

---

**THE**  
**ANTI-COUP**

---

**Gene Sharp**  
**&**  
**Bruce Jenkins**

**The Albert Einstein Institution**

---

## **The Albert Einstein Institution Mission Statement**

The mission of the Albert Einstein Institution is to advance the world-wide study and strategic use of nonviolent action in conflict.

The Institution is committed to:

- defending democratic freedoms and institutions;
- opposing oppression, dictatorship, and genocide; and
- reducing the reliance on violence as an instrument of policy.

This mission is pursued in three ways, by:

- encouraging research and policy studies on the methods of non-violent action and their past use in diverse conflicts;
- sharing the results of this research with the public through publications, conferences, and the media; and
- consulting with groups in conflict about the strategic potential of nonviolent action.

The Albert Einstein Institution  
427 Newbury Street  
Boston, MA 02115-1802, USA

# **THE ANTI-COUP**

All material appearing in this publication is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission from Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins. Citation of the source is appreciated.

Printed in the United States of America.  
Printed on Recycled Paper.

The Albert Einstein Institution  
427 Newbury Street  
Boston, MA 02115-1801, USA  
Tel: USA + 617-247-4882  
Fax: USA + 617-247-4035  
E-mail: [einstein@igc.org](mailto:einstein@igc.org)  
Website: [www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org)

ISBN 1-880813-11-4

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>THE ANTI-COUP</b>                                | <b>1</b> |
| How coups operate                                   | 3        |
| When are coups likely to occur?                     | 4        |
| Support for coups                                   | 6        |
| Attempts to prevent coups                           | 7        |
| Coups have been defeated                            | 9        |
| Germany 1920  | 10       |
| France 1961   | 11       |
| The Soviet Union 1991                               | 13       |
| Anti-coup defense                                   | 16       |
| The putschists require...                           | 17       |
| Direct defense of the society                       | 18       |
| The need for preparations                           | 20       |
| The civilian defenders' aims                        | 21       |
| Resistance: general and organized                   | 22       |
| The importance of strategy                          | 23       |
| Anti-coup weapons                                   | 25       |
| Guidelines for general resistance                   | 26       |
| Treatment of the usurpers' troops and functionaries | 28       |
| Facing attack: obstruction and communication        | 30       |
| Facing attack: repudiation and rejection            | 31       |
| Blocking control by the putschists                  | 31       |
| Defying repression and intimidation                 | 33       |
| The importance of nonviolent discipline             | 34       |
| International support                               | 36       |
| Shifts in strategy during the struggle              | 37       |
| A durable success                                   | 37       |
| In case of need for long-term defense               | 38       |
| Collapsing the coup                                 | 39       |
| Deterring coups d'état                              | 40       |
| Promoting an anti-coup defense                      | 41       |
| Adopting an anti-coup defense                       | 41       |
| Preparations by the civil institutions              | 42       |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Government initiated preparations  | 44        |
| Possible legislation and other plans to<br>mobilize defense                      | 45        |
| Other types of preparations  | 47        |
| Consequences of an anti-coup defense   | 48        |
| <b>APPENDIX ONE</b>  | <b>49</b> |
| <b>Legislation and Other Governmental<br/>Preparations for Anti-Coup Defense</b> |           |
| <b>APPENDIX TWO</b>  | <b>55</b> |
| <b>Preparations by the Civil Society for<br/>Anti-Coup Defense</b>               |           |
| 1. Public education  | 55        |
| 2. Media   | 56        |
| 3. Political organizations   | 57        |
| 4. Religious institutions  | 57        |
| 5. Specific groups and institutions  | 58        |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>  | <b>61</b> |
| <b>A NOTE ABOUT TRANSLATIONS AND<br/>REPRINTING OF THIS PUBLICATION</b>          | <b>63</b> |

# THE ANTI-COUP

Supporters of political democracy, human rights, and social justice have good reasons to be alarmed about coups d'état. These abrupt seizures of the state apparatus have occurred with great frequency in recent decades. Coups have overthrown established constitutional democratic systems of government, halted movements toward greater democracy, and have imposed brutal and oppressive regimes. Coups d'état are one of the main ways in which new dictatorships are established. Coups may also precipitate civil wars and international crises. Coups remain a major unsolved defense problem.

A coup d'état<sup>1</sup> is a rapid seizure of physical and political control of the state apparatus by illegal action of a conspiratorial group backed by the threat or use of violence. The members of the previous government are deposed against their will. Initially the coup group rapidly occupies the centers of command, decision-making, and administration, replacing the previous chief executive and top officials with persons (military or civilian) of their choice. Eventually they gain control of the whole state apparatus. Successful coups are usually completed quickly, at most within forty-eight hours.

Coups d'état have taken place in dozens of countries in nearly every region of the world in recent decades, including in Thailand, Burma, the Philippines, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, Ghana, Liberia, Chile, Fiji, Greece, Libya, Laos, Guatemala, Argentina, Grenada, Poland, and the Soviet Union.

Coups have been very widespread in Africa in the post-colonial independent countries. The first of these was a military coup which ousted Kwame Nkrumah as President of Ghana in 1966. There were five coups in Thailand between 1951 and 1976, making the growth of democracy difficult. In Libya Muammar Khadafi took power as a result of a 1969 military coup. The Allende government

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms "coup d'état" and "putsch" are used synonymously in this paper.

in Chile was deposed by a military coup in 1973. The 1964 military coup in Brazil brought in a repressive military regime that ruled for years. In Guatemala the 1982 coup was followed by another coup which eventually placed retired General Rios Mott in charge. The 1981 declaration of emergency and installation of General Jaruzelski as president in Poland to repress the Solidarity independent labor union, as well as the failed hard-line coup attempt in the Soviet Union in August 1991, are among the best known examples in recent decades. Coups and coup attempts continue.

Some writers have commented that coups d'état—not elections— "have been the most frequent means for changing governments" and that for postcolonial Africa "the military coup has, in effect, become the institutionalized method for changing governments . . . ." <sup>2</sup>

It has been suggested that coups are now occurring with less frequency than previously, but also that this decline may be short-lived and that even when a coup has been avoided for many years a country may remain vulnerable. <sup>3</sup>

Massive efforts and sums of money are regularly devoted to prepare to resist foreign aggression. Yet, virtually nothing is done to prepare societies to deal with the defense problem of coups d'état, despite their frequency in world politics. Serious consideration of anti-coup defense is long overdue.

---

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Rosemary H.T. O'Kane, *The Likelihood of Coups* (Aldershot, England etc.: Avebury, 1987), p. 1; Steven R. David, *Defending Third World Regimes from Coups d'Etat* (Lanham, Maryland etc.: University Press of America, 1985), p. 4; J. Craig Jenkins and Augustine J. Kposowa, "The Political Origins of African Military Coups: Ethnic Competition, Military Centrality, and the Struggle over the Postcolonial State," in *International Studies Quarterly* (1992), Vol. 36, pp. 271-272; Steven R. David, *Third World Coups d'Etat and International Security* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1-2; and Steven R. David, "The Superpower Competition for Influence in the Third World" in Samuel P. Huntington, Editor, *The Strategic Imperative: New Policies For American Security* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1982), p. 236. The quotations are respectively from O'Kane, *The Likelihood of Coups*, p. 1 and Jenkins and Kposowa, "The Political Origins of African Military Coups," p. 271.

<sup>3</sup>David, *Third World Coups d'Etat and International Security*, p. 153-154, and O'Kane, *The Likelihood of Coups*, p. 135.

## **How coups operate**

Seizure of the actual political machinery of command and administration will often begin by action against top personnel of the previous government, and seizure of government buildings and offices, military and police headquarters, and control centers for communications and transportation. Coups normally operate very quickly, often within a few hours, and therefore secret conspiratorial planning is important.

Coups are most often conducted by a critical part of the military forces, acting alone or in alliance with political cliques, intelligence organizations (domestic or foreign), or police forces. Sometimes coups have been executive usurpations: an established head of state (president or prime minister, for example), falsely claiming an emergency, acts to suspend constitutional government and establish a dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes coups have been led by a dictatorial political party, with or without its own paramilitary forces. Coups may also be initiated by a section of the ruling elite backed by other groups. If the coup is to succeed it is important that non-participants in the coup be supportive, remain passive, or be made ineffective. Because of its minority and conspiratorial nature, a coup is the opposite of a mass popular revolution (although putschists may call their action a "revolution").

The group initiating the coup usually intends to use the power of the section of the state which it already controls (or over which it expects at first to gain control) against the other sections in order to gain complete control of the state. Often the other sections readily capitulate. They may do this in face of perceived overwhelming forces supporting the coup. They may also capitulate because they do not strongly support the established government, have active sympathy for the putschists, or feel helpless, not knowing what else they can do.

---

<sup>4</sup>Genuine emergency actions by an executive that then quickly relinquishes such prerogatives and restores regular constitutional procedures do not constitute coups d'état.

The usurpers normally intend to maintain order and to keep the bureaucracy, civil service, military forces, local government, and police intact (at least for the time being), but to bring them under their command. (The new government imposed by a military coup may be fully military, partially military, or fully civilian in personnel.) The combined power of the state under the usurpers can then if necessary be applied against the rest of the society to extend and consolidate the control of the whole country.

### **When are coups likely to occur?**

In some countries an internal coup is unthinkable, as in Norway and Switzerland, for example. Some conditions tend to impede coups. Where democratic constitutional procedures exist, are respected, and provide for peaceful institutionalized means to resolve internal conflicts, to change governments, and to hold government officials accountable, a coup d'état will be less likely. If the groups capable of conducting a coup—as the army—believe in democratic processes and respect the limits that have been placed on their authority, they are unlikely to attempt a coup. They may instead exert self-restraint, believing that it would be wrong to stage a coup.

The social structure of the society is also influential in determining whether a coup d'état is likely to happen. Where the civil, non-state, institutions of the society are strong and democratically controlled, and military institutions and anti-democratic political parties are in comparison weaker, a coup is not likely to occur.

Where the society works together in relative harmony a coup is not likely. That situation, however, is rare and is not required to prevent a coup. If the internal problems are at least of limited severity and can be dealt with by institutionalized and other peaceful procedures, a coup is less likely. Or, if acute conflicts are present but are conducted nonviolently instead of by internal violence, the stage will not be set for a coup by a group that promises to end internal violence and to restore law and order. Where politicians seek to serve the society and avoid corruption, one "justification" for a coup will be removed.

On the other hand, when those conditions are not present, the society may be vulnerable to coups. The roots of democratic political systems may be shallow or eroded. The government may be seen as illegitimate, and there may be widespread dissatisfaction with its performance. Perhaps it may be charged with incompetence, corruption, or indecisiveness in times of crisis. Confidence in the capacity of democratic procedures to remedy the situation may be widely lacking, and in some cases there may be no agreed procedures for succession of governments.

The civil non-state institutions of the society—voluntary institutions of many types, political parties, independent educational institutions, religious bodies, trade unions, and many other types—may be weak or nearly non-existent. Also, the general population may lack significant participation in the political system. Consequently, there would be no groups and institutions capable of opposing a seizure of the state apparatus.

The society may have very serious internal problems associated with violence. Serious social unrest, acute economic problems, sharp political conflicts, or internal violence and assassinations may make the major parts of the society willing to accept a new strong government which promises to act to "restore order" and to end the crisis.

Unfavorable economic conditions, interacting with political factors, may make a society vulnerable to coups, and it has been argued that lack of diversification in exports and excessive dependency on a variable international market for exports can create conditions in which a coup is likely.<sup>5</sup>

At times, individuals, powerful groups, a dictatorial party, or a military clique may simply lust for power and domination—with or without the guise of noble objectives.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>See O'Kane, *The Likelihood of Coups*, and for a contrasting view Jenkins and Kposowa, "The Political Origins of African Military Coups."

