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The Origins of the South Atlantic War

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Abstract. The most widely-accepted views of the origins of the South Atlantic War contend that it arose either out of the Argentine junta's need to divert attention away from a worsening economy or from misperceptions in both London and Buenos Aires. This article argues that the 'demobilisation' of Argentine civil society removed the need for a diversionary war; and that the lengthy crisis bargaining that followed in the wake of the 'grab' of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands substantially mitigated the impact of any misperceptions. This article advances an alternative to existing theories that explains the outbreak of this war by reference to both structural and organisational factors. A fast decreasing gap in relative power between Argentina and Britain may have encouraged the junta more seriously to consider the possibility of initiating a war between the two. Thereafter, however, the organisational pathologies of the Argentine military led to a suboptimally timed preemptive invasion, intransigent diplomacy and a 'hedged' approach to deployments that severely undermined Argentina's military effectiveness, allowing Britain to undertake reconquest of the islands with a very reasonable chance of success.

When the military junta in Buenos Aires ordered the invasion of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands early in 1982, its members operated under the assumption that, faced with a *fait accompli*, Britain would probably not attempt a reconquest. To their profound dismay, they found themselves confronted by a waning empire grimly determined to strike back and retake one of its last colonies. Given ample time to reconsider their prospects while British expeditionary forces gathered for and then made their trans-hemispheric journey, the junta nevertheless opted to fight. They lost the war that ensued, then relinquished power under duress. Their misperception of British resolve no doubt played a role in the 'grab' of the Falklands; but the decision to stay and fight rather than negotiate a withdrawal suggests that the ensuing war resulted from choice rather than inadvertence.

This article examines the origins of the South Atlantic War to

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determine, among other things, whether it arose accidentally or intentionally. Given the longstanding territorial dispute between Argentina and Britain over the Malvinas/Falklands, and the many failures to solve the disagreement diplomatically, the eventual attempt to resolve the matter by force of arms seems unsurprising. Indeed, British intelligence had been providing serious warning of the likelihood of Argentine aggression against the islands as early as 1976.[1] Just why the junta decided to invade in April 1982, though, proves considerably more puzzling; for Britain seemingly still retained capabilities and resources, conventional as well as nuclear, far beyond those that Argentina could muster. Further, significant British force reductions were openly announced for later in 1982, suggesting that time was on the Argentine side.

To explain this case of an apparently weaker state attacking a stronger one, two theories have been advanced. The first contends that the Argentine junta fomented war in order to divert the attention of an increasingly unhappy, unruly populace by seeking an external 'scapegoat.' The second theory holds that mutual misperceptions led to the onset of a conflict that neither side wanted. According to this view, the political need for a rousing *fait accompli* could have fostered biases or wishful thinking within the junta with regard to the chances of success, which open British ambivalence about the Falklands could only have encouraged.

The following analysis discusses the validity of these two theories and argues that, although hypotheses about the influence of domestic politics and/or misperceptions of British resolve contribute to explaining Argentina's initial grab of the islands, the junta's decision to stay and fight requires further explanation. This article provides two additional theoretical perspectives. The first suggests that a substantial shift in relative power had taken place, giving Argentina, for the first time in its

[1] *Falkland Islands Review: Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors* (London: HMSO, Cmnd. 8787, 1983), paras. 22, 32, and 63 chronicle the efforts of the increasingly concerned Joint Intelligence Committee. Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York, 1993), p. 177, points out, however, that the British response to warning was necessarily constrained because sending a force of sufficient deterrent strength would, by her reckoning, have taken three weeks. This would have allowed, or perhaps even provoked, an Argentine invasion. With regard to sending a small tripwire contingent, she notes that 'to send down a force of insufficient size would have been to subject it to intolerable risk.' John Hughes-Wilson, 'From Stalin to the Falklands War,' *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 144/5 (Oct. 1999), pp. 61–4, also makes the point that the idea of a reflexive military response to warning was not the first preference of the Foreign Office, which 'could not conceive of Galtieri's regime actually attacking the Falklands' (p. 64). This point about the Foreign Office is also affirmed by Hugh Hanning, *Five Wars, One Cause: The Case for Peace Crimes Tribunals* (Tunbridge Wells, 1996), pp. 43–4.

history, a reasonable chance of winning a battle for the Malvinas/Falklands. This suggestion that the Argentine decision to fight thus flowed largely from clear-headed calculation by the members of the junta signals the need to revisit the relative correlation of forces between the combatants in some detail. Such analysis serves to point out the manner in which the declining gap in capabilities fostered both Argentine bellicosity and British diffidence.

In this regard, study of the origins of the South Atlantic War may prove especially valuable theoretically as an analytic model applied to potential conflicts between rising regional states and (relatively) declining greater powers striving to maintain their global reach. In addition to illuminating the risks that accompany periods of change in relative power position, this case enjoys particular relevance because it features distinct deterrent and coercive diplomatic phases, and highlights the contrasting styles that characterise crises between authoritarian regimes and democratic governments.

The second theoretical perspective views the war as growing from the organisational pathology of the Argentine military which, in the absence of civilian controls, pursued unchecked aggressiveness prior to the invasion, and intransigence during the ensuing crisis bargaining. Elucidating this organisational dimension of the decision to fight for the Falklands (including an examination of the manner in which the Argentine military prepared to wage the war) may also help further to explain the 'intentional' side of the conflict. The junta may have calculated its aggression, and willingness to fight, in a substantially rational manner; yet the organisational dysfunction of the Argentine military rendered its best efforts preordained to fail. Thus, to the extent to which misperception characterised the onset of this war, Argentina may have 'misperceived itself.' That is, the ruling junta may have relied, to its detriment, upon representations of the military services that, because of the latter's institutional interests, would not be honoured. Finally, this organisational level-of-analysis also enriches the understanding of Argentina's domestic politics, as the military services can be seen as the true 'constituency' of the junta, one which acted alternately as spur or constraint at different times during the crisis.

Historical synopsis

While the historical antecedents of the South Atlantic War derive most directly from the British expulsion of Argentine settlers from the Falklands in 1833, sovereignty disputes over the islands date from the early sixteenth century. Conflicting discovery claims formed the basis for

Anglo-Spanish contention, to which the French added their assertion of ownership by right of settlement in the eighteenth century. With the fall of the Spanish empire in Latin America after the Napoleonic Wars, newly independent Argentina began to assert traditional Spanish claims.[2]

Britain, then becoming more aware of the strategic value of the islands, used force to gain control of them in 1833, and has maintained 'exclusive and continuous' settlement since that time, augmenting its claims based, variously, on discovery and conquest, to which the right of self-determination for the settlers was soon added. Argentina applied pressure fitfully, due no doubt to its often lengthy periods of internal disorder, disputes with continental neighbours, and weak power relative to that of the British Empire.

By the time of the Cold War, Britain's power was seriously waning, and decolonisation became a central element of British foreign policy. Nevertheless, self-determination remained a key principle, too, and Falkland islanders clearly wished to remain firmly under British rule. This preference slowed the pace of negotiations over sovereignty, an issue Britain (though sensitive to the colonists' views) willingly discussed with Argentina. At the same time that the Empire was withdrawing from 'east of Suez', in 1971 a Communications Agreement was signed with Argentina, many clauses of which obviously relay a decolonisation-oriented message.

As the preferences of the islanders remained firmly in favour of continued colonial status, Argentine patience wore thin. Shortly after the military assumed power in 1976, a serious, but unsuccessful coercive diplomatic effort was aimed at dislodging the islands from British control. By 1982, as the sesquicentennial of the expulsion of Argentine settlers approached, the reigning junta decided that enough time had been allowed for diplomacy, and that now the use of force would be

[2] Lowell Gustafson, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands* (New York, 1988) provides a lucid discussion of the arcane legal debate over sovereignty, as well as a lively rendering of the history. Raphael Perl, *The Falkland Islands Dispute in International Law and Politics* (London, 1983) contains copies of all of the relevant documents employed in arguments over sovereignty, from Alexander VI's papal bull of 1493 to the United Nations General Assemby Resolutions passed in the wake of the war. The literature purporting to address historical issues of discovery, settlement and conquest is mountainous, and generally polemical. A good example of balanced analysis is William L. Allardyce, *The Story of the Falkland Islands, Being an Account of their Discovery and Early History, 1500–1842* (Washington, DC, 1909). José Arce, *Las Malvinas: las pequeñas islas que nos fueron arrebatadas* (Madrid, 1950) contains a clear presentation of the case against British ownership. Angel M. Oliveri López, *Key to an Enigma: British Sources Disprove British Claims to the Falklands/Malvinas Islands* (Boulder, 1994) is the most recent, and one of the more unusual, approaches to understanding the sovereignty dispute, employing mostly British sources in the effort to undermine the British claim to the islands.

contemplated as part of the policy mix. A trifling dispute over the presence of some Argentine scrap metal workers in the South Georgias,[3] which may or may not have formed part of a deliberate provocation strategy, served as the catalyst for the ensuing crisis, which soon outgrew its Gilbert-and-Sullivanesque origins.

This study begins at this point, seeking to understand the proximate cause of the South Atlantic War. It considers Argentina's longstanding frustration over the islands as one of the reasons for its contemplation of the use of force to settle the dispute. However, this is viewed as being far from a determining, or decisive factor in the failure to resolve the crisis by peaceful means. With this in mind, what follows explores existing theories relating to the outbreak of this war, and advances some new hypotheses. A detailed chronology of the events examined herein is included in the Appendix.

Relevant literature

There is a substantial body of literature covering the crisis and conflict over the Malvinas/Falklands, which may be subdivided into five main categories. First come the various accounts of the key political participants in the drama: former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger all devote chapters of their memoirs to the conflict. Argentines Nicanor Costa Méndez and Mario B. Menéndez wrote books on their experiences as, respectively, Foreign Secretary and military governor of the islands.[4]

In the second category are the personal accounts of some of the top military commanders who fought in the war. On the British side, the key memoirs are those of Admiral Woodward, who commanded the Falkland Islands Task Force, and Brigadier Julian Thompson, who led the Third Commando Brigade.[5] On the Argentine side, there are the recollections of

[3] The South Georgia Islands are 'Falkland Island Dependencies,' along with the South Sandwich, Orkney and Shetland Islands. Britain declared sovereignty over these territories south of the Falklands in 1908, along with Graham Land.

[4] Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*; Alexander Haig, *Caveat* (New York, 1984); Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York, 1990); Nicanor Costa Méndez, *Malvinas: ésta es la historia* (Buenos Aires, 1993); Mario B. Menéndez, as told to Carlos Túrolo, *Malvinas. Testimonio de su gobernador* (Buenos Aires, 1983). Also worth including in this group is Member of Parliament Tam Dalyell's attempt to elucidate the motives behind the sinking of the *Belgrano*, in which he was assisted by Clive Ponting, a civil servant subsequently prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act. See Tam Dalyell, *One Man's Falklands* (London, 1982); and Clive Ponting, *The Right to Know. The Inside Story of the Belgrano Affair* (London, 1985).

