**OIL WARS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC?**

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*We usually think of “oil wars” as something confined to the Middle East. Yet a war of words, focused on potential oil wealth in the Falkland Islands, is raising concerns of an “oil war” in the Southern Atlantic.*

Occupied by British farmers for nearly 200 years, the Falkland Islands are an archipelago roughly 300 miles east of the southern tip of South America. Though they are a hundred miles of ocean beyond the accepted 200-mile limit, the nation of Argentina claims these islands—which they call the Malvinas—as their own. Argentina asserts its claim on the basis that Pope Alexander VI’s Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 granted to Spain all the lands west of a mid-Atlantic meridian, and that when Argentina declared independence from Spain in 1816, the rights to those islands thus passed to Argentina.

Britain bases its claim to the islands—among the last vestiges of a defunct British Empire—on Sir Richard Hawkins’ 1594 declaration that the islands were a British possession, even though it was not until 1833 that a settlement of British sheep farmers, employed by the Royal Falkland Island Company, arrived on the islands.

Argentina did hold the islands for a total of 74 days in 1982, during the Falklands War, but Britain regained possession. Though the 1994 revision of the Argentine constitution further reiterated Argentina’s claim to the islands, the Argentine government has stated that it has no plans to militarily reoccupy the territory.

So, what will become of the Falkland Islanders? Do they need to take a crash course in Spanish or prepare to drive on the other side of the road?

British Prime Minister David Cameron said recently, “The absolutely vital point is that we are clear that the future of the Falkland Islands is a matter for the people themselves, and as long as they want to remain part of the United Kingdom and be British they should be able to do so” (“David Cameron accuses Argentina of ‘colonialism’ over Falkland Islands,”*The Telegraph,* May 14, 2012).

**OIL WARS?**

Rather than attempt military action, Argentina has focused its efforts on wresting sovereignty from Great Britain by pursuing a legal claim through the United Nations, accompanied by a well-oiled media campaign. “Well-oiled” may indeed be an apt pun to describe the current situation, now that a British company has announced its discovery of oil in the seas around the islands. British oil exploration company Rockhopper believes there could well be 1.2 billion barrels of oil ready for exploitation. Rockhopper is seeking partners to pump the oil at an estimated cost of US$2 billion, with expectations of healthy profits.

One potential partner that has been discussed is the American firm Anadarko Petroleum. However, because of the diplomatic sensitivities, partnering with an American firm could tip the balance of geopolitical pressure in favor of the British. Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner has expressed concern, along with her foreign minister Hector Timmerman who has warned British banks not to become involved, and has threatened legal action against any firm wanting to join in the grab for oil.

If a United States oil company were to become involved in Falklands oil drilling, much of the South American continent could erupt in anger, charging the U.S. and Britain with “economic imperialism” against Argentina—a relatively poor fellow member of South America’s Mercosur trading bloc. Yet, without the realistic threat of military force behind expressions of anger, any sabre-rattling is simply “hot air.” British oil explorers are relying on their sense that reality is far more powerful than rhetoric.

So, how much oil may there be within the territory of the Falkland Islands? About 400–500 million barrels of oil have been confirmed, but estimates indicate that an oilfield known as the “Sea Lion” field could produce up to 1.2 billion barrels, with another field further south bringing the total to 8.5 billion barrels. Yet, despite the forecasts, the area has not yet proved economically profitable, and a recent report revealed that “Desire Petroleum and Border & Southern Petroleum, two of five London listed exploration businesses with interests in the archipelago, recently announced annual pre-tax losses of $42.5 million and $1.7 million” (“UK explorers struggle to strike Falklands oil,” *The Guardian,*April 2, 2012).

Is there precedent for a peaceable solution to conflicting Argentine and British oilfield claims? Some experts argue that a resolution to the problem could parallel the amicable handling of the Bonaparte Basin oil and gas fields claimed by Australia and East Timor. In that case, Australia made generous concessions to East Timor, one of the world’s newest and poorest countries. The terms of the 2002 Timor Sea Treaty gave East Timor 90 percent of revenue from the Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA) and a 50 percent share of the Greater Sunrise gas reservoirs. Would such a negotiated settlement work in the Falklands? Only time will tell.

**SEA GATES IN PERIL**

Some three hundred years ago, Great Britain began to accumulate its strategic naval interests. The geographic and commercial importance of these “sea gates” meant that the Royal Navy would not only “rule the waves” but also would hold a key strategic advantage over its enemies in times of war, and a key commercial advantage in times of peace.

As the British Empire grew, the Suez Canal, Singapore, the Cape of Good Hope, Aden, Malacca, Ceylon, the Falkland Islands—and, of course, the most important of all, Gibraltar—became British possessions. Access to the Mediterranean was controlled by British military power, and ships travelling around all of the world’s southern capes were under the watchful eye of the Royal Ensign. Meanwhile, the U.S. held the Panama Canal as a strategic “sea gate,” as well as the Philippine Islands.

What most people do not know is that it was God who gave these important gates—“choke points” of the world—to the descendants of Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel). To the patriarch Abraham, God promised that “in blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gates of their enemies” ([Genesis 22:17](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Gen%2022.17)). These “birthright” promises were passed on to Isaac and Jacob, and were eventually given to Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. It is the descendants of these two sons of Joseph who have today become Great Britain and the United States. To learn more about this important key to understanding Bible prophecy, read our free booklet, [*The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*](https://www.tomorrowsworld.org/magazines/2012/july-august/tomorrowsworld.org/booklets/united-states-and-great-britain-prophecy)*.* You can read it online at [*www.TomorrowsWorld.org*](http://tomorrowsworld.org/)*,* or request a free copy from the Regional Office nearest you (listed on page 30 of this magazine).

However, God warned that the nations would lose these blessings if they were to disobey Him—that, as punishment for disobedience, enemies would “besiege you at all your gates” ([Deuteronomy 28:52](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Deut%2028.52)). And, indeed, this is what we see happening. Great Britain, despite some remnant of a nominal “Christian” culture, is in large measure rebelling against God and His ways. The same is true of the United States. As a result, it is no surprise to see these nations lose each valuable “sea gate,” one by one. Today, just two remain—Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. The time will come when even those two are wrested from British control. Controversy over the Falklands is just one more sign that end-time Bible prophecy is rapidly being fulfilled!