



Argentina

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Buenos Aires

Type of Government: Republic

Head of Government: President Eduardo

Alberto Duhalde (since 10 December 2001)

Minister of Foreign Relations: Carlos Federico

Ruckauf

Population: 37,384,816

Human Development Index Ranking: 34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Argentina has a **good** record of support for democracy abroad since the restoration of democracy at home in 1983. Argentina has played a critical role in strengthening regional mechanisms for collective action against attempted coups, and subsequently took the lead in applying these mechanisms to specific cases of democratic breakdown, thereby significantly increasing its own influence and leverage. However, in reacting to more insidious instances of democratic decay such as flawed elections, Argentina has shown some ambivalence, especially during the presidency of Carlos Menem (1989-1999). Nevertheless, and despite the current economic, financial and institutional crisis, Argentina's commitment to democracy at home and abroad remains solid.

FOREIGN POLICY BACKGROUND

Argentina's commitment to democracy at home and abroad has grown gradually stronger over the last two decades. There is a direct correlation between the re-democratization of Argentina, initiated in 1983, and the elevation of democracy as a defining element of Argentina's foreign policy. The election of Carlos Menem to the presidency in 1989 represented an especially critical juncture in this evolution of Argentina's foreign policy. The country's experience with military dictatorship acted as a decisive impetus for its efforts to strengthen democracy both within Argentina and abroad, and over the last decade the influence of the armed forces in defining and conducting foreign policy has significantly been reduced. Argentina's democracy promotion efforts have been further strengthened by the progressive re-democratization of many Latin American countries in the late 1980s, and the converging interests of these countries in the promotion of democracy in the region. In general, Argentina's foreign policy uses unilateral measures, bilateral diplomacy and multilateral instruments to promote and protect democracy, while at the same time giving high priority to the pursuit of its legitimate economic interests.

Despite the instability of the first years of the administration of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-89), Argentina made impressive progress to consolidate democracy at home. It is an achievement in itself that the financial, economic and political crisis now engulfing the country has, thus far, been managed within the boundaries of the rule of law. However, certain institutional flaws exist, such as executive predominance on economic policymaking and the excessive use of executive decrees. This paradox partially explains Argentina's cautious response to alterations of democracy in neighboring countries and has tended to inhibit the effectiveness of its democracy promotion policy.

Argentina has significantly altered its foreign policy and reassessed its geo-strategic interests since the restoration of democracy in 1983. Under the Alfonsín administration (1983-1989), Argentina reentered the world system seeking to maximize its autonomy under Foreign Minister Dante Caputo. The current foreign policy of constructive multilateralism is based on a new understanding of the country's geo-economic interests.



It is designed to make full use of regional and multilateral institutions to reposition itself internationally and to further its foreign policy objectives. For example, Argentina has become a strong proponent of making the Organization of American States (OAS) a more effective organization in the promotion and defense of democracy in the hemisphere.¹ In addition, in 1989 Argentina initiated a '*rapprochement*' with the U.S. This was sealed in January 1998 when the U.S. designated Argentina as a major non-NATO ally.² For Guido di Tella, Foreign Minister under President Menem, this shift reflected a more 'pragmatic approach' in the conduct of foreign policy.³

The main purpose of Argentine foreign policy remains, however, to further the country's economic and trade interests. Upon assuming office, Menem asserted that his principal concern was economic policy and thus 'foreign policy was designed to follow and strengthen the economic model'.⁴ Argentina subsequently left the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the early 1990s and has pursued relationships with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It also restored diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom and agreed to settle the Falkland Islands issue by peaceful means. By the end of President Menem's first term in office, 'it was clear that the multilateral card had become crucial to the strategy for redefining the country's place in the world'.⁵

One other aspect of Argentina's foreign policy has been its strong support of regional stability. Argentina has revitalized its relationship with Brazil and settled lingering border disputes with Chile through international arbitration. It has also served with the U.S., Brazil, and Chile as one of the four guarantors of the Ecuador-Peru peace process. Consistent with its policy of constructive multilateral engagement, Argentina has actively supported UN peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building efforts in a dozen countries, often in countries in which Argentina has no strategic interest to defend. In part, Argentina's participation in UN peacekeeping missions may have also been motivated by economic factors linked to remuneration of military personnel.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Over the past decade, Argentina has

responded swiftly to the interruption of democratic governance in neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. It has increasingly resorted to multilateral response mechanisms, often strengthening them decisively.

