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# Interview With The MRTA - December 30, 1996

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## "Is The MRTA's Action Weakening Fujimori?"

**Interview With Isaac Velazco**

**European Representative Of The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA)**

Translated by Arm The Spirit

*Isaac Velazco has been active in the Peruvian Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, whose commando "Oscar Torre Condesu" is presently occupying the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, since 1984. In February 1988, Velazco was arrested and tortured. Had he not been able to escape, he most likely would have died in prison. When statements by a traitor led to a raid on his family's home in 1993, the MRTA decided to send Velazco to Germany. In November 1994, he was granted political asylum. Following a decision by the National Leadership of the MRTA, Isaac Velazco was chosen to act as the European Representative of the MRTA.*

**According to mainstream media reports, the MRTA commando, which is still occupying the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, has proposed a dialogue concerning a lasting and comprehensive peace. It seems the MRTA is no longer demanding the release of all political prisoners, rather just that prison conditions be improved. Have the goals of the action been changed?**

Not at all. The goal remains to discuss and to negotiate. The MRTA will enter into these negotiations with the same demands it made at the beginning of the standoff. In the confrontation with the government concerning these demands, including the release of political prisoners, we will see which points we can agree on. That's how a process of negotiation works.

**The Peruvian government has declared a state of emergency...**

Yes, these measures are designed to retain control over all information and people. Since Sunday, the military has taken over the duties of the police and can arrest anyone without a reason. All members of the opposition are threatened with arrest. This is being done to create the necessary climate either for negotiations or a storming of the compound by force. Both options could be behind this.

**Why did the MRTA choose the Japanese ambassador's residence as the target of its action?**

Japan today is a major economic power, which has the luxury to be able to afford to purchase parts of Wall Street. Many major U.S. corporations are made up largely of Japanese capital. That's why Japan will play an increasingly important role in Latin America, and Japan regards President Fujimori as its primary supporting figure. Now, there is a conflict of interests in Peru between the U.S. and Japan. Japan, in order to strengthen its position there, has financed the dirty war. The Japanese government was even partially to blame for the fact that two of its own citizens, who worked for an aid agency, were murdered by a paramilitary group. Japan is deeply involved in supporting this murderous regime. That's why the National Leadership of the MRTA decided to attack this location - a place which would deeply hurt the dictatorship.

**To what degree will this occupation affect Fujimori's future role? Will it help Fujimori to consolidate his base, under the motto of "joining ranks", or will it lead to splits within the government?**

The Fujimori government has its back against the wall. All those who collaborate with the government - businessmen, politicians, and military figures - know very well that their integrity is in danger. If one day

they, too, should become prisoners of war of the MRTA, the government won't do anything to help them. That's very extraordinary within the context of Latin American history. On three occasions, the comrades of the FSLN in Nicaragua captured politicians and businessmen with ties to the Somoza regime. Each of these incidents ended with their demands fulfilled. Fujimori, on the other hand, has a complete disregard for human life, even for the lives of his partners. Businessmen who support the government ought to think about that.

#### **What about the relationship between the military and the Fujimori regime?**

The support which both have given to one another in the past has only served to act as a cover for state terrorism and corruption. The government and high-ranking military officials are very corrupt. It's no coincidence that, for example, Mr. Montesino, a lawyer for the drug mafia with ties to the military, was not charged despite evidence from a convicted drug dealer. The government did everything in its power to prevent an investigation, and the state prosecutor aided in this cover-up by publicly backing Mr. Montesino. That would be unthinkable in most formal democracies. But such favors are granted to the military by the Fujimori regime. But there is a struggle for drug profits taking place between the military and the intelligence agency. Sometimes they work against each other. That's why the transport of 170kg of cocaine in the President's plane was publicized, as was the discovery of navy ships being used to transport coca paste. But all of this goes unpunished. And the government never talks about the dirty war, the torture, the violations of human rights, the murder of elderly persons, women, and children.

#### **Why did the MRTA take up armed struggle?**

The MRTA formed in the early 1980s as an alliance of various political groups. In the 1970s, there were 60 or 70 political organizations which approached one another towards the end of the decade. Two tendencies developed within this. One sought solutions to the nation's problems through the democratic process. The other felt that the path of political dialogue was blocked and the time was right to resort to other means. This development continued into the 1980s, and the MRTA became an important crystallization point for many armed organizations.

