

Joint Warfighting: Lessons from the South Atlantic War

By Dale C. Eikmeier

The author explores the South Atlantic War through the lens of modern joint warfare. He analyzes this conflict from the point of view of operational art and design and explains the concept of jointness throughout history and failures during this conflict emphasizing the idea that joint warfighting is something that the Armed Forces need to learn and train.

Today joint warfighting is a widely accepted principle that unifies military service capabilities into a synergistic whole, a whole, which in theory is greater than the sum of its parts. For over thirty years, it has been the operating norm for the world's modern militaries. Because of this, an entire generation of military professionals cannot imagine fighting any other way. They take its acceptance for granted. For this generation to truly appreciate the value of 'jointness' it is useful to reevaluate older conflicts through the lens of modern joint warfare.

Although joint operations have existed since the time of Homer, a joint philosophy is a recent construct resulting from the conflicts of the 1980s and 90s that had its genesis, not in success, but in failure. After the Americans' disastrous Iranian hostage rescue attempt in 1980 and the embarrassingly inefficient invasion of Grenada in 1983, it took legislation by the U.S. Congress, to force jointness on a reluctant U.S. military establishment whose natural preference was to fight as separate services.ⁱ Argentina's South Atlantic War in 1982 is another example of a lack of jointness.

In 1982, joint operations were something that environmental circumstances forced on reluctant militaries. It was not a preferred operational concept. It is fair to say, most militaries wanted to fight as separate services in accordance with their own doctrine. Fighting separately was easier and cleaner. More importantly, it did not require subordination of one's warfighting concepts and priorities to another service. Navies could focus on enemy fleets in accordance with Mahan.ⁱⁱ Airpower could focus on the enemy air forces and 'strategic targets' in accordance with Douhet and Mitchell.ⁱⁱⁱ Naval and air support of ground forces was a secondary mission and a diversion from their primary

purposes. For land forces, the need for any naval or air support was an irritating reminder of their own limitations. A joint staff, if there was one, was the dominate service's staff with a few attached liaison officers from the other services.

Joint operations, as distinct from joint warfighting, through the 1980's emphasized coordination and deconfliction, not integration and synergy. The goal was to minimize contact and friction between the services. Cooperation and unity of effort were the primary command tenets, not unity of command. Unity of command meant the subordination of one service to another.^{iv} In the absence of joint doctrine, service doctrine and concepts shaped operational thinking. Joint was how one had to fight, not how one wanted to fight.

This article looks at the conventional warfighting norms of the 1980s that Argentine commanders applied during the South Atlantic War and suggests where a joint philosophy could have resulted in different approaches. This article does not suggest different outcomes, nor is it a criticism of the commanders and decision maker's application of accepted norms. Rather this article compares pre-joint warfighting concepts with current joint concepts, so military professionals can better understand and value jointness. It will do this by exploring three specific areas: joint command and control, joint versus service concepts, and joint integration.

JOINT COMMAND AND CONTROL

When looking at the command of joint forces in the South Atlantic War one must look at both the command structure on paper and as actually executed. The analysis shows that while joint organizations were created, they lacked sufficient authorities, doctrine and a joint philosophy necessary to overcome long established service chains of command and influence. At best, the joint force commander could only hope for unity of effort and cooperation from the assigned services and minimal interference from the service chiefs.

This may sound like a criticism of the lack of jointness in 1982, it is not. At this time jointness as a philosophy did not exist in the Argentine military. Single service operations, perhaps supported by air power were the norm. Again, the purpose of this discussion it is to reinforce the idea of the value of joint mindedness.