[5] Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days* (Annapolis, 1992); Julian Thompson, *No Picnic* (London, 1992).

the commander of the April 2 invasion, the captain of the *Belgrano*, and the senior officer in charge of the defence of Goose Green.[6]

The third group of studies includes official reports produced by special bodies appointed by both governments after the cessation of hostilities.[7] Fourth, are several historical works that analyse the origins and course of the conflict.[8] Finally, there is the theoretical literature on international relations and the causes of war, which has occasionally focused on the Malvinas/Falkland conflict as a relevant case.[9]

[6] Carlos Büsser, *Malvinas. La Guerra inconclusa* (Buenos Aires, 1987); Héctor Bonzo, *1093 tripulantes del crucero ARA* General Belgrano (Buenos Aires, 1992); Italo A. Piaggi, *El combate de Goose Green* (Buenos Aires, 1994); and Horacio A. Mayorga, *No vencidos* (Buenos Aires, 1998). On both the British and Argentine sides, there are also published works by subalterns and enlisted troops. See, for example, Vincent Bramley, *Viaje al infierno* (Buenos Aires, 1993); John Lawrence and Robert Lawrence, *When the Fighting is Over. Tumbledown. A Personal Story* (London, 1988); and Daniel Kon, *Los chicos de la guerra* (Buenos Aires, 1983).

[7] Both in Britain and in Argentina, these official reports analyse the development of the conflict, the conduct of the war, and apportion blame when necessary: *Falkland Islands Review. Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors* (also known as the Franks Report); *Informe Rattenbach. El drama de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1988). See also Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial. Conflicto Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1983); Secretaría de Información Pública de la Presidencia de la Nación, *Islas Malvinas argentinas. Historia y presente del conflicto argentino–británico* (Buenos Aires, 1982); and Latin American Affairs Committee of the Liberal Party Foreign Affairs Panel, *The Falkland Islands* (London, 1984). In this research one other official source is used, the classified six-volume report on the crisis and conflict prepared for the US Department of Defense, *The Falklands War*. Portions of this study have been declassified for this study. Citations therefrom will begin with the prefix 'DNA', followed by the volume number and page(s).

[8] The best works in this area are the product of team efforts by journalists at the *Times* (London) and *Clarín* (Buenos Aires): Sunday Times Insight Team, *The Falklands War* (London, 1982); and Oscar Raúl Cardoso, Ricardo Kirschbaum and Eduardo Van der Kooy, *Malvinas. La trama secreta* (Buenos Aires, 1992). See also Armando Alonso Piñeiro, *Historia de la guerra de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1992); Peter Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis: The Rights and Wrongs* (New York, 1982); Laurio H. Destefani, *Malvinas, Georgias y Sandwich del Sur, ante el conflicto con Gran Bretaña* (Buenos Aires, 1982); Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford, 1988); Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York, 1983); Martin Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate* (London, 1985) and *The Fight for the 'Malvinas'. The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War* (Harmondsworth, 1989); R. Reginald and Jeffrey M. Elliot, *Tempest in a Teapot. The Falkland Islands War* (San Bernardino, 1984); Isidoro J. Ruiz Moreno, *Comandos en acción. El ejército en Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1986); Horacio Verbitsky, *La última batalla de la tercera guerra mundial* (Buenos Aires, 1984); Simon Winchester, *Prison Diary, Argentina. A Falklands Story* (London, 1983). Lastly, two excellent analytic military histories are Bruce W. Watson and Peter M. Dunn, (eds.), *Military Lessons of the Falkland Islands War* (Boulder, 1984); and Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, vol. III, *The Afghan and Falklands Conflicts* (Boulder, 1990).

[9] Most notable are Virginia Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War: A Model for North–South Crisis Prevention* (Boston, 1987); and Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War: The Falklands Conflict of 1982* (Princeton, 1991).

To the extent that this article casts new light on the origins of this war, the findings should help to provide generic knowledge about regional conflict. Because the combatants in this case include a great power that had undergone some decline and a regional state eager to take advantage of a narrowing gap in relative power, there may also be policy-relevance to the situation of the United States in the post-Cold War world. American power remains strong, but has been limited by very substantial force reductions; and in numerous regions of the world, this power may increasingly have to confront the ambitions and growing capabilities of rising adversaries with expanding aims.

Analysing the explanatory theories

As mentioned in the introduction, domestic political pressure may have driven the junta to seek a popular external diversion to shore up its position at home. Jack Levy views this war as a typical example of this phenomenon. T. V. Paul, in his detailed analysis of this conflict, concludes that the war happened 'mostly for domestic reasons.'[10] Another explanation holds that the war grew from mutual misperception. Richard Ned Lebow puts this view of the South Atlantic War most succinctly when he notes the mistaken beliefs 'in London that Argentina would not invade the Falkland Islands and the expectations in Buenos Aires that Britain would accommodate itself to a military takeover of the islands.'[11]

To these theoretical perspectives this article adds two alternative explanations. First, the decreasing gap in relative power between the opponents created permissive conditions for the outbreak of war. The

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David A. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War* (Cambridge, 1993) employs the South Atlantic War to test his theory that wars break out over genuine feelings of being wronged, rather than from either misperception or to dampen domestic conflicts. T.V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge, 1994), on the other hand, defends the explanatory power of both the misperception and domestic political variables in the Falklands case.

[10] Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts*, pp. 146–65, examines this case closely, concluding that the diversionary hypothesis has the greatest explanatory power, and that the need to 'scapegoat' may well have encouraged Argentine misperception. The 'diversionary war' hypothesis is well presented in Jack Levy, 'Domestic Politics and War,' in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, (eds.), *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge, 1989), see p. 94 for his mention of the Falklands/Malvinas War as an archetypal case of diversionary war.

[11] See Richard Ned Lebow, 'Miscalculation in the South Atlantic: The Origins of the Falklands War,' in Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, 1985), p. 89.

second view identifies the organisational preferences of the Argentine military services in fomenting war as a means of resolving the dispute. These theoretical insights thus portray a different causal path to war, governed first by the roughly equivalent usable military strength of the combatants. Then, the aggressive proclivities of the Argentine military, unchecked by any form of civilian control, provided the key pressure that led to both the initial grab of the islands and the decision to fight a potentially costly war for their control.

Domestic politics

Immediately following the seizure of the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, *Newsweek* asserted that 'the squabble presented the Argentine junta with a pretext to divert attention from 13 percent unemployment, 120 percent inflation and growing civil unrest'[12]; while, according to *Time*, 'the attack was likely a *coup de théâtre* designed to line up Argentine public opinion behind a faltering government. Argentina's inflation rate is currently about 130%, the world's worst. Unemployment is an estimated 13%, the nation's highest level since World War II.'[13] In a similar vein, two weeks after the invasion Senator Larry Pressler (R-SD) introduced a non-binding resolution to condemn Argentina, arguing that 'it is clear that Argentina is involving in a macho exercise to distract the attention of its people from its dismal failures at home through military adventures abroad', and the Socialist bloc in the European parliament demanded Argentina's withdrawal from the islands, calling the invasion 'a diversionary tactic to distract attention from the political brutalities and economic failures of its own regime.'[14] Since the end of the conflict, many writers have argued that the military junta invaded the islands in order to distract the population's attention.[15]

It can be readily admitted that the Argentine military may have made an incidental diversionary calculation. However, this does not mean that this was a determining factor in the junta's decision to invade, for a variety of reasons. First, analyses which focus on the exhaustion of the military

[12] *Newsweek*, 12 April 1982, p. 18.

[13] *Time*, 12 April 1982, p. 9.

[14] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 20 April 1982.

[15] See for example Calvert, *The Falklands Crisis*, chapter 2; Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 25, 44, 336–7; Haig, *Caveat*, p. 296; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, chapter 3; Levy, 'Domestic Politics and War,' p. 94; and Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts*, pp. 146–65. Ronald W. Reagan, *An American Life* (New York, 1990), p. 358, supports the diversionary thesis strongly, if in a grammatically vague manner: 'The members of Argentina's military junta were trying to seize the remote islands to save their government.' Most recently, the diversionary hypothesis has received additional support from Robin Neillands, *A Fighting Retreat: The British Empire 1947–1997* (London, 1997), p. 511; and also Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *The Last Colonies* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 208.

government towards the end of 1981 (and explain the Malvinas/Falklands adventure as a diversionary tactic) make undue analogies between the 1966–73 and 1976–83 military regimes. It is true that in both cases we are dealing with regimes that Guillermo O'Donnell has described as bureaucratic-authoritarian, where the initial coup coalition of military and civilian elites begins to unravel as economic crisis sets in and the popular sectors regain their combativeness.[16] But one cannot overlook one key difference between 1966 and 1976: the level of state repression. The 1976 military chose to respond to the guerrilla threat with a massive campaign of illegal abductions and torture, popularly called the 'dirty war.' At least 7,840 persons are known to have been kidnapped and tortured at clandestine detention centres between 1976 and 1983, though the figure may be as high as 30,000.[17] Because of this dirty war, while the 1966 military were plagued by industrial action and violent collective protest as well as by armed struggle, their 1976 comrades presided over the complete demobilisation of civil society. After 1976, military juntas could afford to govern without being liked.[18]

In this respect, just as the analogies between the 1966–73 and 1976–1983 military governments in Argentina are deceptive, it is incorrect to generalise about the demobilisation of civil society under the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of the Latin American Southern Cone without keeping in mind that, 'on a per capita basis, for every person who disappeared or died in official custody in Brazil, ten died in Uruguay, and

[16] See Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics* (Berkeley, 1973); Guillermo O'Donnell, 'Reflections on the Patterns of Change in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Winter 1977), pp. 3–38; and Guillermo O'Donnell, 'Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy', in David Collier (ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton, 1979).

[17] María José Moyano, 'The "Dirty War" in Argentina: Was it a war and how dirty was it?', in Peter Waldmann and Hans Werner Tobler (eds.), *Staatliche und parastaatliche Gewalt in Lateinamerika* (Frankfurt, 1991), pp. 53, 65.

