

## The Upcoming Visit of the President of Panama to the United States

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President Martín Torrijos of Panama will begin a three-day visit to the United States starting May 6. He is scheduled to meet with President George W. Bush on May 9.

### Q1: What are the key issues in U.S.-Panama relations?

**A1:** The relationship between Panama and the United States historically has been very close, starting from the first days of Panama's independence in 1903 and the building and operating of the Panama Canal. Currently, the United States is Panama's largest trade partner by far, and the two countries signed a trade promotion agreement (commonly referred to as a free-trade agreement) in 2007. The canal remains an essential facility for international trade. At present, Panama is undertaking an ambitious project to widen and deepen the canal and to construct new sets of locks that will permit larger ships to pass through the waterway. Beyond these issues, the United States and Panama have mutual interest in a variety of other topics, such as cooperation against drug trafficking and international crime.

### Q2: What are the prospects for the trade agreement?

**A2:** U.S. approval of the trade promotion agreement with Panama is pending, and President Torrijos will urge members of the U.S. Congress to ratify it. A key impediment to approval will be removed on September 1 when the Panamanian legislature (National Assembly) elects a new president. The current president of the National Assembly, Pedro Miguel González, a member of President Torrijos's ruling *Partido Democrático Revolucionario* (PRD), is under indictment in the United States, accused of the murder of a U.S. army sergeant in Panama in 1992. With González in place, there has been little hope of U.S. approval of the trade agreement, but the Panamanian media recently reported that González has announced to PRD leaders that he will not seek reelection as president of the National Assembly. With the González matter resolved, the agreement should obtain sufficient support in Congress for approval, but the key question remaining will be one of timing.

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