

REAGAN'S DILEMMA

Argentina, Britain and the Falklands Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

THE Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands on 2nd April 1982 created a dilemma for the United States. The United Kingdom was, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, an American military ally yet Washington was at the same time engaged in alliance building with Argentina. Many in Britain at the time, especially within the Thatcher government, did not appreciate the extent and sincerity of President Ronald Reagan's courting of the military junta in Argentina and were thus surprised that the President's default position was not supporting Britain in response to this unilateral action. This dissertation aims to contextualise and explain the US-Argentine relationship by explaining its place in early 1980s American geopolitical strategy, before analysing the dilemma it caused Reagan in the Falklands episode.

An analysis of the American dilemma will show how the attempt to apply the rule of anti-communism to the Falklands crisis was misguided. This evaluation is assisted by looking at the subsequent effects of the war on American relations with Argentina and Latin America more generally. Thus the work adds to the substantial literature available on the conflict itself and the ex ante Anglo-Argentine diplomatic battle over the Islands' sovereignty.¹

¹In particular, the 'post-war flurry' of histories that emerged in 1982-4, e.g. *War in the Falklands: The Full Story* (The Sunday Times Insight Team, 1982), *The Winter War* (Witherow, 1983) and even the authoritative *Battle for the Falklands* (Hastings

These subsequent events allow us to extend our evaluation of the effectiveness of the American response with a discussion of the applicability of the assumptions upon which the policy of neutral mediation was based. Both the relationship cultivated with Buenos Aires prior to 1982 and its staunch defence by Argentina's advocates in Washington emerge as misguided and without justification. In this way, the Falklands is a useful case study of Reagan's self-styled 'realist' foreign policy and a test of its real-world applicability.²

Structure

Good relations with Argentina were a key part of the Reagan administration's reengagement with the Cold War, driven by a new worldview derived from a particular reading of Cold War events during the 1970s and the failures of President Carter's human rights guided foreign policy. How their cultivation created a dilemma for the United States is discussed in part I and efforts as the crisis developed to preserve good relations with Argentina and the wider Latin world are thus put into context.

In parts II and III the effect of these American entreaties on the military government in Buenos Aires is examined. It is argued that it was US encouragement of the Argentine junta

and Jenkins, 1983, hereafter HJ) tend to forgive and forget initial American neutrality in the glow of victory (Bicheno, 2006, p.28).

² Secretary of State General Alexander Haig's memoirs of his time at Foggy Bottom, published in 1984 and used extensively below, are entitled *Caveat: Reagan, Realism and Foreign Policy*

that was the most significant factor emboldening them to act to redress the historical grievance of the Falklands (*Las Malvinas*). This is important, because it illustrates the depth of the developing ties between the Argentine junta and the Reagan administration, which will in turn help us understand the dilemma and evaluate the response to it.

In part IV the initial American response is examined, that of not choosing between the belligerents and attempting neutral mediation. Whilst this mediation was the official policy line prescribed by the President and carried out by his Secretary of State Alexander Haig, the Defense Department was covertly but substantially aiding Britain's task force sailing to recapture the islands. Furthermore, the pro-Latin American rhetoric of Reagan's United Nations ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, contradicted official peacemongering and complicated the American response.

In part V we move from the objective to the subjective and attempt to evaluate the Reagan administration's response to the Falklands crisis. Once neutral mediation had failed, due to intransigence in both Buenos Aires and London, the United States officially came to the aid of Britain in the 'tilt' of 30th April. However, in retrospect we can show how the warnings of the Latin Americanists in the State Department were not vindicated; Latin America did not turn against the United States *en masse* and Soviet penetration in the hemisphere did not

increase. In fact, in some countries the opposite proved to be true, either because of local antagonisms against Argentina or because the upholding of international law and the opposing of unilateral aggression were more important concerns than Latin solidarity. Furthermore, the return to democracy in Argentina under Presidents Alfonsín and Menem allowed Argentine-American to reach a previously unattained plane. A conclusion argues that, even without the benefit of hindsight, the Reagan response to the Falklands crisis was constrained by an insistence on Cold War strategic concerns and that pragmatism was secondary to ideology as the motivator of policy.

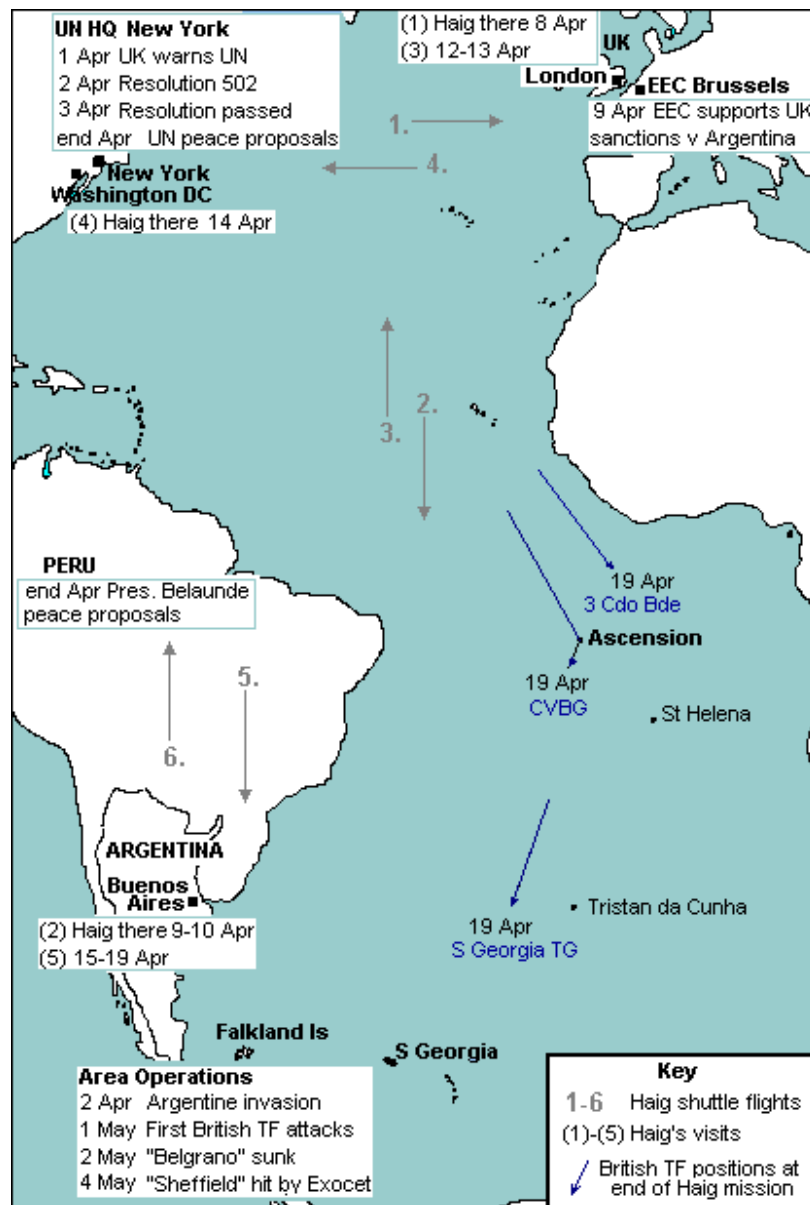


Fig. 1 – Map showing main events in theatre, and first and second rounds of the Haig shuttle.

TF – Task Force

TG – South Georgia advance Task Group

CVBG – main carrier battle group (HMS *Hermes* and *Invincible*)

Cdo Bde – Commando Brigade

Source: www.royalnavy-history.net/F16diplomacy.htm (retrieved 14th November 2008)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1823:** Monroe Doctrine enunciated, US to resist European influence in the Americas
- 1833:** Argentines expelled from Falkland Islands by HMS *Clio*
- 1956:** Britain, France and Israel attempt to regain control of Suez Canal following nationalization by President Nasser of Egypt. Strong American disapproval.
- 1961:** India seizes back Portuguese colonial enclave of Goa
- 1966:** 16 year bilateral negotiations on sovereignty of Falklands/Malvinas begin in New York
- 1976:** Military *coup d'état* deposes Isabel Perón in Argentina, Democrat Jimmy Carter elected 39th President of the United States, Argentine Air Force establishes small base on South Thule, South Sandwich Islands
- 1977:** Carter-Torrijos Treaty granting control of Panama Canal to Panama, Papal arbitration grants control of Beagle Channel islands to Chile.
- 1978:** Argentina hosts and wins football World Cup
- 1979:** Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Islamic revolution in Iran subsequent Tehran hostage crisis, Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, Kirkpatrick's 'Dictatorships and Double Standards' article published.
- 1980:** Leaseback of Falklands and Dependencies discussed, Republican Ronald Reagan inaugurated President.
- 1981:** Nott Naval Review announced, to include withdrawal of ice-patrol ship HMS *Endurance* from South Atlantic and scrapping of Britain's two remaining aircraft carriers, US Senate permits arms sales to Argentina, Gen. Viola briefly replaces Gen. Videla as Argentine President.
- December – Gen. Galtieri becomes President of Argentina
- 1982:** Davidoff secures scrap metal contracts for South Georgia whaling stations
- April 2nd - Argentine forces invade Falkland Islands
- 3rd – South Georgia occupied, UN Security Council Resolution 502 passed demanding immediate withdrawal and ceasefire
- 5th – Task Force sails from Portsmouth, Carrington resigns to be replaced by Pym as Foreign Secretary
- 8th – US Secretary of State Haig begins shuttle diplomacy (see Fig. 1 for details)
- 25th – Operation Paraquat, Britain recaptures South Georgia

- 30th – Shuttle diplomacy terminated, Reagan's 'tilt' to Britain
- May 2nd – *General Belgrano* sunk by submarine *HMS Conqueror*
- 4th – *HMS Sheffield* crippled by Exocet missile
- 7th – Peruvian peace initiative fails
- 20th – UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's peace initiative fails
- 21st – British counter-invasion at San Carlos
- 24th – EEC extends indefinitely economic sanctions against Argentina
- June 3rd - Reagan flies to Paris for Versailles conference
- 15th – Argentine surrender at Port Stanley
- July – Galtieri deposed, replaced by Gen. Bignone. Haig resigns as Secretary of State
- November – Reagan tours Latin American capitals
- 1983:** Raúl Alfonsín elected President of Argentina, Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech, US invasion of Grenada
- 1988:** Caspar Weinberger knighted
- 1989:** Carlos Menem elected President of Argentina, Congress rescinds Humphrey-Kennedy amendment banning arms sales to Argentina
- July-August – Argentine Condór II missile project abandoned
- 1991:** Operation Desert Storm, Argentina sends *ARA Almirante Brown* and *Spiro* to Persian Gulf

I – The Argentine-American Anti-Communist Alliance

The Falklands crisis was a dilemma for the United States because it forced a choice between Argentina and Great Britain, both integral parts of President Ronald Reagan's anti-communist alliance fighting to redress the imbalance created by, in his view, aggressive Soviet and Cuban interventions in the Third World during the 1970s. For Reagan, the dispute over the Falklands distracted attention from opposing the Soviets in the all-important and all-consuming struggle against communism.³

Military-ruled Argentina had established itself as the United States' foremost ally in the American Hemisphere through its support for anti-communist intervention in Central America. Reagan's dilemma was thus a choice between a NATO ally with an illustrious history but which was, since 1945, declining in relative importance as a world power, and an ally with a less than salubrious past but huge potential as a hemispheric bulwark against communism.

