

NEW PALS FOR ARGENTINA

by Paul E. Sigmund

The banners can be seen across the major highways of Venezuela: "The Malvinas Are Argentine." This impeccably democratic country that since 1958 has been an island of freedom in a sea of Latin American military dictatorships has taken the lead in supporting the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. Long one of the closest U.S. allies in the hemisphere, Venezuela now vigorously denounces the U.S. support of Britain and openly discusses the replacement of the Organization of American States with an all-Latin American regional organization. Even the Catholic bishop of Cumaná, in eastern Venezuela, called the U.S. position "traitorous and perfidious" (*traicionera y desleal*). Caracas has also offered petroleum and military aid to Argentina, and it has been a central coordinating point for discussions about Latin American joint diplomatic action against Great Britain.

If the close support of repressive and authoritarian Argentina by democratic Venezuela is not strange enough, we also have the prospect of Fidel Castro offering aid to the Argentines after years of denouncing their military government as fascist thugs. Not to be outdone, Nicaragua, which until recently had been complaining loudly about the Argentine military helping Nicaraguan exiles prepare an invasion, is just as vocal in its denunciations of the British and in its support for the "just claims" of the Argentines.

To Americans, the moral and political issues in the Falklands-Malvinas crisis appear clearly delineated: A military dictatorship launched an unprovoked aggression against eighteen hundred British sheepherders on a barren set of South Atlantic rocks, and the British responded to a violation of international law. Yet to Latin Americans of astonishingly varied ideologies, Britain is the aggressor as "la Thatcher" sends a massive armada to crush Argentina's attempt to recover territories forcefully seized by the British in 1833. The difference between the two points of view may have a lasting and damaging impact on U.S.-Latin American relations, eroding, if not destroying, the

network of inter-American diplomatic and military relations so painstakingly built up over a half-century.

The intensity of Latin American feelings is an indication of the continuing strength of a kind of all-Latin American nationalism that transcends ideological differences. Similar feeling has manifested itself in the past. The Consensus of Vina del Mar in 1969 was a joint statement of Latin complaints against U.S. policy. In the mid-1970s the Venezuelans, with Mexican support, took the lead in establishing a program of economic cooperation (Latin American Economic System) aimed at replacing American financial, shipping, and communications networks with those owned by Latin Americans—often with government participation. Similarly, though the Organization of American States (OAS) authorized a peacekeeping force to legitimate the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, it rejected the Carter administration's 1979 proposal for a similar force to supervise the transition from Somoza dictatorship. Since that time, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Panama have consistently opposed U.S. policy in Central America. The days of the automatic U.S. majority in the OAS are long gone; and in the wake of the Falkland crisis, arguments are being made by some Latins that the headquarters of the organization should be moved from Washington to some other location.

Besides Latin American anticolonialism there is another less obvious element involved—Latin machismo. Even though Argentina itself has twice been run by women—once in name by Isabel Perón and earlier in fact by Evita Perón—the notion of a woman prime minister sending in the fleet to save the Empire raises the hackles of the Latins, especially the Venezuelans, who suffered from earlier British interventions at the time of Queen Victoria. The reference by the Panamanian U.N. delegation to Margaret Thatcher's female "glandular problems" was indicative of a widespread Latin attitude.

In addition, not only Argentines but all Latin Americans have been taught in their elementary school geography courses that *Malvinas* belong rightfully to Argentina.

Yet the apparent solidarity of Central and South

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