



Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso)



Ideology:

The Communist Party of Peru (Spanish: Partido Comunista del Perú), more commonly known as the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso), is a communist militant group in Peru. When it first launched the internal conflict in Peru in 1980, its stated goal was to replace what it saw as bourgeois democracy with "New Democracy". The Shining Path believed that by establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat, inducing cultural revolution, and eventually sparking world revolution, they could arrive at pure communism. Their representatives said that existing socialist countries were revisionist, and they claimed to be the vanguard of the world communist movement. The Shining Path's ideology and tactics have been influential among other Maoist insurgent groups, notably the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and other Revolutionary Internationalist Movement-affiliated organizations.

Widely condemned for its brutality, including violence deployed against peasants, trade union organizers, popularly elected officials and the general civilian population, the Shining Path is classified by the Peruvian government, the U.S., the European Union, and Canada as a terrorist organization.

Organization:

Leader of the organization Abimael Guzmán stated that "the triumph of the revolution will cost a million lives" - at a time when Peru's population was only 19 million. To that end, the Shining Path attempted to eradicate elements of the political and social order, attacking community leaders, teachers and professors, and political leaders. The first case of "popular justice" was the assassination in December 1980 of Benigno Medina, a landowner. In January 1982, two teachers were executed in front of their students. Several months later, 67 "traitors" were subjected to public

execution. In addition, they set about demolishing all government installations and infrastructure. In August 1982, they destroyed the Center for Agricultural Research and Experimentation in Allpahaca and killed the animals.

Since the capture of its leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992, the Shining Path has declined in activity. Similar to militant groups in Colombia, some factions of the Shining Path have functioned as a highly efficient cocaine-smuggling operation, with an ostensibly paternalistic relationship to villagers.

The common name of this group, Shining Path, distinguishes it from several other Peruvian communist parties with similar names (see Communism in Peru). The name is derived from a maxim of José Carlos Mariátegui, founder of the original Peruvian Communist Party in the 1920s: "El Marxismo-Leninismo abrirá el sendero luminoso hacia la revolución" ("Marxism–Leninism will open the shining path to revolution").

This maxim was featured in the masthead of the newspaper of a Shining Path front group. Peruvian communist groups are often distinguished by the names of their publications. The followers of this group are generally called senderistas. All documents, periodicals and other materials produced by the organization are signed by the Communist Party of Peru (PCP). Academics often refer to them as PCP-SL.

The Shining Path was founded in the late 1960s by Abimael Guzmán, a former university philosophy professor (referred to by his followers by his nom de guerre Presidente Gonzalo). His teachings created the foundation of its militant Maoist doctrine. It was an offshoot of the Communist Party of Peru — *Bandera Roja* (red flag), which in turn split from the original Peruvian Communist Party, a derivation of the Peruvian Socialist Party founded by José Carlos Mariátegui in 1928.

The Shining Path first established a foothold at San Cristóbal of Huamanga University, in Ayacucho, where Guzmán taught philosophy. The university had recently reopened after being closed for about half a century, and many students of the newly educated class adopted the Shining Path's radical ideology. Between 1973 and 1975, Shining Path members gained control of the student councils in the Universities of Huancayo and La Cantuta, and developed a significant presence in the National University of Engineering in Lima and the National University of San Marcos. Sometime later, it lost many student elections in the universities, including Guzmán's San Cristóbal of Huamanga. It decided to abandon recruiting at the universities and reconsolidate.

Beginning on March 17, 1980, the Shining Path held a series of clandestine meetings in Ayacucho, known as the Central Committee's second plenary. It formed a "Revolutionary Directorate" that was political and military in nature and ordered its militias to transfer to strategic areas in the provinces to start the "armed struggle", despite the revisionism instituted in China by Deng Xiaoping and its economic success since 1978. The group also held its "First Military School" where members were instructed in military tactics and in the use of weapons. They also engaged in "Criticism and Self-criticism", a Maoist practice intended to purge bad habits and to avoid the repetition of mistakes, but the indiscriminate killings were their first mistakes, which caused the population's fear but not their support (Lucanamarca). During the existence of the First Military School, members of the Central Committee came under heavy criticism. Guzmán did not, and he emerged from the First Military School as the clear leader of the Shining Path.

Campaign of violence:

When Peru's military government allowed elections for the first time in a dozen years in 1980, the Shining Path was one of the few leftist political groups that declined to take part. It chose to begin guerrilla war in the highlands of Ayacucho Region. On May 17, 1980, on the eve of the presidential elections, it burned ballot boxes in the town of Chuschi. It was the first "act of war" by the Shining Path. The perpetrators were quickly caught and additional ballots were shipped to Chuschi. The elections proceeded without further problems, and the incident received little attention in the Peruvian press.