[18] Christopher Gelpi, 'Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1997), pp. 255–82, affirms authoritarian preferences for repression, arguing instead that democracies are actually more likely to engage in diversionary ventures. Gelpi notes that, in the case of the South Atlantic War, it was the Thatcher government, rather than the junta, which was more motivated to seek the rally-round-the-flag effect generated by a potential war. This point is affirmed by Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, pp. 260–1, who note that Thatcher was adamantly opposed to any face-saving option for the junta. Paul Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy* (New York, 1997), p. 95ff, also supports this point of view; and adds that Thatcher was increasingly sceptical of more negotiations, as the weather was worsening and might take away her military options (pp. 85–7). But Sharp does see the period immediately after the retaking of the South Georgias and before the invasion of the Falklands-Malvinas as a perfect point at which to settle the dispute without further fighting – as both militaries would by then have engaged in successful combat operations (see pp. 89–91).

over three hundred died in Argentina.'[19] State terror in Argentina created a culture of fear which pervaded every sphere of human relations and made concerted action extremely difficult. In fact, as a counter to the diversionary hypothesis, the literature on transitions emphasises that, without the Malvinas/Falklands fiasco, the military would probably have perpetuated their rule.[20]

A second counter to the diversionary war theory grows from a close examination of timing factors. Those who argue that the Malvinas/Falklands invasion was a response to domestic political constraints point to the 30 March 1982 repression of a labour demonstration as evidence. It is assumed that the military decided to invade the islands when confronted by the first popular reaction to their repressive rule.[21] This would mean that the invasion was decided between 30 March and 2 April. However, it is known that Admiral Jorge Anaya first asked Vice-Admiral Juan José Lombardo to prepare a plan for the invasion of the islands in December 1981, and that the junta decided, on 6 January 1982, to undertake an invasion if the negotiations with Britain, scheduled for February, yielded no positive results.[22] In fact, the invading force left Argentine shores on 28 March, two days before the ferocious repression of 30 March. If the invasion had been planned for diversionary reasons, why would the junta repress those whose allegiance it was trying to regain? In addition, the evidence suggests that the initial plan contemplated a July 1982 invasion, later pushed forward to May, and that the decision to invade on 2 April was only made when it was suspected that, in response to the burgeoning scrap metal crisis, Britain was sending a naval interdiction force to the South Atlantic.[23] If, on reaching power

[19] Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton, 1988), p. 69.

[20] See John Simpson and Jana Bennett, *The Disappeared: Voices from a Secret War* (London, 1985), pp. 368–76; David Rock, *Argentina 1516–1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 381–6; and Carlos H. Waisman and Mónica Peralta Ramos, (eds.), *From Military Rule to Liberal Democracy in Argentina* (Boulder, 1987), *passim*. Gerardo Munck, *Authoritarianism and Democratization: Soldiers and Workers in Argentina, 1976–1983* (New York, 1998) contends, on the basis of a few general strikes during this period, that civil society was demanding democracy, pressuring the junta so much so as to encourage diversionary actions. In our view, the evidence of successful societal repression far outweighs the few indicators of mobilisation in Argentine civil society.

[21] See footnote 15.

[22] Piñeiro, *Historia de la guerra de Malvinas*, pp. 11, 16; Costa Méndez, *Malvinas: ésta es la historia*, pp. 75, 167; Cardoso et al., *Malvinas: la trama secreta*, p. 46. Also, Nora Femenia, *National Identity in Times of Crisis: The Scripts of the Falklands-Malvinas War* (Commack, NY, 1996), p. 2, points out that the Argentine military's formal planning for an invasion of the islands goes back to 1942, during World War II. The original plan was then revised – not discarded – at the end of the war in 1945.

[23] Alonso Piñeiro, *Historia de la guerra de Malvinas*, p. 20; Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, p. 50; Costa Méndez, *Malvinas*, pp. 95, 128–9, 159, 179, 209; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, p. 59; and, for the official view, see *Informe Rattenbach*, para. 105. Also,

in December 1981, President Leopoldo F. Galtieri had sensed the desperate need to bolster the government's image through a foreign adventure, he would not have waited five months before acting.

As a third objection to the diversionary war argument, it should be pointed out that the popular support given the junta after the invasion went far beyond what anybody could have expected or anticipated. General Confederation of Labour leader Saúl Ubaldini, who had been imprisoned in the repression following the labour demonstration of 30 March, offered to head the union delegation travelling to the islands for the inaugural of the new military governor. Politicians and union leaders also initiated a series of trips abroad designed to obtain international support for Argentina's position. They were in no way coaxed by the military. Even Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, winner of the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize and a former 'disappeared', and the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, went in for flag-waving.[24]

Fourth, even assuming that the decision to invade was made because of domestic political constraints (an argument which we have already exposed as erroneous) it would still be necessary to explain why the junta decided to go to war one month after the invasion. The evidence points to the fact that a permanent Argentine presence on the islands was not part of the original plan.[25] On 2 March, when Galtieri offered the governorship of the Malvinas to General Mario B. Menéndez, he told Menéndez that the invading force would only remain on the islands until November-December 1982, and on 26 March Galtieri told Costa Méndez that Argentina would never fight Britain.[26] Haig and Thatcher have both argued that the Argentine junta painted itself into a corner, that it fed popular enthusiasm so much that war became a forward escape, in the

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Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, p. 68, state that 'it was the urgency of the dispute with Britain rather than the domestic situation which triggered the intervention. The islands needed to be occupied before British military reinforcements ... arrived in the South Atlantic.'

[24] See Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 139–66; *Time*, 21 June 1982, p. 25; the official view is found in *Informe Rattenbach*, para. 571. Femenia, *National Identity in Times of Crisis*, pp. 88–92, provides a great deal of evidence that the 'reconquest' was widely popular among journalists and politicians from across the spectrum of Argentine society.

[25] See Femenia, *National Identity in Times of Crisis*, pp. 92–5; and Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, pp. 140–7.

[26] These facts emerge from the findings of the Argentine commission appointed to analyze official responsibility for the conflict. See *Informe Rattenbach*, paras. 84, 111–13. See also Cardoso et al., *Malvinas: La Trama Secreta*, pp. 70–1, 94, 146; Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas,'* pp. 1–3; and Aldrich and Connell, *The Last Colonies*, p. 208.

sense that, given the popular reaction against the British reconquest of South Georgias on 25 April, the junta had no choice other than war.[27]

This article contends that even this modified version of the diversionary argument is inaccurate. On 14 April, prior to the departure of the Argentine fleet from the Puerto Belgrano naval base carrying supplies to the islands, Vice-Admiral Lombardo gave an impromptu speech to the troops in which he said 'I hope that while you are at sea, we will have reached an agreement [with Britain] because that is the only solution, let us not kid ourselves: when we reach that agreement we will have to give in a few things. Because at this point we theoretically have everything. We have sovereignty and we have the government [of the Malvinas/Falklands]. But we will have to give up something in order to reach an agreement.'[28] The junta could have derived substantial domestic political capital from such a conciliatory attitude. Even as late as 29 May Galtieri apparently toyed with the idea of an Argentine withdrawal from the islands, although by then the war was well under way.[29] Also, the other two junta members, Admiral Anaya and Air Force General Basilio Lami Dozo, could have speculated that an Argentine withdrawal would bring about the end of Galtieri but not the end of the junta – which is what finally came to pass.[30] These last points raise the key issue of why the junta opted to fight even after doubts about British determination to retake the islands vanished.

The role of misperception

A second popularly held view is that the Argentine military decided to invade the Malvinas/Falklands because they misread the likely behaviour of the United States and Britain. According to Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, Argentines expected Washington to remain neutral because 'their misunderstanding is rooted in their attitude towards the use of force in their political system. This is true of most political traditions which are not democracies.'[31] For Nicanor Costa Méndez, Argentina's expectations

[27] Haig, *Caveat*, p. 283; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 220. See Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War*, pp. 179–84 , for a thoughtful refutation of the domestic politics argument as applied to the Thatcher government.

[28] Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 183–4.

[29] Alonso Piñeiro, *Historia de la Guerra de Malvinas*, 176, n.1.

[30] It should be noted that, while the Montoneros and ERP guerrillas were *politically* defeated by 1976, they displayed a remarkable ability to continue operating while the dirty war raged on. In fact, their *military* defeat only came in 1979. And while factions and schisms within the military emerged after the guerrillas' defeat in 1979, the spectre of retribution for human rights violations remained a rallying point for the military well into the period of democratic transition. These issues are explored in detail in María José Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle, 1969–1979* (New Haven, 1995).

[31] *Newsweek*, 17 May 1982, p. 48. See also *Time*, 31 May 1982, p. 13.

of US neutrality were rooted in its beliefs about the American distaste for colonialism.[32] Richard Ned Lebow argues that it was Argentina's participation in the United States' covert operations in Central America, particularly the training of the *contras*, that fuelled the misperceptions about American neutrality.[33] The literature also argues that Argentina misperceived the British reaction: based on the outcome of the Suez crisis and of India's seizure of the Portuguese colony of Goa in 1961, and given Britain's decline as a world power – a point that had been hammered home in Tory arguments during the electoral campaign of 1979, and eagerly consumed in Buenos Aires – the junta fully expected the Thatcher government to confine its struggle to the United Nations and other international fora.[34] Finally, in the notorious interview given to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Galtieri lent some credence to the misperception argument by saying that 'to be frank, when I decided to recuperate (sic) the Malvinas I did not expect to provoke an incident of international importance, now I see that it did have that importance and I am worried.'[35]

Another aspect of the misperception hypothesis is that the Argentines may indeed have perceived clearly the signals being sent, but the signals themselves were misleading. Hugh Hanning argues that 'the British

[32] Costa Méndez, *Malvinas*, pp. 172–3.

[33] Lebow, 'Miscalculation in the South Atlantic,' p. 112. Christopher Dickey, *With the Contras* (New York, 1985) chronicles the extensive Argentine role in supporting the insurgency against the Sandinistas. For additional recourse to the misperception explanation, see Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, Ch. 6; Haig, *Caveat*, p. 296; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 176; Cardoso et. al., *Malvinas*, p. 64.

[34] On Argentine misperceptions of the British response, see Haig, *Caveat*, pp. 267, 295; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 173; Costa Méndez, *Malvinas*, pp. 191–2; Nicanor Costa Méndez, 'Beyond Deterrence: The Malvinas-Falklands Case', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 43, no. 4: (Fall 1987), pp. 119–22; Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, p. 204; Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 75–6; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, pp. 31–2; Lebow, 'Miscalculation in the South Atlantic,' p. 115. Lebow then contradicts himself by stating that the Argentines *did* contemplate a British intervention, concluding that Britain would not be able to retake the islands: '[There was a] belief that there was little or nothing in a military sense that Britain could do to dislodge Argentina from the Falklands ... ' (p. 111). Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 217–18, also contradict their misperception thesis by arguing that Lt. Alfredo Astiz, commander of Argentine forces in the South Georgias, was given the order not to resist the British attack. Apparently the junta believed that the British would feel they had saved face with the reconquest of South Georgia, and would go back to the negotiating table. On the initial (and very contradictory) assessment of British capabilities made in Buenos Aires, Washington and London see Haig, *Caveat*, p. 268; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, pp. 179, 181, 223; Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, pp. 212–3, 215; Middlebrook, *The Fight for the 'Malvinas*, p. 71. Thatcher also (pp. 173–4) mentions that even the Russians held the opinion that 'if we did fight we would lose.'

