Running with the Hare, Hunting with the Hounds: The Special Relationship, Reagan’s Cold War and the Falklands Conflict

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This article reconsiders the negotiations between the United States and Britain at the outbreak of the 1982 Falklands War. The Reagan Administration did not support Britain, its staunchest NATO ally, and on the contrary assumed an even-handed position that recognised Argentina as a key ally as much as Britain. Not only did American mediation fail; it also caused a major crisis in Anglo-American relations. The underlying reason for the American decision was the obsessive importance that the Administration attached to fighting communism in Latin America after establishing covert co-operation with the Argentinian military junta in 1981.

ith President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher into face, the Anglo-American “special relationship”, after experiencing decline during the 1960s and 1970s, seemed to have returned to the “golden years” of Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Second World War alliance or the post-Suez reconciliation nourished by Harold Macmillan and John F. Kennedy.¹ Common perception of a communist threat, championing militarism and muscular capitalism, impatience with state bureaucracy and government control, staunch advocacy of individual freedom and free enterprise, and personal friendship cemented the pan-Atlantic conservative alliance of the 1980s.² Thatcher particularly believed in the existence of what Churchill had defined a “fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples”.³ She echoed this sentiment in a 1985 speech: “There is a union of mind and purpose between our people, which is remarkable, and which make our relationship a truly remarkable one. It is special. It just is. And that’s that”.⁴

Yet, beneath the surface of the “Maggie” and “Ron” myth, reality unveils somewhat more fractious alliance.⁵ As one of Reagan’s close advisors is recently suggested, “They felt like they were soul mates, but they...
ainly disagreed on specific policies or issues”. The Falklands crisis was of them. Surprisingly, when the Falklands War broke out in April 1982, Reagan Administration announced that it would not take a stand in dispute between two allies. However, captivated by the notion of the Reagan-Thatcher “extraordinary relationship”, the American and British press stently reported that the Americans were secretly assisting Britain from the set. The American secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, confirmed view: “We did provide assistance . . . to my mind it was a very, very ir and simple case . . . You had a corrupt military dictatorship from entina on one side. You had our oldest and strongest ally and a member NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) on the other side.”

The degree to which Weinberger’s interpretation has been accepted es. John F. Lehman Jr., the secretary of the Navy in 1982, defined operation between the two Powers as “a textbook case of the special tionship in action”. Several officials on both sides of the Atlantic have unified the “truly marvellous” American military support, whilst others including Alexander Haig, Reagan’s secretary of state, Francis Pym, the ish foreign secretary, and Reagan – deny that co-operation existed before 30 April American “tilt” in favour of Britain.

The matter also divides historians. Emphasising that the Americans vided vital support to Britain’s victory, some see the Falklands cri as a paradigm of the Anglo-American renewed alliance of the 1980s. ongst others, Geoffrey Smith has argued that, “Reagan never let Thatcher vn over the Falklands”. According to this “long-accepted history of the lands conflict”, whilst Haig and Pym strove to find a diplomatic solution avoid war, Reagan and Thatcher sought in accord with their respective ene ministries to accomplish the common goal of defeating Argentinaause Britain was America’s staunchest NATO ally and an essential bul r against the Soviet Union. However, most historians, including Britain’s cial historian of the war, Lawrence Freedman, argue that besides material port, diplomatic quarrels existed between the two allies that left Thatcher appointed. In fact, due to indecisiveness and ambivalence, Washington’s pone to the crisis has been particularly difficult to interpret.

Recently declassified American and British documents shed new light the harsh divisions that animated Anglo-American diplomatic negoti ons and demonstrate that the Reagan Administration did not grant tcher full support both before and after 30 April. Not only was American biguity a major reason underlying the Argentine junta’s decision to ade the Falklands but, during his “shuttle diplomacy”, Haig betrayed tain by suggesting to General Leopoldo Galtieri, the junta leader, not to ept Thatcher’s proposals for settlement. Understanding this unexpected erican behaviour is possible only by looking at the evolving relationp between the United States and Latin America that marked the Reagan. At the turn of the 1980s, Latin America moved to the centre of Cold
War confrontation.\textsuperscript{14} No other American government dedicated more energy to fighting communism in the region than Reagan's Administration. Latin America became the president's foremost Cold War battleground, and the Argentine junta came to play a crucial role in that battle after 1981.

Confronted with the choice either to deny support to its chief NATO ally or undermine its anti-communist campaign in Central America, Washington attempted to find a compromise that would allow a "safe passage" between the two allies. Given the unbridgeable distance between Argentine and British demands, not only did that attempt fail, it precipitated one of the most serious crises facing the Anglo-American relationship since the 1956 Suez crisis. Reagan's interventionism in Latin America and the interweaving and clash of United States transatlantic and western hemispheric interests created by the Falklands crisis was hardly a novel feature of American foreign policy. The Administration's anti-Communist crusade in Latin America found root in the 1823 Monroe Doctrine — refined by the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary — by which the United States designated itself the policing Power in the region.\textsuperscript{15} In 1945-1947, as American leaders began perceiving regional issues through a Cold War lens, the Monroe Doctrine became integral to American grand strategy in confronting the Soviet Union: "The Cold War provided a convenient rationale for enlarging and institutionalising pre-existing United States efforts to impose its ideological and policy preferences.\textsuperscript{16} Anti-communism became the fuel for implementing hemispheric containment. This was particularly true for Reagan.\textsuperscript{17}

