● Why did the armed forces enter government and then retreat from office?

● What is the legacy of military rule for today’s civilian governments?

● What role does the military now play in authoritarian regimes?

First, why did military coups cluster between the 1960s and 1980s? The Cold War was of key significance. During this period, the United States and the Soviet Union were more concerned with the global chessboard than with how their client countries governed themselves. So, ruling generals could survive through the political, economic, and military backing of a superpower even though they lacked support in their own country.

As military governments prospered during the Cold War so, too, did they shrivel after its close. By the 1990s, ruling generals could no longer rely on their sponsoring superpower; instead, conditionality ruled the roost. Aid and technical assistance flowed to civilian regimes adopting democratic forms and offering at least some commitment to civil rights. The last Latin American generals were back in their quarters by 1993 (Figure 4.1), although many surviving African presidents – such as Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso – originally came to power via a putsch. In recent times, military coups have been rare and sometimes short-lived affairs in smaller countries; examples include Fiji (2006), and the West African states of Guinea (2008), Mauritania (2008), and Niger (2010).

Second, what is the legacy of military rule for civilian leaders? The inheritance is far from uniform, but many post-military regimes were characterized by ugly birth defects which festered even as the new order matured.

The main problem was that long periods of army rule led to an interweaving of civilian and military power. In many Latin American countries, senior officers had become accustomed to such privileges as:

● guaranteed seats in the cabinet;

● a high level of military expenditure;

● sole control of the security agencies;

● personal profit from defence contracts;

● exemption from civilian justice;

● a formal role as guarantor of internal security.

The ending of military government did not eliminate these distortions. Indeed, some of these privileges had to be entrenched in new constitutions before military rulers could be persuaded to relinquish their occupancy of the state.

Chile illustrates the difficulties of full disengagement. Before returning power to civilians, General Pinochet ensured that a new constitution approved in 1980 secured military autonomy. The armed forces were granted exemption from prosecution in civilian courts, given guaranteed seats in the Senate, and retained their status as guarantors of ‘institutional order’ and ‘national security’.

Such conditional transitions, characteristic of Latin America, helped the shift to, but weakened the depth of, the post-military democracy. As the era of military rule retreats into history, some of these con-

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**Figure 4.1 The ending of military rule in Latin America**

Although the armed forces remain significant political actors in Latin America, military governments gave way to civilian administrations in the 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecuador</th>
<th>Peru</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
<th>Argentina</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th>Surinam</th>
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