

Observation no: 177 – Falklands War

Country-year: Argentina 1981

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

The current regime in 1981 came to power in a military coup in 1976, during which the government of President Isabel Peron was removed and a military junta was installed.¹ However, just prior to the Falklands War in December 1981, there was a change in leadership at the top. The ruling junta removed General Roberto Viola as President of Argentina, citing his ailing health as the official reason.² In his place, the junta installed Army Commander General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, known to be a hardliner. Prior to assuming the presidency, Gen. Galtieri was still a member of the ruling three-man junta.³

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

The military junta, which installed Gen. Galtieri in power itself came to power in a coup against the government of President Isabel Peron in 1976, during a time of “political chaos and [economic] recession.”⁴

Powell and Thyne (2012) also code Argentina as having experienced 13 coup attempts between 1950 and 1988. Of these, the coups in 1955, 1962, 1966, 1970, 1971 and 1976 were considered successful coups. The coup in 1976 brought the current regime to power. Describing the period between 1955 and 1976, Pion-Berlin () says that no elected leader finished a full term in office – each one was overthrown by a military coup.

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

General Galtiero kept his position as army commander and junta member while serving as the President of Argentina.⁵

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

No.

¹ “Argentine Leader Swears in Cabinet.” *New York Times* December 23, 1981: p A5

² “Ailing Argentine Leader Ousted by Army Chiefs.” *The Globe and Mail (Canada)* December 12, 1981

³ “Argentine Leader Swears in Cabinet.” *New York Times* December 23, 1981: p A5

⁴ “Argentine Leader Swears in Cabinet.” *New York Times* December 23, 1981: p A5

⁵ Ibid

I cannot find any evidence of ethnic, sectarian or racial criteria being used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps.

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

Zagrowski (1988) argues that in late twentieth century Latin America, particularly in Argentina, the very concept of military professionalism has been shaped by “US concerns over the vulnerability of its Third World allies to guerilla warfare and subversion.”⁶ He goes on to argue that leaders in the military thus saw intervention, even to the point of overthrowing civilian leadership, justifiable in order to prevent leftists from gaining power.

In Argentina, this translated into opposition to Peronism as the key ideological focus of the military. This argument is corroborated by Wolpin (1981), who suggests that any attempts at leftist proselytizing were seen by the officer corps as threats.⁷

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find any evidence that entry into the senior officer corps required allegiance to any particular political party. None of the leadership within the military, however, belonged to the Peronists. See 5 and 7.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

Active ideological opposition to Peronism seems to be a key feature of the military junta, as well as its predecessors (Zagrowski 1988). The military, in fact, “viewed Peronism in power as a threat to the professionalism of the institution.”⁸ According to Pion-Berlin (1985), one of the primary reasons the military engaged in a coup in the first place was to “eradicate [leftist] subversion.” As a result of the coup, Isabel Peron was removed from power.⁹

⁶ Zagrowski, Paul W. 1988. “Civil Military Relations and Argentine Democracy.” *Armed Forces and Society*. 14(2) (Spring): 407-432

⁷ Wolpin, Miles D. 1981. “Military Radicalism in Latin America.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. 23(4) (Nov): 395-428

⁸ Zagrowski, p 415

⁹ Pion-Berlin David. 1985. “The Fall of Military Rule in Argentina: 1975-1983.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. 27(2) (Summer): 55-76

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The military was used extensively to repress internal dissent. According to reports and civilian critics of the junta, more than 6,000 people had disappeared by the time Galtieri came to office, due to the military's campaign of repression against leftists.¹⁰

This is corroborated by declassified documents from the US Department of State. According to these files, the US embassy in Argentina documented nearly 10,000 human rights violations, most of them disappearances between 1976-1983.¹¹

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

See 2 and 3.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

Declassified State Department documents suggest that the *Federal Police*, a paramilitary force during the rule of the junta, was a major player in counterinsurgency operations. It regularly participated in intelligence gathering, the running of secret detention centers, torture and disappearances, along with regular branches of the military.¹²

According to data on military and paramilitary organizations used by Pilster and Bohmelt (2012), Argentina nearly tripled the size of its paramilitary forces by 1977, the year after it came to power. Almost the entire increase in paramilitary forces was a result of bolstering the *Federal Police*.¹³

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

¹⁰ "Argentine Leader Swears in Cabinet." *New York Times* December 23, 1981: p A5; "Hard-line Army General Takes Over in Argentina." *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*. December 23, 1981

¹¹ Osorio, Carlos, E.d. "State Department Opens Files On Argentina's Dirty War." *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book 73 Part 1*. GW National Security Archive. <<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB73/>>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Pilster, Ulrich, and Tobias Böhmelt. 2012. "Do Democracies Engage Less in Coup-Proofing? On the Relationship Between Regime Type and Civil-Military Relations." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8(4) (January): 355-372

No, with some caveats.

I cannot find any evidence of the existence of an intelligence agency dedicated to watching the regular military. The primary intelligence organization during the junta rule was the Intelligence Battalion 601, which was the primary death squad unit under the leadership of President (Gen.) Galtieri.¹⁴

However, the unit was the primary coordinator of all counter-insurgency activities of the Argentinian military. This meant that all political opponents, military men included, were targeted.¹⁵

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

There appear to be no accounts of purges of the officer corps in the last five years. It seems that the military was quite united against an external (to them) adversary.

That said, Zagrowski (1988) suggests that “serious fissures” had developed within the military four years into the rule of the junta. The new president, General Viola, was ousted and a ambitious hardliner Gen. Galtieri was brought to power, and news reports suggests that the ousted leader had been reluctant to go.¹⁶ Zagrowski also argues that “military factionalism was...more intense during this period.”¹⁷

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

The leader of the Junta also has a cabinet of ministers, in which civilian leaders play a role. After coming to power, news reports suggest that Galtieri surprised his critics “by selecting a mostly civilian Cabinet of experienced ministers.”¹⁸ For example, Galtieri’s new Economics Minister was also head of the Ministry of Economics during the civilian government of Arturo Frondizi in the 1960s, and the new Foreign Minister also held the same post under the previous military government.¹⁹

¹⁴ “State Department Opens Files on Argentina’s Dirty War.” GW National Security Archive. Press Release. August 20, 2002

¹⁵ Osorio, Carlos, Marcos Novaro and John Dinges, eds. “New Declassified Details on Repression and US Support for Military Dictatorship.” *GW National Security Archive*. March 23, 2006.
<<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB185/>>

¹⁶ Zagrowski, p 421; “Ailing Argentine Leader Ousted by Army Chiefs.” *The Globe and Mail (Canada)* December 12, 1981

¹⁷ Zagrowski, p 421

¹⁸ “Argentine Leader Swears in Cabinet.” *New York Times* December 23, 1981: p A5

¹⁹ Ibid