Due to the imperial propensities of both America and Britain, and the exclusive prescriptions of the Monroe Doctrine, the Third World — Latin America in particular — engendered disagreement between the Americans and British. In one sardonic view, "Had the British colonies of the Caribbean never existed, students of twentieth century Anglo-American relations would have wished to invent something very like them".\textsuperscript{18} Although not the only reason for friction, colonial questions strained the special relationship several times during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{19} In the early 1960s, for instance, Washington urged the British to delay independence of Guyana until a more ideologically favourable political regime took power. Growing increasingly concerned with Guyanese Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan's social reforms, American officials complained, "It is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guyana under Jagan". Macmillan did not spare angry criticism toward the contradictory American behaviour: "How can the Americans continue to attack us in the United Nations (UN) on colonialism and then use expressions like these which are pure Machiavellianism".\textsuperscript{20}

The 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war broke out at a defining moment of the United States-Latin America relationship. Between 1979 and 1989 Latin America moved to the centre of East-West confrontation; in the name of anti-communism, right-wing military units supported by pro-American dictators and overtly or covertly by the United States waged war in El Salvador,
Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The 1979 Nicaraguan revolution had marked the turning point: igniting the culmination of Latin America’s Cold War and, alongside the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the 1980 Iran hostage crisis, heralded the beginning of the end of détente. In 1979, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, a leftist group of anti-American radicals inspired by the Cuban revolution, took power; it was the first successful revolution in Latin America since 1959. Even President Jimmy Carter, who had cut off aid to the right-wing Nicaraguan government and accelerated its defeat, grew concerned about the spread of a “Nicaraguan virus”. His changing perception only helped Reagan, who won the 1980 election seizing upon Carter’s inconsistent foreign policy and flaunting the “Nicaraguan loss”.

Whilst Richard Nixon thought, “People don’t give a damn about Latin America”, Reagan saw it as “the most important place in the world”. As early as February 1981, Haig, Weinberger, and Reagan set a new course. During the Administration’s first National Security Council (NSC) meeting, Haig contended: “This area is our third border. . . . The first order of business is to show the Nicaraguans that we will not tolerate violations as did the past administration”. Weinberger suggested that “with some covert aid, we could disrupt Cuban activities”. Reagan concurred. A few days later, the Administration discussed a CIA proposal destined to become famous as the “Contra program”. In December 1981, Reagan signed a crucial “presidential finding” that formally authorised the CIA to “support and conduct paramilitary operations against the Cuban presence and Cuban-Sandinista support infrastructure in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America”.

By the end of its first year in office, Reagan’s Administration had selected Latin America as the foremost Cold War battlefield. It trained, armed, and financed the Contras, a counter-revolutionary group formed by former Nicaraguan National Guard personnel. Further, the United States provided over $1 billion in military aid to the junta of El Salvador, whilst supporting right-wing military regimes in Argentina, Uruguay, and Guatemala. Yet, the United States was not alone in this renewed anti-Communist battle. Starting in the mid-1970s, the right-wing dictatorships of the Southern Cone took to heart their anti-communist vocation independently of American attitudes. In fact, the trans-nationalisation of ideological conflict that, for instance, inspired the “dirty wars” in Chile and Argentina took place largely in response to a perceived abandonment by Washington. Santiago and Buenos Aires proved particularly critical of détente and felt that the Americans, bewitched by the rising international human rights movement, were falling behind in the fight against the Soviet Union in the Third World. As General Raimondi, an Argentine naval officer put it, “the United States was losing the war in Central America”.

Although it was General Augusto Pinochet’s Chile that paved the way for creating a trans-regional anti-communist network through Operación Cóndor, it was Argentina that developed close co-operation with the CIA
1980-1982 in the battle against the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The Reagan Administration’s dedication to interventionism in Central America, alongside Congressional reluctance for any military commitment, implied finding allies willing to do the “dirty work”. Soon after appointment as CIA director, William Casey learnt that Argentine advisors were training an anti-Sandinista force. As a close advisor to the Argentine resident, Jorge Videla, said, “A fundamental United States objective was to overthrow the Sandinista regime. Thus... when two countries have a common goal, they understand each other much better.” Thus, on 26 February 1982, Casey proposed “a very broad program of covert actions to counter urban subversion in Central America”, which would be implemented in cooperation with Argentina and Honduras. The next day, Reagan issued a presidential finding that instructed:

the Department of Defense... to provide all necessary assistance and support to the CIA (to) engage, directly or in cooperation with foreign governments, in a regional effort to expose and counter Marxist and Cuban-sponsored terrorism, insurgency, and subversion in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and elsewhere in Central America.

