

Stormy waters: Britain, the Falkland Islands and UK–Argentine relations

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On 18 January 2012 the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, updated the House of Commons about his government's position on the Falkland Islands:

The absolutely vital point is that we are clear that the future of the Falkland Islands is a matter for the people themselves. As long as they want to remain part of the United Kingdom and be British, they should be able to do so. That is absolutely key. I am determined to make sure that our defences and everything else are in order, which is why the National Security Council discussed the issue yesterday. The key point is that we support the Falkland Islanders' right to self-determination. I would argue that what the Argentinians have said recently is far more like colonialism, as these people want to remain British and the Argentinians want them to do something else.¹

The previous day, the Prime Minister had chaired a debate about the Falkland Islands and its defence within the National Security Council, which since May 2010 is charged with coordinating and overseeing issues relating to national security, intelligence-gathering/coordination and defence strategy.²

Leaving aside the suggestion by a British prime minister that the Argentinians were behaving like colonialists,³ something that would have caused anger in Buenos Aires, Cameron's statement was indicative of worsening relations between Britain and Argentina. The 30th anniversary of the Falklands conflict has coincided, perhaps unsurprisingly given increased political and media attention,

* This article has benefited from a series of background interviews with officials attached to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Falkland Islands Government London office and the British Antarctic Survey. The author thanks the Royal Navy and Royal Marines for hosting his stay on board HMS *Illustrious* in March 2012. He also thanks the editor of *International Affairs* and two readers for their supportive comments, and acknowledges the advice of Matt Benwell (University of Liverpool). The usual disclaimers apply.

¹ Hansard (Commons), 18 Jan. 2012, col. 538. For the purposes of this article, I will refer, in the main, to the Falkland Islands because attention is focused on British defence and foreign policy and the perspectives of the Falkland Islands community. As is well understood, Argentina and other Latin American countries in particular refer to the *Islas Malvinas*. The islands are also commonly referred to as the Falklands/Malvinas to acknowledge their contested status.

² On the National Security Council, see: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/establishment-of-a-national-security-council/>, accessed 18 May 2012.

³ The term 'colonialism' is routinely used by Argentine governments in condemning Britain for maintaining a portfolio of South Atlantic overseas territories. Its use raises interesting issues about whether Argentina should not be seen as a colonizing power itself, given southern colonization in the late nineteenth century and continued occupation of Argentine Antarctic territory. See S. Scott, 'Ingenious and innocuous? Article IV of the Antarctic Treaty as imperialism', *Polar Journal* 1: 1, 2011, pp. 51–62.

with a marked deterioration in bilateral relations, and this represents a sharp contrast from when I last wrote about UK–Argentine relations and the Falkland Islands for this journal in 1997.⁴ In the late 1990s, there were grounds for thinking that UK–Argentine relations might shift in a more collaborative direction with reference to the Falklands/Malvinas. From 2003 onwards, such optimism looked increasingly misplaced as a succession of Argentine administrations, including the current one under President Cristina Kirchner, have adopted a more strident approach to the sovereignty question in particular.⁵ President Kirchner (the self-styled ‘Presidenta Malvinera’), in a commemorative speech delivered in Ushuaia in April 2012, commented: ‘It is an injustice how in the 21st century there still subsists a colonialist enclave a few hundred kilometres from our shores . . . [it is] totally absurd when pretending dominion over a territory that’s more than 14,000 kilometres away from them.’⁶ The question of the sovereignty of the Falklands/Malvinas is very much at the forefront of contemporary Argentine foreign policy.

In this article I offer a diagnosis of the current situation concerning the Falkland Islands and outline some of the key pressure points affecting the islanders and British policy-makers.⁷ In order to do this, a number of issues have to be addressed: first, the policies and strategies of the Kirchner administration in Argentina; second, UK defence priorities and the debate over the public defence of the Falkland Islands; and finally, recent developments affecting the Falkland Islands themselves. By way of conclusion, the prognosis is gloomy as we confront a situation in which the UK and Argentina are far apart in their views regarding the future of the Falkland Islands. Notwithstanding a more cooperative decade in the 1990s, there is little to suggest that the main parties will find much to agree upon—and one casualty already has been the progressive dismantling of the joint statement of 14 July 1999.⁸

⁴ K. Dodds, ‘Towards rapprochement? Anglo–Argentine relations and the Falklands/Malvinas in the late 1990s’, *International Affairs* 74: 2, 1997, pp. 617–30.

⁵ One vivid illustration of this breakdown in relationship has been the failure to appoint an Argentine ambassador to the UK between August 2008 and January 2012. The current ambassador is Alicia Castro, who has already shown a very public willingness to intervene in the dispute over the Falklands/Malvinas. See the coverage in the *Buenos Aires Herald*, ‘Alicia Castro appointed ambassador to the UK’, 26 Jan. 2012, <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/91033/alicia-castro-appointed-ambassador-to-the-uk>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁶ ‘“The war was not a decision made by the Argentine people,” CFK’, *Buenos Aires Herald*, 2 April 2012, <http://www.buenosairesherald.com/article/97105/the-war-was-not-a-decision-made-by-the-argentine-people-cfk>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁷ Other commentators have recently reflected on future options, including the Argentine author V. Palermo, ‘Falklands/Malvinas: in search of common ground’, *Political Insight* 3: 1, 2012, pp. 18–19.

⁸ K. Dodds and L. Manóvil, ‘Back to the future? Implementing the Anglo–Argentine 14th July 1999 joint statement’, *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33: 4, 2001, pp. 777–806. The joint statement addressed issues such as fishing, tourism, visits of Argentine relatives of the dead, place names, landmines and travel. Its implementation promised, on the face of it, to create genuinely cooperative mechanisms for management of living resources and to normalize relations between Argentina and the Falkland Islands. In the past five years, those cooperative measures and mechanisms have disintegrated, the most striking example being the collapse of the South Atlantic Fisheries Commission.

