



# بحوث بائععية

## RECHERCHES UNIVERSITAIRES ACADEMIC RESEARCH

عدء 11 - جانفب 2014

كلبة الآءاب و العلوم الالبابفة  
Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines

مبلة فكرفة فعن بقضايا الآءاب و العلوم الببببفة  
فءءر عن كلبفة الآءاب و العلوم الببببفة ببفاقس

### شارك فف هءا العءء

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- عماء الببببف
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- أءمء الببببب البببب
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ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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جامعة صفاقس  
كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بصفاقس

# بحوث جامعية

## مجلة أكاديمية محكمة

العدد 11 لسنة 2014



# مجلة بحوث جامعية

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- نور الدين الحاج	- منير التريكي
- عماد الحياني	- علي بن نصر
- الحبيب الجموسي	- محمد بن عياد
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- نافع فهري	- عقيلة السّلامي البقلوطي
- وفا الكشو	
- فتحي بورماش	



## شكر

تشكر إدارة "بحوث جامعة" جزيل الشكر الأساتذة الذين أسهموا في التحكيم بالنسبة إلى هذين العددين وهم :

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- نور الدين الفلاح
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- منير التريكي
- عقيلة البقلوطي



# The Falklands Crisis from Margaret Thatcher's Perspective during and after the War of 1982<sup>1</sup>

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## ملخص :

يتناول هذا البحث الطريقة التي توختها مارغريت تاتشر لمعالجة العدوان الأرجنتيني خلال الأزمة وبعدها. إن الاعتداء الأرجنتيني على جزر المالواين واسترجاع بريطانيا لها غيرا المشهد السياسي البريطاني وكذلك نفوذ تاتشر. إن فوز تاتشر في انتخابات سنة 1983، الذي يعود جزئيا إلى تعاملها مع تلك الأزمة، مكنها من تشكيل الخارطة الاجتماعية والسياسية في بريطانيا لمدة طويلة. الغاية من هذا البحث هو إبراز موقفين مختلفين اتخذتهما تاتشر : الأول أثناء الأزمة والثاني بعدها. وذلك من خلال مقارنة بين خمس خطابات ألقتها تاتشر أثناء الأزمة وبين ما دونته لاحقا في مذكراتها بخصوص الأزمة. أزعج أن تاتشر تعاملت مع أزمة المالواين بالطريقة التي أرادتتها كرئيسة وزراء في برلمان يغلب عليه العنصر الرجالي. لكن نظرتها لاحقا كانت مختلفة مثلها في ذلك كمثل كاتب يسرد أطوار فترة مهمة من تاريخ بريطانيا. وهذا من شأنه أن يدعو إلى إعادة الكتابة حول تلك الأزمة.

## Abstract

My paper is focused on the way Margaret Thatcher<sup>2</sup> reacted to the Argentine invasion during and after the crisis. The invasion and Britain's repossession of

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1- This paper was presented at an international conference on *Rewriting* organised by the English Department at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences, University of Jendouba, Tunisia, held on 13-14 April 2011.

2- Margaret Roberts, born on 13 October 1925 and married to businessman Denis Thatcher in 1951, was leader of the British Conservative Party from 1975 to 1990, British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990 and Baroness Thatcher (Member of the House of Lords) since 1992 (McNaylor, n.p.). Following her impressive speech, "Britain Awake" delivered in January 1976 at Kensington Town hall, Chelsea, *The Red Star*, a Russian newspaper nicknamed her The "Iron Lady" which stuck throughout her political career (<http://www.emersonkent.com>).



the Falkland Islands<sup>3</sup> transformed both the British political landscape and Thatcher's own authority. Thatcher's winning the 1983 British elections, partly due to her handling of the Falklands crisis, allowed her to shape the British socio-political scene for quite a long time. I seek to show that Thatcher used two different lenses to look at the Falklands crisis : one during the conflict and another sometime later. Five speeches<sup>4</sup> delivered during the crisis are juxtaposed to later statements in her memoirs *The Downing Street Years*. I shall argue that Thatcher handled the Falklands crisis in the way she had intended, as a female Prime Minister in a parliament dominated by men. But with hindsight she looked at the crisis from another perspective as a writer of a significant episode in Britain's history, implying that the whole event should be reconsidered or rewritten.

