Operation "Just Missed": Lessons From Failed Coup Attempts

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As an irregular, illegitimate operation, the coup d'etat is the nonroutine event par excellence.
—Donald L. Horowitz[1]

Over the past several decades, a number of studies have examined the primary method of governmental change and succession in Third World countries, the coup d'etat. In individual cases and large scale quantitative studies researchers have examined the causes, justifications, processes, and consequences of successful coups. While a few coups have been executed by nonmilitary groups, the large majority have been undertaken by military forces, eagerly or reluctantly claiming that conditions necessitated such dramatic steps. Although the number of coup attempts may be diminishing now that new, popularly elected governments in South America and Sub-Saharan Africa struggle to take root, weak governments that are unable to solve their countries' problems remain potential targets of takeover attempts.

Not surprisingly, most studies of coups have focused on those that have been successful, the ones that have brought in new leaders to replace those who were overthrown and subsequently killed, exiled, or imprisoned. Many studies have attempted to explain *why* coups have occurred, whether for the protection and advancement of the corporate interests of the military, or for various socioeconomic or political reasons. Other studies have examined the *consequences* of successful coups, such as the composition and policies of the new regimes. In contrast, failed coup

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attempts are rarely accorded much attention; their leaders and supporters are usually quickly relegated to the dustbins of history, their identity and fate being remembered for a shorter time even than failed vice-presidential candidates in American presidential elections.

Failed coup attempts are, nevertheless, important events, both because they are numerous and because they provide insights into the dynamics of (mainly) Third World politics. This article examines some of the problems associated with the study of failed coups, the reasons for failure, the consequences for those who were prepared to take the very high risks associated with coups, and the political impact that even failed coups have had.

Successful and Failed Coups

A coup d'etat is commonly defined as a speedily executed, extralegal takeover of a government by a conspiratorial group, usually consisting of army officers, that uses force or the threat of force to remove the government and assume power for itself. This standard definition would seem to make it rather easy to categorize coup attempts as successful or unsuccessful; officers—or nonmilitary conspirators—either eject the governors from their seats of power within a short period of time, or they fail to do so. Within about 48 hours of the first overt signs of a coup, either the conspirators or head of state and his entourage are in prison, dead, or are being sent off into exile.

However, an examination of coups indicates that this neat distinction does not easily accommodate two types of cases, those in which a conspiratorial group manages to overthrow a government and establish itself for a short period of several weeks or months before it is itself replaced, or those in which some of the main objectives of the coup conspirators are achieved even though the conspirators themselves are unable to take control of the government. The successive "successful" coups in Argentina in September and November 1955, or in Ethiopia in September and November 1974, are examples of the problem of classifying the relatively short-lived first instance as successful or unsuccessful. In both states, the original conspiratorial group split into factions, with the faction first in control soon replaced by a successor.

In the second case, what seems at first to be a clear example of a failed coup may be less certain when, after a period of time, it is evident that the attempt was a key element in producing a significant change in a political system. Thus, the coup attempt in the Soviet Union in August

1991 failed in bringing military officers into the presidential palace, but it did play an important role in the rapid collapse of the authority of President Gorbachev and his resignation at the end of the year. Nevertheless, the fall of Gorbachev was only a part of what the coup conspirators wanted, and it did not occur until their march to the presidential palaces became instead their march to prison.

William Thompson once asserted that for a coup to be designated as successful, the post-coup ruling group must survive "for at least a week," a rather minimal time period for winners to hold high the trophy of victory, yet usually a time sufficient to ensure the permanent removal of the overthrown government. Thompson also states that a distinction must be made between plots that never come to the point of overt action, and unsuccessful coups, which "must involve a recorded and recognizable physical attempt to seize control."[2] This distinction too, while generally useful, may nevertheless categorize a serious, well-developed plan that was suppressed just before action began as "only a plot," while a superficial, shotgun attempt by a few, poorly organized officers who fired a few shots in the air is recorded as an unsuccessful coup. Thus, the carefully considered coup planned in 1962 by elements of the Sri Lankan military, police, and reserve forces that was uncovered by the government just a few hours before it was to begin would be designated as only a plot; in contrast, the takeover of a radio station for a short time by a few poorly organized troops in Zambia in June 1990 would be designated as a failed coup, even though it seems never to have endangered the government as did the aborted coup in Sri Lanka.

