Twitter Thread by Erica De Bruin



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It was frightening and appalling to see protestors succeed in storming the Capitol building yesterday-- in doing this, they used a tactic of coup-plotters, who frequently seek to capture symbolic seats of political power, such as the presidential palace or legislature 1/x

But for those still asking if this was a coup attempt--those not too weary of definitional debates--a few thoughts on why that term still doesn't fit are in this thread 2/x

The aim, in capturing symbolic targets, is to convince members of the military, who have the power to stop a coup, that it has, in fact, already succeeded, and that opposition is futile. This is what @naunihalpublic calls making the coup "a fact" https://t.co/WgqbpaNHfD 3/x

If you want to know more about how coups unfold, this excerpt my from @CornellPress book, How to Prevent Coups, pp. 15-16, describes them: 4/x

How Coup Attempts Unfold

The aim of a coup d'état is to seize executive authority within a state. While violence need not be present in a coup attempt, the threat of it must be. The perpetrators of most coup attempts are thus those within the state apparatus best positioned to threaten violence: members of the state's military and security services. Nonmilitary elites can also instigate coup attempts but must depend on the military if the threat of violence is to be carried out.[1] The dynamics of coups closely resemble "coordination games," in which each actor bases his or her decisions on beliefs about what others are going to do, and the outcome is determined when the beliefs of relevant actors converge.[2] The relevant actors in the context of a coup are almost entirely within the state's military and security forces. Success depends on the ability of coup plotters to quickly convince other officers that victory has in fact already occurred and that resistance to the new regime will be punished—a process Naunihal Singh memorably calls "making a fact."[3]

Classic how-to manuals for coups map out three stages involved in seizing power: the planning stage, the attack stage, and the consolidation stage.[4] In the planning stage, coup plotters must recruit participants without being found out. Coup plotters from within the military have different techniques available for them to stage a coup. Those at the top of the military hierarchy may be able to seize power without the visible movement of troops or use of force at all. In some cases, they may be able to use face-to-face meetings to propose a coup attempt, and use the meeting itself—where officers' responses to the proposal become common knowledge—to create self-fulfilling expectations about its likely success. Where such a meeting is too difficult to organize, senior officers may instead simply announce that they have seized power on behalf of the armed forces, and hope that their announcement is not challenged.[5] These coup attempts can begin and end with an announcement. The 2011 coup in Egypt illustrates this type of coup attempt. It occurred without the use of violence or the movement of troops. Instead, the country's vice president and intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, simply announced that President Hosni Mubarak had been removed from power and that a council of military leaders had taken power.[6]

In many cases, however, such consultation and coordination ahead of time are too risky for coup plotters, even those from within the higher ranks of the military. As Ed Luttwak describes in *Coups d'État: A Practical Handbook*, "The danger of denunciation will also increase as more and more people become aware that a coup is being planned."[7] For this reason, conspirators are typically kept to a minimum. When the coup begins, the majority of military officers are not yet committed to one side or another. Coup plotters attempt to make the coup a fact through a use of force. In doing so, conspirators aim to take advantage of the

But at no point did yesterday's protestors attempt to actually seize control of the levers of state power-- nor did anyone watching think these goons were now running the government. 5/x

There is nothing to suggest either Pres. Trump or his supporters had a real plan to translate this protest into a way for him to remain in office. To make a plausible coup attempt, there would need to have been some a serious effort to recruit *within the state apparatus.* 6/x

That's why so many of us who study coups continue to say this wasn't one. As I've said elsewhere, I think the distinction matters because the tactics you use to defeat coups are different from those needed to stop other anti-democratic actions 7/x
https://t.co/OtbJYzIVEo

I'm not trying police the language of those finding it useful to use the term 'coup' to coordinate opposition right now, but if you are interested in understanding what is happening & preventing it from happening again, then it's worth listening to the multiple... 8/x

coup experts, including @naunihalpublic, @prof_powell, @HarknessKristen, & myself telling you that we know what a coup is, and this is not one. /fin