³ Sir Lawrence Freedman in Badsey et. al. (Sandhurst Conference series) 2005 (hereafter LF), p.17 and Burns, 2001, p.295-6

That the administration decided peaceful settlement was the preferred solution to the dispute is self evident from the above argument; they wanted to avoid the dilemma, to avoid the difficult choice between allies that would have to be made if hostilities broke out. Fighting within the anti-communist bloc was to be avoided at all costs to ensure its strength and to prevent exploitation of fissures by a Soviet Union widely held to be in opportunistic mood following exploits in the Third World in the 1970s:

'Let us remember that, before 1981, the Soviets were definitely in an expansionist mode in the US hemisphere. They had not only established control in Nicaragua, but had effectively taken control of Grenada, with broader effects on destabilisation not only across Nicaragua and El Salvador but also Guatemala, and Honduras. So it was kind of a bad scene in the hemisphere.'⁴

A strong preference for a peaceful solution only makes sense, however, if we accept the view that Argentina was of equal value to Britain in the eyes of the Reagan administration. In light of the tradition of Churchill's 'special relationship' and the short time in which Argentina had come to be accepted as an ally by the United States, such a claim requires explanation. We can take either a system-level view of Argentina's place among American anti-communist allies, or a state-level explanation that relies on the particular world view of the President and the ideas of his foreign policy advisors, as well as the internal political character of Argentina. The utility in using these two levels of analysis is that the first makes the dilemma presented by the Falklands an inevitable consequence of America's

⁴ Kirkpatrick interview with Peter Snow, BBC Radio 4, 2007 (hereafter R4). See also Thatcher, 1993, p.156 and 188, Kirkpatrick, 1979, p.8, Haig, 1984, p.26-31, Weinberger, 1990, p.25. See Westad, 2005, ch.6-7 for details of Soviet 'advances' during the 1970s.

participation in power balancing against the USSR, whereas the second holds the Reagan administration responsible for creating the dilemma it faced.

A system-level viewpoint naturally leads us into the disarmingly simple argument that American foreign policy in the Cold War period can be understood solely as balancing against the Soviet Union. Containment, mutually-assured destruction, détente and the Reagan doctrine of supporting anti-communist resistance fighters were all, according to this argument, preordained by the bipolar system. In 1982, Argentina emerged as a willing anti-communist partner in a strategically important region and was thus afforded help and assistance in perhaps a similar way to South Vietnam's ingratiation with the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s. Such a neo-realist argument makes the dilemma appear a natural consequence of the power-balancing realities of the Cold War.

However, the speed with which Argentine-American relations improved and the sincerity with which Washington cultivated them is inadequately explained by such a sparse analysis. To understand the change, we need to look at the priorities and outlook of the Reagan administration as well as at the approach to foreign policy of the preceding US government; we need to consider state-level explanations.

Jimmy Carter campaigned in 1976 on a platform of decency that resonated strongly with many Americans following the ignominious evacuation of Saigon in 1975 and executive pardons in the wake of the Watergate scandal.⁵ In foreign affairs, President Carter and his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, formulated a new foreign policy based on American moral leadership, using more discerning criteria to choose allies, particularly human rights records. 'Human rights is the soul of our foreign policy' proclaimed President Carter in 1978.⁶

However, such liberalism was short-lived and was never universally accepted in Washington. The 1970s saw a string of events that encouraged a more militant, less idealist world view to emerge among conservatives. The strangling of the world economy by the oil-producing OPEC nations in 1973 and 1978, Soviet supported victories in the Angolan and Ethiopian Civil Wars, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979 and the overthrow of the very pro-Western Shah of Iran and his replacement by the Ayatollahs all suggested a loosening of America's grip on its allies and an inability to contain the spread of communism. By 1980, few Americans, even in the administration, still believed in Carter's focus on human rights and its use as a criterion for choosing allies.⁷

⁵ Pastor, 2001, p.41 and Bicheno, 2006, p.73

⁶ Schoultz, 1998, p.362

⁷ Schoultz, 1998, p.363, Freedman, 1983, p.2, Thatcher, 1993, p.156 and Pastor, 2001, p.65

Soul-searching was the result of this half-decade of setbacks. There was a loss of faith in the vitality of American political economy as revolutionary movements and new governments turned towards the socialist model in Central America, East Africa and the Middle East.⁸ However, the reaction of Governor Reagan's Republican campaign team was aggressive reengagement with the battle against communism rather than introspection. They believed the Soviet Union and its agents to be behind the spread of sympathy for socialism, rejecting out of hand any indigenous agency in a leftward shift. Fiercely critical of the 'obsequious' foreign policy of the Carter administration, Reagan, once President, set out to regain the initiative in the Cold War and re-establish respect for the United States amongst its allies.⁹ Reagan's choice as Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig claims in his memoirs that this was not only the administration's view but also what the people demanded; the voters of 1980 were tired of the 'outdated religiosity of New Deal liberalism', and respected the self-styled realist approach of the Republican candidate.¹⁰ Straightforward language was electorally popular but in reacting so strongly against the liberalism of Carter with such forthrightness, the administration developed a crusade mindset which, while appearing realist on the surface, saw the world in stark blue-red terms, a view which transcended the administration and culminated in the President's famous casting of the Soviet Union as the 'evil empire' in 1983.

⁸ See Westad, 2005, ch. 3,5,7

⁹ Kirkpatrick, 1979

¹⁰ Haig, 1984, p.29

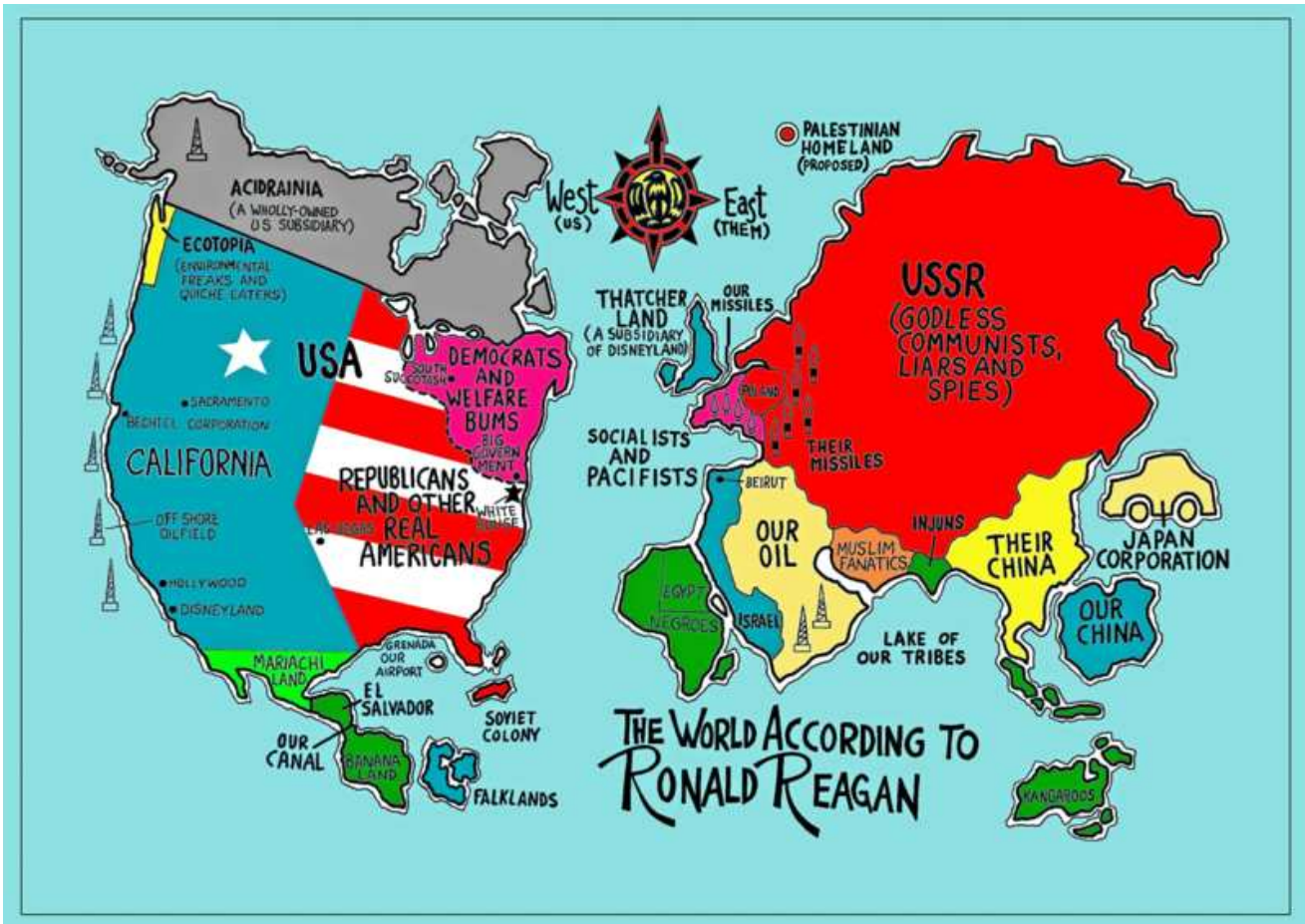


Fig. 2 – spoof map ‘The World According to Ronald Reagan’, capturing the essence of the White House worldview in the 1980s. The presence of Grenada and the Falklands suggest it may have been produced in the run up to the 1984 Presidential election.

unknown German artist: www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/hasrg/german/exhibit/GDRposters/antiusa.html (retrieved 9th March 2009)

The intellectual architect of this new outlook was the new President’s appointee to the post of Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick had considerable influence on the President before his election as a leading conservative thinker at Georgetown University and remained prominent, benefitting from Reagan’s nominal

elevation of the position of UN ambassador to cabinet level.¹¹ However, to claim Kirkpatrick's views were new in 1982 is to unduly credit them with excess originality. They were born out of a scathing critique of the foreign policy of the Carter administration, developed through the late 1970s and systematically laid out in Kirkpatrick's seminal November 1979 *Commentary* article, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards.'¹²

In this article, Kirkpatrick criticised Carter's lack of prioritisation of what she believed to be the United States' *raison d'être* in international relations, the containment and rollback of communism. For Kirkpatrick, the fight against communism had to be paramount and Carter's use of the human rights proviso when choosing allies distracted attention from that battle. Particularly riling was the handing back of control of the Panama Canal to Omar Torrijos, ('a swaggering Latin Dictator of Castroite bent') in 1977.