Thus, the distinction between successful and failed coups in some cases may be less clear-cut than is commonly acknowledged. What appears to be an unsuccessful coup attempt may have ripple effects throughout the political system that rival those produced by a successful one. In most cases, however, the results of the initial clash of conspiratorial and government forces are quite definitive. Either the conspirators or their designated individuals assume the highest state offices and then maintain control of the political system for several months or more, or they fail to achieve those primary goals and reap only the brutal rewards of failure.

Frequency of Failed Coups

While determining the number of successful military coups is quite easy when a new set of military officers replaces the deposed civilian or military leaders, it is impossible to specify with accuracy the number of

unsuccessful coup attempts. On the one hand, there are undoubtedly many more or less vague plans considered by some military officers that never develop to the stage of overt action, such plans failing for a variety of reasons to command sufficient support to enable the conspirators to act. On the other hand, a government may announce the "discovery" of a conspiratorial group that is allegedly plotting a coup, even if the claim is deliberately contrived nonsense, put forward to serve the regime's purpose of initiating emergency rule, suppressing a particular group, or justifying other actions sought by the regime. A coup attempt consequently "fails" even when it is nonexistent. Was the government of Tunisia, for example, being truthful when it announced in May 1991, that it had arrested nearly 300 Muslim militants, including about 100 military officers and men, because they were planning to overthrow the government? Even if a government is acting in good faith, it may be functioning in a crisis situation in which there is a high degree of uncertainty as to the objectives and strategies of opposition groups, and it may make charges that are later found to be without merit.

But just as a government may announce the discovery of a coup plot that in fact does not exist, it may also decide not to announce the uncovering of an actual plot, however well-developed and at whatever point of execution it may be. A government may not wish to acknowledge such a level of opposition to itself, a revelation that might encourage others to consider a coup attempt because of the evidence of other centers of opposition. Further, since every government wants to give the impression that it is stable and legitimate, acknowledging the existence of a coup attempt is embarrassing in the international arena. Thus, the number of serious coup attempts is most likely to be considerably higher than either those reported by governments or discovered by the media.

Even on the basis of available information, the high risk taken by coup conspirators is indicated by the failure rate found in several surveys. In one survey of attempted coups throughout the world from 1945 to 1978, George Schott identified 130 unsuccessful and 151 successful attempts.[3] A more recent survey of 29 African states from 1955 to 1985 found 47 unsuccessful and 50 successful coup attempts.[4] As the data in Table 1 show, there were 12 successful and 26 unsuccessful coup attempts during 1990, 1991, and 1992; in addition, there were reports of other plots and arrests of alleged coup conspirators whose plans were disrupted before their coups were actually initiated.

Whatever the precise figures may be on a regional or global basis, these data clearly indicate that overthrowing governments is not easily accomplished. Even when a government may appear to be weak, ineffec-

Table 1

Attempted Coups, 1990–1992

State	Date	Results
Ciskei	March, 1990	Successful
Afghanistan	March, 1990	Failed
Nigeria	April, 1990	Failed
Sudan	April, 1990	Failed
Ethiopia	May, 1990	Failed
Madagascar	May, 1990	Failed
Cambodia	June, 1990	Failed
Zambia	June, 1990	Failed
Trinidad & Tobago	July, 1990	Failed
Panama	October, 1990	Failed
Philippines	October, 1990	Failed
Transkei	November, 1990	Failed
Panama	December, 1990	Failed
Chad	December, 1990	Successful
Argentina	December, 1990	Failed
Suriname	December, 1990	Successful
Somalia	January, 1991	Successful
Haiti	January, 1991	Failed
Ciskei	February, 1991	Failed
Thailand	February, 1991	Successful
Mali	March, 1991	Successful
Lesotho	May, 1991	Successful
USSR	August, 1991	Failed
Haiti	September, 1991	Successful
Romania	September, 1991	Failed
Togo	November, 1991	Failed
Algeria	January, 1992	Successful
Zaire	January, 1992	Failed
Venezuela	February, 1992	Failed
Afghanistan	April, 1992	Successful
Peru	April, 1992	Successful
Sierra Leone	May, 1992	Successful
Tajikistan	May, 1992	Failed
Georgia	June, 1992	Failed
Iraq	June, 1992	Failed
Madagascar	July, 1992	Failed
Peru	November, 1992	Failed
Venezuela	November, 1992	Failed

Sources: *Los Angeles Times; New York Times; Washington Post; Keesing's Record of World Events; Facts on File Yearbook*

tive, or under great stress, its residual strength is usually vastly superior to that of the conspiratorial group attempting to overthrow it. To be successful, the conspiratorial group must be able to maximize the elements of surprise and speed in its operations in order to offset the larger and better

equipped forces of the government, both military and bureaucratic. The elements of surprise and speed are particularly important—but even more difficult to achieve—in a situation in which rumors of a possible coup attempt have put a government in a high state of alert.

