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March 24, 1976

## ARGENTINA

The armed forces early this morning put the finishing touches on a long expected coup against Maria Estela Peron, who was flown from the capital in the military's custody. A junta composed of the three service chiefs is to assume responsibility for governing, with army commander in chief General Jorge Rafael Videla as its probable head.

The military's final push, which got under way in earnest several days ago, met with virtually no resistance. Most Argentines had long since come to regard Peron's ouster as inevitable. [REDACTED] this morning [REDACTED] activity in the capital was normal, a possible sign that there was no great concern over the ouster.

The armed forces moved methodically, deploying troops along major roads and occupying provincial cities. Late last night troops were patrolling the streets of Buenos Aires and more soldiers were reported to be arriving soon.

The officers, poised to intervene for months, made their move with deliberate slowness. They underscored the fact that they only reluctantly were taking over, in the face of consistent civilian failures. The officers also apparently wished to give Peron every possible opportunity to step down voluntarily.

The armed forces, largely at the behest of Videla, have shown great restraint, tolerating numerous provocations on the part of the administration. Videla finally acceded to coup pressure, however, when it became increasingly difficult to bridle the military's growing restiveness.

The ousted government was in trouble almost from its inception, when Juan Peron died nearly two years ago leaving his wife as constitutional successor. Her administration proved hopelessly inept and aroused widespread opposition by its almost exclusive reliance on a small circle of rightwing Peronist loyalists.

The new government inherits a badly deteriorated economy, widespread terrorist violence, and political divisiveness. The magnitude of the country's problems could enforce the arguments of some officers that there is a need for stricter controls than Videla is likely to advocate. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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3. FYI ONLY: The Department of State responded late yesterday afternoon to the decision of Argentina to postpone the Buenos Aires meeting of foreign ministers scheduled for late March. The Department issued a lengthy statement regretting the Argentine action and pointed out that the Administration opposed the action of Congress excluding OPEC countries, including Equador and Venezuela from the new tariff preference system. The Department also pointed out that the U. S. will continue to work with our Latin American friends on the problems regarding the Trade Bill and that we will continue to address cooperatively the many issues in our hemispheric relations in a spirit of conciliation and friendship.