

WAR AND CONFLICT SERIES

The Falklands War



Vocabulary Review

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On 2 April 1982, Argentine forces mounted amphibious landings, known as Operation Rosario, on the Falkland Islands.

The invasion was met with a nominal defence organised by the Falklands Islands_ [Governor Sir Rex Hunt](#), giving command to Major Mike Norman of the [Royal Marines](#). The events of the invasion included the landing of [Lieutenant Commander](#) Guillermo Sanchez-Sabarots' [Amphibious Commandos Group](#), the attack on Moody Brook barracks, the engagement between the troops of Hugo Santillan and Bill Trollope at [Stanley](#), and the final engagement and surrender at [Government House](#).

The **Falklands War** (Spanish: *Guerra de las Malvinas*), also known as the **Falklands Conflict**, **Falklands Crisis**, **Malvinas War**, **South Atlantic Conflict**, and the *Guerra del Atlántico Sur* (Spanish for "South Atlantic War"), was a ten week [war](#) between [Argentina](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) over two [British dependent territories](#) in the South Atlantic: the Falkland Islands, and its territorial dependency, the South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. It began on Friday, 2 April 1982, when [Argentina invaded](#) and [occupied the Falkland Islands](#) (and, the following day, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands) in an attempt to establish the sovereignty it had claimed over them. On 5 April, the British government dispatched a naval [task force](#) to engage the [Argentine Navy](#) and [Air Force](#) before making an [amphibious assault](#) on the islands. The conflict lasted 74 days and ended with the Argentine surrender on 14 June 1982, returning the islands to British control. In total, 649 Argentine military personnel, 255 British military personnel, and three Falkland Islanders died during the hostilities.



The conflict was a major episode in the [protracted confrontation](#) over the territories' [sovereignty](#). Argentina asserted (and maintains) that the islands are Argentine territory, and the Argentine government thus characterised its military action as the reclamation of its own territory. The British government regarded the action as an invasion of a territory that had been a [Crown colony](#) since 1841. [Falkland Islanders](#), who have inhabited the islands since the early 19th century, are predominantly descendants of British settlers, and strongly [favour British sovereignty](#). Neither state officially [declared war](#), although both

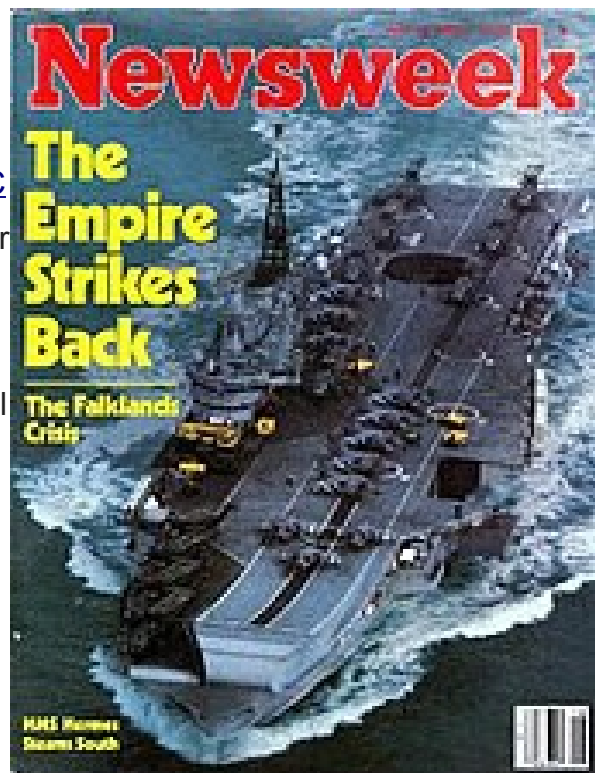
governments declared the Islands a war zone. Hostilities were almost exclusively limited to the territories under dispute and the area of the South Atlantic where they lie.

The conflict has had a strong effect in both countries and has been the subject of various [books, articles, films, and songs](#). Patriotic sentiment ran high in Argentina, but the outcome prompted large protests against the [ruling military government](#), hastening its downfall. In the United Kingdom, the [Conservative](#) government, bolstered by the successful outcome, [was re-elected with an increased majority the following year](#). The cultural and political effect of the conflict has been less in the UK than in Argentina, where it remains a common topic for discussion.

Diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina were restored in 1989 following a meeting in [Madrid](#), at which the two governments issued a joint statement. No change in either country's position regarding the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands was made explicit. In 1994, Argentina's claim to the territories was added to [its constitution](#).

Initial British response

Word of the invasion first reached the UK from Argentine sources. A [Ministry of Defence](#) operative in London had a short [telex](#) conversation with Governor Hunt's telex operator, who confirmed that Argentines were on the island and in control. Later that day, [BBC](#) journalist [Laurie Margolis](#) spoke with an islander at [Goose Green](#) via [amateur radio](#), who confirmed the presence of a large Argentine fleet and that Argentine forces had taken control of the island. British military operations in the Falklands War were given the codename *Operation Corporate*, and the commander of the task force was Admiral Sir [John Fieldhouse](#). Operations lasted from 1 April 1982 to 20 June 1982.



