



ON THE
OFFENSIVE

**ARGENTINA'S
MULTIPRONGED
ASSAULT ON
DRUG TRAFFICKING
PROVIDES LESSONS
FOR OTHER NATIONS**



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Drug consumption in Argentina skyrocketed during the first decade of this century. Marijuana use nearly doubled between 2004 and 2010, while cocaine use by the general population rose from about 0.3 percent in 2004 to 1 percent in 2010, according to a government report.

This increase in consumption has changed Argentina's role in

transnational drug trafficking. Formerly known as a transit country for cocaine heading mainly toward Europe by ship, drugs are now smuggled across the border by land and by air. Cocaine from Bolivia and Peru is smuggled aboard illegal flights into the country or dropped from aircraft within Argentina's borders. Some of this cocaine is consumed locally

while higher quality cocaine is smuggled to its final destination in Europe or Chile.

Marijuana is trafficked from Paraguay, one of South America's biggest cannabis producers. Marijuana shipments are often trafficked along fast-flowing rivers, such as the Parana, connecting Argentina with Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay.

THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS BECAME A PRIORITY, MEANING A NEW STRATEGY WAS NEEDED TO FACE THE THREAT.

In recent years, synthetic drugs such as Ecstasy and methamphetamine have made an explosive appearance in Argentina, especially in the numerous dance clubs in Buenos Aires. Most of these drugs come from European countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, and are trafficked mainly through commercial airline flights and private couriers.

The previous government administration never enacted a coherent strategy to face this growing problem. Only isolated measures were taken, such as increasing personnel and temporary force redeployments (Argentina has four federal forces: Gendarmeria Nacional, Prefectura Naval, Policia Federal and Policia de Seguridad Aeroportuaria). Public officials and decision-makers were in a state of denial — to them, drugs were not a problem for Argentina.

NEW PRIORITIES

In December 2015, a new administration, led by Mauricio Macri, was elected to end 12 years of “Kirchnerismo” (Nestor Kirchner ruled from 2003 to 2007, followed by his wife from 2007 to 2015). The fight against drugs became a priority, meaning a new strategy was needed to face the threat.

The first challenge was to understand the seriousness of the drug trafficking situation. Federal forces were given a standard form to complete after every drug operation that pinpointed where the activities took place. As a result, a map depicting drug operations across the country is now maintained and continually updated at the office of Counter Narcotics Policy.

The second challenge was to identify a strategy for combating the trafficking. In doing so, it was discovered that the best way to understand how organized crime operates, and consequently neutralize the activity, is to follow a strategy developed by criminologist Jay Albanese. In his 2011 book, *Transnational Crime and the 21st Century*, Albanese states that four factors have an impact on how freely organized crime operates:

- The behavior of supply.
- The behavior of demand (the customers).
- The behavior of regulators (the business environment).
- The behavior of competition (affecting profits).

A FRESH APPROACH

The Ministry of Security decided to introduce a strategy based on these four pillars. First, concerning supply, the following actions were taken: enhanced use of criminal intelligence to monitor groups and organizations operating at the border; tightened border controls; increased use of military 3-D radars at the border; increased control over chemical precursors (more than 1,000 industries where supervised); creation of a new office overseeing border affairs; and agreements for common operations with neighboring countries. Also important was the creation of two task forces, one in the northwest (with support from the United States) and one in Buenos Aires’ main airport, Ezeiza, under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC’s) Airport Communications Program (AIRCOP). Both represent transformative innovation for Argentina’s domestic security structure.

The number of officers with special drug training was increased by 168 percent. Moreover, four border hot spots will be patrolled by a new electronic surveillance system, and four speed-boats will patrol the rivers. A joint operation among Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil in the tri-border area was launched in February 2016, and five regional fusion centers were established by the National Directorate of Criminal Intelligence to share criminal information from the provinces with federal forces.

Another important decision was to redeploy the Federal Police under true federal criteria, creating eight regional offices and 29 narcotics offices. Previously, this agency had most of its resources concentrated in Buenos Aires.

Second, regarding demand, the main drug prevention and treatment agency, La Secretaría de Políticas Integrales sobre Drogas, or SEDRONAR, implemented a renewed strategy for drug treatment focused on the local or municipal level. Moreover, increased supply control is driving up prices. This is the case for coca leaf, with a 20 percent price increase this year. Based on different research papers, it is assumed that an increase in price will lead to a decrease in consumption.

Third, regarding the regulatory environment, a huge effort has been made to enact legislation.



A new law targets precursors, the substances that can be used to make illicit drugs. A list of prohibited drugs was introduced and a new law created that groups any drugs under common molecular families with an “analog” criteria. Enhancing international cooperation was also a priority. Argentina signed cooperation agreements with Bolivia, Paraguay, the U.S., Russia, China, Israel and Germany, among others, that incorporated all UNODC early warning systems, such as the Precursor Incident Communication System, the Early Warning Advisory program and AIRCOP.

Finally, regarding profitability, a plan was introduced reforming how Argentina’s Financial Action Office works. In early 2016, the local office was again accepted by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency trained federal forces and prosecutors on money laundering

investigations. Several drugs lords saw their assets frozen because of criminal investigations, and some of those assets were seized and given to federal agencies.

These are only some of the actions taken for each of the pillars that support the new general strategy. Much work still needs to be done, but indicators for this year are encouraging. During the first year of the current administration, while marijuana seizures remained stable, cocaine seizures rose by 28 percent, coca leaves by 4 percent and synthetic drugs by 512 percent. This increase in seizures was driven by an increase in anti-drug operations, which rose by 7 percent, and by focusing on larger organizations (detainees decreased by 7 percent, proving that fewer consumers and small traffickers were targeted). Regarding chemical precursors, a third more establishments were inspected compared to the previous year. □

Argentine officials seize over 4,000 litres of chlorhydric and sulfuric acid in September 2016. The chemicals are used to prepare cocaine for sale.

ARGENTINE MINISTRY OF SECURITY