Throughout the 1980s, the Shining Path grew, both in terms of the territory it controlled, and in the number of militants in its organization, particularly in the Andean highlands. It gained support from local peasants by filling the political void left by the central government and providing "popular justice". This caused the peasantry of many Peruvian villages to express some sympathy for the Shining Path, especially in the impoverished and neglected regions of Ayacucho, Apurímac, and Huancavelica. At times, the civilian population of small, neglected towns participated in popular trials, especially when the victims of the trials were widely disliked.

The Shining Path's credibility was helped by the government's initially tepid response to the insurgency. For over a year, the government refused to declare a state of emergency in the region where the Shining Path was operating. The Interior Minister, José María de la Jara, believed the group could be easily defeated through police actions. Additionally, the president, Fernando Belaúnde Terry, who returned to power in 1980, was

reluctant to cede authority to the armed forces, as his first government had ended in a military coup. The result was that the peasants in the areas where the Shining Path was active thought the state was either impotent or not interested in their issues.

On December 29, 1981, the government declared an "emergency zone" in the three Andean regions of Ayacucho, Huancavelica and Apurímac, and granted the military the power to arbitrarily detain any suspicious person. The military abused this power, arresting scores of innocent people, at times subjecting them to torture during interrogation and rape. Police, military forces, and members of the Popular Guerrilla Army (Ejército Guerrillero Popular, or EGP) carried out several massacres throughout the conflict. Military personnel took to wearing black ski-masks to hide their identities and protect their safety, and that of their families. The masks were intimidating, however, and also hid the identities of military personnel as they committed crimes.

In some areas, the military trained peasants and organized them into anti-rebel militias, called "rondas". They were generally poorly-equipped, despite being provided arms by the state. The rondas attacked the Shining Path guerrillas. The first such reported attack was in January 1983, near Huata, when "ronderos" killed 13 "senderistas" in February, in Sacsamarca. In March 1983, ronderos brutally killed Olegario Curitomay, one of the commanders of the town of Lucanamarca. They took him to the town square, stoned him, stabbed him, set him on fire, and finally shot him.

In an April response, the Shining Path entered the province of Huanca Sancos and the towns of Yanacollpa, Ataccara, Llacchua, Muylacruz and Lucanamarca, where they killed 69 people, in what became known as the Lucanamarca massacre. This was the first time the Shining Path massacred peasants. Similar events followed, such as the ones in Hauyllo, Tambo District. The guerrillas killed 47 peasants, including 14 children aged four to fifteen. Additional massacres by the Shining Path occurred, such as the one in Marcas on August 29, 1985.

The Shining Path's attacks were not limited to the countryside. It mounted attacks against the infrastructure in Lima, killing civilians in the process. In 1983, it sabotaged several electrical transmission towers, causing a citywide blackout, and set fire and destroyed the Bayer industrial plant. That same year, it set off a powerful bomb in the offices of the governing party, Popular Action. Escalating its activities in Lima, in June 1985 it blew up electricity transmission towers in Lima, producing a blackout, and detonated car bombs near the government palace and the justice palace. It was believed to be responsible for bombing a shopping mall. At the time, President Fernando Belaúnde Terry was receiving

the Argentine president Raúl Alfonsín. In one of its last attacks in Lima, on July 16, 1992, the group detonated a powerful bomb on Tarata Street in the Miraflores District, full of civilian people, adults and children, killing 25 people and injuring an additional 155.

During this period, the Shining Path assassinated specific individuals, notably leaders of other leftist groups, local political parties, labor unions, and peasant organizations, some of whom were anti-Shining Path Marxists. On April 24, 1985, in the midst of presidential elections, it tried to assassinate Domingo García Rada, the president of the Peruvian National Electoral Council, severely injuring him and mortally wounding his driver. In 1988, Constantin Gregory, an American citizen working for the United States Agency for International Development, was assassinated. Two French aid workers were killed on December 4 that same year. In August 1991, the group killed one Italian and two Polish priests in the Ancash Region. The following February, it assassinated María Elena Moyano, a well-known community organizer in Villa El Salvador, a vast shantytown in Lima.

By 1991, the Shining Path had control of much of the countryside of the center and south of Peru and had a large presence in the outskirts of Lima. As the organization grew in power, a cult of personality grew around Guzmán. The official ideology of the Shining Path ceased to be "Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse-tung thought", and was instead referred to as "Marxism–Leninism–Maoism–Gonzalo thought". The Shining Path fought against Peru's other major guerrilla group, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), as well as campesino self-defense groups organized by the Peruvian armed forces.

Although the reliability of reports regarding the Shining Path's atrocities remains a matter of controversy in Peru for some people, the organization's use of violence is well documented. Lisa North, an expert on Peru at York University, noted that "the assassinations they carried out were absolutely ruthless... It was so extremist – absolutely, totally doctrinaire and absolutely, totally ruthless in pursuit of its aims." Furthermore, the Shining Path brutally killed its victims and rejected the idea of human rights.

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