

BACKGROUND PAPER

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Left-Wing Terrorism in Peru

RELEASED

The group responsible for most incidents of terrorism in the last two years is a small (500-1000 members) offshoot of the Peruvian Communist Party known as Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). It derives its name and its political orientation from the teachings of Mao and the Peruvian Marxist intellectual Jose Carlos Mariátegui (1895-1930). To date, we have seen no convincing evidence of outside support for the Sendero's activities.

Although the Sendero had its origins as a social and political action group in the southern department (state) of Ayacucho in the 1960's, since President Belaunde was inaugurated in July 1980 it has carried out numerous and often spectacular attacks on police stations, power facilities and other public and private installations throughout Peru.

A well-coordinated attack in August 1982 blacked out the entire metropolitan Lima area for several hours and heightened public concern over the threat posed by the Sendero to public safety and political stability.

The Belaunde government believes that the activities of the Sendero can and should be controlled by the national police. Moreover, the administration claims that the press, which has operated completely free of restraint since the restoration of civilian rule, has exaggerated the dimensions of the terrorist threat.

Belaunde has thus far resisted growing military and public pressure for a direct armed forces role in the counter insurgency campaign. To do so would abdicate all civilian authority in the affected areas, could result in human rights violations, and might eventually lead to a military coup, as it did when Belaunde was overthrown in 1968.

The armed forces have been called upon, however, to provide the under-manned and poorly equipped police with intelligence and logistical support, especially in the area around Ayacucho. Troops and equipment have been airlifted into the remote, mountainous area as back up for police efforts and a state of emergency has been imposed there and in Lima. This measure gives the government more freedom to arrest and hold suspected terrorists, and bans political meetings and demonstrations.

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