The British undertook a series of military operations as a means of recapturing the Falklands from Argentine occupation, though the British had already taken action prior to the 2 April invasion. In response to events on South Georgia, the submarines [HMS Splendid](#) and [HMS Spartan](#) were ordered to sail south on 29 March, whereas the stores ship [Royal Fleet Auxiliary](#) (RFA) *Fort Austin* was dispatched from the Western Mediterranean to support HMS *Endurance*. Lord Carrington had wished to send a third submarine, but the decision was deferred due to concerns about the impact on operational commitments. Coincidentally, on 26 March, the submarine [HMS Superb](#) left [Gibraltar](#) and it was assumed in the press it was heading south. There has since been speculation that the effect of those reports was to panic the Argentine junta into invading the Falklands before nuclear-powered submarines could be deployed.

The following day, during a crisis meeting headed by the Prime Minister [Margaret Thatcher](#), the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir [Henry Leach](#), advised them that "Britain could and should send a task force if the islands are invaded". On 1 April, Leach sent orders to a [Royal Navy](#) force carrying out [exercises](#) in the Mediterranean to prepare to sail south. Following the invasion on 2 April, after an emergency meeting of the cabinet, approval was given to form a task force to retake the islands. This was backed in an emergency session of the [House of Commons](#) the next day.



On 6 April, the British Government set up a [War Cabinet](#) to provide day-to-day political oversight of the campaign. This was the critical instrument of crisis management for the British with its remit being to "keep under review political and military developments relating to the South Atlantic, and to report as necessary to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee". The War Cabinet met at least daily until it was dissolved on 12 August. Although Margaret Thatcher is described as dominating the War Cabinet,

[Lawrence Freedman](#) notes in the *Official History of the Falklands Campaign* that she did not ignore opposition or fail to consult others. However, once a decision was reached she "did not look back".

Position of third party countries

On the evening of 3 April, the United Kingdom's United Nations ambassador Sir [Anthony Parsons](#) put a draft resolution to the [United Nations Security Council](#). The resolution, which condemned the hostilities and demanded the immediate Argentine withdrawal from the Islands, was adopted by the council the following day as [United Nations Security Council Resolution 502](#), which passed with ten votes in support, one against (Panama) and four abstentions (China, the Soviet Union, Poland and Spain). The UK received further political support from member countries of the [Commonwealth of Nations](#) and the [European Economic Community](#). Australia, Canada, and New Zealand withdrew their diplomats from Buenos Aires. The EEC also provided economic support by imposing economic sanctions on Argentina. Argentina itself was politically backed by a majority of countries in Latin America (though not, crucially, Chile) and some members of the [Non-Aligned Movement](#).

The New Zealand government expelled the Argentinian ambassador following the invasion. The Prime Minister, [Robert Muldoon](#), was in London when the war broke out and in an opinion piece published in [The Times](#) he said: "The military rulers of Argentina must not be appeased ... New Zealand will back Britain all the way." Broadcasting on the [BBC World Service](#), he told the Falkland Islanders: "This is Rob Muldoon. We are thinking of you and we are giving our full and total support to the British Government in its endeavours to rectify this situation and get rid of the people who have invaded your country." On 20 May 1982, he announced that New Zealand would make [HMNZ Canterbury](#), a [Leander-class frigate](#), available for use where the British thought fit to release a Royal Navy vessel for the Falklands. In the House of Commons afterwards, Margaret Thatcher said: "...the New Zealand Government and people have been absolutely magnificent in their support for this country [and] the Falkland Islanders, for the rule of liberty and of law".

The French president, Francois Mitterrand, declared an embargo on French arms sales and assistance to Argentina. In addition, France allowed UK aircraft and warships use of its port and airfield facilities at Dakar in Senegal and France provided [dissimilar aircraft training](#) so that Harrier pilots could train against the French aircraft used by Argentina. French intelligence also cooperated with Britain to prevent Argentina from obtaining more [Exocet](#) missiles on the international market. In a 2002 interview, and in reference to this support, [John Nott](#), the then British Defence Secretary, had described France as Britain's 'greatest ally'. In 2012, it came to light that while this support was taking place, a French technical team, employed by [Dassault](#) and already in Argentina, remained there throughout the war despite the presidential decree. The team had provided material support to the Argentines, identifying and fixing faults in Exocet missile launchers. John Nott said he had known the French team was there but said its work was thought not to be of any importance. An adviser to the then French government denied any knowledge at the time that the technical team was there. In contrast, a then French intelligence officer maintained he knew the team was there but it was in an intelligence-gathering capacity. John Nott, when asked if he regretted his earlier praise of the French, said he thought the French were "duplicitous", and "always have been".

The Sierra Leone government allowed task force ships to refuel at Freetown.

VC10 transport aircraft landed at Banjul in The Gambia while flying between the UK and Ascension Island.

