

CHAPTER 26

The Arrest of Guzman
of Peru's *Sendero Luminoso*

Peru is being torn apart by an extremist Maoist group, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path). The president, Alberto Fujimori, organizes an autocoup, overthrowing his congress. Visiting Peru in the wake of the Fujimori autocoup, the author learns that the U.S. intelligence is not helping capture the leader of Shining Path; he also learns why not and begins strenuously lobbying to change the policy, which does, indeed, change. Guzman is captured six months later, and the insurgency, as predicted, collapses. This chapter reveals, for the first time, that the Peruvian antiterrorist experts did get help from the United States in tracking down Guzman and describes the apparent underlying deal.

Until 1992 my work in Latin America was sporadic and unsustained. There were some achievements. In 1974 we sponsored a visit to Chile by some Amnesty International officials that seemed instrumental in arranging the release of about ten political prisoners. In 1977, I went to Brazil in response to the government's mistreatment of Brazilian scientists. The FAS report of November 1977 was well received by the experts. The nonprofit Washington Office of Latin American Affairs (WOLA) wrote that I had "penetrated the reality of Brazil today" and done a "superb job of describing the current Brazilian scene."⁴⁵⁷ A newspaper called *The Brazilians*, printed in New York, republished the entire newsletter.⁴⁵⁸ The president of Brazil called in Dr. Oscar Sala, president of the Brazilian SBPC (i.e., its American Association for the Advancement of Sci-

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ence) and asked why I had come and what the problem was, which was certainly helpful to the Brazilian scientists in showing they had outside support.

We may even have helped secure the release of the son of Dr. José Goldemberg, the president of the Brazilian Physics Society. His courageous stand against the Brazilian-German nuclear deal in the 1970s led, he believed, to the arrest and torture of his engineer son Clovis by the Air Force.⁴⁵⁹ I had, myself, been detained by police for taking pictures of a student demonstration in Brasília, been driven away, and had been demanded to relinquish my film. (I gave them a blank roll, rather than the one in the camera, and then decided to leave town promptly.)^[460]

In 1986, an attractive new president, Alan García Pérez, had been elected in Peru, and I wondered if anything could be done for that desperate country. In particular, I wondered if something could be done to reduce defense spending in the four Latin American states with highest defense spending per capita: Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador.

Based on a timely travel grant from the Ploughshares Foundation, I organized a traveling party, composed of myself and Colonel Edward L. King (U.S. Army, ret.)—at one time the Latin American expert on the Joint Chiefs of Staff—and produced an FAS report entitled “Peru at a Final Crossroads.”⁴⁶¹ But it was hard to see what could be done. My parting question, Columbo-style, to the Peruvian finance minister was, “Just one last thing: If, by some miracle, Peru’s \$14 billion debt were to be paid off tomorrow, how long would it be before Peru was hopelessly in debt again?” His candid answer: “Not long.”

In 1990 Peru turned to a successful Japanese-born businessman named Alberto Fujimori. He had a Ross Perot-type popularity as an outsider who was moving decisively against a corrupt and inefficient government. At first he looked good to the international community and to the international banking and aid institutions because he adopted a tough economic program to stop the Peruvian inflation,

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putting the economy and the poor through an economic wringer. But then he ordered a coup against the legislature and the judiciary that made him, at least temporarily, a dictator. The actions were wildly popular in Peru, but in the neighboring Latin American states, mindful of the tradition of coups in their own countries, it was a dangerous precedent; they used their influence to threaten sanctions against Peru, and Fujimori agreed to a constitutional rewrite.

I convened a lunch for about a dozen experts on Peru on April 15, 1990. My line was, "Peru has gotten the world's attention, which is, according to Madison Avenue, half the game. Now what can we do for Peru?" Peru had numerous problems: enormous poverty, high-level drug trafficking, governmental corruption, and, most of all, the *Sendero Luminoso* guerrilla movement. *Sendero* was a superleftist Marxist movement, similar to the Khmer Rouge in its dogmatism, but very patient and clever. Its leader, Abimael Guzman, was a shadowy figure, comparable to Pol Pot. The movement's strategy was to destroy the state to save it. Terrorism was its tool, and its goal was the leveling of the state of Peru.

