

The Reemergence of Sendero Luminoso (SL)

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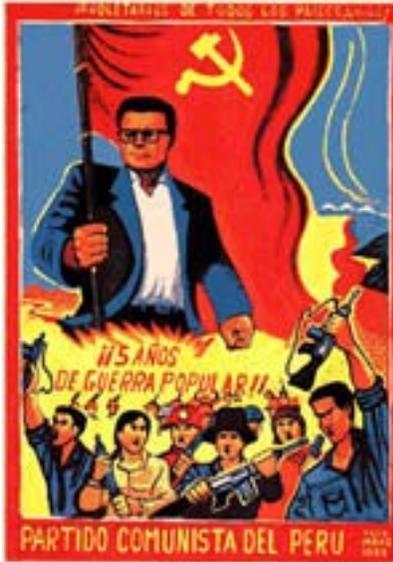
Introduction

This paper examines the critical factors that have led to the reemergence of Sendero Luminoso (SL) in Peru, beginning with a history of SL up until the capture of SL's founder, Abimael Guzman in 1992 (the 'old SL') in order to provide the necessary context for examining the organizational changes which have made SL post 1992 (the 'new SL') so effective. This is accomplished by first, focusing on the downfall of the 'old SL', which can be explained, in part, because it alienated the Peruvian peasantry and was cut off from its primary source of funding (the narcotics trade). Next, this paper examines the three primary factors that have allowed for the emergence of the 'new SL': the change in ideology from Maoist to 'narco-capitalist' which has ensured that the 'new SL' has secure access to funding from the narcotics trade; a shift in SL's attitudes towards the peasantry in an effort to enlist their support for the 'new SL'; and the alliance between SL and the Cocalero movement, an association of coca growers. The latter has greatly increased SL's access to funds, armaments and recruits, while at the same time has led to an increase in the size and influence of the narcotics industry in Peru. It is evident that the 'new SL', allied with the Cocalero movement, poses a mounting threat to Peruvian democracy necessitating immediate attention.

Background: the history of the 'old SL'

The 'old SL' was a Maoist terrorist organization founded in the late 1960s by university philosophy professor Abimael Guzman with the objective of toppling the Peruvian government

and replacing it with a form of government that SL described as a, ‘Maoist utopia’. Guzman and his followers aimed to achieve this by inciting peasant uprisings in the Andean highlands, which would, as they gained momentum and support, ultimately encompass Lima, where their acts of violence would likely have the most impact.



SL’s origins can be traced to a divide in the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP) in 1964, which resulted from tensions that existed between the pro-Soviet and pro-PR China factions. The segment loyal to Moscow opted to install a communist regime in Peru without violence and stressed cooperation with, and co-optation of, the ruling elite.ⁱ In contrast the pro-PR China segment was committed to armed struggle aimed at overthrowing the government. In 1967 the pro-PR China segment of the PCP split, largely because of concerns that the PCP was not taking the necessary steps to bring about revolution in a timely manner. A further split in the PCP occurred in 1970 resulting in the expulsion of Guzman and his followers from the party.ⁱⁱ It was at this time that Guzman formed SL.

In 1971, Guzman was appointed personnel director of the University of Huamanga and implemented a program of hiring radical faculty members who indoctrinated their students with SL’s rhetoric and encouraged them to return to their villages as teachers carrying with them SL’s call for revolution.ⁱⁱⁱ This allowed SL to develop “cells of support” throughout Peru well before violent revolution ensued.^{iv}

Between 1970 and 1977 SL remained primarily involved in educational activities without yet implementing a “call to action”. Guzman used this period to construct the ideology of SL focusing on Chinese Maoist philosophy and the works of Jose Carlos Mariategui, the founder of the PCP. Guzman borrowed the idea of a peasant/agrarian revolution from Mao and combined it with Mariategui’s conclusion that socialism was already evident in pre-colonial Peruvian society.^v Mariategui posited that a Peruvian communist revolution must involve and enfranchise the peasantry because they are the largest segment of society and because they are the most adversely affected sector of Peruvian society. In part this is a result of the structure of landholding that has been in place since the conquest. In addition Mariategui described the peasantry as already organized into “communistic units of production.” Acceptance of this idea is evidenced in PCP party doctrine. For example, one official party publication declared, “The peasantry is the basis of the people’s war...” “...this is a peasant war or it is nothing (Fumerton, 46).” Nevertheless, Guzman opted for a revolution led not by the peasantry but by a proletarian vanguard, declaring that, “the peasantry [is] the main force in our society while the proletariat [is] the leading class...”^{vi}

