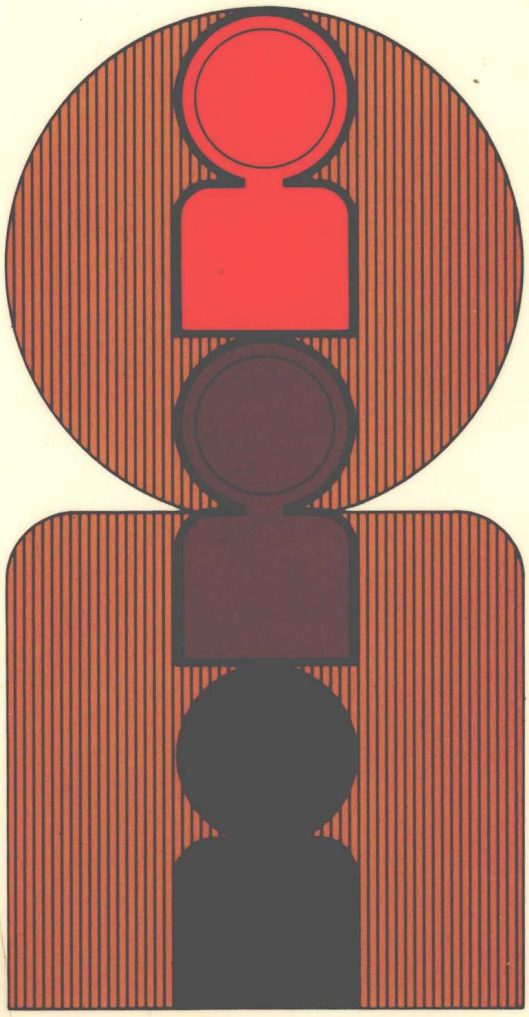
SOLDIERS IN POLITICS
MILITARY COUPS AND GOVERNMENTS

Eric A. Nordlinger



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ERIC A. NORDLINGER

Brown University
Written under the auspices of the
Center for International Affairs,
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FOREWORD

The series in Contemporary Comparative Politics is unabashedly committed to several goals. We assume that the undergraduate student is by and large not interested in becoming a political scientist but is planning to follow other pursuits. This being so, we aim to expose these students to aspects of politics that will be salient to them throughout their lives. In order to make this point stick though, we believe it is necessary to avoid using the so-called "grand theories" of political science as organizing frameworks. Such "theories" are subtle forms of misinformation; they mislead students—and sometimes others —into believing that we know more about political systems and processes than is actually the case.

It is also our assumption that only the rare undergraduate wishes to master the workings of any single political system. Even where such interest may be present, the study of single countries rarely leads to anything resembling systematic comparative analysis. Therefore, we have sought to focus on a wide range of interesting and important aspects of politics that individual volumes in this series treat comparatively.

We also believe that those aspects of politics included in this series should be treated from both an institutional and a behavioral perspective. Political science will remain a hobbled discipline as long as those who write or consume it elect one of these orientations or the other. Political science will become or remain an arid discipline if we neglect to treat the normative side of politics. The authors of this series are neither bare-facts empiricists nor "cloud-ninety" political moralists. They are prepared to use whatever forms of comparative analysis are available to permit us better to understand the relationships between political institutions, behavior, values, and man's condition. The range of understanding we seek to achieve is reflected in the core of the series (Joseph LaPalombara, *Politics within Nations*) and in the titles of individual series volumes.

Because no series can encompass all areas of politics, we have had to make choices. Some of these choices introduce the reader to aspects of politics not often treated on a comparative basis. Our published volumes on political violence, political corruption, and legal culture, and this book on the military and politics, fall into this category. Other choices expose the reader to more traditional aspects of government and politics treated in a fresh comparative perspective. Series volumes on national legislatures, bureaucracies, and elections fall into this category.

