

The Falklands War

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Abstract

The British-Argentine dispute on the Falkland Islands in 1982 gives a clear picture of complex war-like interrelationships: the linkages between military and diplomacy, the incorporation into territories, the sea and air, the primary role of campaign support operations as well as the geographical and attractive superiority of strategic concepts. It began on 2 April 1982 and ended on 14 June 1982. The war broke out when Argentina was under the government of *General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri*, the commander of Argentina's governing military junta. *General Galtieri* decided to invade the Falkland Islands because he wanted to draw attention away from difficulties in *Buenos Aires* with patriotic incentives and because it seemed to him as an easy conqueror.

On April 2, *General Galtieri* ordered the Argentinean armed forces to strike the islands; at first, the small British garrison resisted, but by April 4, the Argentinean armed forces had seized Port Stanley, which is the capital city of the Falkland Islands. The British government were ruled by Margaret Thatcher, who not only accepted the challenge but took advantage of the occasion to make the national pride stand out again.

After making diplomatic tension against Argentina, Thatcher ordered the assemblage of the British Naval Task Force, which is the most significant naval task force since World War 2, to recapture the Falkland Islands. Commanded by Admiral of the Fleet John David Elliott Fieldhouse, Baron Fieldhouse, GCB, GBE, the task force consisted of various groups of forces. In mid-April, as the London operation was underway, Admiral Fieldhouse began to head south to supply a large fleet of freighters and tankers.

The initial phases of the Falklands War were mostly at sea between the British Navy and the Argentinian Air Force; on May 2, the British nuclear-powered submarine sank the Argentinean navy light cruiser, *ARA General Belgrano*. On May 21, the British armed forces landed, and after consolidating his position, Major General John Jeremy Moore began the attack on Port Stanley on June 11. Surrounded on land and blockaded at sea, the Argentinean commander, *Brigadier General Mario Benjamin Menéndez*, realized his situation was desperate and surrendered on June 14, ending the conflict. The British sovereignty of the Port Stanley and the surrender of the Argentinean armed forces in the Falklands followed. The British declared a formal finish to military operations on June 20. The Falklands War lasted only seventy-four days

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The dispute between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982 is a strong example of the dynamic interrelationships of war: the ties between diplomacy and military action, the integration of land, sea and air powers, the central role of campaign support operations and the geographical and atmospheric dominance in strategic concepts. The referendum on the Falkland Islands is an almost perfect example of a campaign: geographically isolated, providing different advantages and disadvantages to each foe, battled against high-tech weapons systems, set against a strong political backdrop, and in just seventy-four days took the British to a final win. While it was not without its part of dooms, this campaign was primarily remembered by military forces trying to accomplish their task as they understood it for brilliantly executed, well-led, bravely fought battles.

This essay aims to understand what triggered the Falklands War by illustrating its consciousness to some of the themes, political motives, the country's historical and psychological torments.

By the fall of 1981, the Argentinean government, under the leadership of *General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri* and the military junta was experiencing a significant decrease in power due to economic and political problems. To distract the population, *General Galtieri* sought to turn military and informational (psychological) strength into political capital. *General Galtieri* intended to ignite a nationalistic fervour by conquering and exercising the Falkland Islands while preventing general strikes and a potential overthrow of the government. (Freedman, 2004a)

General Galtieri had an excellent reason to believe that he was going to succeed. The Falkland Islands people, however, did not want autonomy. The people can retain colonial status with mostly the British heritage. Argentina and the British were invited by the United Nations (UN) to address the Falkland Islands question peacefully in 1965. (Laver, 2001) Despite several aborted attempts to resolve this issue in the international courts, no progress was made. The Argentinean Government withdrew from negotiations, not willing to risk losing their political claim. (Cardoso, Kirschbaum, Kooy, & Australian National University. Australian National Centre for Latin American Studies. Barry Carr, 1987) Additionally, Argentina had been claiming the Falkland Islands, or *Las Islas Malvinas* as they call it, since 1883. (Badsey, Havers, Grove, & Australian National University. Australian National Centre for Latin American, 2005)

Moreover, *General Galtieri* felt that he would have international political support after an invasion. He also worked with the Reagan administration to fund Nicaragua's Contras. (Freedman, 2004a) Furthermore, *General Galtieri* felt that he would push Washington into pressuring London to seek a diplomatic rather than military resolution to

the conflict. He felt the British did not have the political will to use military force to recapture the Falkland Islands. (Hastings & Jenkins, 1997)

The British went through a difficult time during the 1980s, and the government faced many difficulties and problems. By 1979, Margaret Thatcher was being criticised for the failure of her programme and her loudest critics were saying that she mostly could not handle the Prime Minister's job. (Cannadine, 2016) However, no one had anticipated the Falklands War or Thatcher's fighting spirit as suggested when she famously said "I have only one thing to say. You turn if you want to, the Lady is not for turning." (M Thatcher, 1980)