Why Coups Fail

In his how-to-do-it manual, *Coup d'Etat,* Edward Luttwak[3] discusses the many factors of organization, strategy, and tactics that must be taken into account in planning and executing a coup. Because the forces of a conspiratorial group are so much smaller than those available to the government, a primary objective of the conspirators is that of neutralizing as many of the military, bureaucratic, and other political forces of the state as possible. Isolating the government's military units, cutting their communication linkages, disrupting the chain of command, creating uncertainty about how to proceed, delaying the response time of the government's military and bureaucratic forces, and persuading social and political groups in society to stand aside and refuse to support the government are all key objectives. But achieving so many objectives in a short period of time is most challenging; there are many points along the way in the planning and execution of a coup for things to go wrong—fatally so. The conspirators' group may have a Judas in its ranks, a communication may accidentally be intercepted by government forces, a key unit may fail to reach its assigned station when required, or the weather may turn so miserable at a critical juncture that loyal forces have time to organize an effective resistance to the coup attempt.

A survey of failed coups indicates how varied the reasons seem to have been.[5] "Seem to have been" is a necessary qualifying phrase because in-depth studies are usually impossible. Government officials who have nipped a coup attempt in its early stages seldom if ever fully reveal what enabled them to penetrate the conspiratorial group or disrupt its plans, because they do not want to expose their network of informers and operational methods to other potential conspiratorial groups. Nor are they likely to admit that it was mainly good luck that enabled them to stop the coup attempt from developing further. On the other hand, members of the conspiratorial group may be in no position to discuss the reasons for their failure because they are dead or in prison or else reluctant to talk in specifics for fear of endangering as yet unidentified supporters of the conspiracy. Finally, media reporters are rarely on the scene, at least during the initial phases of the operation. Unlike the coverage that can be

scheduled for election campaigns and voting day activities, coups, as extralegal, surprise events, are difficult to anticipate with accuracy.

For these reasons, information about a coup is usually fragmentary and difficult to document, as both the government and the conspirators attempt to turn the news flow to their own advantage, with little independent verification possible. The lingering question of whether President Salvador Allende Gossens of Chile was killed in action or committed suicide during the successful coup that toppled him in 1973 is an example of the difficulty of establishing the facts.[6] Given the problems of media reporting, the case made, by the targeted government, however inaccurately, and the lack of information from members of the conspiratorial group, explanations for coup failures should always be treated with caution.

Among the possible explanations are those that show that the conspirators operated from a fundamentally flawed reading of the support they could mobilize within society and the military. In both Argentina in 1990 and the USSR in 1991, the conspirators failed to understand how much military and civilian attitudes had changed over the years about, respectively, the military's role in Argentina, and the acceptance of democracy in the USSR.[7] As a result of the misreading, anticipated support for the coups did not appear, and both were crushed.

Sometimes the reason for failure lies more in the immediate circumstances of the coup itself, that is, in the ebb and flow in the battle for control. Despite apparent good planning by the conspirators in some instances, government forces eventually prove to be superior and, in the struggle, initial successes of the conspirators in capturing key facilities and in neutralizing key military and political elements of the government are reversed. The attempted coup in Ethiopia in May 1989 illustrates such a failure of an apparently large-scale, well-organized attempt against a government under great stress. Senior military officers led several thousand troops in the seizure of facilities in Addis Ababa and Asmara, timing their uprising to take advantage of the absence of President Mengistu Haile Mariam, who was on a diplomatic visit to East Germany. However, President Mengistu hurriedly returned to Ethiopia, rallied loyal forces, and managed to overwhelm the conspirators after fierce fighting in which hundreds of soldiers were reportedly killed and at least six rebel officers were executed or committed suicide.[8]

