



Falkland/Malvinas, Argentina and United Kingdom 44 years later: what would happen today in a new conflict?

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The [new statements by Argentine president Javier Milei](#) have brought the Falkland/Malvinas issue back to the center of international attention. Buenos Aires has hardened its position against oil exploitation in the waters of the archipelago, initiating sanctioning proceedings against dozens of subjects involved in the Sea Lion project and reiterating that Argentina will not renounce its claim to sovereignty.

Milei, however, **has not announced a military option**. The confrontation remains today political, diplomatic and economic. But the contemporary modernization of Argentine Armed Forces makes an inevitable question: **if a scenario similar to 1982 were to repeat itself, what would be today the balance of forces between Argentina and the United Kingdom?**

The answer is apparently paradoxical: **Argentina today has much more modern technologies compared to a few years ago, but militarily finds itself in a decidedly less favorable position than that of 1982. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, possesses fewer overall forces compared to the Cold War, but the Falklands are today infinitely better defended.**

In 1982 London was caught almost completely unprepared

The fundamental difference starts right here.

On **April 2, 1982**, when Argentine forces landed on the islands, the British military presence was minimal. Defending the Falklands were approximately **70 Royal Marines and sailors of Naval Party 8901**, exceptionally more numerous than normal because the garrison change was underway.

Buenos Aires was therefore able to rapidly conquer the archipelago through an amphibious operation, forcing the small British garrison to surrender.

The British problem began immediately after: to retake islands located almost **13,000 kilometers from the United Kingdom.**

London organized a giant naval and air force comprising approximately **100 ships**, the aircraft carriers **HMS Hermes and HMS Invincible**, Royal Marines, 2 PARA, 3 PARA and subsequently the 5th Infantry Brigade.

It was one of the most complex post-war expeditionary operations.

Argentina in 1982 was also much more dangerous militarily at sea

There is another element often forgotten.

Argentina that went to war in 1982 had a Navy that it no longer possesses today.

The Armada Argentina deployed the aircraft carrier **ARA Veinticinco de Mayo**, the large cruiser **ARA General Belgrano**, destroyers, frigates and above all an operational submarine component.

The *Veinticinco de Mayo* actually came to prepare an attack against the British aircraft carriers. After the sinking of the *General Belgrano* by the British nuclear submarine **HMS Conqueror**, the Argentine fleet drastically reduced its operations on the open sea.

Particularly effective was instead the air force.

Mirage III, Dagger, A-4 Skyhawk, Canberra and especially the **Super Étendard armed with AM39 Exocet anti-ship missiles** caused very heavy losses to the Royal Navy. Argentina had only five Super Étendard available during the conflict, but nevertheless managed to sink the destroyer **HMS Sheffield** and inflict further losses on the British force.

Argentine aviation thus demonstrated an offensive capability far from negligible.

Today the situation on the islands is completely different

This is probably the greatest difference compared to 1982.

The United Kingdom built after the war the **Mount Pleasant Complex**, inaugurated in 1985 precisely to prevent a new Argentine operation from catching London unprepared.

Today the base permanently hosts the **No. 1435 Flight of the RAF with four Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4**.

There is also a **Voyager**, usable also for in-flight refueling, and an **A400M Atlas** for transport and support.

On the ground, a **Roulement Infantry Company** also operates, that is a British infantry company rotated periodically among different units. In 2025 there were also paratroopers from the **3 PARA**; subsequently other units of the British Army took over.

To this are added radar, protected infrastructure, and modern air defense systems.

At sea, the permanent British presence is now ensured by the **HMS Medway**, a River Batch 2 class patrol vessel that in January 2026 replaced HMS Forth as South Atlantic Patrol Vessel.

So the first Argentine problem would be radically different from 1982:

the islands would have to be conquered before they could be defended. And today conquering them would already be the most difficult part of the entire operation.

Argentina is, however, regaining a true combat aviation

This is where the situation becomes interesting.

For almost a decade Argentina had remained substantially without a modern supersonic fighter. The purchase of **24 F-16AM/BM ex-Danish aircraft** gradually changed the situation.

The first **six F-16s arrived in Argentina in December 2025**. The program provides for further deliveries until the completion of the 24 aircraft.

As of **September 10, 2026**, therefore, the program is still in full development phase, with new aircraft destined to arrive and Argentine personnel engaged in progressively achieving full operational capability.

The technological leap is enormous compared to the previous situation of the Fuerza Aérea.

But this does not yet mean having 24 fully operational fighters, trained crews, and a completely mature logistical structure. Argentina is currently **in the midst of the reconstruction phase of its air combat capability**.

Argentine F-16s against British Typhoons

This is probably the comparison that would attract the most attention in a hypothetical conflict.

