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Argentine Command Structure and its Impact on Land Operations during the Falklands/Malvinas War (1982)(*)

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This paper claims that besides training and equipment shortcomings, Argentine command structure was another source of problems that affected the military operations during the Falklands/Malvinas Campaign during April-June 1982. Consequently, the flawed command structure can be seen as a contributing factor in Argentina's military defeat.

Improvisation, confusion, lack of coordination, and desperation prevailed along the command structure throughout the conflict. Operational and tactical commands were seen to be pulling apart between the political imperatives of the High Command in Buenos Aires that transcended to the islands and the military imperatives of the front. This handicap was critical to conduct operations. By using official documents, reports and accounts and the own participants' testimonies, this paper clarifies the issues connected with the structure of the Argentine High Command and it furthers our understanding of how the Argentine armed forces functioned.

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(**)The opinions expressed in this paper belong to the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UCEMA.

Due to the lack of planning for the post occupation and defense of the islands, the successive operations were ordered and improvised "on the march."¹

After months of careful preparation, on April 2nd 1982, Argentine troops occupied the Malvinas Islands. The British government decided to recapture these islands by sending a naval task force and troops to the South Atlantic. The decision caught the Argentine High Command completely by surprise. They had no contingency plan to defend the recently acquired territory. Under the circumstances, they had to set up a new command structure. Improvisation, confusion, lack of coordination, and desperation plagued, nonetheless, along the command structure throughout the campaign.² Argentine military authorities could not develop a coherent and well-coordinated command structure.

Although the official accounts stress that cooperation among services prevailed, a closer reading of the same sources shows that there were numerous criticisms and friction. Contradictory decisions were taken, and tactical commands resented the decisions made from above.

During the campaign the operational and tactical commands were caught between the political imperatives of the High Command in Buenos Aires that transcended to the islands, the military imperatives of the front, and their own limitations. This handicap was critical to conduct operations.

Although much has been written about the military details of the war, there has not been any systematic analysis of the Argentine command structure. This paper aims to fill this gap. It also shows that besides poor training and equipment shortcomings, Argentine command structure was another source of problems that adversely affected the military operations in the field. Consequently, the flawed command structure can be seen as a contributing factor in Argentina's military defeat.

By using official documents, reports, accounts and the participants' own testimonies, this paper aims to clarify the issues connected with the structure of the Argentine High Command and to further our understanding of how the Argentine armed forces functioned.

Part I of this work outlines the organization of the Argentine command structure during the Malvinas campaign. The second part explains the

organizational arrangements particular to the Argentine Air Force. The final part shows how the organization of the command affected the troops in the battlefield.

I.

After the capture of the Malvinas, the Argentine garrison was established as planned. The Army troops soon totaled 500 men. They belonged to the 25th Infantry Regiment (25th IR), 181 Military Police Company for security duties (181 MP Coy. (-)), and part of the 9th Engineer Company (9th Eng. Coy.) There were also present some elements of the Air Force and the Navy providing support to the garrison.³

Changes in the external situation soon compelled the Junta to review their defensive plans. On April 3, the United Nations Security Council passed the Resolution 502, which favored Britain.⁴ With this support, Great Britain declared that it was going to contest the Argentine occupation by sending an expeditionary force to the South Atlantic. These events triggered the first modification of the original Argentine defense plan.⁵ By April 5, it was evident that the British were going to fight back. That same day, the Commander of the Malvinas Operational Theater (TOM), Bde.-Gen. Osvaldo García, considered that the original 500 troops allotted to garrison the islands were insufficient to withstand a British invasion.⁶ Therefore, he asked for more troops.⁷ The Junta immediately ordered to the islands an armored car squadron (10 A Car Sq.) with 10 wheeled armored Panhard vehicles. More important was the decision to reinforce the garrison by sending two major combat units, the 8th Infantry Regiment (8th IR) from Comodoro Rivadavia and the 5th Marine Battalion (BIM 5), from Río Grande, Tierra del Fuego.⁸ The contingent also included the 3rd Artillery Group (3rd AG) from Paso de los Libres.⁹ These units were immediately airlifted to Puerto Argentino. The BIM 5 was added to the defenses around the islands capital, Puerto Argentino, while the whole 8th IR had as its final destination Fox Bay in the Gran Malvina Island (West Falkland Island).¹⁰ Because these last infantry units were stationed in Patagonia, they were the best adapted to the Malvinas environment. This criterion was later abandoned by the Argentine High Command, when they started to rush more troops to the islands.¹¹