To repossess the Malvinas, (Operation AZUL) the Military Junta^v appointed GEN DIV Osvaldo García (Army), as the Commander of the Theater of Operations Malvinas (TOM). On paper, GEN Garcia was the Malvinas Joint Force Commander. Under his command were: Army GEN Américo Daher, the Commander Ground Forces; Air Force BRIG Luis Castellanos, the Commander, Air Task Force; Navy RADM Walter Allara, the Commander Amphibious Task Force 40, which included the Naval Infantry (Marines) under RADM Carlos Busser; and Army GEN Mario Menendez who was to be the military governor.^{vi} In support, but not under GEN Garcia's command was naval Task Force 20, which included the aircraft carrier *ARA 25 de Mayo*.

While GEN García had his own Army staff, the plan for Operation AZUL, (later renamed ROSARIO), was prepared mainly by the Commander of Naval Operations, VADM Juan José Lombardo, and his subordinate naval commanders. Therefore, the real command structure for the repossession of the Malvinas was VADM Lombardo who planned and exercised actual command of Task Forces 40 (Malvinas) 60.1 (South Georgia) and the support Task Force 20 with the *ARA 25 de Mayo*. GEN Garcia, the joint force Commander on paper, participated in the operation with just a few members of his Army staff embarked on the destroyer *ARA Santísima Trinidad*. In execution, he had no significant command role to play. When the reoccupation of the Malvinas was completed, GEN Menendez accepted responsibility of the islands, not GEN Garcia. Thus ended operation ROSARIO.

Once it was clear that Argentina would need to defend the islands, President Galtieri decreed the establishment of a new theater command structure. On April 7th, VADM Lombardo was appointed the Joint Force Commander as Commander of the Theater of Operations South Atlantic (TOAS) with headquarters in Puerto Belgrano.

