

Prepared for publication as an Occasional Paper by the  
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
George Mason University

**Prospects for a Settlement of the  
Falklands/Malvinas Dispute**

**An Analysis of Public Opinion in  
Britain and Argentina\***

by

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and

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March 1992

\* The South Atlantic Council and the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution are grateful to the Glad Foundation for funding which enabled the commission of the March 1990 survey in Argentina. Without this generous support, the research could not have been carried out.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the research projects currently under way at the Institute is the monitoring of Anglo-Argentine relations after the 1982 war and the analysis of the protracted conflict over the South Atlantic islands, known in Buenos Aires as the "Malvinas" and in London as the "Falklands". [See an earlier product of this research in W. Little & C.R. Mitchell (eds) In the Aftermath, College Park, MD: University of Maryland Press, 1989.]

The original focus of our research was on the nature and causes of the conflict itself and on the efforts of the parties [the Argentines, the British and the Islanders] to rebuild relationships after the short, but violent war and to seek long term solutions to the fundamental issues in conflict. Recently, its focus has broadened to a more general consideration of alternative governance systems or "regimes" for small island communities and of innovative solutions for conflicts over such communities.

Whatever ingenious resolutions might be discussed or devised, however, there always remains the problem that options and agreements have to be "sold" to constituents and general publics, so that the process of arriving at a long term resolution of any conflict needs to take into account the barriers which public views and attitudes may [or may not] pose to policy changes. Accurate assessment of the "ripe moment" needs, therefore, to take into account both the flexibility or intransigence of public opinion as well as leaders' perception of their own room for maneuver within that range of opinion.

This present Occasional Paper throws considerable light on this issue by analysing the dynamics of public opinion in both Argentina and Britain in the period since the 1982 war. The Institute was fortunate that Dr. Noguera and Dr. Willetts were both interested in carrying out the survey they conducted in 1990 and agreeable to presenting their findings in both an Institute and in a South Atlantic Council Occasional Paper. We were able to support this work out of a grant from the Glad Foundation in New York. We would like to express appreciation to both researchers and to the Foundation for making the research and the publication of this paper possible.

C.R. Mitchell  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A small group of islands in the South West Atlantic is known in the Spanish-speaking world as the Malvinas and in the English-speaking world as the Falkland Islands. They are nearly a thousand nautical miles from Buenos Aires, but less than two-hundred miles from the southern Argentine province of Tierra del Fuego. The temperate climate sustains an economy that used to be based on sheep farming. Since 1986, the main income has been derived from licensing international fishing fleets, in a Falkland Islands Interim Management and Conservation Zone (FICZ) covering the waters around the Islands.

There are just two thousand permanent inhabitants of British descent, with another thousand expatriate residents, consisting mainly of the British Army garrison at Mount Pleasant, plus small numbers of business people involved in the fishing industry and officials employed in government services. The Argentine government claims "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" by virtue of geography, history, and international law. It is argued that the Islands were a Spanish possession and that Argentina succeeded to the Spanish title until they were taken by the British by force in 1833. The British government claims that more than a century and a half of continuous, effective, peaceful control and the clear wishes of the inhabitants justify the Islands remaining British. The Argentine military dictatorship sought to end this dispute by an invasion of the Malvinas in April 1982, but were astonished to be faced with a British Task Force being sent to recapture the Falklands. The British victory in June 1982 concluded this stage of conflict for the immediate future, but the underlying issues still remain.

In the 1960's it appeared that Britain might transfer sovereignty over the Islands to Argentina. In 1964 Argentina brought its claim to the UN Special Committee on Colonialism

and in the following year the Committee's report placed the question before the General Assembly. The result was Resolution 2065 (XX) of 16 December 1965: it invited the two governments to negotiate "without delay", "bearing in mind ... the interests of the population of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)." The British only abstained on this resolution, so that it was passed unopposed, and then they proceeded to negotiate with the Argentineans. By August 1968 the two sides had agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding providing that "a final settlement will recognize Argentina's sovereignty over the Islands", "after four and within ten years." The combination of reactions from the Islanders, from Parliament and from the media led the British government to reject the Memorandum and Michael Stewart, then the Foreign Secretary, went as far as endorsing "the paramountcy of the Islanders' wishes." A similar process occurred in 1980 when negotiations between Britain and Argentina were moving towards the idea of a 'lease back' agreement. Under this proposal the British would have recognized Argentina's sovereignty claim, but the Argentineans would have agreed to allow the British to administer the Islands for a fixed period of years. (The British Foreign Office was envisaging a period of 99 years, whereas the Argentine Foreign Ministry wanted something nearer to five to ten years.) Again the Islanders' lobby and parliamentary opposition forced withdrawal of the compromise proposal.<sup>1</sup>