Eric Nordlinger in this volume gives us an unusual perspective on military elites as they intervene in those aspects of the political process considered to be the jurisdiction of civilians. Nordlinger has put together a number of provocative theoretical ideas that help us to understand—the when, how, and why—the emergence and characteristic modes of governance of the praetorian state. These ideas are developed with extensive illustrations from the actual experiences of about a dozen countries, including Brazil, Peru, Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, Pakistan, Burma, and South Korea, and references to some two dozen others. Anyone who wants a better understanding of the causes and consequences of military political intervention will be rewarded by reading this book.

This volume does not contain statistical information on a global scale. It does not pretend to "explain" the military's intervention in politics wherever it may have occurred in time and space. But it does deepen our knowledge about a method of seizing or transferring political power—and of governance—that is endemic among contemporary non-Western nations. Military coups are now so frequent and widespread they must be considered as significant as elections. Comparative political analysis is enriched by Nordlinger's sophisticated treatment of this important but neglected subject.

JOSEPH LAPALOMBARA

New Haven

PREFACE

More than two-thirds of the countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have experienced varying levels of military intervention since 1945. The frequency with which non-Western officers have entered the political arena has provided me with the very real challenge of analyzing military intervention in a general fashion without losing sight of particular cases. I have consequently written about both the theory *and* practice of soldiers in politics. The book is theoretical insofar as it offers descriptive and explanatory generalizations that are applicable to the great majority of military coups, governments, and regimes. The book is about the practice of military intervention in that these generalizations do not rely upon abstract or vague concepts. They remain close to the political "ground," to the attitudes, motives, goals, and behavior of the so-called praetorian soldiers, using numerous examples to illustrate and to give meaning and empirical support to the generalizations.

In accounting for the patterns of military intervention I have combined two kinds of explanatory factors that are too often kept separate. There are the internal features of the military, which include its hierarchical structure, level of professionalism, and corporate interests, as well as the officers' class backgrounds, communal identities, self-image, and political attitudes. The external or "environmental" variables include the actions of civilian chief executives, the performance and legitimacy of civilian governments, the politicization of workers and peasants, the severity of communal conflicts, the extent of socioeconomic modernization, and the rate of economic growth. These two kinds of variables are brought together in order to understand the officers' behavior patterns from the vantage point of the soldiers themselves, for the soldiers' political options and decisions are limited and shaped by both types of variables.

Several writers have pointed out that far greater attention has been

accorded the overthrow of civilian governments, the coup itself and the events leading up to it, than to the praetorians after they have seized power. Most coups have marked political and economic consequences, but what the soldiers do after taking control of the government—how a society is governed—is usually of greater consequence than the identity of the governors and the manner in which they have attained their positions. This book therefore gives somewhat greater emphasis to the officers as governors than as coup makers. It deals with the structure of military regimes, their duration, the officers' governing style, and the performance of military governments in legitimizing themselves, governing in a noncoercive manner, promoting modernizing and progressive economic changes, and averting communal and class-based violence. Indeed, the final chapter takes us beyond the period of military government to examine its impact upon the structure and performance of the civilian regimes that are installed after the soldiers return to the barracks.

Despite their well-intentioned efforts to be as objective as possible, social scientists often "find" exactly what they were looking for at the beginning of their inquiries. The working assumptions with which they began turn out to be confirmed, at least so it is argued. Such claims are sometimes warranted, which is also to say that sometimes they are not. I would therefore alert the reader to the possibility that yet another social scientist may have inadvertently fallen into this easily sprung trap. For I began analyzing the phenomenon of military intervention with two working assumptions that have, I will suggest, been borne out by a reading of the literature, the available cross-national data, and the reasoning that was used to answer the questions I posed for myself. At the outset I tentatively assumed that it is possible to make general statements about military intervention as both a characteristic and a distinctive phenomenon. It is a characteristic phenomenon in that most military officers, governments, and regimes exhibit a good number of common features. It is a distinctive phenomenon insofar as there are notable differences between military and civilian elites, governments, and regimes.