As such, SL implemented a revolution that was by no means led by peasants; rather it was a result of an ideology promulgated by middle class academics.^{vii} A central reason for SL’s initial acceptance was not the power of its ideology but a confluence of economic and political insecurity in the country that had marginalized and impoverished the peasantry and had failed to offer tangible evidence that life in the countryside would improve. Between 1977 and 1978 General Francisco Morales Bermúdez began to implement “economic austerity measures” which led to the deterioration of the peasantry’s standard of living, fomenting an outbreak of multiple

widespread revolts. Morales' failed "economic austerity measures" set the stage for (a weakly institutionalized) democracy and in 1980 a civilian leader, President Fernando Belaunde Terry took office. Belaunde's appointment for Prime Minister, Manuel Ulloa began implementing neoliberal reforms under the guidance of the 'Chicago Boys' (disciples of Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago).^{viii} These reforms had disastrous effects on the Peruvian economy, "exports fell, imports increased, industry declined, the trade deficit returned and inflation began to rise."^{ix} The foregoing resulted in Peru's real GDP per capita experiencing a negative growth rate of 2.9% between 1980 and 1990.^x The repercussions of this economic downturn fell most heavily on the urban poor and the Andean peasantry. In the Andes, 57% of the population lived below the poverty line while 32% lived below the extreme poverty line.^{xi}

Guzman's emphasis on a proletarian vanguard led revolution, instead of a peasant led revolution, allowed for the adoption of Marxist-Leninist convictions that only the vanguard was capable of determining the "true interests of the people."^{xii} This in turn fostered contempt for the 'uneducated, primitive' peasant populations resulting in numerous abuses against the peasant population. SL bolstered its ranks by kidnapping young men and teenagers, forcing them to join their ranks. SL murdered indigenous persons 'suspected' of being against SL. According to Philip Mauceri additional abuses by SL that further alienated the peasants were the closure of peasant markets, the replacement of indigenous authorities with SL cadres, and the adoption of different religious and cultural norms by SL.^{xiii}

The contempt by the SL leadership for the peasants and the violence perpetrated against them ultimately played a significant role in the demise of the 'old SL'. The beginning of the (protracted) end occurred in 1989 when President Alan García traveled to Ayacucho to oversee the arming of the local *rondas*, or 'peasant patrols' which were formed to protect rural communities from the abuses of SL. The military, in turn, followed García's example by curbing repression in peasant communities, instituting infrastructure development projects and allowing young peasants to perform their mandatory military service at home alongside the local *rondas*. In doing so the military was able to capitalize on the growing discontent of the peasantry with SL.^{xiv}

President Alberto Fujimori, who would take over the office of the President from García in 1990, continued to create new *rondas* and arm existing ones often personally passing out rifles in public ceremonies. Fujimori also attempted to co-opt peasant populations by selectively financing infrastructure developments (where it was politically expedient). In addition Fujimori garnered the support and respect of the peasantry by adopting their cultures and clothing and riding in the "Fujimóvil" a tractor drawn cart (which he personally designed to be rustic in appearance). Perhaps, the most significant reason Fujimori was able to garner the peasantry's support against SL was that under his presidency the economy began to improve. Between 1990 and 1997 Peru's real GDP per capita growth rate was a positive 3.4%, compared to a negative 2.9% the decade prior.^{xv} However, Fujimori also implemented a number of anti-democratic measures, decreeing that members of the military could not be tried in civilian courts for human rights abuses and expanding military powers in the Andes, which permitted the army to enter prisons, universities, and other SL strongholds. Fujimori's policies were effective and on September 12th 1992 Guzman was captured in a safe house in Lima. The Peruvian intelligence services also recovered SL's master files and as a result were able to round up 90% of SL's leadership by year's end.^{xvi}

The emergence of the 'new SL'

