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Peru: Insurgents Hold the Initiative

The initiative and momentum of the war favor the insurgents. Growing insurgent attacks and terrorism throughout Peru, including rising violence in Lima, have become a major challenge to the government of President Alan Garcia. The growth of violence in Lima during the last two years has been particularly dramatic, giving the Peruvian capital one of the highest rates of terrorism in the world. Most insurgent attacks continue to be directed against domestic targets, but attacks against foreign personnel and property also are rising. Although Garcia is increasingly focused on the problem, we do not believe he can implement a successful counterinsurgency strategy in the near term.

Sendero's Momentum

A tightly knit group of fanatics, the Sendero Luminoso (SL) has steadily, and gradually, extended its membership and guerrilla activities nationwide since it began armed operations as an insurgent group in 1980. The group has developed a hybrid ideology fashioned from elements of Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, and a rural populism that emphasizes the revolutionary potential of the Indian peasantry. The Sendero ideology—with its emphasis on indigenous Indian values—rejects all that the white, Spanish-descended oligarchy represents. SL's violent tactics and strategy of a prolonged war of attrition are aimed at the total elimination of the influence of Peru's whites and the expulsion of all foreign influences from the country.

Sendero is apparently expanding its ranks with fresh recruits, most of whom are Quechua-speaking Indians from the south-central Peruvian highlands. Sendero also successfully proselytizes and recruits among Indians who have migrated to the squatter settlements surrounding Lima and among students at Lima's universities. SL has recently been gaining adherents from the ranks of the United Left (IU), Peru's major opposition party. The crushing defeat suffered by the IU in municipal elections last November may have convinced many of

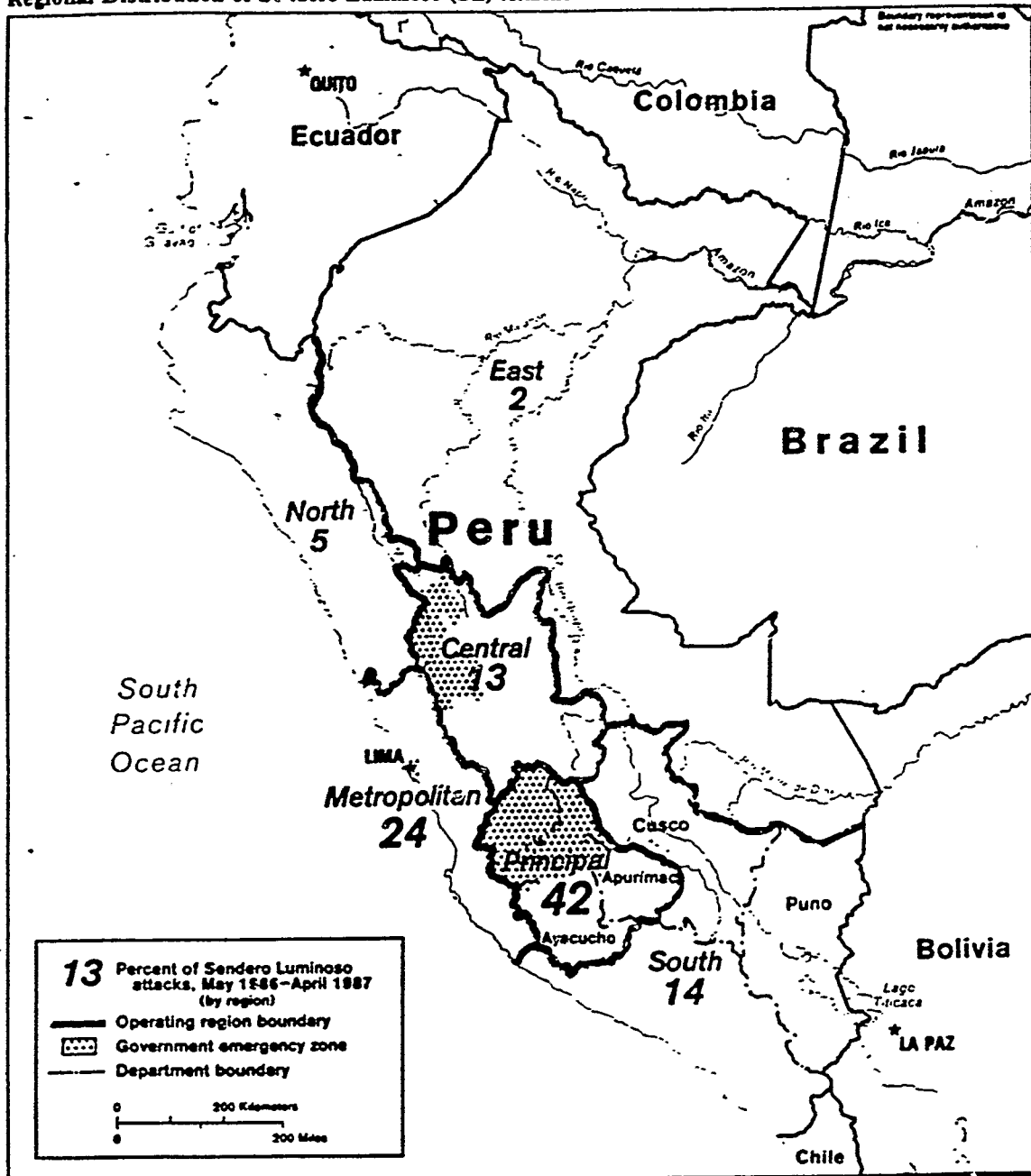
its members to forgo legitimate political activity and defect to the SL to pursue armed revolution. Most recruits are under 20 and some, particularly in the countryside, are as young as 14 or 15. Recruits are heavily indoctrinated and their loyalty well tested before they become full-fledged militants.

