

# WebMemo



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## President Obama Should Side with Britain over the Falkland Islands

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President Obama was effusive in his praise for the Special Relationship when he visited London in May, but his Administration continues to slap Britain in the face over the highly sensitive Falkland Islands sovereignty issue by aligning itself with Argentina's call for U.N.-brokered talks on the future of the islands.

This reckless approach toward the U.S.–U.K. alliance threatens to upset relations between Washington and London at a time when both countries are actively engaged in a major war in Afghanistan and American and British aircraft are enforcing the NATO no-fly zone over Libya.

**Taking Sides Against an Ally.** In April 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands and held captive more than 1,800 British civilians. Under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, 257 British servicemen laid down their lives to liberate the islands and ultimately restored British rule 74 days after the invasion. Nearly 30 years since the liberation, Argentina continues to press its claims over the Falklands, despite the fact that nearly all of the islands' inhabitants are British. In the past 18 months, the Cristina Kirchner regime in Buenos Aires has become increasingly aggressive, issuing threats to blockade British shipping in the South Atlantic, and has been strongly backed by Venezuelan despot Hugo Chavez.

On June 7, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a declaration<sup>1</sup> calling for Argentina and Great Britain to enter into negotiations over the sovereignty of the Falk-

lands, a position that London has long viewed as completely unacceptable. The White House signed on to the declaration, putting it at odds with the British and in league with a number of anti-American regimes, including Chavez's Venezuela and Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua.

The OAS declaration states in part:

It has not yet been possible to resume the negotiations between the two countries with a view to solving the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgias and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas in the framework of resolutions 2065 (XX), 3160 (XXVIII), 31/49, 37/9, 38/12, 39/6, 40/21, 41/40, 42/19 and 43/25 of the United Nations General Assembly, the decisions adopted by the same body on the same question in the Special Committee on Decolonization, and the reiterated resolutions and declarations adopted at this General Assembly; and

HAVING HEARD the presentation by the head of delegation of the Argentine Republic, WELCOMES the reaffirmation of the will of the Argentine Government to continue

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exploring all possible avenues towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute and its constructive approach towards the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands.

REAFFIRMS the need for the Governments of the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to resume, as soon as possible, negotiations on the sovereignty dispute, in order to find a peaceful solution to this protracted controversy.

DECIDES to continue to examine the Question of the Malvinas Islands at its subsequent sessions until a definitive settlement has been reached thereon.

Washington backed a similar resolution last June, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made it clear in a joint press conference with Kirchner in Buenos Aires in March 2010 that the Obama Administration fully backs Argentina's calls for negotiations over the Falklands, handing her Argentine counterpart a significant propaganda coup. The State Department has also insultingly referred to the islands in the past as the "Malvinas Islands," the Argentine name for them.

**The Sovereignty of the Falklands Is Not Subject to Negotiation.** As Margaret Thatcher reminded the world in an address to the House of Commons after the Argentine invasion in 1982, the Falklands are, and will always remain, British:

The people of the Falkland Islands, like the people of the United Kingdom, are an island race. Their way of life is British; their allegiance is to the Crown. They are few in number, but they have the right to live in peace, to choose their own way of life and to determine their own allegiance. It is the wish of the British people and the duty of Her Majesty's

Government to do everything that we can to uphold that right. That will be our hope and our Endeavour and, I believe, the resolve of every Member of the House.<sup>2</sup>

The sovereignty of the islands is not a matter for negotiation, and Britain will never give in to threats from Argentina or its tyrannical allies such as Chavez.

Washington should honor the positions of its closest friend and partner on matters of vital British interest, including the future of British subjects living in the South Atlantic, whose only wish is to remain free under the protection of the Union Jack.

**More Than Platitudes Needed.** The Obama Administration has an exceedingly poor record in its handling of U.S.–U.K. relations in the past and has come under heavy fire in Britain for what could charitably be described as a rather cold approach toward America's closest ally. Perhaps in response to this criticism, in his speech to both houses of the British Parliament on May 25, President Obama reaffirmed Washington's traditional commitment to the Special Relationship. But he should deliver more than platitudes when it comes to America's most enduring and successful partnership.

The Special Relationship is vital to the interests of both the United States and Great Britain, and its preservation is of paramount importance to the defense of freedom and liberty across the world. It is time for President Obama to put his words into action by recognizing and supporting British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and standing by America's closest ally.

—*Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., is the Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at The Heritage Foundation. He is grateful to Ray Walser, Senior Policy Analyst for Latin America at Heritage, for his advice and suggestions.*

1. Organization of American States, "Draft Declaration on the Question of the Malvinas Islands," June 7, 2011, at <http://www.oas.org/en/41ga/docs/AG05445E02.doc> (June 9, 2011).

2. Margaret Thatcher, speech before the House of Commons, April 3, 1982, at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104910> (June 9, 2011).