



## The Falklands Margaret Thatcher Lecture Day

10th January 2022

*Check against delivery*

To mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Falklands War, Policy Exchange Visiting Fellow Charles Moore today delivered the following lecture.

“Ladies and gentlemen,

Today – Margaret Thatcher Day in the Falkland Islands - is the date which marks Mrs Thatcher’s visit there, 39 years ago. It was her first sight of the place which, under her leadership, had been liberated by British troops from Argentine invaders the previous June. I am honoured that the Falkland Islands Government has chosen me to deliver the lecture to commemorate this special day and mark the approaching 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war. I must thank my friend, Richard Hyslop, the Islands’ representative in London, for issuing the invitation.

Richard tells me this event is being watched today in the islands themselves, and I hereby send greetings to you all. In the run-up to the conflict 40 years ago, President Ronald Reagan slightly disparagingly referred to your home as ‘that little ice-cold bunch of land down there’. But, at this season, it is actually a bit colder in this little bunch of land up here from which I am speaking than it is with you. I hope you are enjoying your summer more than we are enjoying our winter.

I read that you have experienced no deaths from Covid 19. Congratulations. We envy you.

I must also thank Policy Exchange, and its dynamic Director, Lord Godson, for providing me with this platform and this august live audience Dean has gathered in London to hear it. I am particularly pleased that the Secretary of State, Ben Wallace, is here and will be speaking to us briefly afterwards. He does not make the widespread 21<sup>st</sup>-century error of assuming that old wars have nothing to teach us about new ones.

I am not, however, a war historian or an expert on warfare. My qualification for speaking to you is that I am the authorised biographer of Lady Thatcher. The two chapters on the Falklands war form the climax of my first volume, *Not for Turning*. It was, perhaps, her most remarkable triumph, and the only matter about which she wrote a personal, passionate and originally private memoir, under the unromantic title of ‘Notes on the Emergency Cabinet Committee’.

Returning to the subject gives me a particularly personal pleasure too. In early 1982, I was a 24-year-old leader writer on *The Daily Telegraph*, the paper for which I still work 40 years later. The Falklands was the first really big news story I had encountered. The war in the metaphorical trenches of Fleet Street remains vivid in my memory, and I have been trying to learn lessons from it ever since.

A far more important person who learnt lessons was a young Labour candidate who unsuccessfully fought a by-election in the middle of the Falklands conflict. His name was Tony Blair. He entered Parliament the following year. One reason for his breakthrough as Labour leader in the 1990s was his determination to study Mrs Thatcher's achievements and persuade his party that, to change, it must welcome the best of them. He admired her success in the Falklands war. This was generous and astute of him, but it may have tempted him into the error of thinking that wars are easily won.

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This was not a mistake Mrs Thatcher herself made. Although the Falklands conflict turned out to be a success for her, it was also a trauma because she felt it so deeply. Robert Armstrong, the Cabinet Secretary - and therefore secretary to the 'War Cabinet' which the Prime Minister hastily set up as the crisis broke - once told me that the Falklands war was 'the single part of her time during which Mrs Thatcher lived most intensely'.

I think that is a good way to put it. She came to see so many things in the light of her Falklands experience. She judged people - both British and foreign - by how they had behaved in the crisis. Had they been, to use her favourite adjective, 'staunch', or had they been 'wobbly' or worse?

For example, she was frequently indulgent to Francois Mitterrand, the socialist President of France, because he had hurried to support Britain immediately after the Argentine invasion. She was ever afterwards intensely suspicious of Charles Haughey, the Irish prime minister, for what she saw as the diplomatic games he had played against Britain during the conflict. And so on.

The same applied to her judgment of institutions. She never forgot or wholly forgave the Foreign Office failures over the Falklands (although she was grateful to the leading diplomats of the war, Anthony Parsons and Nicholas Henderson). She always, on the other hand, greatly appreciated the help provided by the British Antarctic Survey. As a result, it was to the BAS that she later listened about global warming. Partly because of its persuasion, she herself came to expound the theory of man-made climate change.

In all her subsequent actions on the world stage - notably the preparation for the first Gulf War of 1991 and above all her entire approach to ending the Cold War - Mrs Thatcher drew on Falklands experiences to guide her judgment of situations and sharpen the principles of conduct she wished to uphold.

