

Another Ungentlemanly Act

Decades pass and tempers cool. Argentina and Britain now have excellent relations. Argentina has long since apologised for starting the Falklands War in 1982 ... you'd think. But no, there has **never been an apology**. Nor will there be one in the foreseeable future. For the shameful reason that very few Argentinians think that any wrong was done to the Falkland Islanders or to the British people.

Culturally and politically British, the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean had long been claimed by the Argentinians for reasons of third-world machismo and spite. On April 2, 1982, their bloody **dictator**, General Galtieri, needing a device to bolster his flagging popularity, did what dictators love to do: he ordered his people to commit the crimes that they yearned to commit, so that by abasing themselves, they would be at one with him. The Argentinian armed forces captured the Falkland Islands.

Initiating an aggressive war: that is a war crime. Attempting to enslave a free people: that is a crime against humanity. Causing the deaths of 255 British soldiers and three Islanders; maiming others; costing billions; wrecking a peaceful and unique way of life which has not recovered to this day: all those are foul crimes too.

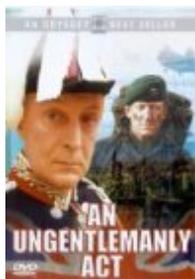
But the Argentinian people **do not think so**. They do not get it. This moral failing in them caused the war in 1982, and it has not gone away. That they are not invading again at this moment is a matter of expediency to them, not morality.

On the contrary, President Kirchner of Argentina is now **demanding** that *Britain* apologise and seek the forgiveness of the Argentinian people. What for? For being invaded? Not quite, but almost. You see, it emerged on Friday that in the frantic rush to prepare the British fleet that would liberate the Islands, corners were cut. Some of the ships were pulled away from their Cold War duties of facing down the Soviet fleet, where they had been deployed with nuclear weapons. To un-install these weapons would take 36 hours, and so it was decided that this should be done while the ships were already under way. The weapons were duly transferred in mid-ocean to other British ships heading back to Britain.

In other words, on their way to a hellish battle in which hundreds of them would die, the British voluntarily disarmed themselves in order to spare enemy lives and safeguard the environment. But by

doing this in a way that did not also impair the Navy's remaining effectiveness, they were committing some vague violation of political correctness. *That* is the transgression which, by the standards of the Argentinian people, warrants apology and forgiveness. Tyranny, aggression and the taking of innocent lives do not. But nuclear equals bad, and therefore the Argentinians were in the right after all. On the basis of that pathetic excuse for a grievance and a justification, and twenty one years later, they are still managing to whine loudly enough to drown out any trace of moral thought.

P.S. Our title echoes that of the movie **An Ungentlemanly Act** which portrays the outrageousness of the invasion with superb understatement, humour and attention to detail.



Sun, 12/07/2003 - 19:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Malvinas, Victorious Falkland War & Hong Kong

Sir,

I somehow feel I should remind you of Hong Kong and the, ahem, thoughtful stance the United Kingdom took against Red China at roughly the same time, back in the late seventies and early eighties.

Of course machismo is an exclusively south american attitude, just as only ungentlemanly dictators would ever follow the notion to wage a splendid little war as a device to turn the public's attention away from, let's say, not so desirable developments.

Whether the sinking of the Belgrano was up to the very highest standard in sportsmanship would only be questioned by an Argentinian or a spoilsport – I'm not the one and do not wish to be the other.

Still, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and Argentine got rid of some unsavoury rulers as a result.

Respectfully

Tjalf Boris Pröbldorf

by Tjalf Boris Pröbldorf on Mon, 11/07/2005 - 21:24 | [reply](#)

Re: Malvinas, Victorious Falkland War & Hong Kong

Thank you for the comment. Consider us duly reminded of Hong

Kong, but we are not sure what your point is. If it is that the British should have held out for a better deal in the handover negotiations, that is certainly arguable. If it is that the British should fight a war to liberate Hong Kong, that is not. There are many positions in between, but whichever of them you were advocating, the relevance to our criticism of the Argentineans, which is the subject of this post, escapes us. Could you elaborate?

by **Editor** on Tue, 11/08/2005 - 01:14 | [reply](#)

Belgrano

1982: British sub sinks Argentine cruiser

Argentina's only cruiser, the General Belgrano, has been sunk by a British nuclear submarine in the South Atlantic.

It is the first serious attack on the Argentine navy by the British since the conflict over the disputed Falkland Islands began last month.

link

I don't understand. They sunk a ship after a war started. What's the criticism?

Not only that, they had a nuclear submarine in the area, but refrained from using nukes. Perhaps machismo isn't so strong in Britain?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 11/08/2005 - 18:41 | [reply](#)

British Amnesia

My friend you are right and wrong.

Yes, the Falklands War in 1982 was a sad thing but if you expect an apology you are wrong. Britain should be giving apologies first.

British opinion leaders have again begun to romanticize the "achievements" of their colonial empire and ignore the bloody crimes and violent history of the building and dismantling of the British Empire.