[35] Oriana Fallaci, 'Galtieri: El general argentino que nunca peleó en una guerra', *El Porteño*, 8 August 1982, pp. 6–9. The interview itself was conducted two weeks prior to the end of the war.

government conveyed the impression that the fate of the islands was not very important to it ... ' and additionally that 'by the spring of 1982 Britain had signalled that it lacked the will to defend the Falkland Islands, and would soon deny itself the means if faced by a modest yet determined threat.'[36] Paul Sharp's analysis keys on the absence of any 'plate glass' deterrent force, arguing that even a small force, dispatched prior to 2 April, would likely have deterred the junta.[37] Finally, Richard Thornton makes the argument that the United States and Britain – motivated by desire for a political transition that would help to keep the Southern Cone non-nuclear – conspired to dupe Argentina into a losing war that would bring down the regime in Buenos Aires. In his view, the Argentine leaders were encouraged to misperceive both British resolve and US neutrality.[38] (This argument does not hold up, however, since it assumes a willingness on the part of the USA to let the British fight a war they had good chances of losing – disastrously. The risks of such a 'sting' were prohibitive.)

While the misperception argument might explain why the junta may have had a motivated bias, that is, the desire, to see British diffidence, it does not explain why Argentina fought the major war it did. It must be kept in mind that, although the Argentine invasion took place on 2 April, active British field operations didn't commence until 25 April, when the British retook the South Georgias. At this point, Costa Méndez declared that both countries were 'technically at war', while Thatcher stated the Haig mission was 'still alive.'[39] However, with the British bombing of Port Stanley on May 1 and the sinking of the *General Belgrano* on 2 May, both countries were unquestionably now in a shooting war. This means, though, that the junta had almost an entire month, between the invasion and the onset of active operations, in which to correct its misperceptions about American and British behaviour.

On this point it becomes important to consider the chronology of

[36] See Hugh Hanning, *Five Wars, One Cause*, pp. 56, 58. However, even if the junta correctly read the British government's signals, it may have misperceived the British mass public – which favored the use of force to retain the islands, and may have limited Thatcher's ability to seek a negotiated solution. For more on this point, see Lawrence Freedman, 'How Did the Democratic Process Affect Britain's Decision to Reoccupy the Falkland Islands?' in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, 1997), especially pp. 245–6. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, p. 99, also subscribe to at least some version of the misperception theory, noting of the period of March 1982: 'Most critically, Britain underestimated the military intentions of Argentina while Argentina overestimated those of Britain.'

[37] Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy*, p. 62.

[38] Richard C. Thornton, *The Falklands Sting: Reagan, Thatcher, and Argentina's Bomb* (London, 1998). Femenia, *National Identity in Times of Crisis*, rounds out this form of analysis by suggesting that the junta misperceived its own status in the eyes of the world – what she alternately calls a 'delusion of self-importance' (p. 95) or a 'national superiority complex' (p. 117).

[39] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 26 April 1982.

events. On 1 April, as Argentine forces headed for the South Atlantic, President Ronald Reagan telephoned Galtieri to warn him that Britain would respond militarily,[40] and Under Secretary of State Thomas Enders met the Argentine Ambassador in Washington, Esteban Takacs, to explain that, if it came to war, the United States might be forced to side with Britain[41]. On 3 April Thatcher dispatched the Task Force. Parliamentary discussion reflected great unity of purpose at this point, with the Labour opposition vigorously supporting Thatcher.[42] On 7 April Foreign Secretary Francis Pym stated in the Commons that Britain would use force if necessary. On 10 April a US embassy source in Buenos Aires told Reuters that he thought Britain would carry out its threat to use force, a warning that was repeated by Haig during his meeting with the junta one week later[43]. On 19 April, as he was leaving Argentina, Haig stated that 'war in the South Atlantic would be the greatest of tragedies, and that really time is running out.'[44] Two days later, during a lecture in Texas, Jeane Kirkpatrick called Argentina the aggressor, the first time a US official formally made the charge.[45]

Britain retook the South Georgias on 25 April. The next day Thatcher declared in the Commons that 'time is getting extremely short as the task force approaches the islands. You can't have a wide range of military options with the task force in wild and stormy weather.'[46] On 30 April the US formally abandoned neutrality, suspended military and economic aid to Argentina, and began responding to British requests for military aid, and the following day the British launched their offensive on the islands.

This brief chronology of events proves that the misperception argument, by itself, suffers from insufficient explanatory power. For, even if some amount of misperception initially existed, the junta had an entire month in which to revise its views, and was given ample opportunities to do so. The messages were anything but ambiguous.[47] Further, the rapid

[40] William Clark, Reagan's national security advisor and a fluent Spanish speaker, told one of the authors in an interview on 20 July 1994 that he himself acted as translator during the phone call, and that the President was 'unambiguously clear' with Galtieri that the general 'would soon have a war on his hands.'

[41] Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 106, 111. Prior to this, on 31 March, US Ambassador to Argentina Harry Schlaudeman was dispatched to see Galtieri and explain that the United States might not be able to remain neutral. See Haig, *Caveat*, p. 264; Costa Méndez, *Malvinas: Esta es la Historia*, p. 157.

[42] See Freedman, 'How did the Democratic Process' pp. 248–51; and Kevin Foster, *Fighting Fictions: War, Narrative and National Identity* (Boulder, 1999).

[43] Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, p. 197; Haig, *Caveat*, p. 279; Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 202. At that meeting, Haig also warned the junta the United States would side with Britain – whatever the cost.

[44] *La Prensa*, 20 April 1982.

[45] *La Prensa*, 22 April 1982.

[46] *Buenos Aires Herald*, 27 April 1982.

[47] The findings of the Rattenbach Commission support this view. The Commission even suggests that Haig's second visit to Buenos Aires provided the junta with an excellent

deployment of a substantial expedition, and the earlier uses of force prior to the amphibious assault on the islands, also argue against the view that the British were bluffing.[48] Finally, it is important to note that Argentina was receiving substantial third-party confirmation that the British were indeed coming. In addition to the many warnings given by various members of the Reagan administration about the deadly seriousness of British intentions, the Soviets also confirmed this, offering the junta both intelligence and material support.[49]

Structural-level factors

Did Argentina have reasonable expectations of success in a war with Britain over the islands? In terms of relative power, the ten years leading up to the 1982 invasion reflect a period in which the former's military strength grew substantially, while the latter's declined. Conventionally, the combatants were closely matched, in terms of usable options. While Britain did possess nuclear weapons, normative inhibitions against the threat of their first use were no doubt severely constraining, and there is no evidence of the junta being intimidated by this extremely unlikely possibility. The geography of the theatre of war placed it near to Argentina, but very far from Britain, virtually guaranteeing the initial success of a *fait accompli*, and forcing the Royal Navy to attempt an amphibious operation that was, in the words of Sir John Fieldhouse, 'the most difficult thing we have attempted since the Second World War.'[50] Finally, on the diplomatic front, Britain achieved some gains, especially in terms of winning French support for an arms embargo. However, the Argentine diplomatic strategy of positioning the United States as an

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opportunity for an honourable withdrawal from the islands that entailed only small political costs. See *Informe Rattenbach*, paragraphs 104, 346, 354, 401. Nevertheless, it would have taken a steely resolve for the junta to have backed away from perhaps the most popular action that they had ever taken – as they would probably have incurred serious, though not necessarily fatal, domestic political costs by negotiating a withdrawal.

[48] On this last point, Britain may have had very little room for bluffing, given its democratic nature. The British public would have much less tolerance for a false run-up to war than its Argentine counterpart. The junta may well have enjoyed greater leeway, given the 'demobilisation' of Argentine civil society. However, the junta could still have been greatly constrained from bluffing by the 'audience costs' engendered by its military constituency. For a perceptive theoretical discussion of these issues, see James D. Fearon, 'Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, no 3 (September 1994), pp. 577–92.

[49] Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 97–9; Haig, *Caveat*, p. 294.

[50] Cited in Aldrich and Connell, *The Last Colonies*, p. 206. As Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, p. 10, note so succinctly, Britain 'was suffering from the constraints of declining power'.

'honest broker' rather than open British ally prevailed – until the outbreak of the fighting.

Between 1972 and 1981, Argentine defence spending doubled, in real terms, despite generally straitened economic circumstances, while British military expenditures remained virtually flat.[51] More importantly, Argentina's expansion was geared generally, and in the case of the navy specifically, to developing the kinds of capabilities that would prove best suited to obtaining regional mastery of the South Atlantic.[52] For purposes of campaigning in the Falklands, Argentina also possessed a 'mountain division' equipped and trained for fighting in the generally harsh environment of the islands, whose winter climate is often as severe as Norway's.

Britain, on the other hand, keyed its defence acquisitions to the possibility of a land war in Europe against the Warsaw Pact, and an antisubmarine campaign in the North Atlantic. The demands of a possible conflict with the Soviet Union kept Britain the fifth most heavily armed power in the world – but one whose ability to project force over great distances was growing ever more questionable. Further, pursuit of the 'Trident option' limited budgetary resources available for traditional sea control or combined operations. The Royal Navy was thus poorly suited either to face a potent surface threat or to support amphibious operations far from home. Fortuitously, British ground forces, though geared to fighting the Russians on the plains of Germany, had significant, though small, elements prepared for combat in very cold environments such as Norway.

At the outset of the war for the Falklands, the forces dedicated to the fight by each side, though not identical, were in virtual equipoise. The British advantage in carriers and submarines was offset by the substantial numerical edge of the Argentines in fixed wing attack aircraft. In terms of ground forces, the Argentine army in the Falklands was one and one-quarter times the size of the British expeditionary force, though the professionalism of the latter no doubt made up for this shortfall, or for the need to seek a variant of the traditional '3 : 1' superiority of attacker over defender. Also, the British sent troops trained to fight in wintry weather, while the Argentines deployed conscripts from their tropical zone. Table 1 describes the orders of battle.

[51] United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1972–1982* (Washington, DC, 1983), pp. 17, 49.

[52] Richard Lane, 'The Fog of War: A Personal Experience of Leadership,' *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, vol. 146, no. 3 (Dec. 1998), pp. 47–54, recounts a war participant's observation that British intelligence was worried most of all about the growth of Argentine naval capabilities.

