

Shining Path, Tupac Amaru (Peru, leftists)

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Introduction

The two main Peruvian rebel groups, both leftist, are the Maoist group Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) and the Cuban-inspired Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru*). Both organizations operated most forcefully in the 1980s and early 1990s, when Peru's government fought a costly war against both insurgencies, but disproportionately the Shining Path. The U.S. State Department identifies Shining Path as a terrorist organization, but Tupac Amaru hasn't been listed as such since 1999. Shining Path had a period of dormancy in the 1990s, but the organization has since resurged, along with the Peruvian cocaine trade. Analysts say the group is small in numbers, but it could gain support in rural areas that have been neglected by the Peruvian government.

Origins of Terrorism in Peru

The Shining Path began in the late 1960s as a small communist revolutionary group led by a philosophy professor named Abimael Guzmán. Guzmán opposed Peru's prevailing political elites. His followers drew on Marxism and the example of Cuba's Fidel Castro, and coalesced into a significant and violent guerrilla army which regularly used terrorist tactics in their effort to destabilize and overthrow the Peruvian government. At the height of its power, Shining Path's ranks numbered around ten thousand, according to a [report from the Jamestown Foundation](#). A [paper from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs \(COHA\)](#) says the main goal of Shining Path has always been to overthrow the existing Peruvian government and political institutions and replace them with a communist revolutionary command. Guzmán, adopting the *nom de guerre* Presidente Gonzalo, attempted to do all of this while resisting overt ties with foreign powers or other Latin American leftist groups, including the contemporary Peruvian group known as the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

Tupac Amaru, or MRTA, was named for an eighteenth-century rebel leader who fought Spanish colonial control. The group, which is Marxist, was founded to rid Peru of all imperialist elements and supported many of the communist principles that led to the Cuban revolution. It took up arms in 1984 and operated mainly in rural areas. According to the book "[Peru's MRTA: Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement](#)," which

examines the group's philosophy and tactics, the MRTA's primary goal was to reform the Peruvian government and create a society in which ownership of property was shared and everyone enjoyed similar levels of prosperity. MRTA members decided the best way to fight the war was to [attack the holdings of Peru's wealthy elite](#), but sought to cause the least amount of injuries possible by frequently warning of its attacks in advance. Experts say Tupac Amaru has been less violent, in general, than Shining Path.

In December 1996, during the rule of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, fourteen MRTA members occupied the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima, holding 72 hostages for over four months. Fujimori ordered armed forces to [raid the residence](#) in April 1997, rescuing all but one of the remaining hostages and killing all fourteen MRTA militants, including the remaining leaders of the terrorist organization. Shortly after this uprising, MRTA's powers and operations within Peru scaled back dramatically.

Strategies

Shining Path's strategy, according to the COHA paper, was to use violence to bring down Peru's democratic government, disrupt the economy, destroy the state's reputation among the peasantry and, ultimately, ruin its reputation among the population in general. A *New York Times* report looking at rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of Shining Path violence says the group [often hacked its victims](#) to death with machetes to save ammunition. The Peruvian government-sponsored Truth and Reconciliation Commission issued a [report \(PDF\)](#) in 2004 saying that the group's human rights violations evolved into "generalized and systemic practice." Guzmán's capture and imprisonment in 1992 derailed the Shining Path's momentum, and remnants of the group now operate mainly in remote jungle areas. Shining Path is not sponsored by any state and has no known links to other terrorist groups. It considers itself the only remaining true communist revolutionary movement.

Initially, Shining Path targeted local authorities, such as mayors, mid-level bureaucrats, police, and local political leaders. Since 1983, however, the group has gradually expanded its [target list](#) to include wealthy locals and state agency heads. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report says that Shining Path attacks killed as many as 11,000 civilians, though it estimates as many as 70,000 people were killed overall in fighting between the Peruvian government and the Shining Path. According to an article in the *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, the campaign cost the Peruvian government [over \\$10 billion](#).