The British national school curriculum has more or less struck the empire and its crimes out of history. The standard modern world history textbook for 16-year-olds has chapter after chapter on the world wars, the cold war, British and US life, Stalin's terror and the monstrosities of Nazism - but scarcely a word on the British and other European empires which carved up most of the world, or the horrors they perpetrated.

You could perfectly write this:

An Ungentlemanly Act

Decades pass and tempers cool. Britain now have excellent relations with the world. Britain has long since apologised for the crimes committed under their empire... you'd think. But no, there has never been an apology. Nor will there be one in the foreseeable future. For the shameful reason that very few British think that any wrong was done to millions of people.

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/history/2003/0816casual.htm>
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/history/2004/07hyperpower.pdf>

by Alexander d'Agui  on Fri, 04/21/2006 - 07:57 | [reply](#)

Re: British Amnesia

The real state of public opinion in Britain is very different from that described in the above comment.

First of all, it is not the case that the British Empire has been "struck out" of history courses in British schools. **Here is a typical textbook** for 14-year-olds studying National Curriculum History (there is no "standard textbook" as such, because the British National Curriculum does not prescribe textbooks or force particular topics on schools). It is called *The Impact of Empire: Colonialism 1500-2000*. Nor does it omit the crimes and horrors perpetrated in the name of the Empire. On the contrary, it acknowledges them and emphasises them. Note the chapter headings: there is an entire chapter on slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire, and also an entire chapter on morally judging the Empire, entitled *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Far from "romanticising" the British Empire, British opinion is overwhelmingly opposed to it, to such an extent that the very terms 'imperialism', 'empire' and 'colonialism' are now used exclusively as terms of abuse, by virtually all shades of British political opinion. The idea that "very few British think that any wrong was done to millions of people" is pure fantasy. The opposite is the case.

As for apologies from British governments, the main reason Tony Blair, for example, has not apologised much for actions of the British Empire is that he considers himself an implacable enemy of the entire moral and political rationale under which it was established and run – which is in any case no longer approved of by any mainstream political faction in Britain. Despite this, there *have* in fact been official apologies. For example, Blair apologised to the Irish people for Britain's role in the Potato Famine. The Amritsar Massacre of 1919 in Imperial India was strongly condemned even at the time by the House of Commons, in defiance of much public opinion which then, unlike now, contained a significant element of approval of the massacre.

The changes undergone by the British people both during and since the days of Empire stand, unfortunately, in marked contrast with the unchanged attitude of the Argentinean government and people that we criticised above. While there is no trace of imperial ambition

left in British politics, and while Britons show remarkably little inclination to justify even the favourable aspects of their former Empire, let alone its crimes, Argentinean attitudes towards the Falklands war consist of very little other than the same morally bankrupt irredentism that caused them to invade in 1982.

The unjustified Argentine demand for an apology – made by present-day politicians on behalf of a present-day population – is not excused by spuriously linking it to British crimes of earlier generations. To call the Falklands war a “sad thing” in this context while eschewing even a single word of disapproval of the Argentinean invasion is an evasion and a moral equivocation of the very type that our post was about. The war as a whole was indeed a sad thing, but the Argentinean invasion in particular was also an immoral thing, a vicious crime against a peaceful people who had done no wrong to Argentina or any other nation. This would merit an apology but cries out much more for the sincere change of heart that would make an apology unnecessary.

by [Editor](#) on Sat, 04/22/2006 - 11:33 | [reply](#)

It's always a dilemma

I read the whole thing and I found it quite interesting even though I do not agree with some of the things you say. In any case, I would like to remark the fact that you didn't use any low resorts like making fun of us Argentinians just to make your point. Personally, I appreciate that and it shows how mature you are.

Now, about the subject: All I can say is that sometimes, a war is started because someone who has a lot of power and feels like doing it just to feel even more powerful and show the world what they can do. Personally, I think it would be very unfair to be labeled as "machista" or something like that just because I'm Argentinian. The same way many Argentinian people don't deserve to be labeled like that. Truth is that Galtieri was a sick twisted man and we all despise him nowadays, the same way he was despised back in the 80s. However, there was nothing people could do about it. You said it yourself, he was a DICTATOR, just like Videla back in the 70s. A man who comitted a crime not only against Englad, but also against Argentina and humanity itself for that matter. The Argentinian soldiers were FORCED to do what they did. Nobody over here wanted to start a war against England, except maybe for those conservative old farts who thought it was a smart idea. Not only because a war can't solve anything, but also, because the Argentinian army is way weaker as well.

