

Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs

December 2005

Background Note: Argentina

PROFILE

OFFICIAL NAME:

Argentine Republic

Geography

Area: 2.8 million sq. km. (1.1 million sq. mi.); about the size of the U.S. east of the Mississippi River; second-largest country in South America.

Climate: Varied--predominantly temperate with extremes ranging from subtropical in the north to arid/sub - Antarctic in far south.

People

Nationality: Noun and adjective--Argentine(s).

Population (2005 est.): 38.6 million.

Annual population growth rate (2001): 1.05%.

Ethnic groups: European 97%, mostly of Spanish and Italian descent; Mestizo, Amerindian or other nonwhite groups 3%.

Religions: Roman Catholic 92%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 2%, other 4%.

Language: Spanish.

Education: Years compulsory--10. Adult literacy (2001)--97%.

Health: Infant mortality rate--16.16/1,000. Life expectancy (2000 est.)--75.48 yrs.

Work force: Industry and commerce--36%; agriculture--19%; transport and communications--6%.

Government

Type: Republic.

Constitution: 1853; revised 1994.

Independence: 1816.

Branches: Executive--president, vice president, cabinet. Legislative--bicameral Congress (72-member Senate, 257-member Chamber of Deputies). Judicial--Supreme Court, federal and provincial trial courts.

Administrative subdivisions: 23 provinces and one autonomous district (Federal Capital).

Political parties: Justicialist (Peronist), Radical Civic Union (UCR), numerous smaller national and provincial parties.

Suffrage: Universal adult.

Economy (2004)

GDP: \$152.0 billion.

Annual real growth rate: +9%.

Per capital GDP: \$4,000.

Natural resources: Fertile plains (pampas); minerals--lead, zinc, tin, copper, iron, manganese, oil, and uranium.

Agriculture (9% of GDP, about 50% of exports by value, including agribusiness): Products--grains, oilseeds and by-products, livestock products.

Industry (22.3% of GDP): Types--food processing, oil refining, machinery and equipment, textiles, chemicals and petrochemicals.

Trade: Exports (\$34.5 billion)--grains, meats, oilseeds, fuels, manufactured products. Major markets-- MERCOSUR 19.7%; EU 17.7%; NAFTA 14.6%.

Year 2004 Argentine Exports--Millions of U.S. Dollars

	Total	EU	MERCOSUR	NAFTA	Rest
All products	34,453	6,081	6,770	5,041	16,561
Primary Products	6,828	1,538	1,062	182	4,046

Agribusiness	11,932	3,557	787	1,038	6,550
Industrial Products	9,522	958	3,549	2,091	2,924
Fuels	6,171	28	1,372	1,730	3,041
Pct Share of Total	100.0	17.7	19.7	14.6	48.1
Pct Growth 2003/2004	16.5	4.4	19.8	21.6	18.8

Imports (\$22.3 billion in 2004)--machinery, vehicles and transport products, chemicals. Major suppliers--MERCOSUR 36.8%; EU 18.8%; NAFTA 19.4%. Imports from the United States were 15.4% of total Argentine imports, and 79.4% of Argentine imports from NAFTA in 2004.

Year 2004 Argentine Imports--Millions of U.S. Dollars

Total Argentine Imports	22,320
1. From MERCOSUR	8,211
2. From European Union	4,199
3. From NAFTA	4,320
(of which, from U.S.)	3,431

PEOPLE

Argentines are a fusion of diverse national and ethnic groups, with descendants of Italian and Spanish immigrants predominant. Waves of immigrants from many European countries arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Syrian, Lebanese, and other Middle Eastern immigrants number about 500,000, mainly in urban areas. Argentina's population is overwhelmingly Catholic, but it also has the largest Jewish population in Latin America, estimated between 280,000 to 300,000 strong, and is home to one of the largest Islamic mosques in Latin America. In recent years, there has been a substantial influx of immigrants from neighboring Latin American countries. The indigenous population, estimated at 700,000, is concentrated in the provinces of the north, northwest, and south. The Argentine population has one of Latin America's lowest growth rates. Eighty percent of the population resides in cities or towns of more than 2,000, and over one-third lives in the greater Buenos Aires area. With 13 million inhabitants, this sprawling metropolis serves as the focus for national life. Argentines enjoy comparatively high standards of living; however, following the economic crisis in 2002, 38.5% of the population was still living below the poverty line in the 28 largest urban areas as of June 2005.

