

@CHAPTER = PERU

Peru is in the tenth year of its return to elected government, and in the tenth year of the guerrilla war carried on by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), perhaps the continent's most vicious and intractable insurgent organization. This is also President Alan García's fifth and last year in office, and his administration seems to have given up trying to control the armed forces to ensure that the fight against Sendero is conducted within the rule of law. Sendero has now grown well beyond its initial enclave of Ayacucho, in the South-Central Andes, and is now present in almost every part of Peru. Despite serious setbacks, it continues to appeal to many young, poor Peruvians and has solidified its grip over peasants and slumdwellers in many regions and cities. Sendero also launched an attack on the November 1989 elections, targetting for assassination elected and appointed candidates and officials from across the political system.

Democracy is thus in serious difficulty in Peru. The armed forces are much less inclined to follow directions from an inefficient and paralyzed government, and the counterinsurgency campaign is increasingly waged as a "dirty war." The armed forces methodically cause persons to disappear in the emergency zones, and frequently resort to indiscriminate attacks on civilians. From time to time, public opinion is shaken by the news of another grisly massacre, usually in retaliation for an attack by Sendero. Government institutions have been unwilling to cope with these abuses. Members of the governing party, *Partido Aprista Peruano*, who occupy key positions in the National Assembly have systematically obstructed congressional inquiries into abuses. And independent officials, such as judges and prosecutors, have failed to live up to their responsibilities to investigate abuses, at times after governmental interference.

The U.S. government has accurately and fairly described the human rights picture in the State Department's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. But U.S. policy toward Peru has been completely dominated by concern over drug interdiction, to the detriment of what could have been constructive efforts to promote human rights.

Peru is a major grower of coca and, as such, a supplier of the Colombian drug cartels. Vast areas of the country are now dedicated to the coca crop, and peasants are increasingly attracted to the crop because of its high market price in relation to alternative crops. The cocaine industry, however, is controlled by Colombian mafias, which buy their product in Peru. Peru thus has experienced little of the violence that in Colombia results from disputes among members of the cartels over control of operations and from efforts by those members to find a permanent place in Colombian society and politics.

The Bush administration's interdiction plan calls for military aid and training and the placement of U.S. advisors in the field. Most of this activity is directed to the Upper Huallaga valley, in the central jungle of Peru, where Sendero Luminoso has established a strong base. Speaking off-the-record, administration officials have acknowledged that military activity in the Upper Huallaga will have to be directed, at least in part, against Sendero. This view stems from the mistaken assumption that guerrillas and drug traffickers in the Upper Huallaga are allied. In fact the situation is much more complex. Sendero has established itself as the representative of growers, who are on the lowest rung of the cocaine ladder. On behalf of the growers, Sendero requires dealers and buyers to pay higher prices for raw coca. In return, Sendero guarantees protection for these middlemen and purchases weapons from them. Sendero thus does not so much have an alliance with the drug traffickers as it maintains an uneasy working relationship with them, in an area where the authority of the

state is almost non-existent.

The Peruvian government has declared a state of emergency in the upper Huallaga Valley, where it has established a Political-Military Command as the supreme authority, headed by General Alberto Arciniegas. Gen. Arciniegas has combined some of the abusive tactics already used in Ayacucho -- there are credible reports of disappearances and extra-judicial executions -- with "civic action" initiatives designed to break the support that Sendero enjoys among growers and peasants. He has stated publicly that it is not his job to fight drug traffic, which is technically a police function. His counterinsurgency strategy consists of striking deals with local economic and civic powers to forge a common front against Sendero, and in Upper Huallaga these powers happen to be heavily involved in drug trafficking. This policy has made U.S. officials very suspicious of Arciniegas. In late September, according to *The Miami Herald*, Melvin Levitsky, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters, accused Arciniegas of having been bought by the drug traffickers. True or not, the accusation created quite a stir in Peru, where observers commented that the Bush administration does not realize the seriousness of the threat posed by Sendero, and that Peru cannot shift its priorities to accomodate U.S. interests.

There have been reports in the Peruvian press that U.S. advisors have occasionally ventured out of their quarters and risked confrontation with the guerrillas. In June, Drug Enforcement Agency personnel, using helicopters and machine guns, took down a flag left by Sendero on an island in the Huallaga river. The U.S. embassy in Lima disciplined the agents for breaching their rules of engagement. White House and Pentagon officials have gone to great lengths to deny that there is any risk of U.S. troops becoming involved in combat, but U.S. military publications and skeptical members of Congress have insisted that U.S. Special Forces, in a supervisory role, have gone out on a variety of reconnaissance patrols with the forces they are training. These suspicions are fueled by a fortified base being built by the DEA in Santa Lucía, 70 kilometers inland from Tingo María, which will have the capacity to hold up to 400 troops.

The Bush administration all but acknowledges that in Peru, its drug-interdiction policy is in effect a counterinsurgency policy. If that is the case, there is no clear debate in Washington about the implications of involving U.S. aid and forces in a local counterinsurgency effort when that effort has increasingly taken on the characteristics of a "dirty war." As in Colombia, a more sound policy in Peru would be to establish strict conditions on aid to ensure that both drug interdiction and counterinsurgency are conducted in strict compliance with fundamental human rights standards.