



Directorate of
Intelligence

[Redacted] 43

(19)

[Redacted]

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
Date 23 APR 1990

[REDACTED]

Latin America Review

[REDACTED]

15 March 1982

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Peru: Terrorism May Threaten Civilian Government



A recent rise in terrorist assaults is increasing pressure on the Belaunde administration, but the President is reluctant to give the military a greater role because of his previous ouster by the Army in similar circumstances.



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**Peru: Terrorism May Threaten
Civilian Government**

Escalating terrorism is increasing public and military pressure on the Belaunde administration to take firmer measures to ensure public order. By intensifying attacks in the violence-ridden Province of Ayacucho, the terrorists have achieved some success in their campaign to discredit the security forces and provoke the military to intervene as it did against a more widespread insurgency in 1965 during Belaunde's first term.

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Intensified Violence

After a lull that caused authorities to allow the expiration of the previous state of emergency in December, Ayacucho once again exploded in violence on 3 March when an undetermined number of assailants attacked police stations and the penitentiary. The assaults resulted in more than 10 deaths and the escape of 247 inmates, among them 54 suspected or convicted terrorists. The incident, the most serious terrorist act in the 19 months since Belaunde took office, was followed by sporadic bombings and assaults. To date, hundreds of police combing the mountains have recaptured only a score of the escaped inmates.

Although authorities have no evidence, they claim the operation was the work of the Shining Path, a terrorist group that operates primarily in Ayacucho. Along with the Red Flag, another terrorist band, the Shining Path forms the violent arm of the Peruvian Communist Party's Maoist wing, which split from the Moscow faction in 1964. Little is known about either group's membership other than that it appears to be dominated by disaffected intellectuals, students, and professionals. There is no evidence of foreign support.

If the Shining Path was responsible for the Ayacucho incident, the group has substantially improved its capabilities. The timing, coordination, and scale of the operation contrasts sharply with the low-level attacks the Shining Path has carried out before. The increased sophistication could result from the establishment of urban and rural centers to train members in combat techniques, as earlier reports suggested.

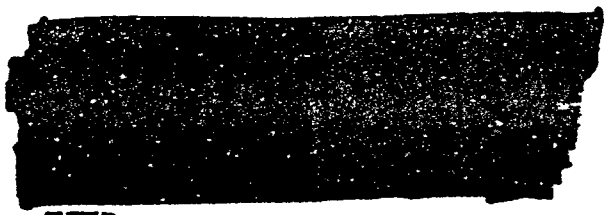
Political Fallout

The Ayacucho attacks have revived the public anxiety that had begun to subside during the lull in violence that followed a security forces' crackdown last fall. Groups across the political spectrum, including the principal leftist newspaper, are again calling for tougher measures against terrorism. Further incidents could completely undermine confidence in the security forces and increase public support for military action against the terrorists.

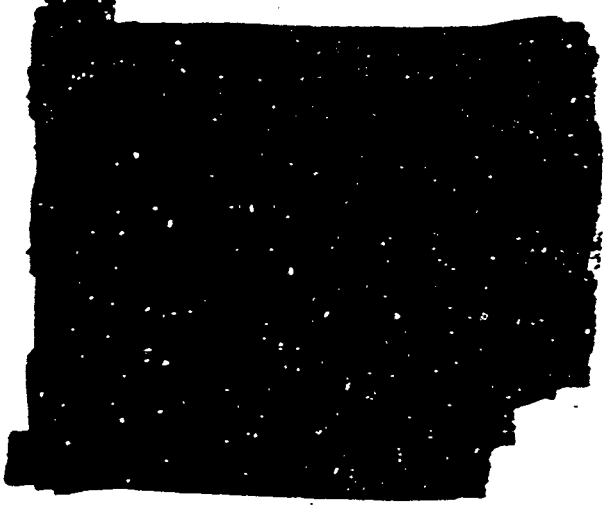
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