A number of recent events are evidence of SL's reemergence. In March 2002, three days prior to US President Bush's arrival in Peru, SL perpetrated a bombing in close proximity to the US Embassy. In June 2003 SL held 73 oil pipeline workers hostage. The next month SL killed five soldiers and two farmers outside of Lima.^{xvii} In 2005 SL killed five police officers. More recently, in 2008 and 2009, SL perpetrated hit and run style ambushes against military convoys engaged in coca abatement.^{xviii}

There are a myriad of factors that have contributed to the emergence of the 'new SL'. This paper will focus on the three most significant factors. First, SL has experienced a shift in ideology from Maoism to 'narco-capitalism,' thus providing SL with large amounts of funds to finance their operations. Second, SL has adopted new practices and attitudes towards peasants. The 'new SL' appears to be making efforts to incorporate indigenous people, or at least it has disavowed the practices of the 'old SL' (ex. kidnapping young men in order to increase recruitment is believed to have stopped). Indications are that these methods have been effective in increasing the willing participation of the peasantry. Third SL has made alliances with the Cocalero movement initially uniting with them because of their shared opposition to foreign eradication programs. This alliance has continued to grow and has provided SL with increased access to new recruits, additional funding, and more advanced armaments. Furthermore, it is postulated that SL has benefited from the advanced organizational skills of the Cocaleros.

Shift in ideology: from Maoist to 'narco-capitalist'

The 'old SL' was dependent on alliances with narco-traffickers in the Upper Huallaga Valley in order to finance their insurgency.^{xix} However the 'old SL's' role was to offer protection to those engaged in drug trafficking in SL's areas of operation, in exchange for financing. This differs significantly from the 'new SL' which is directly involved in the cultivation, processing, and exportation of coca and cocaine. For the 'old SL' coca production was tolerated as part of a "tactical alliance" with the coca industry^{xx} whereas for the 'new SL' coca production is a central goal of the organization.^{xxi}

Bruce H. Kay, writing in the late 1990's concludes that, "the scope and intensity of political violence in a democratizing society are influenced..." "...by regional opportunities arising from state weakness that favor the formation of coalitions against the state."^{xxii} Kay asserts that the failure of state-managed co-operatives in the fertile jungle area of the Upper Huallaga Valley (and elsewhere) left the region devoid of state authority.^{xxiii} This combined with the international drug trade and rising cocaine consumption in the US has provided the perfect opportunity for coca production.

By the 1980's Peruvian coca production netted between 800mn and 1.2bn USD, more than a third of the value of Peru's legal economy. At this time SL was able to gain control of the Upper Huallaga Valley, and SL allowed the coca industry to function under its control. SL served many state functions in the region taking on law enforcement roles, and taxing and conscripting citizens.^{xxiv} However, under Fujimori coca interdiction programs in the Upper Huallaga Valley were pursued and were successful in limiting production and export of coca, in turn decreasing SL's source of funding. At this time the coca industry disaggregated into smaller production areas that were more difficult for the government to target. Conversely, these disaggregated areas of coca production had their own legal economies, civic organizations and ties to the national political system which made it more difficult for SL to regain its foothold, thus restricting SL's access to coca generated funds.^{xxv} Even so, the coca industry continued to

prosper in its new disaggregated form. However, as a result of the aforementioned factors, SL no longer had access to the profits. Because SL was reliant on the coca industry for financing it is postulated that the lack of funds at this time is a correlate of decreased attacks by SL. SL attacks dropped from 1,890 incidences in 1981 to 1,480 incidences in 1990.^{xxvi} The ‘new SL’ realized that in order to ensure a continued and secure source of funding it must become an integral part of the coca industry.

The ‘new SL’ has been successful in firmly establishing itself in Peru’s cocaine trade.^{xxvii} It operates drug labs, coca farms, and narco-trafficking operations.^{xxviii} In the past the coca industry would relocate as a result of government abatement activities leaving SL without access to funding. This is no longer the case as SL carries out its own cultivation, refinement, and trafficking operations, ensuring that it will reap the rewards even if production activities are forced to relocate.^{xxix}

As a result of SL’s active participation in the coca industry, the ‘new SL’ has divorced itself from Maoist ideology, which does not reflect the profit driven nature of the ‘new SL’. The two factions of SL, in the Ene and Apurimac regions have abandoned Abimael Guzman as their ideological leader, and while the faction in the Huallaga region still recognizes Guzman as its founder, all three groups have embraced ‘narco-capitalism.’^{xxx}

These, ‘narco-capitalist’ activities have been extremely profitable and have allowed SL to stockpile ever more sophisticated weapons, hire new recruits, and invest in improving organizational networks. These activities have also provided the necessary funds to finance the co-optation of peasants, allowing SL to disavow its previous hostile attitudes towards the peasantry (discussed below).