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of six types of military coups in third world countries, classified according to motivations and effects, see Steven R. David, *Third World Coups d'Etat and International Security* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 13-16.

Such conditions do not necessarily produce a coup, however. Even when conditions for a coup may be favorable and the potential putschists lack self-restraint, they may not make the attempt because it would likely fail. This propensity to failure may derive from several sources. Important sections of the military personnel, the police, and the civil servants, as well as lower levels of government, may be viewed as unsupportive of a coup and likely to resist the attempt. The independent institutions of the society may be inclined to oppose the coup and are strong enough to act powerfully against it.

The ability of these possible opponents of a coup to act powerfully against a coup attempt can significantly influence the decision of potential coup-makers about whether to make the attempt or not. If a society is likely to resist firmly an attempted takeover, a coup is less likely to occur.

Those who attempt a coup must be able to assume that once they have seized power they will encounter minimal resistance from the bureaucracy and the populace. In societies where the masses are politically mobilized, involved, and powerful, this assumption cannot be made.<sup>7</sup>

### **Support for coups**

The basic prerequisite of a coup is that the putschists' organizational and repressive forces are believed to be more powerful than the other institutions and forces of the society. In short, civil society is weaker than the military forces. Indeed, in many countries, the military forces have been in recent decades expanded to be by far the strongest institution of the whole society. These military forces have often been turned against the very society and population on which their existence has depended and which they were supposed to defend. Such a military coup is more likely if the soldiers are more loyal to their officers than they are to the democratic government.

If the coup is instead an executive usurpation (sometimes called a "self-coup"<sup>8</sup>), it is necessary that the combined governmental civil

---

<sup>7</sup>David, *Defending Third World Regimes from Coups d'Etat*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup>From the Spanish *autogolpe*, used to describe cases in Latin America in the early 1990s.

bodies and military forces assisting the takeover are more powerful than the civil institutions of the society. Instead, the coup may be one conducted by a disciplined political party with its own paramilitary forces. The party's supporters may also at times operate from key ministries in a coalition government or with support from significant sections of the military and police. To succeed, that party must be more able to act than are other sections of the society which might oppose the takeover. In some situations, agents of a foreign government may assist internal political or military groups in carrying out a coup.

In past coups, supporters of political freedom have often been silent and have passively submitted. This does not mean that when a coup attempt succeeds that the general population favored it. In many cases the population may be actually opposed, but does not know what to do. A civil war against the military forces and their allies—a war which democrats would certainly lose—has understandably inspired few. Believers in constitutional procedures and social justice have usually not known how else a coup backed by the military forces could be defeated.

Without serious preparations for an anti-coup defense, a lasting democratic system is very doubtful in many countries, especially in those with a history of coups. Even in countries that have achieved a relatively democratic political situation, anti-coup measures are important despite public statements of innocent intentions by those individuals and groups that are capable of conducting a coup.

### **Attempts to prevent coups**

Obviously it is better to have prevented coup attempts from occurring than it is to have to defend against them. One important issue therefore is how coups can be prevented and blocked.

In many constitutional democracies it has been assumed that if the constitution and the laws prohibit coups d'état, then the democracy is safe. That is demonstrably not true, as too many countries

have discovered to their peril. Democracies with constitutional provisions or laws against attempts to seize control of the state by coups have themselves been victims of coups. Such legal prohibitions should exist, but many times they have failed to block coups. Coups are in fact always conducted by groups which are quite willing to violate constitutional and legal barriers to their intended actions. This does not mean that such constitutional and legal provisions are not useful, but that they are insufficient. Means of enforcing them are clearly needed.

Persons and groups willing to push aside or murder executive officials in order to install themselves as rulers find no problem in violating existing constitutional or legal barriers to their action. Military groups determined to "save the nation" or to establish their own dominance will not be seriously impeded by a legal barrier. Disciplined political parties that see themselves to be the saviors of the people and the makers of a future ideal society may respect no barriers to their taking state power in order to implement their mission.

Efforts to remove justifiable grievances in the society are also needed, but they too are insufficient. Such grievances may genuinely motivate potential putschists or may be merely excuses for a coup which is attempted for less honorable motives.

International condemnation and sanctions are also unlikely to deter determined putschists.<sup>9</sup> It is naïve to expect that international influences will be able to prevent, or unseat, an internal takeover. At best they may support a strong indigenous capacity to block attempted usurpations. At other times, certain international influences may support the coup, or even be a main force in its instigation, as

---

<sup>9</sup>This is not to deny that in some circumstances foreign intervention may block or even overturn a coup, especially where an overwhelming military invasion is possible, as in the United States' action in Grenada in 1983. The point is that these cases are exceptions and those means are not dependable. If they are used, they take control of the situation away from the local population.

It could be very easy to underestimate the difficulties that would face the United States, or any future superstate, that adopted a policy of threatening or applying military intervention to block coups d'état generally. Steven R. David has pointed to these: "The difficulties inherent in protecting regimes from the consequences of large-scale military threats pale in comparison to the problems involved in devising strategies for the protection of leaderships from indigenously created coups d'état." (David, "The Superpower Competition for Influence in the Third World," p. 242.)

for example has the United States government been in several cases.

Obviously, then, something more is required: strong barriers to coups d'état. This essay will argue that these barriers can be erected within the country by a prepared anti-coup defense policy. This policy would not only have the potential of defeating coups. It could also serve as a potential deterrent to these attacks, rooted in the capacity for effective defense.

Because coups have so often been successful, populations are often unlikely to think that effective anti-coup barriers can be erected. The confusion and sense of powerlessness which often accompany coups have been aggravated by the population's absence of planning, preparations, and training to block coups. When the coup is commonly backed by the military forces, the supposed defenders of the society, against which there can be no military power applied, the anguish and despair of the population increases.

### **Coups have been defeated**

The problem of how to block coups d'état would seem insoluble, except for the important fact that sometimes coups have been defeated. Despite often disadvantageous conditions, civilians have at times been able to block illegal seizures of state power. These cases have been remarkable.

Sometimes coups fail because noncooperation and defiance break the intended link between *physical* control of government facilities, and the *political* control of the state. Civil servants, bureaucrats, military groupings, and other state employees at times steadfastly refused to cooperate with putschists, denying control of the state apparatus. Coups have also been imperiled by severance of the link between control of the central state machinery and control of the society—including independent social institutions, local governments, and the population as a whole. Putschists have often narrowly assumed that dominance of state structures equals political and social control. However, without the submission of all these sections of the society the coup leadership cannot become a lasting government.

The defeat of the attempted hard-line takeover in the former Soviet Union in August 1991 is one relatively recent case of mass noncooperation against a coup. Prominent earlier cases of successful anti-coup defense occurred in Germany in 1920 against the Kapp *Putsch* (which threatened the new Weimar Republic) and in France in 1961 against the Algiers generals' revolt (which aimed to keep Algeria French by ousting the de Gaulle-Debré government). In these three cases, and a few others, the coups were blocked by internal nonviolent resistance. Only occasionally, as during the 1991 coup in the Soviet Union, has serious supportive international diplomatic and economic action been threatened or taken.

**Germany 1920**<sup>10</sup> On 12 March 1920, unofficial *Freikorps* units of ex-soldiers and civilians occupied Berlin in a coup against the Weimar Republic organized by Dr. Wolfgang Kapp and Lieutenant-General Walter von Lüttwitz. The coup aimed to establish an authoritarian regime of "experts." The small German army remained "neutral." The legal democratic government under President Friedrich Ebert fled. Though not well prepared, the coup might well have succeeded had there been no resistance.

The legal government proclaimed that all citizens should obey only it, and that the provinces should refuse all cooperation with the Kapp group. After a workers' strike against the coup broke out in Berlin, a proclamation calling for a general strike was issued under the names of President Ebert and Social Democratic ministers—though without their official approval.

---

<sup>10</sup>This account is based on Wilfred Harris Crook, *The General Strike* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), pp. 496-527; Donald Goodspeed, *The Conspirators* (New York: Viking, 1962), pp. 108-188; Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 129-160; Karl Roloff (pseud.: Karl Ehrlich). "Den Ikkevoldelige Modstand: den Kvalte Kapp-Kupet," in K. Ehrlich, N. Lindberg, and G. Jacobsen, editors, *Kamp Uden Vaaben* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, Einar Munksgaard, 1937), pp. 194-213; and John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953), pp. 63-82. See also Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), pp. 40-41 and 79-81.

The Kappists were quickly met with large-scale noncooperation by civil servants and conservative government bureaucrats, among others. Qualified persons refused to accept ministerial posts in the new regime. Kappist repression was harsh, and some strikers were shot to death. However, the strength of the noncooperation grew, and a general strike paralyzed Berlin. The Reichsbank refused funds to the usurpers. On March 17 the Berlin Security Police demanded Kapp's resignation. He fled to Sweden the same day, many of his aides left Berlin in civilian clothes, and Lüttwitz resigned. The *Freikorps* then marched out of Berlin, killing and wounding protesting civilians as they did so.

The coup was defeated by the combined action of workers, civil servants, bureaucrats, and the general population who had refused the popular and administrative cooperation that the usurpers required. The Weimar Republic survived to face other grave internal problems. The financial costs of the resistance to the attempted coup were modest, and an estimated several hundred persons had been killed and others were wounded by the Kappists.

**France 1961** <sup>11</sup> French President Charles de Gaulle in early April indicated that he was abandoning the attempt to keep Algeria French. In response, on the night of 21-22 April rebelling French military units in Algeria seized control of the capital city of Algiers and nearby key points. However, the coup there could only succeed by replacing the legal government in Paris.

On 23 April the political parties and trade unions in France held mass meetings and called for a one-hour general strike. That night de Gaulle broadcast a speech, heard also in Algeria, urging people to defy and disobey the rebels, ordering the use of "all means" to bring them down. "I forbid every Frenchman, and in the first place every soldier, to carry out any of their orders." Prime Minister Debré warned of an airborne attack from Algiers. However, instead

---

<sup>11</sup>This account is based on that of Adam Roberts, "Civil Resistance to Military Coups," *Journal of Peace Research* (Oslo), vol. xii, no. 1 (1975), pp. 19-36. All quotations are from that source.

of ordering military action, he called upon the general population to act: "As soon as the sirens sound, go there [to the airports] by foot or by car, to convince the mistaken soldiers of their huge error."

Copies of de Gaulle's speech were duplicated and widely distributed by the population and loyal French soldiers in Algeria. De Gaulle later declared: "From then on, the revolt met with a passive resistance on the spot which became hourly more explicit."

On 24 April ten million workers took part in the symbolic general strike. At airfields, people prepared vehicles to be placed on runways to block the landing of planes. A financial and shipping blockade was imposed on Algeria.

Loyal French troops in Algeria acted to undermine the rebels. Two-thirds of the transport planes and many fighter jets were flown out of Algeria, while other pilots blocked airfields or pretended mechanical failures. Army soldiers simply stayed in their barracks. There were many cases of deliberate inefficiency, with orders and files "lost" and communication and transportation delayed. Civil servants hid documents and withdrew.

On 25 April de Gaulle broadcast an order to loyal troops to fire at the rebels, but there was no need. The coup had already been fatally undermined. The rebel leaders resolved to call off the attempted coup, and during the night of 25-26 April the parachute regiment that had originally seized Algiers withdrew from the city.

There were a few casualties, probably three killed and several wounded in Algeria and Paris. The attack on the de Gaulle government had been defeated by defiance and dissolution.

**The Soviet Union 1991**<sup>12</sup> On 18 August 1991 in an effort to block the radical decentralization of power in the Soviet Union, a group of hard-line Soviet officials detained Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and demanded that he turn over all executive powers to his vice-president. Gorbachev refused.

