
Interview: Contributing Editor Uwe Parpart

The Malvinas conflict: 'Total war strategy required to defeat Britain'

As the war has escalated in the South Atlantic over the past two months, Latin America's elites are now forced to recognize that what at first appeared to be an Anglo-Argentine battle has now emerged as full-scale economic and military warfare directed at the continent as a whole.

In addition to the mounting casualties and dramatic battles on the Malvinas themselves, events in June drove this message home to even those governments most reluctant to consider the implications of a de facto state of war between themselves and their erstwhile allies, Great Britain and the United States.

The United States vetoed a ceasefire resolution at the United Nations, while shipping American missiles and ammunition to British forces in the South Atlantic; France extended economic sanctions against Peru, refusing to sell that country either new Exocet missiles or spare parts for Peru's French-made Mirages; and London slapped punitive hikes on interest rates for loans to several Latin American countries, while orchestrating a general drying-up of credit to the continent.

Recognition that the war will be neither short nor limited to the stormy tip of South America is sinking in, and with it, the potential for counter-sanctions against Great Britain and the United States. Brazil, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela have announced that their naval forces will not participate in this year's "Unitas" joint maneuvers with the U.S. Navy, which have taken place every year since the early 1950s. A withdrawal of delegations to the defense arm of the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Defense Board, is also under discussion.

Exemplary are the signs of a change in policy in Colombia, which voted against the resolutions of support for Argentina and sanctions against Great Britain and the United States passed by the Organization of American States in mid-May. Colombia's new President-elect, Belisario Betancur, has stated that Colombia would return to "its natural environment—the inter-American system." A delegation from his Conservative Party visited Argentina for a second time.

Prominent individuals in several Latin American nations have begun arguing that Latin America's response

so far has been inadequate, and that a strategy of "total war" against the enemy—and its allies—must be adopted. Argentina journalist Manfred Schoenfeld's call for economic sanctions against the United States, reprinted on page 45, is indicative.

Below, *EIR* assesses the weaknesses and dangers of a "limited war" strategy on the military battlefield itself. A full review of Latin America's possibilities for action—on the economic field as well—is being prepared by *EIR* founder Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

On June 11, Laurence Hecht interviewed Contributing Editor Uwe Parpart for EIR. Parpart, the research director of the New York-based Fusion Energy Foundation, has written studies of U.S. and Soviet military capabilities, and spoken widely on strategic matters. He is a graduate of the West German Naval Academy.

EIR: How would you describe the military situation in the South Atlantic?

Parpart: Before getting into a detailed discussion of the military situation on and around the Malvinas, I would like to say a few things about the broader strategic context. In fact, it would be quite difficult to see how the present military situation could have arisen without recognizing the total disparity of objectives of the British and the Argentine sides. For the Argentines it was a matter of asserting their long-standing and historically clearly justified claim to sovereignty over the islands, a relatively limited and simple objective. For the British it was something different entirely. It was not the Malvinas that mattered, and certainly not the question of "armed aggression." When has that ever been a matter of concern in British colonial history?

What actually counted was the British determination to rope the United States and the European NATO allies into "out-of-area" deployments, that is, into a commitment to extend potential NATO military activity to a global scale. This geopolitical aim, rather than the specific possession of the Malvinas Islands, was at stake. Beyond that, there is talk of establishing a series of British and U.S. or NATO bases in the South Atlantic,

and the South Pacific, using in particular an alleged offer by Chile to make available the ports of Punta Arenas and other locations on the Pacific coast for such purposes.

When looking at this global British strategy, what comes to mind is the historical parallel of the dying Roman Empire in the third century B.C. Under the Emperor Diocletian the Romans attempted to fortify the outer reaches of the Empire, by using satrapies or surrogate powers, the role that would today be played by Israel or Chile. And indeed they had established all along the borders of the Empire military outposts which could quickly be occupied and reinforced by means of their equivalent of today's Rapid Deployment Force. This strategy did not work then, and it will not work today.

However, I do not think that at the beginning of the Malvinas conflict, the Argentines had a full understanding of the broad geopolitical objectives of the British. And thus they probably underestimated British determination to go through with the military expedition to the bitter end. To repeat: in the disparity of objectives, a very fundamental strategic objective on the British side, and a much more limited claim to sovereignty over islands immediately off their coast on the Argentine side, lies the basic explanation for the evolution of the conflict up to this point.