In Ethiopia, suppression of the coup attempt was accomplished by loyal government forces without direct outside aid. In other cases, governments have had to call upon allies for the military support needed to defeat a large-scale coup attempt. In the most serious of the attempts to topple the government of Philippine President Corazon Aquino in late

1989, for example, several thousand well-armed army rangers and other troops seized a number of air force bases and television stations, occupied most of Manila's financial district, forced hundreds of hotel guests to remain in their hotels in downtown Manila where the fighting raged, and attacked the presidential palace. As in Ethiopia, the conspirators' ability to engage in pitched battles over several days indicates the sophistication of their effort and the high level of military support it enjoyed. In this case, U.S. military support was critical to President Aquino's survival, and it was only with the aid of American warplanes, which she reluctantly accepted, that the rebellion was finally crushed after seven days of intense fighting.[9]

Of course, not all coup attempts are well-planned or executed. In Trinidad, Arthur Robinson's unpopular but constitutionally elected government was caught off guard in 1990 by a small group of rebels, mostly 16 to 27 years old, in a bizarre coup attempt. Although initially successful in taking over the Parliament building, capturing the prime minister, and extracting his resignation and an amnesty for the rebels, they naively released the wounded prime minister so he could seek medical treatment. That was a fatal mistake: the "overthrown" government promptly reversed the amnesty agreement, and, supported by the military, which had remained loyal, overwhelmed the lightly armed and inexperienced rebels and sent them off to jail.[10]

Other coup attempts have also been fatally flawed, even though they involved substantially more participants than in Trinidad. In Kenya, for example, a group of lower-ranking air force officers led a coup attempt in August 1982 that scored some initial successes. The officers took control of a major air base, captured the national radio studio, and induced a large number of university students to join in the revolt. But they had failed to gain the army's support before initiating the coup, and without the support of that branch of the military most essential for coup attempts because of its weapons types, its transportation systems, and the location of its bases, the conspirators were soon in trouble. Without tanks, armor, or heavy arms to take and hold key installations, the air force officers' forces were quite easily crushed by the superior power of the loyal army. The inadequacy of the air force officers' planning was also shown by their failure to attack the transmitting facilities of the radio station in addition to the studios, where someone loyal to the government soon pulled the plug and stopped all transmitting. Thus, attempts to justify the coup and rally citizens to support overthrowing the government, at least in the capital city of Nairobi, quickly ended, despite the many signs of growing unrest in Kenyan society that suggested the possibility of broad based popular support for a coup.[11]

Broad-based popular support for a change in government also existed in Nigeria in April 1990, but conspirators there again made a fundamental mistake to add to some tactical ones. In this case, their leader called not only for the removal of corrupt and arrogant politicians, a commonplace justification for coups, but also audaciously called for the dismemberment of Nigeria by the removal of five northern states from the federation. If implemented, this proposal would have led to massive movements of persons from the northern states to the southern—and vice-versa—and, most likely, to a civil war, and it so stunned the population that support for the coup quickly vanished. The proposal also alienated military officers who might have supported a coup aimed at a corrupt government, but would not join a movement proposing such a radical solution to Nigeria's problems.[12]

Because military forces available to the conspiratorial group are usually limited in number, it is essential that those forces move with speed and precision to their assigned targets. The rank and file of those forces may also need to be misled by their officers about the purpose of their "emergency" actions, since to tell them the truth might result in a refusal to obey. The attempted coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991 provides a striking example of the failure of a key unit to obey a command to participate in a coup attempt. Although the coup leaders had isolated and neutralized President Gorbachev in his Crimean villa and appeared to be moving rapidly to take control of key governmental buildings in Moscow, an elite KGB commando unit's refusal to storm the Parliament building was a significant element in the eventual collapse of the coup attempt. Other units then also refused attack orders, and the military command structure rapidly broke down. Clearly, the commando unit had a better understanding of the fundamental changes occurring in Russian society than did the coup conspirators. Although they could undoubtedly have seized Parliament, their leaders believed that civil war would have followed, because the growing reform movement would not accept the return to right-wing authoritarianism that coup leaders thought could be and needed to be reimposed.[13]

As extralegal efforts to secure political power, coups are always potentially violent operations, with no quarter given by either side. Thus, their leaders must be prepared to be ruthless, because any leniency shown to government leaders may backfire by allowing the government to regroup successfully and repulse the coup attempt. Coup leaders, of course, must calculate how their violent acts will later be perceived by their own citizens and by the international community, but the overriding need during the coup itself is to take control of the government. Having already crossed

the line of legal dissent and opposition to the government, coup leaders are inclined to take whatever actions are necessary to ensure immediate success.