Argentine Command Organization, Operation ROSARIO, 7 April 1982 to 26 April

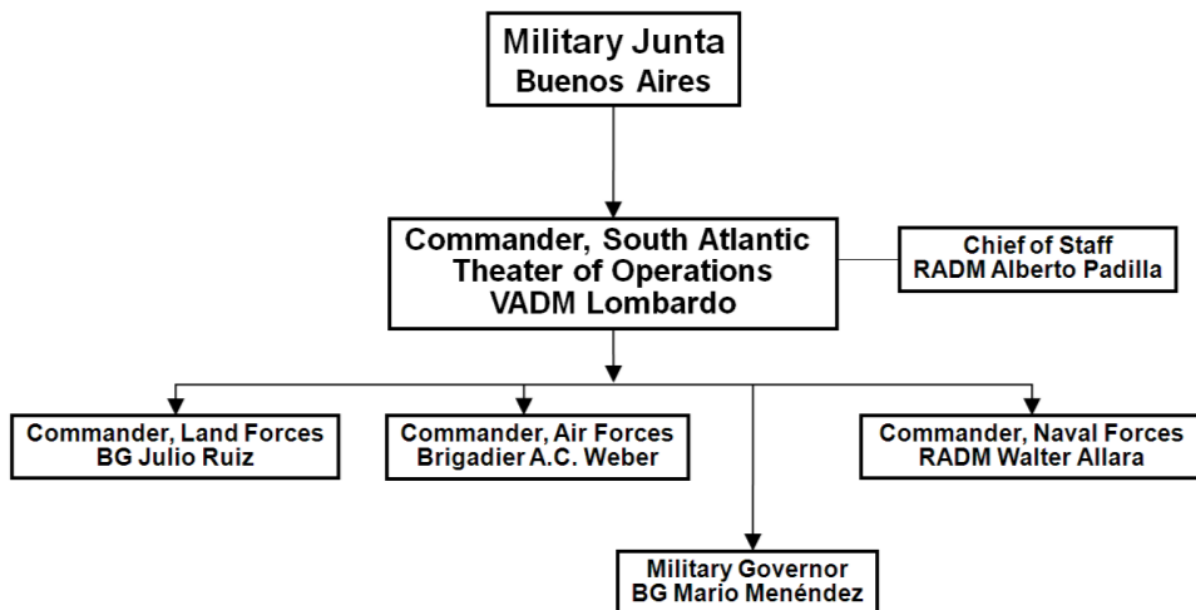


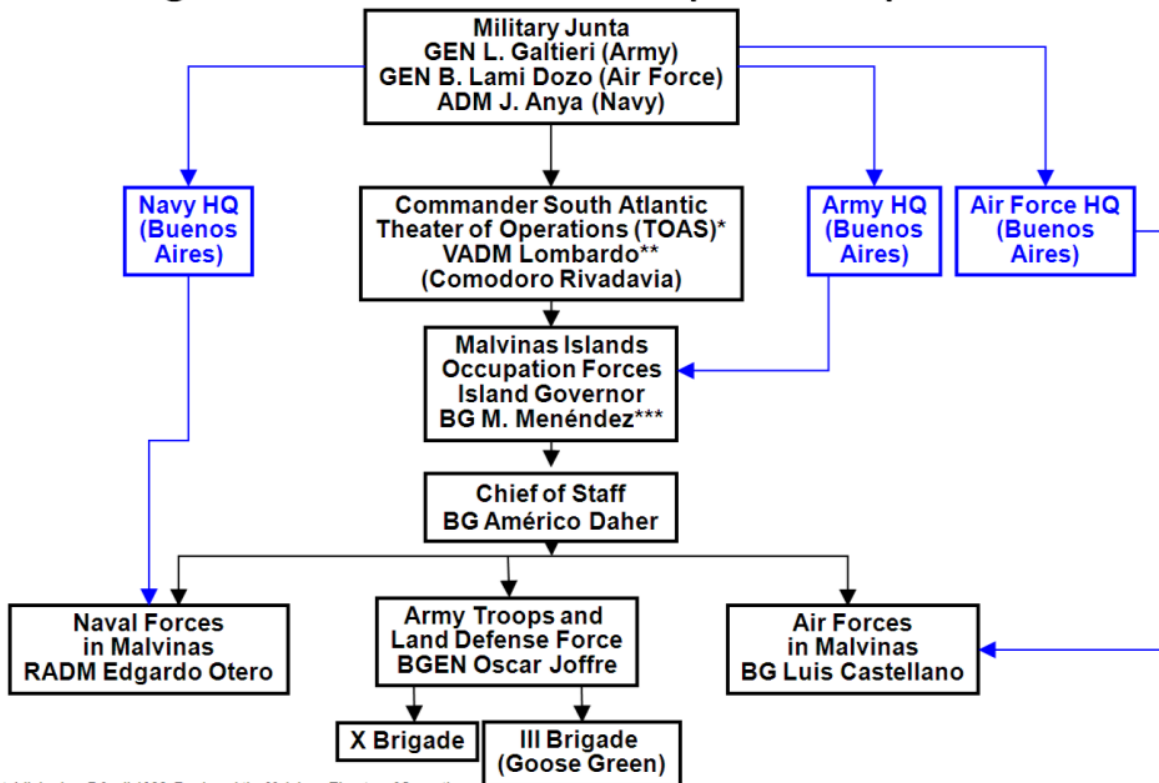
Figure 7. Command Organization, Operation ROSARIO. Sources: *Informe oficial del Ejército Argentino: Conflicto Malvinas*, Volume I; *Signals of War*, 145

On paper, the TOAS, was a true joint command comprised of a land forces command under GEN Julio Ruiz, Air Forces under BRIG MAJ A.C. Weber and Naval Forces under RADM Walter Allara. GEN Menendez continued as the Military Governor and in theory had a civil administrative role, not an operational role. This would have been a sound joint command structure, if VADM Lombardo had the necessary command authorities and had a joint philosophy been in place. However, service chains of command continue to dominate planning and execution, and were reinforced by the Junta's service perspectives vice a joint philosophy. The fact was there were three service leaders in the Junta, and three service headquarters in Buenos Aires directly controlling their respective services in the TOAS, in effect by passing VADM Lombardo. He had command but lacked authority. For example, on paper Weber worked for Lombardo as

his air force commander, but in practice Weber worked for BRIG GEN Basilo Lami Dozo, Commander in Chief of the Air Force. In practice, the TOAS was a paper command.