Judged from the British standpoint, the Argentine claim to the islands in fact had the significance of the much broader claim to full sovereignty in its territorial—as well as by implication, economic—aspirations of a southern tier nation. And it is this claim that is unacceptable to the British as well as to such international monetary and economic organizations as the IMF, the World Bank, and the Bank for International Settlements.

EIR: Do you think the British are going to take Port Stanley?

Parpart: Barring the development of new political, economic, or military flanks, a very short answer to that is yes. The Argentine forces on the island are in an untenable position. This does not mean that they don't retain the ability to inflict significant, even heavy, damage on the British forces. Still, it is difficult to see the basis for a total turnaround. What is, even at this late point, capable of changing this are *political* factors, such as unacceptably high British casualties or a change in the strategic constellation.

The question one should really try to answer is how the present point was reached. Somebody might say, this is not so difficult to see; how could a developing-sector country like Argentine pit itself against the combined forces of the British and NATO troops and the logistical and, much more important, the political support of the United States, and expect to win?

However, if we recall the situation at the outset of the battle, it was by no means clear that the current situation

was the necessary outcome. From the beginning, to the extent that mistakes were made on the Argentine side, they were in effect not so much specific military mistakes as strategic mistakes: misjudging the British determination to carry their military operation all the way through. At every step of the way, the Argentines hesitated to fully deploy their own forces in the most effective way against the British.

A limited-war posture is always a losing one. If you have two forces facing each other and one of them is committed to total war, and the other committed to limited war, but otherwise both are relatively equal in overall capabilities, the side fighting the limited war is going to be at a disadvantage.

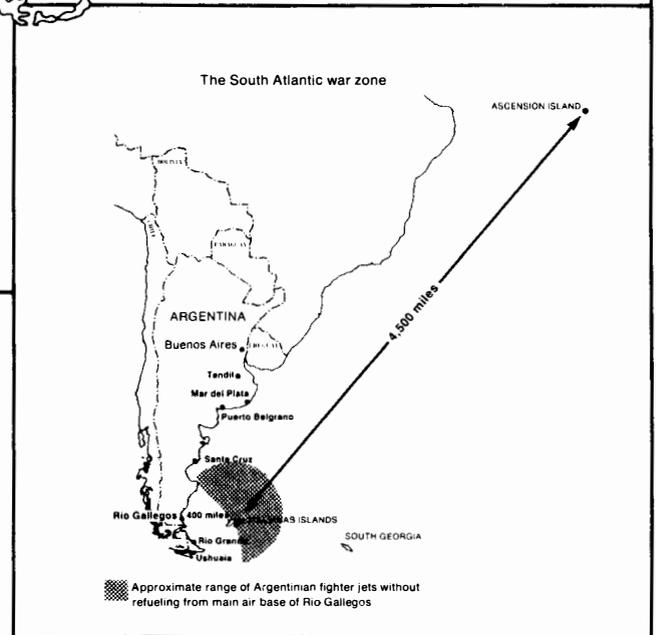
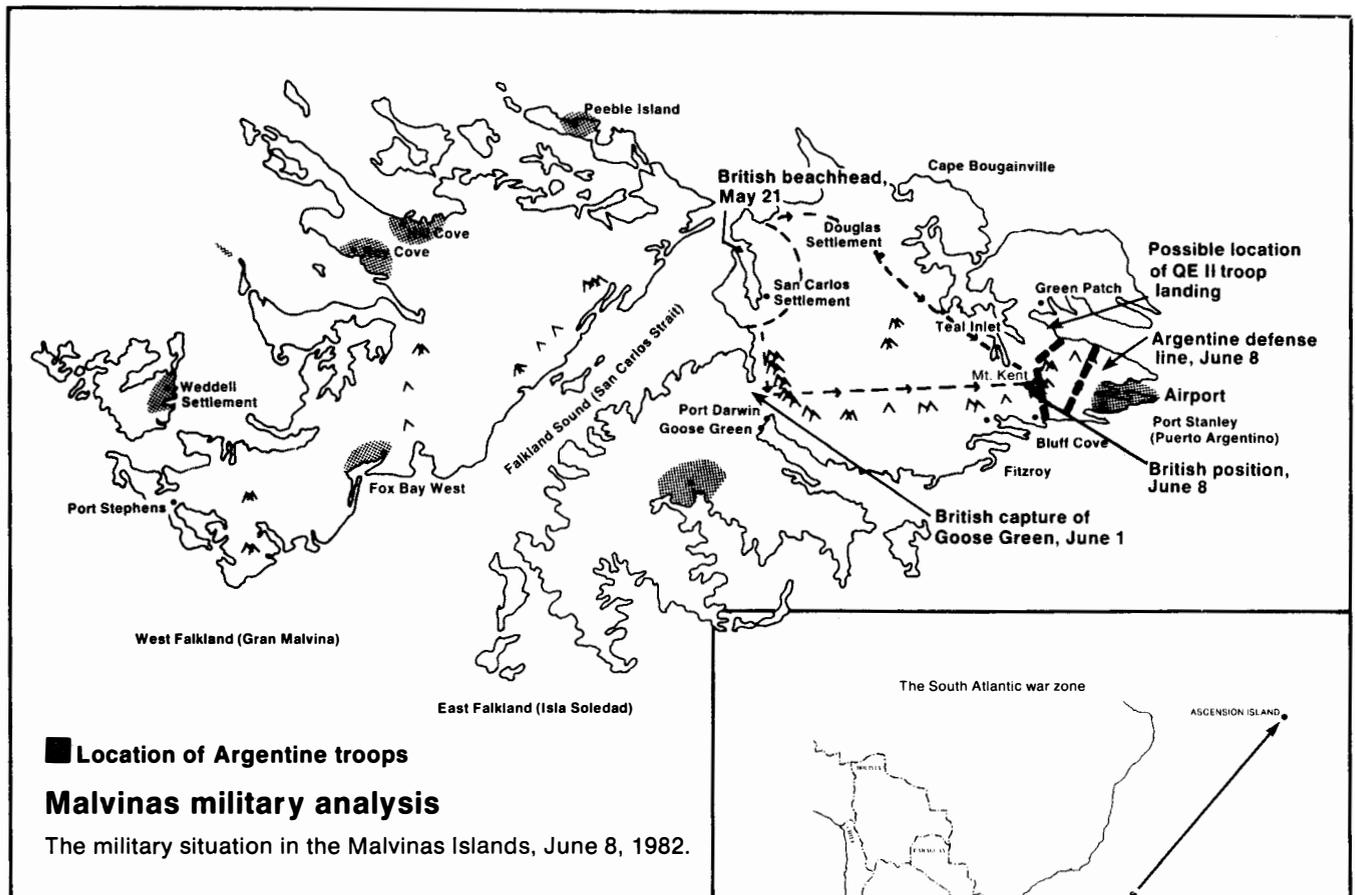
EIR: More specifically, the British have a naval superiority and the Argentines have air superiority. For a long time, the British had an 8,000-mile supply line to deal with, and they seemed very vulnerable. If you would accept the classical doctrine that it takes a three-to-one superiority to capture an island—the British have accomplished their objective with nothing like that. Start with the period before the British landing. . . .

