

## Control of Military Forces

State leaders hope that their decisions about military force will translate into actual actions in distant locations. This translation requires great effort.

### Command

The use of military force generally requires the coordination of thousands, sometimes millions, of individuals performing many different functions in many locations. Such coordination is what is meant by *command*. At best, military forces are large and complex institutions, operating in especially difficult conditions during wartime. At worst, military forces have a mind of their own.

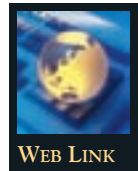
States control military forces through a **chain of command** running from the highest authority through a hierarchy spreading out to the lowest-level soldiers. In battle, controlling armed forces is especially difficult because of complex operations, rapid change, and the fog of war created by the gap between battlefield activity and command-level information. Participants are pumped up with adrenaline, deafened by noise, and confused by a mass of activity that—from the middle of it—may seem to make no sense. They are called on to perform actions that may run against basic instincts as well as moral norms—killing people and risking death.

Militaries enforce the chain of command through strict discipline (such as shooting deserters), and through training to make individuals obey commands reflexively. Military units also rely on soldiers' sense of group solidarity. Soldiers risk their lives because their "buddies" depend on them. Abstractions such as nationalism, patriotism, or religious fervor are important, but loyalty to the immediate group (along with a survival instinct) is a stronger motivator.

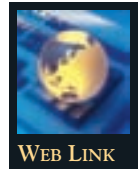
### States and Militaries

Overcoming chaos and complexity is only part of the task for state leaders seeking to control military forces. Sometimes they must overcome their own military officers as well. Although militaries are instruments of state power, in many states the military forces themselves control the government. These **military governments** are mostly in the global South, where the military may be the only large modern institution in a country.

A **coup d'état** is the seizure of political power by domestic military forces—a change of political power outside the state's constitutional order. Coups are often mounted by ambitious junior officers against the top generals. Officers who thus break the chain of command can take along with them the sections of the military hierarchy below them. Coup leaders move quickly to seize centers of power—official state buildings as well as television stations and transmitters—before other units of the military can put down the coup attempt or unleash a civil war. Civilian politicians in power and uncooperative military officers are arrested or killed. The coup leaders try to create a sense of inevitability around the change in government while claiming their actions will bring long-term stability. For example, after overthrowing Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, General Raoul Cedras proclaimed, "The Army is steering the ship of state into port."



Command



Homosexuals  
in the Military

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**HIGHLY IRREGULAR**


A coup is a change of government carried out by domestic military forces operating outside the state's constitution. The number of military governments is declining, but dozens remain. Pakistan's military government took power in a 1999 coup and became a key U.S. ally in fighting Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in 2001. Here, soldiers deploy to the provincial legislature in Lahore after the coup.

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Even in nonmilitary governments, the interaction of civilian with military leaders—called *civil-military relations*—is an important factor in how states use force. Military officers want autonomy of decision once force is committed, in order to avoid the problems created in the Vietnam War when President Johnson sat in the White House situation room daily picking targets for bombing raids. Worse yet, in NATO's 1999 bombing of Serbia, specific targets had to be approved by politicians in multiple countries.

Covert operations are the dagger part of the “cloak and dagger” spy business. Several thousand such operations were mounted during the Cold War, when the CIA and its Soviet counterpart, the KGB, waged an ongoing worldwide secret war. CIA covert operations in the 1950s overthrew unfriendly foreign governments in Iran and Guatemala by organizing coups against them. The CIA-organized Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, in 1961, was its first big failure, followed by other failed efforts against

the Castro government (including eight assassination attempts). CIA covert activities were sharply scaled back after congressional hearings in the 1970s revealed scandals. Such covert operations now must be reported to special congressional *oversight* committees through an elaborate set of procedures. After September 2001, the executive branch enjoyed greater authority in conducting covert operations without congressional scrutiny, although the limits of executive authority remain uncertain.

The traditions of civil-military relations in a state do not necessarily reflect the extent of democracy there. States in which civilians traditionally have trouble controlling the military include some with long histories of democracy, notably in Latin America. And states with strong traditions of civilian control over military forces include some authoritarian states such as the former Soviet Union (where the Communist party controlled the military).

In a few states, certain military forces operate beyond the reach of the government's chain of command—certainly when rebel guerrilla armies control territories nominally under the jurisdiction of the central government. It is also true in the infrequent but dramatic cases when governmental authority breaks down, such as in Somalia

and Afghanistan in the 1990s. Private armies or militias then answer to local warlords rather than to any national government. But in most of the world, most of the time, military forces follow the commands of state leaders (or are themselves the state leaders).