Table 1. *Relative Strength of the Combatants*

Category	Argentina	Britain	Ratio
Carriers	1	2	.5:1
Submarines	4	6	.67:1
Cruisers	1	0	na
Frigates	12	15	.8:1
Destroyers	7	7	1:1
Corvette/Patrol	19	9	2.1:1
Aircraft	216	55	3.9:1
Helicopters	40	154	.26:1
Ground troops	12,150	9,500	1.28:1

Sources: Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*; Middlebrook, *Operation Corporate*; Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War; Falkland Islands Review* (the Franks Report); and *Informe Rattenbach.*

From the purely quantitative perspective reflected in Table 1, it seems clear that the combatants were closely, though not identically, matched. A more qualitative approach to evaluating the correlation of forces does not erode this finding. Argentine military assets were not, with the exception of the aged cruiser *General Belgrano*, significantly less modern than their British opposition. Indeed, two of Argentina's new German diesel submarines were acoustically superior to a number of the British nuclear hunter-killers. Its attack aircraft, though not the equal of the Harrier, could strike from afar – and featured five that were fitted with state-of-the-art Exocet missiles.[53]

The only substantial Argentine disadvantage, qualitatively, was in terms of ground forces. The conscripts it sent to fight for the Falklands, though outnumbering the British expeditionary forces, were much less prepared to fight in a forbidding climate.[54] Indeed, the junta's decision to refrain from sending its mountain division to the islands remains very puzzling. On the other hand, the British were faced with the daunting tasks of landing on a hostile shore, sustaining a lodgement, and then defeating a larger defending force. Indeed, careful reappraisal of the prospective ground campaign convinced British leaders that further forces were necessary, leading to the dispatch of 3,000 more troops on 12 May via the ocean liner *Queen Elizabeth II.*[55]

[53] This assessment derives partially from the opinions expressed by an international group of military experts whose views are incorporated in much of DNA, vol. 2.

[54] Theodore Gatchel, *At the Water's Edge: Defending Against the Modern Amphibious Assault* (Annapolis, 1996), p. 201, argues that the Argentine conscripts had little realistic chance of preventing the British lodgement.

[55] These forces included the Welsh and Scots Guards as well as the Gurkhas. These reinforcements are factored into the ground forces ratio in Table 1.

The fact that Britain did win this war does not imply that it *had* to win; or that the Argentinian perceptions of their winning chances were necessarily mistaken. Scott Sagan, for example, makes this point in his analysis of the doctrines and war plans of the principal combatants in the First World War. He notes that the Schlieffen Plan failed, but that it came within an ace of victory. This in no way proves that it should not have been undertaken, or that it was fundamentally or fatally flawed.[56]

If one considers counterfactually the role of good (or at least rationally consistent)[57] generalship, at both the operational and grand strategic levels, Argentina's chances for prevailing in this conflict grow even greater. The example of the mountain division suggests that the fight on the ground could have been waged much more sternly had the junta chosen to deploy it. Similarly, basing a substantial number of attack aircraft out of the Falklands, instead of requiring them to fly 800-mile round-trip commutes to the fighting, limiting their combat range and effectiveness, might even have prevented a close British approach to the islands.[58] Finally, the Argentine navy could have been employed far more effectively, especially in concert with air operations against the British fleet. However, after the loss of the *Belgrano*, Admiral Anaya felt compelled to keep his fleet 'in being', which really meant 'in port.'

Structural-level analysis of the contending forces suggests that either side could reasonably have won the war for the Falklands. In this regard, the notion that the outcome of the fight was a 'toss-up' is a conservative finding. For, if one considers British assessments of the chances of victory, one glimpses a very dark picture. Lady Thatcher notes in her memoirs, for example, that, on the eve of the Argentine invasion, defence minister John Nott 'gave the MoD's view that the Falklands could not be retaken once they were seized.'[59] The American assessment of the likely outcome, with

[56] Scott D. Sagan, '1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability,' *International Security* vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 1986), pp. 151–76.

[57] For an excellent discussion of counterfactual methodology applied to military and strategic issues, see James D. Fearon, 'Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science,' *World Politics* vol. 43 (Jan. 1991), pp. 169–95; and John Lewis Gaddis, 'Nuclear Weapons and International Systemic Stability,' American Academy of Arts and Sciences Occasional Paper No. 2 (Cambridge, 1990). David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, 1973) remains a comprehensive study of this methodological approach.

[58] Air Marshal R. G. Funnell, 'It was a Bit of a Close Call: Some Thoughts on the South Atlantic War,' in Alan Stephens, (ed.), *The War in the Air, 1914–1994* (Fairbairn, 1994), p. 229, notes that, 'properly used, air power could have achieved the Argentine national aim. The key to success [was] the airfield at Stanley.' This view is also endorsed by Jeffrey Ethell and Alfred Price, *Air War South Atlantic* (New York, 1983).

[59] Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 179. On the narrowness of the margin by which operations remained sustainable, she also notes (p. 228) that, upon learning that

the apparent exception of Alexander Haig, mirrored the British view. As Haig put it, 'there was never the slightest doubt in my mind that ... Britain would win. This was not an opinion that was universally held among the White House staff, the American military, or our intelligence analysts – or even by every knowledgeable Briton.'[60] The Argentine military services took a consistent, though somewhat more nuanced, view, assuming that British naval power was able, if mustered in time, to defeat an initial invasion; but that it would not suffice for purposes of a reconquest of the islands.

The key point introduced in the foregoing analysis is that Argentina did indeed have reasonable chances of winning a war for the Falklands, a view shared by British, American and Soviet military analysts – and by the commander of the British expeditionary forces. This rough military parity vitiates the misperception argument, and perhaps explains Lebow's seemingly contradictory view that, though there were misperceptions aplenty, what really mattered was 'the *junta's* apparent belief that there was little or nothing in a military sense that Britain could do to dislodge Argentina from the Falklands once they had actually occupied them.'[61]

Finally, we note that the structural level-of-analysis, as applied in this case, falls neatly in line with Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's notion that the necessary conditions for war initiation consist of having positive expected utility, which is itself the product of desire for an outcome and an assessment of the probability of winning.[62] Clearly, Argentina had a strong desire for the islands, and held the view that its chances of winning were good, as long as the islands were taken before Britain could interpose a naval blocking force. A wealth of data and informed opinion support the reasonableness of this view.

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nineteen Harrier jets had been flown off the *Atlantic Conveyor* just before it was sunk, '[r]elief flooded over me at the news: we were not fatally wounded after all'.

[60] Haig, *Caveat*, p. 268. DNA, vol. 1, pp. 25–6, confirms the doubts the U.S. military had at the time regarding Britain's winning chances. Woodward, *One Hundred Days*, p. 336, also differs with Mr. Haig, holding that, had the war lasted just ten more days, the Argentines would have won.

[61] Lebow, 'Miscalculation in the South Atlantic,' p. 111. The Rattenbach Commission's official assessment of the chances for an Argentine victory echoes this point, noting further that the initial successful air attacks on the British expeditionary forces convinced the Argentinians 'that the land defense of the islands was unassailable.' From *Informe Rattenbach*, para. 571C.

[62] See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven, 1981), especially Chapters 1 and 2. Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph Siverson, 'War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 89, no. 4 (Dec. 1995), pp. 841–57, uses expected utility analysis in a specific examination of the junta's decision to start the South Atlantic War.

The organisational dimension

The preceding section argued that Argentina had reasonable chances of winning the South Atlantic War, even when limited by the suboptimal employment of its forces, thus creating permissive conditions for the onset of conflict. Also, had the most efficient use of its key air, sea and ground assets been made, its prospects for victory would have grown even brighter. Just why the junta seemingly 'pulled its punches' forms an intriguing puzzle, one that may be fruitfully analysed at the organisational level. This section aims to demonstrate that this level-of-analysis will also explain the pressures to pre-empt possible British responses by invading, and the intransigence that led to the eventual outbreak of the war.

A substantial literature on military organisations and their proclivities already exists, addressing issues ranging from the formation of doctrine to their roles in undermining crisis stability.[63] Generally, armed services are viewed as preferring offensive over defensive doctrines, primarily because the former allow greater autonomy and bigger budgets. This leads to a tendency, on some occasions, for military policy to become ill suited to national security needs. For example, the offensive doctrine of the relatively small Serbian military in 1914 proved very poorly integrated with the national need to pursue a more defensive approach in the face of aggressive, great power adversaries. Another problem is that acting quickly is often requisite for the success of offensive operations, leading military organisations to agitate, in crisis, for going to war under the most advantageous circumstances. According to mainstream theory, only the control of the military by civil authority can prevent the more pernicious effects of organisational pathologies from making themselves felt.[64]

The most recent wave of studies examining organisational influences on military doctrine and policy have tended to view armed services as brighter and nimbler than those envisioned by the classical model. In this

[63] Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca, 1984); Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive* (Ithaca, 1984); and Chris Demchak, *Military Organizations, Complex Machines* (Ithaca, 1991) are examples of this literature most relevant to the argument advanced in this study. Scott D. Sagan, 'The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons,' *International Security* vol. 18, no. 4 (Spring 1994), pp. 66–107, employs the organisational level-of-analysis to consider the consequences of proliferation for deterrence and crisis stability. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York, 1995) argue in greater depth the merits and flaws of a theory of organisational influence.

[64] Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 239–44, argues that the advent of crisis or war will stimulate political leaders to assert control over their military organisations, which may have been 'running free' during peacetime. John Arquilla, *Dubious Battles: Aggression, Defeat, and the International System* (London, 1992), pp. 61–3, counters with the view that, in international crises, the influence of military organisations over civil authority may actually increase.

regard, militaries may, it is argued, demonstrate a considerable ability to innovate, as well as to adopt a variety of doctrinal postures.[65] These insights derive from considerations that go beyond autonomy and size, as motivators, to fundamental issues of organisational survival. To protect the 'life' of one's organisation, one should prove willing to innovate, or to shift doctrines according to the perceived interests of the service, not necessarily those of the state. Finally, this fundamental interest in survival may lead to the development of 'hedged' policies that allow pursuit of an organisation's larger aims while ensuring the safety of its most vital elements.[66]

This more nuanced theory of organisations may provide the clues necessary to solving the puzzle of why Argentina's military first agitated for war and then, when conflict appeared imminent, opted to fight while withholding their key assets safe from harm. The crucial issues for the Argentine services revolve around why the army failed to send its mountain division to the Falklands, the air force based from the mainland rather than from the islands, and the navy refused to fight. All this occurred at the same time that the junta's military 'constituency' was preventing a negotiated settlement of the 1982 crisis.

The Argentine armed services' agitation for grabbing the Falklands in the first place is well documented.[67] In addition to the ideas advanced in the existing body of literature on this point, this article adds the notion that the invasion was actually a case of preemption, in that the 'grab' of the Falklands in April, at a suboptimal time of year, occurred due to fears of the deployment of a British naval blocking force.[68]

[65] See especially Robert L. Kahn and Mayer N. Zalds, (eds.), *Organizations and Nation-States* (San Francisco, 1990); Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, 1991); and Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Doctrine* (Princeton, 1993).

[66] Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 118, describes hedged approaches as a form of 'opportunism ... calculated to promote survival'. On this point, see also Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), pp. 278–9.