Parpart: I think the initial phase must have been one of almost ten-to-one superiority in favor of the Argentines, and they expected three-to-one ground superiority as it initially shaped up. The initial reports had it that the British were sending about 3,000 in ground forces and that they were going to be up against 9,000-10,000 Argentine troops.

Quite apart from the superiority of the British navy, and its ability to contain the Argentine navy through the deployment of nuclear submarines, which I think nobody ever questioned, the combination of large air superiority and a significant ground superiority, or even parity, would have created the situation in which one would say there is really no way in which the British could actually win.

The only advantage that I can see that the British might have had is that even though they had very long supply lines, these supply lines were considerably shortened in effect at the moment the U.S. decided to logistically help out. The traffic at Ascension Island has been massive. The British have been resupplied with everything they needed by the United States. The other thing is that one could assume that the British weapons systems in general were somewhat more modern on the average than the weapons systems of the Argentines, and they had a more experienced fighting force. Still, at the outset it would have seemed very difficult for the British to have accomplished their objectives.

However, the Argentines entirely left the tactical initiative to the British. There were no hostile activities of any kind engaged in by the Argentines, or at least no significant ones prior to the sinking of the *Belgrano*. In



fact, the Argentines themselves publicly declared that their military posture was *deliberately* strictly neutral. The first phase of the conflict was characterized by many as Britain's violation of its own declared 200-mile war zone by the sinking of the cruiser *Belgrano*, which was outside of that zone.

That would already indicate to me that the Argentines had made a misjudgment. It would be very, very foolish to trust that the British would necessarily abide by some declaration of such a war zone. That is like playing chess according to the rules; in that way you cannot win a war, no matter what the situation is.

