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Peru: Sendero Luminoso and Foreign Targeting **SL**

Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path or SL), known for its Maoist fanaticism and discipline, primarily focusses its operations against members of the Peruvian government and security forces. However, the group has gradually increased attacks against a variety of foreign interests over the past several years--capitalist and communist alike. In 1985, for example, Sendero conducted only 4 terrorists acts against foreign interests; the number increased to nearly 20 in 1986. In 1987 we witnessed the first selective assassination attempt of a foreigner living in Peru.

A Reputation for Ruthlessness and Discipline

More than 8,000 people have died since Sendero launched its armed struggle against the Peruvian government in 1980. Although it is rural-based, SL conducts many assassinations in urban areas, primarily Lima, by employing small death squads that research in great detail their intended victims. SL frequently terrorizes rural villages by executing suspected government informants and does not hesitate to kill innocent women and children.

SL cadre are highly dedicated and are kept in compartmentalized cells, making police infiltration extremely difficult. Whenever Senderistas are captured (which is rare in itself), they usually do not divulge any useful information; and if they do, they frequently do not know many Senderistas outside their small cell or details about other SL operations.

SL's Targeting of Western Interests

The group's anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist line has made Western interests in general, and the US in particular, a predictable choice when the group has decided to strike non-Peruvian targets. Attacks on Western interests have tended to comprise a wide range of countries.

In 1987 SL attacks on Westerners included:

- branches of Japanese, US, and British banks; a Coca Cola distributor; a Canadian shoe firm warehouse; and an assassination attempt against the Bank of Tokyo general manager.

Last year's targeting was even wider:

- During Spanish Prime Minister Gonzalez's visit to Peru in November, SL left explosives near his Lima hotel.

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-- SL attacked the Italian Embassy and a Mercedes-Benz dealership in I-4

-- The Machu Picchu tourist train bombing in June 1986 (one week after the Lima prison riots), remains the most lethal attack against foreigners to date. The primary purpose of hitting this target was almost certainly to injure tourists, presumably most of whom would have been Westerners. Two American citizens died as well as seven other persons from West Germany (3), Finland, Spain, and Brazil.

-- In March the Argentine consulate was machinegunned and two bombs thrown (which did not detonate) one day after President Garcia's trip to Argentina.

-- In February, on the eve of the birthday of the deceased APRA party founder, SL conducted bombing attacks against the embassies of Spain, West Germany, Argentina, India, and the United States.

-- SL bombed other US interests in 1986: Sears, Sheraton Hotel, and Eastern Airlines.

In 1985 three out of the four SL attacks on foreign interests were against the United States. They included bombing attacks of the US ambassador's residence, a US-Peruvian binational center and probably the throwing of dynamite at a Coca Cola-owned warehouse.

Communist States Hit Too

SL views itself as guided by the orthodox writings of Marx, Lenin, and Mao and does not hesitate to attack the interests of the Soviet Union, China, or any other communist state which the group labels "revisionist" or otherwise doctrinally deviant.

In 1987 there have been two SL attacks against communist states:

-- North Korea's commercial mission was bombed in Lima in April.

-- SL briefly seized in January a Cuban media agency--Prensa Latina--in its first attack against Cuban interests.

In 1986 we witnessed the largest number of assaults on the communist bloc:

-- Sendero entered the Soviet Embassy compound in July and detonated an explosive before being repelled by security forces.

- SL bombed a store frequented by Soviet sailors that caused several injuries and one death in August.
- A bomb placed outside the Soviet Consulate offices was defused, but a bomb exploded outside the Soviet Cultural center in July.
- SL attacked the PRC Embassy in February and July.

SL's Strategy of Foreign Targeting

SL operations against foreign interests often appear aimed at embarrassing the Garcia government. Selected foreign embassies in Lima have been attacked while President Garcia has been abroad visiting a particular country or during significant SL anniversaries or commemorations. Usually the attacks occur at night and do not cause fatalities; the attacks thus far against foreign interests appear to have been more for international consumption, but the group's penchant for violence and its unpredictability make it an ominous threat for foreign interests in Peru.

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