The self-declared "State Committee for the State of Emergency"—composed of, among others, the Soviet vice-president, prime minister, defense minister, chairman of the KGB, and interior minister—declared a six-month "state of emergency." Opposition newspapers were banned, political parties suspended (except the Communist Party), and demonstrations forbidden. The junta's first decree asserted the primacy of the Soviet constitution over those of the republics and mandated adherence to all orders of the Emergency Committee.

It appeared that the junta had the entire military forces of the Soviet Union at their disposal. Armored divisions and paratroops were deployed throughout Moscow. In the Baltics, pro-coup forces seized telephone, radio and television facilities and blockaded key ports. Armored assault units outside Leningrad began to move on the city.

In Moscow, tens of thousands of people gathered spontaneously in the streets to denounce the coup. In a dramatic show of defiance, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin climbed upon a hostile tank and denounced the putschists' action as a "rightist, reactionary, anti-constitutional coup." Yeltsin proclaimed "all decisions and instructions of this committee to be unlawful" and appealed to citizens to rebuff the putschists and for servicemen not to take part in the coup. Yeltsin concluded with an appeal for a "uni-

---

<sup>12</sup>This account of the August 1991 Soviet coup has been prepared by Bruce Jenkins, and was previously published in Gene Sharp with the assistance of Bruce Jenkins, *Self-Reliant Defense Without Bankruptcy or War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Albert Einstein Institution, 1992), pp. 16-19. It was compiled from the following sources: *The Boston Globe*, 20-23 August 1991; *The Economist*, 24-30 August 1991; Stuart H. Loory and Ann Imse, *Seven Days That Shook The World*, CNN Reports, (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc.: 1991); *Newsweek*, 2 September 1991; *The New Yorker*, 4 November 1991; *The New York Times*, 20-25 August 1991; *Time*, 2 September 1991; *The Washington Post*, 21 August 1991.

versal unlimited strike." Later that day Yeltsin ordered army and KGB personnel within the Russian republic to obey him, not the putschists.

Thousands gathered in front of the Russian "White House" (parliament building) to protect it from attack. Barricades were erected; trolley buses and automobiles blocked the streets. Although the call for a general strike went largely unheeded, miners in the Kuzbass coal fields and near Sverdlosk did strike.

The putschists decreed a special state of emergency in Moscow because of "rallies, street marches, demonstrations and instances of instigation to riots." On the second night of the coup, resistance organizers pasted leaflets throughout the city's subway system calling for a mass demonstration in front of the "White House" the following day.

In Leningrad, 200,000 people rallied in response to Mayor Anatoly Sobchak's call for "the broadest constitutional resistance" to the coup. Tens of thousands in Moldavia blocked the streets to keep Soviet troops at bay. Leaders of the Ukraine and Kazakhstan denounced the coup. A large rally in Minsk called for mass civil disobedience. Lithuanian President Landsbergis appealed to citizens to surround the parliament building in Vilnius for protection from attack. Emergency sessions of the parliaments of Latvia and Estonia declared full independence from the Soviet Union.

In Moscow, banned opposition newspapers secretly printed *The Common Paper* which called on citizens to resist. A donated radio transmitter allowed the Russian government to broadcast resistance information across the nation through local relay stations. The banned independent radio station "Echo Moscow" continued to broadcast, carrying live speeches from an emergency session of the Russian parliament. Although prohibited, Russian Television technicians put their news programs on videotape and distributed them to twenty cities around the Soviet Union.

Officials in the state controlled media refused cooperation with the putschists. The defiant speeches of Yeltsin and Sobchak were aired on the nightly news program which the Emergency Committee's KGB censor chose not to block. Afterwards, the First

Deputy Chairman of Soviet Television, Valentin Lazutkin, received a call from Interior Minister Pugo: "You have disobeyed two orders . . . You have given instructions to the people on where to go and what to do. You will answer for this." Defiant crowds swelled in front of the White House that night to protect the Russian government.

Concerted efforts were made to undermine the loyalty of the putschists' forces. Leaflets and food were distributed to soldiers. Citizens pleaded with tank crews to switch sides. Yeltsin urged discipline: "Don't provoke the military. The military has become a weapon in the hands of the putschists. Therefore we should also support the military and maintain order and discipline in contact with them."

In several cases, entire military units deserted the putschists. Ten tanks in front of the White House turned their turrets away from the parliament building, pledging to help defend it against attack. Mutinies against the putschists were reported at the Leningrad Naval Base and at a paratrooper training academy. Units in the Far East refused to support the junta. In the Russian republic, local interior ministry police and KGB units declared loyalty to Yeltsin. Defense Minister Yasov ordered the Tula division to withdraw from its positions near the White House because of the troops' uncertain loyalty. Interior Minister Pugo disbanded the Moscow police out of fear of disloyalty to the putschists.

In the afternoon of the second day of the coup, the putschists attempted to put together a new assault team to attack the Russian White House. Army paratroops and Interior ministry forces were to surround the White House, clearing the way for an attack by the elite KGB Alpha Group. The head of the Army's paratroops and the commander of the Soviet Air Force, however, refused to take part in the attack. Hours before the planned attack, the commander of the KGB Alpha Group stated that his forces would not take part. "There will be no attack. I won't go against the people."

The following morning, the Defense Board of the Soviet Union voted to withdraw the troops from Moscow. Members of the Emergency Committee were subsequently arrested (one committed sui-

cide). President Gorbachev returned to power. Casualties were low—a total of five people were reported killed during the coup attempt. The coup had been defeated. Mass public defiance and disobedience in the military thwarted the hard-liners' attempt to return to authoritarian rule.

These three cases of successful resistance—Germany in 1920, France in 1961, and Russia in 1991—establish that successful defense against coups is possible. Certainly there are other cases in which similar resistance did not succeed, but the existence of successes establishes that under at least some conditions coups can be defeated.

### **Anti-coup defense**

Attention to how coups d'état work and how they can be defeated teaches us much. Together they show that there is no need to be passive and helpless in face of these blows against freedom and justice. Defense can be waged by the attacked society itself.

The basic point of this essay is that a defense policy against coups d'état is possible. The essence of such a defense policy is two-fold: (1) that those who attack the constitutional system and intend to replace the elected government by a regime of their own choosing must be denied all *legitimacy*—they have no moral or political right to become the government, and (2) they must be denied all *cooperation*—no one in the government or in the population should assist or obey them in any way.

In a coup d'état, the seizure of government buildings, transportation and communication centers, and key geographical points is not done for its own sake. Rather, the purpose of those seizures is to control the state apparatus, and hence the country as a whole. The putschists must secure that broad control if the coup is to be successful.

However, the seizure of such points does not by itself give the putschists the control they seek over the government and the society. They will not initially control the population, the political, economic, or social organizations, the governmental structures, nor even all of the military forces and the police. Nor will the putschists be

in a position immediately to accomplish any possible ideological objectives. After military, or para-military, forces have occupied government buildings and key centers of communication and transportation, a crucial period inevitably follows in which the putschists must establish and consolidate their control. Even in the absence of resistance, that control requires time and effort to achieve. This need to consolidate control—and the time it takes to effect this—makes an effective defense by the society possible.

### **The putschists require. . .**

Immediately after the coup is started, the putschists require legitimacy, that is, acceptance of their moral and political right, or authority, to rule. Endorsements by moral and religious leaders, respected political personages, and in some cases royalty or past officials, will help them to gain that acceptance.

The putschists require that their control of the state apparatus be accepted by the persons and institutions in whom moral and legitimate political authority resides, whether they are elected officials, unofficial moral leaders, or royalty.

### ***The first basic principle of anti-coup defense is therefore to deny legitimacy to the putschists.***

The putschists also require that the civilian leaders and population be supportive, confused, or just passive. The putschists additionally require the cooperation of specialists and advisors, bureaucrats and civil servants, administrators and judges in order to consolidate their control over the society. Journalists and broadcasters, printers and technicians are required to do as they are told. Police, prison officials, and soldiers need to follow orders to make arrests, jail protesters, and execute people as commanded. The putschists also require that a multitude of people who operate the political system, the society's institutions, and the economy will passively submit and carry out their usual functions as modified by the putschists' orders and policies.

In short, in order to consolidate their control putschists require a significant degree of not only legitimacy but also cooperation from the society they intend to rule.

Few or none of these required acts of submission, cooperation, and assistance may be fulfilled, however. They may be jeopardized by repudiation, noncooperation, and defiance. Both the needed legitimacy and the essential cooperation are vulnerable. All these groups and the general population may refuse to do as ordered. The claims to legitimacy can be rejected. The necessary cooperation, obedience, and support can be denied. The consolidation of the putschists' rule can thereby be blocked.

Even moderate opposition may force the attackers to make significant efforts to secure the needed acceptance, cooperation, and support. In a powerful anti-coup defense, the population would prevent the attackers' control of the state apparatus and the country by massive and selective noncooperation, while maintaining their support for the legal government and its call to resist. Strong, determined, and widespread repudiation, noncooperation, and defiance of the coup by the society can block the putschists' objectives and defeat the coup.

***The second basic principle of anti-coup defense is to resist the putschists with noncooperation and defiance.***

If both legitimacy and cooperation are denied, the putsch may die of political starvation.

### **Direct defense of the society**

Therefore, an anti-coup policy is focused on defense of the society *by the society itself*, not on defense of points of geography, nor even governmental buildings. Geography and buildings are ultimately important to coup leaders only when possession is accompanied by human assistance. Seizure of a school *building*, for example, is of no use to someone seeking to control education without a functioning school including the cooperative pupils, teachers, and administra-

tors. Occupation of a railroad yard gives no control over that piece of transportation if the railroad workers and managers are unwilling to operate the trains according to orders. Control of a parliament building itself gives no control over the actual members of parliament or over the population as a whole which believes in parliamentary government.

Instead of attempting to provide constitutional defense by fighting over buildings and geographical points, people actively defend their institutions, society, and freedoms directly. The priorities of action here are crucial. Insistence on abiding by constitutional procedures, or the maintenance of a free press, for example, are of more direct importance to democracy than possession of a given street intersection or building.

It is of course true that sometimes certain sites and buildings have a special symbolic importance. Civilian defenders may then want to attempt to block the seizure of these sites by placing their bodies between the attackers and the buildings. In 1991, for example, both the Lithuanian parliament building and the Russian "White House" were so protected by people power. One should not generalize too widely from these two cases, however. It should first be noted that a human barricade is not always realistic. Under extreme weather conditions, especially cold, it would be virtually impossible for a human barricade composed of the same individuals to remain in position for very long. Therefore, it is important to remember that anti-coup defense is a defense of the *society*, not of geographical points or buildings, which the putschists are able to seize if they are willing to kill enough people.

If the putschists are uncertain of their own intentions and methods, or if their troops are unwilling to kill many of the defenders, then a defense by human barricades may be successful. However, a serious danger exists in attempts to defend key buildings or other sites by human barricades. If, despite the defenders' efforts, the building is successfully seized by the putschists, the defenders and general population may become unjustifiably demoralized. The defenders may then believe not that only the parliament *building* has been seized, but that *parliament itself* has been destroyed. The

defenders and population may believe that the mere physical occupation of the former government headquarters has put the putschists in control.

Extreme care therefore must be used in formulating strategies and tactics for defense of buildings, so that the defenders and population put the emphasis on defense of the constitutional system and the society's institutions themselves, which can continue whatever the fate of the buildings. The coup leaders cannot control the society's population, institutions, organizations, and government without the submission and cooperation of the population.

