

# Principles of irregular warfare were applied to defeat Shining Path

Anyone who thinks that the war of subversion launched in 1980 by the Peruvian Communist Party/Shining Path was typical “Guevara-style” guerrilla warfare like that which flourished in the 1970s throughout the region, is very wrong. Shining Path is not your typical Marxist subversive movement: neither “class struggle” nor “military vanguardism” explain its strategy of “total war” against not only a regime or a state, but western Christian civilization itself.

Shining Path’s “prolonged people’s war” is a product of the ideas that the Bukharinist faction of the Communist International had spread among the underdeveloped nations throughout the 1920s, and which were picked up in Peru by José Carlos Mariátegui, who was the inspiration for Shining Path. In Mariátegui’s view, the class struggle and the anti-colonial revolution should join forces with the most backward “racial cultures” within Peru’s population, in order to combat western values. This concept spread from the military arena into cultural, political, psychosocial, and economic warfare: Shining Path’s “total war.”

For example, in the political sphere, the role of Shining Path’s fifth column within the state and social apparatus—from education, justice, and the congress to the press and the academic community—was a central reason for the state’s ineptness in containing subversion. At the same time, the Shining Path leadership achieved a macabre expertise in using terrorism as a weapon of military policy. Its escalating “strategies of tension” went a long way toward undermining the nation’s morale and confidence in a state already infested by the enemy.

The first stage of its “people’s war” began in the most isolated region of the country. Shining Path attempted to impose its marching orders through sheer terror, enrolling the peasants in its terrorist ranks under threat of death, running bloody “people’s trials” against any individual charged with collaborating with the “rotten state,” and even slaughtering entire communities which refused to yield to their intimidation. Shining Path tried to eradicate the presence of the state and any concept of progress. It destroyed police stations, town and state office buildings, research and development centers, and machinery. It murdered both domestic and foreign technicians; the mere effort to improve the lives of the population was cause for execution by Shining Path.

Under the Maoist slogan “From the country to the city,”

Shining Path tried to create “liberated zones,” eliminating the state’s presence and subjecting the rural population to terrorist systems of local control such as forcing them not to send their products for sale to the cities, sowing only for local consumption, etc. In effect, Shining Path attempted to put up a “Great Wall of China” to isolate the countryside from the dispersed cities.

At the same time, they infiltrated colleges, universities, and trade unions, and turned the prisons into terrorist training centers. When some peasants began to organize self-defense militias in the countryside, and others—estimated at over a million—fled from the terror into the cities, Shining Path infiltrated the slums, known as “young towns,” that grew up around the major cities. Little by little, the center of gravity of Shining Path’s operations was transferred to the cities.

The selective assassinations, bombings, and blackouts from sabotaged electricity towers took their toll on the cities. Thousands of community, trade union, business, and academic leaders were assassinated—often in front of their neighbors, colleagues, or students—for the “crime” of collaborating with the authorities to improve the community’s welfare. In the face of government inaction, the people grew increasingly desperate. The bloody attacks escalated; the 1993 assault on the offices of the government Popular Action Party and the burning down of the Bayer industrial plant, for example.

In 1992, Shining Path began to use car-bombs, multiplying their destructive power by mixing dynamite with ammonium nitrate. Shining Path concentrated its violence in its so-called “armed strikes,” during which the population was forced to stay home from work under threat of bloody assaults and sabotage of their workplaces. The strikes were begun in the cities of Ayacucho, Huancayo, Cerro, and Pasco. They later moved to Lima, starting in the industrial zones and the slums, until they eventually affected the entire city.

A crucial element of this subversion was the close alliance with the drug trade and the strategy of destroying Peru’s physical economy. Shining Path’s first deployments were launched from its birthplace Ayacucho, into the Upper Huallaga Valley—the largest coca-growing zone in the world—and to surrounding coca cultivation areas, which combined brought in some \$3 billion a year. Shining Path stationed itself in the Upper Huallaga in the early 1980s,

before its spectacular growth was anticipated. It infiltrated the coca growers, and created, in effect, a “Huallaga Cartel,” garnering as much as \$60 million by providing protection services to the traffickers. This money enabled them to maintain a People’s Guerrilla Army, while also building up an immense semi-legal and recruitment apparatus.