In November 1981 in Washington, Galtieri met with Weinberger, Haig, and Paul Wolfowitz, but they did not mention guerrillas. A 10 November NSC meeting ultimately convinced Reagan to embrace Casey’s option. The UN ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, never disguising her support for right-wing dictatorships, was the most resolute. “Action must be taken”, she said, “We can use covert action. We can employ proxies.” Reagan ultimately agreed. This decision led to a 1 December presidential finding that initiated a “tripartite” paramilitary effort amongst Argentina, Honduras, and the United States. In the estimation of an Argentine naval officer, “The fight against subversion in Central America marked a period of honeymoon between Argentina and the United States”. One NSC advisor explained, “We need friends wherever we can get em” – the junta was one of them. Consequently, in 1982, diplomacy following the Falklands/Malvinas War could not avoid entanglement with this newed, highly ideological interventionist Administration attitude. In fact, is inter-American alliance against communism hindered Thatcher’s attempt to recover the Islands after the Argentinian invasion. Argentina and Britain were both bulwarks against communism but, in 1982, Reagan’s Cold War as being fought in Central America not Europe.

To average Britons or Argentinians, the genesis of the 1982 war might have appeared somewhat obscure – “a fight between two bald men over
"Comb", said Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. In reality, however, Falklands/Malvinas entanglement began in 1833 when although first settled by the French, Britain controlled the Islands and claimed legal possession. The Argentines disagreed and the issue of sovereignty had never been resolved. In 1980 Nicholas Ridley, Britain’s minister of state for the Falkland Islands, made efforts to persuade the Cabinet and the Islanders to accept a se-back plan by which Britain would transfer sovereignty to Argentina and immediately lease the Island to London and allow British administration for a period of years. The Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO) thought this the only possible solution, but Islanders, Parliament, and public opinion remained dead set against it. Thus, Thatcher did not want to bow her weight behind an unpopular decision and did not consider the problem as a serious one until it was too late. Yet, in December 1981, negotiations over the 149-year-old sovereignty dispute seemed possible. But owing unsuccessful talks in February 1982, the situation deteriorated sharply in late March when a group of Argentine scrap metal merchants paid without authorisation on South Georgia.

Although the South Georgia crisis accelerated the junta decision to invade the Falklands, it was not a “bolt from the blue” as Thatcher has said. As early as December 1981, Galtieri and Admiral Jorge Anaya “considered the possibility of a military occupation of the Islands as a way of forcing Great Britain to engage in serious and definitive negotiations”. Even after negotiations stalled in February, Galtieri informed Eduardo Roca, Argentine ambassador at the UN, about “the decision to occupy the islands . . . because there was no other way out”. He boasted: “Voy a tomar Malvinas (I’m going to take the Malvinas)”. On 12 January, the junta had already discussed “the military option as an alternative action, in case of failure of negotiations” and formed working group to “analyse the use of military force for the Malvinas case”. On 26 March, the junta took the ultimate decision to start the invasion between 1 and 3 April. The Resolución estratégica Militar stated the necessity to “use military power to achieve, consolidate and ensure the military strategic objective: to impose on Britain a military fait accompli, which should give a definitive solution to the issue of Argentina’s sovereignty over the Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, and impede new attempts of usurpation”.

In March, Britain sensed the junta heightening tension to thwart negotiations and, although the extent of Buenos Aires’ ambitions remained clear, Lord Carrington, the British foreign secretary, urged Washington to precede to defuse the situation. Whilst apparent that American mediation was inevitable, Washington’s non-committal attitude would take the tish aback. It began with mild suspicion: “There have been reports”, warned the British Embassy in Washington, “claiming US agreement to support the Argentine position on the Falklands dispute in exchange for Argentine support for United States foreign policy objectives, notably on
Central America". Dismissed as Argentine propaganda, London jettisoned these allegations.

London’s irritation with Washington surfaced more markedly after Enders visited Argentina on 6-8 March to discuss Argentine-American relations. The British had specifically requested that Enders attempt to cajole the junta into tempering its animosity. Nonetheless, Enders received State Department instruction that Argentine support in Central America “should continue and be complementary to US actions”; he “did not advise the Argentines to keep the temperature down as we had suggested”, complained Anthony Williams, the British ambassador in Buenos Aires. Although Enders sought reassurances that there be no war, he stated, “The United States will maintain a strictly neutral position between Argentina and the UK on the Falklands problem.” In addition, on 29 March, the deputy secretary of State, Walter John Stoessel Jr., gave warning to the British ambassador at Washington, Nicholas Henderson: “Haig was concerned about the dispute between two nations who were friends of the United States” and made clear that Washington “would not take sides”. Distressed by Stoessel’s attitude, Henderson reflected, “the Americans could surely not be neutral in a case of illegal occupation of sovereign British territory”. “It was really odd”, lamented the FCO, “to see ourselves put on the same footing as the Argentines”.

Britain was not alone in seeking American diplomatic intervention. The Argentine foreign minister, Nicanor Costa Méndez, asked Enders: “So, what are you going to do in case of a confrontation?” When Enders replied “Hands off”, Costa Méndez thought he meant, “We are not going to intervene”. He recalled in 1983: “On this basis and on the basis of a very frank conversation with Kirkpatrick . . . we reached the conclusion that the United States was not going to intervene . . . and before leaning on one side it was going to attempt energetically mediation”. According to British sources, Enders’ support and Kirkpatrick’s carte blanche proved fatal. As the British UN ambassador, Sir Anthony Parsons, reported “I have evidence that she (Kirkpatrick) gave Roca to understand that, if Argentina would support the United States on Nicaragua, she would return the compliment over the Falklands”. Casey confirmed to British officials that “the Argentines may have been led up the wrong path” because they believed that United States support for covert operations in Central America could grant them acquiescence.