More proactively, Kirkpatrick suggested indigenous strongmen as the best bulwark against communism because of their willingness to engage the United States and their control over local militaries. Authoritarian regimes were preferable to totalitarian regimes because, in

¹¹ Calvert, 1983, p.73, Haig and Henderson interviews, R4

¹² Kirkpatrick, 1979. The 'about the author' section at the end of the online version of this article asserts that its original publication 'led directly to [Kirkpatrick's] appointment by Ronald Reagan as ambassador to the United Nations.' (commentarymagazine.com). Furthermore, the elevation of UN ambassador to cabinet level in 1981 may have been a result of Reagan's respect for Kirkpatrick.

characteristically backhanded language: 'generally speaking, traditional autocrats tolerate social inequalities, brutality and poverty, whereas revolutionary autocracies create them.' Her evidence was that there were far more Cuban immigrants in the United States than Argentines or Brazilians, geographical proximity seemingly being irrelevant. Furthermore, Kirkpatrick answered her liberal critics by pointing out that the 'third wave' of democratization during the 1970s in Brazil, Spain and Portugal showed that authoritarian regimes could evolve into successful democracies.

In her lack of belief in either the importance or power of world public opinion, Kirkpatrick showed herself to be diametrically opposed to Wilsonian liberalism and to the morally guided foreign policy of the Carter administration. She even accused Carter's foreign policy of Marxist tendencies in its implicit belief in modernization and progress rather than a static national interest; 'the American commitment to 'change' in the abstract ends up aligning us tacitly with Soviet clients and irresponsible extremists.'¹³ This is classic realism and contrasted strongly with the progressive liberalism of the preceding administration. There was no room in the Reagan worldview for legitimate socialism or popular left wing leaders, they were either agents of the 'evil empire' (Reagan and Haig's view) or unwittingly encouraged by American promotion of self-determination and democracy (Kirkpatrick's view).

¹³ Kirkpatrick, 1979



Fig. 3 – The Reagan Cabinet in the Oval Office 1981. Seated far left – Secretary of State Alexander Haig, far right, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, standing centre, Jeane Kirkpatrick, seated on the table are President Ronald Reagan and Vice-President George H. W. Bush.

Source: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/photographs/cabinet.html) retrieved 9th January 2009

Latin America would be the testing ground for the strategy outlined in ‘Dictatorships and Double Standards’. Kirkpatrick attempted to justify the focus on the region by claiming the NATO alliance gave American foreign policy a European bias. Her ideas inevitably permeated the Latin Americanist group in the State Department, led by the ‘imposing’

Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Thomas O. Enders.¹⁴ For this group of specialists, Carter's foremost failures were the Canal and the 'loss' of Nicaragua to the Sandinista revolution in 1979. It was from this source that the impetus for improving relations with Buenos Aires came.

Argentina was the country for which the change of administration in Washington had the most significant implications.¹⁵ It was seen as a human rights abusing dictatorship in the eyes of the Carter administration but indispensable anti-communist ally by Reagan. The junta's 'Dirty War' against internal dissidents had been fundamentally incompatible with Carter's ethical foreign policy and he restricted Eximbank and World Bank loans to Argentina, banned military assistance and supported an investigation by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.¹⁶ Once Reagan entered the White House however, relations very quickly improved. The Dirty War was glossed over as a low-key demonstration of the junta's anti-communist credentials (In this respect American policy towards Argentina returned to a pattern reminiscent of the Kissinger years) and Reagan sought to persuade Congress to repeal the Humphrey-Kennedy amendment banning arms sales to Argentina, permitted the export of heavy water for use in nuclear projects, invited Argentine President General Viola to the United States and voted for increased aid flows to Argentina at the

¹⁴ Kirkpatrick, 1979 and Henderson, 1983, p.50

¹⁵ It is possible that the 'Kirkpatrick Doctrine' of supporting anti-communist authoritarian governments was the extensive form of the Ambassador's specific desire to improve US-Argentine relations. Her doctoral thesis at Columbia was a study of Peronist politics in Argentina (later expanded into a book) and she had many Argentine friends (author interview with Malcolm Deas and *The Guardian*, 9th December 2006). See also p. 38.

¹⁶ Sheinin, 2006, p.167 and Feldman, 1985, p.17

World Bank.¹⁷ The administration even mooted a South Atlantic Treaty organisation involving Argentina and South Africa to work alongside its new naval building programme in opposing the growing Soviet maritime threat.¹⁸

However, it was the situation in Central America which made Argentina suddenly a potentially key American ally. The Kirkpatrick-Reagan worldview had Central America, rather than Europe, as the new frontline in the fight against global communist subversion and the region obsessed the 40th President. He made more foreign policy speeches on Central America than on any other country or region and acted to reverse what he saw as growing Marxist pressure in the region with the establishment of a US Navy Caribbean Command and the initiation of the Caribbean Basin Initiative of reduced tariffs on trade with the United States.¹⁹ Two factors made the success of Marxist revolutionaries in Nicaragua and guerrillas in El Salvador especially worrying for the United States. Firstly, there is the obvious point that Central America is closer to the US than Africa or the Middle East where similar revolutions had occurred, and there was still a lingering belief in, if not the domino theory, then at least the idea that instability in Central America could spread to affect the wider region.²⁰ Secondly and more specifically, Marxist successes in Central America excited perennial American fears of Cuban intervention, a long history of which stretched back to

¹⁷ HJ, p.45, Feldman, 1985, p. 2, Bluth in Danchev ed. (hereafter BinD), 1992, p.204-5 and Haig, 1984, p.275

¹⁸ Richardson, 1996, p.7 and BinD, p.205

¹⁹ Freedman, 1983, p.62-3 and Calvert, 1983, p.71

²⁰ Kirkpatrick, R4

the 1959 revolution: 'All I ever hear from you is Cuba, Cuba Cuba!' Soviet ambassador Dobrynin said to Haig in 1981.²¹

Furthermore, for the Reagan administration, a second communist government in power in Central America represented not only a Soviet *and* Cuban victory in America's backyard but also a *Soviet-Cuban* victory. Reagan and his advisors, including Haig, believed in a global anti-American conspiracy that linked together the disparate revolutions and civil wars in the Third World with the rhetoric emanating from Moscow. This impression was strengthened by the September 1979 meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana, at which Cuba and Nicaragua tried to steer the movement towards the Soviet camp.²² Reagan and Haig believed that the Soviet Union, Cuba, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and even Libya were acting in concert in support of the Sandinistas.²³

Argentina was key to Reagan's anti-communist objectives in Central America because of its impeccable right wing credentials, its militarism, and, most significantly, the still relatively

²¹ Haig, 1984, p.107

²² Pastor, 2001, p.52

²³ Haig, 1984, p.123, Pastor, 2001, p.52 and Leiken in US House Subcommittee Hearings, November 1982 (hereafter *House Hearings*), p.53

fresh memory of American losses in Vietnam. Congress would be reluctant to put American troops in harms way again and was wary of even the phrase 'military advisors'.²⁴ Argentina solved this problem and to an extent internationalised the Central America conflicts, adding a modicum of legitimacy to the American crusade. Argentine troops could fight insurrection in Central America in line with American objectives, perhaps even under American command.²⁵ However, Argentina's importance to the United States was quantified in potential rather than actual terms. In 1981, Argentina had had 'no decisive impact on developments on the isthmus' beyond the selling of arms to the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua through a cover business in Florida, and the provision of 'organisation and administration' to anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Guatemala.²⁶

It is worth briefly explaining why Argentina was concerned with Central America because this will reveal the nature of the regime with which the Reagan administration was ingratiating itself. The junta held a perverse belief in a linkage between the left wing urban guerrilla movements in Argentina against which the Dirty War was being fought, and Marxist rebels in Central America. The exaggeration of international subversion was essential to the junta's survival and it pursued Argentine dissidents it now believed to have joined either the Sandinistas or the rebels in El Salvador. The junta also shared with the administration in Washington a fear of Cuba's influence on the region, both in supporting Marxist rebels and

²⁴ BinD, p. 205

²⁵ Calvert, 1983, p.72

²⁶ Norden and Russell, 2002, p.25 and Sheinin, 2006, p.176

through inspiring poorer sections of society in Argentina with the promise of improved living standards.²⁷

To deal solely with changing relations between the United States and Argentina is to assume that it was change along this axis that brought about the dilemma faced in the Falklands. Such an approach, treating the special relationship between Britain and the United States as a constant, oversimplifies a deep and significant alliance and ignores the fact that the relationship is perennially emphasised more in Britain than in America. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was relations between the United States and Argentina that changed more considerably and though Kirkpatrick believed in the importance of Britain as a NATO ally, she echoed the 1823 Monroe doctrine declaring the Americas as the United States' exclusive sphere of influence. She also asked why the United States should support Britain over the Falklands when Britain did not come to the aid of the United States in Vietnam and seemed more concerned with its place in Europe than with the transatlantic alliance.²⁸

²⁷ Norden and Russell, 2002, p.23, Sheinin, 2006, p.176, Bicheno, 2006, p.76 and Burns, 2001, p.103

²⁸ Kirkpatrick, 1989 p.17 and BinD, p.203

II – Argentine-American Relations as a Factor in the Decision to Invade

The problem, and to a large extent the cause of the dilemma, was that the Reagan administration's enthusiasm for the military junta failed to take into account the importance to the Argentine national psyche of the Falklands/Malvinas. 'Seized' by Britain in 1833 and claimed by Buenos Aires ever since, the slogan *las Malvinas son Argentinas* was a popular nationalist rallying call seized upon by the military juntas of the 1970s and early 1980s, in much the same vein as the Videla government's basking in the reflected glory of Argentina's winning of the football World Cup in 1978.²⁹ Schoolchildren were taught that the islands were an integral part of Argentina and the phrase 'Malvinitis' came to describe a commonplace condition afflicting Argentine men whereby they became obsessed with the islands and their 'recovery.'³⁰

The lack of American concern for the longstanding Falklands dispute was not apparent to the members of the junta, they were surprised that the Americans were taken aback by the 2nd April invasion, as they saw American approval for their Malvinas claim as implicit in the strengthening of ties between the two countries.³¹ Indeed, it can be argued that the most significant factor pushing Argentina to action in the South Atlantic was the embryonic

²⁹ Burns, 1987, p.103-4. 'Not since the Berlin Olympics of 1936 had sport been so transformed into a political circus.'

³⁰ Author interview with Esteban Chicello-Hubner and Burns, 2001, p.469

³¹ *La Prensa*, 3rd March 1982

relationship with the United States. To make this claim will require a consideration and rejection of more commonplace arguments for the junta's decision to invade. These include the widely accepted idea in Britain that the Generals invaded to boost their legitimacy, by distracting attention from domestic economic woes. A second theory is that the junta was frustrated by foreign policy failings in its dispute with Chile in Tierra del Fuego. Finally there is the supposition that it was British negligence, through apparent neglect of the islanders and their defence that allowed the invasion. My claim is not that the United States deliberately encouraged the junta to invade the Falklands as official policy, nor that Buenos Aires was ignorant of these other factors, but that the improvement in Argentine-US relations was the most significant factor.