### **The need for preparations**

In the three cases reviewed earlier, the defense was improvised, without the advantage of advance planning and preparations. It is surprising how powerful even improvised social action can be. Inevitably, however, such unprepared resistance will be weaker than if careful plans have been laid for defense against such attacks. Confusion, uncertainty as to what to do, ineffectual or counterproductive protests, and costly delays in taking resolute action can all potentially be avoided or reduced significantly by preparations. Conversely, anti-coup defense by an assertive citizenry can be greatly strengthened by specific preparations and guidelines. These guidelines would aim to prepare the citizenry and social institutions to offer collective resistance to any coup. Such preparations would need to include both general guidelines for the defense and also designated responsibilities for members of particular population groups and institutions, such as civil servants, religious leaders, police, journalists, transportation employees, and many others.

Such planning and preparations for anti-coup defense are possible. Whether independent institutions of the society or the government (with cooperation of nongovernmental institutions and organizations) initiate and carry out anti-coup defense will largely be determined by the political situation in the country and the degree of strength and vitality of the society.

## **The civilian defenders' aims**

Under an anti-coup policy, the resisters will aim to:

- Repudiate the putschists as illegitimate with no rightful claim to become the government;
- Make the attacked society unrulable by the attackers;
- Block the imposition of viable government by the putschists;
- Maintain control and self-direction of their own society;
- Make the institutions of the society into omnipresent resistance organizations against a coup;
- Deny to the putschists any additional objectives;
- Make the costs of the attack and attempted domination unacceptable;
- Subvert the reliability and loyalty of the putschists' troops and functionaries and induce them to desert their mutinous officers;
- Encourage dissension and opposition among the putschists' supporters;
- Stimulate international opposition to the coup by diplomatic, economic, and public opinion pressures against the attackers; and
- Achieve international support in communications, finances, food, diplomacy, and other resources.

## Resistance: general and organized

Strategies of anti-coup defense might be grouped initially into two broad categories, "general" and "organized."<sup>13</sup> Well in advance of an attack, a number of key points would be selected and identified to the general population as points at which the population should resist, even in the absence of any specific instructions at the time from a leadership group. This type of resistance is called "general resistance." These points might include, for example, efforts to promote the attackers' regime as legitimate, attempts to remake or abolish the elected legislature, measures to remake the courts or impose a new constitution, abridgments of freedom of speech and religion, and efforts to control the society's independent institutions.

Infringement by the attackers on any of these points would be the population's signal to resist. The advance provision of guidelines for general resistance would make wise resistance possible even if the legitimate officials or the initial defense leaders have been arrested or executed. General resistance could also be practiced if the defense leaders' communications with the population have been blocked.

"Organized resistance" differs from general resistance in that the defenders act in accordance with a call or instructions from an anti-coup defense leadership group. This group might consist of members of the legitimate government, officials of the anti-coup defense planning body, or persons selected in some other way. This leadership might, for example, be comprised of representatives of voluntary organizations (educational, civic, labor, religious, political, and others) who have been informally accepted by the society (whether or not their individual identities are publicly known).

Organized resistance would supplement, not replace, general resistance. Often, organized resistance would consist of acts focused on a specific event, or would occur in a specific place or at a desig-

---

<sup>13</sup>This clarification was introduced by the late Lars Porsholt. See Lars Porsholt, "On the Conduct of Civilian Defence" in T. K. Mahadevan, Adam Roberts, and Gene Sharp, editors, *Civilian Defence: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, and Bombay: Baratiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967), pp. 145-149.

nated time. Such resistance may take the form of specific acts of symbolic protests or resistance, of which there are dozens of possible types. Examples would include demonstrations, short strikes, protest marches, protest black-outs, tolling of church bells, defiant flying of national flags (perhaps at half mast), organized letter writing campaigns, the simultaneous reading in religious services of official statements from religious leaders, organized hunger strikes, radio broadcasts from hidden transmitters, and expressions of mourning (either because of brutalities by the attackers or acts of terrorism by one's own people).

Both general resistance and organized resistance are very important in defense struggles against coups d'état. The proportional roles of each will vary with the specific situation.

### **The importance of strategy**

The general technique that has been most effective in anti-coup defense is nonviolent struggle. This avoids fighting the putschists with military weapons, with which the usurpers usually have the advantage. The nonviolent technique also maximizes the power of the defenders, vastly increases the possible number of resisters over those able and willing to use violence, and very importantly helps to undermine the morale and reliability of the putschists' soldiers.

The weapons, or methods, of nonviolent struggle—such as strikes, boycotts, types of political noncooperation, and mutiny—are not to be applied randomly. These methods should not be selected in accordance with the whims of individuals or in response to minor events, nor should they be applied in a hodgepodge, improvised, or intuitive way. These methods instead will be most effective if they are applied as component parts of a comprehensive, carefully chosen strategy of anti-coup defense.

Attempting to provide defense without formulating a strategy for the struggle is foolhardy. It is also potentially disastrous. One of the major reasons for the failure of some past nonviolent struggles has been the choice of a poor strategy or very often the neglect to develop any strategy at all. Strategy is just as important

in nonviolent struggles as it is in military warfare.

There needs to be an overall plan for conducting the entire conflict. This is called a *grand strategy*. Within it, individual strategies need to be formulated to achieve major objectives in the conflict or for use in broad phases of the struggle. A *strategy* is a conception, a general plan, of how best to act in order to achieve one's objectives in a major phase of a conflict, within the framework of the chosen grand strategy. The aim is to use one's resources to maximum advantage to gain one's objective at minimum cost. The chosen strategy determines whether, when, and how to fight.

Within a strategy particular *tactics*—plans for limited actions—and individual *methods*—specific forms of action—are used to implement the strategy. These actions are more limited in time, scale, or specific issues in order to achieve intended limited objectives.

Strategies for anti-coup defense need to be planned with much thought and extreme care. The strategies need to draw upon the best available resources about strategic principles. They also need to be based on knowledge of nonviolent struggle, the dynamics of coups, the particular conflict situation, and the strengths and weaknesses of both the defending population and the putschists.

Issues of strategy are more varied and complex than indicated here and readers facing strategic decisions are urged to consult more extensive discussions elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>For a good discussion of strategic principles in nonviolent struggle generally, see Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1994). See also Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: Twentieth Century Practice and Twenty-First Century Potential*. Forthcoming.

For more detailed discussions of civilian-based defense strategy, see Gene Sharp, *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 89-111; Gene Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defense* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Books, 1986), pp. 88-118, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1985), pp. 113-151; and Adam Roberts, "Civilian Defence Strategy" in Adam Roberts, editor, *The Strategy of Civilian Defence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967); U.S. edition: *Civilian Resistance as a National Defense* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1968) pp. 215-251. Other sources are cited in Sharp, *Making Europe Unconquerable* (Ballinger edition), pp. 160-161, n. 1.

## **Anti-coup weapons**

The selection of the most suitable methods of action is of vital importance. The initial anti-coup strategy may use certain of the following nonviolent weapons: a stay-at-home by everyone; paralysis of each part of the political system that the putschists attempt to seize; persistent operation of uncontrolled parts of the political system according to pre-attack policies and laws (ignoring decrees and policies of the putschists); filling streets with demonstrators; conversely leaving the streets completely empty; massive subversion of the attackers' troops and functionaries; defiant publication of newspapers and broadcasts by radio and television with news of the attack and resistance; a general strike; and an economic shutdown (by both workers and managers).

It is important to give primary responsibility in the defense struggle to those methods that directly counter the putschists' initial objectives. These objectives will be primarily related to achieving and consolidating control over the political system and undermining the opposition to the coup. Economic aims are unlikely to be among the putschists' initial objectives. (Economic objectives may be in some cases longer-term aims, such as to keep control of the economic system primarily in the hands of an existing elite or to use the state to take over control or ownership of the economic system.)

Control of the economic system is seldom, if ever, an initial objective of a coup d'état. Therefore, general strikes or economic shut-downs are rarely the most relevant and effective substantive resistance methods in anti-coup action. Applied in short bursts, they can, however, demonstrate the solidity of the will to resist. When applied for an extended period, however, these economic weapons can imperil the capacity of the attacked society to survive its own defense. A general strike, for example, would usually be used only at the very beginning of the anti-coup defense to show the determination of the society to resist the attack, or later in the struggle for some specified but limited purpose, such as to protest extreme brutalities. The general strike or an economic shut-down might also be used when it was thought that a massive and dramatic expression

of resistance might strike a *coup de grâce* to the attack.

Much more important initially will be those specific methods that aim directly at the putschists' initial objectives. These would be ones that: (1) show repudiation of the putschists' claims to legitimacy; (2) block their taking control of the political machinery of the state (as by noncooperation of civil servants, police, military forces, lower levels of government, etc.); (3) demonstrate the population's repudiation of the coup and its noncooperation and disobedience against it; (4) block the putschists' efforts to control the means of communication and instead maintain this through various means including print media and radio; and (5) defy the putschists' efforts to neutralize or control the independent institutions of the society. If the means of defense cited here can be applied massively and effectively to achieve these aims, the coup can only collapse.

### **Guidelines for general resistance**

Guidelines for general resistance against coups can be formulated in advance of any possible coup. Such guidelines would constitute basic elements for an effective anti-coup strategy, instructing the population on how to resist. These could include the following:

- Repudiate the coup and denounce its leaders as illegitimate, meriting only rejection as a government. The denunciation of the putschists as illegitimate should be supported by moral, political, and religious leaders, officials and members in all of the society's institutions (including education, the media, and communications), and national, local, regional, and provincial governments and officials (including heads of state and any royalty). Refuse to give any legitimacy to the putschists by any means, including efforts to negotiate a compromise between them and the legitimate political leaders.
- Regard all decrees and orders from the putschists contradicting established law as illegal, and refuse to obey them.

- Keep all resistance strictly nonviolent in order to make the anti-coup defense the most effective possible. Refuse to be provoked into violent or other imprudent action.
- Refuse and disobey all attempts by the putschists to establish and extend controls over the governmental apparatus and society.
- Noncooperate with the putschists in all ways. This applies to the general population; all experts and technocrats; all leaders of the previous governments and of political parties; all branches of the central or federal government, state, regional, and local governments, including their civil servants and bureaucrats; key occupational and professional groups; all staff of the media and communications; all staff of transportation systems; the police; members and units of the military forces; all judges and employees of the judicial system; the staffs of all financial institutions, both governmental and private; and officers and members of all other institutions of the society.
- Persist in maintaining the normal operations of the society in accordance with the pre-attack constitution, laws, and policies of the legitimate government and the society's independent institutions. This should be continued until and unless the persons are physically removed from their workplaces, offices, and activity centers. Even then as far as possible, continue normal operations from other locations. This applies especially to officials and employees of all branches, departments and levels of government.
- Preserve the functioning of legitimate political and social organizations. Create backup organizations which may need to assume the functions of organizations attacked or closed down by the putschists.
- Refuse to supply vital information to the putschists and their helpers. For example, where it will help, remove road signs, street

names, traffic signs, house numbers, etc. to impede the putschists' activities and protect people from arrest.

- Refuse to supply the putschists with needed supplies and equipment, hiding these when appropriate.
- Engage in friendly "creative communication" with the functionaries and troops serving the putschists while continuing resistance. Explain to them the reasons for the defense struggle, affirm the absence of any intended violence against them, seek to undermine their reliability, and try to induce them to be helpful to the defenders. This help might take the forms of deliberate inefficiency in repression, passing information to the defenders, and in extremes to desertion, with soldiers instead joining the defenders in nonviolent struggle for freedom. Attempt to persuade soldiers and functionaries of the need instead to adhere to constitutional and legal procedures.
- Refuse to assist the putschists in disseminating their propaganda.
- Document in writing, sound, and film the putschists' activities and repression. Preserve the documentation and also distribute the information widely to the defenders, internationally and to the putschists' supporters.