On 1 April, one day before the invasion, evoking the spirit of collaboration between the two English-speaking countries, Reagan urged Thatcher to delay any definitive decision that could lead to war. He could not know that Thatcher had already instructed a Naval Task Force to sail southwards until receiving new orders. Consequently, the Reagan Administration divided in its reaction to the Argentine invasion. On the one hand, “Latin Americanists” like Enders and Kirkpatrick argued for strict neutrality: “the Argentines had been claiming for 200 years that they owned those islands
and that if they own those islands then moving troops into them is not an act of aggression." On the other, "Europeanists" led by Lawrence Eagleburger, a senior State Department official, and Weinberger argued that NATO would be undermined if the United States failed to support Britain. Despite this division, Reagan instructed Haig to broker a peaceful solution that safeguarded favourable relations with both Powers. As Reagan publicly explained, "It's a very difficult situation for the United States because we are friends with both of the countries engaged in this dispute". Eager to avert "a prospective armed conflict in the hemisphere between two friends", the Administration decided on 6 April that Haig would embark on shuttle diplomacy. "We need to move quickly", he said, "while there is still uncertainty on both sides... we should act before we are placed in an untenable position of having to compromise our impartiality."

Prior to leaving for London, Haig met Henderson who, rejecting Haig's proposals, stated that his government "could not enter into any negotiations about the future of the Falkland Islands until the Argentine troops had been withdrawn". Haig pitched the idea of a "mixed administration to run the island" - the core of his negotiating strategy. Henderson replied that the British were "prepared to talk about the future of the islands and their relations with Argentina only when Argentine troops had withdrawn and our administration had been restored". Haig's response left few doubts about American purposes: "I could not see how General Galtieri could survive if he simply had to take away Argentine troops without getting anything in return". The ambassador replied caustically, "It is not our purpose to help Galtieri survive". Yet, Haig remained convinced that whilst compromise was "a risky mission", the Administration had to undertake it to prevent "a major setback to its policies in the hemisphere". When Haig arrived in London, any reconciliation of the two allies' positions evaporated. The Argentines were unprepared to accept any settlement whose sole outcome did not provide for a transfer of sovereignty. The British insisted that Argentine troops had to withdraw, sovereignty was the Queen's, and the traditional administration of the islands be restored.

Thatcher specified that Haig came to London not as a mediator but, rather, as a friend and ally to discuss ways in which the United States could most effectively support British efforts to secure Argentine withdrawal from the Falklands. Haig made a vain effort to talk Thatcher into embracing a temporary mixed administration for the islands, "which might ensure essentials of (the) British position... while leaving Argentina (a) face-saving way out". But the prime minister "indicated little willingness to give in". British obstinacy notwithstanding, Haig presented a seven-point plan that again included an interim administration alongside two additional conditions unacceptable to London: stopping the British fleet from moving further towards the South Atlantic; and negotiations on sovereignty issue be concluded by the end of December 1982.
Moreover, trying to persuade Thatcher that the plan encompassed a reasonable Argentine proposal, Haig attempted to demonstrate an Argentine inclination to negotiate that did not exist in reality:

The package I have brought here is not a US proposal, but I must tell you in candor, I would have to say it's reasonable .... We brought them (the Argentinians) a long way .... The basic concept is to trigger withdrawal by giving the Argentines some sort of interim official presence on the islands and a commitment on negotiations, without saying how the negotiations turn out".71

Haig warned that if negotiations failed and war occurred, the United States feared Soviet involvement and Washington unable to support Britain".72 Thatcher's reaction was nonetheless pessimistic. Bemused at Haig's belabouring a compromise solution, she remarked that "she did not understand what Haig was proposing" since, "once the Argentinian forces had gone, she saw no other way of providing for settled administration .... except by the British Government carrying out these functions".73 She dubbed Haig's proposals "too woolly" and pointed out that "British sovereignty must continue and British administration be restored". Only then could negotiations regarding sovereignty occur as "no vague international presence could substitute for this essential authority".74

Haig had tested the "Iron Lady", who did not hesitate to express what he elegantly labelled a "friendly disagreement". More than a friendly disagreement, the first round of the Haig's shuttle diplomacy failed. "The Prime minster", Haig reported to Reagan, "has the bit in her teeth .... She is rigid in her insistence on a return to the status quo ante .... The Prime minster is convinced she will fall if she concedes on any of three basic points".75 Reagan then instructed Haig to maintain as much room as possible for manoeuvre by making the interim administration more appealing to London "to give Maggie enough to carry on and at the same time meets the rest of equity with our Latin neighbors".76 Reckoning that Reagan aimed to act only as an impartial mediator, rather than an ally, Thatcher concluded that "the State Department, the White House security staff . . . and Reagan himself were never wholly committed to our case".77

If the special relationship had been crumbling in the first round in London, Haig blatantly betrayed the British in Buenos Aires. Advised by Thatcher that nothing less than withdrawal and restoration of British sovereignty was acceptable, Haig suggested that Galtieri reject Thatcher's emands:

The British showed nothing but determination to get your forces off the islands. Thatcher's demands were clear: you must withdraw before they will consider negotiations. I told her I was sure you could not accept this,
and frankly I don’t believe you should. The British position is tantamount to an ultimatum.78

