

# HSC – HISTORICAL COMMITTEE



**Issue: How did the Falkland  
Wars lead to an international conflict?**

**Please note that the United Nations' Security Council is meeting immediately after  
the events of May 1st, 1982.**

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# Introduction

## Preface

The Falklands War, which took place in 1982, stands as a brief yet consequential conflict that brought two nations into military confrontation over an isolated archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean. The conflict lasted 10 weeks and, although it may seem brief, it represents the culmination of centuries of tension between Argentina and the United Kingdom.

At its core lies a sovereignty dispute that has persisted for nearly 150 years, rooted in competing historical claims and national identities. From Argentina's perspective, the islands were an unresolved issue from colonial times and a symbol of national unity. For Britain, however, they represented the embodiment of self-determination (see key terms) and the defense of its overseas citizens.

For both countries, the conflict began at a crucial time. While Britain had to respond decisively to an unexpected act of aggression, Argentina's military junta sought to incite nationalist sentiment amid internal turmoil. The confrontation evolved into a conventional military conflict that tested all aspects of modern warfare — including long-range air power, naval operations in the South Atlantic, and ground combat in cold and challenging conditions.

## Brief Overview

The Falkland Islands are a British-administered territory located roughly 500 km east of Argentina's southern coast. While the population is small—around 1,800 residents of mostly British descent—their political status has generated decades of tension.

Argentina has long claimed sovereignty over the *Islas Malvinas*, arguing that the islands were inherited from Spain upon independence and were wrongfully taken by Britain in 1833. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, maintains continuous administration since that time and argues that the islanders' clear desire to remain British should be respected under the UN Charter's principle of self-determination.

After years of unsuccessful negotiations, the situation has deteriorated into military confrontation. In April 1982, Argentine forces landed on the islands, and Britain is now dispatching a naval task force to reclaim them. As diplomatic mediation efforts unfold, the question before the international community is whether peaceful negotiation remains possible—or whether force will determine sovereignty.

## Key-terms

**Sovereignty** – The full right and power of a state to govern itself and control a specific territory without external interference.

**Self-determination** – The principle that people have the right to freely choose their own political status and form of government.

**Decolonization** – The process by which colonies gain independence from colonial powers, particularly relevant to former British territories.

**Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ)** – A designated maritime area where military force is authorized against any vessels or aircraft; established during conflicts to control access to disputed territories (200 miles from the coast).

**Territorial integrity** – The principle under international law that nation-states have the right to defend their borders and prevent external aggression.

**Mediation** – The process by which a neutral third party assists in resolving conflicts or facilitating agreements between disputing sides.

**Casus Belli** – An event or action that justifies, or is claimed to justify, war or conflict.

**Ascension Island (British territory)** – A small, remote volcanic island in the South Atlantic

Ocean, roughly midway between Africa and South America, used as a strategic base during the Falklands War.

**UN Resolution 2065 (1965):** A key UN resolution recognizing the sovereignty dispute and calling for bilateral negotiations between the United Kingdom and Argentina.

**Operation Rosario:** The Argentine military operation launched on April 2, 1982, to occupy the Falklands

## General Overview

The Falklands dispute dates back to the early 19th century, when both Britain and Argentina laid claim to the islands following Spain's colonial withdrawal. Britain reasserted control in 1833, removing an Argentine garrison, and has since maintained administrative authority. Argentina never accepted this act, insisting that Britain's presence violates its territorial integrity.

A recent renewal of tensions raises a central question: can historical claims justify the use of violence and military force to reclaim disputed territory?

Indeed, on April 2, 1982, Argentina's military forces invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands, a remote British-controlled territory approximately 300 miles off the Argentine coast. The invasion, ordered by General Leopoldo Galtieri's military junta, was justified by Argentina through claims of historical inheritance from Spanish colonial rule.

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, argued that approximately 1,800 of the 2,250 Falkland Islanders wished to remain under British sovereignty. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher condemned the invasion, declaring:

"We have to recover the islands, for the people on them are British."

She assembled a naval task force of 100 ships to retake the islands, asserting that the principle of self-determination must be upheld.

Yet the conflict has also taken on wider geopolitical importance. The South Atlantic is emerging as a region of strategic competition—its waters potentially rich in fisheries, hydrocarbons, and access routes to Antarctic resources. Control over the Falklands grants a significant maritime position, extending influence over the Southern Ocean.

At the international level, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 502 on April 3, calling for the immediate withdrawal of all Argentine military forces and urging both sides to seek a peaceful settlement. However, Argentina still refuses to comply. Mediation attempts by third parties, including the United States and the Organization of American States (OAS), continue but have yet to yield results.

As British forces approached the South Atlantic and diplomatic resolutions remain unheeded, the situation is reaching a critical point. With the Cold War alignments, a full-scale military conflict becomes increasingly inevitable. The challenge is now to find a solution that respects both nations' sovereignty while upholding international law and preventing further loss of life.



## Major Parties Involved

### Argentina's involvement and point of view

On April 2, 1982, Argentina's military government dispatched forces to seize the Falkland Islands, asserting rightful ownership of the territory inherited from Spain after independence in 1816. It argues that Britain's reoccupation in 1833 was an act of colonial aggression and that continued British control violates the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in the UN Charter.