HISTORY

Europeans arrived in the region with the 1502 voyage of Amerigo Vespucci. Spanish navigator Juan Diaz de Solias visited what is now Argentina in 1516. Spain established a permanent colony on the site of Buenos Aires in 1580, although initial settlement was primarily overland from Peru. The Spanish further integrated Argentina into their empire by establishing the Vice Royalty of Rio de la Plata in 1776, and Buenos Aires became a flourishing port. Buenos Aires formally declared independence from Spain on July 9, 1816. Argentines revere Gen. Jose de San Martin, who campaigned in Argentina, Chile, and Peru as the hero of their national independence. Following the defeat of the Spanish, centralist and federationist groups waged a lengthy conflict between themselves to determine the future of the nation. A modern constitution was promulgated in 1853, and a national unity government was established in 1861.

Two forces combined to create the modern Argentine nation in the late 19th century: the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and integration of Argentina into the world economy. Foreign investment and immigration from Europe aided this economic revolution. Investment, primarily British, came in such fields as railroads and ports. As in the United States, the migrants who worked to develop Argentina's resources--especially the western pampas--came from throughout Europe.

From 1880 to 1930 Argentina became one of the world's 10 wealthiest nations based on rapid expansion of agriculture and foreign investment in infrastructure. Conservative forces dominated Argentine politics until 1916, when their traditional rivals, the Radicals, won control of the government. The Radicals, with their emphasis on fair elections and democratic institutions, opened their doors to Argentina's rapidly expanding middle class as well as to groups previously excluded from power. The Argentine military forced aged Radical President Hipolito Yrigoyen from power in 1930 and ushered in another decade of Conservative rule. Using fraud and force when necessary, the governments of the 1930s attempted to contain the currents of economic and political change that eventually led to the ascendance of Juan Domingo Peron (b. 1897). New social and political forces were seeking political power, including a modern military and labor movements that emerged from the growing urban working class.

The military ousted Argentina's constitutional government in 1943. Peron, then an army colonel, was one of the coup's leaders, and he soon became the government's dominant figure as Minister of Labor. Elections carried him to the presidency in 1946. He aggressively pursued policies aimed at empowering the working class and greatly expanded the number of unionized workers. In 1947, Peron announced the first 5-year plan based on the growth of industries he nationalized. He helped establish the powerful General Confederation of Labor (CGT). Peron's dynamic wife, Eva Duarte de Peron, known as Evita (1919-52), played a key role in developing support for her husband. Peron won reelection in 1952, but the military sent him into exile in 1955. In the 1950s and 1960s, military

and civilian administrations traded power, trying, with limited success, to deal with diminished economic growth and continued social and labor demands. When military governments failed to revive the economy and suppress escalating terrorism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the way was open for Peron's return.

On March 11, 1973, Argentina held general elections for the first time in 10 years. Peron was prevented from running, but voters elected his stand-in, Dr. Hector Campora, as President. Peron's followers also commanded strong majorities in both houses of Congress. Campora resigned in July 1973, paving the way for new elections. Peron won a decisive victory and returned as President in October 1973 with his third wife, Maria Estela Isabel Martinez de Peron, as Vice President. During this period, extremists on the left and right carried out terrorist acts with a frequency that threatened public order. The government resorted to a number of emergency decrees, including the implementation of special executive authority to deal with violence. This allowed the government to imprison persons indefinitely without charge.

