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Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands

AMY OAKES

Why do states launch diversionary conflicts? In particular, why did Argentina invade the Falkland Islands in 1982? The existing literature tends to analyze diversionary conflict by examining the direct relationship between domestic unrest (the independent variable) and the use of force (the dependent variable). But such an approach ignores critical variables that shape the likelihood of diversionary conflict. When states face domestic unrest, they have a number of options: they can launch a diversionary conflict, they can reform, or they can repress. We therefore need to consider which variables alter the attractiveness of each of these options, employing what I term "the policy alternatives approach." The decision to launch a diversionary conflict may result more from the inability to reform or repress, than it does from the perceived utility of using force to rally the public. An important variable that facilitates or constrains a state's ability to reform or repress is state extractive capacity. The policy alternatives approach enables a new explanation for the invasion of the Falklands, based on the interaction between domestic unrest and low state extractive capacity, and also highlights a number of other variables that may explain diversionary conflicts.

On 2 April 1982, thousands of Argentine marines landed on the British Falkland Islands in an early morning raid to reclaim the contested archipelago for Buenos Aires.[1] The Argentine forces met little resistance from the small number of British troops stationed on the sparsely inhabited islands. Shortly after the invasion, Argentina's president, Leopoldo Galtieri, walked onto the balcony at Casa Rosado to announce the dramatic victory. He was visibly

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[1] In Argentina, the islands are known as Islas Malvinas.

moved by the cheering masses that spontaneously gathered to celebrate the news. Only days before, many of those in the crowd had called for a swift end to military rule in Argentina and retribution for the countless victims of government brutality during the so-called "dirty war."

The conflict over the Falklands Islands is the archetypal case of diversionary war. Most accounts of Argentina's invasion of the Falklands attribute the junta's decision to retake the islands in large part to a desire to restore public support for the government. However, the consensus regarding the motivation for this particular conflict belies the sharp disagreements about whether leaders routinely seek to distract public attention from domestic problems through military adventure and in what circumstances such diversionary conflicts occur. Indeed, there remains a significant lack of agreement regarding the strength or even the existence of a relationship between internal unrest and external aggression.[2]

The traditional approach to studying diversionary conflict has been to search for a correlation between episodes of domestic unrest and the use of force. Leaders, however, do not usually respond to internal instability by launching a diversionary war. Instead, they often select an alternative policy to address their domestic problems, such as enacting reform measures or repressing the opposition. Given that diversionary conflict is one of several potential policies that states may adopt in response to social strife, rather than simply asking, "do states initiate diversionary conflicts?" it may be more fruitful to inquire, "when does foreign adventure become a more attractive strategy for managing unrest than its alternatives—and why?" By seeking to understand why states opt for one policy rather than another from the menu of options, one may gain a better understanding of the factors that precipitate diversionary conflict.[3]

[2] The diversionary war hypothesis is supported by a number of case studies and anecdotal evidence, but quantitative analyses suggest that there is, at best, only weak evidence of a general relationship between internal turmoil and war. For an excellent review, see Jack Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *A Handbook of War Studies,* ed. Manus Midlarsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 259–88.

[3] A number of recent studies suggest that the addition of policy alternatives to the diversionary theory of war may be useful for understanding the relationship between internal and external conflict. See, for example, D. Scott Bennett and Timothy Nordstrom, "Foreign Policy Substitutability and Internal Economic Problems in Enduring Rivalries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44 (February 2000): 33–61; Kurt Dassel and Eric Reinhardt, "Domestic Strife and the Initiation of Violence at Home and Abroad," *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (January 1999): 56–85; Brett Ashley Leeds and David Davis, "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (December 1997): 814–34; Diana Richards, T. Clifton Morgan, Rick K. Wilson, Valerie L. Schwebach, and Garry D. Young, "Good Times, Bad Times, and the Diversionary Use of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37 (September 1993): 504–35; Paul K. Huth and Ellen Lusk-Okar, "Foreign Policy Choices and Domestic Politics: A Reexamination of the Link between Domestic and International Conflict," in *Conflict in World Politics: Advances in the Study of Crisis, War, and Peace*, ed. Frank P. Harvey and Ben D. Moore (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 62–95. See especially Christopher Gelpi, "Democratic Diversions: Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41 (April 1997):

I begin by discussing the utility of incorporating what I call "the policy alternatives approach" into the theory of diversionary conflict. This approach brings to light new causal variables, such as state extractive capacity, which help to explain why governments may choose to divert the public's attention from their failings instead of adopting reforms or engaging in repression. The second section reexamines the Argentine government's decision to invade the Falklands in order to illustrate the advantages of this theoretical approach, producing a richer and more accurate explanation of this classic case of diversionary war. I also review the alternative explanations for the Argentine junta's decision to forcefully reacquire the Falklands, arguing that while they may account for some aspects of the case, they do not explain key elements, in particular the timing of the decision to reclaim the islands. In the concluding section, I discuss the implications of this analysis, arguing that the decision to initiate a diversionary conflict is typically influenced by three factors: (1) motivation, (2) domestic constraints, and (3) opportunity. Diversionary conflict is likely to be chosen over repression or reform when the state faces escalating social unrest (motivation); state resources are limited due to the government's low extractive capacity, and the government's opposition demands extreme political or economic reforms (domestic constraints); and there is a low-cost, domestically popular target (opportunity).

DIVERSIONARY WAR AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

Domestic unrest is necessary for a diversionary conflict.[4] Such unrest can represent a fundamental challenge to the continued legitimacy, capacity, and even the existence of a state, as European communist leaders discovered at the end of the 1980s. In the face of such a threat, leaders can instigate an international conflict out of a desire to (1) distract the attention of the public from social, political, or economic issues; (2) rally the populace behind the government by whipping up nationalist sentiment; (3) shift blame for domestic political, economic, or social problems to an external scapegoat; or (4) demonstrate the government's competence in foreign policy after a series of domestic public policy failures.[5] Diversionary conflicts, therefore,

255–82. Gelpi's study suggests that repression may be the preferred alternative to diversionary conflicts for non-democratic states facing unrest.

[4] Openly expressed public dissatisfaction with the performance of the government will provoke—under the right conditions—a diversionary conflict. Signs of domestic unrest include protest demonstrations aimed at the national government, strikes, work stoppages intended to change government policy, riots, and armed attacks by organized groups targeted at the government.

[5] See Giacomo Chiozza and Hein Goemans, "Peace through Insecurity: Tenure and International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 47 (August 2003): 445–46. Chiozza and Goemans identify three causal logics in the diversionary war literature: gambling for resurrection, the scapegoat hypothesis, and the rally-around-the-flag or in-group/out-group hypotheses. They overlook, however, two additional reasons why diversionary conflicts may be initiated: the desire to simply distract the public from internal

are defined by the nature of the leaders' motivation to use force, not by whether they do in fact successfully divert public attention from domestic problems or increase popular support for the imperiled government. In fact, like the debtor who heads to the casino, diversionary conflicts often serve only to make the government's problems worse.

Although diversionary wars often fail, in the right circumstances, they can represent a reasonable policy response. The logic of diversionary conflict is straightforward: when the domestic situation becomes unstable, leaders have less to lose from choosing a risky military policy. In such a situation, doing nothing looks certain to produce losses for the regime, while gambling through war at least offers the hope of turning things around. Leaders know that defeat in war will probably signal the end of the regime, but the disgruntled crowds outside the presidential palace look likely to signal the end of the regime also. As Arno Mayer contends, beleaguered governments are "particularly inclined to advocate external war for the purpose of domestic crisis management even if the chances for victory are doubtful [and] in spite of the high risks involved."[6]

Although high levels of domestic unrest seem to heighten embattled rulers' compulsion to act and their propensity to accept policy risks, one cannot rely solely on the magnitude of domestic unrest to make accurate predictions regarding whether states will initiate a diversionary conflict. Internal upheaval may be necessary for diversionary war, but it is clearly not sufficient because internal instability does not invariably result in war. In response to domestic turmoil, leaders typically want to do something, and they can choose from a number of alternatives. Why, then, do leaders select one option from their menu of policies rather than another?

The Policy Alternatives Approach

The existing literature follows an apparently logical approach in considering the question of diversionary conflict by examining the relationship between

problems and the hope that a foreign policy success will demonstrate the government's competence to the public. Furthermore, gambling for resurrection is likely to be the motivation behind each of these explanations for diversionary action. As a result, I do not include this as a separate explanation for the initiation of a diversionary conflict. For a discussion of gambling for resurrection, see Richards, "Good Times, Bad Times"; George W. Downs and David M. Rocke, *Optimal Imperfection? Domestic Uncertainty and Institutions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 68–71; Alastair Smith, "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems,"*International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1996): 133–53.

[6] Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 220–21. This is also essentially the logic of prospect theory, which states that leaders are risk acceptant with respect to losses and risk averse with respect to gains. That is, when a decision maker is faced with two undesirable options, and one option is certain to bring losses, then the second option will be chosen if it promises some hope of avoiding future losses—even at the risk of incurring even greater losses. See Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk," *Econometrica* 47 (March 1979): 263–91; Jack Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," *Political Psychology* 13 (June 1992): 171–86.

domestic factors, such as unrest and the use of force. If we take a step back, we discover that this traditional approach might be overly narrow. We need to consider the problem from the decision-maker's perspective. Governments can respond to domestic unrest in a variety of ways, which is to say they have a menu of options, including (1) co-opting the opposition through reform, (2) repressing the opposition by adopting restrictive legislation or through internal policing, or (3) initiating a diversionary conflict.[7] Thus, instead of the question, "does domestic unrest tend to precipitate international conflict?" we might ask, "under what conditions do leaders choose diversionary conflict from the menu of at least theoretically available policy options?" As Gordon Craig succinctly states, "The duty of the historian is to restore to the past the options it once had."[8] Ignoring the reality that governments choose from a range of policies may mask significant relationships between internal and external conflict.[9]

This view of government decision making, the policy alternatives approach, suggests that policies are often chosen because they have relative utility compared to other options or because preferred avenues have been closed off. Thus, governments may initiate diversionary conflicts when they become more attractive than alternative responses, not necessarily because leaders believe diversionary conflicts are usually effective or will work in that particular case. For many leaders, reform and repression may in principle be more appealing responses than initiating a risky diversionary conflict, but for a variety of reasons these options may not be practicable. At a restaurant, a patron may choose the red hot curry not because he is trying to impress his date or because he likes the taste, but because he cannot afford any of the other menu options. The causes of diversionary conflict, therefore, may lie as much in a state's inability to reform or repress, as they do in the perceived utility of military adventure as a solution for domestic strife.

