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Toward Successful COIN: Shining Path's Decline

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ABSTRACT: The rapid decline of the Peruvian left-wing insurgent organization Sendero Luminoso was not only the result of the arrest of its leader. An analysis of the precipitous weakening of the organization using two social movement theories finds other factors were involved in the demise of the organization as well. These factors—participatory politics, support for the military among the rural population, and alienation of the population by Sendero Luminoso—provide insights to effective counterinsurgency tactics.

Leading scholarship on the decline of the Peruvian left-wing insurgent movement Sendero Luminoso (SL) attributes the group's eventual weakening to the loss of its charismatic leader.[1] While the arrest of the group's leader may be one reason for its dramatic virtual defeat, this article engages two social movement theories—state-centric and framing—to argue decapitation alone cannot account for SL's decline. Three factors in particular account for the weakening of Sendero Luminoso: 1) the participatory nature of Peruvian politics provided citizens with left-wing ideologies the ability to exercise political power without resorting to violence; 2) the military was moderately successful at building credibility with and separating peasants from SL; and 3) SL alienated potential supporters. These circumstances combined to ensure the group's effectiveness and influence would rapidly wane with the arrest of its charismatic leader. Throughout this article, SL will be conceptualized as a social movement—a group engaged in collective action to achieve a particular goal. Sendero Luminoso, however, will also alternately be referred to as an insurgency—a particular type of social movement engaged in "subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region," and a terrorist group—an organization that "instill[s] fear and coerce[s] individuals, governments or societies" to achieve its goals.[2]

1. Robert B. Kent, "Geographical Dimensions of the Shining Path Insurgency in Peru," *Geographical Review* 83, no. 4 (Oct. 1993): 441–54; Sandra Woy-Hazleton and William A. Hazleton, "Sendero Luminoso and the Future of Peruvian Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (April 1990): 21–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599008420232; and Michael L. Burgoyne, "The Allure of Quick Victory: Lessons from Peru's Fight against Sendero Luminoso," *Military Review* XC, no. 5 (September–October 2010): 68–73.

2. Department of Defense (DoD), DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, s.v. "insurgency," (Washington, DC: DoD, January 2021), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf; and DOD Dictionary, s.v. "terrorism."

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Background

In 1970, a charismatic philosophy professor named Abimael Guzmán founded SL at San Cristóbal of Huamanga National University in the city of Ayacucho. The name Sendero Luminoso, which translates to shining path, is a reference to the writings of José Carlos Mariátegui. Mariátegui proposed replacing Peru's feudal land ownership system with a socialist agrarian system that would not subordinate indigenous sharecroppers to a minority of mestizo landowners.[3] Mariátegui referred to the path from sharecropping to socialism as the Shining Path, which Guzmán used as the name for his insurgency. The group referred to its philosophy as "Gonzalo Thought" in honor of Guzmán's nom de guerre, Comrade Gonzalo, and in addition to Mariátegui, it drew inspiration from the writings of Karl Marx and Mao Zedong. Gonzalo Thought advocated for imposing a communist dictatorship in a Maoist-style campaign originating in Peru's countryside.

On May 17, 1980, residents of Chuschi, Peru, went to vote after the transition from a military to a civilian regime and found SL had burned ballot boxes.[4] Following this initial act of rebellion and while President Fernando Belaúnde Terry's administration still underestimated its strength, SL quickly gained territory, employed indiscriminate violence, and assassinated public officials and members of moderate left-wing political parties. In 1982, Belaúnde deployed the army and marines to set up emergency zones. Under his and the subsequent administrations of Alan García and Alberto Fujimori, the military and police acted with little restraint. Most violence occurred before Guzmán's arrest and SL's rapid atrophy in 1992 and resulted in over 69,000 deaths caused by both sides.[5]

Leadership Decapitation

Some scholars contend the decline of SL came about because the group could not function without its charismatic leader, finding positive links between leadership decapitation and the mortality of terrorist organizations including Sendero Luminoso.[6] Other scholars argue the unpredictability of leadership succession in war makes it difficult to identify leadership decapitation as the reason for a group's weakening, or they propose the removal of a group's leadership is outright ineffective

3. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, rev. ed., trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 22–61.

4. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth Commission: Peru 01*, July 13, 2001 to August 28, 2003, https://www.usip.org/publications/2001/07/truth-commission-peru-01.

5. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Peru 01*.

6. Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 14–34; Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (Spring 2012): 9–46; and Patrick B. Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (Spring 2012): 47–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00076.

against terrorist organizations with bureaucratic structures and high levels of popular support.[7]

An important limitation to the statistical analysis that is implied but never mentioned in the literature is that any causal link between leader decapitation and the survival of terrorist organizations only applies to the aggregate level. Given the possible range of ideologies, organizational structures, and resources available to terrorist organizations across geographies and time, it is impossible to say if a single case of leadership decapitation, such as the arrest of Guzmán, fits the aggregate-level findings. Moreover, while leadership decapitation may increase the likelihood terrorist groups will cease to exist, such an increase is no guarantee this will happen.

Even in studies that found leadership decapitation increased the likelihood a terrorist organization would be eliminated, other factors almost certainly influenced the amount by which the likelihood of such an outcome increased. Some scholarship determined leadership decapitation was effective against SL, but these studies also suggest if terrorist organizations can weather the period of turmoil immediately following the loss of key leaders, they can regroup and continue to be viable. "Sendero has failed to revive itself as an ideological organization, although a blossoming connection to cocaine trafficking has some Peruvian officials worried the group could become a resurgent threat."[8] Similarly, a survival analysis model shows the mortality of terrorist organizations that suffer leadership decapitation decreases over time as the organization continues to exist.[9]

At the time of Guzmán's capture, SL had been in existence 22 years and had been fighting for 12 of those years, making it more likely to survive than a younger insurgency. Since at least 2002, SL has been increasing its cocaine trafficking and attacks on the military, which suggests SL survived Guzmán's capture and successfully reorganized.[10] Although there is an undeniable link between the survival of terrorist groups and leadership decapitation, this link alone is insufficient to account for SL's decline. Among others, the example of the Taliban in Afghanistan and its continued survival after significant leadership losses calls into question the notion leadership decapitation alone guarantees a terrorist organization's downfall, including that of Sendero Luminoso.

Social Movement Theories

While political scientists have examined variations in the types and causes of insurgent violence, this article examines SL as a social

7. Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 55–87; and Jenna Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark: Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2014): 7–38, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00157.

8. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 20.

9. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 43.

10. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Peru: Shining Path–Slowly Regrouping* (Washington, DC: National Intelligence Council, August 3, 2003).

movement—a group of people engaged in collective action through formal organization to achieve a goal.[11] Although the Shining Path is often referred to as a terrorist or insurgent group, terrorism and insurgency, as defined above, align with the definition of a social movement. Two theories of social movement explain revolutions—social movements that replace existing power structures as SL tried to do—in terms of the political participation of opposition groups and the ability of movements to craft narratives that resonate with potential recruits.

The state-centric view posits revolutions should fail in systems that allow citizen participation in politics and succeed in personalistic regimes that do not afford citizens political power.[12] But these polities do not have to be democracies: some scholars find revolution to be unlikely in semi-authoritarian regimes that maintain some ability for opposition groups to participate and address grievances within the political system.[13] Whereas the only option to exercise political power in a personalistic regime is through violence, an open political system enables potential guerrillas to exercise political power within the existing system.[14] Moreover, the behavior of such regimes can enable revolutions: the regime in question can marginalize the very elites whose support it needs to remain in power, or by intentionally weakening the military to avoid a coup, the regime can diminish military capabilities to the point its armed forces are unable to quell a rebellion.[15]

A weakness of the state-centric view is that it does not afford agency to individuals. In contrast, framing theorists emphasize the importance of how leaders of social movements can deliver their messages, through words and actions, to garner support.[16] They argue revolutionary movements cannot gain materiel support or sow discontent without using effective messaging to attract this support or change opinions.[17] Framing theory holds individuals have an attitude toward an object—a policy or action—that constitutes the sum of their beliefs about that object. Different individuals may have different criteria that shape their beliefs, and those criteria constitute a frame. If a social movement can craft its message in a way that changes peoples' frames, it can change

11. Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks?: Evidence from Chechnya," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (June 2009): 331–62, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708330881; Laia Balcells, "Rivalry and Revenge: Violence against Civilians in Conventional Civil Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (June 2010): 291–313, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00588.x; Reed M Wood, "Rebel Capability and Strategic Violence against Civilians," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (September 2010): 601–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310376473; and Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy," (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), 26.

12. Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945–1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.

13. Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol, "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World," *Politics & Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1989): 495.

14. Goodwin and Skocpol, "Explaining Revolutions," 493.

15. Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011): 10.