It is striking that Haig, charged with mediating between two American allies, suggested to Argentina at a crucial moment of the crisis not to accept the British proposals. One can only imagine Thatcher’s reaction had she known that Haig advised rejection to the Argentines. Furthermore, Haig told Galtieri: “I now see the promise of a closer relationship with us, but . . . the President has already been severely criticized for our even-handedness . . . . We do not want to lose Thatcher, but we are also determined that you succeed.”79

Haig then proposed another solution drafted along the lines of the seven-point plan presented and rebuffed in London. His goal was evident — seeking to obtain some degree of Argentinian approval either to force the British to compromise or bear public responsibility of rejecting the plan. In an attempt to force Thatcher’s hand, Haig assumed that the British could not bear such a burden given the increasing pressure by both the international community and its European allies. Convinced that “British insistence that withdrawal (was) a precondition unreasonable and unworkable”, he even reassured Galtieri, “If I can present them with a proposal for peace that you have accepted, it will be clear that they will bear responsibility for the consequences of rejection”.80 Thus, the Americans prepared a working paper characterised as “an Argentine proposal”.81 As Haig told Galtieri, it provided “for substantial change from the status quo ante. It would be a clear success for you”. However, Buenos Aires insisted on the automatic transfer of sovereignty by the end of 1982.82

Recognising that Argentine resolve for the automatic outcome of negotiations was unacceptable to Thatcher, Haig returned to London intent on “blurring the question of whether the negotiations would result in Argentine sovereignty”.83 In fact, Haig blurred the question by not mentioning it. Not only did he disregard the strict requirements set by Costa Méndez, he also proposed the modified version of the seven-point plan discussed in Buenos Aires. More importantly, Haig looked to persuade Thatcher that the plan had Argentinian approval — which was false. Thatcher did not fall into the trap, recalling later, “Haig’s proposals were full of holes”.84 When Haig made a last effort to persuade the British to recall the fleet in case an interim agreement proved possible, Thatcher replied that she “would not survive in the House of Commons if the Task Force was stopped before Argentinian withdrawal had been completed”.85 Her residual faith in negotiations vanished as she realised that the Argentines had not agreed to plan discussed.86

After the Thatcher-Haig meeting, the FCO concluded, “The main United States interest in the present crisis was to see it resolved peacefully”. Henderson suggested that Kirkpatrick:
did not see a need for the United States to make a choice between Britain and Argentina. The only appropriate action for the United States was to try and help the two countries to avoid war . . . . Mrs. Kirkpatrick, like Enders, likes to make much of the argument that, if the United States does not maintain good relations with the military regime there will be a return to Peronism and Argentina will turn to the Soviet Union.87

For the British, American hesitancy lay with Administration strategy in Central America: “The Argentinians are currying favour with Washington by showing readiness to make common cause with them in resisting communism in Central America . . . . The issue that arouses Americans more than any other is that of anti-Communism”. The British sensed that the Americans were “hooked on not taking sides”.88 Their judgment could not have been more prescient.

14 April marked the peak of mutual irritation. Disturbed about press leaks concerning alleged American military co-operation with Britain through Ascension Island, Haig informed Thatcher of his intention in a scheduled speech to say, “Britain’s use of United States facilities on Ascension Island had been restricted”. Thatcher burst out: “It is our Island!” Then she complained: “I have done everything possible to support President Reagan and the United States government on every single occasion (it) has asked for help, and the moment we need your help you aren’t there, we just don’t receive it”. Thanks to Thatcher’s intervention, Haig’s speech did not mention Ascension Island directly; but Thatcher could not disguise her astonishment at Haig’s words.89

Thatcher’s grievances urged Reagan to broach the matter directly with Galtieri. Authoritative tones notwithstanding, the American president had not yet abandoned his commitment to keep the junta in charge: “War in this hemisphere, between two Western nations, both friendly to the United States is unthinkable . . . . the only one who could profit from such a war would be the Soviet Union”. He then assured Galtieri that his Administration would maintain “this neutral attitude”.90 Reagan’s impartiality was no secret in London as he spoke to Thatcher and reiterated his commitment “to find a common ground between your country, one of our closest allies, and Argentina, with whom we would like to be able to cooperate in advancing specific interests in this hemisphere”.91

The issue had becoming labyrinthine; with both parties moaning about American ambiguity, maintaining Washington’s even-handedness indefinitely would be impossible. Whilst the American press continued to claim that the Americans were supplying Britain militarily, raising Argentine suspicions, ‘considerable disappointment” grew in London.92 One Thatcher advisor complained that the “save Galtieri lobby in Washington” was giving “paramountcy o Galtieri’s survival”.93 Meanwhile in Washington, Reagan’s new national security advisor, William Clark, expressed anxiety at the “highly critical”
opinion that the British people had of the Americans “for their neutral stance”. Ultimately, Argentina’s rigidity jeopardised American efforts to save the junta. Arriving in Buenos Aires on 16 April, Haig adopted tactics already used in London and handed Galtieri a proposal claiming that it followed British requirements. In reality, the document came from an NCS meeting in Washington the day before. The plan called for linking the withdrawal of Argentine troops with the halt of the British fleet, a tripartite interim administration, and Anglo-Argentine direct negotiations. At a crucial meeting with the full junta, Haig confronted Anaya, who insisted that direct negotiation lead to local Falkland government and administration appointed exclusively by Buenos Aires. Argentine insistence on sovereignty essentially meant the end to the negotiations and forced the Americans to overhaul their impartiality.