As stated earlier, the UN and the British had been trying to settle the Falkland Islands conflict by talking and negotiating for the past seventeen years, but according to Thatcher, it was time to take action. As Fox News suggests, Thatcher believed that aggression should not be tolerated. (News, 2013) The war was crucial to Thatcher as, in her memoirs, she stated that, "What we fought for 8,000 NM in the South Atlantic, though important, it was not just the territory and people of the Falkland Islands. We have maintained the integrity and fundamental principles of our country for the world as a whole." (Margaret Thatcher & Thatcher, 1993)

Thatcher's comment also shows how the Falklands War helped the British by giving the country a sense of hope and pride. By 1982, Thatcher had no choice but to use military forces, although she worked closely with the United States (US) at trying to achieve a diplomatic solution, as suggested. Nevertheless, she immediately sent a military task force that had accomplished its target when negotiators had struggled. (News, 2013)

Military action was ultimately immediately successful, and by June 1982, the Falkland Islands were back under British rule. Once the announcement was made that Argentina had surrendered, Thatcher famously said: "Great Britain is great again." (Booth, 1982) Thatcher had taken a significant risk and did what not many leaders of that time were willing to do. Her decision was precarious, but Thatcher's resolve has given rise to public confidence in her leadership. As the Falklands War proceeded, support went up. Initially, support for the military invasion was 40 per cent, but by the time of the invasion – after HMS Sheffield, Type 42 guided-missile destroyer, and HMS Antelope, Type 21 frigate, were attacked – 80 per cent of those polled thought that the government was right to take measures to capture the Falkland Islands. (Darley, 2005)

The war on the Falkland Islands began on Friday, April 2, 1982, when the Argentine Special Forces (ASP) landed in the Mullet Creek in the eastern part of the islands. Under *Operation Rosario*, (Watson & Dunn, 1984) the Argentine government advanced against the unorganized British Royal Marines (BRM) base on the island at the Port Stanley government house. There was little resistance, and soon the ASP took control of Port Stanley, the Falkland Islands capital, the brigade barracks, and the house of state forcing the governor

to leave the islands. (Great Britain. Ministry of, 1982) On the same day, the Falkland Islands Governor was appointed by *Brigadier General Mario Benjamin Menéndez*, and Port Stanley was promptly renamed, *Puerto Argentino*. (Koburger, 1983)

However, as the invasion was predicted by the British, they quickly assembled and responded with the British's UN Ambassador, Sir Anthony Derrick Parsons, to present a motion for a resolution to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemning the hostilities and demanding immediate the Argentinean forces ultimately withdrawal from the Falkland Islands. (Freedman, 2004b) Upon rejection of the British demands, London announced military forces would retake the Falkland Islands and deployed the British Naval Task Forces to recapture the Falkland Islands from the Argentineans.

Since Buenos Aires expected London to cede sovereignty of the Falkland Islands with little or no conflict, no response planning had been performed, or preparations made to defend the Falkland Islands by forces extensively. Furthermore, the Argentinean government was obliged to hastily prepare for war with the British Naval Task Forces expecting to arrive within three to four weeks seeking to reclaim the Falkland Islands. This upcoming war was to be Argentina's first war in almost 120 years since the Dirty War in Argentina and the military coup of 1976. (Anderson, 2014)

The Argentine junta combat operation was led by a professional military staff structured in a complex command structure overseeing a poorly trained and inexperienced battle force. Under *Vice Admiral Juan Jose Lombardo*, a theatre command, the South Atlantic Operations Theatre (SATO), was formed to command the Argentine naval units and the Falkland Islands garrison. (Freedman, 2004b) Under his authority, the Falkland Islands Governor, *Brigadier General Mario Benjamin Menéndez*, commanded all army, navy and air force units assigned to the Falkland Islands. Under the command of Air Force Brigadier, *General Ernesto Horacio Crespo*, the *Fuerza Aerea Sur* (FAS), the Argentinean Special Forces or the Southern Air Force (SAF), was formed. The FAS/SAF was outside the theatre commander's jurisdiction and reported directly to the junta while sharing power with other commands as well. (Strange, 1983)

In strategic planning and joint operations, the disorganised control structure without a single theatre commander overall operating forces was unsuccessful. In the article of the Joint Forces Quarterly 1994, Robert L. Scheina, the American historian, notes that the organisational and tactical grades of the Argentine Armed Forces (AAF) during *the Malvinas conflict* existed together, but that neither strategically nor doctrinally did they exist. He also explained how Latin American history tends to provide services with separate identities that it should not be shocking, despite this tradition, that in *the Malvinas dispute* with the British, the Argentinian Army, Navy and Air Force fought three battles. (Scheina, 1994) Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the Argentinean view of service identity, as

developed and strengthened by tradition, is the greatest obstacle to joint operation, regardless of how urgently circumstances push for such an innovation. The lack of overall unity, particularly joint training, was a significant factor in Argentina's defeat in this war.