The Argentines, being stirred up by the loss of the *Belgrano*, responded with the sinking of the *Sheffield*, and at that point the entire war took on a new phase. It is my sense that even after this first exchange the Argentines once again adopted a limited-war conception, a waiting position, and left the initiative to the British forces once again.

EIR: Didn't the British stay out of the range of Argentine aircraft for most of that period? What could the Argentines have done?

Parpart: I do not think that was a physical limitation on their capabilities. I think it was a mental self-limitation on what they were going to do, and I think that this may

have its political explanation but not a full military justification. It was proved in later engagements that with refueling, the Argentine air force was quite capable of very significantly extending the range of its aircraft. I think that from the Argentine standpoint, they did not at that point take advantage of the combined superiority of entrenched ground forces and massive air superiority. They did not fully exploit with a major attack on the British fleet, the advantage that they had.

A major attack, even if it would have lost a significant number of aircraft, could have been quite an equalizer. I do not know what kind of warnings, on the part of the United States, for example, may have been received by the Argentines against such a tactic. There were reports in *Der Spiegel* about the fact that the British task force

was carrying nuclear warheads, which in the case of real danger to the fleet they might have used.

But not to have launched a major assault against the fleet clearly left the tactical initiative on the British side, and it continued the no-win position of the Argentines.

I think that there was a great deal of room for improvisation under these circumstances. You have to take chances, even if it costs a good many of your pilots' lives. After all, if you look at how the conflict has since evolved, a dozen or so planes that might have been lost under those circumstances were in any case lost later at a point when their effectiveness was much diminished.

A massive attack on the British naval task force should have occurred well before any attempted landing by the British forces. I think Argentina was holding back for political reasons at that point. There followed some very puzzling situations that, again, I find hard to believe have a simply technical explanation.

If one looks at the disposition of the Argentine forces, which must have been known to the British, there was no point for the British to land on the western island under any circumstances, because they would still have had to go across the sound and it would have been much more difficult to cross over at a later point.

The Argentines had to assume that the landing would occur on the east Malvina. There were, frankly, only two possibilities: either direct frontal assault—in effect, parking the Queen Elizabeth at the docks at Port Stanley—or else landing in the areas of the Falkland Sound. I find it surprising that this area was not better defended than apparently it was.

One can use mining, especially in the case of a relatively narrow strait with a predeterminable number of possible landing sites, quite effectively, with a certain amount of selective mining so as to actually force a landing task force into a certain pattern which is then easier to attack. Mining is not necessarily for the purpose of having somebody run into a mine and put out of action; it can also thrust them into a pattern of deployment which is easier to deal with.

I am puzzled about why that was not done. There were very valiant attacks made by the Argentine air force against the landing forces; still, they were limited essentially to air attacks. I don't understand that. I think the Argentines had the capability of lifting a significant infantry force into the vicinity of the landing area at San Carlos. In the first 48 hours or so of a landing, a beachhead is most vulnerable. I think that there is no question in the mind of anybody who has read even one or two pages of a textbook on tactics, that you do not defeat a landing simply from the air. You have to counter with ground forces, in combination with air support. There was a puzzling lack of determined Argentine resistance to the landing when it was most vulnerable.

Port Darwin was apparently not even defended at all;

the force there essentially capitulated without much of a fight. Goose Green was much more heavily defended and an actual battle ensued; still, one cannot be too impressed by a situation in which the attacking force loses 12 killed, as they claimed, and captures 1,400. That does not wash.

I think that the Argentine air force acquitted itself in a way that there can be no question of the courage of Argentine soldiers, so I am looking for another explanation as to why this debacle occurred.

There was one report I want to mention. This may seem like a cruel thing to get involved in, but there were numbers of canisters of napalm found at Goose Green which had not been used by the Argentines. It so happens that in a relatively unprotected area with a significant concentration of troops, like on a beachhead, napalm is certainly quite effective. I think when you are involved in a full-scale war those questions have to be faced.

Now, the next stage. If you look at phase one as the no-war situation, and phase two as the actual landing, questions arise surrounding phase three—the relative ease with which the British marched across the island; I think of all three, that's perhaps the most puzzling element. For this I have no explanation at all. There was not a single point that we know of at which any significant flanking operation was attempted. One is reminded of a situation in which in the Korean war, U.S. troops were pushed back and were about to be pushed off the peninsula altogether, when MacArthur and others commanded a counteroperation within close vicinity and turned the war around in a matter of just a few weeks.