Judging from past experience, it is nearly impossible to identify the specific "origins" of an article or book. That is not, however, true in this instance. During the 1968–1969 academic year I wrote a paper in which I tested various hypotheses about governmental performance in a quantitative fashion with a set of cross-national data. Only four of the one hundred and twenty pages dealt with military governments. Yet Amos Perlmutter, who was then also a research associate at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, waxed sufficiently enthusiastic about these few pages to encourage me to develop them. That effort resulted in an article entitled "Soldiers in Mufti: The Impact of Military Rule upon Economic and Social Change in the Non-Western States," which appeared in the December 1970

issue of the *American Political Science Review*. Parts of that article are found in chapters 2 and 5. That my attempt to discern and understand the patterns of military intervention culminated in this book, one written for two audiences of scholars and students, is due to Joseph LaPalombara's invitation to contribute to his Contemporary Comparative Politics Series. He has been a most patient editor in getting me to complete the book only two years later than originally planned, and a helpful one in suggesting how I could increase the reader's understanding by decreasing the number of words (but not ideas) in the final manuscript.

I have been especially fortunate in receiving advice, criticism, and encouragement from several friends and colleagues. I am indebted to Maury Feld, Samuel P. Huntington, Morris Janowitz, Alfred Stepan, and Claude Welch for the time they gave to me and even more for their own contributions to the study of soldiers in politics. In fact, considering the scholarly reputations of those who commented on the draft manuscript, I will immediately offer the necessary disclaimer that the final version's shortcomings are my responsibility alone. As in the past, my closest friend, Donald Hindley, has also been my severest critic and an exceptionally well-informed source of information about the politics of dozens of non-Western countries.

At both the beginning and the later stages of this book's writing I benefited from the intellectually and socially congenial setting offered by the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University. Many thanks are also due to Kenje Gleason, Martha Fielding, and Nancy Kaplan for their typing efforts.

My seven-year-old-daughter, Alexandra, is deserving of thanks for her gracious acceptance, if not understanding, of the reasons why I shall be dedicating my *next* book to her.

This book is for Joseph Mayer, who was of absolutely no help in the writing of it, but to whom I shall always be grateful for other, considerably more important "contributions."

ERIC A. NORDLINGER

CONTENTS

THE STUDY OF PRAETORIANISM

1

This book is about military coups and governments in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East since 1945.[1] The military officers who have intervened in the political sphere have been called "men on horseback" in reference to the traditional mounted position of army officers; "soldiers in mufti" because they often substitute civilian titles and clothing (mufti) for their military insignia and khaki uniforms; "iron surgeons" in recognition of the public justification for their intervention, namely, the need for decisive action in regenerating the polity and economy; and "armed bureaucrats" because their political attitudes and governing style approximate those of the higher civil servants.

We will refer to interventionist officers as praetorian soldiers. Praetorianism refers to a situation in which military officers are major or predominant political actors by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force.[2] This term is taken from one of the earliest and most famous instances

[1] Unfortunately, no single term adequately describes and embodies all these countries. The term *developing countries*, for example, implies constant movement toward the model of the developed countries, simultaneously suggesting an invidious comparison between them. We shall use the term *non-Western states* even though Latin America, with its Roman law tradition and influential Catholic church, does not quite fit the label. Our focus upon the non-Western countries is due to the basic fact that almost all cases of military coups and governments are to be found there, rather than in Europe and North America, as noted on page 6.

[2] This book is limited to officers alone. There are several reasons for not dealing with sergeants, corporals, and enlisted men. These soldiers almost invariably accept the orders of their officers. There have only been a handful of mutinies led by sergeants. And even in these instances they do not attempt to seize the government or influence its policies. Mutinies are intended to achieve better pay and living conditions for the noncommissioned officers and enlisted men. One of the rare instances in which enlisted men overthrew a government in

of military intervention. The Praetorian Guards of the Roman Empire were established as a special military unit for the protection of the emperor. They ended up using their military power to overthrow emperors and to control the Roman senate's "election" of successive emperors. The adoption of the term *praetorianism* is meant to convey a message—one that is summarized in the concluding chapter of this book, but that can be foreshadowed by a statement from Gibbon's classic study, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Here we read that the intervention of the Praetorian Guards "was the first *symptom* and *cause* of the decline of the Roman Empire" (Gibbon, Vol. I, p. 91, italics added).