The argument that the junta's decision to embark on a foreign policy adventure was domestically motivated does not stand up to historical analysis. Much is made in the British literature of the fact that the junta needed to distract attention from a failing economy and rejuvenate the legitimacy of military rule in a country that had not fought an external war since 1865.³² Indeed, it is true that, on the night before the invasion, police and rioters clashed in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires in the biggest display of social unrest since the latter days of the Perón era.³³

³² E.g. HJ

³³ Burns, 2001, p. 178-9

However, Argentina's economy had been in a poor state throughout the 1970s and the austerity policies of civilian Finance Minister de Hoz had actually reduced the national debt through cuts in public spending while at the same time stabilising the stock exchange and restoring shaky business confidence.³⁴ Furthermore, social unrest was, for a dictatorship skilled in the art of repression, less threatening than to a more accountable leadership and was in any case confined to the Peronist trade unions and their members in and around the capital.³⁵ It is doubtful that the hope of distracting the masses from problems at home was the foremost motivator for *Operation Rosario*, the Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands.

There is more substantial evidence in support of the argument that the junta felt frustrated in the foreign policy arena. There was certainly an impatience for action, although the extent to which this was brought about by events, rather than being simply a characteristic of military government, is hard to determine. Argentina's failure to gain control of three small islands in the Beagle Channel, Picton, Lennox and Nueva which Chile also laid claim to increased the desire for action within the military, particularly in the navy which was to have played the major role in any action against the Chileans. A Papal arbitration of the dispute had been passed in Santiago's favour in 1977 and it is alleged that Admiral Anaya, head of the Argentine Navy, only agreed to participate in the Galtieri led junta, on the condition that

³⁴ Op. Cit. p. 150

³⁵ Op. Cit. p.180

the Malvinas be recovered by 1983, the 150th anniversary of the British seizure of the islands.³⁶

Such a melodramatic justification was pure propaganda however. Feelings of frustration were largely confined to the navy, cheated of a war against Chile in which to prove itself and in any case, the arguments of military men did not convince the Westernised foreign minister Nicanor Costa Méndez of the merit of the junta's plan for the Malvinas.³⁷ For him, a veteran of negotiations over the Falklands and well-connected in Washington, signals coming from Britain throughout the sixteen year period since negotiations on sovereignty began formed a coherent message that at least the Foreign Office, if not the British Government as a whole, found the Falklands an expensive drain on resources and were keen to relinquish them. For example, in 1981 a law was in process to deny British citizenship to Falkland Islanders without at least one British parent, thus accelerating the decline in population and the shortage of economically active young people.³⁸ Britain seemed unwilling to develop the islands; sheep farming remained the main source of income while fishing was still in its infancy and speculation that the Falklands were sitting on a vast reservoir of oil was never followed up (although Anaya and many in the Reagan administration suspected oil as the motivation for Thatcher's determination to recover the

³⁶ Freedman, *Official History*, 2005, vol. I, p.153 (hereafter OH I) and Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 1990 (hereafter FGS), p.4

³⁷ Author interview with Malcolm Deas. Shortly before becoming Foreign Minister Costa Méndez visited and lectured on international relations at St. Antony's College, Oxford.

³⁸ OH I, p.132-3

islands following the Argentine invasion).³⁹ In the Foreign Office, talk of leasing back the Falkland Islands to Argentina in mirror image to the Hong Kong arrangement was widespread and reached its high point in the desperate cost-saving atmosphere of the 'winter of discontent', 1979-80.⁴⁰

Furthermore, previous opportunistic incursions into the British territories in the South Atlantic/Antarctic region had gone relatively unopposed, most notably the 1976 placement of fifty 'technicians' on South Thule in the South Sandwich group that went unnoticed for over a year and did not interrupt negotiations on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands when discovered. Buoyed up by the success of the South Thule operation, the junta had by 1981 developed a strategy of *ocupar para negociar*, negotiating while occupying a territory from a position of strength.⁴¹ This was a reaction against sixteen years of motionless sovereignty negotiations and, prior to the Papal mediation, was also to be the strategy employed with the islands in the Beagle Channel administered by Chile.⁴² The difference in the Falklands case was that they were inhabited by non-Argentine nationals. To overcome the expected international outcry, Argentina would need a guarantee of support from a major power to ensure the success of their strategy; American blessing was the missing piece in the Falklands recovery strategy.

³⁹ HJ, p.30, Feldman, 1985, p.9 and Haig, 1984, p.268

⁴⁰ Kinney, p.86 in Coll and Arend (eds.), 1985

⁴¹ Feldman, 1985, p.4 and Bicheno, 2006, p.62

⁴² OH I, p. 77 and HJ, p.32

Although Costa Méndez, with a keen sense of history and precedent, took inspiration from the 1961 Indian seizure of the Portuguese enclave of Goa ('there were criticisms but at the end of the day it was accepted'), a seizure of the Falklands with its natively British inhabitants by a non-democracy would be more dubious in the eyes of the international community.⁴³ The Foreign Minister realised the tenuousness of attempts by his diplomatic corps to cast the dispute as part of the gradual dismantling of European empires at the United Nations Decolonization Committees.⁴⁴

Furthermore, *Operation Rosario* would be more militarily challenging than the planned but abandoned *Operation Soberanía* (the occupying of the Beagle Channel Islands) and waiting to invade until after the Nott Naval Review had been implemented would have increased the junta's chances of maintaining an occupation of the islands.⁴⁵ Significantly, these cuts were to include the withdrawal without replacement of HMS *Endurance*, an ice patrol ship that formed Britain's only military presence in the South Atlantic.⁴⁶

⁴³ Costa Méndez in conversation with Haig, April 1982, in FGS, p.205

⁴⁴ OH I p.153 and vol. II, p.152-3

⁴⁵ FGS, p.82

⁴⁶ Richardson, 1996, p.112 and Gamba-Stonehouse in Danchev ed. 1992, p. 115

It was the rapidly improving relationship with the United States that swayed the junta into deciding to go ahead with long laid military plans to invade the Falkland Islands. This is shown by Costa Méndez' use of another example from history, his drawing of encouragement from strong American disapproval for Anglo-French-Israeli action in Suez in 1956.⁴⁷ The contemporary improvement in relations gave Argentina, so Costa Méndez reasoned, an umbrella of American support for a venture that would otherwise inevitably be met with international condemnation from developed countries, outweighing the expected wave of support from the decolonised world. To ensure this American support, Costa Méndez withdrew the Argentine ambassadors to Reagan's enemies, Nicaragua and Cuba.⁴⁸ The importance of American approval to the Malvinas plan is shown by consideration of former head of the Navy Admiral Massera's earlier 'South Atlantic Strategy' which had led to the South Thule escapade in 1976. The strategy had been tacitly encouraged by Kissinger but was put on hold with Carter's inauguration.⁴⁹ In 1982, a recognition of the transient nature of American support for its anti-communist allies contributed to the urgency with which the junta pursued the recovery of *Las Malvinas*.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Feldman, 1985, p. 11 and Bicheno, 2006, p.80

⁴⁸ Feldman, 1985, p.5

⁴⁹ Bicheno, 2006, p.72. Kissinger's July 1976 conversation with Argentine Foreign Minister Guzzetti is relayed: 'You will have to make an international effort to have your problems understood. Otherwise, you, too, will come under increasing attack. If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly.'

⁵⁰ Cardoso et. al. 1987, p.119

III – Complicity?⁵¹ Evidence of American Encouragement

How wittingly American officials encouraged Argentina over the Falklands is a matter of historical debate. Haig clearly states in his memoirs that before the invasion he never gave the junta the impression that aggression would be tolerated. However, both he and the British Ambassador to Washington, Sir Nicholas Henderson, accuse Kirkpatrick of having effectively offered the junta a swap, American acquiescence in the seizure of the Falklands in return for Argentine military support in Nicaragua.⁵² Henderson attests that: 'The influence of these 'Latinistas' may well have encouraged the Argentines in their intransigence, just as it may have emboldened them to take their impetuous decision to invade.'⁵³ For this analysis however, it does not matter whether American officials categorically promised support for the Falklands operation because if substantial evidence that the junta believed the United States to be encouraging them can be found, it can still be said improving American relations were the most significant factor in prompting the invasion.⁵⁴

Even before he became head of the junta, Galtieri was identified in Washington as a useful anti-communist strongman. He was twice invited to the United States during 1981 and

⁵¹ The title of Chapter 3 of Bicheno's 2006 'Unofficial History'. It begins, "Here's where we blame everything on the Americans."

⁵² Haig, 1984, p.269 and 293, and OH II, p.42

⁵³ Henderson, 1983, p.58

⁵⁴ Calvert, 1983, p.72

treated better than some heads of state, attending meetings with Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Vice-President Bush.⁵⁵ Enders visited Argentina in early 1982 and Costa Méndez immediately began a charm offensive with the goal of gaining US approval for the Falklands invasion. What followed was a typical case, repeated several times in 1981-2, of Americans and Argentines talking at cross purposes to one another; Enders' goal rather was to lobby for increased Argentine support for American foreign policy aims in Central America. The two men were pursuing different goals but the cordiality of the meeting meant both left with positive impressions about the outcome of the dialogue.⁵⁶ Such warmth was a function of the degree to which each country perceived it needed the other for its foreign policy aims, creating 'an exaggerated perception of common interest which reached its zenith just prior to the 1982 Malvinas war.'⁵⁷ The Argentines took these American entreaties as encouragement for Argentina's territorial disputes claims over the Beagle Channel and the Falkland Islands whereas American officials sought to 'enlist' more substantial Argentine support in Central America.⁵⁸ Because the Malvinas were so important to them, the junta assumed the Reagan administration understood this; Enders' enthusiasm for Argentina's foreign policy aims in general was taken as a sign of approval for the specific recovery of the Falklands. Unwittingly because of his lack of appreciation of the importance of the dispute, Enders had given Argentina the 'green light' of American approval.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ BinD, p.205 and Feldman, 1985, p.2-3

⁵⁶ HJ (2nd ed. 1997), p.61Cardoso et. al, 1987, p.45-6

⁵⁷ Feldman, 1985, p.2

⁵⁸ BinD, p.205 and HJ, p.51. Also, Gompert, R4

⁵⁹ Cardoso et. al. 1987, p.48 and Feldman, 1985, p.6

The Buenos Aires junta, as a military institution, also took encouragement from the several visits of General Vernon Walters, an expert on military affairs in Central America.⁶⁰ He lobbied hard for Argentine troops being sent to Nicaragua and his second concern, in keeping with the Cold War focussed Reagan tradition, was to prevent the junta falling prey to offers of virtually free Soviet military equipment and as a result centripetally joining the Soviet bloc. The CIA worried that this process had already started as Argentina had been exporting grain to the Soviet Union since the imposition of import quotas on Argentine exports to the United States during the Carter presidency.⁶¹ Walters was concerned the Soviets may gain traction if they were to sponsor the recovery for the Malvinas. In particular the concurrence of Costa Méndez' attempts to cast the dispute as a decolonisation and the USSR's posing as the natural anti-imperialist ally of the Third World worried the General.⁶² His early visits were characterised by such enthusiastic support for Argentina's economic and foreign policy aims in order to dissuade them from the Soviet option that, with the Malvinas as their central foreign policy aim, the junta took such entreaties as support for their ambitions.⁶³

These high level visits and Argentine diplomatic and military support for the United States caused the junta to 'overestimate their leverage in Washington' to the extent that they