Argentina: co-option, disruption and promotion

Since the election to the presidency of, initially, Nestor Kirchner in April 2003 and subsequently (after his death in October 2010) Cristina Kirchner, who was re-elected in October 2011, we have witnessed a very public shift in Argentine foreign policy.⁹ The 1990s, it is worth recalling, were characterized by gestures of normalization and cooperation under the Carlos Menem administration, albeit conditioned by the 1994 constitution committing Argentina to recovering the Falkland Islands. Under the leadership of the charismatic Argentine Foreign Minister Guido di Tella, Argentina carried out what it termed a 'charm offensive' and was credited with attempting to promote a dialogue of sorts with the Falkland Islanders. The 2000s witnessed a marked shift towards belligerence and anti-British sentiment. Both Nestor and Cristina Kirchner, raising echoes of previous Argentine governments in the 1940s and 1950s, have been passionate advocates of the need to address the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and other disputed territories in the South Atlantic, including South Georgia.¹⁰ In November 2003, for example, Kirchner withdrew permission for charter flights between the Falkland Islands and Chile.¹¹ The purpose of such a prohibition was to raise the profile of sovereignty talks over the Falklands Islands and remind the islanders that their air link with Chile could be disrupted, as it was for six months in 1998–9 following the arrest of General Pinochet in London. The Falkland Islands community will watch carefully any changes (actual or proposed) to the air link with South America, whether involving Argentina and/or Chile.¹²

Internationally, the United Nations has long been a favoured site for Argentina's diplomatic campaign to force the United Kingdom to enter into sovereignty negotiations. In both the General Assembly and the UN Decolonization Committee (the C-24), Argentina continues to press this issue. The Argentine President frequently raises the issue of the Falklands and makes appeals to the UN to formally consider continued British militarization of the South Atlantic. In February 2012 Kirchner, standing in front of a map of the Falklands embossed

⁹ There are other aspects of this shift in Argentine foreign policy that are beyond the scope of this article; these include a move from Argentina's close alignment with the United States towards closer relations with Latin American neighbours.

¹⁰ It is worth bearing in mind that the 1959 Antarctic Treaty suspends outstanding territorial conflicts in the Antarctic region under the provisions of article IV. However, the treaty has not stopped what might be termed the pursuit of 'treaty sovereignty' involving the near-continuous promotion of Argentine sovereignty over the Argentine Antarctic territory. This is done through the issuance of public documents, including scientific strategies, that outline Argentina's sovereign rights in the Antarctic peninsula. For further details see K. Dodds, 'Sovereignty watch: claimant states, resources and territory in contemporary Antarctica', *Polar Record* 47: 4, 2011, pp. 231–43.

¹¹ In March 2012 it was reported that the Argentine Foreign Ministry had raised the possibility of establishing a direct air link between Argentina and the Falkland Islands. Under the terms of the 14 July 1999 Joint Statement, a monthly flight existed between Rio Gallegos and the Falkland Islands. Argentina has proposed a direct link with Buenos Aires with weekly flights. Falkland Island representatives have rejected such a proposal. See 'Argentine flights to Falklands offered again', *Penguin News*, 25 April 2012, <http://www.penguin-news.com/index.php/news/politics/item/320-argentine-flights-offer-to-falklands-raised-again>, accessed 18 May 2012.

¹² Any air link between the Falkland Islands and Argentina is a particularly sensitive topic for the 3,000-strong Falklands community, reviving memories of how the Argentine military airline (LADE) operated in the 1970s and early 1980s and the role of LADE staff based on the islands prior to the Argentine invasion.

with the Argentine flag, demanded that the UN take action against Britain's 'colonial behaviour' regarding the planned dispatch of HMS *Dauntless* and the Duke of Cambridge to the South Atlantic. These appeals to the UN have actually intensified since 2010, largely as a consequence of Argentine anger over renewed oil and gas exploration activity in the waters around the Falkland Islands. In September 2011 the Argentine President, speaking to the UN General Assembly, noted—mindful, perhaps, of the routine response of British and Falkland Islands elected representatives who remind audiences at the UN that an English-speaking community has been settled on the islands since the 1830s: 'Once again we have come to claim our sovereign rights over the Malvinas Islands. It is not a historic claim but an absolutely present-time claim.'

Before identifying the elements that make up what we might think of as a Kirchner strategy towards the Falklands/Malvinas, it is worth reflecting on how it relates to the current Argentine government's priorities, especially relating to Argentine sovereignty and resource nationalism. In April 2012, for example, news broke that Argentina was to seize a controlling interest in the Argentine hydrocarbon corporation YPF without paying prior compensation to its Spanish owner, Repsol. Despite international criticism, the Argentine government's decision was widely popular within the country and marks a very public reaction against the widespread privatization of state organizations in the 1990s.¹³ Public support for this intervention (even from some critics of President Kirchner) is noteworthy because it serves as a reminder of the considerable traction exerted by discourses of sovereignty and resource nationalism, especially when juxtaposed against European and North American-led corporatization and globalization. YPF was accused of failing Argentines by not investing sufficiently in domestic oil fields, despite the country possessing huge reserves of shale oil and gas.¹⁴ The European Union has condemned this intervention and trade-based sanctions against Argentina might well follow as a consequence.¹⁵

The intervention in favour of YPF illustrates well the continued importance of the discourses and practices associated with nationalism and sovereignty in Argentine political life, dating back at least to the 1930s.¹⁶ Reviving attention to the Malvinas also fits in well with this emphasis, especially among the supporters of the Kirchner government.

Three elements in current Argentine policy and strategy on the Falkland Islands are worth particular attention in developing a better understanding: co-option,

¹³ There is a longer history within Argentina of the role of oil in animating Argentine politics and being used to justify interventionist policies as well as influencing public opinion against foreign multinationals. See e.g. C. Solberg, *Oil and nationalism in Argentina: a history* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979).

¹⁴ 'YPF oil: EU condemns Repsol state seizure', BBC News, 20 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-17783208>, accessed 18 May 2012.

¹⁵ The emerging combination of oil nationalism and the Malvinas in contemporary Argentine politics is one that will be watched carefully by the British and Falkland Islands governments. For an earlier review, see K. Dodds and M. Benwell, 'More unfinished business: the Falklands/Malvinas, maritime claims, and the spectre of oil in the South Atlantic', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28: 4, 2010, pp. 571–80.

¹⁶ For a historical overview with implications for UK–Argentine relations, see A. Howkins, 'A formal end to informal imperialism: environmental nationalism, sovereignty disputes, and the decline of British interests in Argentina 1933–1955', *British Scholar* 3: 2, 2010, pp. 235–62.

involving Latin American partners; disrupting the economic life of the Falklands; and promoting Argentine sovereignty, by means including if deemed helpful the co-option of celebrities. Argentina under the two Kirchner administrations (from 2003 to the present) has worked tirelessly to promote the country's grievance about the Falkland Islands in regional and international forums, including the UN, the Summit of the Americas and the Organization of American States (OAS). While this is not an entirely new departure, it is striking how often international gatherings have been used to promote Argentine interests regarding the islands. Some opportunities have been taken on apparently bizarrely inappropriate occasions, while others appear more understandable. Among the former, the current Argentine Foreign Minister Hector Timerman has been tireless in attempting to raise the issue of British militarization in the South Atlantic regardless of the speaking venue. In March 2012, at an international nuclear security summit in Seoul, Timerman spoke about an 'extra-regional power' dispatching a nuclear-powered submarine to the waters around the Falkland Islands in apparent violation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which guarantees Latin America as a nuclear weapons-free zone. His utterances led to the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, also attending the summit, to publicly dismiss the claims and to retort: 'I provided that explanation to the Argentine representatives [i.e. that Britain had not dispatched a nuclear-powered Vanguard-class submarine to the region], but I get the impression they are keen to rattle cages in any way they can, which is unfortunate because the issue of sovereignty, as far as the Falklands is concerned, is settled.'¹⁷ In terms of the less bizarre, Argentine political leaders routinely raise the issue of the Malvinas in regional and international venues such as the Summit of the Americas and the United Nations.