This situation created service chains of command and contributed to separate operations that never achieved the necessary level of synchronization and synergy. One can conclude by studying operations in the TOAS that there were three independent operations, all single service planned, led, and executed by the services.

Argentine Command Relationships after 7 April 1982



* Established on 7 April 1982. Replaced the Malvinas Theater of Operations.

** He also had direct command over the surface fleet, submarines, naval aviation, and Marines.

*** Gen Menéndez was military governor of the Malvinas Islands, Georgia, and South Sandwich Islands; however, his subordinates communicated directly with their respective service chiefs on the mainland without consulting him, or for that matter, each other.

Figure 9. Argentine Command Relationships after 7 April. Sources: : *Informe oficial del Ejército Argentino: Conflicto Malvinas*, Volume II; *Signals of War*, 144-5; *Task Force*, 88-89.

On May 22nd, during active combat operations, the Military Junta replaced the TOAS with the Centro de Operaciones Conjuntas (CEOPECON) (Center of Joint Operations) to solve the lack of coordination of the forces. Headquartered in Comodoro Rivadavia, the Center was a triumvirate made up of GEN DIV García, VADM Lombardo and BRIG MAJ Helmut Weber. In case of dissent GEN Garcia was *primus inter pares*.

The creation of CEOPECON may have been an attempt to correct the problem of service headquarters in Buenos Aires bypassing the TOAS and VADM Lombardo. The intent was to force the service headquarters to work through CEOPECON. It may have been a step in the right direction, but it was a small ineffective step.

CEOPECON suffered from two weaknesses. First, it was a triumvirate – a committee made up of services that replicated the problem of separateness rather than jointness. It relied on unity of effort, not unity of command. Therefore the best it could do was to coordinate and deconflict service efforts rather than unify them. The second weakness was timing. By late May the war had evolved into two separate campaigns. The anti-shipping air campaign that CEOPECON could coordinate and an isolated land campaign that CEOPECON was helpless to influence.

