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(b)(1)
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Wednesday 1 November 1978 CG NIDC 78/255

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ARGENTINA: Major Cabinet Changes

[] *The sudden resignation last week of Argentine Foreign Minister Admiral Montes was followed yesterday by an official announcement that four other cabinet ministers will be leaving their posts soon. Although this is the first major cabinet reshuffle since the military took power in March 1976, there are no signs that the changes reflect a crisis or major upheaval.*

[] The Ministers of Planning, Defense, Justice, and Social Welfare--all generals--announced their resignations yesterday, although they will remain at their posts until replacements can be found. The two key cabinet members, Economy Minister Martinez de Hoz, a civilian, and Interior Minister General Harguindeguy, are expected to remain in office.

[] The timing of Montes' departure may have been linked to the fact that he was not consulted in President Videla's decision late last week to continue diplomatic efforts with Chile to resolve the Beagle Channel dispute. The resignations of the other ministers, however, appear to be directly connected with internal military politics.

[] For the past several months, Videla and the military junta have been deadlocked over the issue of who is to make major policy decisions. The seriousness of this conflict is reflected in the failure to agree on a replacement for the Education Minister, who resigned two months ago, or the Foreign Minister. Interior Minister Harguindeguy is now occupying all three posts.

[] If Videla can gain the junta's agreement to the appointment of prominent civilians to the vacated posts, he will have made a major breakthrough; he promised early this year to bring civilians back into the government. A new cabinet dominated by conservative generals and admirals, on the other hand, would indicate that Videla had lost ground to his military opponents and had been forced to give greater consideration to the views of the junta members. []

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