The armed forces of all countries exert considerable political influence. They are symbols of state sovereignty and the primary defenders against possible external or internal attack against the government. Given their prestige, responsibilities, and the material resources needed to fulfill these responsibilities, all military establishments exercise a significant degree of political influence, even in such countries as Mexico and India where civilian governments are clearly in control. Military officers become praetorian soldiers when they threaten or use force in order to enter or dominate the political arena. They intervene in politics when relying upon their control over the enlisted men who actually wield the guns, tanks, and planes in order to influence governmental decisions or occupy the seat of government themselves.

Thus praetorianism (or military intervention) occurs when officers more or less overtly threaten to carry out a coup d'etat unless certain demands are met, when they stage an unsuccessful coup, when a coup brings about or prevents the replacement of the government by another group of civilians, and, most important, when the officers themselves take control of the government. In the last case, civilian regimes are transformed into military regimes, even though certain civilian individuals and groups often enjoy a good measure of political influence.

In delimiting the subject of praetorianism it is also necessary to ask whether a military regime is considered to be just that ten or twenty years after the coup, even if it is "civilianized," with the leaders shedding their military uniforms and taking on the title of president or prime minister. The answer is yes if the following conditions are satisfied: the military took power by means of a coup, the highest governmental officials have served (or continue to serve) in the armed forces, and the governors are primarily dependent upon the support of the officer corps for the retention of power. For example, the current Egyptian regime continues to be identified as a

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order to realize material benefits occurred in Sierra Leone. In fact, the "privates' coup" of 1968 replaced a military government with a civilian one. (Cox, pp. 196–203).

military one even though the original takeover occurred in 1952, its two leaders (Nasser and now Sadat) both took the presidential title, and a majority of cabinet ministers are civilians. For Egypt's two presidents were formerly army officers, military officers continue to head the major departments, such as the Defense Ministry and the Foreign Office, and "the regime of Sadat is completely dependent on the military" (Perlmutter, 1974, pp. 112, 116).[3]

This book centers around two sets of questions. The first deals with the attainment of political power. Why is it that some officer corps accept the principle of civilian control over the military while others engage in varying levels of intervention? How do the internal characteristics of the military establishment affect the likelihood of intervention? What factors motivate the overthrow of civilian governments? What aspects within the civilian sphere encourage praetorian actions and provide the opportunity to put them into effect?

The second set of questions deals with the exercise of governmental power. What are the varying levels or degrees of intervention? In what specific ways do the officers restructure the regime and the polity? To what extent do the praetorians adopt a fairly common governing style? How successful are they in legitimizing their power? How do the praetorians regularly handle the crises of national integration? Do military governments usually preserve the socioeconomic status quo or are they more likely to bring about modernizing, progressive changes? What factors affect the duration of military regimes? What kind of legacy do the praetorians leave for their civilian successors?

As indicated by these questions, this study is theoretical insofar as attempts are made to describe and explain *general* patterns of military coups and governments. Yet these generalizations do not utilize abstract concepts. And they stay quite close to the political "ground," to the actual practice of military intervention, using numerous instances to illustrate, refine, and support the hypotheses. This book is thus about both the theory and the practice of military intervention.

The book's broadest "thesis" may be summarized as follows. Various political attitudes, interests, and behaviors are shared by a greater or lesser majority of military officers. In conjunction with certain political factors external to the armed forces, they have a decided impact upon the decision to intervene, the structure of military regimes, the praetorians' governing style, the duration of military regimes, and the policies and performance of military governments. There are civilian politicians, governments, and regimes that share certain features with their military counterparts. Yet the

[3] See the last section of this chapter for a further clarification of the distinction between civilian and military regimes.

differences among civilian politicians, governments, and regimes are significantly greater than those found among their military equivalents.

It is therefore possible to generalize about praetorianism as both a characteristic and a distinctive phenomenon. It is a characteristic phenomenon because many statements can be made that apply to most military officers, governments, and regimes. It is distinctive phenomenon because there are numerous differences between civilian and military governments and regimes.