Argentina actively participated in all phases of the international response to the coup d'état in Haiti in September 1991. In 1994, Argentina voted positively on all UN resolutions concerning the situation in Haiti (including Resolution 940, which authorized the use of force) and expended diplomatic resources to help resolve the standoff.⁶ Its engagement in the Haitian crisis was particularly critical as it sat on the UN Security Council. Argentina participated actively in the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Haiti, which was established during the tenure of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in early 1993. Former Foreign Minister Dante Caputo acted as a special envoy of both the UN and OAS Secretaries General between 1993 and September 1994, when he resigned in protest over the adoption of Resolution 940 and over the U.S. role in promoting the use of force to restore President Aristide to power.⁷

Argentina's response to the institutional crisis in Peru in April 1992 also reflected its willingness to use regional mechanisms for collective defense of democracy. Argentina backed the OAS response and subsequent handling of the crisis. It severed diplomatic ties with Peru and supported Peru's temporary suspension from the Rio Group in 1992-93. Argentina's position was nevertheless somewhat equivocal, as Menem expressed some understanding for Fujimori's actions. Argentina adopted a more assertive response to the attempted coup in Guatemala in May 1993. It expressed grave concern at the disruption of constitutional rule and energetically condemned President Serrano's *autogolpe* (self-coup). It severed diplomatic ties, recalled its ambassador to Guatemala and cancelled a planned visit of President Serrano to Argentina.⁸

The political crisis in Paraguay in April 1996 constituted a critical juncture in sub-regional affairs. While Haiti, Peru and Guatemala may not have been considered within the immediate sphere of influence of Argentina, the Paraguayan crisis threatened the integrity and credibility of the Southern Cone Common Market (Mercosur). Together with the United States and Brazil, Argentina deployed all its diplomatic instruments to avert an open political confrontation and find a



peaceful solution to the institutional crisis. Throughout the crisis, Ambassador Ahuad of Argentina and President Menem reiterated their support to President Wasmosy and their commitment to protect democratic institutions and the rule of law in Paraguay, stressing that Argentina and its Mercosur partners would not tolerate a disruption of the constitutional order in a member state. Although the recourse to Resolution 1080, the OAS democracy clause, was problematic, Argentina supported its invocation by the OAS. By activating the sanction mechanisms of the OAS, Mercosur and the Rio Group, Argentina raised the potential costs of an interruption of democracy in Paraguay and thereby effectively helped deter it.

Argentina responded with the same resolve to the eruption of political turmoil in Paraguay following the assassination of Vice President Argaña on 23 March 1999. A few weeks later, meeting in Asuncion, Mercosur member states 'energetically condemned' the events in Paraguay and expressed their support of the 'process of democratic normalization and strengthening.' However, relations between Argentina and Paraguay became tense when Argentina granted exile to General Oviedo. The Argentine government justified its decision by arguing that it would help reduce tensions in Paraguay. However, as a 'guest' of the Argentine government, Oviedo continued to plot against the Paraguayan constitutional authorities and, after clandestinely leaving Argentina in December 1999, attempted another coup on 18-19 May 2000. President Fernando de la Rúa, who had just visited Paraguay on 13-15 May, immediately issued a statement condemning the coup attempt and reiterating his country's support for Paraguay's fragile democratization process.⁹ Former Presidents Menem and Alfonsín also joined de la Rúa in his condemnation of the coup attempt.¹⁰

Similarly, Argentina expressed concern with the successive institutional crises in Ecuador in 1997 and 2000. Argentina lamented the encroachment on the rule of law and democratic principles that the overthrow of President Jamil Mahuad on 22 January 2000 entailed. The same day, Mercosur member states issued a communiqué condemning the coup and calling for the restoration of constitutional rule.

Argentina reacted swiftly to condemn the attempted coup d'état in Venezuela on 11-14 April 2002, both through multilateral and bilateral

channels. The events in Venezuela unfolded as the heads of states of the Rio Group gathered for their annual meeting in San José, Costa Rica. In a joint statement on the situation in Venezuela on 12 April, Rio Group member states condemned the 'interruption of constitutional order' and called for the 'normalization of democratic institutions'.¹¹ Unlike his counterpart in the U.S., Argentine President Eduardo Duhalde clearly interpreted the confusing events in Venezuela as a 'coup d'état'. Duhalde stated "There was definitely a coup in Venezuela and I hope it has a democratic resolution, that they call for elections and that the Venezuelan people are the ones to elect a new president. Coups do not help anyone."