[67] See *Informe Rattenbach*; Costa Méndez, *Malvinas*; and Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*.

[68] Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, pp. 72–80, note the urgings of the Argentine military to preempt a suspected British blocking move that they believed was underway – on the basis of unsubstantiated claims made on 31 March in both the *New York Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. See William Borders, 'Britons and Argentines Squaring Off,' *New York Times*, 31 March 1982, p. 3. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse go on to point out (p. 77) that these stories were wrong, causing 'considerable embarrassment' for the media when *HMS Superb* returned to port in Faslane on the 16 April, thousands of miles from the maritime exclusion zone it was purportedly enforcing. However, on this point, *Informe Rattenbach*, para. 227, notes that within hours the Argentine military learned of, and were concerned over, Assistant Defence Minister Wiggin's assertion in Parliament that the Falklands were to 'be defended by other [than the cutter *Endurance*] Royal Navy boats.' Costa Méndez,

In this regard, the Argentine military's desire to act pre-emptively bears striking similarity to the German concerns about mobilising first in 1914. The literature on this latter crisis also explores the organisational dimension of the German decision to pre-empt, which grew out of an unrealistic assessment of the feasibility of tactically offensive operations; but it is equally sensitive to the preventive motivations for war as well. That is, there was a sense of the inevitability of war and, therefore, a desire to begin it at the optimal time, under the most advantageous circumstances.[69]

In the case of the South Atlantic War, the Argentine military proved quite clear-headed about their offensive limitations when faced with a British blocking force. Indeed, this led them, correctly, to point out the need to take the islands prior to the deployment of Royal Navy assets that would make a grab of the islands impossible. As to preventive pressures, the British were in no position to prevent eventual action by the junta. Indeed, delay could only favour the Argentine position. Tactically, waiting until the originally planned invasion date in July (winter in the southern hemisphere) would eliminate British chances for an amphibious reconquest. Strategically, waiting months, or even years, would see the power transition moving ever more in Argentina's favour, as Britain had plans to decommission the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal.*

Pre-emption and prevention aside, the principal interest of this section lies in determining the organisational influence on the origins of the war that followed in the wake of the *fait accompli.* To support our hypothesis that the month-long crisis after the invasion culminated in war because of organisational pressure on the junta to fight, it is necessary to look in some detail both at the emergent 'military polity' that constrained the junta's peace negotiations, and the manner in which the Argentine military prepared for and fought the war. These endeavours will test, somewhat indirectly in the latter case, whether the junta chose to fight in the

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Malvinas, p. 179, notes that the Argentine minister in London, Molteni, produced agitation in the military by reporting, in cable #752, that a British nuclear submarine had set sail from Gibraltar on 25 March, which would soon put it in a blocking position. Piñeiro, *Historia de la Guerra de Malvinas*, p. 21, also notes concern about the imminent arrival of the British surface warfare vessel *Exeter.*

[69] Incisive analyses of the organisational antecedents of preemptive pressures are Stephen Van Evera, 'The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,' *International Security* vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 58–107; and Jack Snyder, 'Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive' *International Security* vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 108–46. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, p. 142, indicate that the Argentinians may also have been driven by their own cult of the offensive: 'Although Argentine planners had been thinking for years about how to seize the islands, they had never developed plans for defending them once seized'.

Argentine national interest, out of their own interest in deflecting domestic opposition, or because their military simply wanted war.

While traditional notions of the manner in which domestic political pressures may foment war were criticised in early sections, this section suggests that, given the demobilisation of Argentine society in the wake of the dirty war, a different sort of 'military polity' arose, built around the officers of the Argentine armed forces. They, it may be hypothesised, formed a constituency to which the junta remained attentive. Indeed, both in terms of the pressure exerted on the junta to grab the islands in the first place, then to stay and fight, much evidence exists to support the notion that a very real form of political constraint was exercised on Argentina's putative rulers.[70]

The theoretical underpinning for this argument may be drawn both from notions that armed service organisations will have a penchant for offensive, aggressive policies,[71] and from the view that unhealthy civil-military relations permit the sorts of mischief caused when militaries are unchecked by civilian authority.[72] The former provides one of the necessary conditions for misadventures such as the invasion of the Falklands. The latter factor adds enough to generate the sufficient conditions for disasters like the junta's decision to remain and fight for the islands.

Going beyond identifying the sufficient conditions for embarking upon misadventures, this article contends that such behaviour is a consequence of the prolonged exercise of power by the military. According to the civil-military relations literature, a regime's length of time in power has deleterious effects on the military as an institution, as well as for the political system. This is true for the military as an institution because it politicises a previously apolitical organisation to the detriment of its original purpose, war preparedness. A weakening of the political system also occurs because, to the military mind, politics and what politics

[70] Haig, *Caveat*, pp. 276–8, argues that the military's pressure on the junta was a cause of the invasion. To explain why Argentina refused to negotiate a peaceful settlement, Haig also points out (p. 288) that 'Galtieri did not hold the power of decision, neither did the junta. On every decision, the government apparently had to secure the unanimous consent of every corps commander in the army and of their equivalents in the navy and air force.' In an interview with one of the authors, 21 July 1994, David Gompert, an aide to Alexander Haig who drafted the various peace proposals, confirmed the American view that the junta operated under these tight constraints. The memoirs of Costa Méndez provide further support for this theory. See also *Informe Rattenbach*, para. 571F.

[71] This view is perhaps most clearly articulated in Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*; and Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive*.

[72] See Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, 1957); and Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1975).

implies (negotiation and bargaining) is anathema. Military rulers, it is therefore argued, frequently preside over policy disasters.[73]

With regard to the issue of organisational influences on war preparedness, if the South Atlantic War arose out of an intractable sovereignty dispute, and the junta deemed the use of force appropriate, ultimately, because of its reasonable prospects for winning, then a military 'best effort' would be logically required. Similarly, if the junta sought war to shore up domestic support, it would certainly want to fight as hard as possible, for defeat would lead to a fall from power. However, if the invasion were a creature of organisational interests, governed by the Argentine services, then one might see a 'hedged' approach to the forthcoming fight. Just as surely as the military valued the grab of the islands, it also must have prized its key assets: well-trained and equipped mountain troops, the aircraft carrier, and the elite air force. Where war for the national interest or the junta's political need would see these elements sent into battle, an 'organisational' war would instead commit only sufficient force to provide a good chance of winning without risking those formations that comprised the services' essence.[74]

This hedged approach to 'having their cake and eating it too' would no doubt also explain an intransigent negotiating position, for the risks accompanying war are mitigated by the withholding of the most vital organisational assets. Indeed, worry over the protection of key assets could also cause the various services to experience collective action problems, in that each, individually, would have little incentive to risk its most vital resources, because such a move might induce the others to refrain from hazarding their best forces. Thus, each service, in pursuit of its parochial interests, would be driven to avoid putting its 'best foot' forward, leading, in theory, to a suboptimised set of deployments to the theatre of war. In practice, this appears to be what happened.

What arguments were used by the services to explain the fact that the Argentine military had not deployed the best forces? The answers to this question vary. The stated reason for the decision not to use the mountain troops in the war, for example, was that they were needed to ensure the security of the Beagle Channel region. It was feared – a fear repeatedly expressed in forceful terms – that Chile might resort to a 'stab in the back'

[73] Though a theme considered by both Huntington and Finer, it is explored in greater detail by Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (New York, 1977).

[74] Indeed, a few years after the war, the United States Army sponsored a series of simulations to replay the campaign with the same forces employed in the actual fighting, and found that British losses could easily have been much heavier, thus casting the outcome in serious doubt. See Wayne Hughes, Jr. and Jeffrey Larson, *The Falklands Wargame* (Bethesda, 1986).

if Argentina became embroiled in a war with Britain. This explanation falters, however, and seems more a creature of organisational interest, if one considers that the Pope had recently arbitrated the dispute with Chile, ruling against the Argentine claim. Chile showed no inclination to risk by war what it had already gained in civil adjudication; and Argentine intelligence confirmed this, rating the likelihood of Chilean attack as minimal.[75]

Another possible explanation for the decision to send conscripts from Argentina's tropical zone to the Falklands instead of those trained for winter fighting is that the junta may have thought Britain would not intervene, obviating the need for deploying the best troops. This might have made sense initially; but when the British expeditionary force set sail from Portsmouth, the need to prepare for a stern fight should have led to the deployment of the mountain troops. Aside from increasing the viability of the islands' defences, the mountain troops would also have enhanced a diplomatic strategy that sought to deter Britain by raising the spectre of a potentially very bloody, uncertain campaign on the ground.

Aside from those forces capable of fighting under arctic conditions, Argentina also had substantial special forces assets available for deployment to the islands. Argentine military doctrine, in theory, calls for these elites to be 'housed' within regular units, then extracted and recombined for unified action. In practice, however, commanders of regular units refused to relinquish their commandos. Many commandos nevertheless found ingenious means of escape from them, then went to the islands. These escapees presented themselves to Menéndez as self-described 'contraband' on April 24, lobbying him to request that all commandos be sent to the islands. Four days later, Menéndez succeeded in overcoming all organisational impedimenta, and Argentine special forces were allowed to deploy. At this point, the pattern of non-use was converted to misuse, as the commandos were assigned primary duties as military police.[76]

Even more puzzling than the failure to deploy the appropriate ground troops to the Falklands is the Argentine decision to fight the air war using mainland bases, forcing attack aircraft to undertake an 800-mile roundtrip commute on every sortie. Given that Argentina enjoyed a month-long period after its *fait accompli* invasion before the British expeditionary force arrived, there can be little excuse for failing to operate its attack aircraft from the islands. Such a move would have raised the risks in approaching the islands to prohibitive levels. Indeed, British leaders worried incessantly about this problem, leading them to strike at the Port Stanley airfield with

[75] See *Informe Rattenbach*, paras. 578–81.

[76] Ruiz Moreno, *Comandos en Acción*, pp. 21–4, 30–1, 56–63.

strategic bombers long before the task force came within range, and to subject it to repeated, if unsuccessful bombings throughout the campaign.

Officially, Argentine reluctance to utilise the Falklands as a major airbase was justified, by the assessment that the airstrip at Port Stanley was too short to comply with safety regulations for landing the various types of air force fighter-bombers that were to be used in the campaign. While true, this objection failed to address the measures that could have easily been taken[77] to bring the landing field in line with the standard operating procedures. After all, the air force, too, had a month's time to prepare for battle, and the benefits from having an 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' in the form of a base in the islands could prove incalculable.[78]

Though the Argentine Air Force (FAA) claimed its decision to base from the mainland grew solely from the problem of runway unsuitability, one might also argue that rear-area basing made sense because of the vulnerability of the Stanley airfield to British counterstrikes. Indeed, the RAF's Vulcan bombing of the island airbase early on indicated the great concern with which the British viewed the possibility of Argentine forward basing. However, had Argentina moved significant air assets to the islands at the time of the invasion, then the likelihood of the RAF or the task force coming near enough to strike would have been severely diminished.

