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Module 3: Operational Art

15 September 2025

DBF 3.5: Falklands/Malvinas

Response

QUESTION: 42. *What effect did the imposition of the MEZ have on the Argentinean plans for the supply and reinforcement of the Falklands garrison? (min. 250 words)*

Primary Post (*by September 15, 2025*)

The British Maritime Exclusion Zone (MEZ) shattered Argentina's Operational Objective (OPO) to sustain and reinforce the Falklands garrison in order to hold the islands, because it severed maritime lines of communication (LOC), forced an inadequate air bridge, and accelerated logistic culmination. It altered the operational factors of space, time, and force in the British favor.

The MEZ, enforced by nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), froze sea lift. Argentine observers judged it "very credible," which "tethered" transports "to the mainland," and III Brigade equipment "never arrived" (Hime, 2010, p. 18). Ends, ways, means broke contact at sea.

After General Belgrano's loss, the Armada retreated to coastal shallows, which definitively cut surface resupply and reinforcement options, tightening the Total Exclusion Zone's (TEZ) sea-denial effect on time and force (Hime, 2010, p. 24; Guardia, 2020).

Buenos Aires shifted to an "air bridge," yet garrisons faced "grave food and equipment shortages" as daily lift failed to meet demand (Hime, 2010, p. 18). British Joint Intelligence Center (JIC) forecast a "culmination of rations" by mid-May, and events matched that estimate (Hime, 2010, p. 30).

Operational art linked ends, ways, means, and risk. The garrison was the operational Center of Gravity (COG), and sustainment was a critical requirement. The MEZ attacked that requirement through sea denial, an operational function decision aimed at the COG's support structure, not its frontage. It degraded sustainment, movement, maneuver, and enhanced protection of the lodgment.

Critics might argue that convoyed sealift under air cover could have pierced the MEZ. However, the SSN threat, the TEZ, and the Navy's retreat ashore rendered sustained surface resupply impracticable at the required distances (Hime, 2010, pp. 18, 20, 24).

In summary, the MEZ broke Argentina's ways to the OPO, reduced available means, and raised risk beyond acceptance, producing early culmination through deliberate sea denial.

References

Guardia, M. (2020, December 21). Falklands War 1982 (Episode 2) [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z61-EKA2Nds>

Hime, D. N. (2010, June 4). The 1982 Falklands-Malvinas case study (NWC 1036). United States Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department.

Secondary Post #1 *(by September 17, 2025)*

QUESTION (Vicki): *Was there any evidence that the British came close to culmination during the prosecution of this operation?*

Hi Vicki. Strong work. The British approached culmination because three pressures compounded. The British Operational Objective (OPO) was to repossess the islands via an East Falkland lodgment to enable the Desired End State (DES) of restored sovereignty. Two moments pushed hardest toward the culminating point: sustained Argentine air interdiction over San Carlos and the loss of Atlantic Conveyor. Heavy-lift helicopters disappeared, operational reach and movement and maneuver collapsed, infantry marched across East Falkland, tempo slowed, endurance thinned. An 8,000 nautical mile Line of Communication (LOC) and tight Replenishment at Sea (RAS) cycles pressed fuel, ordnance, and medical support. No organic Airborne Early Warning (AEW) compressed decision time for Combat Air Patrol (CAP) and Command and Control (C2). Ammunition expenditure for Sea Dart, Sea Wolf, 20 mm, and chaff ran near limits. Weather and short daylight windows reduced options. Exocet risk to carriers and amphibious shipping forced conservative dispositions that cost CAP persistence over the lodgment.

Your framing on range, attrition, and mobility aligns with these drivers. Add AEW, CAP, RAS, and ammunition burn rates to make the culmination case even sharper.

References

N/A

Secondary Post # 2 (by September 17, 2025)

QUESTION (Drew): *What was the Argentinean strategic objective and was it realistic from a military point of view? What effect did it have on the subsequent military planning?*

Hi Drew. Agreed. Argentine strategy aimed at a rapid fait accompli to restore sovereignty and bolster the junta, executed as a bloodless seizure to blunt British outrage. Plausible for the opening days. However, once Britain sailed a carrier task force and imposed a Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ), the premise failed, and the contest shifted to endurance and sea control. Thesis: politically plausible at first, militarily unrealistic once British resolve and external support hardened.

Effect on planning. The Operational Objective (OPO) shifted to hold the islands by breaking the British lodgment in order to force talks. Ways centered on land-based air interdiction, Exocet strikes, and a Stanley perimeter. Means lacked operational reach, unity of command, and logistics for sustained denial at range. Risk surged as distance, tanker scarcity, fuze failures, and fragmented command and control degraded tempo and decision space.

In summary, the objective drove a reactive, air-centric plan that misaligned ends, ways, and means, and set Argentina on a path of attrition it could not sustain.

References

N/A

Professor Feedback

Jeff,

Meets expectations. Your answer and responses demonstrate an excellent grasp of the course concepts.

You are ready for SA-5. Good luck!

GTG+ Ends, ways & means. +STF