

the two sides to the negotiating table again.⁴

The Chilean dimension of the Falklands crisis of 1982 is an important part of the whole story. In 1979 the government of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher took power in the United Kingdom. Its policy was very much Eurocentric and small holdovers from imperial days held little clout among the priorities of the day. This appeared to the government in Buenos Aires as a promising sign for progress on the Falklands sovereignty issue. Further discussions proved, however, that the issues remained intractable with the islanders wanting nothing to do with rule from Buenos Aires, the Argentines determined on major immediate steps towards what they saw as the *return* of the islands, and London unwilling to move far in directions which it knew that Falklanders would reject.

The situation in Buenos Aires continued to evolve. The internal politics of the military *junta* were such that by late 1981, it was important to have a major international victory to shore up armed forces prestige and consolidate the power of the new president army general Leopoldo Galtieri. Only the two sets of islands offered real options here. If the Beagle Islands could be seized and held the government could claim victory on a major scale. If the Falklands could be 'recovered,' there would be little less than jubilation at home and enormous credit to the military officers who had reversed what was about to be a century and a half of perceived humiliation at the hands of British imperialism.

The continued failure to find a solution to the Beagle Islands issue frustrated officers of the armed forces, especially the Army, many of whom had been deeply disappointed by the calling off of the offensive against Chile three years earlier. While some still wished to settle accounts with Chile, most were prepared to accept victory in the Falklands instead. Optimism was dominant among military planners at the time, long at work on contingency plans, with the armed forces certain that even if both the Chilean and Falklands crises came to a head at the same time, Argentine military strength could stand the test and emerge victorious.⁵ There was open talk in the press for months before the actual invasion with speculation of conflict with both Britain and Chile. In general, it was felt that the Falklands would prove less costly an enterprise than anything over the Beagles.⁶

Over the months before April events moved quickly. Argentina became ever more frustrated with what it viewed as British obstructionism on the Falklands issue as bilateral talks led again to nothing concrete. The decision was taken to invade the islands and its dependency of South Georgia on 2 April and this was successfully done by a large combined task force spearheaded by Argentine Marine Commandos in the early morning of that day. Against the overwhelming Argentine force

⁴ The story is well told in Bruno Passarelli, *El Delirio armado: la guerra Argentina-Chile que evitó el papa* (Buenos Aires, Sudamericano, 1998).

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 172, 211, 214.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 218.