The Falklands war also taught her things about herself which she had not known before. Always conscientious, she had tried to prepare thoroughly for becoming prime minister, but

that training certainly had not included the recovery, by force, of a small colony on the other side of the world. Yet she accomplished it, at a time when, for economic reasons, her political authority at home was weak and she had not yet had a chance to prove that Thatcherism could work.

In military or naval terms, Mrs Thatcher knew nothing about war before April 1982. Of the top 20 or so people dealing with the Falklands crisis, she was one of a handful who had not fought in the Second World War or done National Service after it. She was also, of course, the only woman among that elite, so she felt vulnerable to male disdain. Not for nothing, just as the Task Force was leaving Portsmouth to make for the South Atlantic, did she invoke the words of another woman, Queen Victoria, that 'the possibilities of defeat do not exist'. A week earlier, she had not even known that the Argentine invasion would take place. Now she was learning, at incredible speed, how to expand the possibilities of victory.

More than almost any other war since 1945, the Falklands was a conflict where one side clearly won. In some ways, it may not have been good for Mrs Thatcher's character that she so comprehensively confounded expectations by her victory. She may have come to believe too readily that she was at her best when she stood out against received opinion; so she began to listen too little to other voices. But I would argue that in the conduct of the Falklands war itself, she showed no arrogance. Her undoubted courage was often tempered by a good dose of caution.

One of her perennial pieces of wisdom was 'Time spent in reconnaissance is never wasted.' I think she felt guilty that, in the prelude to the Argentine invasion, she had not followed her own prescription. Her Government had not done enough reconnaissance about the state of affairs in the South Atlantic. Its defence cuts, especially the announcement that Britain would get rid of the ice patrol vessel HMS *Endurance*, had sent the wrong signals to Argentina. Although instinctively supportive of people who, like the Falklanders, passionately wished to remain British, Mrs Thatcher had not asserted her commitment to their right strongly enough as Argentina's impatience grew under its new junta. As the islanders saw with terrible clarity on 2 April 1982, she had fallen down on the duty which she so often emphasised in the Cold War – the need to offer credible deterrence.

Christopher Collins, the distinguished founder and editor of the [margaretthatcher.org](http://margaretthatcher.org) website, will show in his forthcoming history of the Falklands war that Mrs Thatcher could never bring herself, even in private, to admit these early errors, and would not discuss them in her own memoirs. She was, however, aware of them. That awareness affected her subsequent actions. Her embarrassment at the mistakes which provoked the invasion made her humbler in listening to military advice. She therefore saw it as her task to clear the way for the armed services, whom she instinctively respected, rather than trying to tell them what to do. Once the invasion had happened, she was unceasingly thorough about how to mesh domestic politics and international diplomacy with the fact that the Task Force was at sea and could not, morally or politically, be brought home with its task unfulfilled.

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To look at these questions in more detail, let us consider a couple of key moments. First of all, the legendary meeting in her room in the House of Commons which took place on Wednesday 31 March 1982.

By then, though intelligence remained poor, the invasion of the Falklands, almost unimaginable the previous month, was known to be imminent. By odd chance, almost all the key British players were abroad or out of action. The Foreign Secretary was in Israel. The Chief of the Defence Staff was in New Zealand and the Commander-in-chief, Fleet, in Gibraltar. The permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office was retiring that week.

In her Commons room, Mrs Thatcher was sitting with a collection of number twos, listening to wretched news and equally gloomy advice. She recalled this as 'the worst moment of my life'. No senior armed-services officer was present, and no one, including the Defence Secretary, John Nott – the only secretary of state in the room – was advising the Prime Minister how to recover the islands. A Cabinet meeting a week earlier had minuted that retaking the Falklands once invaded would be 'an almost impossible task'.

Then, into Mrs Thatcher's room, late and uninvited, strode the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Henry Leach. He was wearing his day uniform after conducting naval inspections. Always pleased by the sight of military dress, Mrs Thatcher looked up eagerly when Leach entered.