After these changes, on April 7, the Junta's Decree 700/82 created a new command, the South Atlantic Theater of Operations (TOAS) under Vice Admiral Juan Lombardo. At the same time, the TOM was dissolved. Both the surface and air naval forces and all the forces stationed in the Malvinas islands came under

the command of the TOAS. At the same time, in a ceremony in the Islands' capital, Brig.-Gen. Mario Benjamín Menéndez was installed as Military Governor. Two days later, he was also appointed commander of the newly created Joint Force of the Malvinas Military Garrison (Fuerza Conjunta de la Guarnición Militar Malvinas, GMM).¹² This command was given the general direction of the operations in the islands. Consequently, the commands from each force branch (army, air force, and navy) came under the orders of Gen. Menéndez.¹³ By now, the number of troops stationed in the islands had increased to approximately 2500. Brig.-Gen. Américo Daher was appointed Commander of the Land Forces in Malvinas (Agrupación Ejército Malvinas, AEM).¹⁴ The Army component had the 8th IR and Element from 9th Eng. Coy. stationed at Fox Bay in the Gran Malvina Island. A Company from the 25th IR occupied Darwin-Goose Green. Finally, the 25th IR (-), the BIM 5, the armored car vehicles, and 3rd AG occupied positions around Puerto Argentino (Port Stanley) on the Soledad Island (East Falkland). Logistic, communications and military police units supported them. The Air Force command (Agrupación Fuerza Aérea Malvinas, AFAM) had Pucará airplanes and AAA units, and the Navy command (Agrupación Armada Malvinas, AAM) had Airmacchi and Turbo Mentor airplanes and some patrol and transport vessels.¹⁵

The TOAS constituted primarily a naval command because of the nature of the operational theater. For the Malvinas campaign, the Air Force had a collateral command, Air Force South (FAS) which operated in the South Atlantic. This command came under the direct orders of the Junta and it was supposed to coordinate its actions with the TOAS.¹⁶

Also on April 7, Brig.-Gen. Daher issued in Port Stanley his operational plan for the defense of the islands.¹⁷ The plan determined the defense of three "key" zones (strongpoints): Port Stanley and Darwin-Goose Green in Soledad Island, and Fox Bay in the Gran Malvina Island. The rest of the territory was to be covered by airmobile patrols.¹⁸

Nevertheless, two days later, the second important modification in the troop allocation occurred. On April 9, the Commander of the TOAS and his staff visited Malvinas. There, Brig.-Gen. Menéndez explained Daher's defense plans. All present at the meeting agreed that reinforcements were necessary.¹⁹ However, Menéndez warned that the precarious logistic situation in the islands precluded large reinforcements. At the same time, in the distant Buenos Aires the Commander in Chief of the Army and also President, Lt.-Gen. Leopoldo Galtieri, without consulting his staff, urgently ordered to the islands the whole X Mechanized Infantry Brigade (X Bde.). Surprisingly, Menéndez was not informed of this decision.²⁰ Therefore, while he was expecting the reinforcement of one infantry regiment, the 3rd, he received instead a total of three regiments

and supporting units. These were the already mentioned 3rd, plus the 6th, and the 7th Infantry Regiments. This great battle unit was airlifted to the islands without its armored vehicles and organic artillery component.

Between April 11 and 16, the X Bde. under the command of Brig.-Gen. Oscar Jofre arrived on the islands. According to Col. Cervo, former member of Menéndez staff, the presence of so many troops was welcome but the problem was how to adequately supply them. He thought that only those in the islands clearly understood the effectiveness that the British blockade imposed on supplying the defenders. He commented that this attitude contrasted with that of those in the continent that had the “fever” to accumulate troops without any consideration about their adaptation to the environment and operative capabilities.²¹ The arrival of the new troops demanded the modification of plans, new logistic calculations, and revised troops movements.²²

For Argentines, logistic support remained a problem throughout the conflict. Each armed service had its own logistic and supply organization and they decided by themselves what to transport to the islands. Because the Navy and the Air Force had their own transport airplanes, they never suffered much shortage. The Army had no such advantage and depended heavily on the two other services. Consequently, Army troops were the ones that suffered most. After the war, however, it was noted that during the campaign the problem was not the availability but the distribution of essential supplies.²³ There was a chronic scarcity of adequate motorized transports. Because the roughness of the terrain most of the supplies had to be moved by hand. In the long run, these activities ended up wearing out the troops.²⁴ To cope with the logistics, the AEM organized on April 10 the Logistics Operations Center (Centro de Operaciones Logísticas, COL). The organization centralized all available trucks and was responsible for the depots and the logistic support in the combat zone of Malvinas.²⁵ Despite this organization and not until the arrival of the cargo ship *Formosa* to Puerto Argentino, the units of the X Bde. had to share the logistics organization of the units already stationed in the islands. This situation was not easy and added a complication to the troops’ daily life.