Peron died on July 1, 1974. His wife succeeded him in office, but a military coup removed her from office on March 24, 1976, and the armed forces formally exercised power through a junta composed of the three service commanders until December 10, 1983. The armed forces applied harsh measures against terrorists and many suspected of being their sympathizers. They restored basic order, but the human costs of what became known as "El Proceso," or the "Dirty War" were high. Conservative counts list between 10,000 and 30,000 persons as "disappeared" during the 1976-83 period. Serious economic problems, mounting charges of corruption, public revulsion in the face of human rights abuses and, finally, the country's 1982 defeat by the United Kingdom in an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Falklands/Malvinas Islands all combined to discredit the Argentine military regime. The junta lifted bans on political parties and gradually restored basic political liberties.

On October 30, 1983, Argentines went to the polls and chose Raul Alfonsin, of the Radical Civic Union (UCR), as President. He began a 6-year term of office on December 10, 1983. In 1985 and 1987, large turnouts for mid-term elections demonstrated continued public support for a strong and vigorous democratic system. The UCR-led government took steps to resolve some of the nation's most pressing problems, including accounting for those who disappeared during military rule, establishing civilian control of the armed forces, and consolidating democratic institutions. However, failure to resolve endemic economic problems, and an inability to maintain public confidence undermined the effectiveness of the Alfonsin government, which left office 6 months early after Peronist candidate Carlos Saul Menem won the 1989 presidential elections.

President Menem imposed peso-dollar parity (convertibility) in 1992 to break the back of hyperinflation and adopted far-reaching market-based policies. Menem's accomplishments included dismantling a web of protectionist trade and business regulations, and reversing a half-century of statism by implementing an ambitious

privatization program. These reforms contributed to significant increases in investment and growth with stable prices through most of the 1990s. Unfortunately, widespread corruption in the administrations of President Menem and President Fernando De la Rúa (elected in 1999) shook confidence and weakened the recovery. Also, while convertibility defeated inflation, its permanence undermined Argentina's export competitiveness and created chronic deficits in the current account of the balance of payments, which were financed by massive borrowing. The contagion effect of the Asian financial crisis of 1998 precipitated an outflow of capital that gradually mushroomed into a 4-year depression that culminated in a financial panic in November 2001. In December 2001, amidst bloody riots, President De la Rúa resigned, and Argentina defaulted on \$88 billion in debt, the largest sovereign debt default in history.

A legislative assembly on December 23, 2001, elected Adolfo Rodríguez Saa to serve as President and called for general elections to elect a new president within 3 months. Rodríguez Saa announced immediately that Argentina would default on its international debt obligations, but expressed his commitment to maintain the currency board and the peso's 1-to-1 peg to the dollar. Rodríguez Saa, however, was unable to rally support from within his own party for his administration and this, combined with renewed violence in the Federal Capital, led to his resignation on December 30. Yet another legislative assembly elected Peronist Eduardo Duhalde President on January 1, 2002. Duhalde--differentiating himself from his three predecessors--quickly abandoned the peso's 10-year-old link with the dollar, a move that was followed by currency depreciation and inflation. In the face of rising poverty and continued social unrest, Duhalde also moved to bolster the government's social programs.

In the first round of the presidential election on April 27, 2003, former President Carlos Menem (Justicialist Party--PJ) won 24.3% of the vote, Santa Cruz Governor Nestor Kirchner (PJ) won 22%, followed by Ricardo Murphy with 16.4% and Elisa Carrió with 14.2%. Menem withdrew from the May 25 runoff election after polls showed overwhelming support for Kirchner. President Kirchner took office on May 25, 2003. He took office following the immense social and economic upheaval stemming from the financial crisis caused by a failed currency convertibility regime. Kirchner has focused on consolidating his political strength and alleviating social problems. He forced changes in the Supreme Court and military and undertook popular measures, such as raising government salaries, pensions, and the minimum wage. The wave of public demonstrations that coincided with the economic downturn has stabilized. President Kirchner won a major victory in the October 23, 2005 legislative elections, giving him a strengthened mandate and a stronger position in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies as he attempts to set Argentina's economic course and consolidate the impressive economic recovery of the past three years.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Democracy returned to Argentina in 1983, with Raul Alfonsín of the country's oldest political party, the Radical Civic Union (UCR), winning the presidency. Three general elections followed in the next 16 years--a remarkable feat in Argentine political history--with the Justicialist Party (PJ) candidate Carlos Menem winning two and the UCR's Fernando De la Rúa one.

