
THE MALVINAS

Latin Americans opt for a new diplomacy

by Cynthia Rush

As *EIR* goes to press, Latin American foreign ministers and diplomats meeting at the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington are concluding their debate on what course of action their nations should adopt in the Malvinas crisis. Despite the wishful thinking of some U.S. media and political observers that all has been “quiet” at the OAS, the two days of meetings reflected the depth of Latin America’s anger at U.S. support for Great Britain and the damage done to the inter-American system as a result of this.

The question Latin American leaders have been debating is how far to take their anger over the role the United States has played in backing Great Britain’s colonial warfare against Argentina. Although the draft resolution introduced by Argentina does not represent a total break with the United States, its strong language was enough to send the U.S. delegation and its allies scurrying to obtain a “watered-down” version.

The Argentine resolution urges the foreign ministers to “vigorously condemn the unjustifiable armed aggression perpetrated by the United Kingdom against the Argentine Republic,” and proposes that Latin American states “adopt those measures they deem appropriate to assist the Argentine Republic in combating the armed aggression perpetrated by the United Kingdom.” The resolution also calls on the United States to “order the immediate lifting of the sanctions applied against the Argentine Republic and to refrain from providing the United Kingdom with any material assistance.”

Whether this or a less strongly worded resolution is passed is less important than the process that was set in motion at the OAS meeting, a process that could have lasting effects on the structure of the inter-American system.

Since the Malvinas crisis erupted, the State Department and leading media have continuously lied that the damage to inter-American relations as a result of the U.S. alliance with Great Britain is inconsequential. Once the crisis blows over, they have smugly predicted, things can be “patched up” without too much difficulty. The harshness of the Latin American response, which has largely been blacked out of the U.S. media, shows otherwise.

In his speech before the United Nations Security

Council on May 22, Venezuelan Foreign Minister José Alberto Zambrano described what is at stake in this crisis. The U.S. decision to back Britain’s aggression against Argentina has had an “unpredictable” effect upon the OAS, Zambrano said, and warned that “world equilibrium and intercontinental relations are seriously affected by this tragic conflict.” The British Empire, he concluded, “extended its colonial domination across the planet with the brutal, systematic, and calculated use of force. . . . The British aggression is not a struggle for the defense of law, but an effort to reimpose the law of the Empire.”

Panamanian Foreign Minister Jorge Illueca condemned British military aggression as “monstrous and abominable” and told the United States that “it is repulsive to learn that Argentine youth are dying from the arms, technology and plans provided by the United States—a country which has signed a military alliance [the 1947 Rio Treaty]—with Latin America. Those who think they can play with the countries of Latin America are very mistaken.”

Due largely to manipulations by Great Britain and the United States, that Security Council session produced a contentless resolution which gives U.N. secretary general Pérez de Cuellar seven days in which to “continue the search for a ceasefire.” The meeting also saw a shameful alliance between the governments of Chile and Mexico, both of whom demanded that the “first use of force” be condemned. *EIR*’s evaluation is that the resolution is intended only to buy time for Great Britain while it escalates military activity in the South Atlantic.

The responsibility for formulating effective action against Britain and the United States was left to the Organization of American States. During the Security Council sessions, Argentine Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Méndez mooted that his government might invoke Article 8 of the 1947 Rio Treaty, by which signator nations must respond collectively with economic or military sanctions to any aggression against a member nation.

To prevent the kind of “embarrassment” that the invoking of Article 8 or some other unified denunciation of the United States would represent, Alexander Haig canceled a scheduled appearance before the World Affairs Council on May 26 in Pittsburgh in order to be present at the OAS meeting. While the Secretary of State intoned to the gathered delegates that the “Rio Treaty is an inappropriate mechanism” for dealing with the crisis, and that they “should return to the United Nations,” the State Department exerted what Latin American military sources described as “terrible and unrestrained” pressure against the smaller nations of Central and South America to prevent them from fully supporting Argentina.

The crude nature of the blackmail, which in the case

of the Central American nations was based on threats of withdrawing the meager "benefits" of the administration's Caribbean Basin program, was revealed in the public statements of El Salvador's representative to the OAS: "We regret that the United States seems to feel that the smaller countries are susceptible to pressure. We have always been an ally of the United States, but we are a brother to Argentina. We are deeply disturbed at what the United States is doing, and by its perception that we are second-class allies. . . ."

Backfire potential

There is no guarantee that Haig's blackmail will produce the desired results. Sources at the OAS meeting report that even if a softer version of Argentina's resolution is approved, solid allies like Venezuela, Peru, and Panama might act together and take further action, such as breaking diplomatic relations with Great Britain and providing military aid to Argentina through bilateral arrangements. Argentina has maintained a tough stand in defense of its position—Foreign Minister Costa Méndez received a standing ovation after his OAS speech—and earlier in the week of May 22-28 the Galtieri government announced the withdrawal of its military representatives from the Inter-American Defense Board in Washington and from training facilities in the Panama Canal Zone, as a protest against U.S. policy.

News of increased U.S. military aid to Great Britain—now including Sidewinder air-to-air missiles and Hawk surface-to-air missiles—has greatly increased tensions between the United States and Latin America. American military aid to Britain will only prolong the conflict in the South Atlantic and threatens in addition to internationalize it, Costa Méndez told an ABC-TV interviewer on May 26. At the opening session of the OAS meeting on May 27, the foreign minister reiterated his warning that the United States was "shattering" the inter-American system by turning its back on its treaty obligations.

The OAS meeting is important because it leads into the conference of non-aligned nations scheduled to begin in Havana on May 30, and will help to shape the debate that takes place there. Argentina is a member of the non-aligned movement and Costa Méndez will reportedly fly to Havana via Lima and Caracas to meet with Cuban President Fidel Castro and other Cuban government officials. According to Argentine diplomatic sources, discussions will focus on how the Malvinas crisis has affected the stability of the inter-American system. Argentine President Galtieri wrote on May 25 to Castro—the president of the non-aligned movement—thanking him for the support the non-aligned nations had shown Argentina, and denouncing Britain's colonial warfare "to the detriment of the developing sector nations."

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