

incidents were few and far between, no doubt largely as a result of controls placed by both sides on access to the region. However, with the growth of international fishing in the area, increasing talk of petroleum prospecting there, and the mere passage of time, the potential for incidents grew.

In addition, many British businessmen wished to take advantage of the trade and investment potential of Argentina, and this was even more the case as the new Menem government began to bring about improvements in the economic condition of the country. Several NGOs were also active in pressing for dialogue with Buenos Aires, and a number of contacts at parliamentary level had stimulated talk of finding some way to reduce tensions.

In this way, the overall environment in the UK was one favourable for CBMs as the 1980s ended. Britain had fought many small wars since the Second World War and rarely bore much of a grudge. Time was passing and memories of the war fading. Argentina was now a functioning democracy. Much seemed to indicate then that the time was ripe for change. Thus both the political and economic context overall, so important in all discussions of CBMs, were favourable to change. And the new attitude in Buenos Aires did much to convince islanders as well that it was safe to engage in limited dialogue with the Argentines and helpful, even financially interesting, so to do.

Argentina and Confidence Building

The Argentine state has, needless to say, not been in existence for anything as long as the United Kingdom. Main inheritor of the River Plate Viceroyalty when Spain was expelled from continental America in the 1820s, Argentina's independent life is still well short of celebrating its bicentenary. Despite this, the South American nation has experienced a wide range of political situations, both domestically and internationally. It has developed a sophisticated diplomatic style, and a quite professional foreign service, especially when compared with most other Latin American diplomatic institutions.

Argentina was born in conflict with the wider viceroyalty quickly shorn of several of what were viewed as its constituent parts – today's Paraguay, Uruguay, southern Bolivia, and the Falklands. It almost immediately entered into a complex balance of power situation in the Southern Cone alongside Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. During well over a century this series of relationships evolved through war, alliances, diplomatic and military crises, mobilizations and border incidents, shows of force, and much else.¹³ Argentina usually looked to Peru for support in its repeated difficulties and rivalries with Chile in the West and Brazil to the North. But a complicated web of relationships saw shifts in alliances within these overall trends with cooperation and conflict possible across a wide range of situations.

¹³ This story is superbly told in Robert N. Burr, *By Reason or Force: Chile and the Balance of Power in South America, 1830-1905* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).