On 20 April Jim Rentschler, a White House official accompanying Haig during his shuttle diplomacy, suggested that the United States no longer practice even-handedness:

The likely imminence of armed conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina require a very hard look at our next course . . . . the practice of even-handedness . . . has now ended . . . at what point does the United States no longer appear “constructively concerned” but instead is perceived by the British and our own public as irresolute, ungrateful, and evasive? . . . Both sides of the conflict have too much invested in emotional, geopolitical, and historical capital to allow us a safe passage between them . . . . We need therefore to decide on an extremely urgent basis in which set of relationships (hemispheric or Atlantic) we are prepared to sustain the most immediate casualties . . . . all of this argues for the earliest possible expression of support for the Brits.

Not everyone agreed. Allen, Reagan’s first national security advisor, counselled the president against ceding to pressures to reverse Administration impartiality: “If we were to join in imposing economic penalties on Argentina, we could drive her swiftly to a tactical alliance with the Soviet Union”.97 The State Department echoed Allen: “The United States has an important stake in peaceful resolution of this crisis . . . . We are concerned that if the conflict drags on, the Argentine junta will look for support where it can find it”.98 Hence, Haig nudged Pym, Carrington’s successor, to submit a “new” proposal to Thatcher. The plan again included a mixed administration and negotiations to conclude by late 1982; Pym surprisingly agreed.99 Although Thatcher rejected Pym’s concessions, her Defense secretary, John Nott, insightfully proposed allowing Haig to forward the plan to Buenos Aires without mentioning British acceptance of the terms; London wanted Argentina to make the first move.100 Behind closed American doors, Haig confessed candidly of the plan’s design to “give ultimate sovereignty to Argentina, but under evolutionary condition”.101 He asked for a junta reply by midnight, 27 April. However, Costa Méndez
plied, "Argentina's unrenounceable objective was the recognition of its sovereignty over the Malvinas, and that the American proposal fell short of Argentinean demands".  

As a result, in a crucial NSC meeting on 30 April, the Americans decided publicly to support Britain and stop arms sales to Argentina. Their impartiality ended, but not their mediating role. Indeed, the meeting's minutes reveal that the Administration wished to "preserve space for new negotiating efforts" to obtain more flexibility from both sides.  

At first, Haig stated: "We do not want to close the door on diplomacy . . . If this pro-American government falls in Buenos Aires it may well be replaced by a left-wing Peronist regime. Therefore, we need to be careful in how we raise our 'tilt'". Even the Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed concern over "the long term impact on our relations within the Hemisphere resulting from the changing nature and greater degree of assistance requested" by the British. Reagan also wanted to maintain room for further negotiations. Whilst discussing the extent of military support or the British coming from the "tilt", he indicated "no objection to giving material support, but wondered if that would not significantly undercut any future role for the United States as a mediator".  

Again, Reagan seemed reluctant to abandon the junta.

Consequently, although the United States confirmed its "tilt" in a press conference, and the Anglo-American special relationship seemed to be resurrected, diplomatic efforts continued. On indications from Haig, Peruvian President Fernando Belaúnde Terry submitted a five-point plan for a peaceful solution at the beginning of May. "Our objective", explained Haig, "remains a peaceful resolution of the dispute with as little damage inflicted on the participants as possible". The most unilateralist American administration of the Cold War now considered the possibility of turning to multilateralism to disguise its continuing preference for a compromise solution of the crisis.

However, the British sinking of the Argentine battleship, General Belgrano, on 2 May precluded any further chance for discussion. Whilst the reality had set in: war had begun. Neither the United States nor the UN could hope to restrain Thatcher. By the end of May, beach landings by British forces began and Thatcher reaffirmed that "having landed, we were not prepared to negotiate". Nevertheless, British irritation with the Americans had faded. At the end of a Cabinet meeting on 16 May, Nott "protested about the American attitude", asking "(do) they realise the bitterness in the United Kingdom about them?"  

By this stage, the Reagan Administration adjusted its priorities towards avoiding total humiliation of the junta. Not only did Haig believe that "a British victory on the Islands, unless followed by an effort to reach negotiated solution, would lead only to further conflict and an unhealable wound in our relations with our Latin neighbors". By telephone, Reagan attempted
to prevent Thatcher from completing the military recovery of the islands. Indeed, he was adamant that once the British invasion started, Argentina could not reject a deal. “We might”, he told the prime minister, “capitalize on the success you’ve had with a diplomatic initiative; Argentina might turn it down, but I think an effort to show we’re all still willing to seek a settlement would undercut the effort of the leftists in South America who are actively seeking to exploit the crisis”. Thatcher interrupted the president: “I didn’t lose some of my best ships and some of my finest lives, to leave quietly under a ceasefire without the Argentines withdrawing... Ron, I’m not handing over the island now”. By 14 June, the Argentines had surrendered. Yet, victory did not seal British sovereignty, nor did it bridge Anglo-American divergences. When the UN discussed the controversy in autumn 1982, the British made clear that they would not negotiate as if war had not happened.