## 1. Background to the study

On 2 April 1982, the Falkland Islands were invaded by Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, President of Argentina (from 22 December 1981 to 18 June 1982), and the first target of the Argentine troops was to destroy the barracks of the Royal Marines at Moody Brook, two miles west of Stanley, the capital of the islands. Stanley was quickly captured, although Governor Hunt mobilised 80 Royal Marines and 20 volunteers from the Islands Defence Force, he could not stop the 5,000 troops from landing on the Islands and claiming sovereignty over them as the *Islas Malvinas*. At 4 p.m. (London time) the invasion was confirmed through an operator in Wales<sup>5</sup>. Lord Carrington, British Foreign Secretary and John Nott, British Minister of Defence, signalled the breakdown of diplomatic relations with Argentina and the readiness of a large task force to sail to the Atlantic (Hastings and Jenkins 76). Thatcher's government regained the Islands on 14 June after the surrender of the Argentine Military Junta.

The whole event has been tackled from different angles and perspectives, generating a bulk of studies dealing with various themes. Kinney, for instance in *National Interest, National Honor : The Diplomacy of the Falklands Crisis* (1989), Thornton in *The Falklands Sting : Reagan, Thatcher, and Argentina's Bomb* (1998) and Gough and

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3- The Falkland Islands are an archipelago in the South Atlantic and 8,000 miles away from Britain.

4- Details about the speeches are provided in the section on methodology.

5- Amazingly, Humphrey Atkins, Senior Foreign Office Minister in the House of Commons stated that there was no invasion as his department had communicated with Governor Hunt a few hours earlier (Hastings and Jenkins 76).

Morton, in *The Falkland Islands/Malvinas: The Contest for Empire in the South Atlantic* (1992), have focused on the war and its implications on Britain as well as Thatcher. Marwick in *Above All, Courage: The Falklands Front Line: First-hand Accounts* (1985) has particularly focused on the British Navy's performance and courage despite the long distance separating the Falkland Islands from the homeland. Calvert, in *The Falklands Crisis: The Rights and the Wrongs* (1982) and Cardoso and Kooy in *Falklands– The Secret Plot*, have dealt with reasons and legitimacy of the war.

But my study is carried out from a different angle, focusing on Thatcher's perspective during and after the war given the significance of Britain's victory, partly to the first lady Prime Minister, and partly to Britain. The first perspective pertains to her position as a female Prime Minister during the conflict; the second perspective pertains to her being a writer of a significant episode in Britain's history.

## **2. Methodology**

Anna Clark<sup>6</sup> argues that history is used by politicians in many ways. They “make history, as actors; they often write history, as diarists and in memoirs...Politicians use the past to demonstrate their own historical significance and their fidelity to national traditions” (120). My study is based on Clark's view, knowing that Thatcher played a significant role during the conflict by convincing the House to wage a war about 8,000 miles from Britain. Similarly, later in her memoirs, she devoted a large part to the whole event, shedding light on the significance of a victory to Britain's prestige. I shall seek to shed light on Thatcher's contribution, through this short conflict in the South Atlantic, to British history as well as Britain's image on the international scene.

Five of Thatcher's speeches are qualitatively analysed and juxtaposed to later statements in her memoirs. Indeed, Thatcher was a major actress during the Falklands war; her performance in the House of Commons, through the speeches she had delivered, was decisive in getting the support of almost everybody in Britain, regardless of war opponents, thus leading to a historical victory over Argentina. This

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6- Anna Clark is a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow in public history at the University of Technology, Sydney. For more details see <<http://uts.academia.edu>>.

achievement saved Thatcher's face from being marred, and therefore her political career. Later in *The Downing Street Years*, she looked at the crisis from a different perspective and used other lenses, arguing that "with the benefit of hindsight, we would always like to have acted differently" (177).

