

**STRATEGY
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**WAS THE INVASION OF THE MALVINAS/FALKLANDS ISLANDS
A CORRECT POLITICAL DECISION BY ARGENTINA?**

BY

**COLONEL EDUARDO BERNADOU
Argentine Army**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper analyzes the political decision of the Argentine government to use limited military power to obtain a political objective. It is based on different historical and diplomatic antecedents about the Malvinas/Falklands sovereignty issue, until the Georgias Islands crisis before the invasion in April 1982.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Who can wonder in this world about the use of military forces? How often have we seen different states making use of the military instruments to accomplish their political objectives?

Do you remember the military intervention on Panama by the United States a few years ago? This was a typical example of the restricted use of the military power to obtain a political objective, but this is not our subject.

The problem that I want to explain is the Argentine political decision to invade the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, during the crisis with Britain, before the war, on April 1982.

I am going to try to demonstrate through different historical and diplomatic antecedents why the Argentine government resolved to use a small part of its military power to obtain the political objective.

II. HISTORIC ANTECEDENTS

It is well known that Spain was the first to colonize the land of America. Nevertheless, nobody knows who first saw the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. Vespucci, Magellan, Davis, Hawkings among others, maybe could have claimed the islands. For this reason they have had a lot of names such as: The Sansons, The Sebaldes, Hawking Land, The Malvinas. According to these

theories of discovery, Spanish, British, French, and the people of Netherlands are almost equally entitled to credit.

A. 1690. Arrival on the Islands.

One of the first men who arrived on the islands was Captain John Strong. He was sailing to Chile when a violent storm sent him to the north part of the islands: They were named Falklands in honor of the first Lord of The Admiralty. Other men followed Captain Strong and then the principal characteristic of this period was the intense rivalry among Spain, Britain and France.¹

B. 1713. Treaty of Utrecht.

The three countries agreed to avoid a possible war to sign a treaty which was called the "Treaty of Utrecht." Under it was confirmed the control by Spain of all its American territories including the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. Nevertheless, this treaty didn't stop English and French ambitions. For example, the English Lord Anson thought that the islands would be very useful in peace as in war. They could be, according to Anson, "a refuge and refreshment base for ships".² This concept of the Malvinas/Falklands Islands as a "maritime key" was thus placed in the political consciousness of the English.³

C. 1764. First Colony.

Antoine de Bouganville (French) was the first man to succeed in taking and settling the islands. He formally claimed them in the name of Louis XV. He and his men landed in the North of the

site called today "Puerto Argentino/Port Stanley", and in this place they built a small fort, which they called Port Louis. Besides the rights of Spain in America, signed in the Treaty of Utrecht, this occupation established a precedent for the future Argentina's reclamations over the Malvinas/Falklands Islands.⁴

D. 1765. Second Colony.

The British, interested in these islands, maybe had known about the Bougainville's expedition and thought of a similar trip, too. For this reason Commodore John Byron was sent to survey the islands. After that, a year later, Captain McBride was sent to consolidate Byron's landing. Their orders were to build a fort and eject any other settlers who could be in the islands or might question Britain's right over this territory.

When both parts met the French pointed out that they had established a colony and that it was McBride who should leave.⁵

E. 1767. Puerto Soledad.

Soon the Malvinas/Falklands Islands were into the world's politics. The Spanish were furious with the breaking of the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht by both English and French expeditions.

At this time France was considered an ally of Spain, and an agreement was reached by which the Port Louis colony was ceded to the Spanish. The transfer took place at a ceremony on the East Malvinas/Falklands Islands, and a new governor, Felipe Ruiz

Puente, was designated at by the Captain General of Buenos Aires. The colony was named Puerto Soledad.⁶

F. 1769/1770 Spain acts against British.

In these years Spain took action against the British intruders. The governor of Buenos Aires was instructed by Madrid to drive any British out of the Islands by force if necessary. Then 5 ships and 1,400 men were sent. As a result of this action the commander in charge at Port Egmont, Captain George Faimer, left the settlement under protest, in 1770.

The result of this situation was the first Britain crisis about the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. After a year of frenetic diplomatic negotiations, with threats of war from both sides, finally they reached an agreement. Britain would be allowed to return to Port Egmont, for a few years, to restore the King's honor, but Spain kept its rights about the sovereignty. A British expedition returned to Port Egmont and after 3 years it was evacuated.⁷

G. 1790. Nootka Sound Convention.

Both nations, Spain and Britain, signed the Nootka Sound Convention, by which Britain renounced any colonial ambitions in South America and the islands adjacent. The Malvinas/Falklands Islands were a Spanish colony for 40 years, until the collapse of Spain's empire in the early nineteenth century.⁸

H. 1810. Actions in Buenos Aires.

The first American movement towards independence from Spain occurred in Buenos Aires. The authorities decided to remove Spanish settlers from Puerto Soledad and from Patagonia. The islands were now used as a refuge for sealing and whaling vessels by a lot of nations.