⁶⁰ OH II, p.128

⁶¹ Henderson, 1983, OH I, p.197 and OH II, p.129

⁶² Haig, 1984, p.294-5, LF, p.11 and Leiken, in *House Hearings*, 1982, p.57

⁶³ *La Prensa*, 24th January 1982

'gained a wildly exaggerated view of their importance to the United States' and believed the administration would wish to protect this new 'special relationship' as much if not more than the older transatlantic one.⁶⁴ Their strategic thinking on the Falkland Islands was based on the so called 'superpower hypothesis', that the United States would act responsibly and try to avoid bloodshed between its allies, thus tacitly supporting the status quo of any Argentine presence on the islands. This complemented the junta's strategy of *ocupar para negociar*.⁶⁵ Furthermore, they expected to be protected from the wrath of both the British government and the international community by a friendly president in Washington. They took the South Atlantic maritime treaty proposals more seriously than did the Americans and believed the United States would support an operation against the Falklands if they were offered the possibility of building a naval base there.⁶⁶ Argentina believed it could call in the debt owed it by the United States for aid suppressing the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and left wing guerrillas in El Salvador.⁶⁷ On another level, the right-wing nature of the junta, their anti-communism and use of free market economic policies was, it was hoped by the junta, in tune with the political climate in Washington. Again, it was the navy under Admiral Anaya that most enthusiastically courted American support, realising how important it was to the success of a military recovery of the islands. His ships aggressively detained Soviet trawlers caught in or near Argentine territorial waters to demonstrate the viability of Argentina as a South Atlantic ally, and the Navy organised extensive publicity of Argentina's

⁶⁴ Thatcher, 1993, p.176-7. *La Prensa*, 24th January 1982. Also Feldman, 1985, p.14, Bicheno, 2006, p.26, Carril in *House Hearings*, 1982, p.67.

⁶⁵ Cardoso et. al. 1987, p.57 and Watson and Dunn (eds.) 1984, p.x

⁶⁶ BinD, p.206

⁶⁷ *La Prensa*, 3rd March 1982

acceptance of large numbers of 'boat people', refugees from America's war against communism in Vietnam.⁶⁸

IV – Shuttle Diplomacy

By unwittingly encouraging Argentina to invade the Falkland Islands, the United States created high expectations in Buenos Aires. The junta hoped for at least protection from the disapproval of the international community, at the United Nations and Organisation of American States, if not direct American support for its invasion in reciprocation of Argentine efforts in Central America.⁶⁹ Reagan's dilemma was created because Britain, as a NATO ally, expected American support to the degree of presumption. Even in the very early stages of the crisis, as Davidoff's scrap metal merchants were causing problems on South Georgia in late March 1982, Thatcher's first instinct was to instruct the Foreign Minister, Lord Carrington, to request that Haig warn the junta of the implications of their actions.⁷⁰ Hugh Bicheno, at the time a British intelligence agent in Argentina, disparagingly called the new relationship between Buenos Aires and Washington, the 'Quadruple A', the Argentine-American Anti-Communist Alliance, but its depth was underestimated in Britain.⁷¹ The

⁶⁸ Sheinin, 2006, p.168-9

⁶⁹ Watson and Dunn (eds.), p.x, BinD, p.206 and Haig, 1984, p.296

⁷⁰ HJ, 1983, p.64 and 66, Thatcher, 1993, p.178 and OH I, p. 207-8

⁷¹ Bicheno, 2006, p.26

British government simply could not countenance that this 'bargain basement Mussolini' was as important to the Americans as Great Britain.⁷²

Invitations to consider the quandary the dispute placed the United States in and its possible wider Cold War implications failed to impress the British.⁷³ London felt that the Latin Americanists' subordination of the conflict to the dictates of the anti-communist struggle in Central America missed the vital points that armed aggression could not be rewarded and that Britain could not be humiliated. This was the Prime Minister's stated position.⁷⁴ Early on in the crisis, Walter Stoessel, Haig's deputy Secretary of State, made a categorical declaration to Henderson that the United States would not take sides on the incident on South Georgia. When this was relayed to London, Lord Carrington 'hit the roof' in anger and amazement.⁷⁵ As the invasion emerged as a *fait accompli*, rather than soothing wounded British pride, Reagan angered British officials with his comments to journalists:

It's a very difficult situation for the United States because we're friends with both of the countries engaged in this dispute and we stand ready to do anything we can to help them, and what we hope for and would like to help in doing is have a peaceful resolution of this with no forceful action or bloodshed.⁷⁶

Thatcher was incensed.⁷⁷

⁷² HJ, 1983 (2nd ed. 1997), p.134

⁷³ FGS, p.159, HJ, 1983, p.328 and OH II, p.139

⁷⁴ although Ambassador Henderson realised the utility of casting the conflict in Cold War terms when 'selling' Britain's case to the Americans (Henderson, 1990, p.45 and Obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 17th March 2009).

⁷⁵ HJ, 1983, p.64

⁷⁶ Reagan Press Conference, 5th April, 1982 (R4)

⁷⁷ OH II, p.132

However, the administration was far from united behind the policy of neutral mediation and the lack of Presidential direction allowed variation between the policies and statements of different foreign policy makers. Insight can be gained by reflecting on the very mechanism by which the United States formulates its foreign policy. A sprawling bureaucracy with separate and distinct departments within the executive branch can, in the absence of direction from the supreme executive, concurrently produce different courses of action; 'the nature of the American government makes it very difficult to have one clear cut and comprehensive fount of policy'.⁷⁸ Different sections of the US political establishment can liaise with separate elements within a foreign country and two or more foreign policy tracks can be followed at the same time.

In 1982, President Reagan did not at first take the issue seriously enough to establish a clear process for managing the American response or delegating direction of it to one individual: 'A lot of people in the government, especially at the White House, looked at it as a sort of a 'comic opera' situation.'⁷⁹ On the outbreak of the dispute, rather than formulate policy, Reagan brushed off the news about "that little ice-cold bunch of land down there" to visit his old Hollywood actress friend, Claudette Colbert, in Bermuda.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Henderson, 1983, p.58 and Henderson, 1990, p.42

⁷⁹ Haig, R4

⁸⁰ Reagan Press Conference, April 1982 in Richardson, 1996, p.121

With a generalised lack of familiarity with the issues at stake and with US national security not immediately threatened in the Falklands, the scope for a united response was limited and disagreement flourished. No-one in Washington was an expert and consultations with either British or Argentine representatives brought strongly partisan responses. Thus it was that American officials made up their own minds on the Falklands issue; whilst nearly all saw it through the lens of the Cold War, a different prioritisation of the different theatres in the confrontation with the Soviet Union led to different parts of the administration taking different lines.

In support of Argentina and in keeping with the principles outlined in 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', Kirkpatrick openly supported the Argentine case from her seat at the UN in New York. This is best shown by a notorious incident on the night the news broke of the Argentine invasion, April 2nd. She dined with Esteban Takacs, the Argentine ambassador to the UN and in response Henderson asked what the American reaction would have been had he dined with the Iranian ambassador on the evening US embassy staff were taken hostage in Tehran in November 1979.⁸¹ Particularly revealing as to Kirkpatrick's stance on the Falklands crisis is her response to this goading: 'Armed aggression would take place in a

⁸¹ *New York Times*, April 8th 1982, Thatcher, 1993, p.180, Henderson, R4, and OH II, p.124

clear-cut way against territory on which there was clear-cut ownership. If the Argentines own the Islands then moving troops into them is not armed aggression.⁸²

Kirkpatrick and her 'Latinistas' (as they became known in Britain) worried firstly that American support for Britain would alienate Argentina as an ally and destroy any prospect of Argentine troops fighting for American war aims in Central America, and secondly that, in Kirkpatrick's phrase, supporting Britain would earn the United States 'one hundred years of animosity throughout Latin America.'⁸³ Although in a minority and largely confined to appointees rather than elected representatives, the Latin American argument had influence by virtue of Kirkpatrick's closeness to the President. In addition, prominent Latin Americanists like Enders and Walters were leading lights in Reagan's Central America strategy, keen to keep open the possibility of using Argentine troops in El Salvador and Nicaragua.⁸⁴ When Francis Pym, the British Foreign Secretary, visited Washington after the United States' tilt to Britain on 30th April, his comment to Haig that he was now visiting as an ally, rather than as a pleading negotiator made some of these pro-Argentina officials 'visibly wince'; they thought the tilt to Britain would irreparably damage the United States' standing in Latin America.⁸⁵

⁸² OH II, p.124

⁸³ Haig, 1984, p.269

⁸⁴ Haig 1984, p.130 and Thatcher, 1993, p.188

⁸⁵ OH II, p.317

Running counter to these forces were American newspapers, which were decidedly pro-British throughout the conflict, 'well ahead of the administration' even extending to opposing the US's own shuttle diplomacy in mid April.⁸⁶ In the more liberal press the pro-British attitude was driven as much by a desire not to reward aggression and horror at Argentina's human rights record as a respect for Britain, a reflection of similar attitudes amongst the Labour opposition in Britain.⁸⁷ Contemporary survey data showed these sentiments to be an accurate reflection of US public opinion, especially on the east coast; one poll taken as the task force sailed south showed 83 per cent of the American public to be sympathetic to Britain's cause.⁸⁸ There is even the suggestion that the eventual tilt to Britain which took place on 30th April was driven partly by domestic political considerations on the part of Reagan himself: 'One hint of a reversal of the pro-British mood and he might well have taken the lead in the opposite direction.'⁸⁹

At the State Department, Under-Secretary for European Affairs, Lawrence Eagleburger was as shocked as the Prime Minister herself that Reagan was not planning to return the diplomatic and political favours she had afforded him. These included support at the United Nations for a peacekeeping force in the Sinai and the provision of election observers in El

⁸⁶ 'Stay Home Al Haig', *New York Times*, April 15th 1982 and LF, p.16

⁸⁷ Richardson, 1996, p.122

⁸⁸ Op. Cit. p.138 and Nott, 2002, p.291

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 28th April 1982, p.14 and Richardson, 1996, p.138

Salvador.⁹⁰ In Congress too there was significant support for Britain in reflection of the public mood. Senator John Tower of Texas, chairman of the Armed Forces Committee commented to a British diplomat: “What do you want, an aircraft carrier? I’ll sign up and join the crew.”⁹¹

However, it was the Department of Defense that represented the polar opposite to the line taken by Kirkpatrick and her Latin-Americanist aides. From the very start of the conflict, Secretary Weinberger held ‘what-can-we-do-for-Britain-today’ meetings with the sole intention of aiding Britain militarily.⁹² Weapons were delivered via the USAF base on Ascension Island and payment was to be arranged after the war was over. The AIM-9L sidewinder missiles supplied for Britain’s Harrier fighter aircraft proved particularly valuable in the ensuing conflict, accounting for sixteen Argentine aircraft destroyed.⁹³ Royal Navy ships with NATO commitments were temporarily replaced by American warships to free British vessels for the Falklands task force. What limited signals intelligence the CIA possessed on Argentina was transferred to Britain and the Royal Navy made extensive use of American communication satellites to convey messages to their submarines. Extraordinarily, Weinberger actually did offer the use of the *USS Eisenhower*, a nuclear powered aircraft

⁹⁰ OH II, p.128-9, LF, p.16 and OH I, p.191

⁹¹ Richardson, 1996, p.141

⁹² LF, p. 17 and Richardson 1996, p.128

⁹³ Watson and Dunn (eds.) p.xi

carrier, in the event of one of the British capital ships being sunk.⁹⁴ The geopolitical logic of the Pentagon was that the absolute worst case scenario would be for its NATO ally to fight and lose, assessed as a very real possibility by American experts.⁹⁵ NATO's military credibility would be compromised and Soviet influence in South America could well increase. However, political considerations with respect to the Haig mediation effort meant increasingly frequent newspaper reports that the United States was in fact helping Britain were denied.⁹⁶



Fig. 4 – USAF transport planes (white livery) deliver supplies to Wideawake Airfield, Ascension Island, April 1982.

