



Obama's Falklands Policy: a Break from the Founders

In a break with America's conventional policy on the matter, the Obama administration announced earlier this week that it would once again be siding with Argentina, this time in the dispute between the UK and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. By default, Obama has sided against Britain in the ongoing conflict over the island chain at the center of a 1982 war.

In a move one British conservative analyst called "hugely insulting to Britain," the Organization of American States earlier this week adopted a declaration calling for negotiations between the United Kingdom and Argentina over the "sovereignty" of the Falkland Islands. While the U.S. delegation did not speak in support of the measure, it ultimately joined a consensus adopting it.

However, Britain does not consider the sovereignty in question. After the British fended off an Argentine invasion of the nearby islands in 1982 — a war in which hundreds died on both sides — the government of the UK continues to assert control over the Falklands and grant islanders British citizenship.

Britain has resisted international calls for the two nations to negotiate the issue — which makes the U.S. position all the more peculiar. Noting that President Obama just returned from a visit to London where he cited the U.S.-U.K. "special relationship," Heritage Foundation analyst [Nile Gardiner](#) said the United States should at least stay neutral on the Falkland issue. "British sovereignty over the islands is not an issue for negotiation. This is a slap in the face for America's closest friend and ally," he said, accusing the administration of siding with Venezuela and others against its friend. "This is a bizarre foreign policy," he added. Gardiner is the director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, whose namesake was Prime Minister during the Falklands war.

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The Obama administration made clear in early 2010 that it would endorse calls for talks over the islands. At a Buenos Aires news conference with Argentina's President in March 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said she agreed with Argentina that the two nations should "sit down and resolve the issues between them."

From there, the United States implicitly backed an OAS document calling for talks last June and again Tuesday at a conference in El Salvador. The latest declaration, which refers to the Falklands as the Malvinas Islands, calls for exploring "all possible avenues towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute" and resuming sovereignty negotiations "as soon as possible."

It was accompanied by some tough words toward Britain. In an OAS press release, Argentine Foreign Minister

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Héctor Timerman declared: “Unfortunately, Britain still declines to resume bilateral dialogue, in violation not only of repeated resolutions of the United Nations and this Organization.” Timerman called for a “peaceful settlement to the dispute.”

In the wake of the adoption, the British government quietly asserted its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands while downplaying the U.S. position — stressing that the Obama administration continues to recognize British control of the territory:

The longstanding U.S. position is unchanged. The U.S. recognizes the U.K.’s administration of the Falkland Islands,” a British Embassy representative told FoxNews.com. “We’re in regular touch with the U.S. on this issue, as on so many issues, and we expect that dialogue to continue.

The government on the Falkland Islands expressed disappointment with the OAS declaration. According to a report in *MercoPress*, Falkland officials issued a statement saying they “regret that this issue should once again be raised on the regional stage” and support the standing British position that “the issue of sovereignty is non-negotiable.”

The Falklands dispute is a prime example of the permanent and entangling alliances the Founding Fathers warned against. While many misunderstand this as meaning that the Founders advocated against American involvement in foreign affairs, in actuality, they were advocating a policy of realism: America’s foreign policy goals ought to be dictated by what serves the national interest in specific places, circumstances, and times. As history has demonstrated, iron-clad commitments to certain nations, by their nature, impede America’s duty and ability to act solely out of the national interest. This variety of realpolitik is historically associated with conservatism, as evident in documents such as the Sharon Statement of 1960, which simply called for a foreign policy that “serves America’s interests first or foremost.” Any long-term commitment made to another country is an obvious violation of these principles.