On April 12, Vice Admiral Lombardo issued the TOAS campaign defense plan.²⁶ According to some analysts, the plan was too ambitious in its goals and too general given the means available. In effect, it did not suggest what kind of battle the Argentine forces should fight. It merely planned for acting on “favorable opportunities.” Finally, the strategy was not truly joint planning because it assigned a limited role to the air and naval components.²⁷ The difficulty stemmed from the fact that the TOAS was primarily a naval command. It had very few Air Force planes under its direct control. For the campaign, the Air Force had its own specific collateral command, the Strategic Air Force

(Fuerza Aérea Estratégica, FAE). On paper, the General Joint Staff coordinated the Air Force operations, which complicated coordination between the forces in Malvinas and the Air Force units in the continent.²⁸

Surprisingly, Menéndez, the Joint Commander of the garrison, did not receive TOAS defense plan until ten days later, on April 23.²⁹ Therefore, the new land commander, Brig.-Gen. Jofre, learned about it after he had already issued and was in the process of implementing his own defense plan.

By April 12, Great Britain started the enforcement of the Maritime Exclusion Zone. The zone covered within an area of 200 nautical miles from the center of the Malvinas. According to the Argentine Army Official Report, that was the beginning of the British “siege” to the islands. Starting on that date, all communications with the islands went solely through the air. The situation compelled Argentines to resort to airlift “with limited transport capacity.”³⁰

Three days later, Menéndez appointed Brig.-Gen. Jofre as commander of AEM because he was senior to Brig.-Gen. Daher. The latter returned to the continent to his former position as Commander of the IX Infantry Brigade. However, his staff was added to Jofre’s staff.³¹

On April 16, the new land forces commander, Jofre, issued his own defense plan. He did not change much of Daher’s original plan. The X Bde.’s staff with the addition of Daher’s former staff worked feverishly to prepare it.³² According to new plan, Army and Marine forces would defend the same key sectors: Port Stanley, Darwin-Goose Green, and Fox Bay. To some participants there was no other choice. The new plan modified the position already in place and the new units were added in a “patchy” way.³³ Nevertheless, it was clear in the plan that the center of the defense rested on the islands’ capital. The outcome of the campaign would be sealed if the British capture it. The plan also stated that the defensive positions would act as strongholds mutually supported with local reserves to counterattack. The defenders would constitute an airborne reserve. In Port Stanley, the artillery was put under a unified command.³⁴

Jofre rejects the assertion that his operational plan was merely the continuation of Daher’s but he acknowledges he made good use of what had been done. The increased number of troops added to the theater and the need to defend areas not defended before prompted many necessary changes. The new plan also included the coordination of the air support from the AFAM and improved the logistical planning.³⁵ Consequently, on April 20, a new order assigned the three newly arrived regiments to reinforce the defensive perimeter surrounding Port Stanley.³⁶

The next day the cargo vessel *Formosa* docked at Puerto Argentino. Her arrival was welcome since she brought part of the heavy equipment of the X Bde.

Most importantly, it landed the kitchen equipment that eased the burden on the other units logistic services to provide meals.³⁷

On April 22 occurred the third important modification in the allocation of troops to the defense of islands.³⁸ That day, Lt.-Gen. Galtieri visited Port Stanley. He and his staff were informed of the defensive measures implemented by the Joint Command (GMM). All present at the meeting agreed on two important issues. They considered the reserves in Port Stanley insufficient, and they believed that with the troops available the enemy could operate freely in other parts of the islands. Vice Admiral Lombardo, TOAS commander, was not present at the meeting. Later, Galtieri and the other visitors flew over the area in company of Brig.-Gen. Jofre. After the aerial inspection the visitors agreed to send a new regiment to the islands, the 5th that belonged to the III Infantry Brigade (III Bde.). The official visit ended at 5 p.m. The same night, at 11.30 p.m., the Teletype in Port Stanley printed the news that they were going to receive not only the 5th regiment but also the whole III Bde (!) This big battle formation fell under the command of Brig.-Gen. Omar Parada.³⁹ This decision again added new stress to the staff, which by then was discussing where to place the new regiment. It also imposed new burden on the logistic system of the garrison. The III Bde. comprised the infantry regiments 4th, 5th, 12th, and the 4th Artillery Group (Airborne).⁴⁰ Once again, the troops were airlifted to the islands while leaving behind most of its heavy equipment. Most remarkably was the fact that the peacetime station of the brigade was the subtropical province of Corrientes.⁴¹ According to one witness, Galtieri's decision responded to his fears about the incoming British Task Force and the information about the number of troops approaching to the islands. However, "the allocation of troops did not responded to any coherent planning, and it was the result of the urgency and improvisation."⁴²

The next day, Brig.-Gen. García returned to the islands representing Galtieri. He wanted to know what would be the deployment of the new brigade. After a meeting with Menéndez, they decided to send one of its regiment to Darwin. Most importantly, it was decided to reinforce the defense of Gran Malvina Island by sending another regiment to Port Howard. Sources agree that Menendez and his staff opposed the plan because it would situate the two regiments in completely isolated positions with little chance of receiving external support and no use at all. But they were overruled, for political reasons; Galtieri and the Junta wanted the island to be occupied.⁴³ Finally, between April 24 and the 28, the units of the III Bde. arrived on the islands.

