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TOPIC: THE FALKLANDS WAR

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Introduction

The Falklands War started on 2nd April 1982 when Argentine forces invaded the Falkland Islands, and then the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, which were British dependent territories, sparking war between Argentina and the United Kingdom. With the ongoing Cold War and decolonisation process, delegates are advised to approach this topic carefully.

Delegates are reminded that as the Historical Security Council is set during the time of the conflict, in this case the Falklands War, any events occurring after the conflict cannot be taken as facts. Any statistical data or military intelligence not available at the time cannot be cited. Delegates may, however, suggest predictions. (For example, instead of “The Soviet Union and China abstained on a resolution condemning Argentina, thus a similar resolution would not be effective”, delegates may state “Any resolution condemning Argentina has the potential to be widely divisive and would be unlikely to gain support from powerful nations such as China and the Soviet Union.”) Delegates are also reminded to consider the technological and social realities of the time, and to suggest solutions that would be feasible at the time.

In the conference, delegates’ actions may well change the course of history, such that events in the timeline may not occur as stated.

Key Terms

Falkland Islands

- A group of islands located in the South Atlantic Ocean, 480 km east of Patagonia in Southern Argentina, which have been colonised by different European powers, before ultimately becoming a British colony.

Sovereignty

- The authority of a state to govern itself or another state.

De facto administration

- The management of public affairs and government which exists in reality, even if not legally.

Background Information and Key Areas to Consider

Cold War situation

- With immense tensions in international relations, further escalation of the Falklands War could lead to an all-out proxy war, pushing the borders of the Cold War to Latin America and encouraging the geographical spread of Communism. In a conflict with the United Kingdom, it is possible for Argentina to ally with her enemy’s enemy, the Soviet Union.

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Decolonisation

- The Falkland Islands were first colonized by France, then ceded to Spain, and subsequently claimed by Britain. After the Second World War, when anti-colonialism was on the rise, British action regarding Crown colonies could spark a wave of decolonisation or anti-European sentiment. This could potentially cause unrest in the United Kingdom's other colonies or newly-independent colonies, such as Brunei (which would gain independence in 1984) or Belize (which just gained independence in 1981). Such effects could spread to colonies or overseas territories held by other European powers or the United States. Aggravating anti-British sentiment would jeopardise transition of power as well as diplomatic status of the United Kingdom.

Military concerns

- As Argentina had successfully invaded the Falkland Islands, stationed military defences and readied both her air force and navy, an amphibious assault on the islands would be difficult, and would likely result in casualties on both sides. The Falkland Islands were small in size, with only three airstrips, none of which could support fast jets.
- Argentina was militarily weaker than the United Kingdom, with fewer missiles, ships and planes. On the other hand, she was geographically much closer to the Falkland Islands. Any military operation on the part of the United Kingdom or her allies would require significant logistical planning.
- The Falklands War would be the largest air-naval combat operation since the end of the Second World War, in the midst of anti-war feelings after the Vietnam War. Failed military operations or casualties in the Falklands War could result in public outcry and decrease in government popularity.

Latin American Diplomatic concerns

- With the majority of Latin American nations in support of Argentina, overreaction or intervention in the Falklands War could lead to escalation of tensions with Latin American nations, which were major exporters of natural resources such as rubber, sugar, cocoa and coffee. Retaliation by Latin American nations in form of embargoes would devastate economies of European nations and the United States.

Guiding Questions

1. Was the British occupation of the Falkland Islands legal?
2. Did Argentina have a rightful claim to the islands?
3. Was the invasion of the Falkland Islands justified?
4. What actions should be taken to prevent further military conflict as a result of decolonisation?

Key Parties Involved

Argentine Republic

- Argentina has long since claimed sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, believing them to be illegally occupied by the United Kingdom. At the time, Argentina was ruled by military dictatorship and was in the middle of transfer of power between military dictators. Economic downturn and resulting civil unrest against the government meant that the Argentine government was looking for a way to divert public attention from internal crises and stir up patriotism amongst the populace. Argentina experienced -5.69% GDP growth in 1981 and -4.957% GDP growth in 1982.
- The Argentine government believed that the United Kingdom would not respond militarily.

United Kingdom

military.

United Kingdom

- The United Kingdom has regarded the Falkland Islands to be a crown colony since 1841. However, the United Kingdom was not well-prepared for the Argentine invasion of the islands and had no contingency plan for such an event, as most military resources were stationed to deter Communist aggression in Europe and Asia. Most importantly, the United Kingdom only had two aircraft carriers available to participate in the Falklands War on such short notice. Retaking the island was considered to be difficult but necessary by the Conservative government. Success would mean a large boost in popularity, and failure would be disastrous at the voting booths.