The Argentine government emphasizes that geographical proximity, historical succession, and the legacy of decolonization all support its claim. The ruling military junta, facing internal unrest and economic instability, views the recovery of the islands as both a patriotic duty and a moment to unite the nation around a shared cause.

Argentina presents the issue as part of a broader Latin American struggle against colonialism. It invokes regional solidarity under the OAS Charter, seeking support from neighboring states and portraying Britain's presence as an outdated relic of empire. Argentina insists that sovereignty must be restored first, and questions the legitimacy of invoking self-determination for a population transplanted under colonial rule.

Thus, nearly 10,000 Argentine troops have been deployed to the islands, supported by naval and air forces. However, the rapid escalation of hostilities and the British mobilization have placed Argentina in a precarious position diplomatically, as the UN and key international actors demand a peaceful resolution.

### **Britain's involvement and point of view**

Britain responded immediately by assembling a naval task force of more than 100 ships, which departed on April 5, 1982, for the 8,000-mile journey to the South Atlantic. The operation involved over 28,000 British personnel — including naval, air, and ground forces.

A maritime exclusion zone was declared around the islands on April 30, and military operations soon followed. The Royal Navy conducted naval engagements, while the Royal Air Force launched long-range bombing missions from Ascension Island.

From London's perspective, a failure to act would undermine Britain's global credibility and threaten other overseas territories. Indeed, the conflict occurs in a context where Britain's global influence is already perceived as diminishing; the loss of the islands would weaken its maritime reach and its ability to protect overseas territories.

Thus, the government emphasizes that the Falkland Islanders themselves wish to remain under British rule, making their protection both a moral and legal duty. London therefore considers Argentina's claim an act of aggression and a violation of the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force.

Britain continues to advocate for diplomacy but has stated that it will “use all necessary means” to restore its authority if peaceful solutions fail.

## Ambiguous Countries

**France** : NATO ally of UK but also has economical ties with Argentina (sold them weapons such as Exocet missiles).

**Spain** : NATO member ally of UK but had its own dispute with UK over Gibraltar, sympathetic to Argentina’s anti colonial argument.

**Peru** : Torn between its Latin American solidarity with Argentina but also its ties and alliances with western countries such as the US.

**Brazil** : Similar situation to Peru, supports Argentina publicly but doesn’t support them militarily due to its alliances with western countries.

**India** : Non aligned movement, balanced between anti-colonialism and respecting international law.

**Chile** : Neighbor with territorial disputes with Argentina, secretly helped the UK despite regional pressure for Latin American solidarity. Chile shares intelligence and monitors movements in the South Atlantic, fearing Argentine expansionism.

**Soviet Union**: Officially neutral, using the crisis to observe divisions among Western powers. While critical of colonialism, it avoids direct involvement to prevent escalation in the South Atlantic.

**United States**: Attempting to mediate between its NATO ally (Britain) and its hemispheric partner (Argentina). Secretary of State Alexander Haig has launched a diplomatic “shuttle mission,” but Washington faces divided loyalties. The U.S. favors a peaceful resolution but may have to choose sides if the conflict escalates.

**Organization of American States (OAS):** Generally supportive of Argentina's anti-colonial framing, but several member states urge restraint and negotiation through international law.

## Time-line

**1833:** Britain reasserts control over the Falklands, expelling Argentine forces.

**1965:** UN General Assembly adopts Resolution 2065, recognizing the dispute and calling for bilateral negotiations.

**March 19 1982** : Argentine scrap metal workers land on South Georgia Island and raise the Argentinian flag, escalating tensions with the UK

**April 2 1982** : Argentine military forces invade and occupy the Falklands through Operation Rosario, start of the war

**April 3 1982** : United Nations pass resolution 502, demanding immediate Argentina withdrawal and calling for peaceful negotiations

**April 5 1982** : British naval departs from Portsmouth, 8000 miles journey to the South Atlantic

**April 7 1982** : Britain declare and warn the Argentine forces that they will repost if attacked within their TEZ (see key-terms)

**April 25 1982** : British forces take back South Georgia Island after a brief battle

**May 1 1982** : British aircraft launches bombs on Stanley Airfield (main Falkland airport), first major military engagement since the beginning of the war

## Possible Solutions

- Shared sovereignty agreement

Both Britain and Argentina would jointly administer the Falklands, allowing citizens from both nations to live and work there permanently.

For Britain, this maintains some control while demonstrating willingness to compromise.

For Argentina, it transforms military defeat into a political success.

However, the islanders would likely oppose the idea, wishing to remain fully British. While this approach could serve as a diplomatic model, shared sovereignty rarely functions smoothly and could reignite tensions later.

- **Long term agreement with British control**

Under this plan, Argentina would formally recognize British sovereignty for a fixed period, during which Britain retains control over governance, defense, and foreign relations.

Argentina would receive lease payments and economic cooperation benefits.

At the end of the term, the arrangement could be renegotiated, with a referendum determining the islands' final status.

This would secure stability and respect the islanders' wishes, while allowing Argentina to preserve its claim symbolically.

- **Full British sovereignty with enhanced Argentina's economic rights**

Britain retains full control but grants Argentina limited economic privileges, such as fishing rights, oil exploration, and trade preferences.

Argentina gains some economic benefits and regional influence but abandons its territorial claim.

This option best serves Britain's interests, while being politically difficult for Argentina to justify. The islanders would strongly support it, as it preserves their current way of life.

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