Source: Bob Shackleton, www.royalnavy-history.net/FpxAAscension.htm (retrieved 6th April 2009)

⁹⁴ Weinberger, 1990, ch. 7 and Richardson, 1996, p.128 and 147, Bicheno, 2006, p.129 and Thatcher, 1993, p.227

⁹⁵ Admiral Dennis Blair, R4 and Nott, 2002, p.286

⁹⁶ OH II, p.157, Feldman, 1985, p.9 and Cardoso et. al. 1987, p.170

Such denials were to protect neutral mediation.⁹⁷ This was the chosen strategy because it was seen as the only way to protect American relations with both Argentina and Great Britain, essential to the success of the broader grand strategy of the Reagan administration. Belief in the prospects for success rested on the assumption that the United States had sufficient diplomatic leverage with both countries to avoid bloodshed and find a face-saving compromise.⁹⁸ In both cases however, the administration had less influence on either the chaotic and intransigent junta in Buenos Aires or the affronted and equally trenchant Thatcher government in London.

Nevertheless, the United States did embark on a mediation effort and the dilemma faced by the United States in attempting to find a solution to this ancient problem in a short time was personified by Haig's shuttle diplomacy. The Secretary of State was chosen for the task because he was the only suitably high profile person in the administration; Vice-President Bush had been snubbed by Galtieri when Reagan first proposed the VP visit Buenos Aires as a mediator in a telephone call of 2nd April, Kirkpatrick's Latin sympathies would have made her unacceptable to London and the political risks to Reagan himself were calculated to be too high.⁹⁹ Lower level diplomats such as Enders or Stoessel would, it was feared, either fail to convince as to the United States' sincerity in finding a solution or be unacceptably biased

⁹⁷ OH I, p.191.

⁹⁸ LF, p.17

⁹⁹ Haig, 1984, p.270

for one party or the other. Haig had some attributes that aided him in the task, a tireless determination, a direct style and powerful persuading skills.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand he was short-tempered, relatively inexperienced and unfamiliar with the issues involved. He was also anxious to prove his abilities to doubters and political enemies in Washington, many of whom accused him of trying to emulate the peace-seeking shuttle of Henry Kissinger following the 1973 Yom Kippur war.¹⁰¹

Regardless of his suitability, the task set for Haig was unenviable. The high profile shuttle between Buenos Aires, London and Washington eventually covered 32,965 miles and took with it a constantly updated and revised peace plan, the main elements of which were:

- 1) Mutual withdrawal from the area by both sides (subsequently this included an immediate ceasefire),**
- 2) An international interim authority governing the islands (Brazil, the United States and West Germany were all put forward as possible temporary custodians),**
- 3) Setting a deadline for a permanent settlement on sovereignty.¹⁰²**

However, Britain was outraged at the affront of an unprovoked armed invasion and Argentina, even realising American support was not as forthcoming as they had hoped, had only a one-shot diplomatic and military strategy. Although some believe there are relatively

¹⁰⁰ FGS, p.160 and Thatcher, 1993, p.205

¹⁰¹ Weinberger, 1990, p.145 and Walters interview, R4

¹⁰² See BinD for a concise description of the Haig shuttle and the evolving peace plan, also OH II p.134 for the genesis of the three point plan.

straightforward solutions to the Falklands/Malvinas dispute today¹⁰³, in the context of the 1982 Argentine invasion Haig's goal was impossible to achieve, as the failure of both the Secretary General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and Peruvian President, Fernando Belaúnde Terry with their peace initiatives show. Bicheno (2006) succinctly describes the intractability of the dispute: 'No meaningful negotiation can take place when the minimum demand of one party is greater than the maximum concession the other can make'.

Much of the literature lists the Haig mission's many operational faults, lack of time, distance between the capitals, language barriers, Haig's shortage of political capital, fatigue, events in theatre and Hastings and Jenkins' evaluation is typical: 'a brave but sorry sub-plot'.¹⁰⁴ However, Haig needed to combine two elements in whatever solution he proposed, saving face for Argentina, and not rewarding aggression. The latter could be achieved by supporting Britain but the aim of the shuttle was to prevent a war *and* to keep Argentina firmly in the American orbit. This was impossible.

¹⁰³ Author interview with Snr. Chichello-Hubner

¹⁰⁴ HJ, p.141

V – The Response Evaluated

Eventually Haig became exasperated with the junta's chaotic decision-making process and lack of consistency. During both his first and second visits to Buenos Aires, having worked hard on teasing concessions out of the junta that would make his peace plan compatible with what was acceptable in London, he was handed a memorandum on the steps of his plane at Buenos Aires's Ezeiza airport reaffirming the junta's hardline and undoing much of his endeavour.¹⁰⁵ On 30th April the United States came out in full support of Britain, declaring the breakdown of peace negotiations to be the result of the junta's intransigence. The President wrote to the Prime Minister:

'I am sure you agree that it is essential now to make clear to the world that every effort was made to achieve a fair and peaceful solution, and that the Argentine Government was offered a choice between such a solution and further hostilities. We will therefore make public a general account of the efforts we have made..... We will leave no doubt that Her Majesty's government worked with us in good faith and was left no choice but to proceed with military action based on the right of self defence.'

To Thatcher, this was 'most satisfactory' as it confirmed her longstanding expectation that the United States would side with Britain.¹⁰⁶ However, Reagan had held out until it was absolutely clear that Haig had failed before calling him back to Washington. Some suggest it may have been domestic pressures from public, press and Congress that caused the President's change of policy.¹⁰⁷ Geopolitical concerns were paramount however, and while Haig still had some chance of success, the difficult choice between Britain and Argentina

¹⁰⁵ HJ, (2nd ed. 1997), p. 135, OH II, p.164

¹⁰⁶ Thatcher 1993, p.211

¹⁰⁷ Richardson, 1996, p.138. The Senate passed a resolution on 29th April 1982 in support of Britain's actions in the South Atlantic. It was cosponsored by the current Vice-President, Joe Biden, then junior Senator for Delaware (BinD p.216). The resolution was unanimous but for the single dissenting voice of conservative Republican Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who opposed the resolution on the grounds that it betrayed the principles of the Monroe doctrine. Five days after the Senate instigated the 'tilt' to Britain, it was ratified by the House of Representatives pledging 'full diplomatic support for Great Britain in its efforts to uphold the rule of law.'

could be avoided. During April, the different viewpoints of the various sections of the administration were both united and served by the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the dispute. For the Latin Americanists, an American brokered agreement that saved face for Galtieri would preserve Argentina as a useful ally and protect American interests in Latin America. For the Atlanticists, the war was a distraction from the main NATO front that carried the very real risk of military defeat for an overextended Great Britain. In the eyes of the United States, no damage had been done to relations with either Britain or Argentina until the decision of 30th April.

The first practical implication of the 'tilt' was the legitimising and increasing of American military assistance to the task force at Ascension Island. It was accepted graciously but not without the rebuke that past form dictated that it should have been forthcoming much earlier.¹⁰⁸ For Thatcher, the principle of not rewarding armed aggression was her foremost motivator throughout the crisis and she was unsympathetic to wider American geopolitical concerns. She expected the United States, as leader of the free world, to help her in upholding principle. Tellingly, her memoirs specifically single out French President Mitterrand for praise for his support, on principle, for Britain throughout the crisis whereas Reagan's contribution is only acknowledged later. Indeed, the most damning indictment for America's slowness to support Britain in the Falklands came from Thatcher's Defence

¹⁰⁸ Nott, 2002, p.293. Of the Reagan cabinet, only Caspar Weinberger was subsequently honoured with a knighthood, in 1988 (Henderson, R4).

Secretary, John Nott. He makes the 'breathtaking' statement in his memoirs that the French, not the Americans, were Britain's greatest ally during the crisis, despite the fact that the extent of their support was cancelling Exocet missiles on order in Argentina and using their diplomatic channels to secure landing rights in former French West Africa for RAF aircraft en route to Ascension Island, whereas for some, including Henderson, American support was an essential component of victory.¹⁰⁹

However, minor negative effects on relations with Britain are not sufficient to inform a foreign policy evaluation of the American response. The special relationship with Britain ran deeper than American relations with Argentina and was, despite strong feelings at the time, repaired to normal levels of cooperation as a result of the personal friendship between Thatcher and Reagan and Thatcher's increasing disenchantment with Europe.¹¹⁰ The Falklands dilemma came about because of a desire in Washington to protect recently improved relations with Argentina and it is here we should look for evidence of there having been problems with the response.

¹⁰⁹ Bicheno, 2006 referring to Nott, 2002, p.305, Henderson, R4

¹¹⁰ LF, p.18

However firstly, the functional inadequacies of the response must be reiterated. In part IV it was posited that this was in part a symptom of a large and complex superpower bureaucracy, unable to present a united front in the absence of a clear threat to US national security. Haig attests that the United States did not fulfil the need for ‘a superpower to speak about its intentions with one clear voice lest it baffle its allies.’ Essentially there was a lack of Presidential direction of foreign policy. Reagan ran a ‘loose ship’ and failed to make clear either his specific backing for one particular line or his categorical vetoing of a policy.¹¹¹ Haig thought he had the full backing of the President for his mediating shuttle while at the same time Weinberger assumed Presidential approval for massive covert military support to Britain. Furthermore, Reagan failed to delegate responsibility for conducting US foreign policy during the crisis. There were three concurrent channels, all reporting directly to the President largely in ignorance of one another, Kirkpatrick at the United Nations, Weinberger at the Pentagon and Haig at the State Department.¹¹² Kirkpatrick’s position effectively closed off the UN as a negotiating arena and Haig and Weinberger did not communicate effectively; Haig believed rumours of American military hardware being supplied to the British at Ascension Island to be false. In response to this dysfunctionality, ex post the two men instigated weekly private breakfasts, linking together at least two of these three separate strands of the administration’s foreign policymaking.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Haig 1984, p.13 and Haig, R4