United States

- Initially, the United States was concerned that Argentina would turn to the Soviet Union for aid and thus attempted to mediate in the conflict. When Argentina declined to cooperate, the United States firmly supported Britain in the Falklands War, providing the United Kingdom with military equipment to assist.

French Republic

- France publicly backed the United Kingdom by providing specialised aircraft training to her pilots and utilizing her intelligence services to prevent Argentina from purchasing missiles. At the same time, a French technical team remained in Argentina throughout the war, identifying and fixing problems with Argentine missile launch systems.

Latin American Nations

- With the exception of Chile, Latin American nations supported Argentina. Peru attempted to purchase missiles for Argentina, Venezuela and Guatemala offered to send troops and Libya delivered military supplies to Argentina with the support of Brazil.

Commonwealth of Nations and European Economic Community

- British Commonwealth nations and European nations overwhelmingly supported the United Kingdom, with the European Economic Community imposing economic sanctions on Argentina. Such support was mainly in form of political support. With the exception of New Zealand offering a frigate for British use, there was no substantial military support from the aforementioned nations.

Timeline

Date	Event
2nd April, 1982	Argentine forces rapidly overcame the British marines at Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands, resulting in British surrender by Governor Hunt.
5th April, 1982	The United Kingdom assembles a task force of more than 100 ships, which sets sail for Falkland Islands. Among those ships are aircraft carriers HMS Hermes and HMS Invincible. Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, resigns over the invasion and is replaced by Francis Pym.
25th April, 1982	South Georgia is retaken by British forces.
2nd May, 1982	Argentine cruiser General Belgrano was sunk by British submarine HMS Conqueror, killing more than 320 Argentine sailors, leading to the single biggest loss of life in the war. Margaret Thatcher faced criticism over the sinking because the vessel was outside the 200-mile exclusion zone around the Falklands.
4th	British destroyer HMS Sheffield was abandoned after being hit by a missile,

1982	Loss of life in the war: Margaret Thatcher faced criticism over the sinking because the vessel was outside the 200-mile exclusion zone around the Falklands.
4th May, 1982	British destroyer HMS Sheffield was abandoned after being hit by a missile, killing 20 crew.
21st May, 1982	British landings begin at San Carlos. British frigate HMS Ardent was sunk by Argentine aircraft, killing 22 sailors. Fifteen Argentine aircraft were shot down.
28th to 29th May, 1982	Battle of Goose Green. 17 soldiers from British Second Battalion, Parachute Regiment were killed in two days of fierce fighting, which ended in Argentine surrender with dozens killed and more than 1,000 taken as prisoners of war.
8th June, 1982	Over 50 British soldiers killed in attacks on landing craft RFA Sir Galahad and RFA Sir Tristram.
11th to 12th June, 1982	British destroyer HMS Glamorgan badly damaged in a missile attack. Three Falkland civilians killed in British naval bombardment.
13th to 14th June, 1982	British forces take Argentine positions on mountains overlooking Port Stanley. General Mario Menendez surrenders to Major General Jeremy Moore as British forces march into Port Stanley.
17th June, 1982	Argentine President Leopoldo Galtieri resigns as leader of Argentina's military junta.

United Nations Involvement

The United Nations Security Council adopted Security Council Resolution 502 on the 4th April condemning the hostilities and demanding immediate Argentine withdrawal from the islands. Notably, Panama voted against the resolution whilst the Soviet Union, China, Poland and Spain abstained.

The United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation was established to implement United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514, which granted independence to colonial countries in 1960. The United States and Britain do not participate in this committee, although Argentina constantly lobbies the committee for assistance.

United Nations Resolution 2065 acknowledged that the Falkland Islands' sovereignty was a remnant of colonial days.

Possible Solutions

United Nations mediated negotiation between Argentina and the United Kingdom:

- Discussion of ceasefire arrangements, military withdrawals, humanitarian concerns, lay groundwork for a future peace treaty

Sanctions:

- Implementing political or economic sanctions to punish responsible parties or to use sanctions in order to deter further escalation of conflict, for example by preventing other countries from involvement

Deployment of humanitarian aid:

- Minimize harm done to civilians through provision of housing, food, medicine

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- Minimize harm done to civilians through provision of housing, food, medicine and other essentials

Deployment of peacekeepers:

- As a last resort, delegates can vote to deploy United Nations Peacekeeping Forces to the Falkland Islands in order to protect civilians and deter further military actions

Further research suggestions

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