

The Latin Americans Teach the Greeks

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Latin America's armed forces may be backward in many respects, but they have developed a technique that Greece's military junta has understood - how to insure the restoration of US military aid after a coup, without actually giving up power.

The technique worked well in Argentina, where democratically elected governments were ousted by the armed forces in 1962 and 1966, despite Washington's threats to withdraw its assistance. Late in March 1962, the Argentine military decided that President Arturo Frondizi had to go. Frondizi, who had survived nearly three-dozen attempts to overthrow him, was finally dumped for making the mistake of allowing the Peronists to take part in - and win - congressional and gubernatorial elections. US diplomats were instructed to spare no effort in trying to head off the coup, warning the military that such action would be in conflict with the Alliance for Progress. This had no effect whatsoever. Consideration was given to withholding recognition and cutting off aid, but Washington was later persuaded there was no interruption to the constitutional process since Jose Maria Guido, the Senate president and Frondizi's legitimate successor, who became chief executive.

Nobody was gauche enough to point out that Guido was a virtual prisoner in the pink Casa Rosada and a puppet of whatever military faction was in control.

The next test came three months later in Peru, where the military opposed the election of Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, the grand old man of Latin American revolution,

to the presidency. When Haya won a plurality and the armed forces appeared ready to move, Senator Humphrey of Minnesota cautioned that such a step would mean the end of US aid. Peruvian military leaders were unimpressed. A military junta took over. This time, the reaction from Washington was prompt. President Kennedy suspended diplomatic relations, halted military assistance and sat back to see what would happen. Most of the Latin nations quickly recognized the new Peruvian government. Under pressure from US business interests in Peru and from the Peruvians themselves - two-thirds of whom had supported presidential candidates other than Haya - Washington recognized the junta a month later and restored aid. (As in Argentina, there was a promise to hold elections later.)

The formula for dealing with protests from Washington is simple - rationalize the coup by charges of communist infiltration and gross mismanagement; follow this with promises of free elections and the restoration of constitutional procedures within a "reasonable" time. It worked in Argentina again in 1966 - although last year President Juan Carlos Ongania's dictatorship didn't even condescend to promise future elections in exchange for recognition - and in Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Brazil. Three weeks after Kennedy's assassination, President Johnson's first move in the hemisphere was to restore military and economic assistance to the Honduran and Dominican dictatorships.

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