Once the decision was taken by the British Government to contest the occupation of Argentina by the armed forces, the British's military power was rapidly mobilised. Operation Corporate was launched from the headquarters in England of over 8,000 NM away. The British chain of command fell under the British Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET), Admiral of the Fleet John David Elliott Fieldhouse, Baron Fieldhouse, GCB, GBE. (Freedman, 2004a) The Task Force Commander located at Northwood near London, England. Admiral Fieldhouse reported directly to the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral of the Fleet Terence Thornton Lewin, Baron Lewin. (Cannadine, 2016)

Admiral Fieldhouse commanded and controlled the South Atlantic Operation (SAO) from Northwood through his field commanders located in the area of operations (AO). Subordinate to Admiral Fieldhouse was the Carrier Battle Group Task Force (CBG-TF) commanded by Rear Admiral John Forster "Sandy" Woodward and the Amphibious Group Task Force (AG-TF) commanded by Commodore Michael C. Clapp. (Fremont-Barnes, 2012) Additionally, the British nuclear-powered submarines engaged in the corporate operation area reported back to Northwood through Vice-Admiral Peter Geoffrey Marshall Herbert who reported directly to Admiral Fieldhouse. (Nott, 2002)

The ground commander was Major General John Jeremy Moore who initially remained at Northwood and directed the 3rd Commando Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Julian Howard Atherden Thompson and the 5th Infantry Brigade controlled by Brigadier General Mathew John Anthony "Tony" Wilson. When Major General Moore arrived, he assumed command of the 3rd Commando Brigade and the 5th Infantry Brigade from aboard the HMS Fearless, an amphibious assault ship. (Fowler, 1982) However, he was not in command of HMS Fearless, which had other priorities and on occasion conflicted with his command and control (C2) priority of the ground forces.

The missing command element was a three-star TFC located within the AO who would report directly to Admiral Fieldhouse at Northwood. This missing command element led to friction and loss of C2, particularly over logistic assets within the AO. Any deconflict between field commanders had to be resolved from Northwood located almost 8,000 NM away. This difficulty increased distance of space led to increased time requirements needed to resolve decisional conflicts between element commanders, thus having a direct adverse impact on forces.

The British Naval Task Force, which composed of three subordinate task groups, consist of the Carrier Battle Group (CBG), the Amphibious Battle Group (ABG) and the Submarine Battle Group (SBG). (Freedman, 2004a) The British Naval Task Force saw the

operations as a conventional naval deterrent in support of diplomacy. The primary campaign objectives of the British Naval Task Force included; military deployment and operations to repel attacks on the British citizen and territory; support the removal of Argentinian forces from the Falkland Islands and the return of the British Government as soon as possible. (English & Watts, 1982) In order to achieve the campaign objectives, the British principally applied two maritime capabilities, sea control and combat operation against the land. Each of these capabilities is paramount in the British's operations in order to achieve their campaign objectives.

From the perspective of sea control, it is evident that the British Naval Task Force wants to quickly establish sea control around the Falkland Islands in the littoral waters with naval assets and the Argentinean counter and use land-based assets. Sea control is characterized as the conditions under which one has the freedom of action to use the sea at a specified time for one's own purposes and, where possible, to refuse enemy use. (Milan, 2009) Thus, the British Naval Task Force in support of its efforts to obtain sea control established a 200 NM, namely Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) from the centre of the Falkland Islands, in which any vessels or aircraft from other countries may be fired upon without warning. (English & Watts, 1982) Consequently, the declaration of the TEZ hinders the British Naval Task Force mobility and ability to gain sea control outside the TEZ. This is evident when the nuclear-powered submarine, HMS Conqueror was ordered to engage the Argentinean navy light cruiser, *ARA General Belgrano*, contrary to the Rule of Engagement (ROE) outside the TEZ. (Anderson, 2014)

Nonetheless, because of the number of elements intersecting such as its complex topography (underwater and near-land interface), the scale of commercial transport (high noise signal ratio – cluster control, pattern discrimination) and the various challenges (anti-shield), the British Naval Task Force is considered to have difficulties in naval operations in coastal waters such as the Complex Adaptive Environment (CAE). (GlobalSecurity.org)

Subsequently, during sea control operations within the littorals, the British Naval Task Force lost four warships, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) vessel, and the British merchant ship. A further 21 other warships and RFA ships sustained damage by Argentinean land-based aircraft bomb and missile attacks. (Great Britain. Ministry of, 1982) Sea control no longer means control over an enemy's fleet, but control over all his navel and land-based assets or systems are required.

