflict neither Argentina nor Britain sought reconciliation. The Argentine government continued to work for the liberation of the Falklands while Britain sought to strengthen its imperial control and the appearance of legitimacy regarding the outcome. Knowing the precarious position in which the British government stood, Thatcher commissioned the second Shackleton Report on the economic, political, and social future of the Falklands

(Dodds 618). After this report was compiled, the Thatcher Administration dedicated itself towards the advancement of the Falklands policy through major investment programs and by exercising British naval dominance in the South Atlantic and Antarctic region.

Thatcher further developed claims to British sovereignty as manifested by the “extension of maritime and air space rights, and military security [which] was further enhanced by the construction of Mount Pleasant airbase in 1985-6” (Dodds 619). This new development strengthened the British commitment to defense of the Falkland Islands in the event that the Argentine government sought to reassert its claim over the area in contest.

Thatcher gained momentary popularity within her country and even exercised growing power and influence regarding other international disagreements. The war helped Thatcher’s government to victory in the 1983 general election, which prior to the war was seen as by no means certain. The Falklands conflict raised the profile of British armed forces and portrayed them in a positive light (Kavanagh 150). The necessity for raising these troops and the efficiency with which they were deployed served as major leverage for Thatcher as she continued her imperialistic foreign policy. The way the Thatcher administration handled the “Argentinean Aggression” changed the way it was publicly perceived in the global arena. Whereas before the United Kingdom and its influence were seen to be on the decline, this conflict gave countries around the world reason to pause. Imperial conquest as a political philosophy was failing, but Britain had bought itself a little more time. According to Sir Nicholas Henderson:

The future of the islands in the South Atlantic has represented one of the residual problems of empire (along with Gibraltar and Hong Kong) which are central to our responsibilities but peripheral to our long-term interests, except in so far as our handling of them affects our standing in the world. (Riddell 198)

The hulking powers of imperialism were slowly being retired as new governments sought to make their own power felt on the international level. This conflict signaled the end of an era of imperialism and

colonization.

The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 502 on 3 April 1982, which called for a cessation of hostilities between Argentina and the United Kingdom and for both parties to work towards a diplomatic solution (UN Resolution 502). Regardless of which country had a legitimate claim in the past, this document called on both parties to reach an amiable solution ranging from control by Argentina to control by Britain, and a myriad of solutions in between.

Although diplomatic relations between Britain and Argentina reached a general cordiality by 1989, the enduring question of sovereignty has never been completely negotiated. Consequently, the debate has begun anew in the past year. On 2 April 2007 (ironically twenty-five years to the day after the commencement of the Argentine invasion), Argentina once again issued its claim over the Falkland Islands. On 22 September 2007, *The Guardian* reported that the United Kingdom had begun preparations to stake new claims on the territory surrounding the Falklands in order to exploit potential natural resources in that area (Bowcott). These claims were further substantiated the following month when a British spokeswoman corroborated that Britain would submit a claim to the UN to extend seabed territory around the Falklands. This would have to be ratified before the expiration of the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, which had previously delineated territorial claims (Dodds). What this claim would actually accomplish is little more than an expansion of the fishing zone around the Falklands. It would, however, allow Britain to police this area to control exploitation of natural resources. Argentina decided to challenge this claim and now seeks to enter into negotiations concerning sovereignty of the Falklands. The Falkland Islands War does indeed signal the end of a world order in that the old philosophy has been found to be alarmingly inadequate. The Falklands remain a testament to the final stand of European imperialism versus the up-and-coming independent nations of South America.

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