Brig.-Gen. Daher returned to the islands on April 25 to help Menéndez in his role as Joint Commander of the Military Garrison Malvinas. Daher became his chief of staff. According to the Army's official report, despite the name of

“joint commander” of the forces in Malvinas, in practical terms, his staff operated as an advisory and coordinating team without any supporting personnel. The commands of each of the services coordinated their actions as best they could, but they did not work according to the true concept of “joint” command.⁴⁴

With two brigades now under his command, Menéndez reorganized it. On April 28, one day after the British recovered the South Georgias Islands, he ordered the dissolution of the AEM. Two new commands replaced the old one. The command responsible for the defense of the capital and surroundings sector became the Agrupación Ejército Puerto Argentino (X Bde., AEPA). It defended the zone East of the line Puerto Salvador-Fitz Roy. This included the city, Peninsula Freycenet, and Peninsula San Luis. Its mission was to deny the enemy its main strategic objective, Port Stanley. The second command was named Agrupación Ejército Litoral (III Bde., AEL). It was responsible for the defense of the coastal sector. It comprised the western part of Soledad Island (East Falkland) including Darwin-Goose Green, and the whole Gran Malvina Island (West Falkland).⁴⁵ See Figure 2.

By April 30, two regiments were deployed on the Gran Malvina Island, the 8th IR at Fox Bay and the 5th IR at Port Howard. Consequently, the former became part of the III Bde. (AEL). Likewise, the 4th IR that originally belonged to the III Bde. was later attached to the defensive perimeter surrounding Port Stanley and became part of the X Bde.⁴⁶

On May 1 the British carried out their first air bombardment of the islands. This marked the beginning of the airnaval phase of the war. During the period, the British Task Force established the strategic operational siege around the Malvinas by controlling the air and the sea spaces.⁴⁷ After the May 1 attacks, Menéndez decided to retain the 4th IR in the sector of Port Stanley. From that day on the Argentine garrison waited for British the landing, which finally came on May 21 when the British landed in San Carlos on the west side of Soledad Island. This event marked the start of the land phase of the conflict. When writing about this phase Jofre evoked despair:

The most remarkable of this land phase of the conflict was that the Malvinas continued alone, abandoned to their own fate.⁴⁸

By mid May the strategic operational and tactical commands were really concerned about the evolution of the campaign. Both Lombardo and Menéndez separately sent reports to the Junta assessing the situation to date as difficult. The army units were spread thin with two regiments immobilized and isolated in Gran Malvina Island, the logistical situation was fragile, and the armed services in Malvinas bypassed the normal command channels by responding instead to

their respective service commands. Finally, the British totally controlled the initiative. During a night meeting on May 23, the High Command in Port Stanley learned that the Junta had ordered the creation of a new strategic operational command named the Joint Operations Center (Centro de Operaciones Conjuntas, CEOPECON). Its creation intended to increase the managerial capacity of the command chain, particularly after the British landing in San Carlos on May 21. Unlike the TOAS, whose quarters were in Buenos Aires, CEOPECON quarters were in Comodoro Rivadavia. The members of the new command were the Commander of the V Army Corps, Brig.-Gen. Osvaldo García, the Commander of the Strategic Air Force (FAE), Brigadier Mayor Helmut Weber, and the Commander of the TOAS, Vice Admiral José Lombardo. Because CEOPECON was a center and not a command, decisions were reached by consensus. This measure was at best, in the opinion of some critics, "lukewarm." It should have been organized as a command and earlier in the campaign. Moreover, in practical terms it did not solve the original factors that caused its creation.⁴⁹ In case of disagreement, the senior officer was the final decision authority, in this case Brig.-Gral. García,. Officially the mission of the CEOPECON was to coordinate the armed services at the strategic operational level.⁵⁰ It controlled all forces under the TOAS, the CAE, and the Army strategic reserves. The creation of the new command structure was kept secret, and conversely, TOAS was never officially eliminated.⁵¹ Thereafter, it was expected that all communications, reports and requests from the islands would be channeled through the Center. The coordination problems increased because of the frequent intervention of the Commanders in Chief of each service and by subordinate commands, which used to communicate directly with their own Commander in Chief, thus bypassing the operational command, the TOAS. An army officer explained that as the conflict progressed "the authority and efficacy of the commanding officer of the TOAS was being diluted."⁵² Moreover, after the fighting began on May 1 the TOAS had difficulties in coordinating operations with the command of the Air Force South (FAS).⁵³

On May 26, the CEOPECON ordered Menéndez to carry out an attack on the beachhead in San Carlos. For the attack Menéndez was authorized to employ, if necessary, the units in Fox and Howard. The command in Port Stanley considered such action impossible. Gen. Jofre wrote in his personal diary:

There existed an evident ignorance [in the continent] of that combat zone, the capabilities of the enemy and our own scarcities...particularly our own lack of mobility.⁵⁴

After their landing in San Carlos, British paratroopers marched and attacked the positions in Darwin-Goose Green. After a two days battle, on May 29, the Argentine garrison surrendered.⁵⁵

Initially, the Joint Command had expected the most probable direction of attack to come from the sea, with the British troops landing near Port Stanley. Later, due to the changing situation Menéndez and Jofre decided to reinforce the defenses from an attack in the west, while at the same time maintaining strong coastal defenses to the east and south of the capital. Therefore, they ordered the 4th IR, originally assigned to the III Bde., to come under the orders of the AEPA and reinforced the western section of defense perimeter.⁵⁶ Between May 29 and June 3 the AEPA ordered adjustments in the perimeter. When completed, the troops could cover only 37% of the perimeter. Consequently, there was no continuous defensive line. The resulting gaps allowed later the enemy to infiltrate and to maneuver offensively.⁵⁷

After the victory in Goose Green, the British advanced to Port Stanley and concentrated their forces for the final assault to the capital. Until June 8, the only land actions were intense skirmishes between patrols.

In the early morning of June 8, Argentine troops deployed on the south side of Mount Harriet observed the presence of British warships in Bahía Agradable (Port Pleasant). They informed CEOPECON and the center asked the Air Force for an air strike. Argentine fighter-bombers surprised the British ships unloading troops and caused important damages.⁵⁸ During the day and the night, British airplanes and naval artillery persistently bombed the Argentine positions. The Argentine command in Malvinas considered moving out and counterattacking on the British in Fitz Roy, which was 16 km south west of Port Stanley. After some consideration the idea was rejected. The command in the capital preferred to maintain the combat capacity of the defending units and did not want to move outside the coverage range from their artillery.⁵⁹ However, the commanding officer of the BIM 5, Commander Carlos Robacio, had initiated the planning and was preparing his unit to counterattack while the British were still in shock from the air strike. According to this officer, to proceed with the counterattack would have required Argentine units to move from the rear guard, but the army command (AEPA) chose to refrain the force defending the capital. Therefore, Robacio later complained that because the defenders' operational-tactical commands unwillingness some army units practically "watched" the battle without intervening.⁶⁰

For the final assault, the British started the investment of the town from the west and for three days they probed the defenses. The western side of the Argentine defensive perimeter ran along the heights that surrounded Port Stanley. They ran from north to south: Wireless Ridge, Longdon, Two Sister,

Harriet, Tumbledown, William, and Sapper Hill. Argentine forces of company size or less defended these hills in strongholds. For this reason, the British could concentrate their forces and proceed to attack each position with local superiority. They were also helped by the fact that the Argentine positions did not mutually support one another. Consequently, these final combats were a series of firefights in which the British reduced piecemeal the Argentine defenders without suffering any counterattack.

The final British assault had two phases. During the night of June 11-12, the British Marine Commandos and Paratroopers attacked Longdon, Two Sisters and Harriet. By the early morning they had captured the positions. After a day for rest and further preparations, during the night of June 13-14, British paratroopers and Scots Guards assaulted the last line of mountains before Port Stanley: Wireless Ridge, Tumbledown, and William. In the morning of June 14 Argentine Marine and Army troops retreated to Sapper Hill, the last height in their hands and prepared to counter attack. The Joint Commander and the commander of the AEPA, however, considered the situation untenable and hopeless, and they asked for a cease-fire. When the fighting ended, the bulk of three Argentine regiments (3rd, 6th, 25th IRs) deployed in the airfield and harbor areas surrendered without having fired a single shot against the incoming British troops.⁶¹

II.

During the Malvinas campaign the Argentine Air Force had its war baptism. Its war record was impressive but it concentrated particularly in two activities, shipping attack and air supply operations.⁶² In terms of cooperation with the other services, however, its record was not impressive at all. From the beginning of the campaign, the Air Force had established its own specific and autonomous command. On March 31, the Commander in Chief of the AAF created the Fuerza Aerea Sur (FAS). With headquarters were in Comodoro Rivadavia, its responsibilities were to protect the whole territory of Patagonia and to operate in the South Atlantic war zone. FAS came under the command of the Strategic Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Estratégica, FAE). There was no joint planning because the creation of the FAS responded to the concept of Task Air Force.⁶³ For this reason, the Air Force acknowledges that the FAS commanding officer confronted a strained relationship with the others collateral commands because the superimposition of the authority conflicted with the TOAS, which also included the Malvinas military garrison (GMM). The Navy complained that

the Air Force conducted independent and autonomous maritime air operations, particularly air search and rescue, maritime patrols, and attacks on naval targets. The Air Force units were not subordinated to the TOAS, consequently, they carried on their own naval war looking for “lucrative” targets unrelated to specific military operational needs.⁶⁴ The Army also protested on several occasions for the lack of air support during the land battle, claiming that it was difficult to coordinate air strikes with an autonomous air command.⁶⁵ In contrast, the cooperation and camaraderie between navy and air force pilots were more apparent in the air bases on the continent.⁶⁶

III.