For the Argentines, the issue of sovereignty is not 'settled', and garnering support in international forums is an important part of their strategy of *co-option*. Co-option is pursued in two senses: first, in acquiring supportive resolutions demanding that Britain seriously negotiate over the future of the Falkland Islands; and second, in using those international encounters to consolidate regional and international support for any actions Argentina might subsequently take to promote its interests. At the 2012 Summit of the Americas, for example, the Argentine President and her delegation pressed for further statements of support on the Malvinas. These were not forthcoming, but resolutions of support were obtained from MERCOSUR and the Union of South American Nations. Notwithstanding his unfortunate geographical error, President Obama noted:

And in terms of the Maldives [Malvinas] or the Falklands, whatever your preferred term, our position on this is that we are going to remain neutral. We have good relations with both Argentina and Great Britain, and we are looking forward to them being able to continue to dialogue on this issue. But this is not something that we typically intervene in.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'Argentina submarine claim "baseless", says Nick Clegg', BBC News, 27 March 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17524714>, accessed 18 May 2012.

¹⁸ 'Barack Obama tries to refer to the Falklands as Malvinas . . . but instead calls them the Maldives', *Daily Mail*, 18 April 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2131359/Barack-Obama-makes-Falklands-gaffe-calling-Malvinas-Maldives.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

While British observers would welcome the lack of interest in intervention *per se*, the exhortation to continue a 'dialogue' (let alone the repeated use of the term 'Malvinas') could be interpreted as double-edged, in the sense that the UK government believes that such dialogue cannot include the question of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands.¹⁹

Alongside this Argentine quest for declarations of support runs a deliberate attempt to 'embarrass' British officials and ministers in international meetings and force them to conjure up improvised statements refuting Argentine assertions on the sovereignty of the islands. While such occasions can be briefly awkward, the main area of concern revolves around whether Argentina can persuade regional neighbours such as Brazil and other MERCOSUR partners to push the UK to negotiate over sovereignty. British officials and ministers, in response to these Argentine initiatives, have sought reassurances that any political support that might be offered in such forums does not lead to more substantial economic measures designed to affect the Falklands and even British investments in other South American countries. It is worth noting that the UK is the fourth largest foreign direct investor in South America, with substantial interests in Brazil, Chile and Columbia. UK–Argentine trade alone was worth around \$1.5 billion in 2011.

It is also worth bearing in mind, with respect to these points, that the current Foreign Secretary William Hague, in the annual Canning Lecture in November 2010, outlined the British government's desire to recognize a profound change in the profile of Latin America:

We will halt the decline in Britain's diplomatic presence in Latin America. And I say to you very clearly as Foreign Secretary, Britain's retreat from the region is over, and it is now time for an advance to begin. We will seek intensified and equal partnerships with countries in Latin America and we will give much increased Ministerial attention to them.

We will look to our partners to suggest new ideas on top of all these about how and where we can best work together. We may not always agree, but I am confident that more often than not we will share the same objectives and have much to learn from each other. It is our intention not to let differences come in the way of closer cooperation. There will be no change to Britain's longstanding position on the Falkland Islands. But this should not be an obstacle to the positive relations we seek.²⁰

Despite the Foreign Secretary's optimism, there is little to suggest that the Falkland Islands will not remain an obstacle requiring careful handling on the part of UK ministers and civil servants.

The second plank of the current Argentine strategy is *disruption*. This is evidenced in a variety of arenas. In 2010 Argentine Decree No. 256 was introduced,

¹⁹ The evolution of US policy towards the UK and Argentina over the Falklands/Malvinas deserves further investigation: one tentative conclusion would be that British journalists and observers believe the Obama administration to be more willing to press for diplomatic dialogue. In March 2010, Secretary of State Clinton caused unease by offering to mediate between the two sides. As is well known, the Reagan administration provided vital political, intelligence and military-based support to the Thatcher government in 1982.

²⁰ William Hague, 'Britain and Latin America: historic friends, future partners', speech delivered at Canning House, 9 Nov. 2010, <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=23536682>, accessed 18 May 2012.

aimed at stopping shipping companies crossing Argentine territorial waters when travelling to and from the Falkland Islands. Another thread of action involves port closures, affecting not only Argentina but also regional neighbours such as Brazil, Peru, Uruguay and Chile. The MERCOSUR declaration of December 2011 prohibits Falkland-flagged vessels from entering Argentine ports and those of neighbouring MERCOSUR port cities such as Montevideo. Royal Navy or other British-flagged vessels have been affected by this decree in differing ways. For example, HMS *Protector* visited Montevideo in January 2012 without incident. However, in March 2012 HMS *Montrose* was prevented from entering a Peruvian port, raising concerns that port closures might affect more than just Falkland-flagged vessels. The point of this kind of activity in general is to embarrass rather than to cause severe disruption. It also reminds the British and Falkland Islands community that Argentina enjoys wider regional support.

Another example of disruption revolves around investor confidence. Argentina is keen to deter international investment in the Falkland Islands, and has attempted to put pressure on companies to this end by making it clear that any company that did invest in the islands would face repercussions in Argentina. One of the most obvious areas of interest involves the future presence of hydrocarbon companies. In March 2012 the Argentine Foreign Minister, Timerman, wrote to the London Stock Exchange warning that ‘illegal’ activities were being carried out by five oil companies operating in the South Atlantic.²¹ The five companies—Argos Resources Ltd, Borders and Southern Petroleum PLC, Desire Petroleum PLC, Falkland Oil and Gas Ltd and Rockhopper Exploration PLC—were, he claimed, ‘illicitly involved in hydrocarbons exploration activities in the Argentine continental platform and thus exposed to administrative, civil and criminal sanctions’. Timerman also submitted a list of other companies involved with the named five, warning that anyone implicated in hydrocarbon activity in the waters around the Falkland Islands would face punitive action against assets held in Argentina if the current government were to prosecute them successfully.