## **2.1 Research Objectives**

The aim of this paper is to show how Thatcher handled the Falkland crisis from two different perspectives, one during the conflict and another with hindsight. In this sense, from a historiography point of view, the whole event could be rewritten from other angles and perspectives by the same person who had been a major actress during the conflict and was later similar to a historian telling his first-hand accounts about the same event. I therefore seek to answer two research questions:

- 1) How did Thatcher react to the Falklands crisis during the conflict ?
- 2) How did she react to the conflict later in her memoirs ?

I shall argue that Thatcher dealt with the crisis in the way she had intended, as a female Prime Minister in a parliament dominated by men (17 female MPs in her first premiership), knowing that losing a vote on an important issue could be very costly to a prime minister; she or he would either resign or call for a general election, in both cases it would be the end of her or his political career. But in her memoirs, she took another stance, implying that the whole event should be reconsidered or rewritten.

## **2.2 Corpus Description**

My corpus consists of two parts, both of which are primary sources. The first part includes five speeches delivered in the House of Commons during the crisis. The first one was delivered on 3 April 1982, one day after the invasion. The second was delivered on 14 April, during the negotiations involving Alexander Haig, US Secretary of State. The third was delivered on 29 April, a date suggested by Michael Foot, Leader of the Labour Party, Her Majesty's Opposition. The fourth was delivered on 20 May, after Argentina's refusal of Thatcher's last proposals, containing, according to her, more concessions than before. The fifth was delivered on 15 June, one day after Argentina's surrender and British repossession of the islands. Two speeches (on 3 April and 20

May) were taken from Harris's *Margaret Thatcher : The Collected Speeches* and the other ones were downloaded from <http://www.margarethatcher.org>.

The second part includes two chapters from Thatcher's memoirs, *The Downing Street Years* which were devoted to the Falklands campaign: Chapter VII, "The Falklands War: Follow the Fleet. *The attempts by diplomacy and the sending of the task force to regain the Falkland Islands-to the end of April 1982.*" and Chapter VIII, "The Falklands: Victory. *The battle for the Falklands in May and June 1982.*"

### **3. Results and Analysis**

There are six major themes raised in Thatcher's speeches. The first one is *the Argentine aggression and the unexpected invasion*. The second theme is *British sovereignty over the islands*. The third theme is *protection of the islanders' wishes and rights*. The fourth theme is *peace negotiations, diplomacy and the military option*. The fifth theme is *international support*. The sixth theme is *victory and repossession of the Falkland Islands*. Each theme is going to be highlighted by providing Thatcher's arguments, occasionally in relation to the interlocutors' interventions in the speeches, and juxtaposing these arguments to later statements in the memoirs.

#### **3.1 The Argentine aggression and unexpected invasion**

On Saturday 3 April, Thatcher stated : "I am sure that the whole House will join me in condemning totally this unprovoked aggression". She also trivialised the Davidoff incident on 19 March, appearing to be relatively minor to her. Davidoff was leader of the commercial expedition who accompanied on 19 March 1982 forty-one men on board the *Bahia Buen Suceso*, an Argentine naval transport vessel, to Leith Harbour on South Georgia, and planted the Argentine flag there. Although Britain protested against this, only a few men left the area; later, the *Bahia Paraiso*, an Argentine patrol vessel, and two corvettes were sent to Leith to protect the men remaining there (Calvert 59). It should also be noted that prior to this incident, there were signs of an imminent invasion ; when the two parties agreed to negotiate in New York on 26 and 27 February 1982, *La Prensa*, an Argentine newspaper, reported that Argentina would escalate the stakes if their demands were not taken seriously (Wynia 10).

What is more, following the Davidoff event, South Georgia was subject to Argentine overflights and incursions, which led the British cabinet to arrange a meeting of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee by the end of March, without producing a coordinated response, even though an Argentine invasion was imminent. Although Costa Mendez, the Argentine Foreign Minister, assured the United Nations of Argentina's peaceful intentions, on 1 April the Argentine forces were "already coming ashore in the remoter [sic] parts of the islands" (Calvert 59). These incidents could have been understood as a serious warning against an imminent invasion of the Falkland Islands.

