

Directorate of
Intelligence

Latin America
Review

13 September 1962

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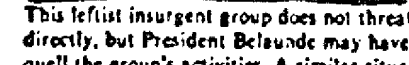








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Articles

Peru: Sendero Luminoso

Summary

Sendero Luminoso (SL) is a small, Maoist terrorist group. Its largest concentration of armed followers is in the Andean department of Ayacucho, although it has small cells in Lima and other metropolitan areas.

At present, SL's numerical weakness and lack of popular support outside certain areas of Ayacucho do not give it the capability to threaten the government directly. If the civilian security forces fail to control its activities, however, President Fernando Belaunde probably would have to authorize the military to take a direct role. A similar situation occurred during Belaunde's first presidency and in part led to his subsequent ouster. We believe that even if the military does intervene again, however, a related coup against Belaunde is unlikely because he would make every effort to limit the military's involvement and strengthen his own control.

Background

Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) is a radical, leftist terrorist and insurgent group that follows the organizational and ideological model of Mao's peasant-based revolution in China. The SL's goals are to bring down the Belaunde government and to remove foreign—particularly US—influence from Peru.

The SL was formed in the rural southern department of Ayacucho in the late 1960s by Ruben Abimael Guzman Reynoso, then a philosophy teacher at the San Cristobal de Huamanga National University in Ayacucho. Guzman was also a member of the Bandera Roja, a pro-Chinese Communist party made up

primarily of attorneys, professors, and merchants. Guzman and his followers—mostly craftsmen, peasants, and students—charged that the group was increasingly favoring urban areas to the detriment of the countryside and was overly deemphasizing armed struggle. Since formally breaking with the Bandera Roja to pursue a more violent path, Guzman has maintained that the SL is the only legitimate Communist party in Peru.

SL's Operations

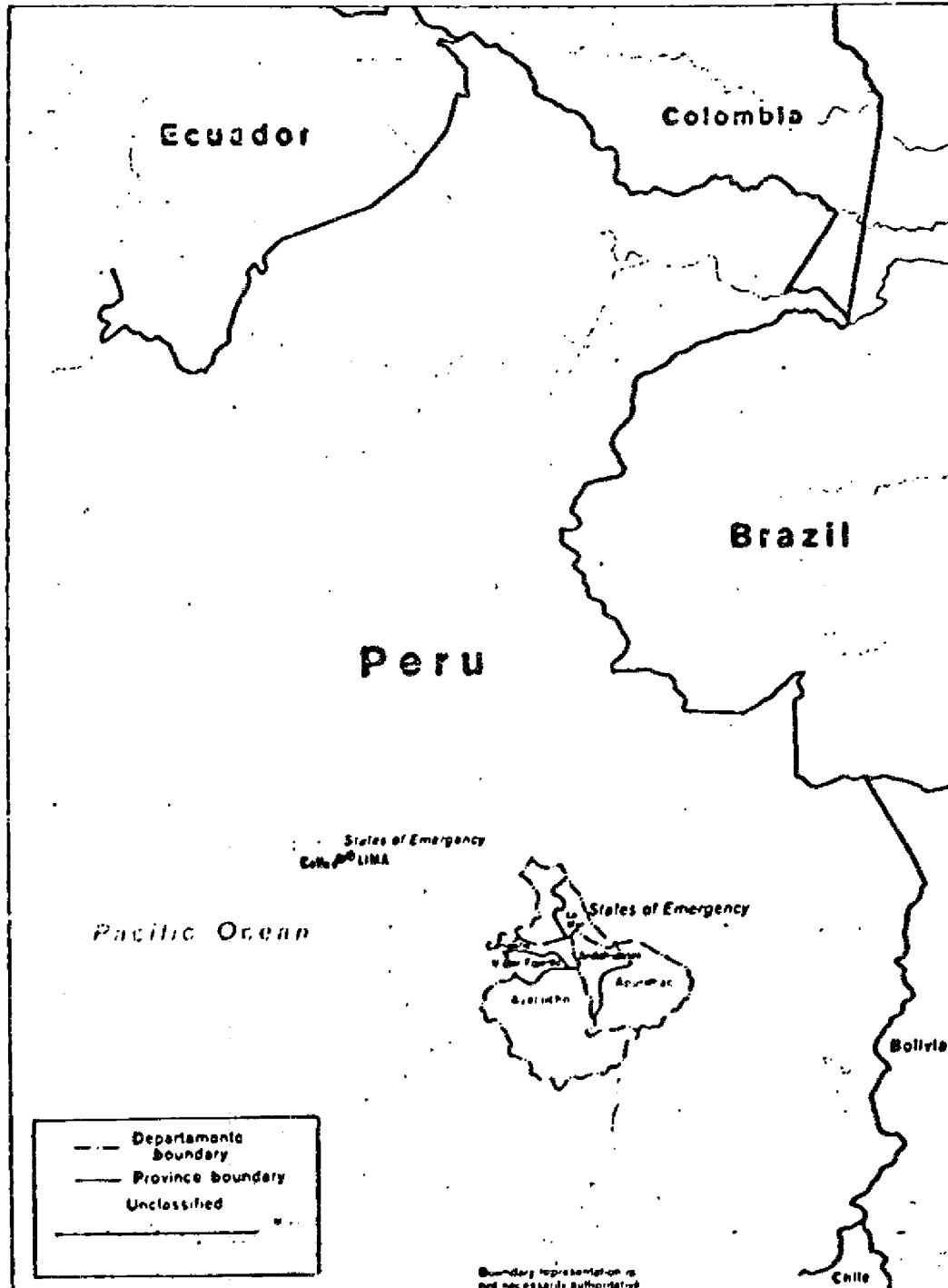
Following President Belaunde's inauguration in 1980, the SL embarked on a campaign of low-risk, high-profile terrorist attacks consisting primarily of dynamiting electrical towers, public buildings, and such symbols of authority as the Justice Ministry and police posts. Within the last year, however, SL operations have increased. While bombings continue, attacks against people, including the assassination of local officials and suspected police informants, are increasing.