President De la Rúa was forced to resign in December 2001 after bloody riots. A legislative assembly elected Adolfo Rodríguez Saa to serve out the remainder of De la Rúa's term, but he too failed to garner political support in the face of continued unrest and resigned that same month. Yet another legislative assembly then chose Eduardo Duhalde to succeed Rodríguez Saa. Duhalde took office on January 1, 2002, in the midst of a profound economic crisis and a widespread public rejection of the "political class" in Argentina, a rejection directed at all three branches of government. Another factor contributing to the perception of institutional instability in Argentina was conflict between the three branches of government in early 2002, culminating in the legislature's attempt to impeach the members of the Supreme Court.

Despite widespread concern, democracy and democratic institutions survived the crisis, and Nestor Kirchner has taken firm hold as President. Since taking office, he has focused on building his political strength from the 22% popular vote he received in national elections April 27, 2003.

Argentina's constitution of 1853, as revised in 1994, mandates a separation of powers into executive, legislative, and judicial branches at the national and provincial level. Each province also has its own constitution, roughly mirroring the structure of the national constitution. The president and vice president are directly elected to 4-year terms. Both are limited to two consecutive terms; they are allowed to stand for a third term or more after an interval of at least one term. The president appoints cabinet ministers, and the constitution grants him considerable power, including authority to enact laws by presidential decree under conditions of "urgency and necessity" and the line-item veto.

Since 2001, senators have been directly elected, with each province and the Federal Capital represented by three senators. Senators serve 6-year terms. One-third of the Senate stands for reelection every 2 years. Members of the Chamber of Deputies are directly elected to 4-year terms. Voters elect half the members of the lower house every 2 years. Both houses are elected via a system of proportional representation. Female representation in Congress--at nearly one-third of total seats--ranks among the world's highest, with representation comparable to European Union (EU) countries such as Austria and Germany. Female senators include Christina Fernández de Kirchner, who was a nationally known member of the Senate for the Province of Santa Cruz before her husband was elected President, and was reelected on October 23, 2005 as a Senator for the Province of Buenos Aires.

The constitution establishes the judiciary as an independent government entity. The president appoints members of the Supreme Court with the consent of the Senate. The president on the recommendation of a magistrates' council appoints other federal judges. The Supreme Court has the power to declare legislative acts unconstitutional.

Political Parties

The two largest political parties are the Justicialist Party (PJ--also called Peronist), founded in 1945 by Juan Domingo Peron, and the Union Civica Radical (UCR), or Radical Civic Union, which claims 1890 as its founding date. Traditionally, the UCR has had more urban middle-class support and the PJ more labor support, but both parties have become more broadly based. Smaller parties, such as the center-right Propuesta Republicana (PRO) and the more-leftist-leaning Argentina for a Republic of Equals (ARI), occupy various positions on the political spectrum, and some are active only in certain provinces. Historically, organized labor--largely tied to the Peronist Party--and the armed forces also have played significant roles in national life. However, labor's political power has declined somewhat, and the armed forces are firmly under civilian control. Repudiated by the public after a period of military rule (1976-83)--marked by human rights violations, economic decline, and military defeat in the 1982 Falkland/Malvinas Islands conflict--the Argentine military today is a downsized, volunteer force.