Significantly, in her memoirs, Thatcher clearly stated her determination to react against the incident by agreeing with Lord Carrington, then Foreign Secretary (on 29 March) to send a nuclear-powered submarine to "reinforce HMS *Endurance* and to make preparations to send a second submarine...My instinct was that the time had come to show the Argentines that we meant business". Although it would take two weeks for the submarine to reach the South Atlantic, Thatcher believed that this "could begin to influence events straight away" (Thatcher 178). This implies that she had seized the Davidoff event as an excuse to show Britain's military strength in the South Atlantic, despite her insistence on 3 April that "this apparently minor problem...should not be allowed to escalate...we wanted to achieve a peaceful solution of the problem by diplomatic means". In other words, this could be seen as a kind of manipulation to the House so as she could carry out her predetermined plan to show her strength in the South Atlantic.

This determination could be explained by Thatcher's intention to restore British prestige and assert Britain's interests more vigorously abroad (Coxall and Robins 29)<sup>7</sup>. She was interested in Britain's regeneration at home and abroad, since Britain's long decline obsessed her. This was echoed in July 1982 when she assured her audience in Cheltenham that "the necessary gamble of the Falklands War had succeeded and the fact had been registered in chanceries and ministries of

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7- The Conservatives wanted to restore Britain's "status as a nuclear power in a strengthened NATO Alliance and defuse the energies and confidence of a Europe-wide, resurgent peace movement" (Williamson 229).

defence around the world” (Cradock 28)<sup>8</sup>. This statement is evidence that she was aware of the risks of waging that war, but she could not have reacted otherwise because she was determined to rekindle the spirit of Britain’s glorious past.

### 3.2 British sovereignty over the islands

Thatcher embroidered the dispute with principles such as democracy versus barbarism and dictatorship; the war was fought to show dictators around the world that aggression would not pay. The same idea was reiterated later in her memoirs by expressing her view about the issue while addressing Alexander Haig :

The issue was far wider than a dispute between the United Kingdom and Argentina. The use of force to seize disputed territory set a dangerous precedent. In that sense, the Falklands mattered to many countries – to Germany, for example, because of West Berlin, to France because of its colonial possessions, to Guyana, a large part of whose territory was claimed by Venezuela” (Thatcher 192).

When Sydney Bidwell, Labour MP for Ealing, Southall, asked (15 June) whether it was not unrealistic that Britain could carry on as a colonial power on that remote piece of land, thus accusing Thatcher of perpetuating colonialism, Thatcher restated her position : “This is British sovereign territory...I am amazed at how he manages to ignore it.” But the following statement by US President Ronald Reagan contradicted her claim : “We were staunch allies of the United Kingdom and supported its right to defend its *colony*” (Reagan 358, my emphasis). Thatcher herself admitted later in her memoirs that she had worried about the anti-colonialist attitude of many nations at the United Nations, which could have resulted in enforcing unsatisfactory terms upon Britain (182).

Thus, what she had considered as part of British sovereignty during the conflict turned to be a colonial territory in her memoirs. These two different attitudes towards the Falkland Islands could be explained by her

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8- Thatcher did not think that the Falklands war was costly (expenses were estimated at £ 3.5 billion) and boasted that she had been able to pay for the war without tax increases though “domestic cut-downs the previous three years [caused the death of] several old pensioners...in central London because they we[re] denied support for heating from the social authorities” (Bryder 37).

attempt, during the crisis, to revive the British imperial past in the hearts and minds of her interlocutors, as well as the British public opinion. With hindsight, however, she considered that remote piece of land as part of Britain's overseas colonies. It should also be noted that the idea of a colony was reinforced at a Special Committee on Decolonization held by the UN General Assembly on 15 June 2006 in New York, emphasising the need for peaceful negotiations to end the "special and particular *colonial* situation in the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)" (GA/COL/3140 16 June 2006, my emphasis).