U.S. Policy

During the 1970s and 1980s, Washington pursued a policy of lending money and giving military aid to Peru to help the country's government wage war against Shining Path. This policy continued even after President Alan Garcia's administration defaulted on some of its loans, despite a longstanding U.S. policy making a country ineligible for aid if it failed to repay military assistance debt for more than a year. In February 1990, the United States and several Andean countries, including Peru, signed the [Cartagena Agreement \(PDF\)](#), a pact aimed at expanding economic and military assistance to help bolster both counternarcotics and counterinsurgency efforts. The assistance program was approved in 1992 as part of a [\\$30-million](#) counternarcotics package of aid, but was

suspended in April 1992 under President Fujimori. The Americas Watch Committee, a U.S. based non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights and is part of Human Rights Watch, issued [a report](#) in 1991 that urged the United States to stop sending military aid to Peru until they [reformed their standards](#) of human rights, including abusive treatment of detainees, intimidation of media and human rights groups, and an orchestrated campaign of political assassinations. The report worried that "U.S. aid would be used to facilitate murders, abductions, or torture."

Buying and Selling Power in Peru (A Narco-Alliance)

Similar to other revolutionary uprisings, Shining Path funded many of its operations through [narcotrafficking](#) and forced taxes on small business and individuals in the areas they predominately operated within. At its height, [Sendero financed](#) itself mainly through drug-trafficking taxes. In return, it insured peasant growers fair prices for coca crops and provided them shelter from violence from traffickers and security forces. Today, the U.S. State Department says that Shining Path has reestablished a financial relationship with Peru's coca growers. As military offensives in Colombia have taken a toll on the operations of the FARC guerilla movement, coca production has in many cases [shifted to Peru \(PDF\)](#). According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the [area controlled by Shining Path \(Reuters\)](#) is "the biggest producer in terms of density per hectare in all of the Andes." It is unknown how much money Shining Path has today to support itself.

Decline of Shining Path

On April 5, 1992, President Alberto Fujimori's administration staged a coup that led to the dissolution of Peru's Congress and the dismantling of the country's legal system. After the coup, Fujimori took over the country's media organizations and almost all its other free institutions, promising that a return to democracy would occur within the year. The accumulation of near absolute power in the hands of the president and his coterie precipitated a campaign of murder and abduction against those thought to be enemies of the state, without having any legal system capable of challenging them. Under these new laws, Lima's security forces are thought to have vastly increased a campaign of violence against Peruvians thought to be sympathetic to, or part of, Shining Path. The United States was alarmed at the turn of events and [withdrew all government aid](#) other than humanitarian assistance, but didn't permanently sever ties with Peru.

On September 12, 1992, Abimael Guzmán, the head of Shining Path, was [captured and imprisoned](#), destroying the group's chain of command. After this, the insurgency quieted down and assassinations and attacks decreased. A few years after his capture, Guzmán called for a [peace deal](#), which caused the remaining insurgents to split into two groups- one that insisted on continuing to fight and another that wanted to put down its weapons.

Resurgence of Shining Path

Recent information suggests that Shining Path has staged a moderate resurgence in the mountainous regions of Peru. The group has [turned to narcotrafficking \(CNN\)](#) to fund its operations, which includes its campaign to overthrow the Peruvian government. The

U.S Department of State continues to classify Shining Path as a terrorist organization in its most recent Country Reports on Terrorism. "This makes Sendero Luminoso a multi-edged weapon aimed at not only Peruvian national security, but that of Latin America and the United States as well," [writes Frank Hyland](#), CEO of S&F Enterprises and a man who has been involved with counterterrorism for over twenty-five years. "Without even pulling a trigger, Sendero Luminoso continues to contribute to the multi-billion dollar annual drain on the U.S. economy," he writes.

The reformed Shining Path has managed to inflict [minor damage](#) on Peru's military and police force. In December 2006, Shining Path killed five Peruvian police officers and two workers from the National Coca Company. Shining Path has easily gained ground in the country due to indifference or outright apathy on the part of the peasantry, writes Hyland. In August 2008, the Peruvian military launched a operation against Shining Path, which resulted in several counterattacks, including an October 2008 ambush that killed at least a dozen soldiers. Analysts such as Alex Sanchez from the Center for International Policy note that Shining Path is too weak to launch a major offensive to take over the country, but Peruvians are afraid the group will gain supporters among rural residents who feel neglected by the government.

Currently the head of the rebel group, known as Comrade Artemio, is the only high-profile Shining Path leader who has not been caught or killed. On March 25, 2008, Shining Path members working with drug traffickers killed a police officer and wounded eleven on an anti-drug patrol. The unit is said to have been lead by Comrade Artemio. Artemio has stated that even though the Shining Path hasn't been very active since the 1992 capture of Guzmán, who received a life sentence in October 2006, they are [rising again](#) and intend to grow and work in secrecy.