Since taking office in 2003, President Kirchner had been engaged in a struggle with former President Eduardo Duhalde and other party leaders for control of the PJ. The President's candidates in the October 2005 legislative elections, many running under the banner of Frente Para la Victoria (FPV), won roughly 40% of the vote nationwide, nearly three times the 15% won by the Radical Civic Union (UCR). President Kirchner's victory was decisive enough to leave him largely in control of the political direction of the country and the PJ. The UCR, although still the second most powerful political party after the PJ on a national scale, has declined significantly since UCR President de la Rúa was forced from office in December 2001. In the April 2003 presidential elections, the UCR received only 2% of the national vote, the lowest tally in the party's history. The UCR continues to retain significant strength in many parts of the country and governs roughly one-third of the provinces. The UCR is the only opposition political party with a nationwide structure.

Government Policy

The reform agenda remains incomplete and has been on hold since the late 2001-early 2002 acute political and economic crisis. The Central Bank's independence is weak, and the reform of the state has not yet been completed. Although the government's broad policy remains one of allowing private initiative to operate, President Kirchner's government has said it would increase the role of the state in an effort to boost economic growth and recovery.

Principal Government Officials

President--Nestor Kirchner

Minister of Foreign Affairs--Jorge Taiana

Ambassador to the United States--Jose Bordon

Ambassador to the Organization of American States--Rodolfo Gil

Ambassador to the United Nations--Cesar Mayoral

Argentina maintains an embassy in the United States at 1600 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington DC 20009; tel (202) 238-6400; fax (202) 332-3171. It has consular offices in the following locations: 245 Peachtree Center Ave., Suite 2101 Atlanta, GA 30303, tel. (404) 880-0805, fax (404) 880-0806; 205 North Michigan Ave., Suite 4209 Chicago, IL 60601, tel. (312) 819-2610, fax (312) 819-2612; 1990 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 770 Houston, TX 77056, tel. (713) 871-8935, fax (713) 871-0639; 5055 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 210 Los Angeles, CA 90036, tel. (323) 954-9155, fax (323) 934-9076; 800 Brickell Ave., PH1 Miami, FL 33131, tel. (305) 373-7794, fax (305) 371-7108; 12 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019, tel. (212) 603-0400, fax (212) 541-7746; 1600 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009, tel. (202) 238-6460, fax (202) 238-6471.

ECONOMY

Argentina's economy began a recovery in March 2002 that has been far more impressive and robust than anticipated by leading international and domestic analysts. An export-led boom triggered three consecutive years of 8-9% growth in real gross domestic product (GDP). Industrial activity and construction activity also performed well, growing 6.5% and 18.5%, respectively, during January-October 2005. Tourism activity boomed: Argentina received 3.7 million foreign tourists in 2005, another record high. The expansion is creating jobs, and unemployment dipped from 20.4% in the first quarter of 2003 to 11.1% in the third quarter of 2005. Investment in real terms jumped 34%, and capital flight has reversed. A higher tax burden and the recovery's strong impact on revenue levels let the Government of Argentina achieve an exceptional 3.6% of GDP primary fiscal surplus, in spite of a 19% real growth in public expenditure during January-October 2005.

Meanwhile, the move to a market-based exchange rate regime and high global commodity prices have lifted exports to record levels and assured hefty surpluses in the trade and current account balances of the balance of payments, in spite of high import growth. The favorable balance of payments performance and Argentina's non-payment of its private debt obligations before the defaulted debt exchange in June 2005 allowed a strong accumulation of foreign exchange

reserves, which reached nearly \$26.9 billion at the end of 2005. The demand for pesos grew a real 148% between November 2002 and November 2005. Argentina's Central Bank has deftly managed monetary policy in support of a competitive peso but with some problems in the inflation field. Inflation was an estimated 12.0% in 2005. Banks are back in the black, and net credit levels to the private sector are positive. In December 2005, President Kirchner announced that Argentina would pay its \$9.8 billion in International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt out of the country's international reserves at the end of the year.