Sir Henry was fired up by his anger over the cuts and his faith in the Royal Navy which he had imbibed from earliest childhood. He took the initiative by asking the Prime Minister for permission to send a task force to the South Atlantic. Everyone was silent. 'What does that mean?' asked Mrs Thatcher. After Leach had explained, she asked how long it would take to assemble. 'Three days,' he said. 'How long to get there?' 'Three weeks, Prime Minister.' 'Three weeks!' exclaimed Mrs Thatcher, ignorant of the geography and the speed of sea travel, 'Surely you mean three days?' He insisted on three weeks.

'Can we do it?' Mrs Thatcher asked Leach, with burning urgency. 'We can, Prime Minister, and though it is not my place to say this, we must.' 'Why do you say that?' 'Because if we don't, if we pussyfoot...we'll be living in a totally different country whose word will count for little.' At this, Leach told me, Mrs Thatcher gave a sort of half-smile, as if this was what she had been waiting to hear. He left the meeting with authority to assemble the Task Force. In the emergency Saturday debate in the Commons, the day after the invasion, Mrs Thatcher was able to announce Cabinet agreement to its imminent departure. Its first elements embarked on Monday 5 April.

This tale of the encounter with Leach seems almost too filmic to be true, but its essence is confirmed by other witnesses. Mrs Thatcher was desperate to find a way of retaking the islands if they were invaded, but had until then had lacked any expert advice that this could be done. She had therefore felt in no position to order a military response. It is a highly significant fact that, until Leach's dramatic intervention, no positive advice had been given. It is evidence not only of unpreparedness, but also that no one high up in British government or administration actively wanted British sovereignty over the Falklands enforced. Even before a single Argentinian soldier had set boot on the islands, Whitehall and Westminster were assuming ultimate defeat. Leach's advice was the first to offer hope.

Ignorant of military affairs though she was, Mrs Thatcher did not instinctively share the prevailing negativity. Indeed, her ignorance may have guarded her against the pessimism which prevailed among so many Second World War veterans. She was passionately anxious about the possible loss of British servicemen's lives, for which she always felt a motherly care, but she had, perhaps, less sense than old soldiers of just how many things could go wrong. She instinctively shared Leach's view that 'There was no point in having a navy if you couldn't use it.' By character and because of her situation, she could take no refuge, as lesser ministers could, in a surrender half-concealed by diplomatic face-saving. She knew that if Argentina stayed in possession of the Falklands that would be the end of her country's international standing, her government and her career.

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Sure enough, the fact that a Task Force had been ordered to sail saved Mrs Thatcher's Government in the House of Commons that Saturday. It forced even Michael Foot's left-wing Labour opposition to be seen to back British forces rather than attempt to bring down the Government or confuse the House with peace plans. It had a similar effect on the Tory so-called 'Wets'. They had long opposed Mrs Thatcher's economic policies, but they dared not directly oppose her over the Falklands. Secretly, they hoped that her new appointment as Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, would emerge as her replacement when, as they expected, things went wrong.

Mrs Thatcher resisted any temptation to act rashly. Her bold decision to send the Task Force, far from making her careless about politics and diplomacy, made her super-attentive to them. The British public and the House of Commons required steady progress towards the aim. This was constantly visible because the Task Force kept moving to the South Atlantic, followed by reinforcements. The wider world, however, required an air of reasonableness, an apparent readiness to get round the table and find what is often called 'a diplomatic solution'.

She had therefore readily accepted the advice of the British Ambassador to the United Nations, Sir Anthony Parsons, that Britain should strike the first diplomatic blow, immediately tabling a Security Council resolution condemning the invasion and demanding the withdrawal of Argentine forces. Britain was invoking Article 51 of the UN Charter, which enshrines the right to self-defence. This was successfully passed, the Soviet Union abstaining rather than vetoing.

This Resolution - 502 - became the model in Mrs Thatcher's mind for future international crises caused by aggression – such as Saddam Hussein's against Kuwait in 1990. Her rule was: make sure of the legality of any response and secure global support, but do not let more complicated UN processes bog down subsequent armed reaction. She accepted Parsons's view that the best way of keeping the UN on side was to engage in active diplomacy in its forums, not letting a vacuum develop which could be filled by tiresome 'initiatives' designed to delay matters and leave Argentina in possession.