### **3.3 Protection of the islanders' wishes and rights**

Thatcher argued, throughout her speeches, that it was her duty to protect the islanders' wishes to remain under the British crown, expressing her determination to allow the islanders to choose for themselves the country to which they would like to belong. On 3 April, for instance, she said: "they [the islanders] have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance". On 14 April, she stated that "when it comes to future negotiations what matters most is what the Falkland Islanders themselves wish". On 20 May, she argued that her interim administration was designed to be "free to take fully into account the wishes of the islanders...If the islanders wished to go to Argentina, I believe that this country would uphold [their] wishes". Obviously, these instances prove that Thatcher had fought the war basically to protect the islanders' wishes and rights<sup>9</sup>.

But she later revealed in her memoirs that she had fought the war "not only [for] the territory and the people...We were defending our honour as a nation". Was it possible that "a common or garden dictator should rule over the Queen's subjects and prevail by fraud and violence? Not while I was Prime Minister" (181). From this perspective, the war had not been fought to protect the islanders but rather Britain's position on the international scene by regaining the bright side of a traditionally great empire, which could be obviously seen in the following statement.

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9- When talking to Cardinal Casaroli, the Pope's Secretary of State (The Pope was on the first papal visit to Britain), Thatcher contended that she could not allow aggression to succeed: "Nor could we bargain the freedom, justice and democracy which the Falkland Islanders had enjoyed for so long and simply hand them over to Argentina, where these things were unknown (Thatcher 230).

The significance of the Falklands War was enormous, both for Britain's self-confidence and for our standing in the world. Since the Suez fiasco in 1956, British foreign policy had been one long retreat. The tacit assumption made by British and foreign governments alike was that our world role was doomed steadily to diminish. We had come to be seen by both friends and enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capacity to defend its interests in peace, let alone in war. Victory in the Falklands changed that. Everywhere I went after the war, Britain's name meant something more than it had. The war also had real importance in relations between East and West: years later I was told by a Russian general that the Soviets had been firmly convinced that we would not fight for the Falklands, and that if we did fight we would lose. We proved them wrong on both counts, and they did not forget that. (ibid 173)

Thus, her gamble in the South Atlantic was not motivated by her sense of obligation towards the islanders to protect their rights and wishes; it was rather her intention to write another chapter in Britain's history through her victory. Thatcher seemed to have gone against the grain because nobody had believed in a successful military operation on that remote piece of land. Sandbrook argues that "Most historians now agree that Britain could never have won the war for what people in 1982 still called the Falkland Islands. To expect victory after an amphibious assault on a handful of tiny rocky islands, thousands of miles from home, with supply lines stretched over the South Atlantic, was the stuff of fantasy" (16). Nevertheless, she had waged the war and won and thus managed to regain Britain's position on the international scene, at least in the aftermath of the conflict, which was manifested, for instance, in the role Thatcher played in settling the problem between the US and the USSR in the Cold War.

Interestingly, when Eric Ogden, Labour MP for Liverpool, West Derby, wanted to know (3 April) what had happened to *HMS Endurance*, Thatcher answered as follows. "*HMS Endurance* is in the area. It is not for me to say precisely where, and the honourable gentleman would not wish me to do so." But in her memoirs, Thatcher said that the ship could



have neither deterred nor repelled any invasion. She had been “very glad that the ship was at sea and not in Port Stanley: if she [the ship] had been, she would have been captured or blown out of the water” (Thatcher 177). In this sense, her claim to protect the islanders seemed ridiculous, bearing the ship’s inability to stop any danger.