The United States again eschewed diplomatic support for British claims, pursuing a policy of neutrality that London perceived as unfriendly at best. The priority, as National Security Directive Decision 71 proclaimed, was now to “reassert United States influence in Latin America” that had been “complicated by the Falkland crisis”. To accomplish this end, the State Department prescribed remaining “neutral on the question of sovereignty and support negotiations, mediation or other peaceful efforts to resolve the dispute”. In early November, the Americans resisted British pressure to vote against or “at least to abstain” from supporting General Assembly Resolution 37/9 seeking renewed Anglo-Argentinian negotiations; the Reagan Administration marched to the beat of its own drum and voted in favour of the resolution. On the eve of the vote in New York, the president sent a heartfelt message to Thatcher: “I am truly sorry that we disagree on this matter”.

London received Washington’s decision as a “major blow” to Anglo-American relations. Britain deplored the resolution because of both its anti-colonialist rhetoric and its request to engage in negotiations to resolve the sovereignty issue. Whilst the British Embassy at Washington commented sarcastically that “one or two people here had a hand in working out” the draft, the ambassador made clear to the State Department that it was “wholly unrealistic after all that has happened to expect us to engage in negotiations about sovereignty”. Thatcher went further, stating that the American vote was “an affront to the government and people of Britain and to me personally”. Additionally, as the United States rapidly worked to restore arms sales to the junta, he British lamented “a further signal of United States anxiety to repair its relationship with Argentina”. Although Argentine-American co-operation in counterinsurgency activities drastically decreased after the setback of the Falklands/Malvinas, the Reagan Administration, to Thatcher’s dudgeon, still refused to abandon Argentina.

Reagan and Haig failed to grant Britain the diplomatic support it expected over the Falklands crisis, the special relationship notwithstanding. More surprising, instructed to keep negotiations alive at any cost, Haig
betrayed the British by suggesting that Galtieri discard Thatcher's "unreasonable" requests. Even after the 30 April "tilt", Reagan and Haig remained adamant about keeping the junta afloat. The reasoning underlying this decision held that the Falklands crisis forced the United States to choose between transatlantic and inter-American interests. The struggle against communism in Central America had emerged as the most obsessive priority to the Republican Administration; and junta military defeat could cause a setback to the hemispheric policy of an Administration that initiated crucial co-operation in training paramilitary anti-communist forces in Central America in 1981. This renewed anti-communist alliance hindered Thatcher's attempt to secure support that she "would expect and always expected to have".121

In private, the British protested vigorously against American impartiality to no avail. In the aftermath of the crisis, whilst reasoning over the possible causes of the unexpected American position, they concluded that the Reagan Administration feared "the impact of the crisis on relations (with) the countries of Latin America".122 And as Costa Méndez recalled later, "the Department of State and many other figures in the Government wanted peace, because they were very much interested in the hemispheric politics and at that moment they were fighting in Central America with the assistance of Argentina".123

However, given the substantial cleavages within the Reagan Administration, the translation of these concerns into policy was to say the least ambiguous. Reagan seemed to think that his Administration "let the junta know privately that . . . our sympathies were on the British side" and that it "assured Margaret Thatcher that we were fully behind Britain".124 Yet, if these were the American intentions, the Administration stood far from effective in communicating them. Both Costa Méndez and Galtieri had the impression - confirmed by Enders and Kirkpatrick - that the Administration would not side with Britain. As for sovereignty, Haig reckoned, "it was not possible to go back to the status quo ante".125 Thus, his plans were designed to ensure a transfer of sovereignty to Argentina "under evolutionary conditions" to give the British "one year in which to sell their settlement to (their) people".126 Nott and Thatcher, for their part, found it "frightening" that "our greatest ally (was) not on our side".127 Furthermore, the way the Administration tried to find an unlikely "safe passage" between its two allies resembled an attempt to run with both the hare and the hounds. It wanted to preserve good relations with both Powers but found itself resented by both.

Further ambiguity came from the fact that American diplomatic neutrality was at variance with the military support given to Britain. Haig, Pym, and Reagan affirmed that the Americans did not provide military assistance beyond the use of Ascension Island - which was in fact British - before 30 April. Many others, including Nott, Lehman, Weinberger, and even Henderson, have stated the opposite. Lawrence Freedman has also submitted that military help came both before and after the "tilt", which remains
at odds with the diplomatic quarrels that animated the Anglo-American meetings. Nonetheless, little doubt exists that broadly authorised by the president, Weinberger granted military assistance. This included Vulcan/Phalanx guns, fuel, ammunition, Sidewinder missiles, intelligence, and spare parts. However, it also appears that Thatcher and Haig remained largely unaware of the extent of co-operation. Even Reagan during the 30 April NSC meeting seemed not to be fully aware of what he had, reportedly, authorised. A possible explanation for this oddity is that Weinberger acted largely on his own, and Nott "was not inclined to tell Thatcher how good the military help was" as "we were mad at the Americans". 128