To my astonishment, none of the experts had any ideas worth noting. Many were experts in human rights and appalled by the undemocratic autocoup. They were, of course, no less appalled by *Sendero* than I was, but there being nothing they could think of to do about it, they tended to concentrate their fire on the government authorities. Their line was, when pressed, that one could never protect Peru from *Sendero* without a lawful and proper regime. I doubted this supposition, and indeed, it turned out to be completely false. And I think I had a hand in proving it so.

The main benefit of the lunch was to deepen my acquaintance with a truly valuable expert, Michael Smith, an American sociologist and journalist who had lived in Peru for seventeen years. He had recently returned from Peru and was temporarily unemployed. I hired him to take me to Peru for a guided tour and to work for at least three months, on the grounds that while, at the moment, FAS had no money for a Peruvian project, something might turn up.⁴⁶²

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From May 15 to May 20, we traveled around Lima and its environs, and I learned a great deal.⁴⁶³ *Sendero* seemed diabolically effective, as cruel as the ancient Incas had been, and as patient as a glacier. They infiltrated villages by planting people there for three years before they would speak up. They assassinated those who opposed them. And the police and judiciary seemed intimidated by them. Our own assistant secretary of state, Bernard Aronson, had said there was a real possibility of a “third holocaust” in our time, after those of Hitler and Pol Pot. People in Peru were petrified. As usual, I rose to the bait with considerable passion. Saving Peru from *Sendero* became my consuming goal for the next six months, until the situation had been brought under control.

On our return, I proposed that Michael put out a small, specialized newsletter devoted to sounding the alarm about *Sendero*. At the end of this period, he would be better known to the interested community and would be able, at least, to find a job more readily. In July 1992 he began writing, editing, and putting out a monthly called “The Sendero File.”

On June 2 I met with Assistant Secretary of State Aronson and his director of Andean Region Affairs, Anne W. Patterson, and gave them a detailed letter with my findings. They offered me the kind of ready cooperation that had been completely absent when I was working on the Khmer Rouge. In this case, they acted as if Michael Smith and I were the only ones around that were beating the drum about *Sendero* besides themselves. Aronson needed and welcomed help. How nice it was not to have to be opposing State Department officials! I briefed and met other knowledgeable officials at State.

Without telling Michael much about it, I also began trying to rouse the interest of the intelligence community, because during the trip I had discovered two startling facts.^[464] The first thing I learned was that, incredibly, our intelligence community had been cooperating with the Peruvian government only in the “drug war” while desiring to steer clear of the conflict between the government of

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Peru and *Sendero Luminoso*. The policy, based on a presidential "finding," was "to fight drugs but to avoid another Vietnam."

In response I prepared a confidential paper of July 5, 1992, entitled "The Ostrich Strategy: Fighting Drugs While Ignoring *Sendero*," explaining how any equipment made available to Peruvian intelligence by the United States was constrained, by U.S. orders, to work only against drug-trafficking targets. The issue was so controversial that Peruvian officials were told not to provide to the United States any information on *Sendero* that they might, perhaps inadvertently, have picked up with the equipment supplied.

As a consequence of this policy, the United States was giving no advice, help, or intelligence in the search for Abimael Guzman, *Sendero's* leader. No really high-powered U.S. technology such as satellites or electronic-surveillance systems were being applied to that important task.

My paper ridiculed the notion of "another Vietnam," arguing that there was no interest in America in such direct involvement anyway. I ridiculed the notion that it was wrong to give such help because of human rights considerations; after all, we had wiretapping here in America under national-security rules.

The policy of pursuing drugs rather than *Sendero* was a "marvelous illustration of the dominance of domestic politics over rational analysis." I called for giving Peru help in listening in on radio and telephone conversations that bore on *Sendero*, in monitoring conversations in safe houses, in the use of satellites to track cars in which *Sendero* leaders were traveling, in locating clandestine radio stations, and in learning modern techniques for finding wanted criminals in cities. The paper concluded, "The Administration should convene an interagency group to consider whether and how to draft a suitable finding permitting the U.S. intelligence community to cooperate with the Peruvian intelligence community on efforts devoted to locating *Sendero's* leadership."

The second thing I picked up from the U.S. grapevine was that some people in the intelligence community were afraid to help

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because of the following scenario: They would provide information to Peru about Guzman. The Peruvian police would use the information to find Guzman, but on finding him, they would kill him. And then, the U.S. operatives feared, they would be charged with having violated the U.S. law about assassination.

During a meeting in Washington, I found myself speaking to a person who had been a key legal consultant to the CIA. I seized the opportunity to ask about this scenario. The opinion provided was that such information would not be complicity in assassination (but some years later the same person provided a different opinion—that it turned on how the information was going to be used).