Britain’s failure to protect the islanders could be obviously seen about thirty years later when the Falkland veterans demonstrated in front of the National Congress in Buenos Aires on 25 February 2010 to ask the British to leave the islands. More importantly, the following day, an article entitled “The Falkland Islanders are as British as people who live in Land’s End and it’s our duty to defend them.” published in the *Daily Mail*, echoed Thatcher’s major motives of waging that war, namely protecting the islanders ; on 16 March of the same year, another article published in the same newspaper, warned against an invasion of the Falkland Islands, “Argentine Falklands veterans threaten to invade islands over Britain’s ‘pirate’ oil exploration”. Such events could be evidence that the British government has never been able to protect the islanders, and more importantly another invasion could be looming.

### **3.4 Peace negotiations, diplomacy and the military option**

Thatcher expressed her willingness to solve the problem through peace negotiations and diplomacy, trying to persuade the House that the military option would be the last resort. On 3 April, for instance, she expressed a wish that the “continuing diplomatic efforts, helped by our many friends, will meet with success”. On 14 April, she argued, emphasising her search for a diplomatic solution that she would “continue genuinely to negotiate through the good offices of Mr Haig, to whose skill and perseverance I pay warm tribute”. She also announced that she wanted a “peaceful solution, but it was not Britain that broke the peace,” blaming the war on Argentina. In the same speech, she stated: “Our diplomacy is backed by strength, and we have the resolve to use that strength if necessary”<sup>10</sup>. On 29 April, she claimed : “It is the Government’s most earnest hope that we can achieve those

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10- Thatcher argued that sending the British Task Force to the South Atlantic would make diplomacy effective, quoting from Frederick the Great (one of the most famous German rulers of all time for his military successes and King of Prussia from 1740 to 1786): “Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments” (Thatcher 191).

objectives<sup>11</sup> by a negotiated settlement. We have done everything that we can to encourage Mr Haig's attempts to find a solution by diplomatic means"<sup>12</sup>.

In her memoirs, however, she did not believe that diplomacy would have been the right option. When talking about handling the Falklands issue in 1979, she stated: "We were keen, if we could, to keep talking to the Argentinians, but diplomacy was becoming increasingly difficult." She also claimed that the Argentinians "could not be trusted" (Thatcher 176-220). This implies that Thatcher had been aware of the probable failure of diplomacy despite her emphasis on finding a peaceful solution through diplomacy in her speeches. Again, this is another evidence that she looked at the conflict from two different perspectives; during the crisis, she seemed reluctant to use force by emphasising peace talks and diplomacy, seen by Sandbrook as "no more than a fig leaf to preserve Britain's last shreds of respectability" (16); but later in her memoirs, she seemed determined to resort to the military option.

Interestingly, no sooner had she been warned against an Argentine invasion (31 March), than she expressed her willingness to retake the Islands: "[I]f they are invaded, we have got to get them back." (Thatcher 179) This could also be seen in Thatcher's feelings: "I felt in my bones that the Argentinians would never withdraw without a fight" (ibid 184). Leach, the Chief of the Naval Staff, had assured her that in case of war "the courage and professionalism of Britain's armed forces would win through" (ibid 179). Also, as early as 2 April, Thatcher pointed out that "feverish military preparations were under way", enhanced by the Queen's expressed wish that Prince Andrew (serving with *HMS Invincible*) would join the Task Force (ibid 180-181)<sup>13</sup>.

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11- These objectives were: the withdrawal of the Argentine forces and the end of their illegal occupation of the Islands, the restoration of British administration, and a long-term solution which is acceptable not only to the House but to the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands (29 April speech).

12- It should be noted that Thatcher had insisted on Britain's sovereignty over the islands whereas Argentina had wanted to regain them, arguing that they had been taken by force by Britain in 1833.

13- His grandfather, King George VI, had taken part in the Battle of Jutland (one of the largest naval battles in history in which the British Royal Navy engaged the German Navy, leading to massive casualties on both sides), the Queen argued, Prince Andrew should not be "treated differently from other servicemen" (Thatcher 180-181).

