

Peru (1982 - 1997)

Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (SL), or Shining Path, guerrilla movement sought to destabilize government structures and establish an autarchic communist state. The armed conflict began in the early 1980s, and the movement had been largely defeated by the late 1990s. Most sources estimate that roughly 30,000 people were killed during the conflict, although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established after the war put the toll at more than twice that number. Most of those killed were poor peasants and rural politicians. The majority of the killings are generally attributed to SL, but the Peruvian army's response to the insurgency contributed substantially to the death toll. During the conflict, human rights organizations accused the army of systematic abuses, including massacres, disappearances, torture and rape.

Abimael Guzmán, a philosophy professor at the provincial university in Ayacucho, in the Peruvian highlands, founded *Sendero Luminoso* in 1970. Guzman envisioned a gradual revolution based on Maoist principles, and he spent a decade recruiting faculty, students and local peasants before SL initiated its first armed actions. During the 1970s, Peru was governed by a reformist military regime. After decades of elite rule, the military had seized power in 1968, introducing land reforms and ousting foreign companies who controlled many mining, banking and manufacturing enterprises. The reforms brought little change to rural areas like Ayacucho, however.

Sendero Luminoso's first attacks coincided with Peru's return to civilian rule in 1980. SL espoused a vision of pre-industrial peasant society, and guerrillas destroyed mechanized farm equipment and killed villagers who did not abide by their edicts. SL supported itself in part by protecting coca growers. The organization recruited peasants, including young teens and women. In the late 1980s, SL began recruiting in urban areas, particularly the capital, Lima, where it targeted foreign companies and government offices with bombings and assassinations.

In 1990, Alberto Fujimori was elected president of Peru on a platform that called for eradicating SL, as well as ending inflation and increasing foreign investment. In 1992, Fujimori suspended the Constitution, retaining power with military support. Throughout his rule, thousands of suspected SL guerrillas were arrested and tried before military tribunals. In 1992, Guzmán was captured and sentenced to life in prison. SL was decimated during the 1990s. Fujimori was forced to resign in 2000, and was driven into exile by accusations of corruption.

In 2002, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission began hearings on human rights abuses committed during the war. In a report issued in 2003, the Commission estimated that 69,280 people died in the civil war. In 2005, the government earmarked \$800 million for compensation payments to victims of the conflict. Hundreds of prisoners have been freed, but Guzman's life sentence was reconfirmed in 2006.

In addition to SL, a smaller guerrilla organization called the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement has also been active in Peru. Tupac Amaru was responsible for seizing the Japanese embassy in 1996.

Print Resources

Palmer, David Scott (1992) *The Shining Path of Peru*. New York: St. Martin's Press.



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Stern, Steve J. (1998) *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980 - 1995*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gorriti, Gustavo (1999) *The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Online Resources

Human Rights Watch. *Peru*.

BBC News. *Analysis: Peru's Shining Path*.

BBC News. *Country Profile: Peru*.

United States Library of Congress. *Peru: A Country Study*.

Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2003).

Timeline

1970 - Guzmán founds *Sendero Luminoso*, begins recruiting

1980 - Peru returns to civilian rule; *SL* begins armed struggle

1982 - assassinations and disappearances escalate as army and *SL* clash

1984 - Tupac Amaru begins Cuban-inspired, anti-imperialist revolution

1988 - *SL* begins recruiting in Lima and other urban areas, targets foreign companies

1990 - Fujimori elected president

1992 - Fujimori suspends Constitution; Guzmán captured and sentenced to life imprisonment

1994 - 6,000 *SL* guerrillas surrender under general amnesty

1996 - Tupac Amaru seizes Japanese embassy

1997 - many Tupac Amaru leaders die in storming of embassy, hostages released

2000 - Fujimori flees to Japan amid corruption allegations

2002 - Truth and Reconciliation Commission opens hearings