The ruthlessness of coup leaders such as Samuel Doe in Liberia in 1980 and Blaise Compaore in Burkina Faso in 1987 in the execution of the presidents of their countries[14] stands in sharp contrast to those officers who captured and held Manuel Antonio Noriega in Panama during the coup attempt in October 1989. Although they could have killed Noriega or at least taken him to a secure place, his captors hesitated, tried to persuade him to surrender power, and then inadvertently let him use the telephone. His phone call quickly led to the arrival of loyal forces, the collapse of the coup attempt, and the execution, shortly thereafter, of about a hundred members of the coup forces by his order.[15] The execution of those officers may have secured Noriega's position for a time, but it also clearly raised the level of hostility to his regime and ultimately led to his arrest by American forces early in 1990.

Some of the most interesting cases of failed coup attempts involve what must be labeled "bad luck," because, despite apparent sound planning, adequate forces, and public support, something happens to interrupt the delicate operation and turn it into disaster. The attempted coup in Venezuela in February 1992 is an example. Economic conditions in the country had deteriorated, corruption was rampant, and in one opinion poll taken in January, 87 percent of the respondents voiced little or no confidence in the president. Venezuela had been a functioning democracy for 34 years, but rumors of a possible coup had circulated for months, not unrealistically, as it turned out. Twelve army battalions, constituting about 10 per cent of the nation's military forces and including a parachute battalion, were involved in the complex plot, which was launched simultaneously in the capital and three other cities at midnight on February 4.

The plan was to assassinate the president, Carlos Andres Perez, after he left the airplane that was bringing him back from a series of European meetings. The plane was to have landed in Caracas' downtown airstrip, but running a little late, it was already dark when the plane arrived at Caracas. The downtown airstrip did not have landing lights, so the president's plane was diverted to the capital's international airport 30 miles away, a diversion that saved the president from assassination. Alerted by now to the developing threat, Perez rushed from the airport to the presidential palace, arriving just before rebel forces attacked with an armored personnel carrier, driving it up the steps of the palace and smashing the front door. The president, hidden under a raincoat, fled from the palace through a secret tunnel and escaped to presidential offices across

town. From there, he went to a television studio and made a pre-dawn appeal for support. With the aid of fighter planes, loyal forces regained control of the capital, suppressed the coup attempt, and arrested over a thousand military officers and men. The bad weather over the Atlantic ocean had apparently saved the president's life.[16]

Poor tactics, sometimes of a most elementary nature, have also doomed coups. An attempt in Laos in 1973, for example, went astray despite the fact that about 400 rebels were recruited to the effort. The conspirators were able to take over an airport and carry out a few attacks, and a radio station was seized. However, the conspirators failed to capture the transmitter, and loyal forces soon disabled it, cutting the conspirators off the air. Following that major failure, the rebels apparently became preoccupied with the distribution of blue and white scarves symbolizing support of the coup to all who would accept them, rather than with securing strategic points in the capital. The early morning marketplace was typically, crowded, and by the time the rebels attempted to move toward the strategic political facilities, the rush-hour traffic so tied them up that the government forces were able to regroup and crush them.[17]

The Price of Failure

Coup conspirators who fail to gain control of the state face the full wrath of the political leaders they attempted to overthrow, and rarely is that wrath tempered by mercy. They rank as traitors, and the punishment for their extralegal acts is usually swift and harsh. Even when the conspirators manage to escape to another state, their exile, away from family and associates, with their hated opponents still in control, is a heavy penalty for failure. Few conspirators, however, are fortunate enough to escape to another state or to escape punishment altogether, as the 24 conspirators in the 1962 Sri Lanka coup attempt were able to do.[18]

The very nature of the coup setting makes escape difficult. The number of leading conspirators is small, the action is concentrated in the capital city, and the struggle is usually limited to a matter of hours. The "window of opportunity" to escape from a failing coup attempt is usually short, and once government forces regain control of the airports and seal the borders, the only escape avenue is underground and eventually across the border. But few friends are willing to incur the risk of giving shelter to conspirators being sought by an angry government, and most are eventually rounded up.

