

The Facts Dictate

Latin Military Coups Abound No Matter What

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MEXICO CITY — Dictatorial governments in Latin America are a fact of life that won't be changed by

Uncle Sam's attitude for or against them. And democracy, where it may exist in Latin America, is often a far cry from representative government as it is known in the United States.

For those reasons, the current debate in Washington over future U.S. policy toward Latin American dictatorships is causing many a raised eyebrow in this part of the world, denoting either amusement or bewilderment.

The debate appears to center on whether to continue the Kennedy policy of breaking off relations with the newly emergent dictatorships until they pledge themselves to restore so-called democratic rule at a time within the foreseeable future or whether to play each case by ear.

At present, there are seven outright dictatorial regimes in Latin America—in Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba. The United States maintains relations with all of them except Cuba.

Under the Kennedy doctrine, Uncle Sam severed or suspended diplomatic ties not only with the new rulers of

Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic but also with the military junta that ran Peru for a year and with the government of Jose Maria Guido, installed by the military in Argentina.



EVERY SUSPENSION or break was widely hailed at the time by Latin Americans genuinely concerned with the promotion of democratic institutions. But in each and every instance relations were eventually resumed, along with financial aid, and those who had praised the Kennedy policy felt themselves badly let down.

In fact, by the time the last of the military coups was staged in Honduras, most Latin Americans couldn't care less about the temporary break in United States-Honduran relations. They knew in advance that the military overlords would agree to a gradual restoration of democratic rights and win recognition from Washington.

In favor of the Kennedy doctrine, it has been argued that if Uncle Sam hadn't wrung such a pledge of free elections from the various dictatorships they might well have sought to perpetuate themselves in power indefinitely.

In support of this line is the fact that free elections were permitted in Peru and Argentina and those two countries are now back under civilian rule. The same has been promised in the other



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"Manana, señor, manana . . . Right now I'm busy toppling the government that toppled me yesterday!"

countries where constitutional regimes were overthrown after the late President John F. Kennedy took office.

(The Kennedy policy didn't apply to Paraguay, where the present dictatorship existed before he became president nor in Haiti where the same condition prevailed, and it was Haiti that broke relations with the United States. It was former President Dwight D. Eisenhower who severed United States ties with Communist Cuba.)

ONE OF THE strong arguments against the Kennedy doctrine is that it doesn't in itself prevent military coups, as the evidence clearly shows. Another argument is based on the awkward position of the United States if the pledges aren't fulfilled on time. Does that mean that Uncle Sam will then automatically again suspend relations and dollar help—thus undergoing more loss of face and accusations of intervening in the internal affairs of the affected country?

In all of Latin America today there are perhaps less

than half a dozen governments actively concerned over the existence of military seizures of power in other countries.

Tiny Costa Rica, one of the few genuine democracies in Latin America, is the most vociferous opponent of military rule and its concern is generally shared by Venezuela, Colombia and Uruguay.

In Mexico, where the threat of military intervention is nonexistent, the government adheres to a policy of live and let live, so far as other countries are concerned. Under the Estrada Doctrine, named after the Minister of Foreign Relations who evolved it many years ago, Mexico maintains diplomatic relations with any government that is able to maintain control of the country over which it rules—whether the government is a dictatorship or not.

Mexico does not use the word "recognition" because it feels it has a patronizing ring and represents a form of interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

In most Latin American na-

tions today it is the military that giveth and the military that taketh away. No one knows it better than the Latins themselves and, while they may not approve of the situation, they accept it. They also know that all military regimes are not evil in themselves, since they vary considerably in their makeup, goals and treatment of the populace.

Certainly if the military were to take over in Brazil to prevent a Communist-backed leftist dictatorship by President Joao Goulart, it would seem in the best interests of the United States to recognize the new government immediately.

The same would be true if the Chilean armed forces were to act to avert the installation of a pro-Communist government.

Simply to withhold recognition from military regimes because they represent an unconstitutional seizure of authority does not invariably guarantee that either the best interests of the country concerned or of the United States will be served.