

## Britain and Argentina

opened up new possibilities for direct Soviet involvement. However, the USSR has little to gain and much to lose by so committing itself deeper to the region's convoluted politics, beyond their present Cuban association. If ever there were advantages to its own professed ideological differences with the two ardently anti-communist protagonists of the war, the time is now. In reality, the Soviet Union could no more afford to intervene directly on behalf of Argentina than it could on the part of Great Britain, without incurring a heavy political and military liability. Nor could such a move offer tangible prospects with regard to strengthening its already substantial economic exchange with Argentina.

Therefore, we might expect the USSR to do little, if anything at all. It need simply wait on the sidelines (as in the present case it did) while its declared adversaries go to pieces. In this sense we can see that the present US policies in the region have the potential of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. From a Cold War perspective, Soviet influence could only increase, by default, if by nothing else. Indeed, for the people in the Kremlin to interfere directly in dismantling the Western collective, when the latter's own various components were efficiently carrying out the task independently, would have been sheer lunacy. The Soviet Union has enough in its immediate sphere of influence without committing itself to this kind of situation.

### Vortex effect

This is not to say that both superpowers might not have inadvertently been pulled into the conflict, had it begun to spread to other nations. In that event, it would have been difficult for either major power to remain unaffected. As noted, the US became directly implicated, albeit reluctantly. Stripped of its regional policing powers, Washington became unable to maintain Pax Americana. The entire conflict-management system, superintended by Washington since the Second World War, was suddenly thrown into disarray. And in all likelihood, it will remain this way for a good deal of time. As a result, a relic from the past — the underlying balance of power system among South American nations, which has the distinct potential for multiplying and accelerating conflicts — has resurfaced. Given existing historical tensions between Argentina and Chile, Chile and Peru, Peru and Ecuador, Ecuador and Colombia and Colombia and Venezuela, not to mention Argentina and Brazil, there is a possibility of a South American-style August 1914 situation developing. Not only a reemergence of the hostilities could bring a spreading war, but local conflicts could proliferate and extend on a continental basis (e.g., the Beagle Channel dispute between Argentina and Chile and the old rivalries between Argentina and Brazil).

Considering the conditions of modern warfare, communications and alliances, such a conflict could produce an unfathomably destructive vortex, a regional firestorm into which outsiders would unavoidably be drawn. Obviously, none of this has passed beyond the realm of speculation. Even so, there is a very real potential for widening, all-encompassing violence developing as a backlash of the Falklands episode. At a minimum, the Argentinian fiasco may well bring about a push for rearming that country, thus throwing the continent into a dangerous arms race.

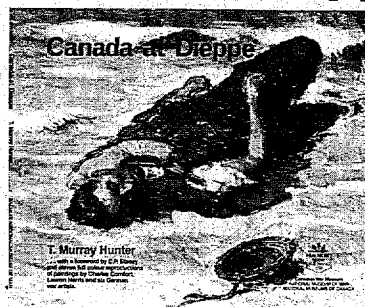
What makes this alternative all the more foreboding is the fact that various Argentinian governments, dating back

to Peron in the forties, have been actively looking to the nuclear option. Since the mid-1970s, the country has had the capability of producing — though not delivering — at least one nominal plutonium bomb per year. The peaceful export of nuclear technology from Western Europe, primarily West Germany, and recently, from Canada, has abetted this capacity. Not being a signatory to the Tlatelolco Treaty of denuclearization in Latin America, and having stated intentions to follow the nuclear road, a similar "small war" such as the South Atlantic crisis, could — time and circumstances permitting — hold one of the keys to Pandora's box . . .

It is not presently known whether or not Argentina actually possesses an operational nuclear device. However, given its domestic and international conduct, even the remote possibility of this is disconcerting. Equally alarming, is the recent international behavior of its extraordinarily well-armed British adversary, engaged in the kind of macho-style politics normally associated with caricatures of Latin American generals. Indeed, the activities of the Thatcher government seems to indicate that not only "war is the extension of diplomacy by other means," but the extension of war means the eradication of diplomacy.

Like the labyrinths of time of modern Latin American writers, history seems to be full of twists and paradoxes. When Britain invaded Buenos Aires in 1806, she was not intent on bringing about the downfall of the Spanish Empire in Latin America. In so doing, however, she set in motion a chain of events that culminated in Ayacucho in 1824, with the emergence of the Latin American republics. It is possible that, once again and inadvertently, Britain may have provided the spark for a process whose implications may be far-reaching. □

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