Shift in attitudes: from violence to co-optation

SL of the 1980s and 1990s, despite its stated aim of replacing existing Peruvian institutions with a “communist peasant revolutionary regime,” was extremely hostile towards the Peruvian peasantry. As discussed, SL’s numerous violent actions against the peasantry resulted in SL losing the support of the peasants and many turned against SL, in favor of working with Garcia and Fujimori’s government and the military to form *rondas* in order to protect themselves from SL.

It is unclear if SL has actually altered their opinions of the peasantry, but what is clear is SL now recognizes the importance of the peasantry for the success of their movement. As a result SL has revised some of its most egregious policies. For example, Antenor Rosas, director of Peru’s counterterrorism police, stated in a December 2008 interview with Reuters that SL has abandoned their recruitment strategy of kidnapping teenagers and instead is offering regular wages to new recruits, which Rosas notes is “more attractive for the youth now”. Rosas furthers, that the ‘new SL’, wealthy from the narcotics trade, is easily winning “friends in small towns...” “...where there is little in the way of basic services like water, healthcare, or electricity.”^{xxxi}

As indicated by Rosas, SL has been particularly effective in the “most vulnerable communities” by providing a wide array of social programs. In Apurimac and Ene, where SL has a large base of support, 54.27% of the population teeters on the poverty line, with an additional 44.84% falling below the poverty line. In addition 80% of the population is without access to potable water and 77% do not have electricity. 51% are chronically malnourished and virtually no one lives past 60 years of age.^{xxxii} The absence of the most basic government

services (ex. the provision of potable water), and the provision of these services by SL, makes SL's message extremely appealing in these areas.

As a result of SL's success in gaining the support of the peasantry in Apurímac and Ene, coca production has skyrocketed in these areas. As many as 17000 families are involved in cultivating 20,000 hectares of coca in these areas. This accounts for well over a third of Peru's coca production (53,000 hectares in total).^{xxxiii}

The economics of coca production have facilitated SL's success in convincing the peasantry to grow coca. One kilo of unrefined coca leaves nets the average farmer six or more USD, far more than any other crop. Additionally, Pablo G. Dreyfus, writing in 1999, noted that SL, in collaboration with narco-traffickers and the peasant producers, has been able to "get the drugs refined," thus making them easier to transport and then "get the crop to [export] markets." These networks were previously unavailable to the peasantry who had difficulty getting their crops to market given the dearth of infrastructure (ex. roads, etc.).^{xxxiv}

In spite of these changes in ideology and attitudes towards peasants, there is no doubt that the 'new SL' is not nearly as large as it was in the 1980's (with tens of thousands of members). Official estimates indicate that the 'new SL' has fewer than 300 members; however this number is likely a significant understatement. Nevertheless, this estimate fails to consider the procurement of advanced armaments and improved organization, each of which are force multipliers. More significantly, this estimate does not account for SL's budding relationship with the Cocalero movement.

SL's relationship with the Cocalero's

Peru's Cocalero movement has strengthened because of its avowed opposition to the eradication policies jointly pursued by Washington and Lima. As many as three hundred to five hundred thousand Peruvians are wholly dependent on coca production for their livelihood. Narco-traffickers have built the Cocalero movement, in part, by attempting to work with other disgruntled groups such as anti-mining organizations, environmentalist groups, and those who oppose free trade with the US. In addition they are implementing social programs, and making other improvements (ex. Infrastructure) in the countryside. A strong relationship has developed between the Cocalero leadership and SL so much so that the Cocalero leadership and SL have, in some areas, become so intertwined that they are, to an extent indiscernible. A recent article in *El Comercio* attests to this relationship. *El Comercio* reports on April 12th 2008 that "...it [SL] is now a new organization in that it is now a group completely involved in all levels of the chain of production of narco-trafficking in the area." The article further states, "the government is acknowledging that SL is akin to the FARC in Colombia, in that it has a political ideology in place to defend its trafficking operations."^{xxxv}

