



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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DEPT OF STATE RM 7234A

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Falklands

May 5, 1982

TO: The Secretary
FROM: PA - Dean E. Fischer
SUBJECT: In Falklands Dispute, Americans Much More Sympathetic to Britain, But Overwhelmingly Favor Neutrality

Listening to the war of words between Argentina and Great Britain, Americans respond sympathetically to the British argument for self-determination by the Falkland Islanders, but not to the Argentine argument against British colonialism. Moreover, Americans react much more sympathetically to Britain's self-justification that it is repelling aggression than to Argentina's self-justification that the British have dragged their feet in negotiations.

All in all, a far larger proportion of the American public is sympathetic to the British than to the Argentines (60% vs 19%). Hispanics are also more pro-British than pro-Argentine (56% vs 27%). The overwhelming preference, however, is that the U.S. remain neutral in the war (83%), rather than help Britain (favored by 12%) or Argentina (favored by a mere 1%).

The public's predominantly pro-British sentiment probably disposes it to support Britain diplomatically and economically, but certainly not militarily.

These findings come from a Harris poll conducted April 16-22. Additional details about the poll are attached.

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Pro-British Arguments:

(1) "The British are right to insist that the people who live in the Falkland Islands should decide themselves which country they want to be ruled by -- Britain or Argentina."

All Groups Predominantly Sympathize with Britain

Harris found that all population groups -- including Hispanics -- sympathize more with Britain than Argentina over the Falkland Islands:

"Which side do you sympathize with more -- the British or the Argentinians?"

	<u>Total Public</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>
British	60%	56%
Argentinians	19	27
Neither, both (volunteered)	9	11
Not sure	12	6

Harris also asked his respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with each of several arguments regarding the Falkland Islands conflict and found a large majority accepted each of the pro-British arguments and rejected each of the pro-Argentine arguments:

Pro-Argentine Arguments:

- (1) "It is not right for England, a country in Western Europe, to have a colony in South America, 8,000 miles away."
- (2) "The Argentines were justified in taking over the Falkland Islands by force, because for over 100 years their claim that the islands belong to them has not been settled by negotiations with the British."

	(1) <u>British Colony in So. America Not Right</u>	(2) <u>Argentine Takeover Justified</u>
Agree	33%	28%
Disagree	59	62
Not sure	8	10

Pro-British Arguments:

- (1) "The British are right to insist that the people who live in the Falkland Islands should decide themselves which country they want to be ruled by -- Britain or Argentina."

(2) "The British are justified in sending a big fleet to retake the Falkland Islands, because the islands were seized by force through an illegal act of aggression."

	(1) Self-Determination by Falkland Islanders <u>Is Right</u>	(2) British Reaction <u>Justified</u>
Agree	84%	65%
Disagree	12	27
Not sure	4	8

But All Groups Overwhelmingly Favor U.S. Neutrality

About four-fifths of nearly every population group opt for U.S. neutrality in a war between Britain and Argentina. Harris asked this question:

"If war were to break out between Argentina and Great Britain -- and assuming that the U.S. would not actually fight in that war -- do you think the U.S. government should help Argentina, should help Britain, or should remain strictly neutral?"

Remain neutral	83%
Help Britain	12
Help Argentina	1
Not sure	4

An ABC poll taken in early April asked respondents whether the U.S. should "back Argentina or England" and did not offer a neutrality option. Nevertheless, a sizeable proportion -- 30 percent -- volunteered preference for neutrality, while 50 percent favored backing Britain and only 5 percent favored backing Argentina (see memorandum of April 27, 1982). These findings suggest that the public predominantly approves siding with Britain in the Falklands dispute short of direct U.S. military involvement.