There is no question in my mind that the Argentine forces had both the equipment and the wherewithal to create counterattacks and flanking attacks.

EIR: So even if you have a much larger force, landing right at Stanley, this could not have justified maintaining the entire Argentine force there?

Parpart: Let's look at what Argentina now has. How could you possibly have put yourself in a worse position than they are in right now? The only historical parallel I know is the British at Yorktown in 1781, where they were in the exact opposite position and they eventually had to give up without a fight because the whole thing was obviously hopeless, surrounded on three sides and cut off by the French navy on the sea. So I don't see how you could have gotten yourself in a worse position. You could always fall back to some defensive position, if necessary. Any form of counterattack, some form of surprise, movement of troops into a position where you know the British have to come through—because after all there are not many ways you can go on that island—should have put them in a much better position.

The final puzzle is the apparent fact that, within the relative vicinity of Port Stanley, the British were able to seize, or at least establish an important presence on, the

high ground without much of a fight at all. I don't just mean Mount Kent, about which there are still conflicting reports; I mean also several other mountains overlooking the Port Stanley area where the British claim they have been able to implace their 105-millimeter guns. It's going to be very, very uncomfortable sitting in a defensive position and having these things showering down on you.

EIR: Would you say now that it's largely the weather that is holding the British back?

Parpart: I don't think the weather has a lot to do with it. I think the basic problem that the British probably had was getting heavy equipment cross the island, getting in position. And when you are in a situation where you have reduced the enemy to a defense perimeter and you are the party laying the siege, you are really in no great hurry.

I would think that what held things up basically was the British reluctance to go in for the final attack, before they had all their equipment and manpower in place. There may have also been political considerations. Perhaps they didn't want to start the attack while President Reagan was addressing the British Parliament.

EIR: There are some very interesting things concerning hardware, it seems to me. For example, the British navy seems to have taken a hell of a beating. In the beginning of the war, all the electronic apparatus on these ships was ballyhooed. Probably the worst losses were taken at the attempted landing at Port San Carlos, where it didn't seem to do them much good. Without the use of Exocets, the Argentine air force, using these old Skyhawks, was able to inflict serious losses.

Parpart: Any time you do a landing, you have landing craft, you have larger group transports and supply ships to protect. One should not be too surprised if such a landing force loses a handful of destroyers and frigates. Without wanting in any way to diminish the success of at least some of the Argentine air attacks, it should be pointed out that any naval commander launching this kind of an operation would expect to lose a number of ships under these circumstances. It would be miraculous if they didn't. In fact, what surprised me, really, was that the losses were kept within those limits. I would have expected that in some way or other, if the Argentines were still in possession of their submarines, they would have brought them to bear against the landing force at that point, which apparently did not occur. And I don't know the reason for that.

There are many well-known battles of World War II that one could cite here. They're not exactly parallels, but just think of the battle of Iwo Jima, where the U.S. lost 20,000 men, and the Japanese defending force was smaller than the total losses incurred by the U.S.

EIR: So if the Argentines had used their air superiority, it's conceivable that the British might not have even gotten in there?

Parpart: You see, one interesting point is that once the British ships were on the Malvinas coast, the most effective weapon that the Argentines had, namely, the French Super Etandard equipped with Exocet missiles, was not useful, because of the closeness of the mountain ranges. So the time to use this capability would have been before this.

EIR: What about the Exocet—especially when it sank the Sheffield, it was sort of the wonder weapon of this war. Would a power like Argentina with sufficient Exocets be able to drive off a modern naval fleet?

Parpart: No, I don't think so. I think that the British fleet was, for whatever reason, very ill-equipped to deal with this kind of threat. The Israeli Navy was subjected to similar rocket attacks by the Egyptians in 1973. The Israelis had learned a big lesson earlier, I think, when one of their destroyers, The *Eilat*, was sunk by one of these rockets. They equipped themselves with a combination of electronic countermeasures and anti-missile missiles, and the result was that from the point on, they did not lose a single ship, or even incur any damage to any of their ships. So I don't think this is a situation against which one cannot defend. The British were just very ill prepared for this kind of an attack. Perhaps they didn't expect it because they have consistently underestimated Argentine capabilities and resourcefulness.

Again, I don't want to detract from the significance of the Argentine air attacks, but the point is, it's quite well known that it's not that easy to attack a well-defended naval task force which is equipped with modern defensive equipment. By the way, in the next phase, laser weaponry is stationed on board of large ships which should have no trouble whatsoever dealing with cruise missiles, which, after all, fly at less than the speed of sound. . . .