While Argentina has no capacity to enforce domestic legislation and legal judgments in the Falklands, the mere presence of the letter reminds us that hydrocarbon exploration (which resumed in 2010) in the waters around the Falkland Islands is deeply controversial. As successive Argentine administrations recognize, the introduction of new investment and possible revenue stream development will only help to consolidate the ability of the UK and the Falkland Islands community to resist any pressure regarding sovereignty talks. Disrupting the resource potential of the islands, including oil and gas deposits and fishing, is one of the most transparent examples of this plank of Argentina’s strategy. In the case of fishing, for example, the Falkland Islands government (FIG) has complained over the years that Argentine vessels have harassed vessels licensed by the FIG to catch squid and

²¹ See ‘Argentina warns UK and US market regulators about “illicit” oil activities in the Falklands’, Mercopress, 22 March 2012, <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/03/22/argentina-warns-uk-and-us-market-regulators-about-illicit-oil-activities-in-the-falklands>, and a follow up piece, ‘Argentina begins legal actions against oil companies operating in the Falklands’, 25 March 2012, <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/03/25/argentina-begins-legal-actions-against-oil-companies-operating-in-the-falklands>, both accessed 18 May 2012.

other fish in the waters surrounding the Falklands. Current revenue from this industry stands at around £12–15 million per year, and at least £5 million per year is spent on fisheries-related research and monitoring: sums indicative of the fact that this licensing regime has been the bedrock of the Falklands economy for over 20 years.²²

A third area of disruption is a possible trade boycott of British goods and services within Argentina. It was widely reported that in February 2012 Argentine Industry Minister Debora Giorgi urged business leaders in Buenos Aires to replace British imports with items from other countries that were sympathetic to Argentina's claim over the Falkland Islands.²³ This not only prompted UK rejection of such a plan (described by Prime Minister David Cameron as 'counter-productive') but more interestingly brought the European Commission into play in March 2012 to demand from Argentina why such a boycott was being proposed contrary to free trade principles, at a moment when there was movement towards a free trade agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR. As mentioned, UK–Argentine trade is at present worth about US\$1.5 billion annually, and Argentina enjoys a trading surplus of about US\$150 million. Large British firms operating in Argentina include BP, Shell, Cadbury and HSBC, and the EU, including Britain, is one of the most important markets for Argentine exports, including wine, chemicals and foodstuffs such as corn.

The final element in the current Argentine strategy is *promotion*, which is closely linked to both co-option and disruption. Argentine governments continue to promote their determination to recover the Falkland Islands within the media, public education and public diplomacy.²⁴ Overseas public leaders and celebrities sometimes assist them. We might even describe this as a form of celebrity geopolitics, which is seized upon to promote Argentina's wider diplomatic campaign.²⁵ In February 2012 the Hollywood actor Sean Penn was widely reported during a visit to Argentina as condemning British colonialism and advocating the return of the Falkland Islands to Argentina. Shortly thereafter the British singer Morrissey, while performing in Argentina, was seen and heard promoting Argentina's right

²² For details on the importance of South Atlantic fisheries and FIG management, see <http://www.falklands.gov.fk/Fisheries.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

²³ Reuters, 'UK protests at Argentine trade boycott call', 29 Feb. 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/02/29/uk-argentina-falklands-britain-idUKTRE81SoTZ20120229>, accessed 18 May 2012.

²⁴ There has been a renewed emphasis on public education and commemoration in Argentina leading up to the 30th anniversary of the conflict. Schools have been instructed to have a classroom named after one of the 'fallen' of 1982. A letter written by a soldier killed in the war called Julio Cao is to be read to all school pupils as part of their national instruction. See 'Malvinas voluntary soldier letter to be read in all Argentine schools as of 2012', *Mercopress*, 2 April 2011, <http://en.mercopress.com/2011/04/02/malvinas-voluntary-soldier-letter-to-be-read-in-all-argentine-schools-as-of-2012>, accessed 18 May 2012. The Argentine political scientist Carlos Escude remains one of the most critical commentators on the role of public education and territorial nationalism in Argentina. See C. Escude, *Education, political culture and foreign policy: the case of Argentina* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University and University of North Carolina, Program in Latin American Studies, 1992). For a more recent examination, see M. Benwell and K. Dodds, 'Argentine territorial nationalism revisited: the Falklands/Malvinas and the geographies of everyday nationalism', *Political Geography* 30: 6, 2011, pp. 441–9.

²⁵ On celebrities and their role in international politics, see J. Street, 'Do celebrity politics and celebrity politicians matter?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2012, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00480.x, accessed 18 May 2012.

to the sovereignty of the islands.²⁶ While the role of celebrities in world politics is attracting increased attention, the Penn and Morrissey episodes are reminders that the Falklands has not attracted much celebrity endorsement since the immediate years after the 1982 conflict—unlike issues such as poverty reduction and debt eradication in the global South.

Penn's statements were seized upon by Argentine political figures. The governor of Tierra del Fuego province (in which the Falkland Islands are included), Fabiana Rios, contended that the actor's observations were indicative of growing support for Argentina's claim for sovereignty negotiations. Both Rios and the Argentine President argue that this kind of celebrity endorsement, especially from US figures, is indicative of the growing success of Argentina's public diplomacy.²⁷ The Argentine President also received the British musician and former leading member of the band Pink Floyd, Roger Waters. Later interviewed on Chilean television, Waters was said to have asserted that the Falklands should be Argentine. The performer later retracted such a claim and noted that there was some kind of mistranslation involved.²⁸ While Penn and Waters would be described as left-leaning in terms of their political views and so broadly in sympathy with the presidential party, what may be described as the Argentine President's 'charm offensive' has extended to encompass other global celebrities and even six Nobel Laureates who in March 2012 issued a joint letter calling on both parties to negotiate about the future of the Falklands.²⁹ Not everyone in Argentina, however, has been so impressed with this celebrity endorsement campaign. The Argentine labour leader Hugo Moyano contrasted the Argentine President's willingness to talk to British musicians with her avoidance of tougher conversations about pay and working conditions in Argentina.³⁰ Anti-Kirchner newspapers such as *Clarín* and *La Nación* have framed such celebrity encounters as distractions from far more pressing problems involving unemployment and public sector reform.³¹

Paradoxically, Argentina's unhappiness over the deployment of Prince William to the Falklands was prompted in part by the recognition that the presence of this well-known and globally recognizable young member of the British royal family was likely not only to increase Britain's profile in the Falklands but also to further harden public opinion in the UK and elsewhere in favour of maintaining the

²⁶ 'Morrissey: Falklands belong to Argentina', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/falklandislands/9119401/Morrissey-Falklands-belong-to-Arentina.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

²⁷ Another interesting development is the launch of Argentine government-sponsored seminar tours, which have been presented to university audiences in Africa, Central America, Europe and Asia. The seminar is entitled 'It takes two to tango: solving the Malvinas/Falklands dispute' and has also been delivered in the United States. See also 'UK "defies South America" when it denies Argentina Malvinas sovereignty', *Mercopress*, 28 Oct. 2011, <http://en.mercopress.com/2011/10/28/uk-defies-south-america-when-it-denies-argentina-malvinas-sovereignty>, accessed 18 May 2012.