### **Treatment of the usurpers' troops and functionaries**

Very early in the coup, the defenders would attempt to communicate with and to warn the putschists, their functionaries, and their troops about the population's hostility to the attack. Words and symbolic actions would be used to communicate the will to resist, to show the type of defense that would be waged, and to urge the putschists to withdraw.

Efforts would be made at all phases of the coup to undermine the loyalty of the putschists' individual soldiers and functionaries. This would be relatively easier in anti-coup resistance than in cases of foreign invasions because the soldiers and functionaries would usually speak the same language as the resisters or at least a common language they both understood. If this were not the case, then communication would still be possible in other ways such as the use of translated leaflets and slogans, or linguistically skilled resisters, or through the defenders' behavior and symbols.

The putschists' soldiers would initially be informed that there will be resistance, but that the resistance will be of a special type. In this resistance, the defense would indeed be directed against the attempt to seize control by the coup but would be conducted without harming the soldiers as individuals. If this could be communicated, the soldiers might be more likely to help the defending population in small ways, to avoid brutalities, and to mutiny at a crisis point, than if the troops expected at any moment to be killed by snipers or bombs.

Repeated demonstrations that there is no violent intent or threat toward the individual soldiers, accompanied by clear resistance, are very important. This combination has the greatest chance of increasing the effectiveness of the anti-coup defense. Strong resistance without personal threat or violence may, at least among some soldiers, create or aggravate their morale problems. The problems may be expressed in uncertain loyalties to the putschists, problems of maintaining self-respect while inflicting repression on nonviolent people, and in extremes, disaffection and mutiny.

There can be no guarantee, however, that the putschists' troops will be favorably affected by the nonviolent discipline, especially in the short run. They may still perpetrate brutalities and kill nonviolent resisters. Such tragedies do not, however, mean the failure of the resistance. Instead, given continued, disciplined resistance, brutalities can weaken the putschists and strengthen the defense struggle, as discussed in later sections.

**Facing attack: obstruction and communication**

Although this anti-coup defense does not work by attacking the putschists' troops militarily, some limited action affecting the troops would be taken even at the first stage of an attack. If identified in time, the deployment of the putschists' troops could be temporarily blocked by obstructionist activities on highways, streets, airports, railroads, and the like. The entry or movement of troops could be delayed by such means as refusal to operate the railroads, blocking highways and airports with many abandoned automobiles and at times on streets and roads by human barricades.

Although such obstructionist activities against the deployment of troops would only be effective briefly, these actions would make clear to the individual soldiers that, whatever they might have been told, they were not welcome as troops of the coup. The people will also urge the soldiers not to believe the coup leaders' propaganda.

As other symbolic actions, the people could wear mourning bands, stage a stay-at-home, conduct a limited general strike, or defy curfews. Such actions would serve two purposes. They would give notice to friend and foe that the coup will be firmly resisted. At the same time the actions would help to build up the people's morale so as to discourage submission and collaboration with the putschists. These actions, however, would be only a symbolic prelude to the later substantive resistance.

The following symbolic methods might be used to help communicate the population's will to resist to the putschists and their forces: leaflets, letters, radio and television broadcasts, personal conversations, newspapers, posters, banners, diplomatic messages, statements at regional and United Nations meetings, third-party assistance, painted messages and slogans, and special types of demonstrations. These means of communication and warning could be aimed at the attackers' troops, leaders, and current and potential supporters of the coup.

## **Facing attack: repudiation and rejection**

In the first hours, days and weeks after a coup d'état is attempted it is extremely important to take quick and solid action to block the putschists from becoming accepted and from establishing effective control over the state apparatus and the society. An immediate strategy of repudiation and rejection of the putschists and their attack is called for in order to defeat the coup quickly. That strategy would combine repudiation of claims to legitimacy and rejection of cooperation. It would include total or near total noncooperation with the putschists. An early defeat of the coup would make unnecessary a later long-term struggle with an entrenched and therefore much stronger oppressive regime.

Because coup attempts are generally at their weakest point in the first hours and days, it is vital that anti-coup defenders undertake immediate and resolute action against the attackers. The defense must be broad and deep enough in the society to constitute a resolute repudiation of the putschists. The attackers' appeals for "national unity"—meaning supporting them—and to allow them time to prove their good intentions, must be dismissed.

## **Blocking control by the putschists**

Politicians, civil servants, and judges, by ignoring or defying the attackers' illegal orders, would keep the normal machinery of government and the courts out of the putschists' control—as happened in the German resistance to the Kapp *Putsch* in 1920.

The legislature would neither receive the putschists themselves nor comply with any orders or requests from them. Instead, the legislature might continue sitting and operating under the established constitution, unless or until the members were actually physically removed by the putschists' forces. Or, the legislature could disperse after issuing a call for popular and governmental resistance to the coup. The members of the legislature could then join the population in other aspects of the defense struggle.

Neither the government treasury nor private banks would provide money or credit to the putschists. In 1920, for example, the German *Reichsbank* refused money to the putschists, declaring that the name of Dr. Kapp, a main coup leader, was not on the list of approved signers for the withdrawal of state funds.

The judiciary would declare the putschists and their helpers an illegal and unconstitutional body. The courts would continue to operate on the basis of pre-invasion laws and constitution. They would refuse to give moral, legal, and repressive assistance to the attackers, even if they had to close the courts. Order would then be maintained by social pressures, solidarity, and nonviolent sanctions; underground courts and independent arbiters could be used.

The putschists should be met with a blanket refusal by the government bureaucracy and civil servants to carry out their instructions, as occurred in the resistance to the Kapp *Putsch*. Or, the bureaucrats and civil servants might simply continue the old policies, ignoring the putschists' orders, and disrupting the implementation of new policies.

Police could be most effective when they brazenly defy the putschists, refusing illegitimate instructions while attempting to continue their normal duties. When under extreme duress, they could fake compliance with the putschists' orders but by evasion and deliberate inefficiencies never implement them.

Journalists and printers, refusing to submit to the putschists' censorship, would publish banned newspapers, newssheets, and other publications in large or many small editions. Broadcasters and technicians would broadcast resistance radio programs from hidden transmitters or from uncontrolled or even foreign territory. For example, President de Gaulle and Prime Minister Debré broadcast appeals from Paris aimed at French army conscripts and officers involved in the coup in Algeria, calling on them to disobey their rebellious officers.

At the same time, efforts should be made to persuade persons who are participating in the coup, and especially those in lower ranks of the military or other organizations who are being ordered to support the coup, that they should instead refuse to obey orders to

carry out illegal activities. Where the dangers to such persons would be great, they might take various types of evasive action or disappear into the general population rather than support the anti-constitutional usurpation.

In some past cases, resisters to government oppression have actively attempted to befriend troops under hostile command to induce them to be mild in their repression or even to join in the democratic resistance. At times such efforts have succeeded. Resisters to coups need to be aware of such options and prepared to apply them.

The cumulative impact of such institutional noncooperation is to prevent the coup leaders from controlling both the government and the society. By blocking such control, the defenders maintain and even increase their ability to continue long-term resistance, should that be required in case the coup does not collapse quickly.

### **Defying repression and intimidation**

Putschists facing strong and well-prepared anti-coup defense are likely to be seriously threatened, and therefore may respond with repression. This is certain to be a difficult time for the defenders and the whole population. Arrests, imprisonment, beatings, concentration camps, shootings, executions, for example, may take a heavy toll on the defenders. However, *in themselves* the repressive measures are not decisive unless they invoke fear and submissiveness in the defenders. In fact, the opponents' repression is evidence of the power of the nonviolent struggle, and is no more reason for despair than if, in a regular war, the enemy shoots back, wounding and killing one's own soldiers.

Against an anti-coup defense, repression may be used to crush resistance and also to instill fear. The Chinese saying is: "Kill the chicken to scare the monkey." However, as has occurred in numerous struggles, if the resisters and population refuse to be intimidated into submission and passivity, then the repression may fail.

Nonviolent defiance often risks serious casualties, but it seems to produce *far fewer* casualties than when both sides use violence. At the same time, persistence in nonviolent struggle contributes to

much greater chance for success than if the resisters had chosen to fight a militarily-prepared opponent with violence.

The putschists may demonstrate grave ruthlessness, such as by killing the head of state and other top political leaders. This brutality may not only be done to frighten the population into acceptance of the coup. Such killings also create clear vacancies in government leadership which the putschists aim to fill themselves. Therefore, an important part of anti-coup preparations is to determine clearly the line of political succession, minimally for several replacements.

### **The importance of nonviolent discipline**

Recognizing that violence undermines the dynamics and strength of nonviolent struggle, the putschists may often deliberately seek to provoke the resisters to use violence. Violence and plans to use violence may be falsely attributed to resisters. Repression, particularly brutal repression, may be intended to provoke the resisters into a violent response. At other times, *agents provocateurs* are placed within resistance groups to instigate or even commit acts of violence in order to support the charge that the resisters are using violence. All these provocations to violence must be rebuffed if the defenders are not to undermine their own defense.

This anti-coup defense is based on the technique of nonviolent struggle. A grand strategic requirement of nonviolent struggle is that courageous struggle must be combined with nonviolent discipline.<sup>15</sup> Nothing is to be gained, and a lot can be lost, by the killing of young soldiers who have found themselves in the putschists' army. The perpetration of violence, especially killings by the resisters, helps to undermine the otherwise nonviolent struggle in several ways. Resistance violence may help unite the putschists' basic supporters and military forces against the anti-coup defenders. In contrast, the main defense strategy regarding such soldiers is to undermine their morale and to induce them to become unreliable and even to mutiny. That aim is made almost impossible to achieve when the sol-

---

<sup>15</sup> See Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, pp. 586-620.

diers are targets of resistance violence.

Violence by the defenders will be used by the putschists to "justify" overwhelming repression which they wanted to use anyhow. It will be used to claim that the putschists are saving the country from terrorism or civil war, and are preserving "law and order." Violence by the defenders may also weaken their own side, as people may be less willing to support or employ violence than participate in a fully nonviolent resistance.

Repression of defiant and disciplined nonviolent resisters can at times have the opposite effect to that intended by the repressor. In this situation there is a strong tendency for the violent repression to react against the repressors' own power position. This is the process called "political *jiu-jitsu*."

Repression against courageous but nonviolent resisters can harm the repressors' power position in several ways. Such repression and the impact of brutalities may at times help to increase the numbers of resisters among the defending population and increase their determination. They may also sow doubts and reservations in the minds of the putschists' troops and other supporters, creating unease, opposition, and finally disaffection and resistance among the attackers' own population, functionaries, and military forces. Heavy repression against the nonviolent defenders may also arouse stronger international opposition to the coup and mobilize international opinion and diplomatic and economic action against the putschists.

This process of political *jiu-jitsu* is a great help when it occurs. However, the strategy of the anti-coup defense should not depend upon it. The strategy should instead concentrate primarily on the repudiation of the putschists' legitimacy and defy their attempts to gain control through massive noncooperation and political defiance.

In summary, maintenance of *nonviolent* resistant behavior by the anti-coup defenders is likely to contribute to: (1) winning sympathy and support, (2) reducing casualties, (3) inducing disaffection and mutiny of the opponents' troops, (4) attracting maximum participation in the nonviolent struggle, and (5) winning wider support. Nonviolent discipline is a key factor in achieving these aims.

## **International support**

Only occasionally, as against the August 1991 Soviet coup, as well as in opposition to the September 1991 coup in Haiti, has serious supportive international diplomatic and economic action been threatened or taken against coups d'état. However, as the case in Haiti of international sanctions to restore President Aristide suggests, successful defense against coups by largely international action may not be effective. Instead, successful defense primarily depends on noncooperation and defiance within the attacked country.