I. 1820. First Argentinean Governor.

The new state or the Provinces of Rio de la Plata (Argentina) sent a ship to claim the islands as part of its post-colonial legacy from Spain and designated its first governor. During the following years things were improved fundamentally by the action of the governor Luis Vernet. He also imposed restrictions on the indiscriminate fishing and hunting within the jurisdiction of this government due to the fact the seal and the whales were in danger of extinction.⁹

J. 1829. The Crisis with the USA.

At this time the protagonist was the United States. Governor Vernet proceeded to execute his functions by arresting an American ship, Harriet, for he regarded that this ship had made an illegal hunt of seals. Besides he had confiscated some of its property. For this reason the American Consul in Buenos Aires protested and threatened reprisals. Supporting his protest he sent the warship Lexington to Puerto Soledad to secure the restitution of the property, mostly sealskins, that Vernet had confiscated. When the American warship landed in the

Malvinas/Falklands Islands, its Captain Silas Duncan ordered all military installations destroyed, the buildings razed, taken all sealskins and most of the inhabitants put under arrest. After these incomprehensible and brutal actions the American Captain said that the islands were free of all government. Consequently, the relations between Argentina and the USA were broken. Another Argentine governor was soon nominated and sent to the islands, but unhappily he remained only two months because he was murdered.¹⁰

K. 1833 The First Crisis Between Argentina and Britain.

The British decided to return to the Malvinas/Falklands Islands, alerted about the confused situation in the islands by the British consul in Buenos Aires. As a result, the Admiralty sent two warships under the command of Captain James Onslow, whose orders were to recover the islands for Britain. Onslow found the commander of an Argentine warship, Jose Maria Pinedo, when he was suppressing the rebels who had murdered the governor Mestivier.

Captain Pinedo was surprised by the Captain Onslow, who informed him that the British flag would replace the Argentine flag the next day and also forced him to leave. Pinedo protested but in front of superior forces he did not resist.¹¹ Buenos Aires immediately objected to this action and protested on the basis of several arguments.

L. 1841. First British Governor.

The islands were formally established as a Crown Colony in 1840, and the first British governor was Lieutenant Richard Moody. At this time the British began to develop a small community which principal activity was the agricultural. Its occupation only was interrupted on April 1982, when Argentina invaded the islands.¹²

III. DIPLOMATIC ANTECEDENTS

During the 150 years from the first crisis in 1833 until the last crisis in 1982, Argentina tried to maintain bilateral diplomatic negotiations with Britain about the sovereignty of the islands. Consequently, to obtain this objective Argentina presented its claims in all possible international forums.

This paper only includes the most important antecedents that contributes to the clarification the problem under discussion.

A. 1833. Argentina's arguments.

After the retirement of the Argentines that occupied the Malvinas/Falklands Islands through the British's military action, the ambassador in London was instructed by his government in Buenos Aires to formulate a strong protest to the British Foreign Secretary.

Different arguments were presented in this opportunity. They were valid until the last negotiations before the war, in 1982.

Argentina argued that it owned the islands because:

1. It had succeeded Spain in the territories that in the past had been governed from Buenos Aires.
2. The treaty of Utrecht of 1713, signed by Spain, Britain, and France had given to Spain all the control over its traditional territories in America, including the Malvinas/Falklands Islands.
3. France had sold to Spain the islands, consequently the Spanish had acquired also the right on prior occupation in 1767.
4. Britain had abandoned its settlement in Malvinas/Falklands Islands in 1774.
5. Britain had lost its claims to the islands in the "secret, unwritten clause" inside the diplomatic negotiations that finished in the Treaty of Nootka Sound, in 1790.¹³

B. 1834/1963. Many Years Without Positive Results.

During these 130 years Argentina presented its claims many times before the British Foreign Office about the sovereignty of the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. It never obtained major satisfaction over its claims. The British always showed little desire to find a solution to this problem. Its permanent diplomatic behavior was to delay the negotiations for a long time. Nevertheless, it is important to express some opinions about these times. They will serve to explain better the problem that we are treating.

1. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, received a telegram from the British ambassador in Buenos Aires, in 1910. It was a request for advice about a new Argentine map which showed the Malvinas/Falklands Islands as part of Argentina. The answer as worded by the Sunday Times of London was "Argentina has no valid claims and the best thing that we can do it is to follow the practice of the previous seventy years and do nothing."

2. About the same problem a member of the Foreign Office's research department wrote a memo to the secretary Sydney Spicer which led him to write the following: "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Argentina government's attitude is not unjustified."

3. In another opportunity, in 1911, an official belonging to the Foreign Office wrote the following "we can not easily make out a good claim, and we have intelligently done everything to avoid discussing the subject with Argentina."

4. The head of the English Foreign Office American department, Mr. John Troutbeck, wrote in 1936: "The difficulty of the position about the sovereignty is that our occupation of the Falklands Islands in 1833 was so arbitrary a procedure as judged by the ideology of the present day. It is therefore not easy to explain our possession without showing ourselves up as international bandits."¹⁴

C. 1964/1965. United Nations Decisions.

In these years two good international decision were made in favor of Argentina. The first was that the UN Committee on

decolonization had included the Islands in its list of territories that ought to be decolonized. It also accepted the inclusion of the Argentina designation "Malvinas" following "Falklands" in the official denomination of the islands. Soon the existence of the dispute was recognized and both parties, Argentina and Great Britain, were invited to negotiate.

The second important decision was the Resolution 2065 of the General Assembly in 1965. This document established that Britain and Argentina should negotiate their problems about the Malvinas/Falklands considering the interests of the islanders. The most important points of this resolution from Argentina position were the following:

- The sovereignty problem should be included in the discussions.
- The islanders should not participate in the conversations between both countries because they were not the first settlers of the islands.
- The "interests" and not the "wishes" of the islanders had to be taken into account by both countries.

This resolution, a clear opposition to the British diplomatic position, demonstrated that the principle of self-determination could not be applied to these territories, and that the problem was bilateral and not trilateral. During the following 3 years both countries negotiated under the terms of the Resolution 2065.

Initially there was considerable progress. For example a "memorandum of understanding" was produced which included the

eventual transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. But when the bilateral conversations were normally developing, something happened in 1968 that made the British government change the rules of the negotiations.

D. 1968. British Government Changed the Rules.

Had British priorities about the Malvinas/Falklands Islands changed? The issue had changed, but not because of a drastic change in the international context or the priorities of the parties involved. Change came because of the appearance of a new actor in the dispute: the Falklands Islands Pressure Group. This group obtained its objective of returning the negotiations to the previous situation in 1965, before the Resolution 2065 of the General Assembly of the United Nations.¹⁵

E. 1968. Objectives of the Falklands Islands Pressure Group.

The pressure group was formed in London in 1967, and it had relatively few members but was very powerful. Most of them were the owners of the Falklands Islands Company, were British, lived in London, and owned 50% of the land in the islands. Its main objectives were:

1. To force the British government to withdraw the sovereignty issue from the negotiations.
2. The "interests" of islanders were not enough; their "wishes" had to be basic in the future conversation.
3. To obstruct or ruin any agreement between the two countries that could damage its own interest.

4. To keep the islands British and reinforce cultural, economic, and defensive connections with the United Kingdom.

During the following years this group played a protagonic role in the negotiations, of course against the Argentine objective that was to recuperate the sovereignty of the islands.¹⁶

F. 1976. Incidents and Support to Argentina by the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

The Argentine government had continued with the negotiations, ignoring demands by nationalists for immediate and drastic action. It was aware of the British Foreign Office's conviction that the development of the economic future of the islands could not be carried out without the active assistance of Argentina. For this reason and in a clear demonstration of volition in 1969 the first steps were taken to open a line of communication with the Malvinas/Falklands by a weekly air service, which began in 1971.

However, between December 1975 and March 1976, the situation was aggravated by two incidents. The first was the visit of Lord Shackleton to the islands to determine its economic potential.

The second was the incident that involved a British warship with the Argentine navy in the South Atlantic. The double situation was perceived as a unilateral move by the Britain, and it destroyed again all confidence between the two countries. It also demonstrated that the British Foreign Office was manipulated

by interest of the Falklands Islands Pressure Group. This crisis provoked a resolution of the Interamerican Juridical Committee. Never was Argentina so fully and clearly supported by the international community. The principal points of the texts insisted on the following:

1. Argentina had an unobjectionable right of sovereignty over the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. The main issue to be discussed with Britain was the reintegration of this territory.
2. The Shackleton mission sent by Britain made a unilateral innovation in the negotiations.
3. The presence of a Royal Navy Ship in American waters constituted "threats to the peace and security of the continent."
4. All these points represented hostile conduct by Britain for the purpose of silencing the claims of Argentina and were designed to obstruct the negotiations recommended by the United Nations.
5. Finally, Argentina was congratulated on its patience.