²⁸ 'Rogers Waters softens remarks on Falklands', *Guardian*, 6 March 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/mar/06/roger-waters-falklands-argentina>, accessed 18 May 2012.

²⁹ 'Nobel laureates urge Britain to open talks over Falklands', *The Times*, 28 March 2012, <http://timesofnews.co/2012/03/27/nobel-laureates-urge-uk-argentina-to-negotiate-over-falklands>, accessed 28 March 2012

³⁰ 'Moyano criticó a Cristina: "Recibió a Waters y no a los trabajadores"', *Cronista.Com*, 9 March 2012, <http://www.cronista.com/economiapolitica/Moyano-critico-a-Cristina-Recibio-a-Waters-y-no-a-los-trabajadores-20120309-0117.html>, accessed 28 March 2012.

³¹ M. Benwell, K. Dodds and A. Pinkerton, 'Celebrity geopolitics', *Political Geography* 31, forthcoming 2012.

status quo. Regardless of whether this should be judged as simply a routine service deployment for Flight Lieutenant Wales, there was a perception in Argentina that it was deliberately timed in order to garner positive press reaction. Argentine newspapers labelled the prince a ‘conquistador’, prompting the British Ministry of Defence (MOD) to restate the routine nature of his deployment.³²

Taking all these strands together, Argentina’s policy towards the UK over the Falklands is multifaceted and reveals a number of trends—increasing belligerence, multinationalizing the dispute, promoting its interests, and where possible disrupting the Falkland Islands’ economy. Argentina has arguably enjoyed most success with Latin American neighbours in regional forums such as MERCOSUR and the OAS. Meanwhile, the United States has not offered any substantive support to Argentina but nor has it dissented from recent OAS resolutions calling for ‘negotiations on the sovereignty dispute’. In March 2010, Secretary of State Clinton’s offer of help regarding ‘sovereignty negotiation’ was rejected by the UK as unnecessary by the then Brown government.³³ Even so, it serves as a reminder, to the UK at least, that the United States needs to be monitored in terms of its public and private attitudes towards the Falkland Islands. Thus far, there have been no further offers to help Britain and Argentina negotiate.

Defending the Falkland Islands

Since taking office in May 2010, the coalition government at Westminster has embarked on an ambitious defence and strategic review, driven by the realization that available resources and ambition were not neatly aligned.³⁴ Successive reviews, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the National Security Strategy*, *Securing Britain in an age of uncertainty: the Strategic Defence and Security Review* (SDSR), and the spending review, have highlighted some profound changes to Britain’s defence capabilities, with particular implications for maritime power projection, exemplified by the scrapping of the Harrier force and the withdrawal from service of HMS *Ark Royal*.³⁵ Almost inevitably, this provoked a debate (which is still going on) about whether the Falkland Islands would be vulnerable to any future attack by Argentine forces, mindful of the fact that many commentators, in the aftermath of the 1982 South Atlantic conflict, concluded that the 1981 defence review may have given the wrong ‘signals’ to Argentina about British commitment to the South Atlantic region.³⁶

³² ‘Argentina calls Prince William a “conquistador” over Falklands mission’, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Feb. 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/falklandislands/9053505/Argentina-calls-Prince-William-a-conquistador-over-Falklands-mission.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

³³ ‘UK rejects Hillary Clinton’s help in Falklands dispute’, BBC News, 2 March 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8544634.stm>, accessed 18 May 2012.

³⁴ A point made by Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, ‘Dr Fox and the Philosopher’s Stone: the alchemy of national defence in the age of austerity’, *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, pp. 335–54.

³⁵ SDSR notes that the UK armed forces have seven military tasks, one of them being ‘defending the UK and overseas territories’. For further information see: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/sdsr>, accessed 18 May 2012. For a critical engagement with the SDSR, see N. Ritchie, ‘Rethinking security: a critical analysis of the Strategic Defence and Security Review’, *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, pp. 355–76.

³⁶ L. Freedman and V. Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of war: the Falklands conflict of 1982* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Before addressing those anxieties, it is worth reminding ourselves about the current defence situation in the South Atlantic. Since the mid-1980s, Mount Pleasant Airbase (MPA) in East Falkland has served as the primary hub for British defensive arrangements.³⁷ British Forces South Atlantic Islands (BFSAI) has a clear mandate:

To deter any military aggression against the South Atlantic Overseas Territories (SAOT).³⁸

Forces are based in the Falklands to demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to the security of UK Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic. They include air defence assets, maritime patrol capability and infantry forces.³⁹

The current force levels include an infantry unit, four Typhoon fighter jets and missile defence systems, along with supporting aircraft such as refuelling tankers, search and rescue helicopters,⁴⁰ and allied assistance in the form of the Falkland Islands Defence Force. The Atlantic Patrol Task South (APTS) provides maritime capability in the form of either a destroyer or a frigate and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) support vessel.⁴¹ This is a standing naval commitment. The deployment of the destroyer HMS *Dauntless* created something of a stir in Argentina, but its visit to the South Atlantic was nonetheless routine, following on from previous voyages (e.g. those of HMS *Edinburgh* and *Montrose*) by vessels attached to APTS.⁴²

What has added extra spice to the debate about the defence of the Falkland Islands has been the public debate in the UK conducted within parliament and the press about Britain's general defensive capabilities and readiness. Spurred on by 30th anniversary retrospective broadcasting, the 1982 Falklands conflict has been used by some commentators to criticize the general tenor of armed forces reform. For supporters of the Royal Navy, including retired admirals and military personnel who served in the 1982 campaign, the recent reform was judged to be unwise, especially in respect of the loss of carrier strike capability and amphibious capacity.⁴³ The implication was clear: Britain would no longer be able to carry out a task force-led operation if, and it is a huge if, Argentina ever sought to invade the islands again. The SDSR in particular envisages a far smaller role for UK forces, with a more limited expeditionary, intervention and stabilization capacity, following on from the experiences of Afghanistan and Iraq. For critics,

³⁷ MPA currently houses about 1,300 personnel and current costs are believed to be about £75 million for financial year 2010/11.

