

regional common market project for the Southern Cone of South America, and began a process of military cuts which reduced the perception of Argentina as an erratic and disruptive player in inter-American diplomacy.

Especially dramatic in all this were the moves to abandon the nuclear rivalry with Brazil, a troubling element of their relationship since the 1960s or even before. In moves which all observers could see as real confidence building, Buenos Aires first cut back the national nuclear energy programme, especially its dubious military components, entered into direct talks with Brasilia on how to make the two national programmes unthreatening, and eventually expanded those to mutual high-level visits to installations, and exchanges of information and personnel. The two countries moved steadily towards close cooperation in the nuclear field instead of direct confrontation and rivalry with an eventual wide-ranging accord on an actual inspection regime as the goal. This effort was seen as a means to take the nuclear field from being a source of lack of confidence to one of actually building confidence and there is little doubt that it worked very well indeed.

These positive trends were well to the fore in the foreign policy of the Alfonsín government but they, like most other elements of that president's approach, could not be sustained during the long agony of that government ending only with the election of President Menem in 1989. Nonetheless the advantages of a cooperative route to better international relations for Argentina were not lost on a public well disposed to more radical approaches to foreign and domestic policy than in the past. In that sense, and in the midst of a dramatic fall in the national economy's performance, confidence building with the UK found more room for acceptance than might have been imagined only a few months earlier. While particularly painful for nationalist and military circles, such a policy still won the day and thus produced the context for the first real moves towards a more open dialogue with London.

Outstanding Issues at the End of the 1980s

Seven years after the war none of the major issues left outstanding at the end of conflict had in fact been resolved. London was fresh from an impressive military victory which had in practical terms reinforced massively the British position on the future of the islands and no British government was in the slightest likely to entertain major changes on sovereignty over them. At the same time, no government in Buenos Aires could afford to be seen as favouring a significant change in the traditional Argentine position bringing it more into line with political reality as it then was. Thus little movement could be expected on matters of sovereignty, the crux of the dispute, and indeed none of substance was obtained.

Outstanding issues related to, and complicating further, the sovereignty dispute were nonetheless to the fore over these years. The war was of course not formally over. Fighting had ceased but the Argentine government was not firm enough in its footing to admit publicly defeat and an end to the military option as a means to recover the islands. Despite the blow to nationalist and military influence in the country dealt by defeat in the war, the Alfonsín government was simply not