In the defense of the Malvinas, Argentine troops fought the crucial battle for Port Stanley under the most unfavorable conditions. Their positions were attacked and surrounded by superior forces, and then they were eliminated one by one. Meanwhile, other units would not come to their support. They remained as spectators during the night infantry duels. Why such a debacle? What was the impact of the command structure in the land war against the British? Here we will delineate the more important factors.

Many Argentine troops suffered privations from poor logistic planning. Even when there were enough supplies in the warehouses and containers in Port Stanley they could not be adequately distributed. There was an almost absolute lack of motorized transportation. Thus much of the supplies were carried by shoulder with the consequent tiring of the troops. There were not enough helicopters, and if there were enough they lacked crane systems to lift heavy equipment. Most troop movements were carried out by foot.

There were also several modifications and rectification in the defensive positions, and each time the troops had to dig in the rocky soil their new positions.

All analysts agree that there was poor planning throughout the campaign. In the Continent, the High Command seemed more concerned about a possible engagement with Chile and they remained obsessed with that idea, even when the British Task Force was sailing towards the South Atlantic. They kept the best troops sitting, facing the Chilean border waiting for an attack that never materialized while other less prepared troops were fighting for their lives. Poor planning also affected logistics.

Remarkably, the justification that the Argentine military cite was their lack of any doctrine for joint operations. However, they also boast the original landing and capture of the Malvinas was a model combined operation.

The organization of the command structure was deficient and it nearly collapsed in mid-May, a week before the British landing in San Carlos. The TOAS was an airnaval command without many resources to support the land fighting. This command had practically no air force resources. These were kept under the control of the Air Force, which created a collateral command with a cumbersome chain of command to coordinate air strikes. Consequently, land troops suffered from lack of air support when they were most needed.⁶⁷

The organization that replaced the TOAS, the CEOPECON, could not solve the problems of coordination and competition among the armed services that plagued the campaign. Despite the bad experience with the TOAS, the High Command created the CEOPECON as a center and not a command. Therefore, only the good will of all parties facilitated the continuation of the campaign. Moreover, according to some sources, the coordinator of the center, Brig.-Gen. García continued to act merely as a representative of Lt.-Gen. Galtieri.⁶⁸

On several occasions, Galtieri intervened personally and made decisions without consulting his staff or against the advice of the operational and tactical commands. For example, he decided to send the III Bde. without informing to Brig.-Gen. Menéndez, the military governor and joint commander in Malvinas.

The political authorities put political considerations above operational concerns. Political leaders ordered to occupy with considerable forces the Gran Malvina Islands. In this way they wasted the power of two infantry regiments.⁶⁹ One of them came from Patagonia and was better adapted to the terrain. These two were literally abandoned to their own resources because there were no means to supply them. Consequently, these regiments suffered unnecessary extreme deprivations. Moreover, because the lack of mobility they were unable to intervene decisively in the combat on the Soledad Island. When the CEOPECON unrealistically ordered them to attack the British rear they could not move from their isolated positions.

Finally, many of the important decisions that greatly affected the campaign in Malvinas were taken by commands far removed from the theater of operations. With some exceptions, very few ever visited it or stayed long enough to learn about its characteristics. They were ignorant of the real conditions in the Islands and lacked any intelligence on the British. In addition, they also sometimes were deceived by optimistic information coming from the islands.

There were many military personnel sent to the islands during the campaign that have been very critical of the leadership of those commands in the continent. The most extreme vision states that

the main causes of the defeat of the Argentine armed forces in the [Malvinas] campaign were the faulty superior level command, political-military of the conflict.⁷⁰

There were also psychological factors that affected the conduct of operations during the campaign. In this case, once again the commands on the continent seemed to ascribe to the illusion that Great Britain was not going to react and fight for the repossession of the islands.⁷¹

The priority was assigned to diplomatic negotiations implied the idea that the war was not going to become the arena of definition of the conflict.⁷²

This assertion is similar to other opinion expressed by foreign analysts. For instance, Harry Train commented that “Argentine leaders did not believe they would have to fight.”⁷³ Leonard Wainstein has also observed that “it probably seemed incredible to the Argentines that they would actually have to go to war, and against Great Britain.”⁷⁴

