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**Prospects for a Settlement of the
Falklands/Malvinas Dispute**

**An Analysis of Public Opinion in
Britain and Argentina***

by

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and

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INTRODUCTION

One of the research projects currently under way at the Institute is the monitoring of Anglo-Argentine relations after the 1982 war and the analysis of the protracted conflict over the South Atlantic islands, known in Buenos Aires as the "Malvinas" and in London as the "Falklands". [See an earlier product of this research in W. Little & C.R. Mitchell (eds) In the Aftermath, College Park, MD: University of Maryland Press, 1989.]

The original focus of our research was on the nature and causes of the conflict itself and on the efforts of the parties [the Argentines, the British and the Islanders] to rebuild relationships after the short, but violent war and to seek long term solutions to the fundamental issues in conflict. Recently, its focus has broadened to a more general consideration of alternative governance systems or "regimes" for small island communities and of innovative solutions for conflicts over such communities.

Whatever ingenious resolutions might be discussed or devised, however, there always remains the problem that options and agreements have to be "sold" to constituents and general publics, so that the process of arriving at a long term resolution of any conflict needs to take into account the barriers which public views and attitudes may [or may not] pose to policy changes. Accurate assessment of the "ripe moment" needs, therefore, to take into account both the flexibility or intransigence of public opinion as well as leaders' perception of their own room for maneuver within that range of opinion.

This present Occasional Paper throws considerable light on this issue by analysing the dynamics of public opinion in both Argentina and Britain in the period since the 1982 war. The Institute was fortunate that Dr. Noguera and Dr. Willetts were both interested in carrying out the survey they conducted in 1990 and agreeable to presenting their findings in both an Institute and in a South Atlantic Council Occasional Paper. We were able to support this work out of a grant from the Glad Foundation in New York. We would like to express appreciation to both researchers and to the Foundation for making the research and the publication of this paper possible.

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Director

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1. INTRODUCTION

A small group of islands in the South West Atlantic is known in the Spanish-speaking world as the Malvinas and in the English-speaking world as the Falkland Islands. They are nearly a thousand nautical miles from Buenos Aires, but less than two-hundred miles from the southern Argentine province of Tierra del Fuego. The temperate climate sustains an economy that used to be based on sheep farming. Since 1986, the main income has been derived from licensing international fishing fleets, in a Falkland Islands Interim Management and Conservation Zone (FICZ) covering the waters around the Islands.

There are just two thousand permanent inhabitants of British descent, with another thousand expatriate residents, consisting mainly of the British Army garrison at Mount Pleasant, plus small numbers of business people involved in the fishing industry and officials employed in government services. The Argentine government claims "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" by virtue of geography, history, and international law. It is argued that the Islands were a Spanish possession and that Argentina succeeded to the Spanish title until they were taken by the British by force in 1833. The British government claims that more than a century and a half of continuous, effective, peaceful control and the clear wishes of the inhabitants justify the Islands remaining British. The Argentine military dictatorship sought to end this dispute by an invasion of the Malvinas in April 1982, but were astonished to be faced with a British Task Force being sent to recapture the Falklands. The British victory in June 1982 concluded this stage of conflict for the immediate future, but the underlying issues still remain.

In the 1960's it appeared that Britain might transfer sovereignty over the Islands to Argentina. In 1964 Argentina brought its claim to the UN Special Committee on Colonialism

and in the following year the Committee's report placed the question before the General Assembly. The result was Resolution 2065 (XX) of 16 December 1965: it invited the two governments to negotiate "without delay", "bearing in mind ... the interests of the population of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)." The British only abstained on this resolution, so that it was passed unopposed, and then they proceeded to negotiate with the Argentinians. By August 1968 the two sides had agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding providing that "a final settlement will recognize Argentina's sovereignty over the Islands", "after four and within ten years." The combination of reactions from the Islanders, from Parliament and from the media led the British government to reject the Memorandum and Michael Stewart, then the Foreign Secretary, went as far as endorsing "the paramountcy of the Islanders' wishes." A similar process occurred in 1980 when negotiations between Britain and Argentina were moving towards the idea of a 'lease back' agreement. Under this proposal the British would have recognized Argentina's sovereignty claim, but the Argentinians would have agreed to allow the British to administer the Islands for a fixed period of years. (The British Foreign Office was envisaging a period of 99 years, whereas the Argentine Foreign Ministry wanted something nearer to five to ten years.) Again the Islanders' lobby and parliamentary opposition forced withdrawal of the compromise proposal.¹

After the cease-fire in 1982, a debate on the future of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands continued in many forums. At the official level the British government confidently assumed the continuation of the current status quo, while the Argentine government with equal confidence asserted its claim to sovereignty. The clash was most evident in the 1980's at the annual debates of the United Nations General Assembly and in the two mini-crises over the declaration of the