16. David A. Snow, "Framing and Social Movements," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 2.

17. Snow, "Framing and Social Movements," 3.

their attitudes and, in turn, their willingness to support or join the movement. According to this perspective, in order to be successful, a movement must craft a message that inspires people to view that movement positively.[18]

In addition to theoretical arguments, more recent work on the role of messaging in social movements has taken advantage of the availability of quantitative data to provide more concrete evidence of the link between framing and the success or failure of social movements. In a study of insurgent group networks and their attitudes toward their targets, researchers, using a news database, found evidence that rhetoric emanating from leaders of insurgent groups was associated with the political entities these groups were fighting against.[19] Using data from Twitter, another study showed how misinformation from right-wing news sites changed peoples' opinions ahead of the 2016 presidential election.[20] A third, survey-based study found some rebel movements positively influenced observers' attitudes about them by using a gendered frame to highlight females' contributions to the movement's goals.[21]

Sendero Luminoso as a Social Movement

Both social movement theories—state-centric and framing—help explain the decline of SL. The state-centric perspective explains how systemic factors—democratization and the availability of peaceful alternatives within the political system and improving civil-military relations—pulled people away from Sendero Luminoso. The framing model shows how an individual-level factor—lack of popular support—pushed potential guerrillas away from SL. These circumstances combined to ensure Sendero Luminoso's organization would be a glasshouse easily broken and requiring years to reassemble.

Democratization and Peaceful Alternatives

From 1968 to 1980, Peruvians who embraced left-wing ideologies had options to exercise political power within an increasingly democratic system instead of joining SL. During this period, Peru was ruled by a military junta that gradually built open political institutions, "peasant federations, and rural cooperatives."[22] These initiatives cultivated a well-organized polity committed to social reform, incorporating

18. Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, no. 1 (June 2007): 104, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054.

19. Michael Gabbay and Ashley Thirkill-Mackelprang, "A Quantitative Analysis of Insurgent Frames, Claims, and Networks in Iraq," (American Political Science Association (APSA) 2011 Annual Meeting Paper, APSA, 2011): 37, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1900770.

20. Yochai Benkler et al., "Study: Breitbart-Led Right-Wing Media Ecosystem Altered Broader Media Agenda," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2017, 14.

21. Devorah Manekin and Reed M. Wood, "Framing the Narrative: Female Fighters, External Audience Attitudes, and Transnational Support for Armed Rebellions," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 9 (2020): 1638–65.

22. Susan C. Bourque and Kay B. Warren, "Democracy without Peace: The Cultural Politics of Terror in Peru," *Latin American Research Review* 24, no. 1 (1989): 7–34; and James Ron, "Ideology in Context: Explaining Sendero Luminoso's Tactical Escalation," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 5 (September 2001): 579.

left-wing groups into the political system, most of which merged into the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) and United Left (IU).[23] Democratic reform reached a crescendo with the transition to civilian rule in 1980.

After the transition to democracy, Peruvian politics became increasingly open to Marxist-leaning opposition groups, and the success of the APRA and IU illuminated a less violent and more desirable alternative to Sendero Luminoso. During Belaúnde's administration, parties of all stripes mobilized and ran for public office. Congress was comprised primarily of IU and APRA politicians, who won a combined 67 percent of the popular vote in national parliamentary elections in 1985 and had similar outcomes at the municipal level.[24] "Unlike the Sandinistas or the FMLN, a Sendero victory was rarely viewed by commentators on the left or the right as an improvement over the existing Peruvian regime, deeply flawed as it was."[25]

While this history paints an optimistic picture of Peruvian politics, skeptics may point to unpopular structural readjustments to the economy, human rights violations caused by the military, and low public approval ratings.[26] It is also true that after taking office in 1990, Fujimori censored the press, allowed the military to detain citizens arbitrarily, and created secret courts to try insurgents. In 1992, he sent the military into the streets of Lima, dissolved congressional and judicial powers, and ruled by presidential decree. While these actions dealt a severe blow to democratization, they received considerable public approval and did not force citizens to resort to insurgency to exercise political power. For example, one 1992 poll showed 73 percent of respondents supported Fujimori's actions, and two months later, that approval rating had increased to 83 percent.[27] Less than a year after the coup, Fujimori called a constitutional referendum and restored legislative and judicial powers.

Improving Civil-Military Relations

Improving civil-military relations also helped pull would-be guerrillas into peaceful political organizations. At the end of the 1980s, the Belaúnde and Fujimori administrations pursued a more population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, codified in the Peruvian army manual *Unconventional Countersubversion Warfare*, ME 14-7. The manual directed the military to organize civilians into *rondas* (patrols) to fight the insurgents and to refrain from using indiscriminate violence. The

23. Bourque and Warren, "Democracy without Peace," 16.

24. Ron, "Ideology in Context," 584.

25. Ron, "Ideology in Context," 571.

26. Gordon H. McCormick, *The Shining Path and the Future of Peru* (Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, 1990).