Nowadays, you see documentaries and movies based upon what happened back then, and many of the Argentinian former-combatants appear crying or giving testimonies about how painful it was to say good bye to their families just because an ignorant savage like Galtieri decided it was time to fight against England. Some of them even killed themselves after the war was over. The point is: I can see why English people would despise us after what happened, but this shouldn't be a massive hatred because we also feel the pain nowadays and we were also victims. This shouldn't be "Argentina against England", it should be "Argentina and England

against Galtieri and his dark warriors"

Regarding President Nestor "Penguin Face" Kirchner, you should know that even though he won fair and square, that doesn't mean he represents all of us. Personally, I think he's a lame excuse for a human being who pretends to be a lefty just to earn more votes from ignorant unwashed masses. It probably sounds cruel, but that's the truth.

Is England the one to blame? is Argentina?...I don't know that, I wasn't even in this world back then. I was born in 1985, but I DO know one thing. People always lie and it's imposible to believe something specific. You can always investigate and come up with your own conclusions. For example, I was raised to believe that English people are the ones to blame 100%, the ones with all the responsibility. Nowadays, being 20 years old, I realize that it is always better to read and investigate instead of giving a fictitious verdict.

by Francisco on Sun, 07/16/2006 - 02:34 | [reply](#)

take the piss

Mr Dilemma

The only dilemma I saw back in 1982, was when our Royal marines where made to put their face's in the floor so you lot could kick right off and invade our island. I, FOR ONE TOOK THAT VERY PERSONAL.

by a reader on Fri, 10/06/2006 - 21:07 | [reply](#)

Don't agree with neither of you

The Malvinas war was a stupid diversionary tactic used by a megalomaniac dictator in a desperate attempt to try to retain his power. People who worked in the government at that time knew it was doomed from the very begging, and I don't believe it was ever intended to succeed.

Moreover, I don't think you can find a single argentine nowadays who thinks it was a good idea, even though at that time, many idiotic people cheered the ruler's decision and waved flags from their cars when it was announced. They seemed to believe it was a 'patriotic' thing to do (which was a much more significant feeling at that time than nowadays). It had nothing to do with the Argentine people's machismo but with the realisation of an old nationalistic feeling that we all have, that those small ilands belong to us due to numerous reasons, amongst which I could highlight:

- the geological and geographical proximity
- the principle of international law of uti possidetis juris, which states that newly formed states should have the same borders that they had before their independence.
- the fact that YOU got them by INVADING them just 150 years before the war.

True, our soldiers -mostly unwillingly except, as Francisco well says,

some 'fachos'- fought yours and managed to get 300 brits and 700 argentines killed, plus one of our best ships sunk (which is not much to say, as we were anyway SO not prepared to put a real fight...!). But truth is the whole thing backfired on us, don't you see? There was no gain, no vindictive pleasure... We just screwed ourselves harder...as we always do!

You miss the point when you quote that joke of a president we have -because that's what he is, a bad joke, a populist clown. Its not to him that the UK should apologize. Maybe its not even the UK, but Galtieri's collaborators who should really be apologizing. In truth, I think that what we feel is that we were used to do a wacko's bidding. We need someone to apologize for all the suffering all those argentine soldiers endured FOR NOTHING but to worsen our relations with a country we formerly revered (and which is great, and I profoundly love!).

I guess our justification is that: partly, that we feel them as rightfully ours, but also, that your whole attitude towards the sovereignty of the islands has been very disrespectful all along.

That's my opinion.

by Belén on Sat, 02/17/2007 - 05:12 | [reply](#)

I just returned from an unwel

I just returned from an unwelcome business trip to Argentina, and was quite surprised to find that Argentines still seemed to be quite obsessed with a far away group of islands that seem to possess only sheep and English people.

I guess it all boils down to this, as the previous respindant stated: "I guess our justification is that: partly, that we feel them as rightfully ours, but also, that your whole attitude towards the sovereignty of the islands has been very disrespectful all along."

It seems that, due to the divine grace which falls upon Argentina and Argentines alone, that whatever they desire is theirs by right, and that disagreeing with them (on any subject, I suppose)is "disrespectful" enough to warrant them sailing over and putting a boot on your neck. Fortunately, the body politic to which that boot is attached is rather weak, so they have a tough time making it stick.

BTW, the principle of uti possidetis juris is not one the aforementioned Argentine should want to invoke, as it states that "territory and other property remains with its possessor at the end of a conflict, unless provided for by treaty" meaning that, according to the principle he invokes, Britain's claim to sovreignty over the islands is (if it wasn't sound before) now beyond doubt as it booted the Argentines off the islands rather unceremoniously.

I don't know where this Argentine attitude comes from. I have only been there once, but I did find the populace to be rude, arrogant, and rather mad at the rest of the world. Perhaps that is because of their great fall from the beginning of the 20th century. At one time

their standard of living surpassed Sweden. What Argentines ought to ask themselves is not why Britain won't give them a few rocks in the sea, but what fault lies within themselves that has brought them to their present miserable condition.

always easier to blame someone else though, isn't it? And it's always pleasant for a weak person to beat up on an even weaker one. It can be an unpleasant surprise, however, when the victim you think is weaker turns out to have claws.

by a reader on Tue, 07/03/2007 - 20:04 | [reply](#)

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