Sometimes, however, international support can be influential in assisting anti-coup struggles. Governments could refuse diplomatic recognition of the putschists and declare a prohibition on economic aid, as the United States and other countries did in reaction to the 1991 Soviet coup attempt. Such governments and societies could also provide technical and economic assistance, publishing, radio, and television services, and telecommunications support to the civilian defenders. Such measures could be planned in advance.

The nonviolent and defiant character of this type of anti-coup defense may stimulate much international publicity and sympathy. At times political sympathy may lead to diplomatic and international economic pressures against the putschists. In the defeat of the August 1991 attempted coup d'état in the Soviet Union, the internal actions—especially reluctance of soldiers within the military to obey the putschists' orders—seem to have been much more important. However, the diplomatic pressures and threats of international economic action seem to have been a significant supplementary factor. This case illustrates that under certain conditions international pressures can further weaken the putschists and strengthen the cause of the civilian defenders. However, there should be no romanticism that international public opinion or even international diplomatic and economic pressure can defeat a coup without determined and strong defense by the attacked society itself.

## **Shifts in strategy during the struggle**

Shifts in strategy by the civilian defenders may be required at certain points to counter new objectives of the attackers, to correct for exposed weaknesses or unexpected strengths among the defenders, and in order to maximize the impact of the defenders' resistance—based on denying legitimacy and refusing cooperation.

The coup leaders may soon discover that they are confronted by a comprehensive fighting force of the general population, organized through its social institutions. The putschists may at some point realize that they are unable to bring the society under their control, and that the defense is strong enough to force them to call off the whole venture. If this does not occur, the defenders must intensify their efforts to undermine the attackers' regime.

Where the putschists' control has already weakened significantly, or appears likely to do so shortly, it may be time for another intense application of the strategy of repudiation and rejection. This may prove, however, to be simply another phase of the conflict followed instead by a strategy of concentrating resistance only at especially important issues. Or, the total noncooperation strategy may prove to be a final blow to the coup.

## **A durable success**

Success in anti-coup defense depends on several key factors. These include, among others, the spirit of resistance, the solidarity of the defending population, the strength of the defending society, the ability of the people to maintain resistance and nonviolent discipline, the strengths and weaknesses of the putschists, the choice of the putschists' strategy of attack, and the wisdom of the defense strategies.

Victory with this anti-coup defense will come only to those who have developed it into a refined and powerful political tool operating with a wise strategy. As with military conflict, genuine power capacity and defense strength are required in this type of defense. Defeat of the constitutional defenders is always possible, just as

defeat occurs in traditional war. However, there are strong signs that a determined people will have strong chances of achieving success with such an anti-coup defense, and that with fewer casualties and less destruction than would accompany a military struggle.

### **In case of need for long-term defense**

If the anti-coup defense is not successful within days or a few weeks, a new strategic situation will have been created. The putschists will have probably succeeded in establishing a modicum of legitimacy, acceptance, cooperation, and control. The conflict will then have been changed from a short-term anti-coup defense to a longer-term struggle against an established dictatorship. For that rather different conflict situation only some suggestive lines of resistance can be outlined here.<sup>16</sup>

In that resistance a strategy of total noncooperation with the new government would probably not be viable because of the need of the society to survive a longer-term struggle. Instead, a policy of concentrating resistance at various key points would be needed until a resulting change in the balance of forces merited an application of more widespread or total noncooperation in order to bring final success.

A longer-term defense strategy against an established dictatorship needs to focus on two main objectives. First, the attackers must be prevented from obtaining any other major objectives beyond the dictatorship itself. If the dictators seek other forms of domination, as economic, ideological, or political, then liberation plans need to concentrate on blocking these. This produces a strategy of "selective resistance," sometimes called "resistance at key points."

Under a strategy of selective resistance, people in various professions and occupations might resist only on crucial issues. For example, the police, while attempting to keep criminal elements from

---

<sup>16</sup>See Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. Bangkok: Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma, 1993 and Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2002.

taking advantage of the situation, might selectively refuse to locate and arrest democratic resisters, perhaps warning people of impending arrests and repressive actions. Teachers would refuse to introduce the regime's propaganda into the schools. Workers and managers would use strikes, delays, and obstructionism to impede exploitation of the country. Clergymen would continue to preach about the duty to refuse to help the dictators.

The second main objective of long-term defense is the protection of the autonomy of the society's institutions. When quick success of the anti-coup resistance has not occurred, the new dictators may attempt to control and silence various institutions of the society. These attempts would especially focus on those institutions that have been involved in the earlier defense struggle, such as the courts, schools, unions, cultural groups, professional societies, religious institutions, and the like. If control over such institutions is achieved, the future capacity of the society for resistance will be further weakened. Therefore, the long-term democratic struggle must firmly resist any efforts of the invader to control the society's institutions. Such institutions are not only points of resistance. They are also actual or potential resistance organizations which can act to defend the society from dictators and to restore the legitimate political system.

The strategy of selective resistance is cited here only to show that an initial failure to defeat a coup need not doom the society to long-term dictatorship. However, the main anti-coup defense should aim to block the usurpation fully and quickly, well before the putschists have consolidated their control.

### **Collapsing the coup**

Such a long-term defense against an established dictatorship may not be needed, however. The initial anti-coup defense struggle may well succeed. If the civilian defenders maintain their discipline and persist in their defiance and noncooperation despite repression, and if they involve significant sections of the populace, the putschists' drive to achieve their aims can be frustrated and finally blocked.

The resistance of a prepared people and their institutions may finally prove to be too much for the coup leaders. Their objectives may be denied to them. Their effort to establish control over the society may have failed. The coup attempt may have merely placed the putschists in a political hornets' nest. The numbers of determined, noncooperating, and disobedient defenders may steadily grow. It may become clear that the defiant defenders are headed for success, a victory enhanced with new vitality and durability.

Great care will then be needed in the transition back to the constitutional system, especially if former political leaders have been killed by the putschists. Where possible, constitutionally selected leaders should be restored to their positions and the previous constitution and laws applied, to be amended in the future where appropriate. Steps should be taken as soon as possible to begin correcting any legitimate problems and grievances that led dissatisfied people to support the coup. The society and government will also do well to consider carefully how the government's democratic qualities can be improved.

### **Deterring coups d'état**

A well-prepared defense capacity against coups d'état can constitute a formidable deterrence against would-be putschists. When a society is known to have a well-prepared anti-coup defense, would-be usurpers anticipating at best a very hard struggle and at worst an ignominious defeat, may well never even attempt a coup.

If would-be putschists or even current government leaders know that if they do not abide by the constitutional limits on their authority, the democratic will of the society will be enforced by political defiance and noncooperation, then they may well decide to stay within their appropriate constitutional roles.

This deterrence capacity is completely dependent upon a credible capacity to wage effective resistance against coups d'état. Hence, the only way to prepare deterrence of internal usurpations is to lay the groundwork for strong noncooperation and defiance against such attacks.

As in military defense, no deterrence capacity is guaranteed to succeed. Attacks may nevertheless occur. If a coup is attempted despite extensive preparations for resistance, then this type of defense could defeat it effectively and potentially very quickly, and restore constitutional government, without the risk of civil war.

### **Promoting an anti-coup defense**

An early step toward this policy will need to be dissemination throughout the society of the concept of anti-coup defense and exploration of the forms of resistance that are most powerful in defending against usurpations. An informational and educational program can be initiated by individuals and organizations even while the concept is quite new. Articles, newspaper reports, public meetings, discussion groups, radio, television, panel discussions, speakers for various organizations, pamphlets, and books, are among the means of communication and education which can be used. Familiarity with the concept that coups can be successfully resisted through noncooperation and defiance is a prerequisite for the needed careful consideration and active support from the major civil institutions of the society and for organized preparations for such defense.

Obviously, consideration, adoption, and implementation of this anti-coup defense should not expect support from cliques intent on potentially conducting a coup. However, the anti-coup policy will be strengthened if it receives "transpartisan" consideration, support, and participation. A transpartisan approach would aim to incorporate people and groups with differing convictions and political opinions in support of the development, adoption, and implementation of the anti-coup policy. Given such varied and wide-ranging consideration the support of most of the population for the anti-coup policy will likely be stronger and more united.

### **Adopting an anti-coup defense**

There are three main ways in which a strong anti-coup defense capacity can be adopted: (1) through widespread dissemination,

throughout all levels of the society, of knowledge and understanding of the grand strategy and broad forms of anti-coup resistance, as just discussed; (2) through the organization of the institutions of civil society so that they are prepared to confront and resist such an attack; and (3) through constitutional and legal changes and organizational efforts within the governmental structure so that it will not be at the disposal of putschists. Ideally, all three of these ways should be applied in sequence or some combination, depending on what is possible or most feasible at the time in the particular situation. However, it is possible to begin the process of education and consideration without certainty as to what will be the final manner of adoption and implementation.

### **Preparations by the civil institutions**

Despite the vulnerability of many democratic governments, not all political leaders will see the desirability and feasibility of preparing for anti-coup defense. A capacity for defense against coups d'état is nevertheless important, and needs to be developed. Where the government for whatever reason does not take the initiative in adopting an anti-coup defense policy and preparing for it, the way is open in societies with any degree of civil liberties for the society itself to take action. In these cases there is a very important role for direct preparations for anti-coup defense by the civil institutions themselves.

In many situations the basic concept of anti-coup defense and the principles of resistance can be disseminated, and preparations for it may be initiated by the civil institutions of the society, independently of governmental involvement.

These preparations would not mean, of course, that everyone thinks that the current government is the best possible or that it has no serious limitations or problems. The view would simply be that the regime that might be imposed by possible putschists would most likely be significantly worse. Blocking the imposition through a coup of a more autocratic and repressive government would then be a

prerequisite to making needed improvements in the political system and society.

Often the targeted current government may suffer from blatant inadequacies, such as widespread corruption, or social disruption, such as a “breakdown of law and order.” Putschists may sincerely or falsely claim that their coup is necessary to correct these situations. That claim may give them significant popular support. Nevertheless, defense is needed against those coups.

The new regime may not end corruption, and the claim to support “law and order” may be used to impose a new authoritarian or dictatorial regime. The use of a coup to correct such problems represents a dangerous precedent as to how a problem regime should be changed. That coup might in fact take a very different turn, and the next coup might be much more sinister. One of several possible alternative remedies includes carefully focused campaigns by conventional forms of action or narrowly directed nonviolent protests or resistance.

As an anti-democratic technique of political change, coups d'état are intrinsically dangerous even when it is claimed they are intended to correct a serious problem. In politics, there are often unintended consequences of one's actions, and not all intentions are always made public.

Nongovernmental institutions and organizations can disseminate the essential concept of anti-coup defense widely throughout the society through various means of communication. Those civil bodies can then individually and in cooperation with others initiate and implement an anti-coup defense policy. They may do this by educating their own constituents, making preparations, and undertaking planning as to how their sector of the population and society might most effectively act to help to defeat a future coup. For example, individuals, groups, and institutions working in communications, transportation, government offices, the police, religious life, education, and every major aspect of the society would need to plan how effectively to block control by the putschists.

Strong preparations for anti-coup defense can merge into both

education and the organization within governmental structures even when a national anti-coup defense policy has not been adopted. In some situations organized preparations by the civil institutions might also involve local and regional governments and cooperation with personnel and groups within the national governmental structure.

This type of planning would need to focus to a significant degree on those aspects of the society that would be priority areas of legitimization and control for the putschists. Among the high priority areas would be control of the governmental apparatus (civil servants, bureaucrats, and the like) and control of the police and members of the military forces. Also highly important would be newspapers, radio, television, telephones, water, energy, and food supplies. Through such initiatives in education, organization, planning, and preparations, national plans to block future coups could be prepared that are suited to specific national conditions. Such a defense policy could be made powerful even without governmental initiative.