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Even more important in Mrs Thatcher's mind was the need to win the active support of the United States. Immediately after the invasion, she too readily assumed that her genuine friendship and ideological affinity with President Reagan would make American support unconditional. This was not the case, although, right from the start, Caspar Weinberger at the Pentagon was shovelling Britain military aid out of the back door without any presidential disapproval. The United States had strong interests in South America and may well – I expect to read more about this in Chris Collins's book – have winked at the Argentine military coup which had brought General Galtieri to power in December 1981. America always feared upheavals in its backyard which might empower Communist insurgencies. Besides, it suited US interests to be seen as the broker of peace rather than the supporter of one side. As Reagan put it, he wanted to 'get these two brawlers out of the bar-room'.

Although irritated, Mrs Thatcher quickly caught up with this reality. She understood the need to play along with the shuttles made between London, Washington and Buenos Aires by the US Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig, even though, when he visited her in Downing Street, she pointedly showed him her portraits of Nelson and Wellington and declared, 'The Good Lord did not put me on this planet so that I could allow British citizens to be placed under the heel of Argentine dictators.' She disliked the negotiations, but did not treat them solely as an unfortunately necessary charade. She always declared publicly that the wishes of the Falkland Islanders should be 'paramount' in any settlement and had told the Cabinet that this was the Government's 'absolute sticking point', but there were moments when she was persuaded to soften this demand.

The most important came in early May, just as world opinion had been shaken by the British sinking of the Argentine cruiser, the *Belgrano*. In full Cabinet on 5 May, Mrs Thatcher found herself arguing among divided colleagues for acceptance of the latest so-called 'Peruvian', but really US, peace plan which Haig was now offering up and Reagan was pushing on her as a 'peaceful settlement'. This involved a multi-national interim administration of the islands without the consent of the islanders. According to the record, Mrs Thatcher told colleagues that 'I fear we can't get wishes of people and self-determination' into the text. She reluctantly advocated the plan's acceptance all the same in order to shore up international opinion.

Anguished by the trap she felt herself to be in, Mrs Thatcher drafted a personal letter to President Reagan after the meeting, speaking to him as 'the only person who will understand the significance of what I am trying to say'. Her letter was highly emotional and appeared to circumvent what her own Cabinet had just agreed. In the face of Reagan's claim to her that his suggestions were 'faithful to the basic principles we must protect', she declared, 'Alas they are not'. If the right of self-determination for the islanders was not defended, she said, then 'our principles are no longer what we believe, nor those we were elected to serve but what the dictator will accept...That our traditional friendship, to which I still loyally adhere, should have brought me and those I represent into conflict with fundamental democratic principles sounds impossible while you are in the White House and I am at No.10.' Yet so, she felt, it had.

The main point about this heartfelt letter is that, though written, it was not sent. Mrs Thatcher felt genuine anguish about the fate of the islanders if the Haig proposals were accepted by Argentina, but in the end she decided it was impolitic to bypass her Foreign Secretary and

speak to the US President in this unguarded tone of sorrow and outrage. A much less passionate version of her letter was sent instead. It pleaded for a provision for locally elected representatives to be 'at least' consulted about any peace-deal administration of the islands, but did not veto the 'Peruvian' proposals being forwarded to Argentina.

One cannot be certain what Mrs Thatcher's game here was. It was in her character to disclaim all political sleights of hand and therefore never to explain – even in private - when she was executing one. Obviously, she was eager to secure full American backing before the final military assault became necessary, and therefore to try, as far as possible, to humour Reagan and even Haig.

Less easy to ascertain is what she thought was likely to happen as a result of her Government's concession over self-determination. Those closest to her thought she was calculating that Argentina would be too stiff-necked to accept the Haig compromise. (At the suggestion of John Nott, a similar gamble had paid off with an earlier proposal.) If so, her judgment was vindicated: Argentina rejected the peace plan. But there can be no doubt her concession was made. If Mrs Thatcher's bluff had been called, the self-determination of the Falkland islanders would have been lost. Her large claim, made at a rally a few days earlier, that Britain now had a world role of 'upholding the law and teaching the nations of the world how to live' (the latter phrase an echo of words of John Milton) would have rung hollow.

