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PERU'S GUERRILLAS BECOME A THREAT TO THE CAPITAL

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HUANCAYO, Peru— Starting from a small nucleus in the Andes, a Communist guerrilla movement has steadily grown in strength in the 1980's to now threaten Peru's coastal cities.

In mid-May, about one million people here obeyed an "armed strike" order by the Shining Path movement, stopping work for three days in Peru's mining and farming heartland.

In a major test of their long-term strategy of strangling Peru's capital from the countryside, the Maoist guerrillas of Sendero Luminoso, or the Shining Path, cut all supplies of food, electric power and export minerals from three Andean provinces to Lima on the Pacific coast. 'Umbilical Cord of Peru'

"Shining Path is no longer a small regional movement," said Enrique Bernales, a Socialist Senator in Lima who heads a congressional commission of inquiry on terrorism. "It can now cut the umbilical cord of Peru."

The war is expected to intensify in the 1990's. Peru's current economic collapse and 8,000 percent inflation rate are feeding more recruits to the rebellion. Dollars for improved weaponry are flowing from a rebel-controlled river valley that is a source of half the cocaine consumed in the United States.

The depth of discontent was clear when Peru's President, Alan Garcia, visited this provincial capital of 500,000 during the strike. By day, he was greeted with sparse, sullen crowds. By night, his visit was marked by about 25 dynamite attacks. [On Saturday, army intelligence officials asserted that David Orosco, the third-ranking leader of the Shining Path, was among 14 guerrillas who died in a clash with army soldiers on June 5. Osman Morote, the movement's second in command, was arrested last year in Lima and is awaiting trial. In early June, a bombing for which the rebels took responsibility killed seven members of the presidential honor guard.] In interviews here, residents said the rebels' May strike call was heeded partly out of fear of the guerrillas and partly out of anger over Peru's collapsing economy.

Prices, which increased 1,722 percent last year, are rising out of the grasp of poor people. Economic activity in the first four months of this year was 25 percent lower than levels in the corresponding period last year. Malnutrition on the Rise

Malnutrition, which affected one million people in 1970, then 7 percent of Peru's population, now affects five million people, or 23 percent of Peru's population of 21 million.

"It's the President's fault," an unemployed construction worker said of spreading support for the guerrillas. "Prices go up and there is no work." Painted in red on walls around him were the Communist slogans that are common in this city: "Soldier, kill your officer and join the popular war"; "Long live Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Gonzalo Thought," and "Whoever erases this will be liquidated."

Gonzalo is the nom de guerre of Abimale Guzman, a 55-year-old Peruvian philosophy professor. Mr. Guzman started the group Shining Path after several visits to China in the 1960's and 70's.

Following a longterm strategy, the Shining Path went underground in May 1980, concentrating its actions among the Quechua-speaking Indians of Peru's remote Ayacucho Province. Mr. Guzman has not been seen since 1979. Guerrilla Progress: Money and Influence In the early 1980's, Fernando Belaunde Terry, Peru's civilian President, routinely dismissed the movement as confined to an area that accounted for 4 percent of Peru's territory, 3 percent of Peru's population and 2 percent of Peru's gross national product.

After nine years and 13,560 deaths, the situation has radically changed.

Half of Peruvians now live in emergency zones in which the army is given wide powers to combat the guerrillas.

"Basically, no area is Sendero free," a Western diplomat in Lima said after studying a map of the nation, which is slightly larger than Texas and California combined. Better Weapons in the 90's

The guerrillas have won outright control of Peru's Upper Huallaga Valley, the source of almost half of the cocaine consumed in the United States. In this "red zone," they have won the support of coca growers by executing thieves and by forcing Colombian coca manufacturers to pay Peruvian growers higher prices for coca base.

In return, the Shining Path is believed to exact a tax on the \$500 million in coca sales that take place in the valley annually.

So far, the guerrillas have fought largely with dynamite stolen from mines and with guns seized from slain policemen and soldiers. But the new war chest is expected to allow the guerrillas to fight in the 1990's with better weapons.

Of equal strategic importance is their spreading influence in three key provinces south of the coca area: Huanuco, Pasco and Junin. That region is the sole source of electric power for Lima's seven million inhabitants. It is a major source of food in a nation that imports about \$500 million in food a year. The region also accounts for half of Peru's mineral production, largely zinc, copper, lead and silver. Stopping the Terror: A Few Theories Hours after the strike started on May 10, guerrilla squads in the three provinces began dynamiting bridges and power pylons and burning trucks and buses on the roads. Three days after the strike ended on May 12, Huanuco and Pasco were still inaccessible by road.

Drivers from Lima could reach Huancayo, capital of Junin province, only by easing their cars over a bridge heavily damaged by a dynamite blast.

The adherence to the strike was apparently complete, down to Junin 's security chief, who closed his store.

"There is no security here - why should I risk having my life savings blown up?" said Abilio Fernandez Gaspar, the provincial prefect. Tired of the Death List

Saying he had formally resigned his job, Mr. Fernandez said he was tired of living at the top of a Shining Path death list, tired of "begging for money" for gasoline for police cars, tired of his \$75-a-month salary, and tired of judges who let guerrilla suspects go free "because they aren't caught with their fingers in the pie."