The policy alternatives approach has the potential to generate new insights into the factors that influence when leaders choose diversion over reform or repression. The traditional approach to the study of diversionary

[7] Regarding reform, I mean attempts by the government to liberalize the political system by, for example, increasing governing institutions' representativeness, allowing greater freedom of the press, and permitting political parties to form. A government adopts a policy of repression if it seeks to suppress domestic groups through internal policing or enacts restrictive legislation, such as banning political parties, halting elections, and withdrawing the right to freely assemble.

[8] Gordon Craig, "History as a Humanistic Discipline," in *Historical Literacy*, ed. Paul Gagnon (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 134.

[9] See David Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 144; Bennett and Nordstrom, "Foreign Policy Substitutability"; Benjamin Most and Harvey Starr, "International Relations Theory, Foreign Policy Substitutability, and 'Nice' Laws," *World Politics* 36 (April 1984): 383–406; Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "Toward a Scientific Understanding of International Conflict: A Personal View," *International Studies Quarterly* (June 1985): 130; Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, *Inquiry, Logic, and International Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989); David H. Clark and William Reed, "The Strategic Sources of Foreign Policy Substitution," *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (July 2005): 609–24.

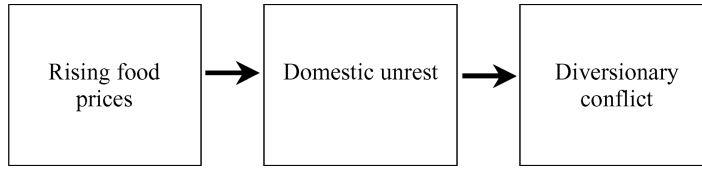

FIGURE 1 The traditional approach to studying diversionary conflict.

conflict seeks to identify the readily apparent direct causes of a government's decision to initiate a diversionary conflict, treating policy choices as the product of a chain of causal variables (see Figure 1). While these direct causes are undoubtedly important, the policy alternatives approach prompts one to look for the often equally important indirect causes of a government's decision, that is, those factors that prevented a preferred policy from being pursued (see Figure 2). If we find that a government that ultimately launched a diversionary war actually preferred, instead, to repress its opposition or enact reforms, then whatever explains why repression or reform were not chosen is an explanation for why diversionary war was chosen.

For this logic to hold, two conditions must be met: (1) the leader prefers a different policy to the one that is chosen, and (2) this preferred policy would replace (not coexist with) the policy that is ultimately chosen. If these two conditions are met, then the variable that eliminates the preferred policy represents an important cause of—and perhaps a necessary condition for—the decision to be explained. In a counter-factual, if that variable had been absent, the leader would have had a broader menu of available options and would have chosen differently. The policy alternatives approach would also have utility if the leader had no preference among policies—since the

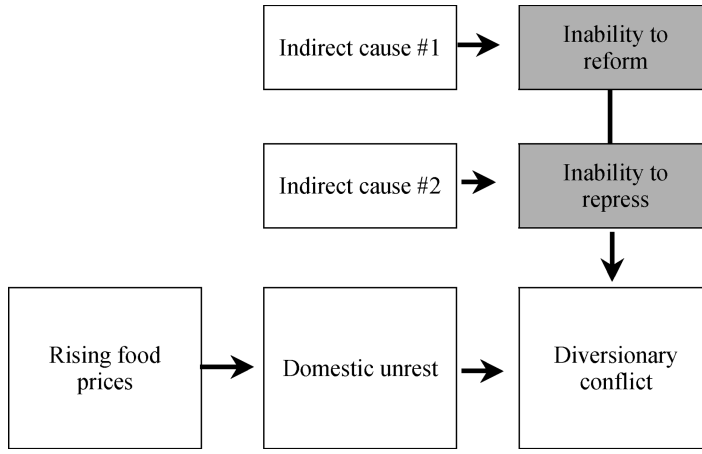

FIGURE 2 The policy alternatives approach to studying diversionary conflict.

factors that eliminated one or more options served at a minimum to narrow his choice.

The policy alternatives approach prompts us to search for variables that propel states toward one option (in this case diversionary conflict) and away from other options (in this case repression and reform). One such variable is state extractive capacity. A government's ability to extract resources from society shapes its response to domestic unrest because certain policies are likely to require greater resources to implement with any hope of success than others; for example, repression of widespread unrest is generally more costly in terms of revenue than enacting political reforms.

The Central Role of State Extractive Capacity

Variation in how leaders respond to domestic unrest results in part because rulers are not equally free to act as they wish; some are more constrained in their policy menus than others. To impose its preferences, the government must possess or have the potential to extract the required resources from society. Thus, state extractive capacity measures the ability of a government to mobilize its nation's material resources to achieve its policy objectives.[10]

In the case of responses to domestic unrest, extractive capacity largely determines whether the government will be able to pay for expensive policies like war, economic reforms, or state repression. As Theda Skocpol contends, "[a] state's means of raising and deploying financial resources tells us more than could any other single factor about its existing (and immediately potential) capacities to create or strengthen state organizations, to employ personnel, to co-opt political support, to subsidize economic enterprises, and to fund social programs."[11] The minimal attention paid to the relationship between state extractive capacity and diversionary war is surprising because this variable has been identified as a key factor in studies of foreign policy, the causes of war, grand strategy, and foreign expansion.[12]

[10] Thomas Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11. See also Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9; Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 144.

[11] Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evens, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16–17.

[12] See, for example, Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*; Alan Lamborn, *The Price of Power: Risk and Foreign Policy in Britain, France, and Germany* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991); A.F.K.Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); David M. Rowe, "World Economic Expansion and National Security in Pre-World War I Europe," *International Organization* 53 (Spring 1999): 195–231; Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In"; Harvey Starr, "Revolution and War: Rethinking the Linkage Between Internal and External Conflict," *Political Research Quarterly* 47 (June 1994): 481–507; Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*.

Rulers of states with high extractive capacity have wide latitude in terms of viable policy options, including aggressive internal and external strategies that require considerable resources to implement. A state with low extractive capacity, in contrast, is less capable of extracting revenues from the public and, therefore, deals with a more limited policy menu; substantive economic reform, repression, and especially full-scale war may not be viable strategies. In some cases, the state is so weak relative to society that it is forced to embrace risky or undesirable policies it otherwise would not have considered.[13] The question is then, how precisely does a state's ability to extract revenues influence the relative attractiveness of reform, repression, and diversionary conflict?

Low Extractive Capacity and Diversionary Conflict

Some scholars have hypothesized that high extractive capacity states are more likely to use force abroad during periods of social turmoil. Geoffrey Blainey claims that it "would be surprising if most wars broke out when or where economic pressures and needs were most compelling, for these are times and places which are less capable of financing a war."[14] This assertion is echoed by neoclassical realists, who argue that states expand when governments become more powerful relative to society and gain access to additional resources.[15] As Fareed Zakaria nicely summarizes, "The stronger the state [that is, the government], the greater its ability to extract national power for its ends...Nations try to expand their political interests abroad when central decision-makers perceive a relative increase in the state's power."[16] Thus, all held equal, governments with high extractive capacity should be more likely to respond to domestic unrest by adopting a bellicose foreign policy than states with limited access to revenues.[17]

[13] One could argue that the concept of extractive capacity is difficult to apply across regime types. However, Christensen finds that, while the exact process by which these states extract resources may be different, "the state-society constraints can be compared across very different types of regimes." Christensen,*Useful Adversaries*, 22. For a further discussion of this issue, see Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman, "Relative Political Capacity: Political Extraction and Political Reach," in *Political Capacity and Economic Behavior,* ed. Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 11–45.

[14] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 87–88. Blainey does admit, however, that wars initiated by resource-poor states "could break out if other factors were pushing strongly toward war." Ibid., 95.

[15] For an excellent review of neo-classical realism, see Gideon Rose, "Neo-Classical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51 (October 1998): 144–72.

[16] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, 38 (emphasis in the original). See also Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 106. Note that while this logic may be consistent with realism, realist scholars often confront difficulties when attempting to explain the outbreak of these types of wars. Because they are initiated largely for domestic political reasons, diversionary conflicts may occur when there is no security threat.

[17] Leo Hazlewood, "Externalizing Systemic Stress: International Conflict as Adaptive Behavior," in *Conflict Behavior and Linkage Politics*, ed. Jonathan Wilkenfield (New York: David McKay, 1973), 173.

But this view is probably wrong. There are convincing reasons to expect low extractive capacity states to initiate conflicts in response to domestic unrest. Waging a war or provoking an international crisis under any conditions is a risky strategy. Rulers who initiate an international conflict in the hope of generating social cohesion often seem to foolishly ignore the lessons of history. Even when these military ventures succeed, the hoped for rally-around-the-flag effect, when it arises, is generally short-lived.[18] If the war drags on and requires greater than anticipated sacrifices, the mobilization process will aggravate the social fragmentation it was waged to ease. The Italian government, for example, entered World War I in part to reduce internal divisions, but the longer-than-anticipated war inflamed opposition to the state. And this war Italy won.[19] If a diversionary war ends in defeat, the end of the regime is often at hand. The use of diversionary force is also a relatively poor strategy for dealing with unrest because, unlike repression or reform, it fails to tackle the root problem—a dissatisfied population. Any amelioration in unrest is dependent on the continuing diversion of the public, a situation that could end at any time. The problem with offering circuses without bread is that the population is still hungry after the performance ends. Consequently, Arthur Stein warns that "political leaders who count on foreign adventures to unify their countries and cement their positions should think again."[20]

It is right to be skeptical about the reasoning behind the launch of diversionary conflicts, but if most of the options on the policy menu are unavailable then it might be perfectly rational. For this reason, the risky gamble of diversionary war is more likely to be undertaken by impoverished governments that are running out of solutions to their mounting domestic problems. While leaders may prefer simply quashing their opposition to diverting attention, states with access to few resources often do not possess the capability to engage in repressive internal policing.[21] Similarly, while leaders may prefer trying to resolve internal troubles by enacting reforms to the smoke and mirrors of foreign adventure, low extractive capacity states may be unable to pay for sufficient political and especially economic changes to satisfy domestic opponents. Thus, through a process of policy elimination,

Hazlewood also argues that a high "capacity to coerce" and high turmoil are related to diplomatic conflict and war.