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I focus on Mrs Thatcher's reluctant flexibility on self-determination not to show that she was untrustworthy, but to point out what a difficult hand she held. For the most part, she played it subtly. Given the absolute simplicity of her aims – complete removal of Argentine forces from the islands and complete restoration of British administration as Britain's sovereign right - she was remarkably patient in how she dealt with various attempts to deflect her. Her carefully projected self-image was of someone sticking to high principles at all times. But in fact she was a more effective stateswoman because this image was partly false. Throughout the story of the Falklands crisis, we see her consistent in her end, but resourceful about her means. Her opponents both at home and abroad wanted to paint her into a corner as the inflexible warmonger, the block to peace. Because she was conscious of the need to avoid this, they failed.

What came through instead was her sincerity.

First, there was her concern for the islanders themselves. Not for her the condescension sometimes expressed in educated British circles towards fewer than 2,000 people outnumbered more than 200 to one by their sheep. Both in public and in private, she dramatised their plight. When later - shortly before battle could be joined - Reagan rang to ask her if she would hold off military action to give a new, backdoor negotiation via Brazil time to work, she refused. The Falklanders, she told the President, were 'a loyal, true and thrifty people' who wanted to 'live their own lives': 'The two greatest democracies should surely protect that wish,' she said.

Second, there was her ardent, womanly anxiety about the lives of British troops. Her husband Denis recalled going up to their Downing Street bedroom shortly before the final reconquest. News had come through that the *Atlantic Conveyor* had been hit. He told me he found his wife sitting on the end of the bed in tears, crying, 'Oh, no. Oh, no. Another ship! All my young men!' 'That's what war's like, love,' he told her, 'I've been in one.' In the private memoir she wrote a year later, Mrs Thatcher described the day of victory with high emotion: 'As I went to sleep very late that night I felt an enormous burden had been lifted from my shoulders...' Victory, she wrote, was 'a miracle wrought by ordinary men and women with extraordinary qualities. Forever bold, forever brave, forever remembered.'

Finally, there was her genius for drawing a general moral out of a specific – and, in this case, most peculiar – situation. Throughout the crisis, she endlessly repeated the lesson that aggression against a free people must not pay. In the era of the Cold War, she saw this as an organising principle for the defence of the free world.

It is a mark of her success in spreading this message that it was most clearly expressed by another. On 8 June, with the war still not quite won, President Reagan addressed MPs and peers in the Royal Gallery of the Houses of Parliament. In a passage he wrote himself and interpolated into his text, he said,

'On distant islands in the South Atlantic young men are fighting for Britain. And yes, voices have been raised protesting their sacrifice for lumps of rock and earth so far away. But those young men aren't fighting for mere real estate. They fight for a cause – for the belief that armed aggression must not be allowed to succeed, that the people must participate in the decisions of government – the decisions of government under the rule of law.'

Five weeks earlier, the United States had still not come down on the British side. Only nine days earlier, Reagan had rung Mrs Thatcher trying to get a ceasefire out of her. Now, in her own Parliament, here he was, endorsing not only the rightness of the Falklands cause, but its universal application. Her view had triumphed.

The world noticed, especially the Soviet Union. A good rule for leaders in military operations is 'Don't forget who's watching you' – not just your immediate enemies, of course, but the wider world. In the case of the Falklands conflict, Argentina gave this almost no thought at all, winning few allies abroad. Mrs Thatcher did think about it. The watching Soviets saw that here was a full projection of force over a huge distance and the notoriously tough proposition of an opposed landing – both successful. This was evidence of a depth of military capability they lacked.

Even more important for them, perhaps, were the wider lessons. Although the operation was unilaterally British, and out of NATO area, the Falklands story ultimately confirmed the formidable depth of the Atlantic alliance. The United States tilted decisively to Britain, and France, usually inclined to its own frolics, came down fast on the British side. Even the European Economic Community, as the EU then was, imposed immediate sanctions on Argentina.

The other lesson was one of leadership. After the weakness of the 1970s, culminating in the failure of Jimmy Carter's 1980 mission to rescue the hostages in Iran, the Falklands proved that a democratic leader in the new decade could decide to use force across the world in the national interest, and win enough support in Parliament, media and public opinion to see it through. Just as the Task Force restored the status quo in the islands, so its victory restored the sense of possibility in Britain and the free world more generally.