The Argentine F-16 represents an enormous improvement, especially thanks to radar, modern missiles, Western avionics, and the future integration of tactical networks.

In 2026 Argentina also began to study greater operational integration between **F-16 and P-3C Orion**, including the sharing of tactical information.

But on the British side there would be the **Typhoon FGR4**, more recent aircraft and perfectly integrated into the RAF system.

And especially the British would start directly from the Falkland Islands.

In 1982 it was the Argentines who possessed the geographic advantage and the British who had to bring their fighters to the archipelago through two aircraft carriers.

Today **four Typhoons are already on the archipelago**.

This radically changes the operational problem.

On the ground, Argentina is modernizing

On the ground level too, Buenos Aires is trying to recover capabilities lost in recent decades.

In 2026 Argentina took further steps in the acquisition program of **Stryker 8x8 armored vehicles**, with the stated objective of reaching up to **235 vehicles** in different configurations. At the same time, the modernization of **TAM 2C-A2** tanks continues, while the Ejército Argentino maintains mechanized brigades, armored brigades, airborne brigades, and Special Forces units.

This means that, compared to the years of greater crisis in Argentine Defense, the ground component is again acquiring greater mobility, protection, command capabilities, and interoperability.

But in the case of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, the main problem would not be the quality of the ground forces per se.

The problem would be getting them to the islands.

TAM, Stryker, artillery and infantry could play a role only after achieving at least temporary sufficient air and maritime superiority, protecting an amphibious force and maintaining an open logistical line to the archipelago.

This very passage appears much more difficult today than in 1982.

On the British side, however, the land component would already start from an organized defensive position, integrated into a system with **Typhoon, radar, air defense and naval support**.

At sea, however, the gap is much more pronounced

This is probably where Argentina's greatest weakness emerges.

The Armada still has three MEKO 360 destroyers of the **Almirante Brown** class, MEKO 140 corvettes of the **Espora** class, new ocean patrol vessels and other units.

In 2026 the Argentine Navy continued to conduct important training activities integrated with surface units and air-naval components.

These are real capabilities, but the combat backbone of the fleet largely dates back to the 1980s.

Above all, **Argentina currently does not have a fully operational submarine force**. The loss of the ARA *San Juan* in 2017 and the subsequent unavailability of other units created a strategic void that Buenos Aires has been trying to fill for some time.

In 1982, however, the submarine **ARA San Luis** represented a real threat to the British Task Force.

Today Argentina would not have an equivalent.

And on the other side there would be the Astute

The Royal Navy is certainly much smaller than in 1982. This should not be underestimated.

But it possesses capabilities that militarily would be extremely difficult for Buenos Aires to counter.

The nuclear-powered attack submarines of the **Astute class** have practically unlimited range from a propulsion standpoint, advanced sonar, Spearfish heavy torpedoes and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The precedent of 1982 weighs inevitably.

It was indeed a British SSN, HMS *Conqueror*, that sank the *General Belgrano*, profoundly changing the conduct of the Argentine fleet.

In a new conflict the British submarine threat would probably be even more difficult to neutralize, while Argentina would start without its own operational submarines.

The two British aircraft carriers still change the equation

London also has **HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales**, aircraft carriers of about 65,000 tons designed to operate with **F-35B Lightning II**.

This does not mean that an aircraft carrier could appear immediately in the South Atlantic.

It does mean, however, that if London decided to concentrate its forces, Buenos Aires would have to consider the possibility of facing not only the Typhoons already present on the islands,

but also **F-35B, nuclear submarines and naval units sent by the United Kingdom.**

Argentina does, however, have one card that cost it dearly in 1982: geography

The Falkland/Malvinas are located about **500 kilometers from the Argentine coast.**

The United Kingdom, on the other hand, remains almost 13,000 kilometers away.

Geography therefore continues to favor Buenos Aires.

Bases like **Río Grande and Río Gallegos**, along with other Patagonian installations, would allow Argentina to operate from national territory without bearing an intercontinental logistical chain comparable to the British one.

It is the same advantage exploited by Argentine aviation in 1982.

But there is an enormous difference: back then Argentine aircraft departed from the continent against a British fleet that necessarily had to approach the archipelago.

Today the first objective to overcome would be a **British defensive system already installed on the islands**, with fighter jets, radar and air defense.

The P-3C Orion are another capability not to be underestimated

Argentina is also rebuilding its maritime patrol capability thanks to **P-3C Orion acquired from Norway.**

The aircraft are progressively increasing Argentine surveillance capabilities in the South Atlantic and cooperation between the Navy and Air Force.

Looking ahead, the integration between P-3 and F-16 could provide Argentina with surveillance, identification and tactical situation sharing capabilities decidedly superior to those possessed in recent decades.

It is probably one of the most important programs to observe.