On June 9, 1992, the Center for National Policy was holding a lunch at which the CIA director, Robert Gates, was speaking. During the reception I introduced myself again—we had not spoken since the AAAS meeting at which I called him a “virgin” expert on Russia—and asked if I could quickly brief him on my trip. Right then and there, in a corner of the cocktail party, I told him that Guzman could not leave Lima for the mountains because of a blood disease. Accordingly, he was traveling around from one safe house to another in Lima and had been for *fourteen years*. Indeed, it was thought that he was traveling in a green Mercedes with frosted windows! If this were New York, I said, the CIA would be helping, and we would have caught him long ago. Why were they not helping?

One reason, I surmised—in addition to those of my memo—was that after the Fujimori autocoup, the U.S. intelligence community had broken off relations with the Peruvian intelligence community *in general*. Gates’s body language seemed sympathetic, and he seemed to confirm what I had learned about the general cutoff of relations of the intelligence communities.

In conversations in Washington with an informed insider, I was given to understand that the intelligence community would be emboldened if a “liberal” group like our own would urge this kind of intelligence-community collaboration with Peru, and, certainly, it would distinguish it from an issue of assassination.

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In fact, twenty years before, my December 1972 FAS newsletter—entitled “The Intelligence Community: Time for Review”—had urged a firm rule against government-sponsored murder or torture and had complained about the Phoenix program in Vietnam, said to involve widespread assassination. We learned only later that CIA director Helms had already issued a directive in March 1972 banning foreign assassinations and that the ban had been expanded under CIA director William Colby in August 1973, to say: “CIA will not engage in assassination nor induce, assist or suggest to others that assassination be employed.”⁴⁶⁵

Happy to show by example that this was different, I wrote two letters. One, dated June 19, 1992, was addressed to Assistant Secretary of State Bernard Aronson and began, “Ought not the United States, as a matter of the highest priority, be helping the Government of Peru to locate Abimael Guzman, who is living in Lima in safe houses and in universities?” A copy was sent to Gates, to remind him of our conversation.

On June 30, at 4:00 P.M., I met with Robert Morley, an assistant director of Latin American Affairs at the National Security Council, to express my fears. And at that time I gave him a personal one-page “Dear Brent” letter urging the national security adviser (Brent Scowcroft) to instruct the intelligence community to help the Peruvian government.⁴⁶⁶

On July 6 I met with the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, James Lilly, whom I had met when he was the ambassador to South Korea, and sought his help.⁴⁶⁷ And on July 9 I was back at the Pentagon raising my concerns with the head of Latin American Affairs for the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Dr. William A. Naughton. I was also in regular touch with State.

I urged *The Washington Post* to have its correspondents spend more time in Lima, and on June 19 the paper sent Don Podesta to talk to me before his departure to Latin America as their new correspondent. On July 13, in his first dispatch from Lima, he referred to our effort: “Jeremy Stone of the Federation of American Scien-

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tists, who this month launched a newsletter and lobbying effort in Washington to focus attention on Peru's war, compares Shining Path to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge and says the guerillas are in it for the long haul."⁴⁶⁸

On July 28 *The Washington Post* finally printed my op-ed piece entitled "Save Peru from *Sendero*," and it was run in the August 1-2 issue of *The International Herald Tribune*. The article claimed that the *Sendero* strategy of destroying Peru so that it could rebuild it might work and, indeed, might spread to other revolutionary movements. It concluded that "Peru has become an international problem requiring some kind of collective international help from the community of states—much as the permanent five members of the United Nations undertook to save Cambodia."^[469]

By coincidence, the *Post* article appeared on the Peruvian independence day. At their embassy at lunch, amidst the throngs of Peruvian well-wishers, I was greeted as a kind of savior. People were convinced that the *Post* had deliberately printed my op-ed piece on their national day, and they considered it the first thing about Peru printed in a long time that was not hostile to their government.