This blew back on the Soviets. It was they who, as a sexist joke, had first described Mrs Thatcher, when leader of the Opposition, as 'the Iron Lady'. Now she had proved that it was no joke at all, but the plain truth.

All this changed the calculus for enemies of the West and the West's own attitude to itself. The post-Vietnam spell that the bad guys were bound to win was broken; and the most prominent good guy was a woman.

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Before finishing, I should like to discuss what might apply from this stirring story 40 years on.

Could something comparable happen today? Do we in Britain and the West more generally retain the same capacity for action as was displayed in 1982?

I am not talking so much about the defence of the Falkland Islands themselves. Ever since June 1982, they have been well protected. A garrison of roughly 1,000 armed service personnel guards the islands, with air cover to look after South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and monitor fishing and other activity in the South West Atlantic. If Argentina tried to repeat what it did in 1982, it would be much worse placed than it was then - although it is worth noting that in recent years it has grown close to China over arms trading, the hog industry, soybeans and help with the pandemic. Argentina may now be likelier to do China's will in international forums than that of Western powers.

But no, I am talking more globally. So many things have changed, in apparently unfavourable ways.

The media provide an obvious example. At the time of the Falklands war, there was no internet, no social media and hardly any mobile telephones. Even Parliament itself was not televised. Because of the remoteness of the islands, almost all media coverage on the spot came from British reporters, cameramen and photographers travelling with and controlled by the Task Force. Such tight news management, unusual even then, is unimaginable today. I think I am right in saying, for example, that the British public never saw a single photograph of a dead British serviceman. A war covered by social media today would be much tougher on a free country than on a dictatorship.

Something similar applies to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century invasion of the battlefield by lawyers, whether this be over the law of armed combat, the claims of human rights or the growing rights of service personnel to sue their employers. The world of law firms such as Leigh Day and Public Interest Lawyers does not mix with the world of Margaret Thatcher, though no politician was

more punctilious than she about getting legal advice before dangerous operations. She understood that legality, rightly handled, can be a force-multiplier more than a straitjacket. Nowadays, however, politicians seem to run scared and forget that lawyers issue only advice, not orders.

Or again, wars today are not strictly military conflicts (note, indeed, that only three civilians were killed in the Falklands). They are what people call 'full spectrum', involving cyber, propaganda spread by state-backed Twitter posts, technologies unthought of 40 years ago, sometimes lethality capable of delivery from thousands of miles away. And, we now hear, the Russians may be able to cut the undersea cables which secure 99 per cent of world communications.

In Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014, Russia used extensive cyber activity to confuse within and without the conflict, to conduct information operations to convince the resisting forces not to fight, or confuse them about where the fight was, and persuade foreign powers that there was no fight until it was too late for their intervention to count.

In recent years, in the Palestinian conflict, Israel has used Iron Dome to provide a shield against incoming missiles, and an increasingly active cyber and information campaign, backed up by precision strike operations rather than more conventional army interventions on the ground.

As for China, one could almost say it has built its own series of 'Falkland Islands' in the South China Sea. These it defends not with Galtieri era garrisons, but with a fleet of suspiciously uniform trawlers known as its 'maritime militia' and an aggressive and well-armed Coast Guard. It ties up foreign powers in the courts while ignoring the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China declares ownership of the airspace around these islands and defends this with radars and missile sites on them, and ballistic and hypersonic 'carrier killer' missiles safely siloed many hundreds of miles away on its mainland. All the while, a campaign of 'Grey Zone' activity is waged to keep foreign powers on the back foot, unable or unwilling to challenge this pattern of behaviour.

There is also greater complication on the home front in many Western countries, caused by less homogeneous populations. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan showed, significant numbers of British Muslims took a different view of the issues from that of the wider population. The British are well used to foreign wars, having taken part in them on average once every six years since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but obviously it is harder to assume popular consent if cultural or religious differences increase at home. Our justified returning interest in nation states should not fool us that non-state actors have ceased to matter. One of them, the Taliban, has recently recaptured an entire state.

