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Current Intelligence Weekly Summary

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ARGENTINA

The failure of the Argentine Government to settle the dispute with Chile over the Beagle Channel has focused attention in Argentina on the inefficiency of President Videla's system of consensus government. Conservative military leaders, who have long criticized Videla's moderate and conciliatory style, now appear to be gaining ground at the President's expense.

Although the present system of government calls for Videla to share power with the three service chiefs who make up the military junta, many senior Argentine officers are disturbed by Videla's insistence on gaining the military chiefs' agreement on all key matters. While Videla maintains military unity in this manner, many officers believe that authority at the top is overly diluted.

A recent Cabinet shuffle—in which Videla failed to make good on a promise to appoint prominent civilians to head the Ministries of Education and Justice—provided fresh evidence of his inability to assert his authority. The armed services also reportedly vetoed his first choices—retired officers in each case—to head the

Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Social Welfare.

Although

some officers are talking about replacing Videla, there is no serious coup plotting or wide military support for such a move. The possibility of a coup is remote so long as the dispute with Chile is Argentina's primary policy concern.

The government, however, is divided over how to handle the Beagle Channel affair and has not decided on its next move. Last week, Argentina announced it is willing to accept a mediator, but it also insisted that another round of bilateral talks precede arbitration by a third party. Chile first raised the subject of outside mediation several weeks ago, but Argentina has been reluctant to go along.

A bilateral commission that had been trying since last February to arrange a settlement had reached an impasse when its tenure expired on 2 November. Since then, both nations have maintained their military forces in a high state of readiness. While no hostile moves have occurred, both sides remain concerned over the possibility of an armed confrontation.

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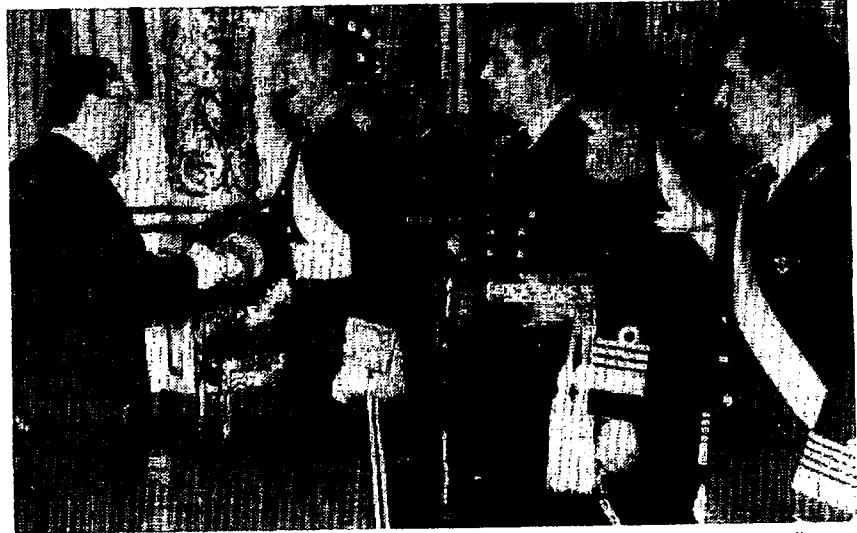
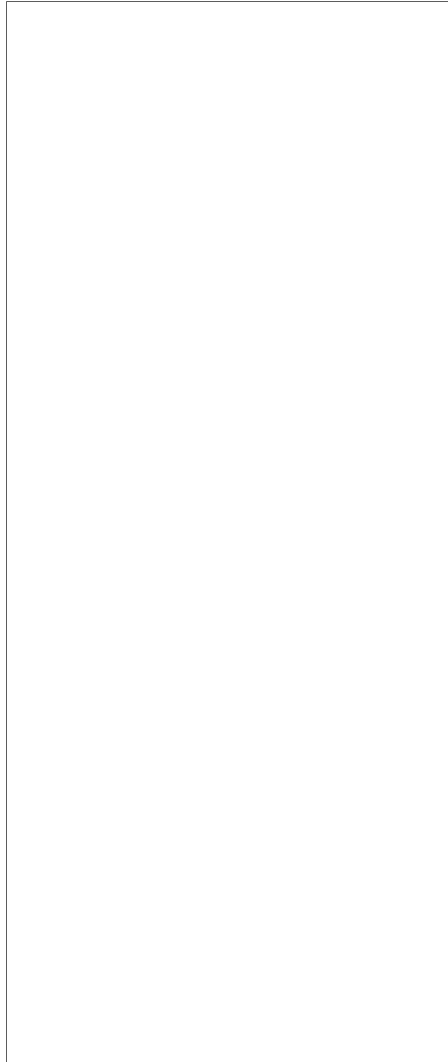
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At a Beagle Channel conference, Argentine President Videla (2nd from l) greets the Chilean delegation leader, Dr. Vicuna, observed by Admiral Massera (2nd from r) and Air Force Chief of Staff General Agosti

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