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## WHEN GOLIATH DEFEATED DAVID: ARGENTINA IN THE FALKLANDS WAR

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***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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## **WHEN GOLIATH DEFEATED DAVID – ARGENTINA IN THE FALKLANDS WAR**

*“No one starts a war – or rather, no one in his sense ought to do so – without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct It”.*

- Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1982, the Argentinian task force (TF 40) departed from its home port in Puerto Belgrano; almost everybody on board the different ships was convinced that the programmed yearly amphibious exercise was starting. Very few of the Officers on board knew about the true nature of the deployment, but they were not authorized to reveal any details. After one day at sea and at the same time the ships turned their general courses from south to east, the real aim of the underway was communicated and all realized that they were tasked to achieve Argentina’s greatest sovereignty dream, retake the “Islas Malvinas”<sup>1</sup>.

Although the dream came true, at least for a short time, it quickly transformed into an enormous nightmare: the failure of the Argentinian forces in the Falklands War. The worst part of this failure was that even though the UK came with a greater and more modern force, the real defeat started before the military actions began.

This paper will demonstrate that the primary reason for the Argentinian defeat in the Falklands war was the wrong planning assumptions at the strategic level.

The paper’s first focus is on analyzing the misperceptions that the Argentinian “Junta de Gobierno”<sup>2</sup> (Junta) had during the time when they decided to retake the Falklands Islands from the United Kingdom (UK), which led them to pass the wrong planning assumptions to the

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<sup>1</sup> In Argentina people use the term “Islas Malvinas” instead of Falklands Islands.

<sup>2</sup> Argentinian form of government during the time of the military dictatorship; the Junta at the time of the war was composed by General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri (acting as President of the Republic and Chief of the Army), Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya (Chief of the Navy) and Brigadier Basilio Lami Dozo (Chief of the Air Force).

operational level. This essay will then describe how the operational plan to retake the Islands by Argentina, was based on the wrong assumption that Great Britain would not respond to a foreign military aggression, which is what finally conducted the Argentinian forces to improvise the necessary actions to retain the Falklands, even though the organized British Forces were ready to enter the big fight. Finally, the major findings will be presented in the conclusions.

## **PART ONE – THE ORIGIN OF THE WRONG GUIDANCE.**

When addressing a superior's assumptions, the Canadian Operational Planning Process (OPP) states when they may be made and at the same establishes some important pre-requisites:

...In the absence of positive proof, assumptions may be made to provide necessary information in order to enable commanders and staff to continue the planning process and to ultimately decide upon a course of action. They must however realize that assumptions must later be validated before a plan could be considered reliable.<sup>3</sup>

This section will prove that the perceptions the Junta had at the time they ordered the generation of a plan to invade to Falklands, the UK reaction, the expected support from the United States (US) to the Argentinian cause, and the support of the international community present at the United Nations (UN), were completely mistaken. Notwithstanding, they passed these to the operational level planners as the main strategical level assumptions for the planning process.

### **Thinking that “the empire” would not “strike back”:**

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Forces College, “OPP Stage 2a: Mission Analysis”, Lecture Delivered by The Directing Staff during the execution of the course DS 544 “Basic Joint Operational Planning”, Toronto, February 2016.

The first Junta's misperception in analyzation, considered also as "the first and most fundamental error made by Buenos Aires"<sup>4</sup>, was that the UK would not respond to a military invasion of the Falklands.

Based on some facts, like the UK's 1975 and 1981 Defence Reviews, which defined the retirement from active duty of a great part of the surface combatants, mainly the aircraft carriers, landing ships and the HMS *Endurance*<sup>5</sup>, and the low interest demonstrated by UK Officials' for the islands, the Argentinian strategic level wrongly arrived at the conclusion that Great Britain was either not interested nor properly equipped to respond against a military threat in the Falklands.

US Admiral Harry D. Train II describes in his paper *An Analysis of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands Campaign*, the interpretations made by Argentinian Admiral Isaac Anaya, the Junta member responsible for ordering the generation of the plan to invade Malvinas, related to the UK defence reviews:

...Admiral Anaya's [Chief of the Argentinian Navy] interpretation was that the United Kingdom had become a nation lacking not only the means to defend its interests 8,000 miles from England, but also the national will to employ what little capability remained.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the low interest that the Argentinians officials believed the UK had on the islands, Falklands war researchers Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins wrote in their book *The*

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<sup>4</sup> Lyle Goldstein, "China's Falklands Lessons", *Survival* Volume 50 (Issue 3, July 2008): 67, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00396330802173214#.VxeDB8vbLIU>.