[18] John Mueller, "Public Support for Military Ventures Abroad: Evidence From the Polls," in *The* Real *Lessons of the Vietnam War: Reflections Twenty-Five Years After the Fall of Saigon*, ed. John Norton Moore and Robert F. Turner (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 188.

[19] Paul Corner and Giovanna Procacci, "The Italian Experience of 'Total' Mobilization, 1915–1920," in *State, Society, and Mobilization During the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 231.

[20] Arthur Stein, *The Nation at War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 87.

[21] For a discussion of the costs of repression, see Christian Davenport, "Multidimensional Threat Perception and State Repression: An Inquiry into Why States Apply Negative Sanctions," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (August 1995): 683–713.

governments with low extractive capacity are more likely to be tempted to initiate a diversionary conflict. High extractive capacity states will typically use their resources to reform or repress.

But why would a state with few resources engage in an expensive war? A state that cannot afford to fight its own people surely cannot afford to fight another country. The term "diversionary war" is misleading, however, since it covers a wide range of interstate disputes, including blustering, shows of force, low intensity militarized conflicts, and war. Given their lack of resources, impoverished states are likely to be reluctant to engage in a protracted and costly international war. Indeed, low extractive capacity may mean this type of diversionary conflict is off the menu. What is possible for impoverished countries, however, is noisy saber rattling or the use of force against a symbolic target, where significant resistance is deemed unlikely. Where low extractive capacity states do end up fighting large-scale wars, the original intention may have been otherwise. Instead, impoverished states may launch a low-cost but popular mission only to get unexpectedly dragged into an escalated war they have little hope of affording. By engaging in foreign adventure, low extractive capacity states are tempting fate: if they pick enough quarrels, one will eventually come to blows. In summary, state extractive capacity has two seemingly contradictory pressures on a government's response to domestic unrest. It propels low extractive capacity states toward low-level conflicts (such as threats to use force or small-scale symbolic actions), while discouraging them from fighting wars.

In the following section, I use the policy alternatives approach to reexamine Argentina's decision to invade the Falkland Islands. Why conduct an in-depth study of a single case, and why this particular case? To evaluate the logic of policy alternatives approach, one must (1) identify the government's actual policy response to unrest, (2) establish the government's preferred policy response to unrest, and (3) locate those factors (such as low state extractive capacity) that made the preferred response impracticable, thereby pushing the government toward its actual policy response. A substantive analysis of the sequence of events preceding a government's policy choice and the leaders' decision making is needed to accomplish these tasks. The depth required for such an analysis necessitates a single case study. The careful study of a single case also serves an additional purpose: it can suggest new potentially generalizable variables that shape how leaders respond to unrest.[22]

The Falklands War was chosen because it is considered a classic instance of diversionary war. To date, no studies of this conflict have systematically

[22] See Alexander L. George. "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New York: Free Press, 1979), 48; Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 228.

examined factors that explain why the junta chose to invade the islands and not to repress its opposition or to enact reforms. Viewing the case through the lens of the policy alternatives approach produces a novel and more accurate explanation, illuminating a number of causes of the conflict that have been overlooked. This case was also selected because the junta suffered from a limited ability to mobilize resources, allowing the examination of whether and how this key variable shapes a government's decision making during periods of unrest.[23]

ARGENTINA'S INVASION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

In 1982, Argentina launched an invasion of the Falkland Islands, hoping to end a longstanding dispute with the United Kingdom regarding the territory's ownership. Most accounts of Argentina's invasion focus on either the events immediately preceding the landing of Argentine marines on the islands in April 1982 or the subsequent escalation of tensions between Argentina and the United Kingdom. The origins of the decision to use force, however, can be traced to a meeting of the military government several months earlier. In December 1981, the members of the junta, including newly appointed President Galtieri, Admiral Jorge Anaya, and Brigadier Basilio Lami-Dozo, decided to invade the Falkland Islands in a plan so secret, even the Argentine foreign minister was not immediately privy to it.[24] This is a study of the factors that compelled the junta to abandon diplomatic negotiations with Britain and instead use force to reclaim the Falklands; it does not address why the junta launched the invasion itself.[25]

[23] For the application of the policy alternatives approach to additional cases, see Amy Oakes, "States in Crisis: How Governments Respond to Domestic Unrest" (PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, March 2006).

[24] See Rubén O. Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict: The War for the Malvinas* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 7; Gary W. Wynia, *Argentina: Illusions and Realities* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), 10; and Oscar Cardoso, Ricardo Kirschbaum, Eduardo van der Kooy, *Falklands: The Secret Plot* (Surry, UK: Preston Editions, 1987), 32.

[25] It is important to emphasize here that the purpose of this case study is to identify the cause(s) of the junta's initial decision to invade the Falklands, that is, to identify the necessary or sufficient conditions of this government's plan to invade this particular target at this moment in time. One can conceive of a number of rival causal schemes that could have resulted in an invasion. More important still, one can imagine alternate scenarios in which the state's extractive capacity was high, domestic unrest was minimal or non-existent, and Argentina still invaded the Falklands. Because other conditions could have produced the same or a similar outcome, one identifies a cause as necessary or sufficient knowing that it was not in any ultimate sense either necessary or sufficient. Yet this predicament can be escaped. One can reasonably claim that a cause was necessary or sufficient as long as one fully specifies the background factors that form the context in which the event occurred. Put differently, a condition can be necessary or sufficient in a particular context. If the escalating domestic unrest in Argentina and the state's low extractive capacity were necessary or sufficient for the junta to decide to invade the Falklands, we must describe, as much as possible, the background against which these factors assumed causal importance. This is not only required in order to produce a complete explanation of Argentina's invasion of the Falklands but also to identify which necessary conditions may be generalizable to other cases. It will enable one

The most basic question for this analysis is whether the Falklands War was indeed a diversionary conflict. I argue that it was. Before presenting this case, however, I will discuss three prominent alternative explanations for the junta's decision to retake the islands, all of which maintain that the primary motivation for the conflict was not the escalating social unrest in Argentina.

Alternative Explanations

Chile and the Beagle Channel Dispute

Several accounts of the Falklands War maintain that the junta's decision to reclaim the islands was part of Argentina's grand strategy to achieve regional dominance. In particular, historians have argued that it was partly a byproduct of the dispute between Argentina and neighboring Chile over the ownership of three small islands located near the Beagle Channel.[26] Argentina maintained that if it were not granted sovereignty over the islands, Chile would have a significant foothold in the competition for control over the Antarctic Peninsula, would dominate the shipping route around Cape Horn, and could control waters close to one of Argentina's key naval bases.[27] Thus, if Argentina were not awarded the islands, it would affirm Chile's position as a major power in the South Atlantic.

Historians have identified three reasons why the junta's concerns about the outcome of the conflict with Chile influenced its decision to seize the Falkland Islands. First, they contend that the junta believed if Argentina could regain control of the Falklands, it might strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis Chile in the Beagle Channel dispute.[28] Chile and Argentina had managed

to distinguish, as much as possible, between those conditions that were necessary given the context in which the junta acted and those that might be necessary conditions for any government to initiate a diversionary conflict in any place and at any time. For further discussion, see John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 149–51. For a discussion of the dangers and utility of the logic of necessary and sufficient condition for the analysis of individual cases, see Gary Goertz and Harvey Starr, "Introduction: Necessary Condition Logics, Research Design, and Theory," in *Necessary Conditions: Theory, Methodology, and Applications*, ed. Gary Goertz and Harvey Starr (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 3–12; and Gary Goertz, "The Substantive Importance of Necessary Condition Hypotheses," in *Necessary Conditions*.

[26] The simplest explanation, however, is that the military government decided to invade the Falklands simply for the glory of achieving a victory over a great power—Britain—and of retaking a territory of great symbolic importance. Although there is some evidence to support this claim, it does not explain the timing of the invasion. Galtieri and Anaya had been in power for some time (though Galtieri had not been president) before seriously considering an invasion. The decision to claim the Falklands was made in late 1981 when the unrest reached a fever pitch. See Daniel K. Gibran, *The Falklands War: Britain Versus the Past in the South Atlantic* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1998), 72–73; Arthur Gavshon and Desmond Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984), 57; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 69.

[27] See Gibran, *The Falklands War*, 65–66; Paul Eddy and Magnus Linklater, *The Falklands War* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1982), 29.

[28] Gibran, *The Falklands War*, 66.

to avoid a military confrontation over the islands by accepting an eleventh-hour offer by the Vatican to mediate the dispute. The Vatican considered the matter for two years then quietly informed Argentina that its judgment was likely to favor Chile. Dissatisfied with this outcome, Argentina asked the Vatican to reconsider. Argentina's leaders reasoned that if they adopted a tougher stance on the Falklands and demonstrated their readiness to use force to achieve their objectives, the Vatican would offer concessions to Buenos Aires over the Beagle Islands. Second, if the Vatican ultimately chose not to reverse its decision, the junta hoped to compensate for its loss of the islands by recovering the Falklands.[29] Finally, the junta sought to reclaim the Falklands because it feared Chile and the United Kingdom would form an alliance against Argentina.[30] As a result, the military government believed asserting its claim over the Falklands was necessary before an alliance between Chile and the United Kingdom could be forged.

These might appear to be a compelling series of mutually reinforcing arguments, but the evidence in their favor is limited. There is some indication that the Argentine navy believed a victory in the Falklands would increase Argentina's leverage in the Beagle Channel dispute. An editorial in *Conviccion*, a paper known to represent the views of the navy, hinted that "the taking of the Malvinas would actually help resolve the Beagle Channel issue since it would strengthen Argentina's negotiating hand."[31] In addition, Galtieri had long considered Chile to be a threat to Argentina's position in the regional balance of power, and Argentina's relations with Chile reached a new low under his leadership.[32] Finally, in the weeks before the invasion of the Falklands, Britain received intelligence that Argentina's foreign minister, Nicanor Costa Mendez, was concerned that a peaceful resolution of the conflict over the Falkland Islands was unlikely if the outcome of the Vatican's mediation of the Beagle Channel dispute did not favor Argentina.[33] One can safely conclude, therefore, that managing the Chilean threat was a priority for Galtieri and that some members of the government believed the Beagle Channel and Falkland Islands disputes were linked.