After the cease-fire in 1982, a debate on the future of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands continued in many forums. At the official level the British government confidently assumed the continuation of the current status quo, while the Argentine government with equal confidence asserted its claim to sovereignty. The clash was most evident in the 1980's at the annual debates of the United Nations General Assembly and in the two mini-crises over the declaration of the

fishing zone around the Islands in October 1986 and over the British "Fire Focus" military exercises in March 1988. At the same time there was an implicit desire by both sides in the 1980's for relations to improve, as evidenced by the attempt at talks in Bern in July 1984, the British lifting of trade restrictions in July 1985, President Alfonsin's conciliatory proposals of November 1986, the exchanges via Washington in 1987-88, President Menem's offer to put sovereignty "under an umbrella" in July 1989 and the talks in Madrid that led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations in February 1990. Since the exchange of ambassadors there has been a rapid improvement in bilateral relations, but no attempt to work towards an agreed future for the Islands.

Within Britain two groups have put pressure on the government to shift the emphasis on policy. On one side the Falkland Islands Association has promoted the rights of the Islanders, been cautious about contacts with the Argentines and argued for a strong unilateral policy to regulate fishing in waters around the Falklands. On the other side the South Atlantic Council has promoted contacts with Argentina, supported long-term settlement of the dispute and put forward the case for a multilateral regime for fishing around the Falklands. In Argentina the main lobbying has come from the various groups representing those who were wounded or bereaved as a result of the war, and from several research institutes.<sup>2</sup> None of these have sought any change in Argentine government policy on the future of the Islands. However, there have been disputes between some relatives of the soldiers who died in 1982 and the government, with the relatives wanting the bodies returned for burial at home and the government objecting to a transfer from the Malvinas to the mainland. In addition business interests have been keen to promote the resumption of economic relations with Britain.

The debate about the future of the Islands has produced a variety of creative solutions.<sup>3</sup>

In both Britain and Argentina lease-back still has some adherents, notably among active and retired diplomats.<sup>4</sup> In Argentina the emphasis has usually been upon recognition of the Malvinas as an Argentine province, with it being granted a special autonomous constitutional status, so that the Islanders could maintain control over their way of life.<sup>5</sup> No problems arise over the Islanders maintaining their religion, their educational system, use of English and driving on the left-hand side of the road. Somewhat more controversial are the questions of whether they would retain a separate currency and local control over immigration from the mainland. In Britain the idea of an autonomous province has been explored by the South Atlantic Council, in a paper analysing similar provisions that have operated since 1921 in the Aland Islands.<sup>6</sup> Some of the more internationally minded have advocated the territory coming under the UN Trusteeship System. One variant of this idea is that the Falklands could be designated a "strategic area" under the Security Council, in which the British government would have the right to veto any decisions, rather than under the Trusteeship Council, in which the British could be outvoted.<sup>7</sup>

The problem with the UN Trusteeship is that it is regarded in the UN Charter as a temporary system pending "progressive development towards self-government or independence."<sup>8</sup> However, a new form of permanent UN administration could be established by the Security Council or the General Assembly under provisions for the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes."

Martin Dent, from the University of Keele, has been a persuasive advocate of Argentina and Britain sharing sovereignty over the Islands and leaving the day-to-day decision-making to a Governor and local Council.<sup>9</sup> Edna Lemle, a New York business woman with a commitment to conflict resolution, has proposed a "pentocracy" for the Islands, consisting of five elements:

the two external disputants, the local community, business interests and the UN as the voice of the international community. This scheme is designed as a model for resolving many regional disputes.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally there are hints from the Islands that independence might be a desirable option, though that would be meaningless unless it was either accepted by the Argentine government or guaranteed by a continued British military presence.<sup>11</sup>

The debate at both the official level and among private groups has been, exclusively within Britain and predominately with Argentina, a debate within two small elites consisting of individuals who each have very personal reasons for the issue being salient to them. This paper will examine opinion poll data in Britain and Argentina to see how the general public in each country responds to the concerns of the two elites. First we will analyse public attitudes to the improvement of bilateral relations between Britain and Argentina. Secondly, it is important to know whether attitudes towards changes in the status quo are inflexible or whether a negotiated settlement to the Falklands/Malvinas dispute might be acceptable.

In their normal coverage of public attitudes in Britain to a wide range of issues, the Gallup Poll asked a limited number of questions on British-Argentine relations on three occasions in July 1984, October 1984 and February 1986. Meanwhile, in Argentina SOCMERC have held a regular series of polls and in March 1990 it was commissioned by the South Atlantic Council to ask the same questions of the Argentine electorate as Gallup was asking that month in Britain. Thus the March 1990 polls in each country give a basis for direct comparisons of attitudes in the two countries. A further poll in Argentina in August 1990 updated some of the March 1990 results.<sup>12</sup>





































