Argentine Command Organization, 23 May

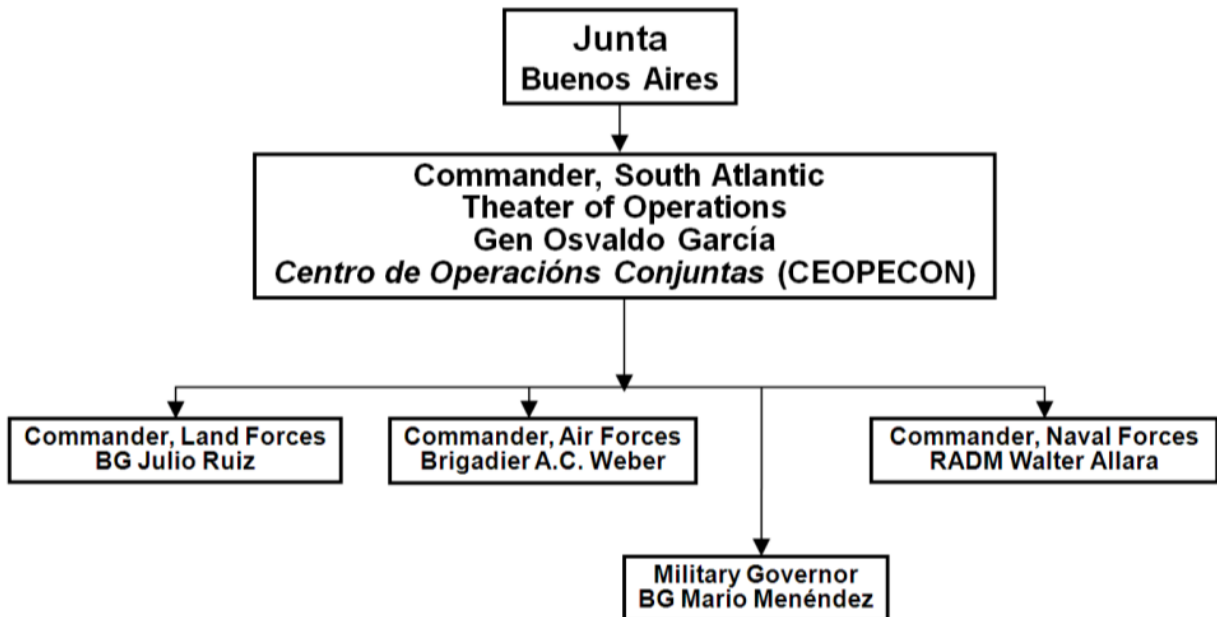


Figure 19. Argentine Command Organization, 23 May. Source: *Signals of War*, 362.

The Ad hoc nature of these various commands was the result of a lack of a joint philosophy, doctrine, and pre-established joint headquarters. Because of this absence, when situations changed, new command and control organizations were created. This

was typical of the time. The British had the same issue and also changed their command structure three times. However, every change created new reporting chains, different roles and responsibilities for commanders and staffs, and delayed gaining situational awareness that slowed planning, information sharing, and problem solving. None of which contributed to warfighting efficiency.

Efficiency and effectiveness represent the value of joint warfighting. The integration and synchronization of the capabilities of the Argentine Armed Forces would have been more efficient and effective if the following conditions of joint command and control existed:

1. A joint headquarters trained and staffed.
2. A joint force commander with the required command authorities, both formal and informal, to exercise operational control over assigned or allocated joint forces.
3. Service headquarters in Buenos Aires working through the Joint Force Commander in a supporting role, rather than around him.

If VADM Lombardo, as the Joint force Commander, had these joint conditions then the TOAS could have served as a model organization for integrated and synchronized warfighting. Would it have been enough to change the outcome? No one can say, but the application of capabilities would have been more efficient and perhaps effective. What could have arguably changed the outcome were joint concepts and joint integration.

JOINT VERSUS SERVICE CONCEPTS

In the 1990s joint doctrine, barely existed, and was more about de-conflicting than integrating. For example, in the 1990 Persian Gulf War, the coalition's, "... campaign was 'joint' more in name than in fact. Each service fought its own war, concentrating on its own piece of the conflict with single-minded intensity..."^{vii} This was illustrated by friction between land and air forces over targeting priorities that forced General Schwarzkopf to appoint his deputy, General Waller, as the arbitrator between the Air and Ground Commanders.

The source of the friction was differing service perspectives and doctrine. Ground forces, naturally wanted air power to focus on enemy ground forces, the Iraqi Republican Guard specifically. Air forces preferred to strike softer 'strategic' targets such as command and control and infrastructure. These different perspectives resulted from different service doctrine and the lack of unifying joint concepts and doctrine.

Two examples of unifying joint concepts include joint intelligence and the center of gravity concept. Both, if used, can increase the synergy of service capabilities.

Other than national level intelligence services, most military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities reside in the separate military services. The services then focus these capabilities on their particular domain and their specific requirements. Reporting and analysis tend to remain in the service and sharing data is more a courtesy than an operating principle. Even when requirements and capabilities overlap, services tend to trap intelligence in bureaucratic mazes, and rarely share it.

The joint force commander, with the required authorities, could establish intelligence requirements and priorities that support the entire joint force mission, not just service requirements. Synchronization of intelligence capabilities and functions at the joint force level reduce service centric procedures that restrict intelligence sharing, and achieve greater synergy.

Had joint warfighting principles existed during the South Atlantic War, the Joint Force Commander could have established a priority intelligence requirement to locate and track either Task Force 371.8, (the British carrier force), or Task Force 317.0, (the amphibious group). The Joint Force could have then used the Fuerza Aerea's 707s, and Learjets, combined with the Aviacion Naval's S-2Es, and Neptunes and other aircraft to conduct maritime surveillance missions. In coordination with the aerial surveillance, the Armada's submarine force, the *ARA Santa Fe* and *San Luis*, along with the trawler *Narwhal* and other ships could provide additional surface surveillance and extend the coverage area. A joint effort using air, naval surface and subsurface assets could achieve greater synergy than separate service efforts.