<sup>5</sup> At the time the only Royal Navy ship with integral capacity to provide all-time sustainment in the Falklands was the HMS *Endurance*, and in case of war the only ships that could provide a real capacity to retake the islands were the aircraft carriers and landing ships.

<sup>6</sup> Admiral Harry D. Train II, U.S. Navy (Retired), "An Analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Campaign", in *The Falklands War Officer Training Package* (Toronto, Ont. : Canadian Forces College, 200-), section 12, p 36.

*Battle for the Falklands* the thoughts of the influential Argentinian Foreign Minister<sup>7</sup>, a recognized veteran on the Falklands affairs:

...He knew the British Foreign Office were keen for a settlement. The treasury had shown not the slightest interest in the development of the islands. The ten-year-old Communications Agreement [agreed by the UK and Argentina to improve sustainment to the islands and improve well-being of the habitants] remained unhonoured by the British side... HMS *Endurance* was to be withdrawn; the islanders had been denied full British nationality; even the British Antarctic Survey was about to close its South Georgia station for lack of funds. If ever a nation was tired of colonial responsibility, this was it.<sup>8</sup>

A counterargument comes from Matthew Fehrs from the Department of Political Science in St. Mary's College of Maryland, who blamed the British for not giving clear signs about their real intentions toward the islands. In his paper he wrote that "the failure of Thatcher's government to respond decisively to Argentine threats and provocations meant that there was no credible deterrence threat".<sup>9</sup> Although he presented good arguments related to previous periods, it is important to recognize that before the war, mainly after the South Georgia incident, many clear signs were given to Argentina. These included the deployment of HMS *Endurance* with a contingent of Royal Marines and a nuclear submarine in late-March, 1982.<sup>10</sup>

The latter analysis of the counterargument contributes to demonstrate that although Admiral Anaya and Minister Costa Mendez could have based their thoughts in some valid facts, the final resolutions taken by Great Britain right after the first Argentinian military provocation

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<sup>7</sup> The same book states that Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez was appointed to this same point ten years before, so he had a special knowledge about the Argentinian Foreign issues and at the same time he was very influent at the Junta level.

<sup>8</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London: M. Joseph, 1992), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Fehrs, "Too Many Cooks in the Foreign Policy Kitchen: Confused British Signaling and the Falklands War", *Democracy and Security* 10 (2014), 230, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17419166.2014.941464>.

<sup>10</sup> The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, *The Falklands Conflict*, in *The Falklands War Officer Training Package* (Toronto, Ont. : Canadian Forces College, 200-), 17.

in South Georgia, were pointing to the use of force. This concludes that a strong military response to a foreign invasion was completely expectable.

Having proved that the Argentinian strategic level did not believe in a British military response in case of an invasion, now the assumption related to the expected support from the US to its cause will be analyzed.

**Believing strongly in the least likely option:**

Since the 1970's, Argentina had shown a strong commitment to the organizations promoted by the US in Central and South America, intended to create a local collective security system, mainly the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American and the Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance. Also, after Galtieri's arrival as head of the Junta in 1971, the country had become the closest contributor to the US effort to stop communism in Central America, specifically in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, where Argentinian soldiers were deployed to fight against the Sandinista insurgency. Although the US government showed some support to the Argentinian position during the diplomatic negotiations over the sovereignty of the Falklands, it was not correct to believe that this would continue happen in the case of undertaking military actions against its historic main ally.

In his article *Anglo-American Relations and the Falklands Conflict*, Christoph Bluth, from the Department of War Studies, King's College, London, wrote:

...Galtieri was clearly given the impression that the relationship with Argentina had assumed great importance for the US administration...They [the Junta] became convinced that the United States would look the other way and not object [the occupation of the islands] in return for co-operation in Central America and the South Atlantic

[where Argentina was also promoting some security measures against Soviet maritime power].<sup>11</sup>

A different view is presented by Andrea Chiampan (PhD), specialist in international history, who argues that the US showed ambiguity during the negotiations, thus letting the Junta think about possible support from the superpower. In her paper *Running with the Hare, Hunting with the Hounds: The Special Relationship, Reagan's Cold War and the Falklands Conflict*, she wrote:

...The Argentine foreign minister, Nicanor Costa Mendez, asked Enders [Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs]: "So what are you going to do in case of a confrontation?" When Enders replied "Hands off", Costa Mendez 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 [US Ambassador to the UN] ... 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".<sup>12</sup>

Although this argument brings some evidence about possible support from the US to Argentina, it is important to state that the final conclusion was made on the basis of words and thoughts, but not on real facts. When the first military actions were taken, the US attitude proved to be the opposite; this was illustrated by Commodore Ruben O. Moro in his book *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict, The War for the Malvinas*:

...Any scholar of U.S. foreign policy could assume the reaction of that nation in the face of such a conflict. Historical and political considerations could only lead to the conclusion that when the chips are down, the old allies of two world wars and pillars of the Atlantic Alliance would close ranks and act as one, at the expense of hemispheric relations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christoph Bluth, Anglo-American Relations and the Falklands Conflict, in *International Perspectives on the Falklands Conflict: A Matter of Life and Death* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 203 - 205.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Chiampan, "Running with the Hare, Hunting with the Hounds: The Special Relationship, Reagan's Cold War and the Falklands Conflict", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* Volume 24, (Issue 4, December 2013): 646.

<sup>13</sup> Ruben O. Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict-The War for the Malvinas* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 33.



With no doubt the last paragraph contributes to the conclusion that the Argentinian perception about the US support to its cause in case of a confrontation against the UK were absolutely wrong. Having demonstrated the second misperception of the Junta, now the support it was expecting from the international community will be analyzed.

### **Excessive trust in the world's decolonization process and in UN resolutions:**

Between 1960 and 1965 Argentina obtained her greatest victory on the Malvinas issue; first, because the world's decolonization process started at the UN, and second, due to promulgation at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 2065 (XX), recognizing the islands as colonial territory, noting a sovereignty dispute between both countries, and encouraging both countries to negotiate.<sup>14</sup> The main reason to celebrate this event was that the international community was not recognizing the British sovereignty over the Falklands. As negotiations between both countries never succeed, mainly due to the UK's low interest, Argentina submitted claims twice to the UNGA, which finally passed two more Resolutions, 3160 (XXVIII) in 1973 and 31/49 in 1976.

Due to the lack of commitment showed by the UK toward the requirement to negotiate from the UNGA, the Junta wrongly believed that by generating a bloodless military invasion in Malvinas, the international community would support its position, contributing to press Great Britain in order to relinquish sovereignty of the Islands in favor of Argentina. In their book *Signals of War-The Falklands Conflict of 1982*, both specialists in the Falklands/Malvinas

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<sup>14</sup> Fabian Raimondo, "The Sovereignty Dispute Over the Falklands/Malvinas: What Role for the UN," *Netherlands International Law Review*, Volume 59, Issue 3 (September 2012): 410-413. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1017%2FS0165070X12000277>.

conflict, Sir Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, wrote about the Argentinian belief about the future behaviour of the international community:

...Once an incident had taken place the Security Council would become involved. Argentina might have a rough time because of the recourse of force, but the likely requirement for a diplomatic settlement would see in a much stronger position, as past UN resolutions had always tended towards the Argentine line on sovereignty.<sup>15</sup>

Professor David A. Welch from the University of Toronto also addresses this issue in his paper *Remember the Falklands*:

...They [the Junta] also incorrectly gauged the extent to which the international community would sympathize with Argentina. They expected that world leaders would accept or even applaud a bloodless use of military force in the pursuit of a just end, especially since Argentina was sending troops into what many countries – including virtually all of Latin America – considered to be Argentine territory. Moreover, they believed, Argentina was carrying out the operation in pursuit of decolonization, a principle endorsed by the United Nations.<sup>16</sup>

The Argentinian perception about the support of the international community proved to be mistaken, because once the UN realized the first news about the invasion of the Falklands by Argentinian troops, the UN Security Council passed the Resolution 502. This document brought great consequences to Argentina, because it completely delegitimized its position and at the same legitimized Britain's actions necessary to restore sovereignty<sup>17</sup>.

This section has proved that the three main perceptions of the Argentinian Junta when they decided to adopt as course of action the invasion of the Falklands, were complete wrong, because Great Britain decided to respond, the US did not support the adopted course of action (for example by exercising his right of veto) and the international community present at the

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<sup>15</sup> Sir Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War-The Falklands Conflict of 1982* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1991), 81.