Further, even if some damage to the airfield were suffered, repairs would always be possible or, at worst, the FAA could *then* base from the mainland. As it turned out, contrary to the reporting at the time, very little damage was ever done to the Stanley airfield, which continued to be used right up to the surrender. Indeed, records show that, of the fifty-four bombs dropped on the base, only one came close enough to 'crater' the runway, and it was filled in within hours.[79]

Finally, in support of the organisational hypothesis, some evidence

[77] According to DNA, vol. 4, p. 41, the FAA maintained large stocks of AM2 runway matting, the same material that the British used to make it possible to fly their F–4s (also the FAA's mainstay) from the Falklands later in 1982. B.H. Andrada, *Guerra aérea en las Malvinas* (Buenos Aires, 1983), pp. 38–40, further suggests that lack of runway length was less a problem than the fact that FAA pilots did not like landing at steeper-than-usual angles of descent, required for the use of Stanley airfield, which lies nearby a range of hills and ridges. Prevailing winds often necessitated landing approaches over this obstructing terrain, followed by sharp, immediate descents.

[78] Ernest Howard, *Demand the Advantage: When Is Airpower Central to a Campaign?* (Maxwell AFB, 1992) contends that the Argentines would probably have won had they been able to use the airstrip on East Falkland Island to its full potential. He also notes (p. 26) that the needed matting was loaded on the *Ciudad de Córdoba*, which was kept in port due to the British submarine threat. What his discussion fails to address, though, is the possibility that the Argentines could have either shipped in the matting right along with the invasion force, or flown it in bit by bit during the long run up to war.

[79] DNA, vol. 4, p. 16.

exists that the FAA refused to base out of the islands because it would have come under some degree of navy operational control. Indeed, Admiral Carlos Büsser, who led the invasion, points out that FAA pilots rebelled at this notion, even to the point of refusing instruction from naval aviators in how to attack ships at sea.[80] Further, Büsser notes that the small FAA contingent based at Goose Green consistently refused to take orders from either the navy or the army.[81]

The Argentine navy's behaviour completes a picture of the deep-rooted organisational influences on this conflict. It had agitated most for war, yet did the least of the fighting. Margaret Thatcher notes derisively that it had simply 'skulked in port.'[82] Two explanations were given by the navy for its inactivity. First, the assertion was made that it could never seem to generate the conditions for the 'lucky chance' it sought to engage the British fleet under favourable circumstances. Second, the navy continually asserted that the United States was providing detailed information about the location of the Argentine fleet to the British, making a fair fight impossible.[83]

In summary, the foregoing supports the theory that organisational influences persisted throughout the crisis over the islands, lending credence to the notion that both the initial grab and the intransigence regarding a negotiated solution[84] were the products, to a significant

[80] Büsser, *Malvinas: la guerra inconclusa*, p. 133. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, p. 144 also observe that Argentina's military services 'tended to operate independently of each other, and there were innumerable arguments about the division of roles and responsibilities.'

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 134. Piaggi, *El combate de Goose Green*, pp. 58, 63, 66–7, also comments on the unwillingness of the FAA to provide either rotary or small fixed wing aircraft for the movement of troops, whose mobility was highly constrained during the mud season in which the ground campaign took place; and also notes that even though he had received confirmation from the high command that the FAA commander at Goose Green was to act under his (Piaggi's) orders, the latter refused to place himself under an army officer's control.

[82] Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 228.

[83] Büsser, *Malvinas*, p. 131. Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, Chapter 16, analyse this issue and find no basis of support for the Argentine contention that the Americans were relaying to the British the location of Argentine naval units. This situation, of a navy reluctant to fight, though its declaratory doctrine was offensive, is eerily similar to the rationale offered by the German naval high command in World War I regarding its reluctance to engage the Royal Navy. Back then, the High Sea Fleet sought a similar, and equally elusive, *glücksfall*, or lucky chance, to strike, which never seemed to materialise. In reality, the German navy stayed out of battle for quite a long time because of its organisationally-centred fear of losing its capital ships, and its influence on high-level policymaking. See Arquilla, *Dubious Battles*, Chapter 5, for a discussion of the German case.

[84] It should be noted that, though there were 'sticking points' on both sides, from quite early on Britain displayed a substantial degree of flexibility with regard to the issue of administration. Then, late in the negotiations, Britain backed away from insistence on maintaining absolute sovereignty over the islands prior to any settlement talks. See Robert A. Burns, *Diplomacy, War and Parliamentary Democracy* (Lanham, MD, 1985) for

degree, of Argentine service preferences. That the military effectively ran the government, even to the extent of constraining the decision making of members of the junta, fatally vitiated chances for peaceful settlement.[85] Just as important, perhaps was the chilling effect that the power of the Argentine services had on any meaningful debate of the decision to fight a major war. Thus, a social norm of 'reticence' on the part of military officers to criticise war plans, or to call for more prudential behaviour, was imposed, and may be a sign that the psychological phenomenon of what Irving L. Janis called 'groupthink' was in play,[86] reinforcing the errors that had been induced by narrow-minded organisational preferences.

Evaluating the explanatory power of the theories

Because of the significant lapse of time between the Argentine invasion and the British counterattack, the Malvinas/Falklands conflict affords an ideal opportunity to test for the necessary and sufficient conditions for war initiation. In this regard, the domestic politics and perceptual theories may contribute to an understanding of the factors that influenced the decision to attack in April 1982. However, only by examining the structural and organisational factors that came into play may one begin to comprehend more fully why the junta opted, first for a grab of the islands, then to stay and fight.

While the Galtieri government was newly installed, military rule had been in place for nearly six years by the spring of 1982. The discomfiture of the Argentine people was growing, and was exacerbated by the short-term effects of painful monetarist economic reforms. Certainly, these factors could encourage a spirit of foreign adventurism, or at least a greater willingness to contemplate risky policies.[87] Compounding these

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a comprehensive analysis of the British negotiating strategy. That the Argentine military continued to constrain the junta from achieving a settlement, even in light of British negotiating concessions which came in earnest after the sinking of the *Sheffield* on 4 May suggests that these organisational influences were quite deeply rooted.

[85] For evidence that the Argentine military services' influence was pervasive, even to the extent of holding provincial governorships and magistracies, see Verbitsky, *La última batalla*, pp. 40–5; and Cardoso et al., *Malvinas*, pp. 174–5.

[86] See, for example, I. L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston, 1972), which explores this problem, as manifested by the U.S. military, in fiascoes ranging from Pearl Harbor to the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam.

[87] In this regard, the junta's risk acceptancy might be argued to have grown out of its self-perception as being in the 'domain of losses,' as it is put in prospect theory. Thus, the junta's position might be likened to the gambler, down to his last chips, willing to stake all on a final throw. The principal tenets of prospect theory were laid down in Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk,' *Econometrica* vol. 47, no. 2 (Summer 1979), pp. 263–91.

problems, and offering a possible avenue of escape, the British government appeared to lack the desire or will to hold on to the disputed islands. Further, their great distance from the locus of British power no doubt served to weaken whatever deterrent effort might be made.[88] Taken together, these factors provide a reasonable explanation for the initial act of aggression.

As to the decision to fight, once British resolve had grown clear, both the domestic political and perceptual theories lack sufficient explanatory power, on their own. At this point, structural and organisational factors afford the best explanation. However, as we believe this study has shown, the role of organisational influences permeates this story throughout. Indeed, the Argentine military's offensive proclivities even appear to have fostered a serious alarm, in the face of ambiguous evidence of a speedy British response to the invasion threat, encouraging a pre-emptive attack at the wrong season of the year.

Also, the Argentine military services appear to have formed the junta's core 'constituency.' They fomented both the bellicosity that led to the grab of the islands, and the intransigence that prevented a negotiated solution. Thus, they also caused the war, for which they had agitated, to be fought inefficiently and lost. In this regard, this article advances the argument that states with poor civil-military relations are driven, by their organisational pathologies, to develop poor war-fighting strategies, as their military services pursue their own rather than national interests. If this is so, a curious trade-off may develop in the post-Cold War world. States with uncontrolled militaries may be difficult to deal with in a crisis, but less formidable in war. If democratic enlargement tends to improve civil-military relations, then the spread of liberal political systems, though it may make states less prone to war initiation, may allow them to actualise their full warfighting potential.[89]

In the case of the South Atlantic War, this may mean that better governmental control of the military would have made war less likely; but that, had war broken out anyway, the same sort of control would have severely diminished Britain's chances of winning. In such a scenario, Argentine civil intervention would have compelled the military services

[88] In addition to distance, Britain's 'usable options' were limited by the normative prohibition against making nuclear threats, and the inappropriateness of the British Army of the Rhine for fighting in the near-arctic conditions soon to be expected on the islands. On this point, see the connection between limited usable options and deterrence failure drawn in Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1974), pp. 80–2.

[89] Our view draws inspiration from theoretical insights developed in David A. Lake, 'Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War,' *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no. 1 (March 1992), pp. 24–37.

to overcome their collective action problems and institutional incentives to pursue a hedged approach to war.

Was the South Atlantic War an accident? Yes, it is contended here, despite the fact that the islands lay at the heart of an intractable dispute, and that the opposing parties' usable military capabilities were in rough balance. For, in the end, it was the Argentine military services, unchecked by political controls, which engaged in a precipitate pre-emptive action at the wrong season of the year, then hamstrung the junta as it tried to wriggle peacefully out of the crisis. Finally, the organisational pathology that led to a hedged Argentinian approach to deploying for the war gave British political leadership and their armed forces the window of opportunity they needed to close in for an amphibious assault on the islands. Without this organisational misfeasance, the FAA would have been properly deployed on the islands, giving Britain's superior ground forces no chance to land and wage the war they ultimately did, in which they reawakened and reaffirmed their distinguished martial traditions.

Chronology

1976

Jan.
Argentina fires warning shots across bow of icebreaker *Shackleton*.
Withdrawal of ambassadors from both countries.

1977

Massera asks Anaya to prepare plan for invasion of Malvinas

1979

July
Diplomatic Relations Resumed.

Sept. 19
Constantino Davidoff signs contract with Christian Salvensen Limited, buying all the stuff in the whaling stations. Davidoff's authority to go to Georgias expired 3/31/83 according to the terms of the contract.

1981

7 Dec.
5 of 14 Super Etendards bought from France arrive in Argentina.

11 Dec.
Davidoff notifies Falklands officials that his men would go to Georgias to work on inventory. Trip occurs without problem.