In the Falklands War, sea control was the precursor to conducting combat operations against the land including Anti-Air Warfare (AAW), Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) and Amphibious Forces Operation (AFO) in order to conduct a military deployment and operations to repel attacks on the British citizen and territory. The principal means of combat operations against land executed by the British Naval Task Force was the AFO and

Amphibious Landing Operation (ALO). However, the key to AFO/ALO was a surprise. (Fowler, 1982) The British Naval Task Force saw that the Falkland Islands covered enough real estate to assure that the ground forces could get ashore remote from Port Stanley, using the navy's mobility for a surprise. Undoubtedly, the navy's mobility allows it to strike across vast distances before the enemy can prepare a fortified defensive position.

However, one must note that during AFO/ALO such as the British Naval Task Force was conducting; a fleet temporarily surrenders it the tactical advantage of mobility while it guards the beachhead. While guarding the beachhead, a naval force is vulnerable and must depend on defensive systems to fend off attacks. We see clear evidence of this when five Argentinean air forces, Douglas A-4B/C/Q Skyhawk, bombed three of the British ships, damaging two RFAs, and sinking one Landing Craft Utility (LCU) while conducting the Amphibious Resupply Operation (ARO). (Chant, 2013) Furthermore, one must not go that during the AFO/ALO was distributed among the number of ships arriving in the area at different time.

The sailing of the British Naval Task Force in order to achieve advance sea control demonstrated the diplomatic and military roles of the navy. Diplomatically, political action takes place without engaging in war or the use of violence, coercion or the threat of using force, stopping the deployment of the AAF, raising the trust of the islanders and, symbolically, of the British. Militarily, there are maritime power projection, sea control and battlespace dominance. Combat operations against the land are a military role associated with the maritime power projection.

The British logistic effort was complicated by both rapid mobilization and distance between Britain, the British Forward Operating Base (FOB), namely the Ascension Islands and the Falkland Islands. Over 10,000 tons of freight, 95 aircraft and 400,000 tons of fuel had to be loaded and transport into a conflict area over 8,000 NM away. During the height of the war over 10,000 British personnel, 44 warships and Ships Taken Up From Trade (STUFT) were located in the AO. ("Falklands War," 2015)

Additionally, converting the STUFT for use as a military transport ship required a significant effort. Due to the shortage of time allowed for embarkation, combat loading was not employed, and the ships were loaded in a disorganized fashion so that they can drive as quickly as possible towards the Falkland Islands. (Wiese, 2014) Once loaded, there was little understanding of what was placed where and on what ship. Efforts were made to inventory the ships once underway. However, command and communication issues prevented the inventories from full completion before reaching the FOB. A re-load was required on the FOB of all ships before any landings on the Falkland Islands could take place.

Once on the Falkland Islands, lift and movement would become a logistical challenge. The terrain and weather on the Falkland Islands were challenging and affected the land force logistics. In many places, peat bog with abundant tussock grass existed

along with numerous rock outcroppings. (Bingham) A loaded wheeled vehicle towing any equipment would be limited in capability. Fortunately, the British had the foresight to consider these factors and were somewhat prepared to take on the challenging conditions. A decision on the early planning stage was made to take a minimum number of wheeled vehicles, and the British brought a lot of stacked over-snow vehicles to be transverse the problematic terrain. (Great Britain. Ministry of, 1982) Besides, airlift capabilities were on hand to assist with logistic movements.

The British logistics system had several challenges and setbacks throughout the war such as the sinking of the SS Atlantic Conveyor, the British merchant navy ship which was attacked by two Argentinean Air-Launched Exocet missiles (AM39). (Badsey et al., 2005) A higher-level overall commander forward with the three task groups would have assisted in providing more excellent command and control over the British logistic challenges freeing time and also reducing the overall of the British battlespace.

In conclusion, many in the naval community believed that it was impossible to take the Falkland Islands back. However, the Falklands War is an excellent example of how a naval force can be utilised to project naval diplomacy and power 8,000 NM from its home station in order to gain sea control of complex littoral waters and launch the AFO/ALO to regain control over a territory. The Falklands War was not easy for the British; their abilities to gain sea control and the Argentinean land-based aircraft and missiles contested their conduct of combat operations against the land. Nonetheless, the Falklands War indicates the need for naval capabilities in the modern spectrum of operations.

Furthermore, the Falklands War has many strategic and political lessons to be learned. The British's C2 structure was missing a critical operational command element component in the theatre. The Argentinean armed forces were lacking joint coordination among their services, which were army, navy and air force. Both sides struggled with operational factors such as time, space and force, which during the fog of war, went unnoticed. Besides, the Argentine defeat led to *General Galtieri's* collapse, and it also helped depict Thatcher as a reliable, stable and decisive leader. Nevertheless, the status of the islands continues to cause problems in the relationship between the two countries.

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