<sup>16</sup> David A. Welch, "Remember the Falklands? Missed Lessons of a Misunderstood War", *International Journal*, Issue 3 (Summer 1997): 493. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1290503675?pq-origsite=summon>

<sup>17</sup> Sir Lawrence Friedman, "The Impact of the Falklands Conflict on International Affairs", in *The Falklands Conflict Twenty Years On – Lessons for the Future* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

UNSC – although some countries supported the Argentinian position – finally approved Resolution 502. But some months before the invasion, Admiral Anaya, based on the wrong assumptions described in this part, and without having done any validation during the strategic planning process, ordered the generation of the plan at the operational level.

## **PART TWO – PREPARING THE ROAD TO DEFEAT**

The Junta, having made the analysis of the possible courses of action to solve the Malvinas issue, and by keeping in mind the wrong assumptions described in part one, decided to recapture the Islands through a military invasion. Now the strategic level needed to order the beginning of the planning process.

This part of the essay will prove that the plan used by the Argentine forces to carry out the invasion was incomplete and obliged them to improvise the defence of the islands, mainly because it was based on the strategic wrong assumption that the UK was not going to respond to a military invasion of the Falklands.

### **The strategic mistake that affected the operational level:**

During a meeting held in Puerto Belgrano at the end of 1981 between Admiral Anaya and the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) of the Argentine Navy, Vice-Admiral Juan Lombardo, the latter officer was ordered to lead the plan intended to recapture the Falklands. A better guidance from the strategic level, through realistic assumptions, could have allowed the Argentine operational level to plan not only for an invasion of the Falklands, but also for a joint defence of the islands in case of a British response.

The order received by Admiral Lombardo generally asked to elaborate a plan to retake the islands, but not necessarily to retain them. His thoughts regarding this task were detailed by military historian Martin Middlebrook in his book *The Fight for the “Malvinas”, The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War*:

...Vice-Admiral Lombardo soon decided that he needed some clarifications of his orders. One point that emerges from his description of the next moves is that Admiral Anaya, at least at this time, was not necessarily determined upon the *retention* of the Falklands...<sup>18</sup>

Later on in the the same book, the personal actions taken by Lombardo to clarify his instructions were described as follows:

...Soon after receiving my first order, I flew to Buenos Aires to meet Admiral Anaya again and ask for clarification. I set out my questions in a handwritten document to make sure they were “on the record”... Was the intention to take and keep the islands, or take them and then hand them over to someone else, and, if so, would this be an Argentine force or a world force, that is the United Nations?<sup>19</sup>

The answer received from Anaya was very clear, “to plan a take-over; but not to prepare the defence of the islands afterwards”.<sup>20</sup> Having received the required answers, Admiral Lombardo went back to the Navy headquarter in Puerto Belgrano with the aim to organize his planning cell. He described that the three senior officers of the group asked him the same questions previously discussed with Anaya, so he took a decision again:

...I started talks with those three, and they all asked the same or similar questions. So I went back to Buenos Aires to insist...He [Admiral Anaya] repeated that it was a Navy task – to take over the Malvinas [not to keep them]; what followed was for the junta to decide. They [the planning cell] did not think that there would be a military reaction by the British.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The Fight for the “Malvinas”, The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War* (London: Viking, 1989), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p4.

This sets the scene for the coming problem, because if the strategic level (in this case Admiral Anaya) was consulted twice about the validity of an assumption, the minimum action that should have been taken at the time was to use all available resources (for example intensify intelligence gathering) to better define it, and later to provide the planners with more elaborated guidance. Instead of this, the junta kept its position and the plan to retake but not to defend began to be drafted.

But maybe the greatest problem related to this situation was not only that the operational planning process was ordered to be conducted on the basis of a wrong assumption, but also that the Junta's misperception lasted almost up to when the British response was imminent. This was very well explained by Professor Douglas N. Hime from the Joint Military Operations Department of the United States Naval War College. In his *1982 Falklands-Malvinas Case Study*, he summarized a post-conflict interview made to Admiral Lombardo on this subject:

...They [the Junta] couldn't believe it. It seemed impossible that the British would go to so much trouble, to mobilize so many ships and modify so many merchant ships and liners over such a place as the Malvinas. For example, when [General] Menendez was put in charge of the Malvinas with a large party of senior officers and politicians [politicians], no one told him that it would be his task to defend the Malvinas. I<sup>22</sup> sent him a message on 8 April, telling him I was coming to see what he was doing in the military sense. Menendez said: "What the hell are you talking about?" His only problems until then had been to look after the kelpers [Falkland's habitats].<sup>23</sup>

