

MILITARY GOVERNMENT

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Summary

In this article, the concept of military government and the actual phenomenon of the armed forces playing the leading role in government—often regarded as the traditional preserve of civilians—will be examined. This examination will be commenced by introducing traditional and historical approaches to the study of the military in government and, for practical purposes, positing definitions. As part of the general adumbration of the extant literature, what will be explored are the reasons behind the armed force's seizure of power, the means by which it enters the government's corridors of power (more often than not, by the coup d'état), the aims and objectives of military leaders, and the actual track record of military regimes once installed in power.

To this end a broad number of geographical examples will be cited in order to provide comparison and contrast and determine what kind of states are prone to fall victim to a militarily-led coup d'état. In addition, the reasons for the near inevitable disengagement of the military from government and its return to the barracks will be evinced and this will be supplemented with a comparative exploration of the concept and practice of civilian control in the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Japan—examples of civilian control which will demonstrate the importance of behavioral and legal norms.

It will be concluded that military regimes need not be left-wing or right-wing, but do tend to be brutal, short-term attempts to solve economic and political problems, which civilian governments have failed to solve. Whether or not they actually succeed in addressing these problems is one of the moot points that further research needs to address.

1. Introduction

Temporally, the study of the military's role in government has traditionally been limited to wartime. However, with the rise of the two superpowers after 1945 willing to support enormous peacetime defense budgets and the centrality of the military in both systems of government, the study of the role of the military in peace-time began to gain acceptance as an academic field of study. This is especially so with the rise of a number of Third World nations midwifed by the pivotal role of the military. Thus, only in the 1960s did military government become a recognized area for research. However, examples of military government can be cited even in antiquity. Edward Gibbon's study of the Roman Empire and the role of the Praetorian Guard elucidated that one of the first symptoms and causes of the decline of the Roman Empire was that the emperors were obliged to instrumentalize a number of methods in order to appease the Praetorians and maintain their own position. In this article, we seek to examine the role of the military during peacetime, its motives for intervening in civilian politics, its record as a governor, and the reasons for its disengagement from government. In addition, we shall highlight the maintenance of stable civilian-military relations and the concept of civilian control.

First of all, we need to provide some definitions. Is military government a conceptually useful term in political science? Can we use it to describe a type of government, as we do the terms "communist", "liberal democratic", or "fascist"? What makes military governments worthy of attention? The manner in which military governments are forced to consider how to prolong their rule or whether to cede their rule are, unlike the leaders of other regimes, questions only they face. Moreover, as this article demonstrates, the extent to which civilian regimes will go to limit the power of the military and keep it contained, suggests the singularity of this particular organ of the state. Furthermore, there is a case to be made for the specific study of military government as a phenomenon, which seems to be limited largely to the second half of the twentieth century, and to certain developing parts of the globe.

Broadly speaking, democratic government consists of three organs: the executive, the judiciary and the legislature (see *Democracy*). The police and armed forces are regarded traditionally as occupying a neutral, non-political position. This factor forms one of a number of recognized norms of modern western liberal democracies. Thus, the military has constituted traditionally a very powerful organ of the state and has required institutions to both organize the military itself and to decide upon its use. In the case of military dictatorships these two organizations overlap. In western liberal democracies the government has kept strict civilian control of the military, leading to a stabilized and formalized relationship based on legal or behavioral norms, as we shall see in section six. Defense of a nation-state's boundaries is one of the central tasks of a government. Scholars generally recognize it as possibly the core function of government. The armed forces play a crucial role in both advising the government on suitable policies through a process of dialogue and then implementing the resultant policy. Thus, the military has always played a central role in the organization of the state.

Some scholars regard all forms of government as military in nature because the state maintains the right to utilize all legitimate forms of force. Mao concurred when he

asserted that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun”. As the military plays such a crucial role in the defence of the state, the history and prestige of the nation, it is natural that the military will be a salient organ of the state. Thus, in most countries from the Third World to the deeply embedded political systems of the Western liberal democracies, it is obvious that the military can have a varying degree of influence.

A variety of terms have been utilized to describe the phenomenon of military men taking part in government: “men on horseback” referring to their traditions; “soldiers in mufti” highlighting their civilian image; “iron surgeons” attempting to justify their intervention; “armed bureaucrats” pointing to their similarity with the domineering bureaucracy; and “praetorian soldiers” tracing their historical roots back to the Praetorian Guards of the Roman Empire, established as a personal bodyguard to the Emperor, but which became eventually a political force deciding the future Emperor.

Regardless of semantics, military government appears to be a non-western phenomenon (see *Authoritarian System*). Between 1945 and 1977, more than two-thirds of the countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East experienced some form of military intervention. In his 1968 work, Needler has elucidated the fact that in Latin America alone, there were 22 military coups d'état during the period 1945 to 1954, compared with 16 in the previous decade. In his 1962 book, Finer has calculated that of 15 nations, which came to power during the 1945 to 1955 period, 66.7% have experienced military coups d'état compared with 57.7% of 64 nations created before 1945. However, during the nineteenth century, it appeared to be a European phenomenon, as demonstrated by Napoleon Bonaparte and Nicholas Chauvin. However, with the blossoming of democratic processes in the twentieth century and especially after the Second World War, the phenomenon of military government appears to have shifted to a concern of either developing and/or Third World nations. Since 1945 only a handful of Western states have experienced military intervention: France in 1958, Greece in 1967, Portugal in 1974, Spain in 1981. In his 1966 work, Huntington suggested a clear correlation between poverty and the existence of military government. He has asserted that military coups d'état are more likely to succeed in nations with a per capita GNP of under US\$1000 and that coups d'état only occur in nations with a per capita GNP of under US\$3000. Although Huntington's analysis may seem slightly deterministic, it does appear that developing nations display the social and economic tensions, the lack of political security that encourages a competitive rather than co-operative relationship between the military and civilian cadres.

However, the term “military government” conjures up the more striking image of a Pinochet or a Peron donning military uniform and implementing strong-arm tactics and undemocratic methods to seize and then propagate the rule of the army. A broad definition would include military officers installed in key political positions, martial law, the extra-judicial influence of security forces, control by foreign military forces, etc. This general definition includes nations like South Korea, Iran, and Taiwan, where the military plays an important role due to peculiar security threats but is subservient to the civilian government. This article attempts to address directly this fuzzy area and explore the difference and interplay between the two forms of governance. In his 1990 book, Pinkney states the key point is that the focus should be placed on governments which locate their main power base, not within the electorate or a political party, but within the armed forces. This leads to his basic proposition that military government

implies the wielding of formal executive authority by soldiers altered by a number of provisos including sharing power with civilian elements or constrained by these same elements.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. Hugo J. Dobson is a lecturer in the international relations of Japan in the School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. Previous to this, he was employed as a lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Kent at Canterbury, UK, gaining his PhD from the University of Sheffield in 1998. He has also studied at the Universities of Leeds, London, Tokyo and Tampere, Finland, and has been the recipient of scholarships from the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Toshiba International Foundation. He is the co-author of *Japan's International Relations: Politics, Economics and Security*, Routledge, 2001, and sole author of *Japan and United Nations Peacekeeping: New Pressures, New Responses*, 2003, and *Japan and the G7/8, 1975-2002*, 2004.