

UK Trained Argentine Soldiers After Signing Controversial Falklands Oil Deal

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The UK bans the export of goods to Argentina that might enhance its military capability. But Britain trained senior Argentinian military officers after a 2016 deal sought to facilitate oil development around the Falklands.

The Argentine soldiers were [sent](#) to Britain in 2018 but it is not known how many were trained or which courses they attended. The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) refused to clarify when asked by *Declassified*.

Argentine soldiers also [attended](#) three courses at the UK Defence Academy in Oxfordshire in 2019-20.

These courses included ‘Building Integrity for Senior Leaders’, which is [designed](#) for high-ranking commanders. Argentine military personnel also attended the ‘Advanced Command and Staff Course’ which “[aims](#) to prepare officers for high grade appointments”.

The course includes lectures from the most senior officers in the UK military and [allows](#) the students “to gain insight into the structure and workings of the MoD”. The UK Defence Secretary has previously attended.

The military training came after the UK and Argentina had [signed](#) a controversial Joint Communiqué in 2016. The agreement [promised](#) to “remove all obstacles” to the development of oil deposits around the Falkland Islands.

The deal also “agreed to strengthen relations between the two armed forces” and “widen their fields of cooperation”.

It is likely the Argentine military training was a part of this new cooperation. There is no publicly-available evidence showing the UK had provided military training to Argentina before 2018.

Since the 1982 Falklands War, the UK has [not allowed](#) the “export and trade of goods judged to enhance Argentine military capability”.

Alicia Castro, Argentina’s ambassador to the UK from 2012-15, told *Declassified*:

“It’s hard to believe we’ve been sending our senior officers to be trained by the same military that killed more than 600 of our soldiers and torpedoed the Belgrano in a horrific war crime.”

She added:

“That it looks like we were given this military training in exchange for giving up our claim to las Malvinas (Falklands) and its resources is even more shocking.”



UK Defence Academy in Shrivenham, Oxfordshire, where Argentine military personnel have been trained. (Photo: UK Defence Academy)

Improving relations

The information comes as the two countries are marking the 40-year anniversary of the conflict which ran from April to June of 1982.

The war led to the [deaths](#) of 255 British military personnel, 649 Argentine soldiers, and three Falkland Islanders. On 2 May 1982, Argentina’s ARA General Belgrano warship was [torpedoed](#) by a British submarine, killing 323 Argentine sailors.

In 2018, the same year as the Argentine military personnel were trained in the UK, Alan Duncan, the foreign minister who had negotiated the 2016 Joint Communiqué, made a [statement](#) to parliament announcing a change in British arms export policy towards

Argentina.

“This change will lift additional restrictions which were imposed in 2012, at a time when the Argentine government was escalating actions aimed at harming the economic interests of the Falkland islanders,” he said.

Duncan stated that since the election of rightwing President Mauricio Macri in 2015, “the UK’s relationship with Argentina has been improving.”

He added that the “historic” 2016 UK-Argentina agreement had “established closer cooperation across our bilateral relationship (including in defence)” and that the UK may now grant arms exports licences for Argentina.

‘Something very odd here’

In 2019, a new left-wing government swept to power in Buenos Aires, with Cristina Kirchner as vice-president. Kirchner had been president when the UK had added additional restrictions to military exports to Argentina in 2012.

The new government moved to ensure that the 2016 UK-Argentina Joint Communiqué promising increased “cooperation” between the countries armed forces was a “[letra muerta](#)” (dead letter).

Last month, the UK government was [asked](#) about reports of increased military deployment in Tierra del Fuego, a province in southern Argentina, and its implications for the security of the Falkland Islands.

Foreign minister Amanda Milling said:

“The UK undertakes regular assessments of possible threats to the Islands to ensure that an appropriate defence capability is maintained.”

The British military base on the Falklands hosts at least [500 troops](#) and the UK regularly [conducts](#) military exercises, which include the firing of air defence missiles, on and around the islands.

Paul Rogers is an honorary fellow at the Joint Service Command and Staff College, which trains UK military officers. He told *Declassified*:

“Britain spends at least £60 million a year on Fortress Falklands yet is educating Argentine military personnel at UK defence colleges. Something very odd here.”

A Ministry of Defence spokesperson told *Declassified*:

“We do not train the Argentine armed forces to fight. Occasionally, we offer educational classroom-based courses, covering topics such as good governance and international humanitarian law.”

He added:

“Such courses are offered to a wide range of nations and serve an important diplomatic function.”

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