The number of persons killed and wounded in coup attempts varies

widely. Some coups are successfully completed with no loss of life, but unsuccessful attempts that reach the point of overt action usually involve serious injury and loss of life. Conspirators must be willing to risk high violence levels to achieve their objectives, and government forces willingly use whatever force is seen as necessary to suppress the coup and then punish the perpetrators for their deeds, thus sending a powerful signal to future coup planners.

The available evidence indicates that coup attempts can be violent, but it is likely to be incomplete and distorted because governments may deliberately provide only partial information about the fate of the conspirators and the number of nonparticipant casualties. Civilians may become casualties during the coup attempt, along with the conspirators' military forces and the government. In the fighting that took place in Venezuela in the November 1992 coup attempt, over 500 persons were killed, including about 200 men in a prison uprising encouraged by the coup leaders.[19] Reports of more than 500 deaths circulated in Kenya following the 1982 coup attempt, while the December 1989 coup attempt in the Philippines resulted in the death of about 100 persons.[20]

Intense hatreds generated and expressed during coup attempts can also lead to wanton acts of indiscriminate killing, even as the coup attempt is failing. In Ethiopia, the 1960 coup attempt, in which over 2,000 persons were killed, ended as the two coup leaders, in a final act of desperation, machine-gunned 15 government officials being held in the palace, after which one leader committed suicide and another was captured, tried, and hanged.[21] In other cases, as in Bangladesh in 1975, members of the president's family, including young children, were deliberately killed,[22] and the level of violence enveloped and destroyed many bystanders as well as military and government officials.

The major participants captured after an abortive coup are often promptly executed, with or without the formality of a trial. The execution of about 100 military officers and men ordered by Manuel Noriega in 1989 was followed shortly by the execution of at least 69 officers in Nigeria after the failed coup in 1990.[23] Also in 1990, 28 officers, including three retired generals, were executed in the Sudan the day after a failed coup attempt.[24] While the number of persons tortured and executed for participation in failed plots and coups is not accurately known, the figures on political executions compiled by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International suggest that hundreds of persons suffer every year because of alleged or real participation in plots and coups.[25]

The costs of failure may be much broader than the punishments imposed on specific individuals. In the case of the failed coup attempt in

Kenya in 1982, not only were about 650 individuals convicted of mutiny but the Air Force of about two thousand persons was itself disbanded,[26] to be recreated later after a thorough purging of suspected disloyal persons. The failed coup in Venezuela in 1992 also resulted in a large-scale reorganization of the military, as the government reacted to the fact that 12 army battalions had participated in the coup attempt.[27]

Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this general overview of failed coups? First, that the simple dichotomous categorization of coups as "successful" and "failed" is too rigid and fails to account for the dynamic political process of which coups may be a part. Even though the sharply contested military struggle of a coup may be compressed into a few hours or several days and the conspirators may more or less formally surrender, often to be executed later, the broader consequences of the failed coup may continue to be felt for a much longer period. Some coups are clearly partially successful in achieving some of the results desired by the conspirators. Even those that seem to be complete failures may result in some benefits from the government, as in Zambia in 1990, where President Kenneth Kaunda agreed to free about 1,000 political prisoners and later agree to multi-party elections.[28] What is needed is a better way to evaluate the impact of "failed" coups on the mainstream of the political life of societies.

Second, among the cases of reported coup attempts, the proportion of unsuccessful attempts may be increasing. Further investigation is needed to determine the reasons for the apparent trend: are governments becoming more adept at intercepting and exposing coup plots through better intelligence, or are more coups being attempted by officers who are woefully ill-prepared to lead them? Is the success of some governments in suppressing terrorism of various types being replicated in the area of coups?

Third, the large number of coups that fail to achieve the main goal of overthrowing a government indicates how difficult it is to plot and execute a coup and then remain in power, despite the fact that when conditions are favorable, only a very small military force is actually needed to achieve initial success. To put it another way, the evidence shows how many things can go wrong in plotting and executing a coup, in which so little time is available to react to unforeseen conditions and so few reserves are available to draw upon when reinforcements are required. Additional de-

tailed case studies of what went wrong for the conspirators and what went right for the threatened government are needed to understand better the reasons for the high rate of failure of attempted coups.