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Argentina's response to manipulation of electoral processes has been less vocal but nonetheless conducive to a pro-active policy of regional intervention. Argentina's response to the Peruvian institutional and political crisis in 2000-01 was undertaken mainly through multilateral channels. The equivocal response of the international community to Peru's flawed elections in 2000 reflected, among other things, a general discontent with the lack of government-endorsed benchmarks and standards by which to evaluate them. Like many other Latin American countries, Argentina cautioned against framing the flawed Peruvian elections as a "sudden interruption" in the constitutional order, which would require invoking the mechanisms provided for by OAS Resolution 1080. Despite persistent efforts by the U.S. to build support for invoking Resolution 1080, only Costa Rica was willing to back its use. Nevertheless, as a compromise solution, Resolution 1753 adopted at the OAS General Assembly in Windsor, Ontario, in June 2000, recognized the 'credibility' problem surrounding the Peruvian electoral process and set in motion a series of important steps that ultimately led to the democratic transition in Peru. At Windsor, then Argentine Foreign Minister Rodriguez Giavirini declared that the traditional policy of non-intervention does not mean "non-indifference" to the clear evidence of electoral fraud.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Consistent with its strong support for multilateral approaches and international



institutions, Argentina has, since the early 1990s, used its leverage and influence to strengthen the effectiveness of the OAS as a credible mechanism for the promotion and protection of democracy. Argentina has been an active supporter of the inclusion of 'democracy clauses' in regional and sub-regional agreements and in the by-laws of multilateral institutions. The Peruvian crisis of 2000 generated a new impetus to refine OAS instruments with which to respond to the erosion of democratic governance, and led to the adoption in September 2001 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which Argentina strongly supported. A core element of Argentine foreign policy at present is the strengthening of the Southern Cone Common Market (Mercosur), established in 1991, not only as a mechanism for economic integration, but also as a tool for coordinating political positions. Accession to, and continued membership in, Mercosur is now conditional on upholding democratic rule. The 1996 Paraguayan crisis, in particular, increased the resolve of Mercosur member states to strengthen its institutional mechanisms to respond to reversals of democracy. In June 1996, under Argentine chairmanship, Mercosur adopted a 'democracy clause' in its bylaws, which states that any interruption of the constitutional order in a member country 'constitutes an unacceptable obstacle for the continuation of the process of integration.' The 1998 summit of the group, chaired by Argentina, adopted the Ushuaia

Protocol on the Commitment to Democracy – a Paraguayan initiative, which explicitly linked the process of regional integration to the preservation and consolidation of democracy.

Similarly, Argentina has been a strong proponent of the inclusion of democracy promotion on the agenda of the Ibero-American Summits. It has also strengthened the political foundations of the Rio Group, which has progressively intensified its commitment to the promotion and defense of democracy, as demonstrated by its quick response to the April 2002 coup in Venezuela.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Like most Latin American countries, Argentina pursues a policy of 'constructive engagement' with the region's only entrenched autocratic regime, Cuba. Argentina's relations with Cuba have evolved during the past twenty years. While the Alfonsín administration had developed close ties with Cuba, President Menem adopted a more critical stance towards the Castro regime. While Argentina maintains diplomatic relations with the Cuban government, it has repeatedly condemned the human rights situation there, endorsing the corresponding resolutions of the UN Human Rights Commission, most recently in 2002. Nevertheless, it has simultaneously condemned the economic blockade imposed by the United States.

¹ "The Quality of Democracy," address by Adolfo Naclares, Argentinean Undersecretary of Latin American Policy at the Conference of the Carter Center on Challenges to Democracy in the Americas, Atlanta, United States, 16-18 October 2000.

² Jorge Osella and María Julia Rodríguez, "El Nuevo aliado extra-OTAN." Archivos del Presente (1999): 143-151; and Alberto De Núñez and Jorge Osella, "Argentina y Estados Unidos: Del Desencuentro a la Cooperación." Archivos del Presente (1999): 163-175.

³ Joseph Tulchin, "Continuity and Change in Argentine Foreign Policy" in Heraldo Muñoz and Joseph Tulchin, eds. Latin American Nations in World Politics. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 185.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.167.

⁶ United States. Department of State. Voting Practices in the United Nations, 1994. Washington DC: US Department of State, 31 March 1995:101-167.

⁷ New York Times 22 September 1994: A15.

⁸ Rubén Perina, "El regimen democrático interamericano: el papel de la OEA," in Arlene Tickner et. al., Sistema Interamericano y Democracia: Antecedentes Históricos y Tendencias Futuras. Washington: OAS UPD, November 2000: 311-376.

⁹ "De la Rúa: 'Hay que respaldar a la democracia del Paraguay'." Clarín. 15 May 2002.

¹⁰ "Unánime repudio en Argentina a la intentona golpista." Clarín. 20 May 2002.

¹¹ Ortiz, Fiona. "Latam Leaders Express Concern, Discuss Venezuela." Reuters. 12 April 2002; "Chavez Ouster Criticized at Summit." Associated Press. 12 April 2002. < <http://www.grupoderio.go.cr>>.