In terms of material losses caused by Shining Path, their systematic destruction of physical infrastructure cost an estimated \$25 billion, a sum greater than Peru’s foreign debt. The effect of discouraging investment in the economy by both Peruvians and foreigners was also immense: Entire regions of the country helplessly watched as businesses fled the terror and lack of protection. Shining Path’s advance across the country proceeded like clockwork. Shining Path boasted that its military arm was only one element of its structure; the majority of its militants were not guerrilla fighters, but constituted an immense network, including Socorro Popular, the Association of Democratic Lawyers, the Association of People’s Artists, the Class Workers Movement, and, of course, its propaganda outlets.

Shining Path also insisted that its military successes go in parallel with its political successes, and not precede them. Already by late 1991, Shining Path was able to announce with impressive certainty in its own media that it was moving from a strategy of “defense” to a strategy of “equilibrium.”

### **The 1980s: weakness, corruption, complicity**

Shining Path steadily advanced for 10 years, starting on May 18, 1980, when the first “democratic” government in 12 years was elected and the “armed struggle” was launched.

They could not have chosen a more opportune moment. Starting in 1976, the government of Gen. Francisco Morales Bermúdez subjected the country to the brutal austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, causing a dramatic growth both in poverty and in the drug trade, thereby creating the ideal “material conditions” for Shining Path subversion.

The Fernando Belaunde government (1980-85) took two long years before admitting that Shining Path was no mere “band of outlaws,” but a serious subversive threat guided by the concept of “total war” in collusion with the drug trade. It was not until 1982 that the Anti-Terrorism Directorate (Dircote) was created. Anti-subversion efforts were so improvised that Abimael Guzmán was actually imprisoned in 1978—two years before the war was launched—and militarily surrounded in 1982 (according to several reports). But on both occasions he was soon allowed to go free.

From the 1970s onward, the primary recruiting ground for Shining Path was neither the peasantry nor the labor unions, but the students of both high school and college level, and the professors themselves. One of Shining Path’s bunkers until a few months ago was the Pedagogical University. Current President Alberto Fujimori notes that Shining Path was founded on state campuses by individuals who were on the state’s payroll. Until 1990, terrorist propaganda freely

circulated under “freedom of the press” provisions; *El Diario de Marka*, the Shining Path newspaper, and *Cambio*, the mouthpiece of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), openly celebrated each terrorist action in their pages. Subversion also received scarcely veiled sympathy from the “legal left,” as well as from the Marxist daily *La República*.

In 1983, the government decided after great hesitation to call upon the Armed Forces and to identify Ayacucho and surrounding areas as the first “emergency zones.” Military

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chiefs were given political and military control over these zones. The legal left-wing congressional opposition, fully aware that a military offensive in Ayacucho had the potential to stop subversion in its tracks, immediately charged that such measures were unconstitutional. The Army’s offensive was, however, halted by an unhappy development that was fully exploited by the Marxist press and its allies. In 1984, the directors of several newspapers sent a group of journalists to the Ayacucho “red zone,” in express violation of military orders. The journalists, who were supposed to investigate charges of “human rights abuses” in the area, were savagely murdered. The press immediately launched a national and international campaign to blame the military, and the government changed the military command and called off the offensive.

Throughout this period, several government figures were openly calling for “dialogue” with the terrorists—which implied halting all counter-terrorist action. When the APRA government took power in 1985, the leading proponents of “dialogue” were Armando Villanueva, Javier Valle Riestra, and Prosecutor General Miguel Cervero. The MRTA, which surfaced in 1984, called a “truce” to test the alleged “anti-imperialism” of the APRA government. By then, Shining Path had turned the jails into terrorist universities and planning centers. The problem reached total crisis proportions in June 1987, when an armed riot by Shining Path prisoners was crushed, resulting in dozens of deaths.

The so-called “prison massacre” became a rallying cry for the international human rights lobby, leading the APRA government to abandon the anti-subversion fight and to hand

the Interior Ministry over to "dialogue" advocate Armando Villanueva. In July 1990, just weeks before the transfer of power to the new Fujimori government, MRTA chieftain Víctor Polay and 50 members of that group "escaped" from the Castro Castro security prison in Lima. The press openly acknowledged the government's responsibility, noting the long-standing friendship between Polay and Alan García, the lame-duck President of Peru.