³⁸ The reference to South Atlantic territories is significant because they comprise not only the Falkland Islands but also Ascension, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

³⁹ For further details on the BFSAI mandate see <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceFor/ServiceCommunity/OverseasPosting/BFSAI/BritishForcesSouthAtlanticIslandsbfsai.htm>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁴⁰ The six-week deployment of Prince William as a search and rescue RAF helicopter pilot beginning in February 2012 led some Argentine commentators to condemn the decision as 'provocative'. His deployment continues a long tradition of the royal family visiting or serving in the Falkland Islands. His grandfather, Prince Philip, visited in 1956 and his uncle Prince Andrew served during the Falklands War.

⁴¹ HMS *Clyde* is also stationed in the Falklands as a patrol vessel, and at present HMS *Protector* operates in the South Atlantic and Antarctic.

⁴² A nuclear-powered attack submarine may complement APTS but such movements are neither confirmed nor denied by the MOD.

⁴³ One of the most high-profile critics of the armed forces reforms and their possible implications for the Royal Navy is Rear-Admiral Sandy Woodward. The former commander of UK naval forces during the 1982 conflict has warned that the naval reductions render the Falklands virtually 'undefensible'.

the defence reviews are symptomatic of a myopic approach, which fails to appreciate that recent British military engagements from the Falklands onwards were not anticipated.

Rear-Admiral Chris Parry, a Falklands war veteran, has been one of the most high-profile critics of the implications of recent reforms for the Falklands. In an article for *Prospect* magazine in February 2012, writing under the headline 'Can Britain defend the Falklands?' Parry argued: 'If Argentina did manage to capture the Islands again, it is extremely doubtful whether Britain could recover them by military means, given its recession hit and incoherent defence policy, with its hollowed out capabilities, weak lines of supply and lack of aircraft carriers. Also, the Obama administration has stated that it wants no part in any dispute.'⁴⁴ The inference is that Parry believes the UK can no longer turn to the United States, as it did in April 1982, to make up any military, intelligence and/or diplomatic deficiencies that could be cruelly exposed if Argentine forces captured and cut off MPA. While Parry does not explain why Argentina might choose to retake the Falklands by military force as opposed to a more likely campaign of logistical/resource disruption, his article speculates about a possible military scenario in which Argentina could reinforce and fortify its occupation.

In response to the charge of leaving the Falklands vulnerable to a second invasion at some time in the future, government ministers and some defence experts attached to think-tanks such as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) offer an alternative analysis. The existing defence commitment is judged to be adequate by the coalition government, which places particular emphasis on the assets stationed at MPA. Discussions in 2012, in contrast to those in 1982, tend to concentrate on air power and in particular the highly symbolic presence of the Typhoon fighter. Critically, MPA is also connected via air-bridge to Ascension Island and thence the UK, allowing for reinforcement to be initiated in 18 hours. Little wonder, then, that the director general of RUSI, Michael Clarke, concluded in his review of the security situation in the Falklands: 'Whoever controls Mount Pleasant controls the Islands.'⁴⁵ For the critics of the armed forces reforms, this assumes that Britain has sufficient assets to maintain de facto control of MPA in the event of a future attack.⁴⁶

For their part, the Argentine military forces have not received any substantial investment since the 1982 conflict. The Mirage jets used during the war campaign have not been replaced and would be no match for the ultra-modern Typhoon fighters. Defenders of the UK defence status quo contend that—*pace* Parry, among others—Argentina is in no position to launch a credible military invasion of the Falklands, and that there are no plans to modernize Argentine armed forces before 2020–25. This lack of investment has added force to the arguments of those

⁴⁴ C. Parry, 'Can Britain defend the Falklands?', *Prospect*, 22 Feb. 2012, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2012/02/can-britain-defend-the-falklands/>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁴⁵ M. Clarke, 'The Falklands: the security equation in 2012', 21 Feb. 2012, <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4F6324444BE2E/>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁴⁶ Lord West, commander of HMS *Ardent* during the 1982 campaign and a former senior naval officer, advocated the dispatch of a nuclear-powered submarine to the South Atlantic in order to signal Britain's intention to defend the Falkland Islands.

British commentators who note that the existing defence provision is more than adequate and perhaps explains the frustration of others that the lack of carrier strike capability is not judged to be critical, at least in the context of the South Atlantic theatre.⁴⁷ The parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence, Gerald Howarth, noted in January 2012:

All the advice we have received says that the Argentines have neither the capability nor the intention to repeat the folly of 1982 and that the military deterrent we have in place is fully up to the task. I assure my Hon. Friend and the House that, in this 30th anniversary year, all of us, as Ministers, are much seized of the matter.⁴⁸

Being 'seized of the matter' is significant because no minister, regardless of party political allegiance, wishes to be either accused of complacency and/or exposed in the way the Thatcher government was in March–April 1982 when it was clear that there was little to no advance warning of Argentine belligerence.⁴⁹

In short, while the defence of the Falkland Islands will continue to be reviewed and monitored by the MOD, the military balance is very much in favour of the United Kingdom in terms of force strength and technological sophistication. But this has not prevented the debate in Britain from rumbling on, forcing ministers and chiefs of staff to reassure their audiences publicly that the defence reviews have not exposed dangerous gaps in Britain's capability to protect its diverse portfolio of interests, including widely distributed overseas territories. The then Defence Secretary Liam Fox noted in June 2011: 'We have Typhoons stationed there [on the Falkland Islands]. We have a very clear message that we have both the naval power if necessary, and certainly an intent to ensure that the Falkland Islands are kept free and their people enjoy the liberation we fought so hard for 30 years ago.'⁵⁰

The current Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond, reasserted this position when speaking to the House of Commons in February 2012:

There is no evidence of any current credible military threat to the security of the Falkland Islands and therefore no current plan for significant changes to force deployments.

However, Her Majesty's Government is committed to defending the right of the Falkland islanders to self-determination and plans exist for rapid reinforcement of the land, sea and air forces in and around the islands, should any such threat appear.⁵¹

⁴⁷ One interesting aspect of this UK debate over the defence of the Falkland Islands is that whatever assets the UK sends to the South Atlantic region will prompt accusations from Argentina of further 'militarization'. It could be argued that the UK's defence posture is comparatively modest given the hostility of Argentina to UK sovereignty over the Falkland Islands.

⁴⁸ Hansard (Commons), 26 Jan. 2012, col. 488.