While America may have allied itself with Britain in specific contexts, out of self-interest, in the Falklands dispute, a policy of neutrality has generally been accepted as the more prudent course of action because of the stakes involved — especially in the 1982 war, when the balance of power could have easily shifted toward communists had America allied itself with either Argentina or Britain. Analyzing the Falklands crisis in April 1982, Virginia Prewett and William R. Mizelle (“Understanding the Falklands/Malvinas Issues,” *Western Goals Report*, Vol. 3 No. 4, April 1982) wrote:

In the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, the biggest loser is the West. Communists everywhere have congratulated themselves as two of their “glavnoye vrugi” —major enemies, priority targets — have expended upon each other proud fighting ships and trained fighting men precious to the Free World’s own defense. Anti-Communists, who have often seen campaigns for “peace” used to mask leftist expansion, must in this case be the doves. For Free World peacemakers to fix blame on the government of Argentina or of Britain would only hand our Marxist-Leninist enemies a further bonus. Only a pragmatic “no-fault” settlement can heal the breach in the West’s defenses inflicted by the Falklands/Malvinas fighting. The only path to peace is to end the status of the Falklands/Malvinas and their dependent island groups as New World colonial possessions of an Old World power. Until this comes to pass, Argentines under whatever government, under whatever truce, in this or future years and generations will wage cold war or hot for Las Malvinas.

Essentially, Western Goals Foundation (founded by the late Congressman Larry McDonald, who was also chairman of The John Birch Society until he was lost aboard Korean Airlines Flight 007 in 1983) argued that neutrality was the best course of action to take in the conflict, a position which was generally held early on in the conflict by the Reagan administration. Before the British took military action in 1982, the Reagan administration was, to the consternation of the British foreign office, very much on the fence and, initially, wedded to the neutrality position. Reagan’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, lobbied for the Argentinean cause, fearful of the power vacuum that could appear in the event of a British victory. In a letter to Thatcher,

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Reagan said that his government would take a neutral position on the matter — again, causing great anger — but would come out in favor of its ally if the Argentines decided to start shooting. It is important to remember that even after hostilities commenced, Reagan was pressing the Thatcher government for a ceasefire, a decision which profoundly irritated her. While British troops advanced on Port Stanley, the two leaders spoke on the telephone, with Reagan suggesting an immediate cessation of fighting. As the *Times* noted in 1992, Thatcher, “with barely concealed impatience, scotched the plan with a verbal explosion.”

In his memoirs, George Shultz remembers another Falklands-related fissure in the “special relationship” between the United States and the U.K. Incidentally, Thatcher also opposed America’s invasion of Grenada in 1983:

I had persuaded President Reagan that we should vote in favor of a balanced UN resolution on the Falklands. Although our consultations had let her know what was coming and our negotiations produced a resolution she could live with, Margaret Thatcher was furious. We voted with Argentina and the rest of the Western Hemisphere for a resolution that she opposed. Her ambassador, on instructions, read me off like a sergeant would a recruit in a Marine Corps boot camp. I felt Mrs. Thatcher was wrong to oppose us for taking a reasonable position on a critical issue in our neighborhood. (George Pratt Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years As Secretary of State*, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons.)

Essentially, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) also articulated the same Reaganite realism in an April 27, 1982 speech in Congress, where he warned that with mutual defense pacts, such conundrums are inevitable, as defense commitments with both sides of the conflict created a quagmire for America; as a member of a permanent alliance with both Argentina and Britain, America, in ignoring the Founders’ advice, tied its own hands and prevented itself from acting in the national interest. Under NATO, America is obligated to come to the mutual defense of Britain, and under the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty), America is obligated to come to the defense of Argentina (a concept with its origins in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823). To quote Paul, “...fulfilling treaty obligations becomes impossible and the primary responsibility of national defense becomes secondary.” (Ron Paul, *A Foreign Policy of Freedom: Peace, Commerce, and Honest Friendship*, pp. 9-10.)

Obama’s latest foreign policy blunder is clearly an aberration from the principles of the Founders and is a deviation from Falklands policy firmly established by Reagan, which calls upon America not to allow alliances and treaties to cloud all foreign policy decisions, which instead, must be dictated solely by our national interests.