There are marked variations in the confidence that can be assigned to the generalizations found throughout the book. All of them are thought to be valid, but their plausibility differs according to the persuasiveness of the underlying reasoning as well as the amount and reliability of the supporting evidence. Unfortunately the relatively little systematic research that has been done on praetorianism leaves most of our descriptive and explanatory generalizations with far from sufficient evidence. They are thus to be read as more or less plausible hypotheses, rather than as well-tested valid propositions.

WHY STUDY PRAETORIANISM?

Why study praetorianism? For one thing, it is an inherently interesting, even a fascinating, subject. An inherent interest in praetorianism may, for better or worse, derive from a commonly experienced attraction to force and violence. Soldiers have guns. Although guns are only fired in a small proportion of coups, there is always the possibility that they may be, and they are always in the foreground as forceful threats.

Military coups may also generate considerable interest because rapidly occurring events are usually more compelling than those that are drawn out over months or years. Coups are executed suddenly and quickly. They surprise, titillate, and often come within a hair's-breadth of succeeding.

Then, too, the powerful often provoke more curiosity than the powerless. Chairman Mao was certainly correct when he stated that "power grows out of the barrel of a gun." The ultimate power of the state, as of those who might hope to overthrow it, lies with the men who possess rifles, machine guns, tanks, and planes. Since these weapons are usually in the near-monopolistic hands of the soldiers, they have enormous potential or actual coercive power. A united officer corps is virtually always capable of maintaining a civilian government in office, or taking control itself.

Reasons that are more intellectually respectable, though not necessarily more salient, can readily be given for the study of military intervention. Praetorianism may or may not be inherently interesting; praetorianism in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East is undeniably important. The importance of a particular political phenomenon partly depends upon

the frequency with which it occurs. The study of military intervention in non-Western countries from 1945 to the present is then eminently warranted. In fact, given its frequent occurrence in the past, present, and presumptive future of most of these countries, military intervention constitutes one of the major characteristics of non-Western politics, particularly when contrasted with its near absence among Western countries during the same period.[4]

Among the twenty Latin American countries it is only in Costa Rica and Mexico that the soldiers have not acted as praetorians since 1945. There is a popular saying in Latin America that the highest *military* rank is the presidency—a comment that is borne out by the fact that more than half of the 121 men who served as presidents of their countries between 1940 and 1955 were military officers. Between 1945 and 1976, soldiers carried out successful coups in half of the eighteen Asian states. By 1976 the soldiers had made at least one successful or unsuccessful attempt to seize power in two-thirds of the Middle Eastern and North African states. They established military regimes in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Sudan, Libya, and Algeria. Officers did not intervene in the tropical African countries prior to 1963, since almost all of these states were under colonial control until then. But already by 1966, civilian governments had been overthrown in Togo, Congo/Brazzaville, Zaire, Ghana, Dahomey, the Central African Republic, Upper Volta, and Nigeria. By 1976 coups had occurred in more than half of the African countries, and in that year the military occupied the seat of government in half of them.

Bringing together these and other data, it turns out that the military have intervened in approximately two-thirds of the more than one hundred non-Western states since 1945. In any single recent year they controlled the government in about one-third of these countries, while acting as praetorians behind a façade of civilian control in the other third. It is exaggerating only somewhat to say that "the intervention of the military in the domestic politics [of non-Western states] is the norm; persistent patterns of civil supremacy are the deviant cases that require special explanation" (Janowitz, 1971, p. 306). Clearly, then, this book deals with one of the most common, and thus characteristic, aspects of non-Western politics.

In and of itself, the coup is an important political event. The first military coup has a major impact upon the "rules of the game." Through it the military clearly signals and sharply asserts its "rights" as a political player; the political arena is expanded to include the military as an im-

[4] Only three Western countries have experienced military intervention since 1945: France in 1958, Greece in 1967, and Portugal in 1974, and only in the latter two did the soldiers succeed in taking power. This is why the present study deals solely with the non-Western countries.