

# [***Argentina's Falkland War defeat stirs patriotic fervor but President Milei has other concerns***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPM-06H1-DYMD-6332-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 3, 2024 Wednesday 1:15 AM GMT

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**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 818 words

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**Dateline:** BUENOS AIRES, Argentina

**Body**

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — For decades, Argentines could count on coming together April 2 around a steadfast claim to the islands they know as the Malvinas and — at least until recently — expect their president to share that conviction.

But President Javier Milei on Tuesday continued his struggle to navigate nationalist sensitivities around the archipelago, which Britain controls and most of the world refers to as the Falkland Islands.

The right-wing leader has shown more interest in [*boosting trade with the British*](https://apnews.com/world-news/general-news-b7768ac285a5bf4182db8fee5222dc6c) than lambasting their territorial claims, and once even praised the leader who deployed troops to eject Argentine forces. In the name of [*belt-tightening*](https://apnews.com/article/milei-argentina-chainsaw-fed35a37c6137b951e4adada3d866436), he called off plans for a grand Malvinas Day parade Tuesday to coincide with the [*anniversary of the war’s start*](https://apnews.com/article/argentina-south-america-europe-b543a53553521ca53318cfd49a07ee5e). And he delivered a speech aimed at his own domestic political opponents rather than perceived enemies across an ocean.

Even as Milei lavished warm praise on the nation’s soldiers, not all veterans were feeling the love.

“I was never clear on the president’s stance on this basic national issue,” Carlos Retamozo, who fought in the war as an 18-year-old conscript, told The Associated Press after Milei’s speech at Tuesday’s memorial event in downtown Buenos Aires. “Today, I am still not clear.”

Argentina argues that Britain illegally took the islands in 1833, violating the principle of territorial integrity. Britain says its claim dates back to 1765, and sent a warship to the islands in 1833 to expel Argentine forces that had sought to establish sovereignty. The brief war in 1982 killed 649 Argentine service members and 255 British soldiers.

On a national holiday typically bursting with patriotism, attacks on the British stance are practically scripture. But Milei made no mention of the U.K. in his speech, instead only promising an undefined “roadmap for the return of Malvinas to Argentine hands."

Argentines had already harbored skepticism about the depth of Milei's devotion; at one point during his campaign last year, he sparked a firestorm by confessing his admiration for fellow libertarian Margaret Thatcher, the former British prime minister who dispatched military forces to retake the islands after Argentine troops mounted their unsuccessful invasion ago. For hardcore patriots, there are few graver rhetorical sins.

He also made nice with [*British diplomat David Cameron*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-argentina-david-cameron-falkland-islands-8489ea11fd16ba5720f903e377bf8f41) earlier this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where the two spoke about possible investments in Argentina. [*Mere weeks later, Cameron became the first British foreign secretary in three decades*](https://apnews.com/article/uk-falklands-argentina-david-cameron-visit-9aca29123c09ef2ac78f466b0a4bc7ca) to visit the Falkland Islands, touring battle sites and vowing the islands would remain part of Britain “forever”.

Argentina’s provincial governors decried Cameron’s trip as an outrageous provocation. Milei, who has stressed the need for a diplomatic solution respecting the will of the island's 3,000 residents, stayed silent.

“We see (Milei) as kneeling before the British empire, as totally dedicated to laws and decrees that hand over our border lands to big businessmen,” Ramón Robles, president of the country’s main veteran association, told the AP.

Milei also invoked the cause of Malvinas sovereignty to boost his plans to lower trade barriers — including with the British — and take a shot at his rivals.

“For a sovereign nation to be respected, it must be a protagonist of international trade,” he said in Tuesday's speech, lambasting previous leftist governments as “serial defaulters” whose claims to the islands couldn’t be taken seriously.

His opponents, for their part, were seizing on Milei's missteps at a separate event outside the capital city.

"You cannot honor or idolize Margaret Thatcher who treacherously ordered the killing of Argentine soldiers,” said Axel Kicillof, the powerful governor of Buenos Aires province, whose left-leaning Peronist movement has dominated Argentine ***politics*** for the past two decades. “Sovereignty is not just speech,” he said.

Some veterans were dismayed to see the [*nation's political polarization*](https://apnews.com/article/military-dictatorship-argentina-milei-history-disappeared-coup-09f8c7e64ef2888453069d65441f7785) injected into a day that, for years, had united Argentines around a common cause.

“This day is now about political propaganda,” 60-year-old Daniel Pereira, who served in the war as a teenage conscript, said as Milei’s supporters interrupted Tuesday’s solemn wreath-laying ceremony with shouts of “Long live freedom!” — the president’s slogan.

Others had no interest in even discussing their president. Malvinas Day, they said, should be nothing more than a chance to honor the dead and remember their defeat.

When asked about Milei, 74-year-old Carlos Milock started to criticize the president's stance but stopped himself.

"I experienced death, anger, sadness and injustice,” he said, gazing at the hundreds of names — friends and comrades killed in combat — etched on the polished black granite slabs. “And for what? For the greatest reason of all, the recovery of the Malvinas.”

**Load-Date:** April 2, 2024

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