Making matters worse was the spectacle of impotence presented by the judiciary, which, through fear, corruption, and the absence of any legal support structure, proved incapable of convicting the terrorists captured by the police and Armed Forces. The pro-terrorist left within the Congress successfully sabotaged approval of anti-terrorist legislation, since the crime of terrorism was no longer acknowledged by the new Constitution.

Repeated attempts to pass enabling anti-terrorist legislation failed in the face of the left's propaganda apparatus and the complicity of the APRA and other political parties. There were no drastic penalties against terrorism; apology for terrorism was not a crime; the judiciary had no guarantees. The anti-subversion fight had no legal backing.

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### Why was the 'Fujimorazo' unavoidable?

President-elect Alberto Fujimori assumed office in July 1990, after defeating the candidate of the international banks, Mario Vargas Llosa, in a run-off election. Fujimori was left without a majority in the Congress. The "Fujimori phenomenon," an unknown candidate "without a chance" until just a few weeks before the first electoral round, won the presidency and stunned the world. Nonetheless, Fujimori was forced by the system into forging alliances with the other parties in order to guarantee the weak and conditional support of the Congress. The President announced his goal of totally defeating subversion by the end of his mandate, in 1995, but few believed he could do it under the circumstances.

Fujimori's governability pact was shipwrecked even before the end of 1991, when the parties in Congress rejected the new anti-terrorist legislation which the government had prepared in order to give a definitive and coherent form to the anti-terrorist fight. The pacification laws, among others, gave the National Intelligence Service adequate powers for the first time ever to conduct an effective campaign. In December 1991, the political parties "approved" the decrees, but at the same time *annulled* the changes that were introduced by the decrees! Already back in September 1991, the parties had announced their decision to "demilitarize" the anti-terrorist fight. This implied that the military presence in the emergency zones, terrorist-infiltrated universities, and so

forth, were now illegal. What the parties had accepted as an anti-subversive strategy was "dialogue" with subversion, and they had pressured the government for months to turn the National Pacification Council into the conduit for said "dialogue."

The proposal for dialogue was of course rapidly accepted by Víctor Polay, head of the MRTA which had already, as of mid-1991, launched its Free Fatherland (*Patria Libre*) movement as a legal electoral front.

Meanwhile, the judiciary continued to release terrorists as fast as the Armed Forces and security police could capture them. "Until April 5, 1992," said President Fujimori in June of that year, "justice under my government had freed 220 terrorists," many of them the authors of bloody attacks shortly after their release, for "lack of evidence" or "on bail." The maximum sentence that could be applied was 30 years, but that was imposed in only one case.

In December 1991, the recently named Army Commander Gen. Nicolás Hermosa announced the Armed Forces' full support for President Fujimori, who was in a showdown with the Congress over its sabotage of the anti-subversion fight and its rejection of the relevant legislation to pursue that fight. The terrorists' legal fifth column and the liberal establishment blocked every possible effort to confront the terrorist offensive.

Over the following weeks, the confrontation intensified, until President Fujimori finally moved on April 5, 1992 to dissolve Congress, reorganize the corrupt and intimidated judiciary, approve drastic anti-terrorist legislation, and dictate a series of emergency measures.

Washington's reaction to the "self-coup" was immediate rejection and support for the political parties. These in turn refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the regime, and began a campaign of destabilization, whose climax was the failed coup attempt and assassination plot against Fujimori on Nov. 13, 1992. All the "experts" on Shining Path predicted in the aftermath of the "self-coup" that the radical sectors of the various political parties would join the subversive fronts, and that the situation would polarize even further.

Shining Path understood the implications of Fujimori's actions, and reacted with a series of bloody assaults, such as the attack on Channel 2 television in Lima. In May, they began a series of car-bombings against targets in the very heart of Lima. On July 16, 1992, the world was shaken when a 600-kilo car-bomb exploded on a street of apartment buildings in Lima, killing 25 and wounding 100. The very next day, Shining Path carried out simultaneous attacks against the township of El Salvador outside of Lima and against police stations in various poor neighborhoods. In this atmosphere of generalized terror, rumors flew in all directions. On July 22 and 23, an "armed strike" hit Lima. While the government's new anti-terror strategy would take time to yield results, Shining Path was playing all of its cards at

once. It announced that on Oct. 12-13, it would enforce another “armed strike” to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of the Americas.