[29] See also Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano, *Argentina: The Malvinas and the End of Military Rule* (London: Verso Editions, 1984), 15; Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2002), 242.

[30] Britain's decision to lift its sanctions against and sell arms to the Chilean government appeared to confirm the junta's suspicions. See Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War: The Falklands Conflict of 1982* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), 11.

[31] See Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, 28.

[32] A few weeks after coming to power, Galtieri confirmed that he was prepared to repudiate a 1972 treaty with Chile, which stated that any border disputes would be submitted to the International Court of Justice. See Martin Honeywell and Jenny Pearce, *Falklands/ Malvinas: Whose Crisis?* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1982), 80–81; Maz Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), 47; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 22.

[33] *Falkland Islands Review: Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors*, Command 8787 (January, 1983), 43.

On the other hand, there is no evidence that when the junta decided to invade the Falklands in December it was predominantly motivated by a desire to secure a favorable papal decision in the Beagle Channel dispute. It hardly seems likely that the Vatican would have been favorably swayed by an unprovoked attack on the Falklands.[34] There is also scant evidence that the junta planned the invasion to compensate for the probable loss of the islands in the Beagle Channel. Indeed, tensions with Chile arguably led the junta to use more caution in regard to the Falklands. Finally, the junta's concerns about British-Chilean collusion had receded by December 1981. After London announced in June 1981 that it was withdrawing HMS *Endurance* from the South Atlantic, the junta concluded that its fears had probably been exaggerated.[35] Instead, the belief that Britain was increasingly disinterested in the region played a far more important role in the junta's decision to invade. Furthermore, if the ties between Britain and Chile were becoming stronger, an Argentine invasion of the Falklands would not have severed them. Rather, it is far more likely that, if Argentina provoked a conflict with the United Kingdom, it would have pushed Chile and Britain closer together. The fear of an alliance between Britain and Chile, therefore, was either not a factor in the decision to attack or one that made the option of invading the Falklands less attractive.

Brinkmanship and the Failure of Diplomacy

After seventeen years of formal negotiations over the Falkland Islands between Argentina and the United Kingdom, very little progress had been made. Richard Ned Lebow argues that mounting frustration with the diplomatic process led Buenos Aires to initiate a brinkmanship crisis, which he describes as "a confrontation in which one state knowingly challenges an important commitment of another with the expectation that its adversary will back down when challenged."[36] Lebow maintains that Britain's unwillingness to meet Argentine demands during a series of talks in February 1982 convinced the military government that the dispute could not be resolved diplomatically, and a new strategy was needed to pressure Britain to negotiate. The junta decided that by threatening an invasion, they might be able to blackmail London into ceding sovereignty over the islands. In Lebow's words, "After the termination of the New York negotiations, the generals set out upon a

[34] See Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 1–23.

[35] Richard C. Thornton, *The Falklands Sting: Regan, Thatcher, and Argentina's Bomb* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998), 65–66. See also Virginia Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War: A Model for North-South Crisis Prevention* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 105.

[36] Richard Ned Lebow, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic: The Origins of the Falklands War," in *Psychology and Deterrence*, ed. Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Stein, and Patrick M. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 119.

deliberate course of escalating tensions with Britain. Their strategy was to commit themselves step by step to military action with the expectation that this would succeed in eliciting some kind of British concession on sovereignty before they were compelled to act."[37]

Lebow maintains that the junta sent Britain signals that it would use force against the Falklands if no progress was made and began preparing public opinion for the possibility of an invasion. The brinkmanship failed, as London refused to concede the islands, putting Argentina's leaders in a difficult position. After promising the Argentine public that it was going to recover the islands, the junta was faced with a choice: it could back down and lose power or invade and risk war with Britain. In the end, the junta feared the public's wrath more the wrath of London.

This argument nicely captures some of the dynamics that prevented the junta from withdrawing its troops from the Falklands before and after the April invasion. As Lebow suggests, the government was constrained by the tremendous outpouring of public support for the military action and, in particular, Galtieri's promise after the invasion that Argentina would "give battle" if Britain retaliated.[38] That said, the logic of brinkmanship cannot explain why the junta initially decided to recover the islands by force in December 1981. Lebow asserts that the decision to invade (or rather to threaten to invade) was made in response to the failed talks in February and that the junta did not truly want to use force to recover the Falklands. The evidence suggests, however, that the junta formed its plan to invade two months earlier than Lebow claims.[39] The disappointing outcome of the talks, therefore, could not have been a cause of the junta's decision to invade, except in the sense that a British capitulation would have averted military action. Thus, the invasion was not the unintended consequence of a failed attempt at initiating a brinkmanship crisis, as Lebow contends, but rather a deliberate choice. The junta's frustration with the progress of the negotiations with Britain did not induce it to provoke a brinkmanship confrontation because it had already decided to go over the brink.[40]

[37] Lebow, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic," 108. Moro similarly argues that "the government decided to seek alternative means to induce the British to resume serious negotiations without, however, discarding the military option should all others fail." Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict*, 7.

[38] Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 144; Alexander Haig, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1984), 282.

[39] See Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict,* 7; Wynia, *Argentina*, 10; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 32.

[40] There is some evidence that the talks were part of Argentina's plan to forcefully acquire the islands. The junta hoped and expected that Britain would not meet its demands at the February talks, giving it a pretext for invading the islands. Indeed, the junta was frustrated when the negotiations went better than expected. See Juan E. Corradi, *The Fitful Republic: Economy, Society, and Politics in Argentina* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 19, 141–42; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 50; and Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 39.

The Fragmentation of Military Rule

Jack Levy and Lily Vakili contend that the fragmentation of the Argentine junta was an important cause of the invasion of the Falklands, arguing that bureaucratic authoritarian regimes, like Argentina's military government, initiate international conflicts in response to domestic unrest when divisions emerge among the ruling elite. When such regimes are unified, they are insulated from domestic pressures because they can exclude the public from decision making. Thus, it follows that only when the regimes are fragmented and there is a "rupture in the self-imposed isolation" do their leaders feel compelled to respond to the public's demands.[41] In addition, when such a regime loses its unifying purpose, it may choose to initiate an international conflict to renew its sense of shared mission.

Levy and Vakili describe Galtieri's decision to invade the Falklands as a "classic instance of this pattern."[42] When the military came to power in 1976, it sought to rebuild the economy and rein in widespread domestic terrorism through a combination of orthodox economic liberalization and repression called the Process of National Reorganization, or simply "the Process."[43] During the first four years of military rule, the junta ruthlessly eliminated any traces of opposition. The dirty war was so effective that, by 1980, "even isolated acts of terrorism seldom disturbed the peace."[44] The government's economic reforms were considerably less successful, and the Argentine economy was soon on the verge of collapse.

Initially, their shared commitment to economic reform and the war against leftist subversives enabled navy, air force, and army commanders to put aside competing bureaucratic interests.[45] Divisions within the junta deepened, however, as the public began to demonstrate against the Process, demanding that the government repair the economy and account for the disappearance of thousands of Argentines during the dirty war.[46] In other words, without a unifying mission, the military government was torn apart by factional infighting. By ordering an invasion, Levy and Vakili contend, Galtieri sought to give the junta a new unifying mission, creating, in effect, a rally within the government.[47]

[41] Jack Levy and Lily Vakili, "Diversionary Action by Authoritarian Regimes: Argentina in the Falklands/ Malvinas Case," in *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, ed. Manus Midlarsky (New York: Routledge, 1992), 127.

[42] Levy and Vakili, "Diversionary Action," 123.

[43] William C. Smith, *Authoritarianism and the Crisis of Argentine Political Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 231–42; Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 215–54; Paul Lewis, "The Right and Military Rule, 1955–1983," in *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910–Present*, ed. Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1993), 147–80.

[44] Paul Lewis, *Guerillas and Generals: The "Dirty War" in Argentina* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 179.

[45] Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 234.

[46] Wynia, *Argentina*, 9

[47] In this same vein, it was rumored that Galtieri promised Anaya that he would invade the Falklands if the admiral backed his bid for the presidency. There is, however, no consensus regarding whether

Historical accounts of the events prior to the Falklands War generally support Levy and Vakili's argument. In David Pion-Berlin words, "The changing of the guard [in December 1981] did nothing to reunite the armed forces . . . Galtieri's plunge into war . . . was a desperate act designed to reunify a badly split institution."[48] The question remains, however, whether the fragmentation of the governing elite was a necessary condition for the junta's decision to reclaim the Falklands. Levy and Vakili contend that, while the plan to invade was intended to address the social unrest in Argentina, the timing of the decision is best explained by the breakdown of the military government. That is, the Argentine government only felt compelled to respond to the domestic unrest after it splintered and was no longer insulated from domestic pressures. In order to evaluate the importance of elite fragmentation, therefore, one should consider the following counterfactual: would the rising domestic unrest have been threatening enough to compel a unified government to invade the Falklands or, at least, to respond seriously in some way?

If there was one issue at the beginning of Galtieri's presidency that every member of the government was acutely aware of, it was the need for a strategy to address the public's increasingly insistent calls for political and economic reform. Not only did the public ask the government to ease its economic woes, but it demanded the end of military rule. Thus, while there may have been little consensus regarding which policies would revive the economy or whether the government should liberalize the political system, members of the junta agreed that something had to be done in response to the public's dissatisfaction with military rule.[49] Indeed, the pressure to respond to the rising domestic unrest was so great that even a cohesive regime would have perceived it as a threat to its survival that needed immediate attention.[50] Furthermore, the breakdown of military rule was itself largely precipitated by the deepening social fragmentation. When the domestic unrest resurfaced in 1981, the members of the junta initially could not agree on how best to respond, fracturing the government.[51] Levy and Vakili, therefore, overlook

such a deal was ever made. For opinions on both sides of this issue, see Wynia, *Argentina*, 8–9; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 46, 110–12; Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 73–75; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, 3; Haig, *Caveat*, 277; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 6.