The similarities between FARC, ELN and SL are instructive in terms of predicting the potential threat of SL to Peruvian society. Both the FARC and ELN were founded in the 1960's after the end of the power sharing agreement between Colombia's two major parties. FARC and ELN desired a communist revolution similar to the Cuban model for Colombia. Like SL, FARC and ELN claim to "represent the rural poor against Colombia's wealthy classes'..." "...the privatization of natural resources, multinational corporations, and rightist violence." Also, like SL, FARC and ELN receive most of their funding from the narcotics trade. Estimates show that FARC nets between 200mn and 300mn USD per annum with more than half of these funds

coming from the narcotics trade. ELN, a much smaller organization, also receives most of its financing from the narcotics trade.^{xxxvi}

FARC and ELN, currently control vast areas of Colombian territory, which have for the most part become autonomous from the Colombian government. SL's potential for control over vast areas of Peru, is perhaps even greater than it was for FARC and ELN during their early stages in part because SL does not have to contend with right wing paramilitaries for control of coca production. Furthermore, the narcotics trade may be more profitable to SL than it is to FARC or ELN. According to the 2007 United Nations World Drug report, while FARC controls the cultivation of much of Colombia's drug supply it does not control the smuggling or much of the refinement which is done by professional smuggling groups and the cartels (resp.)^{xxxvii} whereas the narcotics industry in Peru is more vertically integrated.^{xxxviii} SL is heavily involved in the narcotics industry in Peru, especially in the Upper Huallaga Valley.^{xxxix}

SL has been able to ensure the supply of chemicals required to process coca leaves into cocaine HCL^{xl} which has significantly increased profits, as a kilo of coca leaves nets 6 USD while a kilo of cocaine HCL nets the 5,000 USD in Peru (20,000 when sold inside the US). The result has been the conversion of Andahuaylas "into the Andean Medellin", where the majority of coca is refined into cocaine HCL. The city has experienced an economic boom as evidenced by newly implemented large construction projects, funded by the narcotics trade.^{xli}

Just as Bruce Kay postulated a correlation between the drop in the 'old SL's' terroristic activities as a result of decreased access to funds from the narcotics trade, it is suggested, that today there is a direct correlation between increased drug production, as a result of the beneficial relationship between SL and the Cocaleros, and increased attacks by SL.^{xlii} For example, SL received, from the Cocalero leadership an estimated, 6,200 plus rifles and nearly 870 units of explosive materials in the beginning of 2007 alone.^{xliii} SL has been using these and other armaments to threaten the government. Attacks against police stations in Apurímac and Ene in September and October of 2008,^{xliv} and against remote military bases and military convoys in the jungles, often using explosives to blow up military vehicles have escalated.^{xlv}

Conclusions

The shift in SL's ideology from Maoism to 'nacro-capitalism' is significant in that it has allowed for the full integration of SL into the narcotics trade, thus providing SL with access to funds. In addition SL has altered its practices towards the peasantry incorporating them into the movement by providing social services as well as a viable economy for coca. However, if the 'old SL's' track record with the peasantry, or the experience of peasants under FARC and ELN control are any indication, SL may revert back to open contempt for the peasants. Yet at this stage its consolidation of power in the countryside continues to grow. SL's propensity for violence against the government, combined with the sheer size of the Cocalero movement and the vast funds generated from the narcotics trade suggests that if SL and the Cocalero leadership were to mobilize the hundreds of thousands of growers they could pose a very real threat to the Peruvian state. Alternatively, if the movement were large enough and sufficiently financed it could accomplish an electoral victory. Evidence of the Cocalero's electoral strength can be found in the election of Nancy Obregón, one of the Cocalero movement's top leaders, and nine other Cocaleros to parliament as representatives of the Union for Peru (UPP) party.^{xlvi}

In conclusion, a 'new SL' has emerged and in its reconstituted form it has the potential to be a significant threat to Peruvian democracy necessitating further research into understanding

the organizational structure of the 'new SL' and its relations with the Cocalero movement. Attention should also be directed to studying recruitment methods and the 'new SL's' relationship with the peasantry. This will enable the Peruvian government to formulate and implement effective strategies for countering the 'new SL.'

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