As early as 1991, Shining Path was forced by Fujimori’s anti-terrorist offensive to condense its own timetable, and with the April 5 “self-coup,” launched a parallel offensive for which it was not really prepared. With its indiscriminate, genocidal actions against the cities, Shining Path left no doubt in anyone’s mind that its goal was nothing less than its promised mass slaughter of 1 million Peruvians. The images of the car-bombings transmitted by television woke Peru’s population up, and created a new popular fighting spirit. This was the beginning of the end of Shining Path.

The anti-terrorist command structure made a dramatic decision: to concentrate all available resources on the capture of Abimael Guzmán and the circle around him which planned and issued the marching orders. Previously, they had delayed in going for the head, instead concentrating on cutting off one or another of the monster’s extremities. The damage caused was major, but the tentacles continued to reproduce themselves, because they were continuously fed from the head. With the new decision, failure could mean losing everything. The command structure decided on all or nothing.

In the early months of the Fujimori government, the Shining Path Central Committee had already been dealt several blows. In late 1990, a committee chapter was dismantled and a video was seized which permitted the identification of nearly every member of the Central Committee. In January 1991, the head of Shining Path finances, Nelly Evans, was captured. The liaisons between the Central Committee and the national operations apparatus were the Department of Organizational Support (DAO) and the Group of Partisan Support (GAP). Both the DAO and GAP had taken several major hits since 1990. But without the decision to concentrate all forces on the capture of Guzmán and his staff, these blows would have no lasting effect. With the capture of the Central Committee, the fall of the more disconnected regional commands would be just a question of time.

### **The lessons of irregular warfare**

In the 1980s, it was already clear that the situation required a new conception of “irregular warfare,” non-conventional, different from the classical conception. The Peruvian Armed Forces were up against a kind of “total war” which they had never before experienced. Limited to a military response and straitjacketed by a weak state under the domination of corrupt political parties, the Armed Forces found it impossible to adequately respond to the variety of forms of subversion, some under legal cover. The war could not be pursued in the political and psychosocial, much less cultural, arena where Shining Path concentrated its sophisticated apparatus. The release in 1987 of the book *Modern Irregular Warfare*, by German Gen. August von der Heydte (ret.),

analyzed these details through a comparison of the various subversive phenomena in the world, and had tremendous impact on the Peruvian situation. The naming of General Hermosa as Army commander in December of 1991, consolidated the orientation toward a strategy of “total war” against subversion.

Peruvian military thinking had already distanced itself from both the “scorched earth” policy—argued by Gen. Luis Cisneros (ret.)—and the absurd thesis of “structural violence,” in all its forms. The state’s evaluation of Shining Path

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in the 1980s had gone from viewing it as a “band of outlaws,” to seeing it as a response to the underdevelopment of the peasantry in the Peruvian Andes. Years were lost in defining the necessary response to subversion.

As long as subversion remained in the Central Sierra of the country, the thesis of “structural violence”—that is, that subversive violence was a “natural” response to state violence—seemed innocuous enough. But when Shining Path began to cut a genocidal swath across the country, murdering authorities and attacking military installations in Lima and elsewhere, it became clear that the attacks were being used to buy time to consolidate the “armed struggle.” As opposed to its original slogan of “from the country to the city,” Shining Path in recent years concentrated its actions on the cities, in part because of the strategy employed by the Armed Forces to arm the peasantry in anti-terrorist militias. The brutal assassinations of peasants in “people’s trials” caused a furious rejection of Shining Path.

The strategy of forming “peasant militias” was intensely discussed in the late 1980s. On the one hand, the state was fearful of handing over weapons to a peasantry that could later be infiltrated by the subversives. But on the other hand, the congressional left and the “Theology of Liberation” networks feared such militias as a potentially devastating anti-subversive weapon. In 1991, Gen. Luis Pérez Documet be-

gan to hand weapons over to peasant militias which had already organized themselves into the Mantaro Front years earlier. Now, with the full backing of the state, the Army trained and armed these self-defense groups, which succeeded in routing the majority of the subversives from the Central Sierra, although a few Shining Path columns remained to terrorize their "terrorist base" through a continued indiscriminate use of violence.