#### **How many activists did the MRTA have at that time?**

During the First Conference of the MRTA as a political-military organization, which was still legal at that time, 300 activists took part. Of course the total membership was much higher than that. Following this conference, the organization took its work underground and the first units were formed to carry out armed propaganda actions. For example, they occupied radio stations, attacked arms depots, confiscated trucks full of food and distributed these goods in poor neighborhoods, in addition to a series of actions designed to provide funds for the organization. The first military clashes were in the south of the country in 1984. The military surrounded one MRTA unit which was in the area to help establish a rural guerrilla. Following a long battle, 12 of our activists were arrested and many weapons were confiscated. They were then thrown into prison and tortured. Another unit was able to break through the military's lines and link up with other MRTA forces elsewhere in the country. The deployment of the Peruvian military was marked by massive attacks on the civilian population.

#### **And how strong is the MRTA today?**

For security reasons, I cannot say. But our forces are present throughout the country. The MRTA is present at many levels and is organized in various fields. There are rural units, special units, commandos, and militias. In accordance with our outlook, our members are active in a variety of fields, such as propaganda, union organizing, social movements, and the guerrilla.

**The Peruvian government and President Fujimori in particular have declared victory over the guerrilla. That doesn't seem to be true. In 1996, the MRTA carried out several attacks on military and police targets.**

Yes, the Fujimori government claimed a great victory over the armed movement. Two factors played a role in this. First of all, the leader of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Abimael Guzman, signed a peace agreement with the government. Secondly, there was tactical retreat by the MRTA. As a result of several

military offensives by the Peruvian military, the repression against the population, and the neo-liberal policies of the government, our social base was narrowed. We decided to concentrate our political and military structures in the rural areas of central Peru, in Selva Central. In the rest of the country we only had commando and militia structures, which carried out intensive political and organizational work in city neighborhoods, with farmers, and with workers. The government lied to itself and even made itself believe that the guerrilla, in particular the MRTA, had been defeated. Now the government is faced with a new situation. We have continued our political work over the past few years and given political-military training to a new generation of fighters and cadre. We were never as weak as the government supposed. The number of actions carried out by the MRTA across the country, which dealt heavy blows to the army, are evidence of this. The government has tried to cover all this up, but they have failed. The people know that the government has not defeated the guerrilla and they know that the government's neo-liberal policies are making poverty worse. That is evidenced by the large participation of the population in recent riots.

**A few weeks ago, there were three days of riots in Lima's historic district, because the police tried to force all vendors off the streets. Hundreds of people and police were injured. Have protests against the government increased?**

Yes. Since the end of 1995, the people are slowly rebuilding their organizational and mobilizational capacities. There are more riots, where the people defend their right to existence. But the repression has changed as well. Before, police and soldiers were everywhere in Lima. Today, you don't see as many. They have been replaced by secret police and plain-clothes forces. A German friend of mine recently had his briefcase stolen on the street in Lima. Within seconds, at least 20 plain-clothes police officers were on the scene and brutally beat up the thief.

**Sendero Luminoso has also reorganized, is active militarily, and seems to have altered its line...**

The peace deal with the government signed by a large part of the group led to deep divisions within Sendero. That faction which wished to continue the armed struggle has carried out armed propaganda and has taken to interacting with the people in a way which Sendero used to criticize the MRTA for doing. But despite some corrections in its political methods, Sendero is still the same. For example, in March of this year, labor activist Pascual Arozda was murdered. They have continued to attack all those who stand in their way or don't share their views.

**How would you describe the relationship between Sendero and the MRTA? In the past, Sendero has attacked the MRTA.**

Sendero is a very domineering force. They claim to be the sole possessors of the truth and the only standard bearers of revolution in Peru. That's why they have never accepted the existence of other revolutionary organizations in Peru. At the least, they have described us as "armed reformists" and "traitors". But Sendero has also, in the past, described us as their main enemy and murdered many MRTA activists. They have even ambushed MRTA units. These are crimes which cannot be justified in any way; they contradict the values of revolutionaries.

**How do you envision the MRTA's future?**

The MRTA arose as a movement. Many social sectors are represented within the MRTA: men and women from the cities and rural areas; intellectuals, religious people, indeed the whole society. Of course, to transform society we must tear down the old state and build a new one. That means we must seize power. But seize power for whom? For what? And to what end? That is the central question. The answer is: Power must be in the hands of the workers in the cities and the countryside. There must be a participatory democracy. Mechanisms for people's power must be advanced. And we have been doing that for years.

Interview by Darrío Azzellini, junge Welt, December 30, 1996

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