[48] David Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power: Institutions and Civil-Military Relations in Argentina* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1997), 62. See also David Pion-Berlin, "The Fall of Military Rule in Argentina, 1976–1983," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 27 (Summer 1985): 70; Corradi, *The Fitful Republic*, 138, 137.

[49] Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 57. See also Honeywell and Pearce, *Falklands/Malvinas*, 79; Smith, *Authoritarianism,* 244; Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, 62.

[50] It is noteworthy that the junta chose as its unifying mission virtually the only policy that also promised to increase public approval of the government.

[51] At most, there was an interaction between the domestic unrest and the conflict among the elite. After the domestic unrest began to escalate and the junta fragmented, the infighting among the military elite opened the door for the public to express its dissatisfaction with the government's performance.

two factors: (1) elite divisions may result from domestic unrest, and (2) a united government will fear domestic unrest if it is sufficiently strong.

In any case, whether or not it was a necessary condition, the fragmentation of the governing elite was certainly not sufficient to cause the junta's decision to invade the Falklands. Although this factor may help explain why the government felt compelled to address the rising social unrest, it does not explain why the junta initiated a diversionary conflict instead of, for example, enacting reforms or repressing its opposition. Levy and Vakili implicitly recognize elite fragmentation as insufficient when accounting for the junta's choice of diversionary conflict over its alternatives, by attempting in an ad hoc manner to explain why the junta did not enact reforms or repress its opposition. They mention, for example, that the government chose to initiate a diversionary conflict because of "the absence of viable alternatives" and suggest that neither reform nor repression was possible because the resources "to provide material rewards for supporters of the regime" or to coerce the opposition were not available.[52] Thus, infighting made the junta more vulnerable to the public's demands for change, but it did not make the invasion of the Falklands inevitable.

Domestic Unrest: Was the Falklands War a Diversion?

What unites these three arguments is that they downplay the extent to which the invasion was truly a diversionary war. The evidence suggests, however, that desires to distract attention from domestic problems and to rally the public behind the regime were important motivations for the war—so much so that domestic unrest was a necessary condition for the use of force. The Falklands invasion thus deserves its reputation as the archetypal diversionary war.

Galtieri became president at a time when Argentina was facing the collapse of its economy and escalating domestic turmoil. From March 1980 to March 1981, more than forty banks and investment firms declared bankruptcy. When the junta attempted to reverse the economic decline by repeatedly devaluing the peso, inflation skyrocketed. Between June and July 1981, for example, the value fell from 4,200 to 7,800 pesos to the dollar.[53] The public outcry was tremendous. Union leaders reestablished the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and launched a series of strikes. Business organizations openly criticized the government's economic policies. The Catholic Church, which had initially adopted a policy of accommodation toward the junta, distanced itself from the government by publicly reaffirming its commitment to democratization and forming an alliance with the labor movement. Mothers of the victims of the dirty war gathered in increasing numbers in the

[52] Levy and Vakili, "Diversionary Action," 122.
[53] Lewis, *Guerillas and Generals,* 181.

Plaza de Mayo and demanded an explanation from the government for the disappearance of their children. These demonstrations came to the attention of the foreign press, other governments, and nongovernmental organizations. As a result, the military government was under mounting international pressure to improve its human rights record. Several of the political parties, which existed before the advent of military rule, reorganized and founded the *Multipartidario*, effectively ending the junta's ban on party activity. Finally, the Argentine press abandoned its tacit agreement not to openly criticize the government, launching a barrage of attacks on the junta's economic policy only days after Galtieri was sworn into office on 18 December. In sum, union representatives, political parties, business leaders, students, the Church, intellectuals, and human rights activists "formed a chorus of opposition that by the beginning of 1982 was difficult for the government to ignore."[54]

Despite the three alternative arguments outlined earlier, there is in fact a considerable degree of scholarly consensus regarding the degree to which the junta was influenced by the rising social unrest when it planned to invade the Falklands.[55] Many argue that the timing of the decision to invade is best explained by the fact that the junta was facing unprecedented domestic opposition. The public discontent encountered by the junta in December 1981 differed in two significant ways from the unrest that the junta sought to contain after coming to power in 1976.[56] First, members of most sectors of society were expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of the military government, including groups that had previously backed the junta. Most notably, this included the Catholic Church and business leaders, important sources of support for the junta. Second, the junta's opposition not only questioned the government's economic policies but also called for an end to military rule. In addition to requests for better wages, the right to engage in collective bargaining, and lower inflation, union leaders and the *Multipartidario* demanded that the junta step down and allow Argentina to democratize. As Juan Corradi notes, "[the] right of the regime to stay in power was called into question in a significant way for the first time, and by established groups."[57]

[54] Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 240.

[55] Gibran, *The Falklands War*, 70; Dabat and Lorenzano, *Argentina*, 76–77; Honeywell and Pearce, *Falklands/ Malvinas*, 82; Corradi, *The Fitful Republic*, 136–37; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 48; Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, 30, 62; Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 242, 244; Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict*, 31; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, 4; Wynia, *Argentina*, 12; Paul Lewis, "The Right and Military Rule," 191; Haig, *Caveat*, 296; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 7, 21, 75; Jimmy Burns, *The Land that Lost Its Heroes: The Falklands, the Post-War, and Alfonsin* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), 30. A small number of scholars argue that domestic politics played a secondary role in the decision to invade. See Smith, *Authoritarianism*, 256; Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War*, 131–32; Douglas Kinney, *National Interest/National Honor: The Diplomacy of the Falklands Crisis* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 61.

[56] See Pion-Berlin, *Through Corridors of Power*, 60; Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 18.

[57] Corradi, *The Fitful Republic,* 136–37.

Thus, when Galtieri became president, the junta recognized it urgently needed to find a strategy to manage its growing domestic problems; to ignore the opposition was "politically impossible."[58] During his inaugural speech, Galtieri himself acknowledged, "I know that the time for words and promises is gone. I also know that words have lost their force and power to persuade. This is a time for firmness and action."[59] Given its collapsing political base, the junta had to do something—the question was, what?

Galtieri and the other members of the junta, unsurprisingly, have publicly denied that the plan to invade the Falklands was conceived in response to their domestic problems, but the evidence suggests that it was.[60] Foreign correspondents in Argentina reported before and after the invasion that the junta's decision to reclaim the islands was profoundly influenced by the domestic situation. Weeks before Argentina invaded, *Latin America Weekly Report* stated Galtieri had been planning to retake the Falklands since his ascension to power. "The link with internal politics is clear . . . Galtieri feels that tough action over the Malvinas, for long a question of nationalist pride, could do wonders for his popularity."[61] More important still, Argentine journalists indicated prior to the invasion that the junta's plans to occupy the islands were connected with its declining popularity. An editorial published in *Conviccion* in February, for example, said, "Right now, conditions are at their best. We have a decisive president and an excellent foreign minister. If, having won the war against terrorism, we recover the Malvinas, history will forgive the economic stupidities."[62] Similarly, three reporters from the daily newspaper *Clarín*, who interviewed many of the key players in the conflict and had access to confidential documents, maintain that social strife was a decisive factor in the junta's decision to retake the Falklands:

> Galtieri knew that he was arriving at the Casa Rosado with a country coming apart at the seams, with deep social divisions and a yearning for political change . . . In particular, he felt that it would be essential to have

[58] Wynia, *Argentina*, 12.

[59] "President Galtieri Gives Inaugural Speech," *Buenos Aires Domestic Service*, 24 December 1981.

[60] Exactly what motivates leaders to act is always difficult to know. Sometimes the leaders themselves do not know. In cases in which government decision making is shrouded in secrecy and the press may not freely comment on the conduct of the state, uncovering the aims of leaders is a particularly challenging task. As a result, one may be forced to draw conclusions from evidence that is often circumstantial. We can analyze the statements made by those who participated in the events, recognizing that these public and private comments are often intended to promote a specific agenda. In the end, one can attempt to make a reasonable judgment based on a judicious assessment of the available evidence.

[61] "Islands Used as Vote Catchers," *Latin America Weekly Report*, 12 March, 1982, 5. See also "Stroke of Genius or Fatal Gamble," *Latin America Weekly Report*, 9 April 1982, 11; "Forces that Galtieri Unleashed," *Latin America Weekly Review*, 30 April 1982, 9; Edward Schumacher, "Argentina Sped Past the Point of No Return," *The New York Times*, 11 April 1982; "Argentina; Nationalists All," *The Economist*, 17 April 1982, 25; Jimmy Burns, "Fear of 'War Economy' Dashes Recovery Hopes," *Financial Times Survey*, 10 May 1982, 36; Carl J. Migdal, "For Argentina, Troubles Are Just Beginning," *US News and World Report*, 17 May 1982.

[62] *Conviccion* editorial, 27 January 1982, quoted in Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, 28.

> some resounding triumph in order to give impetus to the military regime which was struggling to survive . . . He placed much emphasis upon the Foreign Ministry, since he supposed that in foreign policy he might find a key to the success of his strategy.[63]

The British and American diplomats who attempted to negotiate an end to the crisis in April 1982 also concluded that managing the internal unrest had been the impetus behind the junta's invasion plans. The British ambassador to the United States said, for example, that Galtieri "brought about the present occupation in order to distract public opinion from economic and political difficulties."[64] Reflecting on his efforts to mediate the dispute, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig wrote that there "was a widespread impression that the junta was creating a foreign distraction to give itself a respite from domestic economic problems, including severe inflation."[65] The evidence, therefore, points to the fact that the mass discontent in Argentina was a necessary condition for the invasion.

The presence of increasing social strife, however, is insufficient to explain why the junta chose to initiate a diversionary conflict to address its domestic problems instead of another policy. In other words, while the rising domestic unrest compelled action, it does not account for why Argentina's leaders did not choose to repress their opposition or attempt to increase domestic support by adopting popular political and economic reforms. The question remains, therefore, as to why a diversionary conflict was perceived to be a more attractive policy response than its alternatives.

The Argentine Junta's Preferences

In order to use the policy alternatives approach to identify the factors that led to the Argentine government's decision in December 1981 to invade the Falkland Islands, one must first clearly identify the junta's preferred strategy for addressing the unrest. There is evidence that the Argentine junta would have preferred adopting a mixed strategy of limited political reform, economic reform, and repression to initiating a diversionary conflict, and these alternatives, if they had been practicable, would have been chosen instead of an invasion of the Falkland Islands.