If such institutions are strong and represent the diverse components of the society, it is possible for them to prepare and to conduct a sufficiently powerful anti-coup defense that is able to defeat such an attack even when the government itself has not participated in the organization of such defense.

### **Government initiated preparations**

Where the society has a high degree of democracy, or at least the political leaders wish their society to evolve peacefully without abrupt changes by coups d'état, governments may adopt anti-coup defense policies. Legislatures and other parts of the government can establish measures to prepare for effective defense against future coups. These measures might be aided by constitutional, legal, and organizational changes aimed to bar putschists from seizing control of the government and society.

For example, in 1997 Thailand adopted a new constitution that takes a major step in this direction. Its Article 65 states:

A person shall have the right to resist peacefully any act committed for the acquisition of power to rule the country by a means which is not in accordance with the modes provided in this Constitution.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, such a constitutional provision is of major significance. However, to be effective it requires the addition of legal provisions for implementing the principle, and also both governmental and nongovernmental preparations to make the noncooperation sufficiently powerful so as to be successful.

Where possible, involvement of the government itself in the dissemination of the concept of defense against coups, and in the preparations for a vigorous defense can have significant advantages. The most important advantage would of course be the direct preparation of the governmental machinery to resist a takeover. The bureaucracy, civil service, ministries, administrative departments, police, and military forces could be trained to offer strong resistance. Specific obligations and guidelines for anti-coup resistance would be developed for and by civil servants, media staff, communications operators, police, military forces, and employees of local, regional, and provincial governments. If these components of the state machinery can be kept unusable by putschists, the defense will be more extensive and powerful than if this were not the case. Also, the struggle is likely to be shorter with fewer casualties.

### **Possible legislation and other plans to mobilize defense**

Governmental preparations may require new legislation and implementation of its provisions. Among the steps that can be taken are these: (For a fuller discussion of governmental preparations, see Appendix One. For a discussion of preparations by civil institutions, see Appendix Two.)

---

<sup>17</sup>Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. A certified correct English translation has been used and can be found at: [www.krisdika.go.th/law/text/lawpub/e11102540/text.htm](http://www.krisdika.go.th/law/text/lawpub/e11102540/text.htm)

- A constitutional amendment can be adopted that grants citizens the right and responsibility to resist a coup and denies them the right to recognize a coup as being legitimate.
- Legislation can be enacted that obliges all police and military forces to refuse to participate in or assist with a coup.
- Legislation can be enacted that obliges all government employees to refuse cooperation with a coup and obedience to usurpers. In the event of a coup, government employees would be obliged to carry on their work according to established constitutional and legal procedures and policies.
- Legislation can be enacted that obliges all personnel in the fields of communications, media, and transportation to resist censorship by the putschists and to refuse to cooperate with, or communicate orders from, coup leaders.
- Legislation can be enacted that obliges all public and private financial institutions to refuse financial relations with the putschists.
- The constitutional government can communicate in advance of a crisis with all international bodies, organizations, and governments with which it has relations that in the event of a coup, those bodies should maintain recognition of the constitutional government and refuse all relations with the putschists.
- In the event of a coup, individuals and bodies within the constitutional government can appeal to religious and moral leaders to denounce the attack and to impress upon their adherents that they should refuse to cooperate with it.
- The constitutional government can make plans for continuation of leadership in case important government buildings are seized or government officials are imprisoned or executed.

- The legislature can prepare plans for how the constitutional government should resume control of the country once a coup attempt collapses.
- The legislature can appeal to organizations and educational institutions to develop and implement programs to educate citizens on their right and duty to refuse cooperation with an attempted coup.

In all of this planning, it must be made clear that the nature of the anti-coup resistance is nonviolent and that no one is to commit acts of violence against fellow citizens who illegally support the coup. It should also be made clear what the penalties are for individuals who are found guilty of either initiating or cooperating with a coup.

### **Other types of preparations**

In addition to preparation and dissemination of general guidelines for anti-coup resistance, several other types of preparations for defense are possible. For example, training maneuvers could be organized in which imaginary coups would be defied by staged civilian resistance. These maneuvers could take place in residential areas, offices or factories, cities, provinces, and across the whole country.

Technical preparations would also be necessary for this type of defense against coups. Provisions and equipment would be required for communications after the putschists had occupied key centers and seized facilities of established newspapers and radio and television stations. Publishing supplies and broadcasting equipment for underground newspapers, resistance leaflets, and underground radio could be secured and hidden for use in emergencies. Advance arrangements should be made for locating such broadcasting stations, communications centers, or printing plants, in the territory of a friendly supportive country.

## **Consequences of an anti-coup defense**

The objective of this defense policy against coups d'état is to preserve constitutional government by blocking the imposition of viable government by the putschists, by making the attacked society unrulable by the attackers, and by enabling the population to maintain control and self-direction of their society even when under attack. The responsibility for this preservation of constitutional government rests with all members of the society. It is they who can maintain and expand their freedoms and continue to improve their society in accordance with the cherished principles of the nation.

This anti-coup defense policy would have major positive qualities. It is a policy based on people, not bullets and bombs, on human institutions, not military technology. It is a policy that can serve freedom instead of threatening civil war or submitting to a new dictatorship. Adopted and practiced widely internationally, this policy would make a major contribution to removing the coup d'état as a major political problem. This would limit the rise of new dictatorships, reducing the prevalence of tyranny in the world.

This policy is a creative defense based on the power of people even in grave crises to become, and remain, the masters of their own destinies. The consequences of this could be profound.

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **LEGISLATION AND OTHER GOVERNMENTAL PREPARATIONS FOR ANTI-COUP DEFENSE**

Important preparations can be made by governments to prevent and defeat coups d'état. These may require new legislation and implementation of its provisions. In all of this legislation and these declarations of responsibilities and duties, it shall be made clear that no one is to commit acts of violence against one's fellow citizens who are acting illegally. The following legal measures and procedures are recommended for this purpose.

1. A constitutional provision should be adopted that no citizen of any status, role, or position in the society whatsoever has the right to accept as the legitimate government any person or group that has conducted a coup d'état.

To the contrary, all citizens without exception have the constitutional duty to deny legitimacy to any group of putschists and to refuse all cooperation with them and all obedience to them. Citizens will persistently continue their usual duties and assist in meeting the human needs of their fellow citizens while defying the putschists.

2. Specific laws should be enacted to establish the legal obligations of all government employees and civil servants, on national, regional and local levels of government, to refuse to assist coups d'état. Their legal obligation would be to persist in conducting their work according to established (pre-coup) constitutional and legal procedures and policies only. They would also be legally bound to refuse all cooperation with and obedience to any group of usurpers. This refusal would be aimed to deny to putschists all administrative support to carry out their illegal orders and objectives.

3. Specific laws should be enacted to implement the new constitutional provision to make it a legal obligation of all members of police forces and all members of the military forces to swear not only

allegiance to the constitutional government, but to pledge—perhaps in the induction oath—to refuse to participate in any conspiracy to organize or conduct a coup d'état. In case a coup is then later attempted, it would be the duty of these persons to refuse to obey, serve, or collaborate with any group that has attempted to seize the state apparatus.

The police at all levels and members of the judicial system must be mandated to continue to apply the previously established laws, policies, and procedures only. They must ignore any new policies, edicts, and orders, received or announced, from those who have illegally attempted to seize the state. Specifically, they may warn persons and groups of the likelihood of arrest, and they should refuse to locate and arrest patriotic resisters who are defying the putsch, either by individual actions or by group resistance and demonstrations.

At times this police resistance may be quite open and at other times police may pretend to be obeying the putschists but not actually doing so. For example, they may report that it was impossible for them to locate and arrest wanted persons.

If ordered to disperse street demonstrations, police actions may range from simply being present at the site but not taking repressive measures to joining the demonstrators as resisters themselves. The police must not be allowed to become a tool of repression for the usurpers.

4. In addition to resisting the putschists, police should, wherever feasible, be obligated to actively assist the resistance. For example, it has happened in past resistance movements that police transported supplies of resistance newspapers and other literature in police cars to other parts of the city or region where they were needed.

5. Soldiers and other members of military forces must not allow themselves to become a tool of repression in the service of those who have attempted to replace the constitutional government. Their noncooperation and disobedience may be especially difficult when the coup has been conducted by officers of the military forces, as

compared to a political group which seeks the compliance of the military forces in enforcing their illegal domination on the government and society.

Similarly to the options for police, soldiers in this difficult situation who oppose the coup may take any one of a range of actions, none of which serves the usurpers. They may, for example, be very gentle in facing street demonstrators, or, when ordered to fire at protesters, may shoot above their heads so as not to injure anyone. They may also seek to encourage their military unit to openly defy the usurpers, or, without using their military weapons, soldiers may engage in especially dangerous acts of protest and defiance against the putschists.

Open resistance by both police and military troops is likely to be extremely dangerous as the penalty for disobedience and mutiny is often execution. Consequently, other less obvious ways of denying usurpers obedience and assistance merit investigation and application.

6. Specific laws should be enacted to make it a legal obligation of all persons and organizations working in communications to persist in their loyalty to the constitutional government only. This would mean that in the event of a coup d'état they would be legally bound to refuse to submit to the putschists' attempts to impose censorship, publish announcements and orders from the putschists, and comply with any other illegal orders from the putschists.

In case the regular communications, printing and broadcasting facilities are made unusable for normal activities and for use on behalf of the legitimate government as a result of repressive actions of the putschists, it should be the responsibility of people in those professions, as well as other citizens, to create new means of communication among the population outside the control of the usurpers.

7. All persons and groups working for any level of government should, in the event of a coup, for as long as possible, continue to apply established policies and procedures and ignore any new poli-

cies, orders, and instructions issued by the usurpers.

Under likely initial conditions, the government employees can continue this defiance at their usual places of work. If intolerable repression is launched against them there, these persons and groups can go on strike or even disappear. The machinery of government must not be permitted to become a tool of the usurpers for controlling the society as a whole.

8. Specific laws should be enacted to make it a legal obligation of all persons and organizations working in transportation to refuse all orders from the usurpers and to make the transportation system unusable by the putschists and instead to use it to assist the resistance.

9. Specific laws should be enacted to make it a legal obligation of all governmental and private financial bodies, all banks, business institutions, and other financial institutions, and all labor unions and similar associations, to refuse all financial relations whatsoever with the putschists.

10. Well in advance of a coup attempt, the government should communicate to all governments with which it has diplomatic relations, and to all international organizations, including the United Nations, that those bodies are requested to refuse to conduct any normal political or economic relationships with potential usurpers and instead should recognize the constitutional government only.

11. The legislature and governmental ministries and departments should make various types of contingency plans for the continuation of legitimate leadership in case the putschists occupy government buildings, imprison or execute government officials and representatives, or take similar repressive actions.

12. The legislature should in advance make precise plans as to how constitutional government shall resume full normal operations upon the collapse of the attempted coup. No other group of usurpers

shall be permitted undemocratically to impose its own rule during a period of transition. In case of loss of life by previous officials during the coup and defense against it, provisions should be made as to how other persons may legitimately assume the constitutional positions that have been vacated.

13. The legislature should in advance of an attempted coup urge and support all independent institutions, organizations, associations, and all educational institutions of the country to participate in the education of their members and the general citizenry as to their appropriate patriotic duties to repudiate the usurpers and to practice noncooperation and defiance against any attempted coup d'état.

14. The legislature may also enact legislation to deny participants in a coup any lasting financial gain from their illegal activities. They would also be prohibited from holding any future government employment or positions.

