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Narco-Terrorism in Peru: The Return of Shining Path

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In the 1960s, leftist philosophy professor Abimael Guzman started a Maoist guerilla group at the University of San Cristobal de Huamanga in Ayacucho, Peru. Guzman named this organization in honor of the most celebrated phrase ever turned by an early Peruvian Communist and journalist, Jose Carlos Mariategui, who wrote that “Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to the revolution.”¹

Little did Peruvians realize then that the path would turn into a river of blood. Dried up for a time by Alberto Fujimori, the river has unfortunately begun to rise again.

Shining Path, the Sequel: Starring Hugo Chávez, FARC, and Narco-Terrorism. On April 9, just days after Fujimori was sentenced to 25 years in prison for being the intellectual author of two kidnappings and the assassinations of 25 persons by the paramilitary group Colina, 14 soldiers were ambushed and killed by terrorists in Peru’s southern Ayacucho region. The attack was led by “Comrade Olga,” who is close to one of the current leaders of the Shining Path, Victor Quispe Palomino (“Comrade Jose”).² The attack occurred in an area of deep jungle known as the VRAE (Valley of the Apurimac and Ene Rivers). Most of the dead Peruvian soldiers were 18 and 19 years old. One young man was just 17.³

Shining Path is active again in the area, providing the locals with such practical help as dental and barber services, distribution of food, and teaching women manual skills to help their husbands. The group no longer tries to impose its beliefs at

gunpoint. They have learned from the methods employed by the sinister former head of Peruvian intelligence services Vladimiro Montesinos and the Peruvian army.⁴

The problem now, in addition to Shining Path’s long-term goal of overthrowing market-based democracy in Peru, is the narco-terrorism that funds the group. In the 1990s Shining Path demanded protection payments from narcotics traffickers operating in areas it controlled. Now the tables are turned, and Shining Path is dependent financially on the narcos, even doing contract killings for them. Shining Path has gone into the “business” itself, producing its own coca crops and operating maceration “pits” where the coca leaves are mashed, as well as clandestine labs where the mashed leaves are processed into cocaine.⁵

The transformation of Shining Path into a subsidiary of narco-terrorist groups is similar to the evolution of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a violent narco-terrorist guerrilla group and long-time enemy of Colombian democracy. Indeed, the two groups are now operating together. The FARC has strong bonds with Peru, a source of new recruits, weapons, and coca.

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Ollanta Humala, the leader of Peru's nationalist party and a favorite of Hugo Chávez, has said the Peruvian army should leave the VRAE and turn over security to the local police. About 400 Shinning Path operatives in the VRAE provide security to the "backpackers" who take the drugs to the coast. More than 50 percent of the cocaine in Peru—152 tons—comes from this area.⁶

Of course, the narco-terrorists want the army out of the VRAE as well. The same arguments are made by leftists and narco groups in northern Mexico, where the local police are either bought off or terrified. So far, fortunately, Mexican President Calderon has ignored those requests and sent in the Mexican army with help from the U.S. through the Merida Initiative.⁷

Courting International Support. Like the FARC, Shinning Path has NGOs throughout the world devoted to protecting their "human rights" and projecting a positive image of the group.⁸ Both groups also have "ambassadors" in Europe and North America who are constantly seeking to raise money so that the groups can continue the "class struggle."

Some of the pro-Shinning Path groups include:

- The "Red Sun Embassy" maintained by Shinning Path operatives in Hamburg, Germany, and other cities in Europe;
- The "New Peru Friendship Association" in the U.S.;
- Guardare Avanti in Italy; and
- The Socialist Party in Iran.

There are many other groups in Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, and Spain.

Indeed, Monica Feria, a prominent former terrorist and active Shinning Path "ambassador" in Britain, was given an award by Georgetown University in 2007, demonstrating the university's leftist/elitist credentials while serving as an example of academia's support for groups like Shinning Path.⁹

The U.S. Must Launch a Peruvian Partnership. Peruvian President Alan Garcia's government must take immediate steps to defeat the terrorists and narcos in the VRAE. First and foremost, the Peruvian government must stop the flow of an estimated 2 million gallons of kerosene per year into the VRAE. Kerosene is the main chemical used to produce cocaine. This would increase the groups' production costs and thus increase the street price of cocaine in the U.S. and Europe.

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2. "Senderista 'Olga' Habria Dirigido el Ataque en el VRAE," *El Comercio.com.pe*, April 13, 2009 at <http://www.elcomercio.com.pe/impresanotas/senderistaolga-habria-dirigido-ataque-vrae/20090413/272493> (May 21, 2009).
3. Hilda Sanabria, "Defensoria del Pueblo Ucayali," *El Comercio.com.pe*, April 15, 2009, at <http://www.elcomercio.com.pe/noticia/273377/uno-soldados-asesinados-emboscada-terrorista-sanabamba-era-menor-edad> (May 21, 2009).
4. "Senderista 'Olga' habria dirigido el ataque en el VRAE."
5. Jaime Antezana, Buen Gobierno Peru (a Peruvian NGO in favor of good government), at http://www.buengobierno.com.pe/ver_noticia.php?id=36 (May 22, 2009).
6. "ONUDD: Nueva Estrategia del VRAE Debe Priorizar Desarrollo Alternativo a la Hoja de Coca [ONUDD: New Strategy for the VRAE Must Prioritize Alternatives to Coca Cultivation]," TV Peru, at http://www.tvperu.gob.pe/index.php?option=com_content&task=view_notp&id=7714&Itemid=2&ncid=16 (May 21, 2009).
7. Ray Walser, "Mexico, Drug Cartels, and the Merida Initiative: A Fight We Cannot Afford to Lose," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 2163, July 23, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg2163.cfm>.
8. Mariella Balbi, "Si no Hacemos Algo Tendremos unas FARC, Advierte Otto Guibovich [Peruvian Army General Otto Guibovich Warns That If Something Is Not Done, Peru Will Have a FARC to Deal with]," *El Comercio.com.pe*, April 19, 2009, at <http://www.elcomercio.com.pe/noticia/275304/si-no-hacemos-algo-tendremos-unas-farc-advierte-comandante-general-ejercito> (May 22, 2009).
9. Red Sun Magazine, at <http://www.redsun.org> (May 21, 2009); New Peru Friendship Association, at <http://www.geocities.com/npfausa/ActionsInt.html> (May 21, 2009); Socialist Party of Iran, at <http://www.jonbesh-iran.com> (May 21, 2009); "Justice for All: Three Jurors Make Fair Treatment Life's Work," *Georgetown.edu*, October 22, 2007, at <http://explore.georgetown.edu/news/?ID=28593> (May 21, 2009).

Just as Colombia (which benefits from the U.S.-funded Plan Colombia) and Mexico (which has the U.S.-funded Merida Initiative), Peru is a good friend of the United States and needs U.S. help to defeat this new challenge. Consequently, President Obama should direct the establishment of a U.S.–Peru partnership. Congress should provide emergency funding for this partnership and also help Peru by approving pending U.S. free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama, which, along with the recently approved agreement with Peru, will

strengthen U.S. ties to—and the economy of—the Andean region.

The U.S. and Peruvian governments should not underestimate the problems posed by the re-emergence of Shining Path. The two governments must take the fight against terrorism to the VRAE.

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