EIR: What can the Argentines do militarily now?

Parpart: Well, right now I think there is precious little that can be done in strictly military terms. The only possible thing would be to launch a flanking move which would break through enemy lines and force the British to divide their forces. Also significant would be a determined counterattack at some relatively weak point of the British lines, possibly achieving a politically significant effect, and making the British think twice about the final, necessarily bloody battle. Still, the chances of success at this late date are very small, barring a change in the strategic constellation which could have military repercussions—most notably if the U.S. were to constrict British resupply capabilities. Because it is, after all, not just the British doing battle with the Argentines, but the British backed with U.S. logistical capabilities.

EIR: Is there any hope of the Argentines reinforcing themselves . . . establishing a beachhead?

Parpart: I don't really see that happening. There have been reports that they have some troops on the western islands. I would see that more as a kind of bargaining chip in the negotiations that will ensue as this thing winds down. I don't see how they are going to get those troops across the sound and into a position to threaten the British in time.

I'd like to just close the circle in a way, to point out that the greatest danger I see right now is that the British succeed somehow in dragging the U.S. into the situation of participating in, or being a party to establishing a military base on the islands, and in that way being dragged into this global strategy I described earlier, while simultaneously once and for all ruining any chance of establishing any semblance of decent relationships with—certainly Argentina—but also with other Latin American countries.

And the second lesson I think to be learned by this, as

I said at the outset, is not to impose limitations on your own fighting capability. You have to ruthlessly exploit the opportunities you have. You cannot permit yourself to hope that pulling back will bring you some rewards. I think that at least some of that kind of thinking must have gotten into some of the heads of some of the Argentine leadership; otherwise I cannot understand this whole sequence of events I have described. Clausewitz's book on war says that if you limit yourself and the enemy doesn't, you will lose.

EIR: Could it have been the nuclear threat?

Parpart: I don't think so. It was a much broader political threat that initially played an important role. The Argentines, many of them political as well as military, said from the outset that if the U.S. gets involved, we have no chance. I don't buy that. I think they could have inflicted the kind of damage on the British which could have turned the whole situation to their advantage. I think certain opportunities were definitely missed.

An Argentine calls for economic warfare

Leading Argentine journalist Manfred Schoenfeld, arguing that Argentina cannot vacillate in waging "total war" on Britain, called for Argentina to break with the "ally of our enemy"—the United States—for supporting Great Britain's war in the Malvinas. Excerpts from Schoenfeld's May 30 op-ed in the Buenos Aires daily La Prensa, translated by EIR, follow:

It is the fact, let me stress, that Washington has such disdain for Latin American opinion that it is systematically arming a power which on its own is incapable of invading the territory of the Western hemisphere.

We must respond directly to the ally of our enemy and our invaders. We must break diplomatic relations with Washington and expel from the country the band of CIA agents and spies which, with or without diplomatic immunity, inhabits that fortress in Palermo known as the American Embassy.

Moreover: the country must prepare itself, as I have been saying for some time now, for a war that is something more than a war for the Malvinas or for the other southern archipelagos. This has become a total war, and it is important that this be understood,

that we declare this before the world. . . . What is important is that the world, and even more so our own country, realizes that . . . this will be just the beginning of the war. . . .

Meanwhile, we have to hit the United States where it hurts. Beginning now, we have to declare economic warfare against them which, unfortunately . . . was not even done in the necessary manner against Great Britain; we must take over—and not as late as was done in the case of British companies, which had rushed beforehand to "convert" themselves into "Dutch" companies—all of the American companies in the country; close [American] banks; seize their assets; and above all, make felt the threatening weight of a freeze of all our foreign debt. This is not the time for pretty talk, but for bludgeoning and applying the old adage "scratch with the nails that you've got."

We are in a position to create a bit of chaos on Wall Street, much as it pains some of the beloved friends of our "financial geniuses." What are we waiting for? For them to destroy our Air Force and our Naval Air Force with their missiles?

The idea that if we don't pay our debts now, in the future, no one will ever again give us credit is false and unrealistic. Credit is not a favor; it is business for the lender who grants it. The capital markets are seeking clients and Argentina has always had a reputation as a reliable payer; if on one occasion, it fails to do so, it will be recognized in the future that it took this action selectively against countries with which it was at war—because it was under attack.