According to Commander Robacio, the high command in Port Stanley was also psychologically affected by an inferiority complex that magnified the British capabilities. These mental images exaggerated British capabilities. There was a constant fear and concern of those in the locality about a possible landing in the surrounding shores, or landings by helicoptered troops, and/or the constant action of commandos. These excessive fears motivated the decisions to maintain an important number of troops defending the coasts near Port Stanley instead of reinforcing the western perimeter when the British attack began. Because of the fear of commando attacks, the lights of Port Stanley were kept on all night, thus helping British artillery spotters who controlled the fire over the Argentine positions in the surrounding mountains.⁷⁵ Robacio adds that the commands in the locality also had a precarious concept of risk; apparently they had “risk averse” mindset. They exaggerate the impassability of the terrain. They also assigned an insufficient number of troops for counterattacks. This made it easier for the British to repel these attacks to overwhelm the defensive perimeter.⁷⁶

According to most analysts during the campaign Argentine forces suffered not only from a lack of strategic operational planning but also from poor coordination, competition, and rivalry among the three armed services. Far from solving these problems, the war imperatives worsened them and contributed to the defeat. The key issue is that these problems affected the chances of survival of drafted soldiers who were just dropped in the islands.

Once again, the study of this campaign shows that war is not only a problem of sophisticated technology and equipment but also of sophisticated human management.

Notes

- ¹ Comisión Rattenbach, *Informe Rattenbach. El drama de Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Espartaco, 1986), 246.
- ² Martín Balza, *Malvinas. Gesta e incompetencia*. Buenos Aires, Alántida, 2003, pp. 71-73.
- ³ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, Desarrollo de los Acontecimientos*. Buenos Aires: Ejército Argentino, 1983, 28.
- ⁴ Resolution 502 from the Security Council declared that there has been a breach of the peace in the region of the Malvinas Islands. Therefore, it demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities and an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the islands. It also called the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom to seek a diplomatic solution to their differences.
- ⁵ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 29*.
- ⁶ The TOM was created on March 28, 1982. It was activated to conduct the landing operations in the Malvinas. The TOM came under the orders of the commanding officer of the V Army Corps, Brig.-Gen. Osvaldo García. These corps was responsible for the defense of the Argentine Patagonian sector. (Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 24-25*).
- ⁷ Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas" in *Operaciones terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 57.
- ⁸ In the original plans, the 8th IR constituted the strategic operational reserve (Félix Aguiar, "La crisis y la guerra" in *Operaciones terrestres en las Islas Malvinas*, Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985, 31).
- ⁹ Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas," 57-58; Francisco Cervo, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios" in *Operaciones terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 108-109; Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 28-29*.
- ¹⁰ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 29*; Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente. Batallón de Infantería de Marina N° 5* (Buenos Aires: Solaris, 1996) 39-40.
- ¹¹ Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas," 59.
- ¹² Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas." 59.
- ¹³ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. II, Abreviaturas, Anexos y Fuentes Bibliográficas*, Anexo 13.
- ¹⁴ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 31*; Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas," 59.
- ¹⁵ The commander of the Air Force component was Brig. Luis Castellanos; the commander of the Navy component (COAGRUNAVINAS) was Commander Adolfo Gaffoglio, then Captain Antonio Mozzarelli. Finally from April 27 the officer in charge of the Navy component was Rear Admiral Edgardo Otero. (see Francisco Cervo, "La recuperación militar de las Malvinas," 58-59).
- ¹⁶ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 31*.
- ¹⁷ Orden de Operaciones 1/82 (Defensa).
- ¹⁸ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 30*; Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," in *Operaciones Terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 192-193.
- ¹⁹ Commander Carlos Robacio, commanding officer of the BIM 5, presents a different version of the meeting. According to him, General Daher explained the defense plan and when Vice admiral Lombardo asked if they needed reinforcements, the General "emphatically stated that they had all the necessary elements, although they were short of logistic and mobility items." (Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente...*, 66)
- ²⁰ Francisco Cervo, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 103; Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I, 31 and 33*.
- ²¹ Francisco Cervo, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 103.
- ²² Francisco Cervo, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 104.
- ²³ Besides the lack of adequate means of transport, a report of Vice Admiral Lombardo, blame the existence of Army soldiers suffering from severe malnutrition to problems of disorganization, and faulty leadership

(Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos. Relato de las operaciones navales en el conflicto del Atlántico Sur*, Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1998, 339).

²⁴Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino*. Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1990, 90; Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 339.

²⁵Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 90.

²⁶Plan Esquemático Nr. 1/82). (For the complete text see Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. II, Anexo 11.

²⁷ Félix Aguiar, "La crisis y la guerra," in *Operaciones Terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 35-37; Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 105-106.

²⁸ Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 106.

²⁹Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 32.

³⁰Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 33 and 34.

³¹Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 33.

³²Dalton and Balza characterized it as "abridged planning." Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 194.

³³ Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," (otm 108 Dalton and Balzo have the same opinion Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 197.

³⁴For a full description of the plan see Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 196-198.

³⁵Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 62-63.