Members of the SL are organized into cells that operate independently.

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While the heaviest concentration remains in Ayacucho, recent activities and reports indicate an increased presence in Lima and other metropolitan areas.

[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]

Not only is the SL's Maoist ideology incompatible with Soviet philosophy, but, more importantly, Moscow values its arms relationship with Peru, its only client in South America.

The US Embassy reports that members arm themselves with small arms and machineguns purchased in Peru or stolen from police and military posts. Explosives are stolen from mines and construction sites. Funds are obtained primarily from robberies, although there are unconfirmed reports of money being extorted from narcotics traffickers. Indoctrination and paramilitary training are given at clandestine "people's schools."

[REDACTED]

Twice in little more than a year, the US Embassy was the target of bomb attacks, presumably perpetrated by the SL. On 31 August 1981, dynamite thrown from a passing vehicle caused structural damage to the chancery and ambassador's residence; recently a caller to a Lima newspaper claimed that the SL was responsible for the attack. In an almost identical operation on 24 July 1982, terrorists used more sophisticated nitrate-based explosives, which caused

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minor damage to the chancery; three Peruvian policemen guarding the compound were injured. In addition, US and other foreign-owned businesses have been targets.

Other recent terrorist operations suggest that the SL's plan to increase its activity is being implemented. In March, the SL mounted a highly successful attack on the Ayacucho prison and freed 247 inmates, including accused and convicted terrorists. More recently, numerous civil guard posts and small municipalities have been attacked. Last month, the SL dynamited several electrical towers near Lima, blacking out the city for several hours. At present, states of emergency exist in Lima, Callao, three provinces of Ayacucho department, and one in Apurimac department.

The Threat to the Government

The threat to the Belaunde administration is indirect. We judge that the SL cannot by itself overthrow the government, and its operations in the past tended to recede temporarily in response to government pressure, implying that they may tail off again under the current state of emergency. If, however, the terrorists were to assassinate a prominent official, pull off another spectacular such as the jailbreak in Ayacucho, or generally stage more technically sophisticated operations, military pressure on Belaunde to sanction a direct Army role could be overwhelming. Civil-military relations could then undergo a period of stress, although we are by no means certain that the Belaunde government would be threatened by a military takeover as a result.