The above written summary constitutes a proof that the plan elaborated at the Argentine operational level was complete based on the strategic level's incorrect assumption that Great Britain was not going to respond to an aggression. Admiral Lombardo and his subordinates, all

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<sup>22</sup> After the invasion Vice-Admiral Lombardo became the Commander, South Atlantic Theater of Operations.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas N. Hime, *The 1982 Falklands-Malvinas case Study*, United States Naval War College Joint Military Operations Department NWC 1036 (June 5, 2010), 14.

senior officers, tried on two occasions to clarify a situation that in their understanding and experience appeared illogical, but Admiral Anaya kept on with his obstinate position.

With all this evidence, we can conclude that the final operational plan to retake the Malvinas, according to the strategic wrong guidance, considered only the military invasion, and the settlement of a Governor. Soon the doubts from the operational level were going to be answered, because the British government of Margaret Thatcher sent a task force. Now a complete part of the Argentine plan was missing.

### **Improvising the actions that should have been planned before:**

The Argentine operational level found itself in a great problem, with no prepared actions to counteract the British. This part of the essay will focus only on the main defence actions improvised by the Army, Navy and Air Force, because they contribute to demonstrate that the wrong strategic guidance, defeated the appropriate preparation of a joint campaign.

The three Argentine services carried out independent actions and according to improvised actions, which never allowed them to hit the British center of gravity (COG) for the campaign. A good analysis of the British COG was made by Dr. Milan Vego, theorist and academic in operational planning. In his book *Operational Warfare at Sea: Theory and Practice*, he wrote:

...In the Falklands/Malvinas conflict of 1982, the proper operational centre of gravity for the Argentines, prior to the British landing on the Falklands, was the two British carrier forces (Hermes, Invincible). Without these carriers and accompanying escorts, the British could not have landed...The troops and equipment could be replaced relatively quickly, but not the aircraft carriers. After the landing, the British 3 Commando Brigade (despite its relatively small size) was the proper operational center of gravity for the Argentine defenders.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Milan Vego (PhD), *Operational Warfare at Sea, Theory and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 131.

The first service that had a concrete opportunity to hit the carriers was the Argentine Navy (ARA) early in May 1982, but the attack failed due to weather conditions<sup>25</sup>. After this attempt the Argentine Cruiser *Belgrano* was attacked and sank by HMS *Conqueror*, which caused a reaction that proved the ARA had no plans and was improvising. Admiral Anaya ordered to Lombardo<sup>26</sup> to retrieve the Navy back to safe waters. This was described by Robert L. Scheina in his book *Latin America – A Naval History 1810-1987*:

... This [the sinking of the *Belgrano*] and the belief that Great Britain possessed reconnaissance intelligence from U.S. satellites and aircraft [was never neither proven nor investigated], convinced the Argentine navy of the wisdom of retiring to secure coastal waters. The carrier's aircraft deployed to southern naval bases where they could be used in the fighting for the Malvinas.<sup>27</sup>

The Army also began its improvisation of the defence, because they never put in the necessary means to defeat the British landings up front. At the end of the war, it was calculated that Argentina used only the 50% of its Army.<sup>28</sup> This was not the good way to solve one of Menendez's<sup>29</sup> major problems for the defence, which was the insufficient number of troops to cover all possible landing places. The situation was described by the lecturer in security studies from the University of Hull, Dr. Paul Robinson:

... The Argentine considered Port Stanley to be their centre of gravity... If they could hold Stanley, even they lost the rest of the Falklands/Malvinas, they would be in a position to make British negotiate. Early reconnaissance of the islands showed that there were too many possible landing sites for them to defend, so Menendez decided to concentrate his

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The Falklands War 1982* (London: Penguin, 2001), 142-145.

<sup>26</sup> It is important also to note that the order was issued by the Chief of the Navy to the Theater Commander, what finally let the latter without the possibility to use the remaining navy means (many) in a maritime theatre.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Schiena, *Latin America: A Naval History 1810-1987* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 253.