As a result of the crisis, and until 1979, the bilateral talks were frozen.¹⁷

G. 1979/1981. Good Period of Negotiations and New Intransigent British Position.

During this time the British Foreign Office accepted to again put the sovereignty problem on the table of the negotiations. This round of conversations was one of the most

positive. Argentina offered special safeguards to the islanders; for the other side, Britain began seriously considering the possibility of a lease-back arrangement, by which Argentina would receive titular sovereignty but with a British administration for around 15 to 25 years. Also at this time were studied the possibilities for a joint Anglo-Argentine economic program for the exploitation, exploration and development of the region. In spite of these conversations the Falklands Islands Pressure Group again interrupted the negotiations. In this opportunity this group pressed to include a representative member of the islanders in the conversations and to freeze the sovereignty issue.

Again the negotiation rules established by the international forum were changed by the English unilateral decision. Once more Argentina proved patient.¹⁸

IV. THE CRISIS IN 1982 AND ARGENTINA POLITICAL DECISION TO INVADE

A. The Problem With the Argentine Workers in the Georgias Islands.

An Argentine scrap dealer named Davidoff had arranged with a Scottish company to dismantle an unused whaling factory in the Georgias. The contract signed in Edinburg in 1978 permitted the dealer to remain at the station for four years. After that the contract was extended until 1986.

When Mr. Davidoff and a group of 40 workers arrived on the Georgias Islands to do his job, on March 1982, the Falklands

Islands Pressure Group was worried about this situation. Their reasons were that the only people on these islands would be Argentine and their presence was legal. On March 20, the governor of the Malvinas/Falklands, Mr. Hunt, noticed the situation on Georgia and sent instructions to the Argentines to leave the islands immediately. If they wanted to land on this place they must observe the formalities of requesting entry, receiving permits, and having their passports stamped. And if this were not accomplished, they would be removed by force.¹⁹ Argentina could not accept these demands because this would have been to recognize British sovereignty over the islands, and this issue was the subject of the negotiations between both countries.

As a result of this grave problem, the situation of the negotiations became critical, with intransigent positions on the part of both countries, in the last days of March. Consequently, Argentina's government decided on the invasion of the Malvinas/Falklands Islands.

B. Argentina's Political Decision to Invade.

1. Reasons.

The political decision to invade was taken on 26 March. It is possible to determine different reasons that supported this decision of using military means to obtain the political objective. For example:

a. Political reasons.

- The government was exercised by a military assembly; consequently, to make the decision was easy.

- The public opinion was motivated with the Malvinas cause and with the government position.
- The geopolitical necessity to be present in the South Atlantic and its projection over Antarctica.

b. Diplomatic Reasons.

- 150 years (1833- 1982) of frustrated negotiations.
- Continuous changes in the British decisions during the negotiations.
- The political influence of the Falklands Islands Pressure Group in the Britain decision.
- The incapacity of the United Nations to maintain their resolutions.
- The little international interest in this problem.

c. Military Reasons.

- Few troops and military means to defend the islands.
- Strategic surprise (diplomatic and military).
- The possibility of obtaining the military objective without causing much damage.
- The possibility of enlisting a force with the capacity to accomplish this mission.
- To obtain the initiative before Britain could send troops to re-enforce the security of the islands.

2. Political Objective.

The political objective of the Argentine government was to occupy the Malvinas/Falklands Islands but not to hold them indefinitely. With this action, the Argentines wanted to provoke an international shock to force Britain to enter into substantive

negotiations on sovereignty. And also, to ensure that the United Nations and the United States took the issue seriously and helped bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.²⁰

As we can see this was a limited political objective, because it didn't want to obtain the definite possession of the islands, it only wanted to cause an international commotion about the Malvinas/Falklands sovereignty. At the moment of the decision to invade, 26 March, the only intention of Argentina was to provoke this shock, never the war.

For a better comprehension of this aspect, it is necessary to indicate some political directives that were given before the occupation.

- a. The military intervention should be bloodless with respect to the local population.
- b. It should cause the fewest possible casualties to the British troops.
- c. It should avoid unnecessary destruction by the operation.
- d. When the operation was accomplished, the intervention forces should abandon the islands as soon as possible. Only a small garrison should be kept to protect the objective.