The war was an unexpected event in a world strained by the [Cold War](#) and the [North–South divide](#). The response of some countries was the effort to mediate the crisis and later as the war began, the support (or criticism) based in terms of anti-colonialism, political solidarity, historical relationships or [realpolitik](#).

The United States was concerned that a protracted conflict could draw the [Soviet Union](#) on Argentina's side, and initially tried to mediate an end to the conflict through "[shuttle diplomacy](#)". However, when Argentina refused the U.S. peace overtures, U.S. Secretary of State [Alexander Haig](#) announced that the United States would prohibit arms sales to Argentina and provide material support for British operations. Both houses of the [U.S. Congress](#) passed resolutions supporting the U.S. action siding with the United Kingdom.

The U.S. provided the United Kingdom with [Sidewinder](#) missiles for use by the Harrier jets. President [Ronald Reagan](#) approved the Royal Navy's request to borrow the [Sea Harrier](#)-capable amphibious assault ship [USS Iwo Jima \(LPH-2\)](#) if the British lost an aircraft carrier. The [United States Navy](#) developed a plan to help the British man the ship with American [military contractors](#), likely retired sailors with knowledge of *Iwo Jima*'s systems.

[Peru](#) attempted to purchase 12 missiles for Argentina, in a failed secret operation.

[Chile](#) gave support to the UK in the form of intelligence about the Argentine military and early warning intelligence on Argentine air movements. Throughout the war, Argentina was afraid of a Chilean military intervention in Patagonia and kept some of its best mountain regiments away from the Falklands near the Chilean border as a precaution.

According to the book *Operation Israel*, advisers from [Israel Aerospace Industries](#) were already in Argentina and continued their work during the conflict. The book also claims that Israel sold weapons and [drop tanks](#) in a secret operation in Peru. Peru also openly sent "[Mirages](#), pilots and missiles" to Argentina during the war. Peru had earlier transferred ten Hercules transport planes to Argentina soon after the British Task Force had set sail in April 1982. Nick van der Bijl records that, after the Argentine defeat at Goose Green, Venezuela and Guatemala offered to send paratroopers to the Falklands, under [Muammar Gaddafi](#), Argentina received 20 launchers and 60 [SA-7](#) missiles, as well as machine guns, mortars and mines; all in all, the load of four trips of two [Boeing 707s](#) of the AAF, refuelled in [Recife](#) with the knowledge and consent of the Brazilian government. Some of these clandestine logistics operations were mounted by the [Soviet Union](#).

The British Taskforce

The British government had no contingency plan for an invasion of the islands, and the task force was rapidly put together from whatever vessels were available.

The nuclear-powered submarine [Conqueror](#) set sail from France on 4 April, whilst the two aircraft carriers [Invincible](#) and [Hermes](#), in the company of escort vessels, left [Portsmouth](#) only a day later. On its return to Southampton from a world cruise on 7 April, the ocean liner [SS Canberra](#) was requisitioned and set sail two days later with [3 Commando Brigade](#) aboard. The ocean liner [Queen Elizabeth 2](#) was also requisitioned and left [Southampton](#) on 12 May with [5th Infantry Brigade](#) on board. The whole task force eventually comprised 127 ships: 43 [Royal Navy](#) vessels, 22 [Royal Fleet Auxiliary](#) ships and 62 [merchant ships](#).

The retaking of the Falkland Islands was considered extremely difficult. The U.S.

Navy considered a successful counter-invasion by the British "a military impossibility". Firstly, the British were significantly constrained by the disparity in deployable air cover. The British had 42 aircraft (28 [Sea Harriers](#) and 14 [Harrier GR.3s](#)) available for air combat operations, against approximately 122 serviceable jet fighters, of which about 50 were used as [air superiority fighters](#) and the remainder as [strike aircraft](#), in [Argentina's air forces during the war](#).]Crucially, the British lacked [airborne early warning and control](#) (AEW) aircraft. Planning also considered the Argentine surface fleet and the threat posed by [Exocet](#)-equipped vessels or the two [Type 209](#) submarines.

By mid-April, the [Royal Air Force](#) had set up the airbase of [RAF Ascension Island](#), co-located with Wideawake Airfield on the mid-[Atlantic](#) British overseas territory of [Ascension Island](#), including a sizeable force of [Avro Vulcan B Mk 2](#) bombers, [Handley Page Victor K Mk 2 refuelling aircraft](#), and [McDonnell Douglas Phantom FGR Mk 2 fighters](#) to protect



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them. Meanwhile, the main British naval task force arrived at Ascension to prepare for active service. A small force had already been sent south to recapture South Georgia.

Encounters began in April; the British Task Force was shadowed by [Boeing 707](#) aircraft of the [Argentine Air Force](#) during their travel to the south. Several of these flights were intercepted by Sea Harriers outside the British-imposed exclusion zone; the unarmed 707s were not attacked because diplomatic moves were still in progress and the UK had not yet decided to commit itself to armed force. On 23 April, a Brazilian commercial [Douglas DC-10](#) from [VARIG](#) Airlines en route to South Africa was intercepted by British Harriers who visually identified the civilian plane