

To some extent this assessment was accurate. The bulk of the international community greeted the return of democracy in Argentina with undisguised pleasure and extended a warm welcome to the new government. London in particular was happy to see another democratic government in Buenos Aires and hoped that it would be less nationalistic and obsessed with the Falklands issue. First signs were positive as Argentina slowed the acquisition of weapons and equipment programme with which it was attempting to make up for the serious losses incurred in the 1982 war. The defence budget was also cut in what was to become a major decline in national defence potential over the long run. In addition, the direction of the nuclear energy programme of the country, in the past always in the hands of a military officer, was now given to a civilian. Finally, some 26 generals, 16 admirals and three air force senior officers were retired. Things seemed to be changing with considerable speed and in the direction of a new and more peaceable Argentine approach to foreign affairs.

There was to prove to be little of this reflected on the issue of the Falklands. Alfonsín, under pressure not to appear soft on the sovereignty issue, announced that no negotiations of the islands could be undertaken without the question of sovereignty being solidly on the table. At the same time, like Bignone before him, Alfonsín refused to formally end the war until real negotiations were under way. Adopting a multilateral approach, Buenos Aires began a serious campaign to muster international support for a policy aimed at forcing the British to negotiate on the sovereignty issue. At the Organization of American States, and in the United Nations, Argentine diplomats were always to keep the Falklands issue alive and press for anti-British collective positions. This resulted in some pro-Argentine resolutions here and there but little else.

The British were of course in no mood to be pressured. Having just conducted a tremendously successful military campaign, and having enjoyed widespread international support, London would not hear of discussions of sovereignty of islands which had just cost over two hundred British lives, and much treasure, to defend. Nor was international pressure at any stage a serious concern for London.¹⁰ Even pressure from Argentina itself was reduced when in October 1983 all Argentina political parties agreed that there could be no use of force to recover the islands and that a contact group of nations should help to get negotiations started in earnest to resolve the matter. Thus the military threat was largely removed, a state of affairs of course reinforced by the steady decline in Argentine military power over this period.

The British nonetheless offered in February 1984 to begin talks but with a clear understanding that discussions of the sovereignty of the islands was out of the question. Argentina therefore refused despite the deepening economic crisis in the country and the widespread desire to normalize relations with the European Community and the rest of the world. Some informal and even formal talks between the two governments did occur in 1984 and 1985, stimulated by growing grants of oil concessions in the Falklands area by the British, and the refusal of Buenos Aires to

¹⁰ Roberto Russell, "Argentina: una nueva política exterior?", in Heraldo Muñoz (ed). *El Desafío de los '90: anuario de políticas exteriores latinoamericanas 1989-90* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1990), pp. 15-29.