Sendero's activity during the past six months shows a continuing trend in geographical expansion of its operating area. While sustaining a high level of action in its Ayacucho home base, the group is making particularly strong advances into Peru's southern departments of Apurimac, Cuzco, and Puno, and is making new inroads in the heretofore quiescent north coast departments. In these new areas Sendero is staying true to its strategy of ridding the countryside of central government authority; it intimidates and "selectively assassinates" local ruling party and elected officials, policemen, government rural-development workers, civilian defense personnel, and other peasants accused of collaborating with the government.

Sendero also is striking hard at the soft economic infrastructure and is increasingly hitting foreign investment targets. Small electric power substations and transmission lines are favorite targets, and blackouts have become a regular feature of life in Peru's rural areas and in Lima. Postal, telephone, oil, and water facilities are often damaged, as are rail and road bridges.

SL's highly compartmented terrorist squads in Lima carried out more attacks last year in the capital than in any single department and are increasing attacks this year at an alarming rate. In its first known attack against a foreign business official, SL attempted to assassinate the manager of the Bank of Tokyo in Lima earlier this year, wounding the banker and his

Regional Distribution of Sendero Luminoso (SL) Attacks



driver. Sendero also recently bombed the Bank of London office, critically injuring four people; and, in a particularly vicious attack, Sendero terrorists killed six people and wounded at least 10 others while machine-gunning patrons at a Lima restaurant.

The overall increase in terrorist attacks in Lima is also attributable to the increasing activity of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), a pro-Cuban middle-class group of about 200 to 300 members. In late December 1986, the MRTA went on a bombing rampage, attacking seven US-affiliated facilities, including the United States Information Agency building. This year Tupac Amaru has bombed approximately 50 bank branch offices in Lima, causing considerable damage but few injuries. In April MRTA guerrillas, armed with automatic weapons and explosives, attacked a police station in a north coast town and killed two policemen. That action, as well as recent propaganda activity in other coastal departments, suggests that the generally Lima-based MRTA may be trying to establish itself outside the capital.

The Government Response

We are not optimistic that Garcia will develop an effective and comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy during the next several months. Garcia continues to send what his military chiefs perceive as mixed signals by ordering them, on the one hand, to adopt aggressive tactics to deal with suspected insurgents and to intimidate supporters of insurgents, while, on the other hand, he publicly heralds his administration's commitment to punish human rights abuses committed by the military. Moreover, we believe that his efforts to assert civilian primacy over the military, particularly his creation of a new Defense Ministry, are widely perceived as meddling in armed forces institutional affairs and are likely to distract military leaders from their counterinsurgency mission—at least in the short term.

Military leaders have decried Garcia's lack of clear direction and failure to put into place a comprehensive counterinsurgency program, but the military as an institution has not become fully committed to the effort. Although it is the largest and best equipped military on the west coast of South America, the Peruvian armed forces are structured to defend the country against simultaneous, conventional attacks from its traditional rivals, Chile and Ecuador. At

present we estimate that probably less than 10 percent of the armed forces' manpower is committed to counterinsurgency operations. A large share of the counterterrorist burden still falls on Peru's three, poorly equipped and trained, national police forces.

The Peruvian security forces are improving their counterinsurgency capabilities, but we believe they will be hard pressed to contain insurgent expansion until at least some of the following shortcomings are remedied:

- Lack of officer initiative: performance by field commanders has been uneven, with some officers undertaking aggressive patrolling but others keeping their troops garrison bound.
- Shortage of trained personnel: the officer corps suffers from a shortage of pilots, maintenance personnel, and other technical specialists.
- Shortage of equipment: tactical air mobility and troop transport capability is poor because of a lack of operational helicopters that are effective at high altitudes.
- Logistic weaknesses: inadequate maintenance and spare parts shortages inhibit operational readiness.
- Poor intelligence: the failure of multiple intelligence services to share data and coordinate operations effectively is a serious problem.

Outlook

The number and effectiveness of terrorist attacks so far this year have demonstrated that there are no short-term solutions to the still expanding Sendero Luminoso insurgency and urban terrorism. We believe that during the next six months the well-entrenched insurgents will continue to grow gradually in numbers and will pose an increasing threat to personal security and political stability. In our opinion, Sendero Luminoso will have substantial success moving into new areas in the interior and both Sendero and Tupac Amaru, will most likely escalate terrorist attacks in the capital. Garcia is increasingly focusing on the problem, and his call for increased civic action, rural development programs, and psychological operations, as well as a planned reorganization of the intelligence and police services, are all promising developments. Even if carried through, however, such measures are likely to have an impact on the counterinsurgency effort only over the longer term.