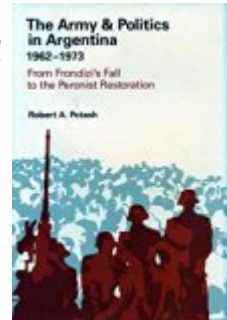


**Robert A. Potash.** *The Army and Politics in Argentina, 1962-1973: From Frondizi's Fall to the Peronist Restoration.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996. xv + 547 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-2414-2.



**Reviewed by** Joel Horowitz

**Published on** H-LatAm (January, 1997)

Robert Potash has over the last three decades changed the face of Argentine historiography with what is now his three-volume investigation of the Argentine army. The books cover the period from 1928 to 1973, from right before the army seized power for the first time in 1930 to the handing of power to the Peronists after the failure of the "Argentine Revolution" of the 1960s and early 1970s. Potash states that the third is his final volume, but he has said similar things before and we can hope that there will be a fourth.

The first volume was truly revolutionary (though one hesitates to use the word about the Argentine army). It showed that it was possible to write a balanced, insightful examination of such a crucial institution. Information was provided about the origins of the generals, indicating that many were the sons of immigrants, just like the politicians they distrusted. Information was also provided on the many intrigues and on military thinking. The presentation was clear and closely based on the sources, which were a combination of a wide range of printed sources, diplomatic dispatches, oral interviews, and documents still held

by participants. Although some have criticized Potash's unwillingness to move further from his sources and make larger generalizations, this reviewer finds this characteristic to be a strength. Readers have enough material to draw their own conclusions; the evidence is there. The first volume covers the long 1930s, the era of neo-conservative dominance and the military regime that followed, which permitted Juan Peron to begin his rise to power.

The second volume covers the period from the elections which Peron won in 1946 until the collapse of the immediate post-Peron political solution with the overthrow of Arturo Frondizi in 1962. This volume resembles the first in its scope and approach, except that the wide circulation of the first volume in Argentina clearly encouraged many officers to cooperate with Potash by granting interviews and by sharing documents. This enabled the author to focus more than ever on the internal workings of the army.

The third volume, the one under review, is similar to its predecessors, in that it discusses the impact of the army on the political situation of the

country in a chronological, dispassionate manner. However, the book is both longer and covers a shorter period. Why? As the author himself points out, more emphasis is given to the intra-military conflicts and decision making, but less consideration to other factors. The interplay between groups and individuals is discussed in great detail and was made possible by the numerous interviews and documents given to the author. What one has is a study of the constant intrigues and internal bickering that beset the military during this period, obviously placed in a wider context but focusing on it. The military controlled the government directly for all but thirty-three months of the eleven years considered, and even during the months when it did not, it had extremely large influence, even by Argentine standards. This book will almost surely remain for the foreseeable future the basis for any discussion of the army during this period unless major new sources are permitted to come to light. Because of the extreme importance of the army, it is also essential for many other types of studies.

What strikes this reader is the sheer ineptitude, pettiness, and hauteur of the army leaders, as they played with the future of the people of Argentina. While it is not surprising that they behaved in such a fashion, the extent is distressing. Since they constantly complained about the competency of the civilian leadership, one is tempted to offer in reply the childhood taunt of "it takes one to know one."

Again, while the situation is not surprising, the book makes extremely clear the intermeshing between the civilian and the military world. While military leaders considered themselves above the civilians, they received constant advice and cooperation from politicians and labor leaders. A large segment of the political class shares with the military leaders some of the responsibility for the mess that the military created.

Emerging from the work is a series of pictures of key political leaders that are intriguing.

Probably the most interesting is that of Jose Maria Guido, the interim president in 1962-63. He is portrayed as more principled and stronger than he is usually shown. He bends but he does not break.

Potash has written a worthy successor to his previous volumes. Together they stand as an indispensable keystone for the historiography of modern Argentina. It is a shame that Potash has decided not to undertake the daunting challenge of examining the blood-soaked years that followed 1973. The horrific actions of the military built on their past. Moreover, it is doubtful that a historian unknown to participants would have access to the same sources as Potash. (Given the nature of what was done, it is questionable whether much evidence still exists or that anyone will be permitted to see it). Still, he has given us three valuable volumes. It is perhaps too much to ask for more.

Copyright (c)1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for nonprofit, educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net at [H-Net@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:H-Net@h-net.msu.edu).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

**Citation:** Joel Horowitz. Review of Potash, Robert A. *The Army and Politics in Argentina, 1962-1973: From Frondizi's Fall to the Peronist Restoration*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. January, 1997.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=778>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.