In the weeks before its decision to retake the Falklands, the junta discussed the possibility of liberalizing the political system by reintroducing some aspects of democratic rule. Specifically, it contemplated formally allowing political parties to organize (though not necessary compete in democratic

[63] Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 21.
[64] Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 58.
[65] Haig, *Caveat*, 263.

elections).[66] As we will see, the increasingly extreme nature of the political reform demands made this otherwise attractive policy response untenable. Galtieri and the other members of the junta also sought ways to revive the national economy. Indeed, they were desperate to address Argentina's economic difficulties because the military came to power on a promise to improve the country's economic performance.[67] As we will see, however, low state extractive capacity essentially shut off this option. For the Argentine military government, repression had always been and continued to be the default strategy for dealing with domestic opponents. Although the repressiveness of the state had been in decline since 1980, the government continued to respond to small-scale demonstrations with police violence.[68] In late 1981, however, widespread opposition and a lack of resources foreclosed this otherwise preferred response to the worsening domestic situation. Overall, it was the removal of preferred alternatives that to a large extent explains the junta's road to war. In the remainder of the paper, I explain precisely how these preferred alternatives were eliminated.

The Junta's Extractive Capacity

The question of why the junta chose to initiate a diversionary conflict and not to repress its opposition or adopt reforms is partly answered by examining how the state's low extractive capacity influenced the government's policy options. The junta's inability to extract resources hindered its capacity to respond to the unrest: it could not adopt costly measures, such as meaningful economic reforms, sustained repression, or a full-scale war.

There is little doubt that Argentina faced serious economic challenges by December 1981, including soaring inflation, rising unemployment, and a rash of bank failures. In addition, government revenue from taxes was severely diminished. Monica Peralto-Ramos finds that the "ability of the state to cover its expenses with income from collected taxes was at the lowest level in twenty years."[69] A World Bank report on Argentina's tax system attributes the decline in government revenues to tax evasion, inefficient tax administration, and rampant inflation. "Poor compliance, the proliferation of incentives and exemptions, and high inflation rates have affected revenue

[66] See Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War*, 132; Honeywell and Pearce, *Falklands/Malvinas*, 80; Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 244; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 46; Wynia, *Argentina*, 12

[67] See Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 256; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 87; "Galtieri Speaks in La Pampa on Government Goals," *La Nación*, 13 February 1982.

[68] Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 87–88; Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War*, 75.

[69] Monica Peralta-Ramos, *The Political-Economy of Argentina: Power and Class Since 1930* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 87.

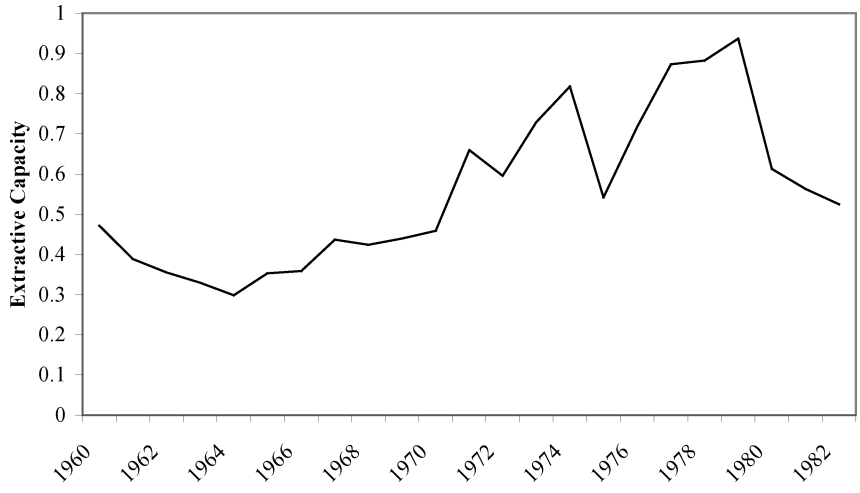

FIGURE 3 Argentina's extractive capacity. 1960–1982.

performance . . . In 1981 and 1982, total revenues from all taxes fell sharply as a fraction of GDP."[70]

Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman's data on state extractive capacity also suggests that the junta's ability to extract resources was declining in 1981 and 1982. Revenues were far short of the amount that theoretically could have been extracted from Argentina's economy (see Figure 3).[71] Another indicator of the state's low extractive capacity during this period was the junta's increased efforts to find additional sources of revenue. After Galtieri came to power, the junta sought to increase its income by selling publicly owned businesses and taking out loans. The government's decision to privatize state-owned industries was a reflection of its firm commitment to classical liberal economic principles, but it was also "designed to fulfill important short-run objectives such as acquiring badly needed cash from the sale of assets and attracting foreign investors."[72] By 1982, Argentina's public and private sectors had accumulated foreign debt equal to 60 percent of its gross national product (about $40 billion).[73] Interest payments on the debt (domestic and

[70] World Bank, *Argentina: Economic Memorandum*, 1 (Washington, DC, 1985), 96, 99.

[71] In assessing a state's ability to mobilize national resources, the best available data is Jacek Kugler and Marina Arbetman's measure of relative extractive capacity. Kugler and Arbetman estimate the level of tax revenues each government could collect based on the country's total economic resources. They then identify states that are better or worse than expected at extracting revenues. If a government extracts revenues equal to the expected amount based on the size of its economy, a state receives a score of 1.0. Scores less than 1.0 indicate that the government did worse than expected relative to the size of its national economy. Kugler and Arbetman give Argentina an extractive capacity score of 0.56 in 1981 and 0.52 in 1982. See Kugler and Arbetman, "Relative Political Capacity." See also Organski and Kugler, *The War Ledger*.

[72] Smith, *Authoritarianism*, 245.

[73] Ibid., 246.

foreign) rose from 10 percent of the government budget in 1977 to 37 percent of the budget in 1982.[74] Moreover, half of Argentina's external debt was scheduled for repayment in 1983.[75] Simply put, the state was on the verge of insolvency.

When the government's access to resources declined, so did its freedom of action. The scarcity of revenue severely constrained how the Galtieri-led junta could respond to the escalating unrest in December 1981. First, the government's limited access to resources substantially removed the option of meaningful economic reforms—higher wages and better working conditions for state employees, a reduction in unemployment, and increased spending on social programs—to placate domestic critics. To implement these changes, the government needed access to resources it simply did not have. Thus, instead of granting the public's demands for reform, Galtieri's economic minister instituted a wage freeze for government employees and announced a reduction in government spending. In the words of one historian, the Argentine government had "insufficient resources for attending to society's multiple demands, from education to public health to the salaries of state employees."[76] Galtieri's public statements also suggested that the state's low extractive capacity hampered efforts to improve the economy. The president advised the public that his ability to address the country's economic problems depended on whether the government had access to sufficient revenues:

> I profoundly believe in the importance of the state. A state that should not carry out what must and can be done by the private sector. . . . It is not a question of reducing the state to a minimum, but of giving it the necessary strength to carry out the great tasks that our republican organization has given it. Give it an authentic capability so that it can look after the educational and health sectors, the security of our people and the defense of our territory. So that it can expand and improve justice . . . I will be hard, even miserly, in all management of public finances that are not channeled toward the high priorities that I have just mentioned.[77]

Second, the junta's low extractive capacity limited its ability to engage in sustained repression against its domestic opposition. Although the government used the police force to control isolated demonstrations and strikes, such repression would have proved too costly if employed on a large scale and for a long period.[78] This was particularly true given the nature of the government's opposition at the end of 1981. Instead of just targeting

[74] World Bank, *Argentina*, xxvii.
[75] Ibid., 19.
[76] Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 256.
[77] "Galtieri Speaks," 1, 12.
[78] Pion-Berlin, "The Fall of Military Rule in Argentina," 66.

left-wing subversives as it had done during the dirty war, a policy of repression in 1981–1982 would have necessitated an expensive campaign of state violence against almost all sectors of society.[79] Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy report that Galtieri believed a popular revolt would be "uncontrollable," suggesting that he knew the state did not have the capabilities to contain widespread unrest.[80] Consequently, while the police were permitted to use force in response to several anti-government demonstrations by the CGT, the junta did not attempt to stamp out other signs of opposition, such as dismantling the *Multipartidario* or preventing the mothers of the disappeared from gathering in the Plaza de Mayo. The government was in no position to carry out the sort of sustained repression required to solve the crisis.

Argentina's low extractive capacity was a necessary condition for the invasion of the Falkland Islands; if the government had been capable of extracting additional resources, it would have chosen the less risky options of reforming its economy and repressing its opposition. Unfortunately for the junta, these more desirable policy responses were not on the menu of available options.

A combined effect of domestic unrest and low extractive capacity contributed to the invasion. Examining the independent effect of low extractive capacity on state behavior, one might have predicted inactivity rather than the adoption of a bellicose foreign policy. Only when the junta's low extractive capacity was combined with its escalating domestic problems did it became inclined toward initiating a conflict. Domestic unrest compelled the junta to adopt a policy to quell the unrest, while the government's lack of resources limited the scope for reform and repression. Low state extractive capacity also served to limit the scope for a large-scale war against Britain. But crucially, as we will see, the junta did not think Britain would fight. Invading the Falklands to rally the public, and thereafter managing a diplomatic crisis with London without actually fighting a war, was one of the few strategies to ameliorate the domestic crisis that the junta could afford to do.

The Final Pieces of the Jigsaw

The state's inability to mobilize resources and the domestic unrest are not sufficient conditions for the Falklands War, however. They do not explain why the junta chose not to adopt the monetarily low-cost political reforms requested by the public (for example, their demand for greater participation

[79] Wynia, *Argentina*, 12.

[80] Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 87. This is confirmed by the fact that shortly after the government faced a popular revolt in response to Argentina's defeat in the Falklands, it set a date for elections. Of course, officials also clung to the hope that, if they oversaw Argentina's democratization, they might be able to participate as elected leaders.

in the political process). We also still need to explain why the Falkland Islands were the target of the junta's diversionary conflict: why would a cash-strapped government invade the territory of a far more powerful state?