¹¹² *New York Times*, May 31, 1982

¹¹³ Haig, R4

Shifting the analysis to the fundamentals however, it was improved American relations with Argentina that caused the dilemma over the Falklands to come about. Handwringing in the State Department over the effect of supporting Britain on US relations with Latin America, continued well after the tilt of April 30th, as shown by the Latin Americanists' prompting the President to telephone Thatcher on 13th May asking for an immediate ceasefire.¹¹⁴ The prompting came from Kirkpatrick; she feared irrevocable damage to the United States' position in Latin America if Argentina was bloodily defeated in the battle for the Islands' capital, Port Stanley. She took a cooling of support for Britain amongst the nominally Catholic members of the European Community following the contentious sinking of the *General Belgrano* on 2nd May, as a dangerous precedent for similar effects on America's standing in Latin America if Britain humiliatingly defeated Argentina. The administration feared, as echoed in a *New York Times* article of 23rd May, three negative effects of a total Argentine defeat. Firstly, Galtieri would be replaced by a revanchist Peronist anti-American successor. Secondly, a mauled but frustrated Argentina would distract British attention from NATO commitments in the northern hemisphere by tying down military units defending the Islands. Finally, a loss of American credibility in Latin America would provide further opportunities for Soviet and Cuban advances in the region.¹¹⁵ These sentiments continued to have an effect on the President, reflecting the influence of the UN Ambassador upon him and led to Reagan urging restraint on Thatcher's War Cabinet with the Churchillian plea for 'magnanimity in victory'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Thatcher, 1993, p.220

¹¹⁵ *New York Times* May 23rd, 1982

¹¹⁶ *Time* magazine, June 14th 1982, Pastor, 2001, p.80, and Henderson, 1983, p.57

However, as subsequent events show, the hopes and fears underpinning the Latin Americanist point of view were misguided, 'there was good reason *during the conflict* to believe they had been exaggerated and based on scanty evidence.'¹¹⁷ The 'Latinistas' premised their expectations of the effects of America supporting Britain over the Falklands on three false premises. Firstly there was the assumption that the tilt would damage US interests in Latin America; Kirkpatrick and the members of her 'faction' extrapolated ill-feeling towards the United States in Argentina to the whole of Latin America.¹¹⁸ Secondly, the Latin Americanists, as keen architects and supporters of the proxy campaigns in Nicaragua and El Salvador, feared the corollary effect of greater Soviet penetration in Latin America resulting from American support for Britain in the Falklands. Finally, the Latin Americanists displayed an ignorance of the character of US-Latin American interaction in their belief that the Falklands would be the most important thing affecting relations with the United States for all Latin American countries. All three of these fears were either inflated or invalid and led to the United States risking its relations with Britain for the sake of false assumptions about Latin America.

Part of the anxiety of the Latin Americanist lobby was driven by the desire to improve North-South relations that had been perennially characterised by hostility and mistrust. Latin Americans had always felt like second-class citizens compared to Europeans in US eyes, an

¹¹⁷ LF, p.18, emphasis added

¹¹⁸ Kirkpatrick, R4

impression reinforced by America's fighting in two European wars, the refusal of Marshall-like Aid to the region, continued neglect of Latin American economic needs and lingering suspicions of Fascist sympathies during World War II.¹¹⁹ The Falklands crisis neither dispelled nor intensified these impressions during the Cold War period; in general Republicans tended to ignore Latin America unless it became important to the Cold War struggle against communism, while Democrats, such as Carter, either preached painful economic doctrine or moralised over human rights, invariably in a condescending fashion.¹²⁰

Idealists outside the administration hoped that the early 1980s reengagement with Latin America would herald a new understanding between the two Americas and finally create a North-South 'special relationship' founded on trade and mutual assistance. However, the geopolitical priorities lying behind this reengagement overrode the economic concerns important to Latin American governments.¹²¹ In the 1970s chronic slow growth and hyperinflation gave rise to 'dependency theory', an indigenous political economy model that recognised the fundamental trade-off for a Latin American country between independence in foreign policy and economic well-being. However, in Washington the Latin Americanists were strategists rather than economists and they failed to appreciate the importance of development to North-South relations.

¹¹⁹ Schoultz, 1998, p.333

¹²⁰ Wiarda in *House Hearings*, 1982, p.28 and del Carrill, also in *House Hearings*, p.66, Schoultz, 1998, p.363

¹²¹ Perera, p.154 in Coll and Arend (eds.), 1985

The corollary of a lack of appreciation of the importance of development was a gross overestimation of the importance of the Falklands issue to governments other than Argentina's.¹²² Economic concerns were of far greater importance than other countries territorial disputes and Latin America was not and is not a united region, despite the assumptions of Kirkpatrick and her 'one hundred years of animosity' hypothesis. Divisions amongst the countries of the region mitigated enormously any generalised anti-Americanism that may have resulted from the 30th April tilt; despite a common history and linguistic homogeneity (apart from Brazil), the continent remained divided geographically and ethnically. Different levels of economic development have created difficulties for regional cooperation and perennial border disputes have undermined regional solidarity ever since decolonisation in the early nineteenth century.¹²³

In 1982, many Latin American countries were at least mildly antagonistic towards Argentina because of its human rights violations, its pretensions as the continent's cultural nexus, and its aggressive foreign policy: 'Argentina had made itself none too popular by its arrogance [*engreído*] towards the rest of Latin America.'¹²⁴ Contemporary reports relay cheering and

¹²² Hurrell in Woods ed. 1996, p.166-70 and Bicheno, 2006, p.82

¹²³ For example, Venezuela's border dispute with Guyana over the Essequibo river basin and with Colombia over maritime borders remain a barrier to pan-Latin Americanism (Perera, p.134 and 144-5 in Coll and Arend (eds.), 1985).

¹²⁴ Thatcher, 1993, p.191 and author interview with Malcolm Deas. Also LF, p.19 and Franck, p.24 in Coll and Arend (eds.), 1985

celebration in Brazil when it was announced during a football broadcast that the British had retaken Port Stanley, and the Chilean government provided the British with intelligence so as to facilitate the frustration of Argentine foreign policy.¹²⁵ Calvert (1983) and Thomas (1989) go so far as to argue that Britain gained prestige in Latin America by resisting Argentine aggression in the South Atlantic, but that the United States attracted criticism outside Argentina because of its ex ante support for the junta.¹²⁶ Uruguay was wary of Argentine claims to islands in the Plate Delta and even non-contiguous countries such as Mexico, despite Latin sympathies, were aware of the risks of setting a precedent for military settlement in a continent 'laced with territorial disputes', as the comments of a member of President-elect Hurtado's campaign team showed: "It was as well that the British took on the Argentines and taught them a lesson. A principle was involved. The Argentines needed to learn. One only hopes they are teachable."¹²⁷ Argentina's failure to gain tangible support for the Malvinas occupation at the Organisation of American States (OAS) was a symptom of such sentiments.¹²⁸

Furthermore, in the years following the Falklands crisis, a scaling back of American military involvement in Central America and the Mexican debt default of December 1982 led to a dependence on American economic aid, reorienting North-South relations in the Americas

¹²⁵ *Christian Science Monitor*, 13th July 1982, LF, p.20 and author interview with Malcolm Deas

¹²⁶ Calvert, 1983, p.69 and Thomas in Bulmer and Thomas (eds.) 1989, p.77

¹²⁷ *Christian Science Monitor*, 13th July, 1982

¹²⁸ Feldman, 1985, p.13

around economic dependence rather than security concerns leading to a generalised improvement in relations during the 1990s.

Similarly, Argentine defeat in the Falklands had a negligible effect on the level of Soviet influence in the continent as a whole. Although a Soviet military delegation paid a visit to Argentina in November 1982, the general military build up which the conflict provoked throughout Latin America was largely made possible through the purchase of European, including American, and even British supplied hardware. For Argentina itself, offers of Soviet military equipment during the conflict were resisted and subsequently ties between the two nations subsided as grain exports fell and the United States stepped in, despite mild protest from Britain, as Argentina's main supplier of military equipment.¹²⁹

Strengthening the argument against the Latin Americanist point of view are the effects of the war on Argentina itself, although they could not have been ex ante foreseen by the administration. The strong preference for keeping the junta in power whilst in full knowledge of their human rights record and anti-democratic nature highlights again the blinkered focus on anti-communism. The Argentine military's spectacular failure in the Falklands undermined the juntas' basic premise for power - that they were more competent

¹²⁹ Millán and Goldblat, 1983, p.22-3 and LF, p.21

than the civilian government they replaced in 1976. Galtieri was deposed within two weeks of the Argentine surrender and replaced by General Bignone, whose administration lasted just eighteen months before elections brought in a civilian government led by experienced human rights lawyer Raul Alfonsín.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, even under the military Bignone government, bilateral relations improved somewhat as the General tried to distance himself from the failings of the previous junta. Reagan's tour of Latin America in November and December 1982 strengthened ties with the region more generally, with only Argentina and Venezuela refusing to receive him because of American support for Britain six months previously.¹³¹

The return to democracy in Argentina was a direct consequence of defeat in the Falklands War which the United States had, unwittingly, helped bring about. Under Alfonsín Argentine-American relations improved. Though troops were withdrawn, he continued to support American goals in Central America through sponsorship of the Contradora peace process, participated in joint naval manoeuvres in 1988 and supported American farm subsidies at the OAS.¹³² In his relations with the United States, Alfonsín fully recognised that the military juntas had overestimated their leverage in Washington and blamed them for the lack of meaningful cooperation on important economic issues. For Argentina, rescheduling the huge national debt left behind by the military governments was the priority and

¹³⁰ *The Guardian*, 2nd April 2009

¹³¹ Calvert, 1983, p.76

¹³² Sheinin, 2006, p.185

Alfonsín's government was largely successful in moving relations away from anti-communism towards a focus on economic development.¹³³

To show how misplaced the fears of the Reagan administration were, we can identify a date at which relations between Argentina and the United States recovered to their pre-invasion state. The watershed event which signalled the end of mutual suspicion and the beginning of a period of historically unparalleled good relations was the surrender to US inspection of the fledgling Argentine ballistic missile programme, *Cóndor II*, in July-August 1989, symbolising an ending of historical Argentine antagonism towards the United States. Formalised in a 45 minute meeting with President Bush in Washington on 27th September 1989 and Congress' rescinding of the Humphrey-Kennedy amendment in November, this rapprochement came about as relations returned to their more traditional pattern of trade and economic development.¹³⁴ Perhaps because of his country's economic needs (the national debt had climbed to \$64 billion by the end of 1989), the new President, Peronist Carlos Menem, responded to the efforts of the US Ambassador to Buenos Aires, Terence Todman to build a stable bilateral relationship. By 1991, relations were at an historical high, as shown by Argentina's sending of two American built warships to the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Desert Storm.¹³⁵

¹³³ Thomas in Bulmer and Thomas (eds.) 1989, p.77

¹³⁴ Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2007

¹³⁵ Sheinin, 2006, p.200 and Burns, 2001, p.460

Indeed, the commentators assembled to report to the House subcommittee on Inter-American affairs in July and August 1982 realised that, counter to the Latin Americanists' fears, the return to civilian rule in Argentina provided a much better opportunity to improve Argentine-US relations than the forced improvement engineered prior to 1982. Defeat in the war became a significant weapon used by Alfonsín and Menem to scale back the influence of the military in internal politics, rather than a major factor determining foreign policy.¹³⁶

CONCLUSION

Analysing the foreign policy response of the Reagan administration to the Falklands crisis leads us to conclude with three interrelated problematics. Firstly and most obviously, the effectiveness of the response was compromised by the lack of direction described in part IV. Secondly, the Latin Americanist viewpoint was both opposed contemporaneously by the Atlanticists in the State and Defense Departments and was ex post exposed as misguided. Third, the Falklands provides a useful case study of the problems of the Reagan administration's foreign policy and strategy. The failings of the response can be linked to both the overreaction against the liberalism of the Carter presidency and the fixation with a dichotomous communist/anti-communist worldview.

