

CONFIDENTIAL

Box 1
from Alfred

Politics and war in the Falklands: after South Georgia

26 April 1982

(You may not find this all new, but it may have useful formulations)

"This is no time to be mealy-mouthed" Sir Keith Joseph
Upminster 1974.

We are not out of the wood yet

There are many forces abroad whose interests do not coincide with Britain's. There are many forces at home (not least inside our party) whose interests do not coincide with the present Prime Minister's. To a greater or lesser extent, they find common cause, some consciously, others spontaneously. The more subtle, the more dangerous; the more innocent, the more guilty.

The sailing of our Fleet to the South Atlantic was a blow to them. They could not prevent its sailing. So long as our military activity maintains a momentum of its own, they are in a difficult position. But they will not give up hope. If the military action loses its momentum, their opportunities will recur.

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As Bismarck said, you can do almost anything with bayonets except sit on them. Our military credibility is based on assessment of our military potential and our political will. Our potential is widely, though by no means universally, recognised. Our political will is subject to more varied interpretations. It is also subject to pressures.

So long as the Fleet is doing something, its credibility grows. The moment the Fleet becomes passive, its credibility begins to decline, while its vulnerability to mishap (storms, aircraft, submarines, distance from bases, morale, battle-fitness, illness) and to political pressures grows, at home and abroad.

The "Save-Galtieri Lobby" in Washington

Powerful forces in the USA are committed to saving General Galtieri, for a variety of reasons, not necessarily consistent. Some are motivated by neo-isolationism, thinly disguised as "hemispherism" or regionalism. (The hemispheric thesis lacks intellectual validity, but so far no one has troubled to demolish it.)

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(Some are former allies of ours, like Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who allowed herself to become too embattled and hence one-sided, but also developed a strong personal dislike of Parsons and his coterie, who were beastly towards her personally and politically from all the wrong reasons, and helped shift her into a false position.)

Can both Galtieri and Thatcher survive?

It seems to me most unlikely that an agreement satisfactory to Britain, and to the present Prime Minister's national popularity, could also safeguard Galtieri's position - which has never been strong in any case, hence his Falklands adventure in the first place.

So it is not fanciful to see a choice between the present Prime Minister's survival (over months at best) and General Galtieri's (over weeks at best).

Haig, among others, has strong personal-political reasons for giving paramountcy to Galtieri's survival, since the Secretary of State's personal reputation is at stake. If the eventual result is one which would have occurred without his intervention, he will be one down, so he must try to exact concessions from London.

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We cannot rely on countervailing forces in the USA
acting spontaneously in the opposite direction, even
though potentially they outweigh Haig and his allies.

* It would deter his successors from nailing their
colours to the Falklands mast. (You may argue that
his immediate successor might well justify his coup
by claiming that Galtieri was too weak. But one
dictator more is a short episode in Argentine history.
The lesson would not be lost.)

* It would induce a period of confusion, during which
international and internal pressures on Britain to
be "reasonable" would be muted, long enough to permit
mopping up to proceed unhindered.

Pour encourager les Autres

* When Argentine dictators come to see that they
stand to lose more than to gain by raising the Falklands
issue, they can be relied on to find means of dropping
it; that is what politicians are for.

Lest I be misunderstood. It is not a matter of force
being needed to overthrow Galtieri. There is no
hard and fast line between the threat of force and
its use (viz assault and battery). It is a question
of how far the Fleet can remain inactive without

either losing credibility, finding itself drawn into conflict under conditions, or on ground, not of its own choosing, or alternatively, vulnerable to disasters, which might not necessarily be on a large scale, but could have disproportionate political effects at home.

But this is another way of saying that our military superiority in the South Atlantic is not unconditional, not just measurable by a ready-reckoner of equipment and manpower. Intentions, political will, are inextricable elements.

On whose side is Time?

Under these circumstances, time is on the side of whoever makes best use of it. Haig will work to bring pressures to bear internationally and inside Britain. The more the US is seen to be "leaning" on the Argentines to make "concessions" (ie to reduce their gratuitous demands) the greater the automatic and apparently reasonable pressures on Britain to respond. Both Foot and especially Steel will be only too ready to join in the hue and cry against the present Prime Minister's "inflexibility".

It behoves Britain, therefore, to forestall such pressures by creating new situations which preempt them, by use of superior force while it remains in a position to do so, physically and politically.

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Naturally, this must always be seen to be reasonable, and indeed in the interests of the situation and of the Argentines themselves. The landing on South Georgia is well received, particularly since it is out of reach of land-based Argentine aircraft, hence less liable to create incidents.

Next Steps

It follows that a next step should be to request the Argentines to move their land-based aircraft out of the Southern airbases, to avoid dangers of unintentional clashes, since they now claim to be technically at war with us. If they refuse, the bases will be "neutralised" (ie taken out by the Vulcans). This would count as a limited action designed to avoid incidents which might escalate into general fighting.

If Galtieri agrees, he suffers a psychological shock, and the impetus of British military intervention continues. If he refuses, he suffers a physical shock.

The next step would be to announce extension of the zone of conflict, in order to avert unintentional sea battles, which might escalate. Galtieri would bear the onus of acceptance or refusal.

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As for letting the Argentines fire first, we should remember the fate of Maréchal Saxe, at the battle of Fontenoy, who out of courtesy, invited the enemy to fire first: "Après vous, Messieurs!" But there was no "après" for him; the enemy fired first with good effect.

The Overstrained UN

The next danger is that we shall be pressed to take the matter to the United Nations, ie Russia, Uganda, Ruanda, Venezuela, etc.

But it is in the UN's best interests that we should not do so. The UN is already overloaded with issues: Afghanistan; Iran-Iraq war and side conflicts arising from it; the Lebanon; Namibia; Cyprus. It would be irresponsible and selfish for us to dump another problem onto it when its political and administrative resources are overstrained. Far better a bi-lateral solution, however difficult to reach.

Words can mislead

Journalists and politicians keep parroting the phrase "a diplomatic rather than a military solution". This is misuse of words.

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* All solutions are finally concluded through diplomacy, whether or not the force used to "clear the market" is actual or merely potential, exerted,, threatened or implied.

As Clausewitz put it: every war is designed to end in a peace. The peace is then negotiated by diplomatic channels.

* All solutions must represent a balance of forces, if they are to be stable.

So long as the Argentinians have an exaggerated view of what they can achieve by force and clamour, the South-West Atlantic will not be pacifiable by diplomatic means alone.

end.