

kind of ally, as are Argentina and Chile in the Southern Cone.

But it is one thing to prop up small neo-fascist dependent regimes in Central America. It could be quite another to nurture similarly-inclined sub-paramount powers such as Argentina (and Brazil, Chile, South Korea, Palhevi's Iran). The former small countries may never develop the capacity to wreak genocide far beyond their immediate borders. The latter, on the other hand, may in time achieve this capability, and the will to do so. Nourished by a continuous flow of economic, military and technological assistance (ironically for the preservation of "stability") it is not inconceivable that such regimes may ultimately turn their military and plutonic energies outward. What then of global "stability?"

### **The Internationalization of national problems**

This takes us to the second level of our analysis: the extent to which national conflicts can be transferred to the international arena. As two world wars have dramatically illustrated, there is a tendency for economic crises and social strife to be "solved" by incumbent governments through the flexing of international muscles. Nothing reveals more starkly the contradiction between the abstract "public interest" and the concrete interests of the public. While governments orchestrate campaigns of popular outrage against external foes, internal domestic problems can be obscured and forgotten. Facts are distorted, social reforms are sidetracked. Only in retrospect does it sometimes become clear that populations have been aroused in defence of a proclaimed "national interest" which in fact bears little resemblance to their own. Rather what has been primarily at stake are the positions and prestige of those already in power. Argentina and Britain are contemporary cases in point; two more poignant examples of the national "need" for the occasional "limited war" would be difficult to find.

In Argentina, scarcely two weeks before the invasion, General Galtieri was facing a resurgence of public demonstrations against the regime, despite the pervasive atmosphere of fear in the country. Not only was the junta saddled with one of the worst human rights records in Latin America, its economic performance, as seen by double-digit unemployment and triple-digit inflation, had also proven disastrous. Moreover, on top of widespread civilian unrest, the legitimacy of the regime was in question even among the armed forces, following the coup which overthrew the preordained successor to General Jorge Videla, Army General Viola. Under these circumstances, the regime's adventurism appears as a risky, but calculated, gamble not only to increase its prestige, but to ensure its very survival. And the move did in fact create a sense of national unity and purpose by focussing public attention on the one issue in Argentine politics upon which the whole nation is in apparent agreement: the historical claim of sovereignty over the Malvinas.

The British government for its part, obvious differences with the Junta notwithstanding, found itself in a markedly similar predicament. Although the broader political outcomes of the whole affair are as yet open, the Argentinian move clearly dealt a severe blow to a shaky and highly controversial political adventure. At the time of the invasion, the Thatcher government was already beleaguered by recession, high unemployment and the

myriad of social ills and tensions associated with its generally unsuccessful domestic program. It is hardly surprising then, that the government would leap at the external diversion. As in the Argentinian case, the opportunity to rally around the flag and transform a liability into an asset proved an irresistible temptation. Indeed, the hawkish response was not only in keeping with Prime Minister Thatcher's own "iron" image; her cabinet's seeming obsession with preserving that appearance left little alternative. If sending the fleet was an over-reaction, it did serve to soothe domestic discontent by playing an old British tune. The problem is that for both contenders, confrontation



Frances Hallinan

simultaneously became a "zero-sum," all-win-or-lose situation, with the very political survival of those in power at stake.

### **War psychology: masses and elite ideology**

This brings us to the third factor of the crisis: the subtle but important psycho-cultural aspect of international conflicts. On the one hand, there is the issue of mass psychology — the profound sense of social frustration and anxiety resulting from a protracted socio-economic malaise. For Britain, the retreat from Empire has been a forced, often traumatic, experience — witness Northern Ireland, even today. In many respects, the post-war disintegration of old colonial structures has chipped away at the very essence of traditional British pride. This process inexorably undermined that deeply-instilled national assurance which, only a short time ago, was unabashedly equated with imperial rule. The psychological blow this has dealt has not been