These are all important points, but I draw attention to some which might weigh on the other side.

One is that we have now moved away from the early 21<sup>st</sup>- century idea of 'humanitarian intervention' and the delusions this can cause. In his first speech as the new Chief of the

Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin declared that we are witnessing 'the return of the state as the central, indispensable feature of the international system'. This complements thinking of the Prime Minister's main foreign policy adviser, John Bew, who has written of the 'revenge of the nation state'. With it, the new CDS went on, has returned the 'traditional notion of British national interest', with nations contesting, competing, cooperating with and confronting one another. This has meant, among other things, that we are according renewed importance to the navy and its aircraft carriers - the situation which prevailed in the Falklands conflict.

This is also, more broadly, a situation which Mrs Thatcher thought essential to the successful conduct of war. Alliances can deliver only if their main participating nations are states strong enough to make their own military decisions and stick with them, offering repeatability, dependability and popular support. It is remarkable how few democratic countries in the world are truly in such a situation. The United States and Britain are. So, probably, is France. So is Australia. So is Israel. So are a few small but determined countries such as Norway. To wage war successfully, you must have an independent nation-state behind you. When you win, you find you can help make the rules in the world.

In the end, I return to the least technical and least strictly military lessons of the Falklands war. I return to that need not to forget who is watching you. In Iraq and Afghanistan this century this was forgotten too often. As a result, China, which watches what the West does much more closely than the West has watched China these past 20 years, may believe that the West does not have the will to assert itself, whether trying to order the affairs of the Middle East or defending Taiwan. Iran is currently wondering whether it can get away with posing a nuclear and ballistic threat to Britain and our allies. Russia, also watching, is testing whether the West means what it says in relation to Ukraine. We may see merciless applications of these Russian tests in the coming weeks. These nation states, hostile to our interests and values, will flourish at our expense if we in the West feel embarrassed about upholding ours.

Are we yet ready to pass such tests? I doubt it. I do not yet see a clear enough relationship between Western beliefs and ideas and Western military policy. Whereas I do, unfortunately, see a clear relationship between what President Vladimir Putin says about Russia and what he wants to do in Ukraine, or what President Xi Jinping says about China's role in the world and what he wants to do about Taiwan and is doing with his Belt and Road Initiative.

The one note of optimism I can strike is that we in the West are much more aware of the dangers than we were five years ago.

The example of Margaret Thatcher 40 years ago shows the overwhelming importance of political will. All politics is a test of what leaders really want, and it frequently exposes that they have neither furnished the means to implement their decisions, nor defined the end. War provides by far the most extreme of these tests, with nowhere to hide when things go wrong. In the Falklands war, with the world watching, she established an impressively close relationship between what she said and what she did. For her, democracy and liberty, self-

determination, strong Western military alliances to oppose tyranny, rule of law, and property rights were not just words, but were actively, boldly defended. Perhaps in secret Mrs Thatcher did not agree with Queen Victoria that the possibilities of failure did not exist. After all, they seemed shockingly real at the time. But she recognised unflinchingly that failure would mean the end of her and of everything she believed in and had hoped to achieve for her country. Success had to be achieved. So it was achieved.

This is what made the Falklands so utterly different from decline-of-empire situations such as Aden or even Malaya, where the ultimate purpose was to get out. Here, the one and only purpose was to get back in. At the end of March 1982, there appeared to be, in Matthew Arnold's phrase in another context, "an unplumbed, salt, estranging sea" between Britain and the repossession of her most distant possession. By June, it looked quite different. It was a tide in the affairs of men – and women – which Margaret Thatcher took at the flood.

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I shall end with the briefest description of Mrs Thatcher's victory celebration in 10 Downing Street. It is very well known, but it does bring out the uniqueness of her situation.

She wished to give a dinner to thank all those most intimately involved in the Falklands campaign. So many people deserved a seat at the table that spouses could be asked only to drinks in the drawing rooms afterwards. The wives had to wait. Of all the 120 principals invited, there was only one woman, the Prime Minister. After the CDS, Lord Lewin, spoke in reply to Mrs Thatcher's speech of thanks at the dinner, she rose once more. 'Gentlemen,' she proposed, 'Shall we join the ladies?'

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