In addition, Alexander Haig's proposals made with the assistance of Francis Pym, Foreign Secretary after Carrington's resignation, modified later, had not pleased Thatcher. Alexander Haig had visited Britain first, not Buenos Aires, at the beginning of his mediation to understand Britain's position and react accordingly, evidence that the negotiations led by Alexander Haig were monitored by Thatcher. She had agreed with him to inform the press that she had wanted immediate implementation of Resolution 502<sup>14</sup>, without giving any impression that Britain was flexible (Thatcher 192-193). Significantly, on 31 May, when President Ronald Reagan had wanted to restart negotiations to prevent Argentina's humiliation, Thatcher had exclaimed: "What would have been wrong was to snatch diplomatic defeat out of the jaws of military victory" (ibid 230), a sign of her determination to the use of force.

These instances are also evidence that Thatcher reacted to the Falklands crisis in two different ways, one during the conflict as a lady prime minister aggressed by Galtieri, a president of a Latin American country, presumably not equal to Britain, and another later in her memoirs as a diarist and a writer of such a historic event. This could be explained by the challenging situation she had faced during the conflict, particularly in her 3 April speech. She later claimed in her memoirs that she had had two tasks in that speech: to defend her government against "the charge of unpreparedness" and to convince Members of Parliament that Britain's reaction to the Junta's aggression should be forceful and effective (ibid 183), another sign of Thatcher's exclusion of any diplomatic solution.

### **3.5 International support**

Thatcher had been supported by many countries around the world, including the US and the European Community, as well as the United Nations. She had already stated on 3 April that "the Foreign Ministers of the European Community...condemned the intervention and urged withdrawal". However, throughout her speeches, Thatcher highlighted the US contribution: "I believe that we have had everything that we have asked for." Ironically, a newspaper article, published in March 2010,

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14- This Resolution had been adopted on 3 April and had called for: i) an immediate cessation of hostilities; ii) an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands; and iii) a diplomatic solution in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter (see <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org>).

reveals that the US was backing Argentina; Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State sympathised with the Argentine cause, which was seen as a “slap on the face” for Britain over the conflict (Drury, n.p.). Had that been the American position during the conflict, the outcome would have been disastrous to Thatcher as well as Britain. It would have been a renewal of the Suez Affair of 1956.

Conversely, Thatcher was silent about the French contribution, though François Mitterrand, President of France rang Thatcher personally on the morning of 3 April to pledge his support for Britain. The French President later revealed : “With her four nuclear submarines in the south [sic] Atlantic, she’s threatening to unleash an atomic weapon against Argentina if I don’t provide her with the secret codes that will make the missiles we sold the Argentinians deaf and blind.” (Henley, n.p.) As for Thatcher, it was only later in her memoirs that she expressed her gratitude to the French President, arguing that Mitterrand had been among the staunchest of her friends: “I never forget the debt we owed him for his personal support...throughout the Falkland crisis,” (182-183) mentioning France’s influence at the UN to swing other countries in Britain’s favour to get Resolution 502 passed<sup>15</sup>.

Thatcher’s silence about the French contribution during the conflict, compared to her revelation in the memoirs, could be explained by her intention to handle the conflict under US control, possibly as part of the ‘special’ Anglo-American relationship which flourished under her government; later in her memoirs, however, she seemed like a politician reconsidering and rewriting her own past, or a historian uncovering the truth and writing a more credible story of the same event.

This silence could also be the outcome of a compromise between Thatcher and Mitterrand, a socialist presidential candidate elected one year before the crisis, after having beaten Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, his centrist rival. Mitterrand was admired by millions of young people in France who were openly opposed to Conservatism and particularly to Thatcher, considered the most unpopular politician in France. In view of this, Mitterrand could neither allow himself to give public support for

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15- King Hussein of Jordan, an old friend of Britain, was persuaded by Thatcher to cast Jordan’s vote on Britain’s side to get Resolution 502 (Thatcher 183).

conservatism and colonialism nor Thatcher to praise the French support for fear of losing the sympathy he was enjoying at home.