Largely ousted from the countryside, Shining Path shifted into the cities. In 1992, a new strategy to halt Shining Path infiltration of Lima's shantytowns was established: the so-called *rastrillajes* (literally, "clean sweeps"). Surmounting the efforts of the leftist press and of Shining Path to provoke popular resistance to the military within the shantytowns, the Army abandoned its initial strategy of installing permanent bases and militarily encircling those neighborhoods that were infiltrated by Shining Path. With the *rastrillajes*, the Army would encircle the shantytowns—with voter registration drives and offers of medical and other assistance to the residents. With each such "offensive," the resident Shining Path cell would invariably be taken by surprise, and would surely fall. Despite the terrible logistical, material, and financial limitations of the Armed Forces—the result of budget cut-backs demanded by the International Monetary Fund and accepted by the Fujimori government—Shining Path's "iron belt" was slowly being deactivated.

These advances would have come to nothing had the government accepted the Congress's blackmail and abandoned its anti-terrorist proposals, as that body had demanded at the end of 1991. Immediately following Fujimori's "self-coup," the decrees were put into effect. These contained many vital elements, among them the reorganization—under the new strategic perspective—of the National Intelligence Service and of the anti-terrorist command of the National Police.

The decrees also clearly defined the crimes of terrorism, apology for terrorism, and criminal association with a terrorist organization, and provided more severe penalties for these crimes, up to and including life imprisonment. The new legislation guaranteed and legalized a military presence in the emergency zones and on the universities. Further, they permitted the more effective trial and sentencing of captured terrorists by the only courts possible—military courts—while introducing the system of the "faceless judge" in order to protect magistrates from terrorist retaliation.

### Subversion in defeat

On Sept. 12, 1992, the country leapt with joy upon hearing the news that Abimael Guzmán, and an important section of the Shining Path Central Committee, had been captured in Lima, without a single shot being fired. Seized along with Guzmán were Elena Iparraguirre and Maritza Garrido Lecca, among others. Later, other Shining Path leaders fell in rapid succession: Laura Zambrano Padilla, the director of Socorro

Popular; political chief of Lima operations Martha Huatay; and the heads of the Association of Democratic Lawyers Jorge Cartagena and Alfredo Crespo. A few months earlier, in May 1992, MRTA chieftain Víctor Polay had been recaptured, and a wave of arrests of MRTA leaders followed. The military chief of the MRTA in Lima, Luis Cárdenas Schulte, had been arrested shortly before. In 1993, after being nearly totally deactivated in Lima, the MRTA began to fall apart in its only other operational front, the Upper Huallaga, following the capture of Lucero Cumpa Miranda and its entire communications and logistics network.

In June and July, the majority of remaining fugitive MRTA leaders surrendered to the Army under the Law of Repentance, which allowed any subversive who contributed to the capture of his leaders to be pardoned and protected. Nestor Cerpa Cantolini and César Rincón are currently the only MRTA leaders still in hiding. In the Upper Huallaga, there remains but a single column of 60 MRTA guerrillas still in operation. It is estimated today that 98% of the MRTA leadership and 85% of the Shining Path leadership are either in captivity or dead.

The downfall of subversion following the capture of Guzmán and Polay was also in large part due to the strategy of psychological warfare used. Following their capture, Guzmán and cohorts were publicly displayed at least three times in striped prison uniform and in a cage. Previously, in 1991, the police had released the captured Shining Path video showing a drunken Guzmán dancing with other members of the Central Committee. The myth of Guzmán's invulnerability was deflated from then on.

In just 15 months of anti-subversive warfare, the Dincote alone captured 832 terrorists. By June 18, the special prosecutor for terrorist cases announced that in the previous nine months alone, 432 terrorists had been sentenced, 103 of them to life imprisonment. Thus, the number of those sentenced in nine months—in the period following April 5—was nearly equal to the number of terrorists sentenced over the previous 10 years.

Today, terrorist attacks have slackened off dramatically. "Armed strikes" are not having nearly the effect they had earlier. In the countryside, surviving terrorist columns reappear sporadically, but continue to suffer important defeats. The "birthplace" of Shining Path in the south central Andes, is becoming peaceful. While neither subversion nor its philosophical and cultural "mother"—that is, anti-Christian indigenism—are totally destroyed, a sense of victory is in the air throughout the country.

On July 15, 1993, at the Ibero-American Presidential Summit in Bahia, Brazil, President Fujimori said that the defeat of terrorism is "today a tangible reality. And it is not only to the benefit of our people, but to the entire region, that we annul the possibility that this disgrace may spread to our brother countries, thereby preventing the terror and violence we Peruvians have already suffered from reaching them."