The reasons underlying Anglo-American disagreement appear rather clear. The Reagan Administration saw the crisis through a Cold War lens; Thatcher did not. "We did not sense", complained Haig, "that the British had sufficiently thought through that an Argentine-British military conflict might lead to the cementing of a Soviet-Argentine military relationship".129 The demonstration that limits existed to the anti-communism of the Thatcher government – limits Reagan was unprepared to accept – surfaced after the crisis. In October 1983 the Reagan Administration intervened militarily to overthrow the communist Revolutionary Military Council that had taken power after a coup d'état in Grenada, a member of the Commonwealth. Thatcher, who had not been warned, was appalled. Not too differently from what Macmillan had to say in the early 1960s about American attitudes towards the decolonisation of British Guyana, Thatcher exclaimed: "We in the Western democracies use our force to defend our way of life. We do not use it to walk into independent and sovereign territories . . . . If you are going to pronounce a new law that wherever Communism reigns against the will of the people, there the United States shall enter, then we are going to have really terrible wars in the world". 130

NOTES

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10. Lehman, “Reflections”.


17. Smith, Monroe Doctrine, p. 5.


20. Rabe, British Guiana, pp. 91-94.

21. Rabe, Killing Zone, pp. 144-45; Brands, Latin America’s Cold War, pp. 189-95; Patrice J. McSherry, Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America (Lanham, MD, 2005).


23. Westad, Global Cold War, pp. 340-42.


25. Jean Kirkpatrick quoted in ibid.


29. Rabe, Killing Zone, p. 7; Brands, Latin America’s Cold War, pp. 199-200; Grandin, Empire’s Workshop, Westad, Global Cold War, pp. 341-46.


32. On Operation Condor, see John Dinges, The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents (New York, 2004); McSherry, Predatory States.

33. Armony, Anti-Communist Crusade, p. 67.

34. General Miguel Angel Mallevia Gar in Armony, “Transnationalizing the Dirty War”, p. 139.


40. Armony, Anti-Communist Crusade, p. 66.

42. Freedman, “Special Relationship,” p. 64.
44. Interview Sir Patrick Robin Fearn, BDOIP, pp. 32-34.
46. Michael Parsons, The Falklands War (Stroud, 2000); Freedman, Official History, Volume 2, p. 11.
47. Quoted in Richardson, When Allies Differ, p. 112.
52. DEMIL 1/82, Annex III/8, IF-CAERCAS, p. 32.
62. Reagan to Thatcher, 1 April 1982, Cables HOSF (Head of State Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA) Box 34.
64. Kirkpatrick quoted in Freedman and Gamba-Storehouse, Signals of War, p. 39.
65. Richardson, When Allies Differ, p. 118.
68. Henderson, Channels and Tunnels, p. 88; and Haig, Cauter, p. 272.
69. Haig memorandum to the President, 6 April 1982, BDF RB 5 n.26920.
70. Renshler telegram to Haig, “Secretary's working dinner with Prime Minister Thatcher”, 8 April 1982, BDF RB 6 n.26845.
71. Ibid.
74. Thatcher, Downing Street Years, p. 274.
77. In Nott, Here Today, p. 16.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. II-CAERCAS, Annex V/12, p. 76.
82. Haig memorandum for the President, “Conversation between Haig and Galtieri”, 10 April 1982, BDF RB 5, n. 26867.
84. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, p. 195.
85. Memcon, “American Draft Agreement”, 12 April 1982, PREM 19/617; on the British mood about Haig’s agreement, see Fall (Pym’s private secretary) memorandum to Whitmore (Thatcher’s private secretary), “The Falkland Islands: Mr. Haig’s visit of 12 April”, 11 April 1982, THCR (Margaret Thatcher Papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge) 1/20/3/6.
90. Clark memorandum to Haig, “President’s phone call to President Galtieri”, 15 April 1982, BDF RB 5, n. 26921.
92. Memcon, “Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and Secretary Haig”, PREM 19/617; Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, p. 200.
93. Sherman (Centre for Policy Studies) memorandum to Thatcher, “Politics and war in the Falklands after South Georgia”, 26 April 1982, ASP (Alfred Sherman Papers, Royal Holloway Library, University of London, London) AC 515, box 6 2/20, TI.
94. In the same conversation Henderson told Clark that against the staunch support of the Europeans, the American attitude was “highly disappointing”: memcon Henderson and Clark, 17 April 1982, THCR 1/20/7.
96. Rentschler memorandum to Clark, “The guns of April—Where we now stand with Argentina, the United Kingdom, Ourselves”, 20 April 1982, BDF box 90223, n. 26871. Also see Rentschler telegram to Clark and MacFarlane, nd, BDF box 90223, n. 26870.
100. FCO telegram to State Department, “Message from the Prime Minister to Haig”, 24 April 1982, PREM 19/621.
101. Minute of NSC Meeting 48, “South Atlantic Crisis”, 30 April 1982, ES-NSC MF, box 91284; see also the exchange of letters between Reagan and Thatcher on 29 April, THCR 1/20/3/12, THCR 3/1/20.
102. Cardoso et al., *Secret Plot*, p. 203.
104. Ibid.
110. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, p. 229.
117. FCO telegram to British Mission (UN), "Falklands at the General Assembly", 3 November 1982, FCO 7/4871.
118. Wright (British Embassy, Washington) to FCO, "Falklands UN Resolution", 1 November 1982, FCO 7/4871.
130. Thatcher interview with BBC, MTF, n.110628.

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