And NATO? Why didn't Article 5 trigger in 1982

There is then a question often overlooked when discussing a possible new Falkland crisis:

Article 5 of NATO does not apply automatically to the archipelago.

The reason is geographic.

Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty establishes that, for the purposes of Article 5, the collective defense guarantee includes islands under the jurisdiction of Member States located in the North Atlantic region **north of the Tropic of Cancer**.

The Falkland/Malvinas are instead located in the South Atlantic, around the **52° south parallel**.

This is why in **1982**, when Argentina invaded the islands, the attack did not trigger the activation of NATO Article 5.

The United Kingdom thus fought the conflict as a national state, while receiving political, logistical and intelligence support from various allies.

The same legal situation would remain valid today.

A new Argentine invasion of the Falkland **would not automatically trigger the collective defense clause**, precisely because the archipelago is located outside the geographic area covered by Article 6.

However, this does not mean that London would necessarily be alone.

The allies could still consult under **Article 4**, provide intelligence, logistics, ammunition, base access, military capabilities or intervene through national decisions and coalitions.

In other words, **NATO would not automatically trigger, but very broad support from allies to the United Kingdom could still occur.**

1982 versus 2026: the balance has practically reversed

In 1982 Argentina had an enormous initial advantage: **the Falkland were practically undefended.**

Buenos Aires could rapidly occupy the archipelago and force London to organize a reconquest from the other side of the ocean.

Today London has transformed that vulnerability into its main element of deterrence.

In extremely brief terms:

Argentina 1982		Argentina 2026
Fighters	Mirage, Dagger, Skyhawk	F-16 under introduction
Aircraft carriers	1	None
Operational submarines	Yes	Non-operational capability
High seas fleet	Substantial	Reduced and aging
Maritime patrol	Neptune	P-3C Orion
Ground forces	Numerous but not very modern	TAM 2C-A2, Stryker under introduction
Geographic proximity	Major advantage	Major advantage

And for the United Kingdom:

United Kingdom 1982		United Kingdom 2026
Initial defense of the islands	About 70 men	Permanent garrison
Fighter jets on the Falkland	None	4 Typhoon
Military air base	No equivalent	Mount Pleasant
Aircraft carriers	Hermes + Invincible	Queen Elizabeth + Prince of Wales
Embarked fighters	Sea Harrier	F-35B
Nuclear submarines	Crucial	Astute class
Ground-based air defense	Limited	Modern system
NATO Article 5	Not applicable	Not automatically applicable

If a new war really broke out?

The scenario would be completely different from that of 1982.

A replay of the **Operation Rosario**, that is a major Argentine landing against Stanley followed by the conquest of the archipelago, appears today extremely more difficult.

Buenos Aires would first need to obtain at least temporarily sufficient air and naval superiority around the islands.

And it is precisely here that Argentine shortcomings would emerge: **absence of an operational submarine force, limited amphibious capability, relatively old surface fleet and an F-16 component still in the growth phase.**

Even ground modernization, with Stryker and TAM, would only impact after overcoming the decisive problem: **transporting and sustaining those forces on the islands.**

On the other hand, however, the United Kingdom of 2026 is not that of 1982.

Royal Navy and British Army are numerically much smaller and London would still have to transfer men, ammunition, ships and aircraft for thousands of kilometers.

For this reason **the first hours and first days would have decisive importance.**

But the starting situation would decidedly favor London.

In 1982 the United Kingdom had to recapture the Falkland Islands.

In 2026 it should instead **prevent them from being conquered.**

And that is an enormous strategic difference.

Is Milei therefore preparing a new war?

To date **there are no elements to support it.**

The Argentine government continues to move mainly through political, diplomatic, economic and legal tools. At the same time, Buenos Aires is rebuilding military capabilities that for decades had been left to deteriorate.

However, the two issues should not be automatically overlapped.

The real novelty is something else.

For the first time in many years, Argentina is gradually returning to having **modern Western fighter aircraft, long-range maritime patrol, new ground systems, greater interoperability and new defense investments.**

By 2026 they do not yet represent the tools necessary to militarily repeat 1982.

But if the F-16 program really reaches **24 aircraft**, if the P-3C fleet is completed, if Buenos Aires rebuilds the submarine component and seriously modernizes the Navy, the balance of forces in the South Atlantic will become much more interesting to observe by the end of the decade.

For now, however, the fundamental fact remains one:

In 1982 Argentina found only a few dozen Royal Marines ahead of it. Today it would find Typhoons, radars, anti-aircraft missiles, a permanent military base and, behind them, the possibility of British F-35B and nuclear submarines intervention.

And even without an automatic activation of NATO's Article 5, London could still count on much broader allied support on the political, logistical and military level.

And this is probably the main reason why a new Falkland/Malvinas war, although periodically returning to political debate, remains today an extremely remote scenario.