Effectively integrating the diverse capabilities and minimizing limitations of these surveillance assets requires coordination, synchronization that occurs best at a joint

headquarters rather than at separate service headquarters. Better surveillance improves intelligence giving the commander more information and time to make effective operational decisions. This type of joint integration could have located either Task Force sooner, allowing the Joint Force Commander more time to make a decision and possibly vectoring air, surface or subsurface assets for more effective action against the targets.

The center of gravity is another unifying joint warfighting concept. The concept's purpose is to focus planning and operations on what is vitally important while identifying and avoiding wasteful peripheral efforts. It suggests to the force what to protect and what to attack in order to achieve the objective. The concept's greatest utility is at the operational level of war, which is generally the level where joint warfighting is integrated and synchronized.

Without the center of gravity and its analysis, services tend to look at their adversary counterpart as the main target. Land forces focused on the enemy's main land formation and likewise for air and sea services. Without the unifying effect of the center of gravity, warfighting more easily devolves into separate service campaigns. Which is what happened to the U.S. led coalition when they misapplied the concept in the 1990 Gulf War.^{viii}

Conventional thinking at the time, suggested that the British Carrier Task Force 317.8 should be the main target or "center of gravity." This view was based on current air and naval doctrine and concepts that suggested the main force's capital rather than auxiliary ships had to be neutralized. The modern understanding of the center of gravity could validate TF 317.8 as the center of gravity, but it could also suggest another approach.

A center of gravity analysis of the British objectives and forces suggests that the Carrier Task Force TF 317.8, was defensive in nature and had a supporting mission. Arguably the real center of gravity was TF 317.0, the amphibious landing force. Only TF 317.0 and the landing forces had the capability to seize the Malvinas. The carrier task force was a "critical requirement" that protected the amphibious force center of gravity. The carriers and their supporting ships could not seize the islands.

Identifying the Amphibious Task Force as the center of gravity and the Carrier Task Force as a critical requirement helps to frame an operational approach for defending the Malvinas. It also suggests that operations at South Georgia were an unnecessary effort that contributed very little to actions against the British center of gravity.

The Joint Force Staff would study and debate how to attack the center of gravity (the Landing Force). They could take a “direct approach” and focus joint forces on neutralizing TF 317.0. Or they could take an “indirect approach” and focus efforts on a critical requirements such as the Carrier Force. Both options have advantages and disadvantages and would have to be thoroughly debated. The debate would center on the vulnerabilities of both task forces matched against Argentine capabilities to exploit those vulnerabilities. Would the sinking of a British carrier end the war? Could it be done, and at what cost? What effect would the sinking of the troop ship *SS Canberra* or the amphibious assault ship *HMS Intrepid* have? Would that have prevented the landing of troops? Regardless of the choice, the use of the center of gravity concept would have raised these questions and contributed to a more informed decision.

The choice of the center of gravity and the use of a direct or indirect approach has implications at both the operational and tactical levels. Let us assume for this discussion that the operational level center of gravity was TF 317.0 (amphibious force) and a direct approach was selected. The entire Argentine Task Force 79, including the *ARA Belgrano*, *Santa Fe* and *San Luis*, could then focus on the more vulnerable TF 317.0 somewhere between the Malvinas and Ascension Island, rather than the stronger British Carrier Task Force.

At the tactical level, viewing the landing forces as the center of gravity may have focused air attacks on troop shipping in San Carlos Bay rather than on destroyers and frigates in the Falkland Sound. This is not a criticism of Argentine pilots; I acknowledge their bravery and the difficulty of selecting targets while trying to avoid anti-aircraft missiles. Rather it is a suggestion how to focus valuable resources against higher pay off targets. Again, it is about the relationship between the center of gravity and its supporting critical requirements. As tempting as the British destroyers and frigates were, their only requirement was protection of the critical landing forces.