As a result of these directives, the military operation should be made by surprise and rapidly to accomplish the mission bloodlessly.²¹ It is important to remember that Argentina didn't want to provoke a war, only an international shock.

3. Result of the operation.

The operation "Virgen de las Nieves" (Virgin of the Snows) was executed on 2 April 1982. In only a few hours the objective was obtained and at noon the Argentine flag was raised over the government house.

All the instructions and directives about not producing unnecessary damage were accomplished. It is enough to remember that there were casualties neither among the population nor among the English troops. Only a few Argentine soldiers were killed. The military operation had been a success, and the political objective had been gained, too.

The United Nations, as a result of this action, should now take part in the negotiations. Additionally, the nations of the world knew about the Malvinas/Falklands' sovereignty problem between Argentina and Britain.

V. CONCLUSION

In my point of view, there were several important reasons that supported the difficult political decision to invade the Malvinas/Falklands Islands.

As we have seen there were historical and diplomatic antecedents, as well as a favorable political and military situation. Let's remember the most important historical facts:
- 1713. The Treaty of Utrecht confirmed the control of Spain on all its American territories, including the Malvinas/Falklands Islands. The treaty was signed by Britain, France and Spain.

- 1764. The first colony in the islands was established by France, not by Britain.
- 1767. France transferred the islands to Spain and the new colony was called Puerto Soledad.
- 1790. Britain renounced any colonial ambitions in South America by the treaty named Nootka Sound Convention.
- 1820. First Argentine governor.
- 1829. Argentina exercised its rights over the islands in the conflict with the United States.
- 1833. Britain occupied the Malvinas/Falklands Islands by force, through a military occupation.

In my opinion these were enough historical antecedents that supported the Argentine rights on the islands. Now we can enumerate the most important diplomatic facts from 1833 to 1982. For example:

A. 1833. Argentina protested to Britain for the military invasion that provoked the withdrawal of the Argentine settlers. The different arguments at that time were:

1. The treaties signed between Spain and Britain.

2. Argentina had succeeded Spain in all the territories that in the past had been governed from Buenos Aires.

3. Britain had abandoned its settlement in Malvinas/Falklands in 1774.

B. 1834/1963. There were 130 years of claims before the British Foreign Office without positive results.

C. 1964/1965. Two very important resolutions by the United Nations occurred in these years.

1. The Malvinas/Falklands Islands were included in the list of the territories that should be decolonized. Also accepted was the name of "Malvinas".

2. The Resolution 2065 established:

a. The inclusion of the sovereignty's problem in the discussion.

b. The islanders were not included as an interested party.

c. Only the "interests" and not the "wishes" of the islanders should be considered.

D. 1968. The presence of the Falklands Islands Pressure Group and their interests on the islands provoked continuous changes in the British position, as a result of this situation, the negotiations were broken.

E. 1976. During the incidents provoked by the Shackleton economic mission, Argentina received very important international support by the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

The most important aspects included in the resolution were:

1. Argentina had rights on the islands and the reintegration of this territory should be discussed between both countries.

2. Argentina was congratulated on its patience.

For all these and other reasons, when the crisis occurred in 1982, my country analyzed the possibility of the restricted use of military forces.

We should ask us if there were not other ways to resolve the problem, like for example the withdrawal of the Argentine ambassador in London or to present a strong diplomatic protest in

the international community. These actions had been already done in other opportunities. During a lot of years, Argentina had demonstrated correct diplomatic behavior, but this way had not given positive results to the negotiations for all the reasons that we have seen.

In my point of view in that moment the political, diplomatic and military situations were favorable for a military intervention with a limited objective. Consequently, I completely agree with the purpose of provoking an international shock about the Malvinas/Falklands' sovereignty problem. In my opinion this decision was correct and opportune. This was demonstrated by the exit of the military operation called "Virgin of the Snows", and the immediate interest of the international community about this issue.

To conclude I want to emphasize that only four died during the military occupation and all them were Argentinean soldiers. Let this research be my homage for those men.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ M. Hastings and S. Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, New York , London: Norton and Company, 1983, pp. 1 - 2.
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- ⁶ Ibid. p. 3.
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- ¹⁰ Ibid. p. 10 and L. Freedman and V. Gamba, *Signals of War*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. xxxi - xxxii
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- ¹² Freedman and Gamba, p. xxxii.
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- ¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 90 - 95 - 97.
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- ¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 90 , 95 - 97.
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- ¹⁸ Ibid. p. 100 and Freedman and Gamba, p. 8.
- ¹⁹ The Sunday Times Of London Insight Team, pp. 62 - 64 and L. Freedman and V. Gamba, pp. 46 - 48.
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