Argentina's impressive recovery is a function of a number of factors. First, following a decade of market reforms, the economy was fundamentally sound except for the high level of indebtedness. Second, the adoption of a market exchange rate and favorable international commodity and interest rate trends were catalytic factors in the export-led boom. Third, the government has applied moderate fiscal and monetary policies. Argentina has sound fundamentals and should continue to perform well, with growth projected to be 6% for 2006. Nevertheless, slowness in addressing public service contract renegotiations, capacity constraints, potential energy shortages in the face of continued high levels of economic growth, demand for higher wages, inflation and the government's heterodox policies to contain it (including pressure on the private sector for "voluntary" price controls), and a still-weak investment climate are potential obstacles to sustaining the recovery.

Foreign Trade

In 2004, foreign trade equaled about 37.3% of GDP--up from 11% in 1990--and plays an increasingly important role in Argentina's economic development. Exports represented about 23% of GDP in 2004, up from 14% from 2002. Argentina's trade surplus was \$12.1 billion in 2004.

MERCOSUR Trade Pact

MERCOSUR, the customs union that includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, remains the cornerstone of Argentina's international trade policy. Close cooperation between Brazil and Argentina--historic competitors--is the key to the integration process of MERCOSUR, which includes political and military elements in addition to a customs union. Chile and Bolivia have become associate members. MERCOSUR members are active participants in the negotiation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). MERCOSUR also continues to pursue an active program of trade negotiations with other countries and regional groups, including Mexico and the European Union.

Argentina adheres to most treaties and international agreements on intellectual property. It is a member of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Argentine Congress ratified the Uruguay Round agreements, including the provisions on intellectual property, as Law 24425 on January 5, 1995. However, extension of adequate patent

protection to pharmaceuticals has been a highly contentious bilateral issue. In May 1997, the U.S. suspended 50% of Argentina's generalized system of preferences (GSP) benefits because of its unsatisfactory pharmaceutical patent law. In November 2000, after years of protracted debate, a new patent law took effect, and a number of pharmaceutical patents were issued. This law improved earlier Argentine patent legislation but provides less protection than that called for in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

In April 2002, negotiations between the Governments of the United States and Argentina clarified aspects of the latter's intellectual property system, such as provisions related to the patentability of microorganisms and the import restriction regime. In addition, the Government of Argentina agreed to amend its patent law so as to provide protection for products obtained from a process patent and to ensure that preliminary injunctions are available in intellectual property court proceedings, among other steps. Congress was expected to pass the outstanding amendment by the end of 2003. Finally, on the outstanding issues that remain, including data protection, the U.S. Government retains its right to seek resolution under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. In return, the U.S. Government is committed to considering all Argentine requests to expand market access for Argentine products as soon as U.S. legislation reauthorizing trade preferences under the GSP is enacted.

Investment

U.S. investment is concentrated in financial services, telecommunications, energy, petrochemicals, food processing, and motor vehicle manufacturing. However, the economic crisis and subsequent government decisions clouded the country's investment climate, and many U.S. firms substantially wrote down the value of their Argentine investments. Other major sources of investment include Spain, Chile, Italy, France, Canada, and Japan. Several bilateral agreements generated significant U.S. private investment during the 1990s. Argentina has an Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) agreement and an active program with the U.S. Export-Import Bank. Under the 1994 U.S.-Argentina Bilateral Investment Treaty, U.S. investors enjoy national treatment in all sectors except shipbuilding, fishing, nuclear power generation, and uranium production. The treaty allows for international arbitration of investment disputes, and some U.S. investors are currently pursuing arbitration claims against the Government of Argentina.

NATIONAL SECURITY

The president and a civilian minister of defense control the Argentine armed forces. The Interior Ministry controls the paramilitary Gendarmeria (border police) and the Prefectura Naval (coast guard). The Argentine armed forces maintain close defense cooperation and military supply relationships with the United

States. Other countries also have military relationships with the Argentine forces, principally Israel, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela.