The answers to these questions are found in the nature of the opposition's demands for political reform, the junta's misperception of Britain's willingness to use force to defend its territory, Argentina's new alliance with the United States to fight communism in Latin America, and the Argentine public's desire to recapture the Falklands. These factors, when considered in conjunction with the extent of the domestic unrest and the state's extractive capacity, were jointly sufficient to explain why the junta chose to initiate a diversionary conflict (and not to reform or repress).[81]

British Resolve and the Likelihood of War

The junta was "absolutely, viscerally, convinced that the British would not fight" if Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands.[82] During and after the war with Britain, Galtieri confessed that he had misjudged London's response, saying that "such a stormy reaction as was observed in the United Kingdom had not been foreseen."[83] The simple truth is that Argentina's leaders would not have considered an invasion if they thought the United Kingdom was prepared to go to war over the islands. The misperception of Britain's resolve was a necessary condition for the use of force.

If one examines how Argentina prepared for and conducted the invasion in April, for example, there is ample evidence that the Argentine military was not anticipating a war with Britain. Although Argentina initially took

[81] Identifying additional necessary conditions is a requisite task if the combination of unrest and extractive capacity is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the junta's decision to reclaim the Falkland Islands. Though this may be an obvious point to some, it is one worth making. Any causal explanation is incomplete until sufficient antecedent conditions (a single one or a complete set of them) are stated. To assert that a condition or set of conditions is necessary to cause an event may be to provide something less than a full explanation, unless one has identified enough necessary conditions to have caused what one is attempting to explain. Of course, a complete explanation of an event may require only a single cause if it is both necessary and sufficient. Therefore, I attempt to identify the conditions that were jointly sufficient to cause Argentina's invasion of the Falklands.

[82] Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 147. See also Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 243; Freedman, "Reconsiderations," 199; Gibran, *The Falklands War*, 71; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, 10; G. A. Makin, "Argentine Approaches to the Falklands/Malvinas: Was the Resort to Violence Foreseeable?" *International Affairs* 59 (Summer 1982): 391–428.

[83] Wynia, *Argentina*, 8. Although the war proved to be a miscalculation with disastrous consequences, it is not difficult to see why Argentina's leaders might have doubted Britain's resolve. In the months prior to the decision to invade, Britain announced the withdrawal of HMS *Endurance* from the South Atlantic, which was its only semi-permanent naval presence in the region, and the closure of the British Antarctic Survey base in South Georgia, which was its only presence on South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. Together, these events suggested that if "ever a nation was tired of colonial responsibility, this was it." Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 47. See also John Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Recollections of an Errant Politician* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2002), 254–56.

the islands with a force of 1400 troops, half of those sent were recently trained conscripts, and the junta kept its best-trained troops stationed along the Chilean border.[84] Furthermore, the admiral in charge of the campaign was instructed to send all but five hundred soldiers back to Argentina in the days immediately after the invasion.[85] The remaining troops were charged with keeping order on the islands and not with defending the territory against a British assault.[86]

The junta's belief that Britain would not oppose an Argentine invasion of the islands profoundly affected its decision making in December 1981. Leaders did not have to calculate the economic costs of fighting a war with Britain (surely high enough to deter an attack given the government's perilous financial situation), whether additional resources could be mobilized if drawn into a lengthy war (dubious at best) or whether their military could defeat the British (hardly a certainty). While it might have had air superiority in a war with Britain, the junta risked its military being outgunned.[87] Because it was entirely convinced that Britain would accept Argentina's occupation of the islands as a fait accompli, it devoted very little time to contingency planning for the possibility of a war with Britain.[88] The junta simply expected that "the military would have nothing to do after the invasion but drive up and down the streets of Port Stanley for the benefit of the media."[89] This was something the government's extractive capacity could cover. Simply put, if the junta had thought that Britain would fight for the islands, Argentina would not have invaded.[90] As a representative of the Argentine navy said a few days prior to the invasion, "We can't stand more than 15 days of combat, let alone think of war."[91]

[84] See Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 131; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 47.

[85] Eventually this decision was reversed, though only after most of the troops had been sent back to Argentina.

[86] Admittedly, the junta did not intend to reclaim the islands in April. The junta was compelled to move up its plan for invasion by several months after Argentine workers landed on South Georgia, refused to request formal authorization for their presence, and hoisted an Argentine flag. Therefore, one could argue that the military might have been better prepared for an invasion had it taken place in July or October as originally anticipated. That said, the abbreviated timetable cannot account for the absence of a plan to defend the islands against a British reprisal.

[87] This is not to suggest that Britain was guaranteed a military victory. Indeed, Argentina was able to inflict significant damage on Britain's task force. And, if Argentina had been able to acquire additional Exocet missiles, the damage would have been even greater. See Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano,* chap. 2; Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 112; "Argentina Sticks to Its Guns but Pins Hopes on Diplomacy," *Latin America Weekly Report*, 23 April 1982.

[88] See Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 30–31; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War*, 142; Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 106; Nora Kinzer Stewart, *South Atlantic Conflict of 1982: A Case Study of Military Cohesion* (Alexandria: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1988), 59–60.

[89] Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 31.

[90] Dov Zakheim, "The South Atlantic Conflict: Strategic, Military, and Technological Lessons," in *The Falklands War: Lessons for Strategy, Diplomacy, and International Law,* ed. Alberto R. Coll and Anthony C. Arend (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 159–88.

[91] Anonymous source, quoted in Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 97.

Britain's apparent lack of resolve made an invasion possible but in the absence of other factors such as domestic unrest that provided the motivation for action, Argentina would not have used force to reclaim the islands. Rather, Britain effectively had a veto over the invasion: it could have prevented Argentina from invading if it had strongly signaled its willingness to use force.[92] By declining to do so, Britain paved the way for an Argentine attack. It was a classic necessary, but not sufficient, condition.

American and Argentine Rapprochement

During the Carter administration, Argentina's relationship with the United States deteriorated significantly. In an effort to compel the junta to improve its human rights record, President Jimmy Carter imposed an arms embargo on Argentina. During the early days of the Reagan administration, however, U.S. policy toward Argentina became more conciliatory.[93] This about-face resulted from President Ronald Reagan's desire to exploit the junta's strong anti-communist stance to combat the perceived Soviet threat in Latin America.[94] Reagan found a particularly receptive audience in Galtieri, who was flattered by the American president's attentions during the general's two lengthy visits to the United States in 1981.[95]

Argentina's decision to invade the Falklands has been attributed to the heady experience of being courted by the United States. There is considerable evidence that Galtieri's rapport with Reagan led to "an unrealistic sense of Argentina's comparative strategic importance in the world," with the junta believing the United States would either support its efforts to recover the islands or, at a minimum, remain neutral.[96] In a January 1982 editorial published in

[92] Franks, *Falkland Islands Review*, 76–77.

[93] The policy reversal began during the Carter administration in response to the revelation that Argentina had been developing a nuclear weapons program.

[94] See Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 53–54, 256.

[95] Galtieri, who was then commander of the army and a member of the military government, also made a very favorable impression on many officials in the Reagan administration. After one visit, he was described as "Argentina's General Patton" and said to possess a "majestic personality." See Thornton, *The Falklands Sting*, 70; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 15.

[96] David Lewis Feldman, "The United States Role in the Malvinas Crisis, 1982: Misguidance and Misperception in Argentina's Decision to Go to War," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 27 (Summer 1985): 6. The belief that the United States would remain strictly neutral or even side with Argentina instead of Britain, its historic ally, was a product of wishful thinking and miscommunication. A conversation between Costa Mendez and Thomas Enders, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs, is thought to have been particularly influential in shaping the junta's perception of the likely U.S. stance on a conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom. After politely listening to a lengthy presentation on the legality of Argentina's Falkland Islands claims, Enders told Costa Mendez that U.S. policy toward the dispute was "hands off." Enders later insisted that he had not given Argentina a green light to invade. "What I said to him was that we were 'hands off' *on the basic dispute*, but that we hoped they would get on with the discussions with the British." Michael Charlton, *The Little Platoon* (London: Blackwell, 1989), 165 (emphasis in the original). See also Wynia, *Argentina*, 14; Smith,

La Prensa, Iglesias Rouco, who was closely connected to high-ranking government officials, stated that the junta anticipated the United States would side with Argentina in the event of an invasion. "[Argentina is] searching for something beyond the mere recovery of a portion of its sovereignty. As far as we know, Washington understands it so, this being the reason why it has reportedly expressed its support for 'all of the actions' leading to the recovery [of the Falkland Islands], without excluding military actions."[97] Galtieri, who once described himself as America's "pampered child," admitted he misperceived how the United States would respond to an invasion. "I didn't expect his [Reagan's] approval or support . . . but I was sure that he would behave with balance and neutrality."[98]

It is improbable that Argentina would have invaded the Falklands if its leaders believed the United States was prepared to offer Britain significant support in the South Atlantic.[99] Although many analysts prior to the war indicated that a British victory was far from assured, Argentina could hardly have believed it would win if Washington aided Britain.[100] Thus, it follows that Argentina's calculations regarding the prudence of an invasion were influenced by its expectations about the diplomatic effects of using force to reclaim the Falklands. In other words, a point existed between the belief that an Argentine invasion would be followed by diplomatic condemnation (which was almost certain) and the belief that it would be followed by U.S. military support for Britain (or indeed support by any other powerful state), at which Buenos Aires would no longer have considered the costs of an invasion acceptable. To say that the junta's belief in the United States' strict neutrality was a necessary condition for the war is perhaps too strong a claim. On the other hand, it was necessary for the junta to believe the United States would not actively assist Britain. In the end, however, the question of American neutrality is largely irrelevant. The foregoing discussion assumes that Argentina expected to fight a war with Britain over the Falklands. It did not. A more accurate assessment of the causal importance of America's rapprochement with Argentina, therefore, is that it reinforced the junta's perception that the Falklands were a low risk target. Britain would be forced to acquiesce; the United States would happily acquiesce.

Authoritarianism, 256; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 70; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 120; Honeywell and Pearce, *Falklands/Malvinas*, 81–82; Lebow, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic, 112, 251; and Haig, *Caveat,* 267.

[97] J. Iglesias Rouco, "The Foreign Offensive," *La Prensa*, 24 January 1982.