15. The legislature should also consider what other types of punishment should be provided in the law for initiating and cooperating with a coup. These provisions need to take into consideration the need to encourage early supporters of a coup to reverse their action and to join the defense against it.



**APPENDIX TWO**  
**PREPARATIONS BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY**  
**FOR ANTI-COUP DEFENSE**

Coups d'état are less likely to be attempted and more likely to be defeated if the institutions of civil society are prepared and able to resist any attempted seizure of the state.

This defense would be prepared and waged by the nongovernmental organizations and associations, educational institutions, economic organizations, communications and transportation bodies, religious organizations and institutions, and other bodies.

This resistance action by civil society may be waged either in support of planned governmental defense measures, or, in their absence, may be waged independently and directly at the initiative of the citizenry.

In either case, advance preparations for anti-coup resistance by the society's independent institutions are likely to make any coup plotters think twice before attempting such an attack. If they nevertheless attempt a putsch, these preparations would increase the power of the anti-coup defense.

These preparations and resistance can be grouped roughly into five types of activity: (1) public education; (2) media; (3) political organizations; (4) religious institutions; and (5) specific groups and institutions.

**1. Public education**

The tasks of these nongovernmental bodies would include educating their members and the general citizenry about effective means to reject as illegitimate any usurpers and how to wage widespread noncooperation and defiance of the putschists' efforts to govern. The aim would be to make illegitimate controls and rule impossible.

While all institutions of civil society should participate in these efforts to educate their own members, certain institutions would be especially suitable for reaching the general public. These would include the formal educational system and various branches of the

media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet, and the cinema. The political content of such public education measures would include both: (1) the importance of denying legitimacy to any putschists and, (2) the importance of noncooperation and defiance to make it impossible for them to establish and maintain their illegitimate rule. In addition to explicit instructions on how to resist, documentaries and film dramas about cases of earlier anti-coup resistance could be used. Information on consequences in other countries of the failure to resist a coup d'état could also be important.

The public will need to be informed about the characteristics of nonviolent struggle, including its many methods, and the way it operates in conflicts.

At times open street demonstrations may be useful to communicate opposition to an illegal seizure of the state. However, at other times such action as street marches toward the guns of the putschists' troops may be most unwise. Such action may lead not only to massive casualties but also strike fear into the public, and therefore submission.

Because of these situations, the public must be informed well in advance of the crisis about alternative forms of protest and defiance that are less obviously dangerous but that make popular opposition unmistakably clear. For example, if the mass of the urban population for specified periods simply stays indoors, in their homes, schools, or other buildings, the streets will be largely empty of people, and therefore not be suitable shooting ranges to kill and intimidate resisters. The empty streets will, however, communicate widespread opposition.

## **2. Media**

The members of society's media—journalists, newspaper and magazine editors, radio and television reporters and directors, printing unions, communication aides, and the like—can organize advance resistance against a coup d'état. This would include plans to resist censorship by the putschists, plans to communicate messages

from the constitutional government to the general citizenry, and plans to refuse to communicate messages from the putschists to the population.

In addition, media personnel can make advance preparations for communications in case they lose their operational centers or must go into hiding. If the putschists take control of society's media apparatus, printers unions, radio operators, and others can claim mechanical failures and inability to carry out the putschists' instructions. Plans for underground printing presses and secret radio broadcasting capacity can also be developed. Preparations to broadcast from neighboring countries can be arranged as well.

All of these actions will significantly limit the legitimacy and control that people could give to coup leaders because those leaders will be unable to exercise full control over the information to which the society has access and the defenders will be able to communicate widely among themselves and with the public.

### **3. Political organizations**

Both political parties and nonpartisan organizations devoted to advancing their social, economic, and political agendas should include in their missions efforts at educating their members and the public as to the importance and methods of anti-coup defense. Their prior organizational contacts and networks can also help significantly in communicating guidance about needed resistance and conducting the anti-coup defense.

### **4. Religious institutions**

Religious and moral leaders and groups should urge their believers and supporters to regard a coup as an attack on constitutional democracy that is both immoral and a violation of the codes of behavior by which their adherents and believers should live. Consequently, if such an attack occurs, those religious and moral leaders and groups should urge their believers and supporters to apply their beliefs by refusing to give any legitimacy to the putschists, refusing all coop-

eration with and obedience to them, and instead by participating actively in the anti-coup defense.

## **5. Specific groups and institutions**

The members and officials of individual groups and institutions in the society could also organize around preventing the putschists from controlling the areas of the society that they operate. For example, members of civil society who work in transportation, economic activities, mass media, communications, religious institutions, and all other major functioning components and services of the society need to prepare and apply noncooperation and defiance to retain their independence from putschists.

It will be highly important for these bodies and institutions to block attempts by the putschists or their supporters to seize internal control of these bodies and institutions. Attackers may also even attempt to destroy these independent groups and institutions and replace them with new institutions controlled by the putschists or their collaborators. Those efforts, too, will need to be defeated.

The citizens and their nongovernmental institutions should launch preparations and in a crisis should initiate actual resistance. This anti-coup resistance could be in accordance with an advance governmental anti-coup defense plan or, as noted earlier, could be launched independently if no such plan has been prepared.

Those population groups and institutions that operate or control important social, economic, political, or industrial functions, will usually be more skilled in determining what specific forms of noncooperation and defiance may be most effective in keeping that area of the society out of the control of usurpers than the theorists of such resistance. A few examples follow:

- Transportation workers, such as truck drivers, railroad employees, or airline operators are likely to be far more skilled in determining how best to slow or paralyze the transportation system and to keep it out of the hands of the putschists, than staff in a government office. They are also likely to be most skilled in know-

ing how, despite partial paralysis by resisters or blockages of transportation by putschists, to move food and other important supplies to places where they are most needed.

- In the communications field, as long as cell phones and e-mail systems are still operating, they can be used creatively to help communicate resistance plans, to initiate resistance activities, and to report the status of putschists' controls and resistance struggle.

Reserve broadcast equipment that has been hidden away for an emergency can be used for defense purposes even when government offices or previous broadcasting stations have been occupied.

- Civil servants in government offices can continue to function independently, even if their directors have joined the putschists. In addition to open defiance, civil servants can also quietly resist the coup through bureaucratic slowness, misfiling important papers and similar nonprovocative but effective activities that limit the putschists' control.
- Labor unions can defiantly refuse to follow putschists' efforts to direct economic activities and can continue those activities that have been prohibited, whatever the putschist leaders, collaborating administrators, or corporation officials may say.
- Special days that honor persons, events, or principles of significance to the nation and to the democratic resisters may be observed even when the putschists ban them and new such days may be instituted to honor events or casualties of the anti-coup resistance.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Gonzalo Arias for his gracious permission to use in English the title of his pioneering 1982 book *EL ANTIGOLPE* on this same subject. Readers of Spanish language publications will find it of interest.<sup>18</sup>

The Albert Einstein Institution is grateful to the Arca Foundation for a grant to make possible the publication of this and other publications on the practice of nonviolent struggle.

Hardy Merriman of the Albert Einstein Institution has been of very great help in the preparation of this publication, through his advice, editorial skills, suggestions and management of the production arrangements with the printers.

Probably the most important acknowledgement must go to the brave people who in past years, without benefit of advance planning, have improvised anti-coup resistance in several countries, including Germany, France, the Soviet Union, and Thailand. They have shown that such defense is possible and at times can succeed.

Earlier publications by Gene Sharp on this subject have been published and aroused significant interest in Panama, Venezuela, El Salvador, Haiti, and Thailand. Personal testimony was also presented by Gene Sharp to the House Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Thailand in 1992 and by Bruce Jenkins and Gene Sharp to a committee of the Supreme Soviet (Council) of the Soviet Union in 1991.

An earlier version of the main text of this publication was included in a few photocopies of *Against the Coup: A Guide to Effective Action to Prevent and Defeat Coups d'État* by Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, distributed by the International League for Human Rights in New York in 1994. It appears here in slightly expanded form, with appendices, and in print for the first time.

---

<sup>18</sup>Gonzalo Arias, *El Antigolpe: Manual para una respuesta noviolenta a un golpe de Estado. Con un comentario de Fernando Savater y una contribución de Adam Roberts*. Vélez-Málaga, Spain: Ahimsa, 1995, Fourth Edition. E-mail: ahimsa@arrakis.es



## **A NOTE ABOUT TRANSLATIONS AND REPRINTING OF THIS PUBLICATION**

To facilitate dissemination of this publication it has been placed in the public domain. That means that anyone is free to reproduce it or disseminate it.

The authors, however, do have several requests that they would like to make, although individuals are under no legal obligation to follow such requests.

- The authors request that no changes be made in the text, either additions or deletions, if it is reproduced.
- The authors request notification from individuals who intend to reproduce this document. Notification can be given to the Albert Einstein Institution (contact information appears in the beginning of this publication immediately before the Table of Contents).
- The authors request that if this document is going to be translated, great care must be taken to preserve the original meaning of the text. Some of the terms in this publication will not translate readily into other languages, as direct equivalents for “nonviolent action” and related terms may not be available. Thus, careful consideration must be given to how these terms and concepts are to be translated so as to be understood accurately by new readers.

For individuals and groups that wish to translate this work, the Albert Einstein Institution has developed a standard set of translation procedures that may assist them. They are as follows:

1. A selection process takes place to select a translator. Candidates are evaluated on their fluency in both English and the language into which the work will be translated. Candidates

are also evaluated on their general knowledge surrounding the subject area and their understanding of the terms and concepts present in the text.

2. An evaluator is selected by a similar process. The evaluator's job is to thoroughly review the translation and to provide feedback and criticism to the translator. It is often better if the translator and evaluator do not know the identities of each other.
3. Once the translator and evaluator are selected, the translator submits a sample translation of two or three pages of the text, as well as a list of a number of significant key terms that are present in the text.
4. The evaluator evaluates this sample translation and presents feedback to the translator.
5. If major problems exist between the translator's sample translation and the evaluator's evaluation of that translation, then either the translator or the evaluator may be replaced, depending upon the judgement of the individual or group that is sponsoring the translation. If minor problems exist, the translator proceeds with the full translation of the text, keeping in mind the comments of the evaluator.
6. Once the entire text is translated, the evaluator evaluates the entire text and gives feedback to the translator.
7. Once the translator has considered this feedback and made any necessary changes, the final version of the text is complete and the translated book is ready to be printed and distributed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Gene Sharp**, D. Phil. (Oxon.), is Senior Scholar at the Albert Einstein Institution in Boston, Massachusetts. He holds a B.A. and an M.A. from Ohio State University and a D.Phil. in political theory from Oxford University. He is also Professor Emeritus of political science at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. For nearly thirty years he held a research appointment at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs. He is the author of various books, including *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973), *Gandhi as a Political Strategist* (1979), *Social Power and Political Freedom* (1980), *Making Europe Unconquerable* (1985), *Civilian-Based Defense* (1990), and *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1993 and 2002). A new major book is now in preparation (2003) *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: Twentieth Century Practice and Twenty-First Century Potential*. His writings have been published in more than thirty languages.

**Bruce Jenkins** is Policy Director of the Bank Information Center in Washington, D.C. He previously served as Executive Director of The Albert Einstein Institution from 1995-2000 and was also Assistant Director of the Institution's Policy and Outreach program. He holds a B.A. (Political Science) from the University of New Hampshire and a *Diplom* (Political Science/International Relations) from the Freie Universität Berlin, with a special focus on international economic sanctions. He has extensive international experience working with both policy makers and civil society groups. He has participated in consultations, workshops, and fact-finding missions in China, Sweden, Russia, and the Baltic states on nonviolent democratization processes.