¹³⁶ *The Guardian*, 2nd April 2009, LF, p.19 and Burns, 2001, p.442

Part IV discussed the dysfunctionality of the administration's foreign policy apparatus during April and May 1982. An inadequately informed President chose not, rather than was unable, to delegate authority for the crisis to a single individual. Under Article II, section II of the Constitution, the President is granted substantial control over the foreign policy of the Union which in practice means he must be able to confidently delegate foreign policy to a subordinate without losing oversight. However, during the Falklands crisis, Reagan allowed information to reach him through several channels and tolerated the much more serious problem of different sections of the executive pursuing different policies with different American allies simultaneously. Haig in his memoirs retrospectively acknowledged the need for there to be 'only one official in the government responsible, under the President, for the formulation of foreign policy and for its public enunciation He and he alone has to speak for the President on matters of foreign policy on those occasions when the President chooses not to speak for himself.'¹³⁷ However, Weinberger at the Pentagon and Haig at the State Department were simultaneously working at cross purposes. The RAF arrived at Ascension on 3rd April and the naval Task Force sailed south from the base on the 17th. During that time invaluable American munitions and spare parts were stowed on Task Force ships while Haig was shuttling between London, Washington and Buenos Aires claiming American neutrality (beginning on April 8th until the mission's termination on the 30th) attempting to use the leverage gained from not taking sides to broker a deal.¹³⁸

By being a 'remote and disengaged President', Reagan made the difficult task of mediating between the belligerent parties more difficult rather than impossible.¹³⁹ It was however an impossible task because of the incompatible demands of the belligerents and the intransigence of both the junta and Margaret Thatcher. Nevertheless, the Reagan White

¹³⁷ Haig, 1983, p.12

¹³⁸ See R4 interviews with Haig and Weinberger for a discussion of this dichotomous situation.

¹³⁹ Bicheno, 2006, p.80

House chose to pursue the policy of neutral mediation because of misplaced assumptions about the value and suitability of Argentina as an ally, an overestimation of their leverage in the two capitals, and misplaced fears of the effect supporting Britain would have on US standing in Latin America. How these misperceptions came about brings us to our second problematic, that of the enthusiasm with which the Reagan administration embraced Galtieri in 1981.

It was in not appreciating the importance of the Falklands/Malvinas for the Argentine junta that the administration committed its greatest mistake and it is here the criticism of poor judgement can be made. In courting Argentina as an ally in Central America, the administration failed to appreciate the importance to Buenos Aires of the longstanding territorial dispute with Britain and its potential to explode into an alliance-threatening confrontation.¹⁴⁰ While they were well aware of the Beagle Channel dispute and the potential it had to create a conflict between two allies, Argentina and Chile, the identical threat over the Falkland Islands was overlooked by Washington.¹⁴¹ This is a reasonably mild charge however because, as the Franks inquiry showed, the British government were no more prepared for the invasion than was Washington.

¹⁴⁰ Op. Cit. p.77

¹⁴¹ Cardoso et. al. 1987, p.46

More fundamental are charges against the administration for initially courting the Argentine dictatorship. To liberals, it remained a human rights abusing autocracy. Carter's foreign policy and the efforts of his Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Patricia Derian, may have brought the Dirty War to the world's attention but it, and non-governmental pressure from groups like Amnesty International, did not produce meaningful change within Argentina. For most even mild liberals the relationship with Buenos Aires showed that Washington had not learnt the lessons of Vietnam; of supporting locally unpopular regimes with poor human rights records simply because they were friendly to the United States.¹⁴²

Even using more pragmatic logic, realists that avoided accusing Buenos Aires of human rights abuses because of the potential usefulness of Argentine troops in Central America were themselves acting on misplaced assumptions and inflated expectations. Argentine troop numbers in Central America never exceeded 500, operated in Guatemala rather than war-torn El Salvador and Nicaragua and failed to command the respect of the Contra rebels nominally under their command.¹⁴³ In addition, Thatcher tried to make the point that the islands would become invaluable if the Panama Canal were ever to be closed as it would be better for them to be controlled by a trusted ally.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² The 'Kirkpatrick doctrine had become explicit policy, as shown by Enders' testimony before Congress in 1981 (Feldman, 1985, p.10) - 'Henceforth, the U.S. would only concern itself with how aid transfers could bolster U.S. security interests in the region.'

¹⁴³ Norden and Russell, 2002, p.25 and Sheinin, 2006, p.176

¹⁴⁴ Thatcher, 1993, p.221

Furthermore, whereas ex ante the enthusiastic embrace with the Argentines meant the United States failed to foresee the risk the Falklands posed, once the crisis had broken the reaction of Kirkpatrick and the other Latin Americanists was one of paranoia. This unlikely, and from Washington's point of view, peripheral, crisis prompted a response driven by fear of disproportionately disruptive effects on the Reagan foreign policy project. The Latin Americanists failed to understand, as the work of dependency theorists makes clear, that US-Latin American relations are driven by the issues important to Latin Americans, economic development and trade, rather than security and anti-communism, as the Reagan administration believed, or human rights, as the Carter administration tried to impose.¹⁴⁵ By ignoring the central tenet of the North-South relationship, the Reagan administration overestimated the importance of the Falklands issue and overreacted.

From a more general perspective, the reaction to the Falklands crisis reveals the limitations of the non-pragmatic crusading character of the Reagan administration's foreign policy when applied to unpredictable realities. By assuming Latin America to be one reasonably homogenous bloc, blanket policies were implemented that worked counter to American goals in some areas while alienating nearly all with their lack of specificity. Assuming all of Latin America would turn against the United States if they supported Britain in recapturing the Falklands negated evidence of generalised anti-Argentine feeling throughout the continent and ignored the importance of principle and the possible benefits to American

¹⁴⁵ Pastor, 2001, p.33, Schoultz, p.363 and Hurrell in Woods ed., 1996

prestige that could be gained by opposing unilateral aggression and upholding international law.

The failure to consider other options and therefore the fundamental root of the Reagan administration's dilemma was the shoehorning of the crisis into the restrictive paradigm of the bipolar Cold War. The Falklands dispute had no place in the worldview of the administration and in trying to make the crisis fit, the administration compromised its own efficacy as a peacemaker. The Falklands was an anachronistic territorial dispute between two countries both opposed to communism. Therefore the response should have been based on the actual issues at stake – sovereignty and principle. Attempting to fashion a solution in the framework of the war against communism actually prevented the United States from decisively taking a side and using its power to avert a war.

Counterfactually, the best American response to the Falklands crisis would have been for the United States' to threaten Argentina with both a reduction in the aid recently granted, and a show of military action against Argentine units around the Falkland Islands. The presence of American warships in the South Atlantic alongside the British Task Force could well have deterred Argentina and forced a withdrawal without hostilities. Galtieri had greater respect for the American armed forces than he did for a Britain he believed would not fight up until

the last moment.¹⁴⁶ Such action could have been justified in defence of international law and was the line taken by the Prime Minister as well as the House of Representatives (see ¹⁰⁷). Ex post, a moral stand was recognised as probably the best strategy to have pursued by David Gompert, a member of Haig's shuttle team.¹⁴⁷ As it was, American 'neutrality' emboldened the Argentines to fight to defend their newly acquired possession, therefore making the war more likely.

Furthermore, Thatcher believed America's peace-seeking diplomacy would have been much more successful had it been backed up with a military threat to intervene on Britain's side, echoing Frederick the Great's assertion that 'diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments.'¹⁴⁸ This was also Weinberger's lesson from the conflict; that soft power is only effective if backed up by hard power.¹⁴⁹

Such actions would only have been in the American national interest however if Kirkpatrick's concern for the effects of the war on US relations with Latin America were misplaced. Subsequent events, as detailed in part V, show this to be the case. Although the return to

¹⁴⁶ Walters, R4

¹⁴⁷ Gompert, p.110 in Coll and Arend (eds.), 1985 and Thatcher, 1993, p.173. This is also Bicheno's conclusion (Bicheno 2006, p.83)

¹⁴⁸ Thatcher, 1993, p.191

¹⁴⁹ Weinberger, 1990, p.6

democracy was not foreseen, animosity towards the United States outside Argentina did not materialise and there were incidences of the opposite, of the United States gaining prestige for making an eventual stand against unilateral aggression. Even in Argentina, once relations returned to a pattern of trade and development, grounds for antagonism diminished and relations improved considerably during the Menem presidency.

The American response to the Falklands crisis is an indispensable case study of the foreign policy culture of the Reagan presidency. Though Reagan styled himself as a realist, a convincing claim when compared with the idealism of the Carter years, classical realism of the Morgenthau variant is a pragmatic doctrine, devoid of ideological motivations in the prudent pursuit of national security. Contrarily, the Reagan administration's narrow ideological focus on opposing the Soviet Union compromised the flexibility with which it could respond to the Falklands crisis and set up severe clashes between moderate defensive realists like Weinberger and offensive realists, most notably Kirkpatrick. Such ideological influences caused Reagan to risk the Atlantic alliance with his delaying of support for Britain. The 1983 US invasion of Grenada shows that Reagan did not heed the lesson of the Falklands – again Britain was affronted as Grenada is a Commonwealth member and London was not consulted before the invasion.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Thatcher, 1993, p.331 and Thomas in Bulmer and Thomas (eds.), p.78. See Pastor, 2001, p.178-90 for a comprehensive yet brief discussion of Operation Urgent Fury, the October 1983 US invasion of Grenada.

Although ideological principles may have been appropriate for applying to domestic economic and social matters in the 1980s, the Reagan White House did not heed Machiavelli's warning that even the most principled Prince must have a different set of ethics when dealing with other nations, in order to advance the national interest in dangerous surrounds. In both the Falklands and Grenada cases, pragmatism in defence of the national interest (preserving the NATO alliance with Britain) was foresworn in favour of the pursuit of ideological aims informed by a broad-brush, overly simplified view of international relations typical of Reagan's public pronouncements. Bicheno posits that this is a uniquely American illness, echoing Tocqueville's prediction that the great nation's one shortcoming would be the conduct of its foreign policy:

The USA is particularly prone to formulating policy in terms of overarching idealism. President Kennedy's vow to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and success of liberty" led to the Vietnam war and anti-American riots all over the world.¹⁵¹

The ultimate vindication for those critical of the American response to the Falklands crisis perhaps comes from one of the chief architects of the worldview which engendered it, Jeane Kirkpatrick, recognising after the event the lack of realism in American foreign policymaking:

I came away from the experience convinced again that we Americans are not very good at thinking and acting accordingly in support of our national interests as the British and French regularly do.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Bicheno, 2006, p.73

¹⁵² Kirkpatrick, 1979, p.20

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