[98] Leopoldo Galtieri, quoted in Lebow, "Miscalculation in the South Atlantic," 113.

[99] In the end, American assistance, although limited, helped Britain win the war. See Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 72.

[100] See Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War,* chap. 5.

The Nature of the Target and the Demands for Reform

In order for an international conflict to produce a rally effect, the government must select a target that will unify the citizenry behind the ruling elite. A military adventure will produce internal cohesion only if there is a wide consensus that the use of force is justified. There is some evidence that most international conflicts produce a temporary surge in support for the government. If the government's primary motivation for initiating a conflict is to improve public opinion, the government will prefer using force where there is widespread domestic support, such as reclaiming territory that has cultural or historical significance or defending the country against a generally recognized threat.

The junta planned to recover the Falkland Islands, therefore, not only because it was a low-cost target (that is, Britain was not expected to go to war over the Falklands) but also because it was a popular foreign policy goal.[101] Indeed, it was perhaps the only policy that was supported by all sectors of Argentine society, including the junta's most avid critics. In the words of one Argentine, "The dispute has assumed the proportions of a national feeling going back to the childhood of every native of Argentina (without any political or class distinction) and uniting the national conscience in the knowledge of having been robbed and subjected to insult without apology."[102] This was evidenced by the public's reaction to the invasion in April 1982. Thousands of celebrants gathered in the Plaza de Mayo to demonstrate their support for the reoccupation of the islands. Even a number of *Montoneros*, the left-wing guerillas targeted by the junta during the dirty war, were in the crowd, risking execution if they were discovered by the government.[103] In contrast, the Falklands would not have been a viable target for a diversionary conflict if an invasion was a divisive issue or if the public was indifferent regarding their recovery. The existence of a unifying target was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the invasion. Obviously, this causal factor alone cannot explain why the junta decided to invade in December 1981, since the public had supported military action in the Falklands for decades.

As we saw, the junta's low extractive capacity prevented it from adopting the economic reforms requested by the public. The question is, therefore, why the government also largely ignored its opposition's demands for substantial political reform. The answer is quite simple. Even the most reform-minded leaders are likely to resist the public's demand for a fundamental

[101] Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 18.

[102] Anonymous source, quoted in Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 31.

[103] Gavshon and Rice, *The Sinking of the Belgrano*, 46; Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 75; Eddy and Linklater, *The Falklands War*, 135; Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 243; Moro, *The History of the South Atlantic Conflict*, 30; Wynia, *Argentina*, 16; Cardoso, Kirschbaum, and van der Kooy, *Falklands*, 102; Haig, *Caveat,* 276–77.

restructuring of the state's political and economic institutions, even if acquiescing would end the unrest immediately. In this case, the Argentine public wanted democratization. As one union leader declared in the fall of 1981, "The political solution does not lie in changing the president or ministers, but in changing the system."[104] If the junta had complied with the demands of its opponents, it would have meant the end of military rule and possibly a Nuremburg-style trial of the leaders responsible for the dirty war. The junta was not willing to remove the threat to its regime by ending the regime. Thus, the specific nature of the public's demands for political reform was a necessary condition for the invasion of the Falklands; if the demands had been more moderate, the government would probably have offered concessions rather than use force.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES IN PERSPECTIVE

Identifying the sources of diversionary conflict to a large extent involves understanding why alternative and, in many ways, less risky options are not chosen. This in turn suggests the critical role played by low state extractive capacity, which may foreclose economic reform and repression as viable policy options and dramatically narrow the menu of options. In applying these insights to the case of the Falklands War, I find that the combination of low extractive capacity and high domestic unrest not only compelled Argentina's leaders to desperately search for any policy that held some hope of addressing their domestic problems; it also ruled out preferred policies, such as substantial economic reform and sustained repression, to moderate or end the unrest (see Figure 4). Low extractive capacity and domestic unrest also removed the option of initiating a protracted militarized conflict. What was left was the use of force without sustained warfare against a unifying target—the Falklands. Perceptions of British resolve, or the lack of it, made the use of force seem to be at least a plausible strategy, although hardly ideal, for solving difficulties at home. Therefore, the diversionary attack on the Falklands was driven less by its inherent or perceived utility and more by the fact that it was virtually the only option on the menu that the junta could afford.

The necessary conditions for the Falklands invasion can be divided into three categories: motivation, domestic constraints, and opportunity (see Figure 5). The necessary motivation for action—domestic unrest—was present. The military government lacked the resources to either repress or appease its opposition by enacting reforms, especially given the magnitude of the public's demands for change (domestic constraints); it, therefore, chose to initiate a diversionary conflict. Finally, the junta selected diversion over its

[104] "Radical Leaders Want Political System Changed," *Noticias Argentinas*, 20 November 1981.

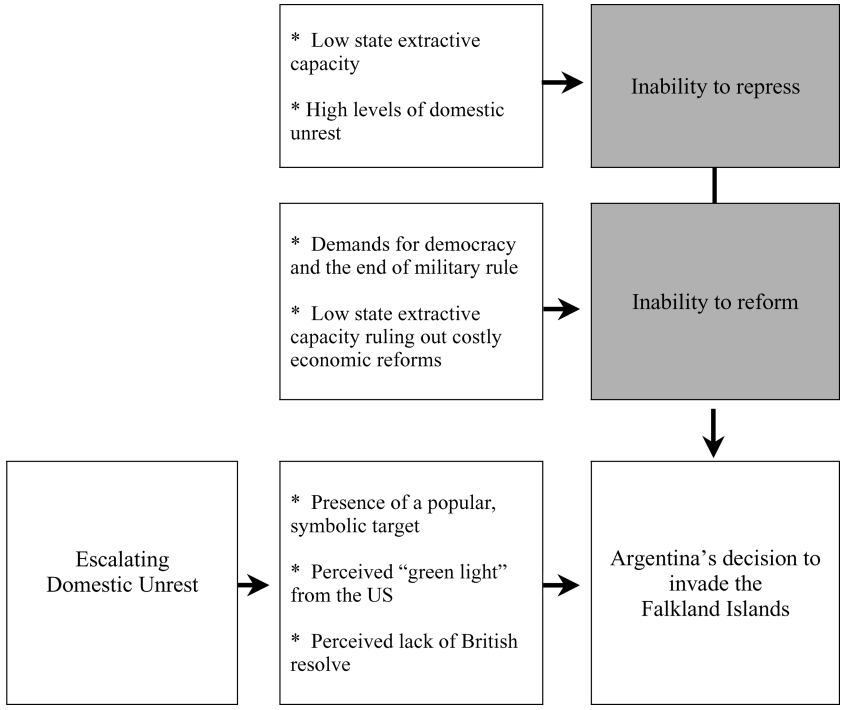

FIGURE 4 The policy alternatives approach applied to Argentina's decision to invade the Falkland Islands.

alternatives because it was presented with opportunity: military action against the Falklands Islands was perceived as being both unlikely to provoke an international response and likely to produce the desired domestic response.

There may be few cases in which the diversionary motivation is as clear-cut as in the Falkland Islands War, but there are many other cases where states used force, in part, to distract the public or rally opponents.[105] Extractive capacity is likely to be a powerful cause of diversionary war more generally because this variable profoundly shapes the policy menu available to leaders. In other words, governments are likely to calculate the cost of reforms or repression—relative to their ability to extract resources—and search for alternate solutions if the former exceeds the latter.

Other conditions may have been necessary in 1982 only, given the particular geopolitical context in which the junta acted. With a different set of background conditions, other factors might become necessary conditions for

[105] These include the Crimean War (1853), the Franco-Prussian War (1870), the Russo-Japanese War (1904), World War I (1914), and the Sino-Japanese War (1931). For a discussion of the domestic causes of these and other wars, see Blainey, *The Causes of War*; Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War"; Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963); Arno Mayer, "Internal Crises and War since 1870," in *Revolutionary Situations in Europe*, ed. C. Bertrand (Quebec: Interuniversity Centre for European Studies, 1971).

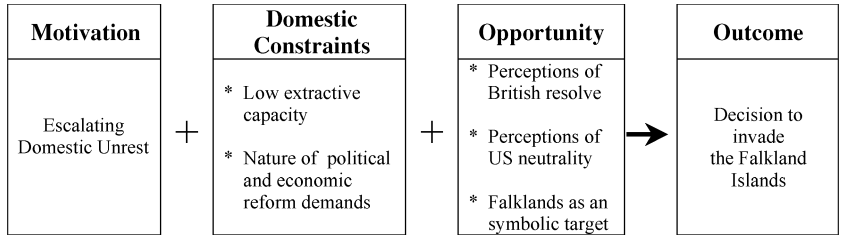

FIGURE 5 Necessary conditions for Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands.

a similar outcome to have occurred. This means that not all of the conditions that were necessary for the junta to invade the Falklands may prove useful for explaining why states initiate diversionary conflicts in general. If a state has considerable military capabilities relative to its target, it may not be necessary for its leader to believe that military action would encounter little resistance or not provoke an international response. Nevertheless, most states must perceive a target as a low-cost objective before initiating a diversionary conflict. This is particularly true if they lack resources for an extended fight (often the case when the mob is gathering outside the palace). While Britain's apparent reluctance to defend its colony and the junta's expectation that the international community would not interfere were clearly necessary conditions for the Falklands War, one might expect most leaders to make similar calculations at the outset of any military adventure. In sum, one cannot conclude that these generally are important causal factors without examining other cases of diversionary conflict, reform, and repression. There are a number of insights from this case, however, that may improve our ability to predict when and why states initiate diversionary conflicts, which should be included in future studies of how states respond to domestic unrest.

This case study has demonstrated the utility of thinking in terms of policy alternatives. If we want to explain a government's policy choices, the first step is to hypothesize the primary alternatives to that option and secondly to consider which variables would influence the ability of the state to enact these alternatives. These variables might not be obvious if one were to simply consider the direct causal relationship between the relevant independent and dependent variables. There is no obvious reason, for example, why extractive capacity would make a state facing domestic unrest more likely to initiate a diversionary conflict; it is not evident in the direct causal chain linking demonstrators with war. Instead, this variable only emerges when we consider the alternative policies that were not chosen. Therefore, the policy alternatives approach has wide potential application in studies of foreign policy decision making.