Moreover, Thatcher had been satisfied with the UN suggestion of restraint on both sides, and had declared in the House (on 3 April) that a meeting had already been held in the United Nations Security Council, and that another one was being planned. In her 14 April speech, she had emphasised the Government's determination to "secure the withdrawal of all Argentine forces in accordance with" Resolution 502. Thatcher's use of this Resolution, all through the Falklands crisis, could be explained by her intention to calm Members of Parliament and please international opinion. In other words, she wanted to gain support at home as well as abroad through that Resolution.

Later in her memoirs, however, Thatcher revealed that she had had one short-term and many long-term diplomatic objectives at the beginning of April 1982. Her short-term objective had been to win UN Security Council support to secure the withdrawal of the Argentine forces, and by so doing give the Falklands crisis international appeal. But in the long run, she had intended to keep the affair out of the UN as much as possible, leaving Britain a free hand. She also argued that the UN had been unable to handle such issues through Resolution 502, a "fragile achievement" (Thatcher 183). Thus, once again Thatcher presented the issue from two different perspectives, one during the conflict and another in her memoirs. Had she been grateful to Mitterrand for his help and had she admitted the UN weakness, her opponents, as well as international opinion would have had a different stance towards the conflict and its outcome.

### **3.6 Victory and repossession of the Falkland Islands**

On 15 June, Thatcher had focused on Britain's victory and expressed her joy to retake the islands. She had attributed this victory to the British Task Force, highlighting their performance and courage in the South Atlantic against the Junta's weakness. But she also emphasised the significance of that victory to the whole nation throughout her speech. This had also been echoed on 3 July 1982 in Cheltenham by trying to give Britain a bright image at home as well as abroad, arguing that her country "still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history" (Thatcher: 3 July 1982).

Later in her memoirs, she argued that “Nothing remains vividly in my mind, looking back on my years in No.10, than the eleven weeks in the spring of 1982 when Britain fought and won the Falklands War” (Thatcher 173); in this sense, an eleven-week event seemed to have erased an eleven-year political career from Thatcher’s memory.

Significantly, Thatcher seemed unwilling to provide the House with an accurate number of casualties on both sides, stating that 250 British men and civilians had been killed but had “no details of Argentine casualties”. Michael Foot, Leader of the Labour Opposition, hoped for a statement on the casualties, an implication that the total number of casualties could be equal to the number of inhabitants on the islands (about 1,800 people during the conflict), and thus putting the whole campaign at stake. In contrast, Thatcher stated, in her memoirs, that she had decided to withhold details about casualties as it would have a great impact on their families (Thatcher 233), stressing the value of compassion, not the calculation of lives against objectives gained.

Comparatively, Alfred Corn reported that the monument raised in Plaza San Martin, in Buenos Aires, was a memorial for the 5000 Argentines who died for no defensible reason during the war (n.p.). In this sense, measuring the number of losses against the implication of victory in the South Atlantic could have put the whole campaign at stake; therefore, Thatcher’s survival in the House as well as Britain’s image would have been reversed.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have tried to show that Thatcher looked at the Falklands crisis from two perspectives. The first one during the conflict as a female British Prime Minister threatened by a Latin American country under a military regime led by Galtieri; the second perspective was with hindsight as a writer of a significant event in Britain’s history, which could be seen as another version of the dispute (likened by Borges<sup>16</sup> to that of “two bald men fighting for a comb” (qtd in Beck 16). Actually, most of the arguments in the speeches did not match her later statements in *The Downing Street Years*. In this regard, from a counterfactual history

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16- He was an Argentine writer and poet, born as Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges on 24 August 1889 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and died on 14 June 1986 in Geneva (<http://www.biography.com/people/jorge-luis-borges-9220057>).

perspective, if Thatcher had not behaved in that way during the war, the outcome could have been different, in relation to Thatcher's survival as a politician and Britain's image in the world. Yet, Thatcher's popularity soared, especially after recapturing the islands on 14 June, 1982. The Iron Lady became an outstandingly successful figure, the Warrior Queen, raising herself above politics from the Falklands victory onwards (Campbell 183). Contrastively, Galtieri was imprisoned for three years for his military incompetence.

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