⁴⁹ On the question of intelligence-gathering, it is also worth noting that MPA is engaged in extensive electronic monitoring of Argentina. The one area of potential concern might be privately sponsored ventures by rogue Argentine individuals and groups eager to 'occupy' and 'claim' the islands for Argentina. This was a feature of Falkland Islands life in the 1960s and 1970s. For some further details of the pre-1982 period, see K. Dodds, *Pink ice: Britain and the South Atlantic empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ian Dunt, 'Britain threatens force over Falklands', *Politics.co.uk*, 27 June 2011, <http://www.politics.co.uk/news/2011/06/27/britain-threatens-force-over-falklands-as-row>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁵¹ 'Argentina does not pose threat to Falklands, says Philip Hammond', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 Feb. 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/falklandislands/9094677/Argentina-does-not-pose-threat-to-Falklands-says-Philip-Hammond.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

Such reassuring statements have not dampened speculation that the UK still remains vulnerable to an invasion in the future, regardless of current Argentine statements emphasizing peaceful means only of attempting to change the status quo. While government ministers cite the presence of the *Typhoon*, the critics continue to point the finger at missing aircraft-carriers and Harriers. Until 2020, the Royal Navy has no fixed-wing carrier strike capability and HMS *Illustrious* is now a helicopter carrier after its refit.⁵²

What is interesting about the contemporary debate about the defence of the Falkland Islands is that these anxieties on the one hand, coupled with reassurances by ministers on the other, have been in evidence for much of the post-1945 period. In the 1960s, for example, the Wilson government worried that a small number of Royal Marines stationed in the Falklands might not be sufficient to deter Argentina and advocated deploying some hovercraft to improve mobility within and between the islands. In the late 1970s, Prime Minister Callaghan famously warned about the ‘dots on the map’ and advocated sending a nuclear-powered submarine to patrol South Atlantic waters.⁵³ The difference, however, between the late 1970s / early 1980s and the contemporary era is that Britain maintains MPA and Argentina has not invested in its armed forces—in large part because democratic governments in Buenos Aires remain wary of a well-funded military, given the violent behaviour of military regimes in the 1970s.⁵⁴

The contemporary Falklands

It is easy to underestimate how far, and to what extent, the Falkland Islands have changed from the picture conveyed by the grainy television images that circulated during and after the 1982 conflict. In the late 1970s, it was not unreasonable to describe the community of between 1,800 and 2,000 islanders as a quasi-colony. Its economy was dominated by sheep farming and the Falkland Islands Company, its governance largely shaped by the Governor of the Islands and expatriate specialists brought in from the UK to manage affairs. Over the last 30 years that situation has changed greatly, and the FIG both in Stanley and in its London office have been highly active in communicating to the wider world about the nature of life for the community, now numbering some 3,000 people. One visible element in this strategy is the website maintained by the FIG alongside an active programme of public diplomacy ranging from attendance at UN General Assembly C-24 meetings to ensuring that a regular number of MPs and VIPs visit the islands for ‘fact-finding’ purposes.⁵⁵

⁵² The author saw at first hand HMS *Illustrious* in action during Exercise Cold Response in March 2012.

⁵³ P. Beck, ‘Review article: the conflict potential of the “dots on the map”’, *International History Review* 13: 1, 1991, pp. 124–31.

⁵⁴ It is estimated that by 2016 Argentina will be spending around 1.3% of GDP on investment in its armed forces, and is likely to procure ocean patrol vessels, maritime patrol craft and an amphibious support vessel. Current Argentine assets, while clearly higher in number than anything the UK has based at MPA, are clearly not as modern and technologically sophisticated: this applies to their combat-capable aircraft and naval fleet, including three submarines.

⁵⁵ See FIG website, <http://www.falklands.gov.fk/>, accessed 18 May 2012. A glossy brochure entitled *Our islands*,

The scale of change on the islands since 1982 is difficult to exaggerate. At its heart lay the decisions to construct a British airbase at Mount Pleasant and to initiate a fishing licensing regime in the mid-1980s. If the former offered military security, the latter provided economic security and allowed the FIG to undertake substantial investment in internal communications, education, health and welfare. At its height, the fishing licensing regime generated around £30 million per year, and even today yields something between £12 million and £15 million per year, notwithstanding concerns about the fragility of fish and squid stocks in the south-west Atlantic.⁵⁶ The South Atlantic Fisheries Commission last met in 2007, although Argentina stopped cooperating fully with it in 2005.⁵⁷ The Falkland Islands Fishing Company Association has expressed concern that Argentina is committed to harassing Falkland Islands licensed fishing vessels, and is unconcerned with fish stock management in the south-west Atlantic. Such anxiety is understandable, given that fishing is still vitally important to the Falklands economy, notwithstanding the growth of other sectors such as civil service employment, tourism (both land- and ship-based visitors) and the service sector generally. Oil and gas exploration, while deeply controversial, has not thus far paved the way for a fundamental alteration in the economic profile of the islands.

The 2008 constitution (which updated the 1985 and 1997 versions and came into force on 1 January 2009) reiterates the importance of the elected representatives of the FIG in shaping the day-to-day governance of the Falkland Islands. As Mike Summers, a long-standing elected FIG representative, noted in January 2009:

We too have a constitution—another fact conveniently ignored. It is a new, post-colonial constitution initiated by the Falkland Islands Government, endorsed by the UK Government and on which the Falkland Islands people were consulted. It recognises the reality of the modern world in which the rights of free peoples are paramount and the assertion of territorial rights, irrespective of the wishes of those who live there, has no place. It enshrines in the first Chapter our inalienable right to self-determination in accordance with the United Nations Charter, the International Covenant on civil and political rights and the European Convention. Despite being endorsed by the UN's Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonisation) as recently as last October, that principle has never been accepted by Argentina as applying to Falkland Islanders. Whilst Britain and the Falkland Islands have moved on to a new relationship based on democracy and self-determination our Argentine neighbours remain in a time warp, still pressing their anachronistic claim to territorial sovereignty. It is they, not Britain, who wish to colonise the Falkland Islands.⁵⁸

The governor of the Falkland Islands, while responsible for ensuring good governance and overseeing foreign and defence matters, occupies a very different

our home and produced in English and Spanish has recently been released, with the support of the FIG, offering a series of portraits of islanders and clearly designed to remind audiences of the long history of UK–Falkland Island settlement.

⁵⁶ Falkland Islands Government Fisheries Department: for further details see <http://www.fis.com/falklandfish/html/management.html>, accessed 18 May 2012.

⁵⁷ In March 2007 Argentina also walked away from any cooperation in the so-called joint zone of exploration with regard to oil and gas in the south-west Atlantic.