Hinting heavily that the spreading terror would only be combatted by extra-legal action by the police and army, he said, "Even if the world is going to say we are reactionaries, we have to start taking drastic, concrete actions before it is too late."

In the context of Latin American counterinsurgency wars, the phrase "drastic measures" has often meant detention without trial, torture and summary execution.

At City Hall, Mayor Ricardo Bohorquez Hernandez advocated a different approach.
French Workers Killed

"While we have poverty, while we have unfair distribution of wealth, alternatives like Sendero will always rise up," said the Mayor, who was shot four times in the chest by a Sendero assassination team in January. "Only economic development - water, sewers, schools - will take away the flags of Sendero Luminoso."

Gustavo Ramirez Piza, rector of the local university, advocated a similar approach. But the interview was cut short when the Shining Path telephoned his office with a bomb threat.

Recognizing that development could eventually defuse their movement, the guerrillas have sought to drive out Peruvian and foreign aid groups. Summary
'People's Trial'

In December, the Shining Path detained a Frenchman and a Frenchwoman who were working on an irrigation, carpentry and forestry development project in a village in Apurimac Province. After a brief "people's trial," the guerrillas cut the aid workers' throats.

"Sendero wanted to control the zone, and a development project constituted a control of the population to the detriment of Sendero," Jean-Jacques Boutrou, leader of the French development organization, said in an interview.

The killings followed the guerrilla slaying last summer of an American aid worker. As a result, virtually all of Peru's 600 foreign aid workers live in Lima or in provincial capitals. A Polarized Land: Maoism vs. the Market Although the Shining Path controls mountain villages within 40 miles of Lima, the war seems far away from Peru's coastal capital.

Drivers have learned how to glide through blacked-out traffic lights and candlelight dinners are now routine.

The guerrillas have had little success taking over Lima's mainstream Marxist industrial unions, either through infiltration or assassination. Lima's disorganized shantytowns, many flooded with war refugees, may prove to be more fertile recruiting ground

But, reflecting a sharpening ideological polarization in Peru, the shining path for many coastal Peruvians is not 1960's Maoism, but the open market, an economic model adopted in the late 1980's by neighboring Chile. Many Peruvians are envious of Chile's low inflation, hard currency and success in attracting foreign investment. 'They Want a Coup'

Mario Vargas Llosa, the novelist, is running for President on a free-market platform. Although Peru's presidential elections are a year away, Mr. Vargas Llosa has a comfortable lead in public-opinion polls.

But the Shining Path and another guerrilla group, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, have vowed to disrupt elections. The first elections, for city offices in November, will provide a clear map of rebel influence in the nation. With mayors across the Andes resigning because of guerrilla death threats, it is believed that the guerrillas will block voting in 20 percent of municipalities.

"Sendero will kill the candidates," said Nelson Manrique, the historian who has become a "Senderologist" - a booming field of academic research here.

"They want a coup d'etat," he said. "Then people will have to choose between Sendero Luminoso and the army." The Army's Role: Strained Defense After a spate of coup rumors in January, however, the military is believed to have decided to allow Mr. Garcia to finish his term in July 1990. In an election year, deep rivalries are keeping civilian politicians from reaching a consensus on how to fight the guerrillas.

Without clear political direction, the army plays a largely defensive role in the war.

In one strategic study, the army reportedly concluded that it is impossible to defend the Central Highway, a two-lane road between Lima and the Andean Sierra that winds through passes as high as 15,500 feet. The military report concluded that if Lima loses control of Junin 's fertile Mantaro Valley, some food cultivation could be shifted to coastal areas now planted with export crops - cotton and sugar cane.

"The strangling of the capital from the Mantaro has not happened yet, but it is a question of time if things continue the way they are," La Republica, a Lima daily, warned in an editorial after the armed strike. 300,000 Guns in Lima The warning came as the violence deepened.

During one week in mid-May, a Canadian diplomat was shot and critically wounded outside his house, the president of Peru's foreign press association, Alberto King, briefly left the country because of death threats, and a newspaper survey reported that 40 Peruvian congressmen had received death threats. Two legislators have been killed since April 27.

Applications for visas to the United States are being made at twice last year's rate.

In Lima, where the number of color television channels increased to nine in the last five years, the large, Westernized segment of the population is hostile to the idea of eventually living under Andean Maoism. With 300,000 guns, according to estimates, in private circulation in Lima, conditions are ripe for increased violence. Killing on Scale of Franco? "They are fanatics," a young woman who works for Mr. Vargas Llosa's center-right group said of Shining Path. "The only thing you can do is kill them. How many people did Franco kill to pacify Spain? One million? Hopefully, we won't have to go through such a civil war."

At the Congress, Senator Bernales paused recently from studying his staff's latest computer printout tabulating guerrilla violence.

"Sometimes I think I am a Greek chorus," the Senator said. "I've seen tragedy, but I am powerless to avoid it."