Lack of budgetary resources is the most serious problem facing the Argentine military today. Current economic conditions and the government's commitment to reduce public sector spending have slowed modernization and restructuring efforts. Argentina's traditionally difficult relations with its neighbors have improved dramatically, and Argentine officials do not see a potential threat from any neighboring country. MERCOSUR has exercised a useful role in supporting democracy in the region.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

In recent years, Argentina has had a strong partnership with the United States in support of UN peacekeeping. Argentina was the only Latin American country to participate in the 1990-91 Gulf war and all phases of the 1994 Haiti operation. It has contributed Argentine soldiers and policy to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. In recognition of its contributions to international security and peacekeeping, the U.S. Government designated Argentina as a major non-NATO ally in January 1998. Under President Kirchner, Argentina's enthusiasm for the Summit of the Americas process and the Free Trade Area of the Americas initiative (FTAA) has cooled somewhat, with more emphasis placed on sub-regional initiatives with the other MERCOSUR members, including Venezuela.

The U.S. and Argentina continue to maintain positive relations despite President Kirchner's sometimes populist rhetoric and stated opposition to the FTAA. President Bush's efforts in 2003 to reach out to the newly elected President and support with the IMF were key elements in maintaining good relations. In response, Argentina has actively cooperated with the U.S. in counterterrorism operations in the Tri-border region as a committed member of the 3+1 framework (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and the U.S.). Despite popular opposition, Argentina sent a sizeable contingent of troops to Haiti in support of UN peacekeeping operations. Since meeting with Evo Morales instead of Bolivian President Mesa at the 2003 Ibero-American Summit, President Kirchner has become an active supporter of Bolivia's political and economic stability. In Venezuela, President Kirchner played a constructive role in pressing President Chavez to hold a recall referendum, although we need to keep him engaged. Despite the populist rhetoric, the Kirchner administration has remained fiscally conservative and has not resorted to large-scale state intervention in the economy. In September 2004, following 10 years of negotiations, the Government of Argentina signed a Letter of Agreement with the Department of State, both demonstrating its increasing willingness to work with the U.S. on counternarcotics issues, and enabling the U.S. to begin providing assistance to the Government of Argentina.

U.S.-ARGENTINE RELATIONS

President George W. Bush and President Kirchner met most recently in November 2005 in Mar del Plata during the IV Summit of the Americas, and many senior U.S. officials visited Argentina to discuss issues of mutual concern. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Argentine Ministry of Defense hold an annual Bilateral Working Group Meeting, alternating between Argentina and Washington, DC.

U.S. Embassy Functions

The U.S. Mission in Buenos Aires carries out the traditional diplomatic function of representing the U.S. Government and people in discussions with the Argentine Government, and more generally, in relations with the people of Argentina. The positive political relationship between the United States and Argentina is increasingly reflected in the U.S. Embassy's efforts to facilitate cooperation in nontraditional areas such as counter-terrorism, anti-narcotics, and scientific cooperation on space, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and the environment. The Embassy also provides a wide range of services to U.S. citizens and businesses in Argentina. Officers from the U.S. Foreign Service, Foreign Commercial Service, and Foreign Agricultural Service work closely with the hundreds of U.S. companies which do business in Argentina, providing information on Argentine trade and industry regulations and assisting U.S. companies starting or maintaining business ventures in Argentina.

Attaches accredited to Argentina from the Department of Justice--including the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation--U.S. Customs, the Federal Aviation Administration, and other federal agencies work closely with Argentine counterparts on international crime and other issues of concern. An active, sophisticated media environment, together with growing positive interest in American culture and society, make Argentina an uncommonly receptive environment for the information and cultural exchange work of the U.S. Embassy as well. The Fulbright fellowship program has more than tripled the annual number of U.S. and Argentine academic grantees since 1994.