The SL appears to enjoy little popular support, even in Ayacucho, although it may appeal to a few Indian groups by harking back to their Incan heritage.

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By assassinating suspected informants and local officials, the SL has probably alienated most people in the affected area. The periodic attacks in Lima have not won SL many adherents in the capital, whose more sophisticated

non-Indian inhabitants are even less likely to appreciate the SL's unusual ideology than the highland population.

The SL probably believes, however, that its current tactics—even though they may not be winning much popular support—will provoke a violent response by the Army. They hope that this in turn will lead to military repression and a subsequent rise in popular sympathy for the SL and its violent tactics. The Peruvian public so far seems to be increasingly weary of terrorist disturbances, however, and is probably more likely to approve of direct military action against the SL than to support the terrorist.

In its operations to date, the SL has not posed a significant threat to the military. Destruction of electrical towers and assaults on isolated police posts are difficult to prevent and require little technical expertise to execute. Most of the SL's recent urban operations could have been planned and carried out by small well-trained units.

According to the US Embassy, most of the SL's successes—such as the Ayacucho jailbreak—can be attributed to the laxity and inefficiency of the civilian security forces. Rivalries among the various intelligence and law enforcement organizations hamper the government's efforts. The competing organizations often refuse to share information or to follow up leads, as was notably the case in the jailbreak. Coordinating and centralizing intelligence and law enforcement activities, combined with more modern police equipment, probably would give the civilian services all they need to neutralize the SL. We see no indication, however, that this parochialism will be overcome in the near future, increasing the likelihood that Belaunde may have to bring in the Army.

Likelihood of Intervention

We agree with the Embassy assessment that Belaunde will delay involving the military as long as possible, even at the risk of appearing indecisive. He clearly hopes that the civilian forces, aided by increased military logistic support, can hold the line against the SL. The President remembers his ouster in 1968 by a military that had become highly politicized during its earlier involvement in a counterinsurgency campaign,

and he does not want to set up a similar situation now. In addition, the Embassy reports he is concerned that a tough Army antiterrorist campaign might endanger Peru's favorable human rights image and perhaps aid the SL's hopes of increasing its public support.

We believe military intervention could follow an incident that highlighted police inefficiency and made the terrorists appear more dangerous than we believe they are. It could also result from a long period of heightened terrorist activity that clearly could not be controlled by civilian forces. A major SL success against an Army unit—rather than the police—could also provoke a military response.

Military leaders several months ago told Belaunde that, if they were ordered to move against the SL, the President would have to muzzle any press criticism of their actions. They also insisted that the Army be given command of all antiterrorist operations and total control of all routes in and out of Ayacucho. Belaunde probably would refuse to grant the military such sweeping authority and would try to maintain his ability to monitor and control the scope of operations. He might, for example, allow the Army to operate in isolated Ayacucho, where civilian security forces have been less successful than in Lima. He would be less likely to surrender full civilian authority in the capital or other major cities, where large-scale military activity would be under closer national and international scrutiny. We believe that the service chiefs would agree to some such restrictions to prevent a major break with the President, which they probably would prefer to avoid.

Outlook

While tensions between civilian and military authorities almost certainly would rise during an Army

intervention against the SL, we believe that this would probably not lead to a coup. Military leaders are not eager to reassume political power because they are fully aware that they have no innovative solutions to Peru's current problems. Most want to concentrate on professional matters neglected during the 12 years the military governed the country.

The survival of Peruvian democracy—and particularly the pro-US Belaunde government—remains important both for its demonstration effect and for the long-term prospects for stability in the region. We do not believe that SL alone currently represents a threat to Belaunde, but the military—the direct threat—will be carefully monitoring events. Military intervention would become more likely as a result of:

- Increasing popular support for the SL.
- Evidence of substantial foreign assistance to the SL.
- Terrorist activity in the northern and jungle regions.
- Larger, more sophisticated SL operations against important government targets, especially military units.

Even under these circumstances, the SL would almost certainly be shattered by a confrontation with the Army, especially if the military had the kind of unfettered authority it would like. The terrorists are still at a relatively rudimentary stage and the Army has performed effectively in past counterinsurgency campaigns.