The value of the center of gravity concept, combined with a joint warfighting philosophy, is its ability to focus the entire joint force on what is important, what is not and why. Then the force, leveraging all of its joint capabilities in a synergistic way can be more effective.

JOINT INTEGRATION

Real joint integration comes primarily from three elements, joint command and control, joint doctrine, and joint training. Perhaps the best example of the need for joint integration is the air operation from May 1 to June 8. Fuerza Aérea and Armada Aviación operations were coordinated so as not to conflict, but they were still service operations planned and controlled separately.

Each service brought unique capabilities. Naval aviation brought anti-shipping experience, and surveillance functions provided by the S2 Trackers and Neptune aircraft. The Fuerza Aérea brought air defense /fighter, aerial refueling, and long-range bombing. However, these capabilities were not maximized due to separateness. Had a joint air command been in place, it could have organized these capabilities into 'packages', balanced the strengths and weaknesses and synchronized the attacks. Additionally a joint headquarters could gather intelligence and lessons learned and more quickly share them throughout the force. For example, issues with bomb release altitudes and fusing or the effectiveness of British anti-aircraft systems.

Joint doctrine and training are the other essential areas. To maximize capabilities and flexibility services need doctrine and training in what may be considered non-traditional areas. For example, Army forces should have doctrine and some experience in amphibious operations, while Marines train in mountain or jungle environments. Aviation units regardless of service need doctrine and experience in air defense, ground attack and maritime missions. Even if resources restrict actual training, having joint doctrine on tactics and techniques will be force multiplier and an improvement over ad hoc operations.

CONCLUSION

The South Atlantic War showed that service oriented warfighting, like individual warriors on a battlefield, no matter how brave, or glorious, can only go so far. What was needed was a concept that unites warriors into stronger and more capable cohorts. A joint warfighting philosophy that starts at the top and fully embraced throughout the force is that concept. By investing in joint warfighting the sum of a military's parts can become a greater warfighting organization. For this reason militaries, and military educational institutions recognize the value of joint warfighting and continue to invest in it.

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ⁱ Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Urgent Fury: the Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Grenada 12 October – 2 November 1983*, Joint History Office, [US] Office of the Chief of Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997 p. 1-7, 69-71, 85. Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, USN, "Decision Making and the Grenada Rescue Operation," *Ambiguity and Command: Organizational Perspectives on Military Decision Making*, edited by James March and Roger Wessinger-Baylon, Harper Collins Publisher, 1988 p.277-297. James R. Locher, III, "Taking Stock of Goldwaters-Nichols," *Joint Forces quarterly*, Autum 1996, p 10-16.

ⁱⁱ Philip A. Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: the Naval Historian," *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 444-480

ⁱⁱⁱ David MacIsaac, "Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists," *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, edited by Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 624-647

^{iv} U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense, hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 98th Congress, 1st session, 1983-1984, part 5 p. 187*

^v The members of the Military Junta in 1982 were also Commanders in Chief of their own Forces. They were LT GEN Leopoldo Galtieri, also president of Argentina and CINC of the Army, ADM Jorge Anaya, CINC of the Navy and BRIG GEN Basilio Lami Dozo, CINC of the Air Force.

^{vi} *Informe Oficial del Ejercito Argentino Conflicto Malvinas Tomo II*, Informe Oficial Ejercito Argentino, 1983, Email interview with Rear Admiral (Retired) Alejandro Kenny, Argentine Armada, Professor of Operational Art, Escuela Superior de Guerra Conjunta, August 10 2017, Subject questions and answers. Douglas N. Hime, *The Falklands-Malvinas Case Study NWC 1036*, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Road Island, 2010, p.3-4.

^{vii} Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1995, xiv

^{viii} Ibid