³⁶Complementary Order Nr. 1 (Partial modification of the defense line) (Orden Complementaria N° 1 (Reestructuración parcial del dispositivo) a la Orden de Operaciones 1/82 (Defensa). (Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 68).

³⁷Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 74.

³⁸ Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 110 and 203; Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 75.

³⁹Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 73-74.

⁴⁰ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 35.

⁴¹ Initially this unit was ordered to mobilize to the south in expectation of a Chilean movement in the frontier. Most of its support equipment never reached the islands. This fact, the lack of adaptation of the troops to the environment and their late arrival left the unit in a weaker situation and it was destined to suffer the heaviest casualties.

⁴²Francisco Cerro, "La recuperación militar de las Islas," 60; and Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 110.

⁴³Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 203-204; Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 75.

⁴⁴Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 34. For this reason, some observer asserts that the organization was "created precariously." Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 105 fn. 2.

⁴⁵ This included Isla Borbón (Pebble Is), Fox Bay, and Port Howard. (Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 205; Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 36).

⁴⁶Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 36.

⁴⁷ Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, "La Batalla de Puerto Argentino," 206.

⁴⁸ Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 165.

⁴⁹ This organization also reflected the political realities of the distribution of power during the military government in Argentina, where the each armed service was responsible for 33% (1/3) of the government positions (Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 352; Francisco Cerro, "La concentración y el despliegue de los medios," 102).

⁵⁰ Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas*, Vol. I, 62; Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 141.

⁵¹ Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 352.

⁵² The reasons for its decline were it lacked of naval elements when the fleet had been neutralized by the presence of nuclear submarines, its air component was very small and the army units were under the orders of General Menéndez (Francisco Cerro, “La concentración y despliegue de los medios,” 101).

⁵³Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 347-356.

⁵⁴ Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 145.

⁵⁵For a first hand account from the Argentine perspective see Piaggi, Italo A. Ganso Verde (Goose Green), Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1989 and Cerro, Francisco, “El cerco estratégico operacional y el combate de Darwing-Prado del Ganso,” in *Operaciones Terrestres en las Islas Malvinas* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1985) 123-189.

⁵⁶ Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, “La Batalla de Puerto Argentino,” 210.

⁵⁷ Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, “La Batalla de Puerto Argentino,” 212.

⁵⁸ Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, “La Batalla de Puerto Argentino,” 219.

⁵⁹ Eugenio Dalton and Martín Balza, “La Batalla de Puerto Argentino,” 221-222; Ejército Argentino, *Informe Oficial del Ejército Argentino Conflicto Malvinas, Vol. I*, 100; Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 195-199.

⁶⁰Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente...*, 186.

⁶¹(Middlebrook 1989, 272-273; otm 239-241; Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 212-281; for a very critical view of the performance of the Argentine High Command in Malvinas see Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente...*, 257-341.

⁶²For a balance appraisal of the Argentine Air Force role see Middlebrook (1989) 285-286.

⁶³The Air Force Command had no dependency relation because they were a specific command, whose component elements were from only one service. (Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 340; www.faa.mil.ar)

⁶⁴Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 338 and 343; Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente...*, 144 and 182. One problem, according to both the Navy and the Army, was that the Air Force airplanes persisted on attacking warships and not the transport ships, which were more critical to the sustainability of the military offensive.

⁶⁵Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 202, 203, 218; Menéndez in Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 355.

⁶⁶Horacio Mayorga and Jorge Errecaborde, *No Vencidos...*, 342.

⁶⁷ According to Jofre, the TOAS and later the CEOPECON lacked of adequate means to operate in support of the land combat zone. (Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 290)

⁶⁸In Malvinas there were not joint operations but “cooperation among armed services” (Oscar Jofre and Félix Aguiar, *Malvinas: La Defensa de Puerto Argentino...*, 97).

⁶⁹ According to Balza the deployment of two regiments in Gran Malvina “created a secondary, marginal, and insignificant theater of operations which wasted and distracted forces.” Moreover, the decision was “an insult to the principles of strategy”. (Balza, *Malvinas. Gesta e incompetencia*, p. 74)

⁷⁰Félix Aguiar, “La crisis y la guerra,” 30. See also idem. 29. Also very critical are Balza, *Malvinas. Gesta e incompetencia* and Robacio y Hernández. *Desde el frente*.

⁷¹ Balza, *Malvinas. Gesta e incompetencia*, 75 and 82-83.

⁷² Félix Aguiar, “La crisis y la guerra,” 26, see also 22.

⁷³Harry D. Train, “An Ananalysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands Campaign,” *Naval War College Review* XLI (1) winter 1988, 38.

⁷⁴Leonard Wainstein, “Reflexions on a Small War,” *Conflict* 6 (2) 1985, 102.

⁷⁵ Carlos H. Robacio and Jorge Hernández, *Desde el Frente ...*, 74, 77, 109, and 454-55.

⁷⁶Idem, 186 and 187.