

The Coup: Tactics in the Seizure of Power

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particularly *not* those individuals who would seem to have the most to gain from reading its thesis, namely professional intelligence managers in the post-Cold War era. Even so, they could still benefit from at least reading the final chapter on "Threats and Enemies."

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Farcau, Bruce W. *The Coup: Tactics in the Seizure of Power*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994.

Although coups may be losing their status as the most frequently used means to change Third World governments, they continue to be a readily available instrument to military forces dissatisfied with conditions in their societies. This study by Bruce Farcau, a US foreign service officer who was stationed in Bolivia during two of that state's frequent coups, provides a most useful guide to the characteristics of Latin American military forces and the ways in which they plan and execute coups when they conclude that this form of military intervention is required.

Farcau, the author of two political novels, *Crisis* and *Coup!*, under the pen name of Alexander M. Grace, aims this study at the "informed layman" rather than the academic community. Consequently, this is a jargon-free explanation of the tactics of organizing an illegal, high-risk act that has the awesome objective of taking political control of a state. Although he devotes a chapter to a review of the causal theories of coups — all of which he finds deficient except for those that stress the personal ambition and motives of individual officers — Farcau's primary purpose is to explain the dynamics of coup plotting and execution, using case studies to illustrate the general principles of recruiting conspirators, mobilizing necessary resources, establishing targets, and executing the coup.

This book is less of a "how-to-do-it" manual than is Edward Luttwak's *Coup d'Etat — A Practical Handbook*, (London: Allen Lane, 1968) as Farcau emphasizes, but many of the same issues of organization and strategy are covered. A comparison of the two is inevitable. While the general principles discussed by Luttwak, derived from Third World characteristics and examples, are still valid, his shorter book is now quite dated in the data and examples of coups he provides. Farcau's book is a more expansive discussion of coup plotting, based upon his interviews with coup participants and his own first-hand observations. It is, however, quite limited geographically as it is set very much in the context of Latin American culture, economic conditions, and political and military institutions. Except for a brief case study of the failed coup attempt in Spain in 1936 and not very

useful brief discussion of events in Russia in August 1991, Farcau's analysis is limited almost exclusively to the Latin American scene.

In contrast to Luttwak's limited discussion of a government's ability to mobilize its resources to thwart coup attempts, Farcau devotes a chapter to the topic of "Countering the Coup d'Etat." Many of the same types of resources and tactics are available to both sides, but usually the resources are held in much greater abundance by the government. Its intelligence capability is, or certainly should be, much better, and its ability to redeploy military officers to new assignments and locations, to divide and rule, to create new paramilitary forces, etc., are clearly superior. Still, the conspirators' ability to confuse government forces and delay their response time can give even small conspiratorial forces a chance for success. As Farcau and others observe, the best protection against a coup is to establish and maintain an aura of legitimacy in the eyes of the people and to decentralize political power.

After chapters on the organizing and execution of coups, Farcau devotes one chapter to case studies of failed coups and one chapter to case studies of successful coups. While many factors contribute to individual successes and failures, Farcau emphasizes the importance of "the coup experience." He asserts that coup attempts made after an interval of many years are often unsuccessful because of the inexperience of the coup conspirators. However, at least in Latin America where unsuccessful conspirators often survive to try again, the chances of success increase greatly in a subsequent attempt.

While the reestablished Latin American democracies begin to achieve increasing legitimacy and longevity, Farcau is not sanguine about the chances that Latin American coups can be relegated to the past. On the contrary, he predicts that "we will see another wave of coups and coup attempts throughout Latin America in the coming years," (p. 211) with successful ones becoming more common as the military officers who survive learn from their predecessors' mistakes.

Farcau concludes his study by restating his position that an adequate understanding of coups can be achieved only by focusing upon the very personal decision of officers to participate or not to participate in coup attempts. Country specific factors thus become of paramount importance, and any attempt to predict a coup requires that an observer first "get into the guts of the country in question, study the personalities involved, and then study the political, social, and economic milieu in which they function." (p. 205)

The bibliography provided by Farcau includes many works related to Latin America, but it omits numerous studies that examine coup motives and case studies of coups outside Latin America.

Although tighter editing would have benefitted this book, Farcau does achieve his purpose of explaining the distinctive characteristics of Latin American military forces and the way in which they can intervene in the volatile dynamics of Latin American politics. His analysis deserves to reach a much wider audience,

particularly among university students, by being published in a paperback edition in addition to the hardback version.

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Brzoska, Michael, and Frederic S. Pearson. *Arms and Warfare: Escalation, De-escalation and Negotiation*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994.

Arms and Warfare endeavors to assess the effects of arms shipments to war zones on the course and outcome of the conflicts concerned. It does this principally through an extensive set of case studies drawn from wars fought during the past 30 years. In doing so it draws a number of significant and, in some respects, unexpected conclusions.

Most studies of the effects of arms transfers on conflicts are concerned with the build-up of armaments before the conflicts break out, and there is often an assumption that these processes are instrumental in creating the conditions for war. This book, by contrast, is concerned with the impact of arms transfers *after* the outbreak of war. Furthermore, the conflicts selected are among those which are less clearly affected by the East-West divide, though in almost all cases there is some impact.

Eleven wars are examined, ranging from the Indo-Pakistan conflicts of 1965 and 1971 through to the major Middle East wars of the 1970s and 1980s. The Falklands War is treated in some depth, as is the earlier Ogaden War, and there is a brief but informative section on the Tanzanian intervention in Uganda in 1978-79. One of the most significant conflicts covered is perhaps the least-well-known, the bitter war for the control of Western Sahara, starting in 1976 and still not properly resolved.

The book is impressive in content and effectively analytical. The authors' knowledge and understanding of the role of arms transfers in the development and conclusion of wars stems partly from an almost encyclopedic coverage of the process of arms transfers and a series of detailed analyses of their purpose.

In the case of the Falklands War, the Argentine re-armament program, ironically relying partly on British supplies, was still in its early stages when the conflict developed. Yet the process of the arms build-up, even if incomplete, seems to have given the junta an added belief in its chances of success. As the war progressed, the coalition developed by Britain to block further transfers had, at the very least, a psychological impact on the junta, though no substantial military effect.