The Embassy's Consular Section monitors the welfare and whereabouts of more than 20,000 U.S. citizen residents of Argentina and more than 300,000 U.S. tourists each year. Consular personnel also provide American citizens passport, voting, notary, Social Security, and other services. With the end of Argentine participation in the visa waiver program in February 2002, Argentine tourists, students, and those who seek to work in the United States must have nonimmigrant visas. The Consular Section processes nonimmigrant visa applications for persons who wish to visit the United States as tourists, students, temporary workers and other purposes, and immigrant visas for persons who qualify to make the United States a permanent home.

The Department of Defense is represented by the U.S. Military Group and the Defense Attaché Office. These organizations ensure close military-to-military

contacts and defense, and security cooperation with the armed forces of Argentina.

Principal U.S. Embassy Officials

Ambassador--Lino Gutierrez

Deputy Chief of Mission--Hugo Llorens

Political Counselor--Phillip Egger

Economic Counselor--Perry Ball

Commercial Counselor--Brian Brisson

Consul General--Susan Abeyta

Science & Environment Counselor--Kathleen Barmon

Management Counselor--Gustavo Mejia

Defense Attaché--Col. Douglas Lengenfelder, USAF

U.S. Military Group Commander--Col. Joseph Napoli, USA

Public Affairs Officer--Robert Banks

The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General in Argentina are located at 4300 Colombia Avenue in the Palermo district of Buenos Aires. Mission offices can be reached at by phone at (54)(11) 5777-4533/34 or by fax at (54)(11) 5777-4240. Mailing addresses: U.S. Embassy Buenos Aires, APO AA 34034; or 4300 Colombia, 1425 Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Other Contact Information

American Chamber of Commerce in Argentina

Viamonte 1133, 8th floor

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Tel (54)(11) 4371-4500; Fax (54)(11) 4371-8400

U.S. Department of Commerce

Office of Latin America and the Caribbean

International Trade Administration

14th and Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20230

Tel (202) 482-2436; (800) USA-TRADE; Fax (202) 482-4726

Automated fax service for trade-related information: (202) 482-4464.

TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program provides Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings, and Public Announcements. Consular Information Sheets exist for all countries and include information on entry requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, areas of instability, crime and security, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. posts in the country. Travel Warnings are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country. Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. Free copies of this information are available by calling the Bureau of Consular Affairs at 202-647-5225 or via the fax-on-demand system: 202-647-3000. Consular Information Sheets and Travel Warnings also are available on the Consular Affairs Internet home page: <http://travel.state.gov>. Consular Affairs Tips for Travelers publication series, which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are on the Internet and hard copies can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, telephone: 202-512-1800; fax 202-512-2250.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained from the Office of Overseas Citizens Services at (202) 647-5225. For after-hours emergencies, Sundays and holidays, call 202-647-4000.

The National Passport Information Center (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778). Customer service representatives and operators for TDD/TTY are available Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 877-FYI-TRIP (877-394-8747) and a web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/index.htm> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. A booklet entitled Health Information for International Travel (HHS publication number CDC-

95-8280) is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, tel. (202) 512-1800.

Information on travel conditions, visa requirements, currency and customs regulations, legal holidays, and other items of interest to travelers also may be obtained before your departure from a country's embassy and/or consulates in the U.S. (for this country, see "Principal Government Officials" listing in this publication).

U.S. citizens who are long-term visitors or traveling in dangerous areas are encouraged to register their travel via the State Department's travel registration web site at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> or at the Consular section of the U.S. embassy upon arrival in a country by filling out a short form and sending in a copy of their passports. This may help family members contact you in case of an emergency.

Further Electronic Information

Department of State Web Site. Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including Background Notes and daily press briefings along with the directory of key officers of Foreign Service posts and more.

Export.gov provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.

STAT-USA/Internet, a service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides authoritative economic, business, and international trade information from the Federal government. The site includes current and historical trade-related releases, international market research, trade opportunities, and country analysis and provides access to the National Trade Data Bank.