15 Dec.
Anaya asks Lombardo to prepare plan for invasion. He works with Garcia Boll, Allara and Büsser and presents it to Anaya Dec. 20.

29 Dec.
Galtieri, Anaya and Lami Dozo meet and present the latter with the plan. No decision made.

1982

6 Jan.
Commanders meet again and decide on invasion if negotiations with UK on Feb. 27–28 fail. Anaya requests that an admiral be ambassador in London at that time, arguing that he would be better able than a civilian to explain to British the meaning of the operation (LTS p. 46). The British object, Costa Méndez argues with Galtieri who says it is up to Anaya, Costa Méndez then talks to Lami Dozo who agrees with him, and a civilian is appointed.

Early Feb.
Junta allows Galtieri to put Costa Méndez in the picture.

9 March
Davidoff notifies UK embassy that the *Bahia Buen Suceso* will go to Georgias with 41 men.

11 March
Embassy requests list of personnel and Davidoff gives it to them.

An AAF Hercules C–130 does an emergency landing at Stanley, apparently en route to the Antarctic base Vicecomodoro Marambio.

19 March
Scrap merchants arrive at Leith. They raise the flag.

20 March
Offices of LADE in Stanley attacked by kelpers with toothpaste

21 March
Bahia Buen Suceso returns leaving the workers in Georgias.

26 March
Costa Méndez calls the Georgias incident "a serious incident that worries us, in which we must protect the workers who are working there in fulfilment of a commercial contract that Great Britain is fully aware of." He announced the government would take all diplomatic steps to protect the workers and that it was sending the *Bahía Paraís* to Georgias, as well as the Drummond and Granville (both *corbetas misilíticas*).

Britain sends *Endurance* to Georgias with orders to use force if need be.

28 March
Fleet leaves Puerto Belgrano for Malvinas.

30 March
Repression of demonstration in BA.

1 April
At night UN Security Council asks UK and Argentina to refrain from using force in the islands. Britain had called the meeting.

Reagan tries to talk to Galtieri 2pm–10pm. Reagan warns UK will respond militarily and Thatcher will fight (LTS p. 106).

Enders meets Takacs and says that if it came to war, US might not be able to remain neutral (LTS p. 111).

3 April
Argentina occupies Georgia.

Thatcher announces she is sending the Task Force.

UN passes Resolution 502.

5 April
Carrington resigns, Pym takes over.

The British leave Portsmouth.

6 April
Reagan appoints Haig mediator.

7 April
UK Ambassador Anthony Williams leaves Argentina.

General Mario Benjamín Menéndez takes over as governor of Malvinas. Ceremony attended by union leaders, politicians and government officials, including CGT leader Saúl Ubaldini, imprisoned during the repression a week earlier.

UK announces 200-mile blockade. In Commons Pym says UK 'does not appease dictators' and vows to use force if necessary.

Haig travels to London.

8 April
Haig talks to Thatcher for 5 hours.

Argentine parties, unions and business groups ratify their support for the government.

9 April
Haig flies from London to BA.

10 April
EEC ban on imports from Argentina (30% of Argentina's exports). Embargo goes into effect 4/17 for one month.

Haig meets twice with Galtieri and twice with Costa Méndez in BA, while huge crowds assemble in front of the Rosada. Galtieri speaks from the balcony and says 'the honour and the dignity of the Nation are not negotiable'.

US embassy source in BA tells Reuters that he thought UK would carry out its threat to use force.

11 April
Garrison in Malvinas said to number 9–10,000 men.

Haig travels to London.

12 April
Blockade begins.

Politicians and union leaders leave Argentina to try to get support in the international community.

Haig tells Costa Méndez on the phone that it is unlikely that he will come back to Argentina because the British position is rigid.

14 April
Reagan and Galtieri speak on the phone again.

15 April
Haig returns to BA.

The fleet leaves Puerto Belgrano heading south.

17 April
Haig meets Junta and tells them that if this dragged on UK would use force and US would have to side with UK even if this compromised the stability of the Argentine government (LTS p. 197).

18 April
Galtieri meets with all active-duty generals (de división y de brigada) to inform them of progress in the Haig mission.

19 April
Haig returns to Washington. At Ezeiza airport he says to journalists that 'During more than three days of extremely detailed conversations there has been an additional identification and refinement of the Argentine position ... I am more convinced than ever that war in the South Atlantic would be the greatest of tragedies, and that really time is running out' (LP 4/20).

Sen. Larry Pressler R-SD introduces a non-binding resolution to condemn Argentina: 'It is clear that Argentina is involving in a macho exercise to distract the attention of its people from its dismal failures at home through military adventures abroad' (BAH 4/20).

The Socialist bloc in European parliament calls for withdrawal of Argentina from Malvinas, 'a diversionary tactic to distract attention from the political brutalities and economic failures of its own regime' (same).

Costa Méndez requests OAS meeting to discuss application of Rio Treaty.

20 April
OAS votes to have meeting of Rio Treaty, 18–0 with 3 abstentions.

21 April
Giving conference in Texas, Kirkpatrick calls Argentina the aggressor, first time a US official does that.

Argentina changes Stanley's name to Puerto Argentino.

Thatcher sends Reagan/Haig a proposal, in anticipation of Pym's visit: 1) immediate Argentine withdrawal 2) détente period during which UK maintains control of administration 3) negotiations over sovereignty to begin after consultation with kelpers. *The Standard* reports that Tory backbenchers are getting nervous with the likelihood of war, and that if Thatcher were to order the fleet back now, 'without obtaining satisfaction to the demands she posed two weeks ago,' her government would fall (LP 4/22).

22 April
Galtieri visits Malvinas.

Argentina calls for meeting of Rio Treaty.

24 April
Costa Méndez travels to Washington to participate in meeting of Permanent Council of OAS, with Iglesias, Miret and Moya (The Three Stooges, LTS p. 175).

25 April
British retake Georgias. 189 prisoners, 150 military and the 39 scrap metal workers. Astiz taken to UK. *Santa Fe* sub severely damaged in attack.

In DC Costa Méndez says negotiations are closed because of attack on Georgias. Asked by American journalists if Argentina is at war, he says 'Technically, yes'. Source close to Thatcher says that as far as UK is concerned, Haig's mission is 'still alive' (BAH 4/26).

26 April
UK papers give unanimous support to government re Georgias.

Demonstration in front of Casa Rosada to protest Georgias, called by labour. Banner reads 'Malvinas yes, Process no' and the people chant 'Galtieri, Galtieri: The Malvinas belong to Argentina but the people to Perón' (BAH 4/27).

In Commons Thatcher says 'A state of war does not exist between ourselves and Argentina ... . I must point out to the House that time is getting extremely short as the task force approaches the islands. You can't have a wide range of military options with the task force in wild and stormy weather' (same).

According to *L'Express*, shuttle between mainland and Malvinas functioned until today.

29 April
Task force reaches Malvinas and UK imposes total blockade.

30 April
Pérez de Cuellar offers to mediate.

US abandons neutrality, suspends military and economic aid to Argentina, and promises to 'respond positively' to UK requests for military aid.

1 May
British offensive begins with attacks on airport at Stanley and Darwin. Attacks begin at 4.40 am and Argentine response comes at 5 p.m. (from official communiqués in LP 5/2).

Pentagon expert reported as saying that the British can last 30 days without resupplying

2 May
Belgrano sunk by *Conqueror* 36 miles outside the exclusion zone. 123 survive (then 680) or a 1,042 crew.

Belaúnde proposal.

3 May
AN's *Sobral* hit by British planes.

Argentina turns down Belaúnde proposal but Iglesias and Moya travel to Lima.

QE2 to take more troops south (Welsh guards, Scots guards and Gurkhas).

4 May
Argentina sinks destroyer *Sheffield* with Super Etendard and Exocet.

British attack airports at Stanley and Goose Green.

Ireland drops its backing of Britain.

6 May
Both countries accept UN mediation (for plan see LP 5/7).

7 May
UK widens blockade to within 12 miles of Argentine coast.

12 May
QE2 leaves carrying 3,000 men.

14 May
Thatcher speaks at party conference in Scotland and says that it looks like negotiations will fail and UK will have to take islands by force.

Argentine Defence ministry says Stanley airport can still be used by light aircraft in spite of attacks.

15 May
Brits hit the *Bahía Buen Suceso* and the *Río Carcarana* and sink the *Isla de los Estados*.

17 May
EEC renews sanctions against Argentina for one week.

18 May
British Sea King helicopter crashes near Punta Arenas, Chile.

20 May
Pérez de Cuellar abandons mediating efforts.

21 May
The British move into San Carlos (Water) and land on Soledad (East Falkland), at Port San Carlos, 50m from Stanley.

Argentina sinks the Frigate *Ardent*.

23 May
Argentina sinks the Frigate *Antelope*.

24 May
Argentina calls for another meeting of OAS under Rio Treaty.

Argentine planes attack the destroyer *Coventry* and hit the supply vessel *Atlantic Conveyor*. The *AC* stayed afloat but the crew jumped ship and Brits lost huge amounts of invasion equipment including Chinook helicopters and spare parts for Harriers. *AC* was within sight of *Hermes*.

25 May
Costa Méndez gives his colonialism speech at UN Security Council.

28 May
John Paul II in London.

29 May
Junta's communiqué #150 announces the British have 'consolidated their beachhead' at San Carlos with 4–4,500 men. The attack starts with 2,000 against 800 Argentines.

30 May
The Non-aligned begin their meeting in Havana.

Brits move to Goose Green/Darwin. Fleet bombs Stanley.

2 June
Land combat 20 km away from Stanley.

UN Security Council Resolution 505. Vetoed by US/UK.

3 June
Vulcan plane makes forced landing in Rio. Brazilian government reports that its air space was not violated because the plane had 'technical difficulties', 'if it hadn't landed, it would have crashed', and denies this is collaboration with UK.

Costa Méndez gives his speech in Havana.

9 June
AAF repels a landing attempt at Bahía Agradable (Bluff Cove) and Fitz Roy. *Plymouth* (frigate), *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Tristam* (landing ships) hit.

11 June
John Paul II in BA.

12 June
The Fallaci interview appears in the *London Times.*

UK announces troops have started the assault on Stanley. They control Mt. Longdon, Twin Sisters and Harriet.

14 June
Fighting ends.

15 June
Menéndez surrenders.

Galtieri speaks on TV.

About 2,000 demonstrators in front of Casa Rosada are dispersed by police with tear gas and rubber bullets. They were chanting things like "Surrender is Treason" and throwing coins at the Rosada. Things heated up around 7 p.m., when Galtieri was supposed to speak from the balcony, and that is when repression started.

Demonstrators burnt buses and cars.

18 June
Galtieri resigns.

22 June
Nicolaides becomes a one-man junta.

Revelations about logistical problems by conscripts begin.

6 July
Rattenbach commission formed.