Fourth, the evidence indicates that the cost of failure varies widely: in some cases it is limited to the punishment of a few conspirators, but in others the failed coup has a broad impact upon the society and its government, as noted in the case of the failed coups in the former Soviet Union in 1991 and in Kenya in 1982. Yet the cost of failed coups needs to be more completely compiled and evaluated, not only with respect to specific individuals, whose lives and careers are at stake, but also to the broader psychological and political costs of failures of major coup attempts such as the widely supported ones in Venezuela in 1992. More in-depth case studies of attempted coups are needed to understand the impact of this still popular form of attempts to achieve political change.

Notes

1. Donald L. Horowitz, *Coup Theories and Officers' Motives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 14–15.

2. William Thompson, *The Grievances of Military Coup-Makers* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Sage Professional Papers in Comparative Politics, Series No. 01-047 (1973), 53.

3. Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 195–207.

4. Tormod K. Lunde, "Modernization and Political Instability: Coups d'Etat in Africa, 1955–85," *Acta Sociologica* 34, 1 (1991): 13–32. Another survey of Sub-Saharan African states from 1960 to 1982 identified 52 coups, 56 attempted coups, and 102 plots. See Thomas H. Johnson, Robert O. Slater and Pat McGowan, "Explaining African Military Coups d'Etat, 1960–1982," *American Political Science Review* 78, 3 (September 1984): 622–40.

5. See, for example, Kathleen M. Collihan and Constantine P. Danopoulos, "Coup d'Etat Attempt in Trinidad: Its Causes and Failure," *Armed Forces and Society* 19, 3 (Spring 1993): 435–450; Jean-Paul Barbiche, "The Attempted Coup in Trinidad and Tobago: The Islam in the West Indies," *Plural Societies* 20, 3 (December 1990): 51–5; Kate Currie and Larry Ray, "The Pambana of August 1—Kenya's Abortive Coup," *Political Quarterly* 57, 1 (January-March 1986): 47–59; Julius O. Ihonvbere, "A Critical Evaluation of the Failed 1990 Coup in Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, 4 (December 1991): 601–26; Habibul Haque Khondker, "Bangladesh: Anatomy of an Unsuccessful Military Coup," *Armed Forces and Society* 13, 1 (Fall 1986): 125–43; and Stephen M. Meyer, "How the Threat (and the Coup) Collapsed: The Politicization of the Soviet Military," *International Security* 16, 3 (Winter 1991–92): 5–38.

6. The differing versions of Allende's death are evaluated by Nathaniel Davis, who concludes that suicide was the most likely cause of death. See Chapter 11, "Assassination or Suicide?" in *The Last Two Years of Salvador Allende* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).
7. On the changed situation in Argentina, see *The Washington Post,* December 4, 1990, and on the USSR, see *The New York Times,* August 23, 1991.
8. This account is taken from the *Los Angeles Times,* May 17–19, 1989.
9. See the accounts of the coup attempt in the *Los Angeles Times,* December 1–8, 1989.
10. Collihan and Danopoulos, "Coup Attempt in Trinidad."
11. Currie and Ray, "Kenya's Abortive Coup," 51–2.
12. Ihonvbere, "Failed 1990 Coup," 616–18.
13. *The Washington Post,* August 23, 1991.
14. Doe's execution is described in *The New York Times,* April 13, 1980, and Campaore's in *The New York Times,* October 17, 1987.
15. See *The New York Times,* October 4–11, 1989.
16. See *The New York Times,* February 5–6, 1992.
17. See Steven R. David, *Defending Third World Regimes from Coups d'Etat* (New York: University Press of America, 1985) for a series of case studies of coup attempts, including this one on Laos, 46–51.
18. Horowitz, *Coup Theories,* 224–5.
19. *The New York Times,* December 6, 1992.
20. The data on Kenya is from *The Washington Post,* August 9, 1982; on the Philippines, from the *Los Angeles Times,* December 10, 1989.
21. David, *Defending Regimes,* 25–33.
22. Khondker, "Bangladesh," 131–2.
23. Ihonvbere, "Failed 1990 Coup," 602.
24. *The New York Times,* April 25, 1990.
25. See the annual reports of Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report* (New York: Amnesty International USA), and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (New York, Freedom House).
26. *The New York Times,* August 22, 1982.
27. *The New York Times,* February 11, 1992.
28. *The New York Times,* July 26 and September 28, 1990.