

The new government of General Reynaldo Bignone held on for another year negotiating a withdrawal from government with as much face saved as possible. Despite the massive return of prisoners of war by the British, the government could not formally terminate the conflict for fear of a major backlash in public opinion. Thus the war did not come to a complete end complicating the post-conflict scene for both countries especially in terms of terminating the boycotts and embargoes placed on Argentina by Commonwealth and European countries.

At the same time the economic situation in the country worsened steadily. Inflation rose sharply and the international debt situation became critical, not least because of the costs of the war itself.⁸ The armed forces were meanwhile in a state of total crisis with mutual recriminations about who lost the war the rule among services with a long history of rivalries of the most dramatic kind. The main political parties in the country, not without their own responsibilities both for the dirty war and the Falklands adventure, at the same time called for elections soon while hoping the military could move forward on the economic front before handing over power, thus saving the civilian politicians from unpopular measures and blame for the overall state of the economy.

The situation in the United Kingdom was of course quite different. After many years of marked decline, the country had reasserted itself in dramatic fashion, proving the strength of its political leadership, the continued pluck of its people, and the efficiency of its armed forces. The Thatcher government basked in the glory of military triumph and diplomatic success. The economy continued to move forward. And popular support for the 'Iron Lady' reached new heights. The Conservatives went on to win the next election handsomely, although the role of the Falklands victory in deciding the electoral behaviour of the population has probably been exaggerated.⁹

The Alfonsín Government and the Falklands: 1983-1989

The general strikes, mass marches and overall general pressure on the military government resulted in elections and a return to civilian government in 1983. The last months of the military government, harassed on all sides, saw little attention given to international relations in general or to the Falklands situation in particular. The new government of Raul Alfonsín came to power with enormous legitimacy in a country long accustomed to military rule but with strong democratic aspirations. Counting on this status the foreign policy of the new government emphasized that the nation's isolation from the rest of the world was exclusively the responsibility of the military regime and that the new democratic government should logically find a welcoming international context in which to work.

⁸ José Luis Machinea, "Stabilization under Alfonsín", in Colin Lewis and Nissa Torrents (eds), *Argentina in the Crisis Years 1983-1990* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1993), pp. 124-43.

⁹ Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 100-4.