⁵⁸ Falkland Islands Government, 1 Jan. 2009, <http://www.falklands.gov.fk/news/2009/01/article-on-the-new-falkland-islands-constitution-by-councillor-mike-summers-obe/>, accessed 18 May 2012.

role from the governors of the 1960s and 1970s. The right of the islanders to self-determination of their future has been reinforced and is embedded in the main body of the constitution. Echoing UK requirements relating to transparency and accountability, the FIG has created a public accounts committee to review and assess expenditure and appointed a complaints commissioner as a focal point for any grievances needing to be addressed. Elected councillors have also had their responsibilities for domestic affairs clarified, with particular emphasis placed on the governor's duty to respect the views of the Executive Council, in particular with due regard to 'good governance' and external affairs, including defence and the public administration of audit and management. The references to 'good governance', while controversial in the context of British overseas territories (especially in the Caribbean, in the light of money laundering scandals affecting, for example, the Turks and Caicos Islands), were important in stimulating further clarification of the everyday governance of the Falkland Islands in line with British legislative requirements regarding transparency, human rights and audit.

The net result of these changes in the Falkland Islands has been to produce and sustain an overseas territory that is thriving in terms of both per capita income and overall GDP. Fishing, agriculture, tourism and other sectors including services and investment contribute to a local economy that is tied into a diverse range of international markets and partners including the United Kingdom, Spain, South Korea, Chile and the other members of the European Union. UK development aid ended in 1991, and the current defence bill of around £70 million per annum is not judged to be unsustainable.⁵⁹ If anything, critics in Britain have complained that it might be too modest and even leave the islands vulnerable to potential aggression from Argentina.

Conclusion

The current impasse over the Falkland Islands represents the worst moment in UK–Argentine relations since the 1982 conflict. Argentina's political and economic campaign against the Falklands has intensified, as has its attempt to disrupt British and international business interests in the Islands and the wider South Atlantic. President Cristina Kirchner is personally committed to recovering the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands for Argentina, as was her late husband Nestor. The 30th anniversary of the conflict has unquestionably reignited passions on all sides, but the reality is that this decline in relations is born in part out of a sense of frustration on the part of Argentina. Oil and gas exploration around the Falklands is

⁵⁹ The coalition government at Westminster has to date issued no statement decrying the cost of defending the Falkland Islands, notwithstanding the general austerity-driven measures relating to UK defence policy. The Kirchner government no doubt hopes that UK public opinion might turn against defending the Falklands on the grounds of overall financial cost, but again there is no evidence of any support for a British withdrawal. A joint opinion poll carried out in the UK and Argentina in April 2012 revealed that neither country's citizens were wedded uncritically to current UK and Argentine government policies. For further information see <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/04/12/joint-poll-shows-falklands-malvinas-issue-is-important-for-argentinians-but-only-relevant-for-brits>, accessed 18 May 2012.

unquestionably irksome because it serves as a reminder that Britain continues to enjoy *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty over the islands and that the FIG is able to manage and regulate its own affairs in a way that might have seemed unimaginable to all parties in June 1982.

Argentina faces a dilemma.⁶⁰ If it behaves as a good neighbour and cooperates in areas such as communications, resource management, air travel and the like, then it is unlikely ever to persuade the Falkland Islanders and the UK government that the question of sovereignty needs to be confronted. A British military victory in June 1982 did not resolve the Falklands problem in that sense. If, as the current administration has decided to do, Argentina behaves in a more aggressive and disruptive manner, then it will merely harden UK and Falkland Islands opinion against any discussion whatsoever over sovereignty. In retrospect, one of the achievements of the 1990s was to implement a so-called 'sovereignty umbrella' (formulated in October 1989 during talks in Madrid) so that all parties could begin to develop collaborative mechanisms safe in the knowledge that their arguments concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands were put to one side for the sake of good will and cooperation. While that might have suited the United Kingdom and the Falkland Islanders for the long term, Argentina had, and has, less to gain from such an arrangement, and arguably pursued a twin-track policy of collaborating on areas of mutual interest only if doing so assisted progress in pursuing its sovereignty interests.

As the 180th anniversary of continuous British–Falkland Islander settlement and administration approaches, it is becoming clear that the 3,000-strong community is an overseas territory that enjoys what in the Scottish context would probably be termed 'devolution-max'. Its substantial autonomy, as noted in the 2008 Falkland Islands constitution, means that Argentina has targeted its politico-economic assault on the Islands, believing that if the islanders' economy could be disrupted and weakened then the UK might be forced to the negotiating table. The price that Britain has to bear is as much a diplomatic one as it is financial, in the sense of maintaining a credible British defence presence. It means that for the foreseeable future its diplomats and political leaders will need to be ever vigilant, especially in the wider context of UK–Latin American relations. As long as Brazil, Chile and Uruguay in particular offer only a modicum of political support to Argentina, then the situation regarding the Falklands is manageable. If that were to change, however, then the cost of the UK's commitment to respect the rights of the Falkland Islanders to self-determine their future will increase. There is little or no prospect, after all, of any Argentine government renouncing its claim to the sovereignty of these South Atlantic islands, especially if substantial oil and gas revenues are realized.⁶¹

⁶⁰ There is another aspect to this dilemma, which is how Argentina continues to address and negotiate the legacy of the 1982 conflict, including the fate of veterans, the public education of its citizens, and wider re-examination of the legacy of human rights abuses in the 1970s and early 1980s. The release of the Rattenbach Report in March 2012 is clearly an important step forward in the 'opening up' of this debate, given that the report (previously classified for it was thought at least 50 years) provides a detailed critique of the performance of the Argentine armed forces in 1982. This topic is beyond the scope of this article.

⁶¹ It is worth noting some evidence that certain Argentine commentators and intellectuals have questioned

The most likely scenario for the immediate future is that Argentina will continue to pursue a policy designed to garner support from regional neighbours in the hope that this will lead to the United Kingdom being denied access and influence in the wider Latin American region. But this policy could backfire as those very neighbours that have offered a modicum of support tire of Argentine insistence that they press harder against UK diplomatic, military and commercial interests. In turn, this might provoke Argentina to pursue ever more aggressive policies (short of any kind of military confrontation) designed to make UK support for the Falkland Island community untenable. However, there is absolutely no evidence that current British policy to respect the wishes of the Falkland Islands community will change. Stormy waters lie ahead.

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In June 2012 it was announced that the Falkland Islands would be holding a referendum asking residents to vote on its 'political status'. It is expected that the referendum will be held early in 2013 and it would be reasonable to assume that the vast majority of eligible voters will confirm that they wish to remain a UK overseas territory.

the wisdom of the current Argentine approach to the Falklands and the UK. See 'Malvinas: un grupo de intelectuales pide cambiar la política', *La Nación*, 21 Feb. 2012, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1450381-malvinas-un-grupo-de-intelectuales-pide-cambiar-la-politica>, accessed 18 May 2012.