<sup>28</sup> Francisco Fernando de Santibañez, "The Effectiveness of Military Governments during War: The Case of Argentina in the Malvinas" *Armed Forces & Society* Volume 33 (July 2007): 624.  
<http://afs.sagepub.com/content/33/4/612>

<sup>29</sup> As it was viewed before, General Mario Benjamin Menendez was appointed first as Argentine Governor in Malvinas, but later when the British military reaction was imminent, he was tasked also to command the defence of the islands.

forces around Stanley and let the British come to him. He believed that the British would attempt to attack Stanley directly from the sea, so the landing at San Carlos and subsequent march overland took him entirely by surprise.<sup>30</sup>

The way the Argentine Air Force conducted their operations, serve both as counterargument to the improvisation showed by the Army and Navy and at the same time continue demonstrating that it was not correctly included as an integral part of the campaign. The air force succeeded in inflicting a great damage to British fleet and avoiding the adversary to achieve air superiority, but also never hit the COG.<sup>31</sup> Earl H. Tilford wrote in the book *Military Lessons of the Falkland Island War*:

Argentina [Air Force] adopted a simple strategy: destroy British ships. Bombing and strafing troops after they came ashore would seem appealing given the lack of natural cover on the islands... The best way to stop the invasion was to sink the ships in the hope of either killing the troops before they went ashore... The attacks on the fleet proved costly... The Argentine Air Force and Navy [only naval aviation] scored some impressive victories in their attacks on the fleet.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time the Air Force was showing good results, some great limitations coming from the lack of planning began to impact their assets' performance. The main limitation was described by Dr. Scot Macdonald in his paper *The Falklands Campaign: The British Reconquest and the Argentine Defense*:

... The major factor in the British victory in the air was the distances the Argentine's had to fly to engage their enemy... The Argentines could have negated the range factor in any of a number of ways. Port Stanley's 4,000 foot runway could have served as forward base. However the runway was too short for the best aircraft in the Argentine inventory... Argentina had the steel mating, as well as the ships and planes to carry the

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Paul Robinson, *The Falklands/Malvinas War* (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2001): A-10/21.

<sup>31</sup> Alastair Finlan, *The Royal Navy in the Falklands Conflict and the Gulf War: Culture and Strategy* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2004): 90.

<sup>32</sup> Earl H. Tilford, Jr., "Air Power Lessons", in *Military Lessons of the Falkland Islands War – Views from the United States* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press; London : Arms and Amour Press, 1984): 44.



matting to the Falklands to lengthen the Port Stanley airstrip to accommodate Mirages and Skyhawks, but they did not carry out the improvements<sup>33</sup>.

As it was proved before, after the British decided to come, Argentine forces were obliged to improvise rapid actions, because the plan was not complete. As a consequence of the bad strategic assumption, the forces were left to improvisation and the results were also evident. The Navy, after a short participation in early May went back to safe waters and did not participate as part of the defence; the Army did not possess the quantity of means to perform the last line of defence; and, the Air Force although it achieved some good results during the actions, never reached the flexibility to carry on more precise operations due to the obligation to operate from the mainland, instead of from a forward position.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has analyzed the misperceptions the Argentine Junta de Gobierno had at the time they decided to retake the Malvinas from the British, and how they were passed to operational level as assumptions to base the planning process for the invasion.

In the first part of the paper the perceptions of the Argentine strategic level were analyzed, considering the possible reaction of the UK in case of being invaded, the attitude of the US in case of adopting the military course of action to recover the islands, and the expected support from the international community through the UN. Finally, in part two, the impact of the strategic assumptions on the operational plan were examined, mainly the evaluation of the UK's reaction toward the invasion of the Falklands by the Argentine forces.

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<sup>33</sup> Scot Macdonald, "The Falklands Campaign: The British Reconquest and the Argentine Defense," *Marine Corps Gazette Volume 84* (March 2000): 73. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/221497423?pq-origsite=summon>.

It was demonstrated that the analyzed perceptions of the Junta were completely wrong, because the US did not support the Argentine actions to retake the islands, and the international community also voted for approving UNSC Resolution 502, which delegitimized the invasion and gave legitimacy to the UK's actions to expel the aggressors. But the utterly wrong strategic perception that Great Britain would not react to recover the islands, later passed as a planning assumption to the operational level, proved to be catastrophic. Due to the strategic level's persistent obstinacy on this assumption, the plan to recapture the island only considered the military actions to take the Malvinas, but not to retain them in case of a British reaction.

Finally, the main reason for the Argentine defeat in the Falklands War, was the wrong guidance of the strategic level, which obliged the operational level to improvise a defence against a determined and more powerful adversary. If David had known that Goliath was coming, his preparation could have been much better, but this time the legend changed. The giant finally crushed the simple human.

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