Indeed, I was promptly taken to task by Americas Watch for not having emphasized sufficiently the human rights deprivations of the Fujimori government: "Stone's oblique reference to the 'human rights outrages of Peruvian society'—which he deems petty compared with the threat from *Sendero*—suggests that no one, or everyone, is responsible."⁴⁷⁰

On July 31, thinking that *Sendero* might in fact succeed in destroying Peru, I began pondering ways in which Peru and other similarly threatened countries might be helped. The idea was a kind of trusteeship for countries that were reverting to the kind of instability and incompetence that motivated the creation of the Trusteeship Council for states emerging from colonialism. The UN Secretariat had explained to me that the entire UN Trusteeship Council was now supervising only one state (Palau); I wondered whether it, or something like it, could be used for states in Peru's

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predicament that would temporarily cede their sovereignty to a trustee in order to get help and stabilization. The analogy in real estate was a “sale and leaseback,” an agreement by which an owner of a failing rental property would sell it to a reputable personage while continuing to administer it and with the right to buy it back after ten years. Sovereignty would be the item “sold and leased back”; the UN trusteeship would persuade the international community that the state was workable, and Peru would recover its sovereignty when its emergency was over.

I went to New York and discussed this, on September 10, with a very relevant Peruvian, the former secretary-general of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuellar—and also with a high-ranking Peruvian in the UN Secretariat, Alvaro DeSoto.

Guzman Captured

Two days later Guzman was captured. He was not killed when arrested, and much information was captured with him. It was an enormous success. *The New York Times* quoted Enrique Obando, director of research at the Peruvian Center for International Studies, as saying, “We now finally realize that Peru is not about to fall to Shining Path. And we can say there is reason to believe that the group can be totally destroyed over time.” Observers had never seen Peruvians “so ecstatic and optimistic” and said, “People had forgotten they could feel this way.”⁴⁷¹

Guzman’s one occasion to express himself publicly occurred when he was given a press conference; he shouted over the heads of the journalists that the movement should “keep to the strategy.” Since three-quarters of the *Sendero* Central Committee was in prison or dead by June 1993, the remainder could do little else than follow these instructions from their great leader. (The Central Committee had been reorganized by December of 1992 and had reaffirmed its loyalty to Guzman.) But the old strategy into which

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they were now locked was not working. Even the activists at the universities wanted a moratorium on bombings, which were, they felt, fostering more resentment than fear. They wanted to work up a new strategy. But this was impossible in the wake of Guzman's injunction. *Sendero* strikes failed when emboldened peasants organized against the guerrillas in the highlands and the movement began losing people faster than it could replace them. (*Sendero* began attacking prisons to liberate old cadres and kidnapping people to force them into the movement.) At the same time, the government offensives were becoming more effective.

So the human rights movement had been proved wrong in their contention that nothing important could be done about *Sendero* without addressing the human rights shortcomings of the Fujimori government. On the contrary, nothing much could be done to improve the human rights behavior of a government under siege by the *Sendero*.

Our effort to hasten the capture of Guzman was thoroughly vindicated. By August 1996 his arrest had, indeed, made it possible to improve civil liberties substantially. *The Washington Post* reported, "Despite some recent bomb attacks, Shining Path and Tupac Amaru [another revolutionary group] are now greatly weakened, and many here argue that it is time to revamp the anti-terrorism statutes."⁴⁷²

But did the United States help in his capture and, if so, how did the policy change? I heard that inside the government, the State Department was taking credit for having mobilized the U.S. intelligence community to take action—exactly what I had worked to do and, indeed, had prodded State to do (and, at one stage, vice versa). Later I wrote a White House official a polite, short note thanking him and the government for anything the United States might have done to help to capture Guzman. I received his reply in the mail. It read, "We did a lot." So evidently, the United States did help.

And what of the rule precluding U.S. government employees—or persons working on their behalf—from engaging in, or conspir-

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ing to engage in, assassination?⁴⁷³ How were fears about this finessed? While writing this book, I learned that under the rule, as interpreted by the Department of Defense, those providing the information have an obligation to ensure that the information will not be used wrongly. In a case like this, the policy would probably require assurances that the arresting officers would not kill Guzman—as, indeed, they did not. The CIA may not have had equally developed “regulations” interpreting the rule but probably felt the same way. Furthermore, I have been advised that this entire episode was written up, inside the government, as a “classic case in which things were done correctly.”

It could be termed a success only if American intelligence helped to secure the capture of Guzman. But it could be termed a classic case in which things were done correctly, I believe, only if the United States had asked for assurances against the assassination of Guzman, received them, then helped the Peruvians and then found Guzman safely captured. Whether this is true or not, the press will undoubtedly determine in the aftermath of the publication of this book. (In the meantime, as this book goes to press, I believe I have learned the [low-tech] method which the CIA funded and by which Guzman was captured but I have not been able to confirm it.)