27. María Teresa Quiroz, "Medios de comunicación y opinión política de los jóvenes en la ciudad de Lima, (coyuntura del 5 de abril de 1992)," *Contratexto*, no. 7 (January 2, 1994): 133, https://revistas.ulima.edu.pe/index.php/contratexto/article/view/1943/1945.

manual also required the military to pay fair prices for items it acquired from civilians and respect their "fundamental rights."[28]

Some high-level commanders implemented the population-centric approach and saw considerable success. After assuming command of the Upper Huallaga Valley, Brigadier General Alberto Arciniega Huby quickly realized indiscriminate violence "did not lead to favorable results" and ordered antidrug police not to "engage in repressive operations against coca growers."[29] Huby gained support with coca growers by telling them he realized selling coca was their only way to eke out a living and "they were not considered delinquents but participants in the informal sector."[30] Though likely exaggerated, Huby recounts after that meeting, the coca growers fought alongside the army in 60 battles and killed 1,000 SL members.[31]

The city of Ayacucho also experienced some success in improving civil-military relations. In 1990, US officials visited Ayacucho and concluded the number of deaths and disappearances by the military and police had decreased.[32] Ayacucho's district attorney and the special prosecutor for human rights spoke of increased cooperation from the army in prosecuting human rights violations, and others, including the local Catholic bishop, spoke of General Petronio Fernandez-Davila Carnero's efforts to improve civil-military relations.[33] Similarly, during a SL strike in Ayacucho City, the police abstained from repression because they believed such behavior would elicit SL retaliation against civilians.[34]

Aside from reducing indiscriminate violence, the military began to work closely with the communities it protected. The military established, trained, and equipped *rondas* in indigenous communities and began distributing shotguns to them in 1991. The following year, Fujimori codified the rights of these citizens to bear arms into the constitution. This action had a symbolic effect because Peruvian law had prohibited indigenous people from owning firearms since the colonial period.[35]

Lack of Popular Support

Sendero Luminoso alienated potential supporters in words and actions. It used slogans such as, "if we do not understand Maoism as the

28. Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, "Tomo II," 287–89, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/commissions/Peru01-Report/Peru01-Report_Vol2.pdf.

29. Alberto Arciniega Huby, "Civil-Military Relations and a Democratic Peru," trans. Patricia Radu and Michael Radu, *Orbis* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 115.

30. Huby, "Civil-Military Relations," 116.

31. Huby, "Civil-Military Relations," 116.

32. US Embassy Lima, *In the Eye of the Storm: An Ayacucho Trip Report, Part I* (Lima, Peru: US Embassy Lima, December 20, 1990), 4, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB64/peru25.pdf.

33. US Embassy Lima, *Ambassador's Human Rights Calls in Ayacucho* (Lima, Peru: US Embassy Lima, December 11, 1990), 8–9, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB64/peru23.pdf.

34. US Embassy Lima, *In the Eye*, 5.

35. Orin Starn, "Villagers at Arms: War and Counterrevolution in the Central-South Andes." in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru 1980–1995*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 224–258, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822398059-010.

new, third and higher stage of Marxism, it is impossible to understand anything." Instead of linking its cause with the marginalization of indigenous people by the state or highlighting the rural-urban divide, Gonzalo Thought reduced the plight of rural indigenous communities to class warfare.[36] Initially, SL received reluctant support from indigenous peasants marginalized by exploitative sharecropping arrangements and racism because the organization provided education and redistributed land from wealthy plantation owners.[37]

But the movement lost the allegiance of the indigenous population by forcibly replacing indigenous leaders with its own leaders, forcing farmers not to grow crops, banning indigenous social and religious practices, and enslaving some indigenous people.[38] In areas controlled by Sendero Luminoso, residents faced brutal punishments for infractions such as adultery, drunkenness, and complaining about the movement.[39] Some communities formed *rondas*, but SL violently retaliated. In the village of Lucanamarca, SL insurgents hacked up approximately 70 peasants with machetes and hatchets and attacked other left-wing groups.[40]

Though indigenous communities bore the brunt of SL violence, the group did not attack these communities out of racial or ethnic hatred but instead attacked them to achieve the goal of installing a communist dictatorship. A key pillar in Gonzalo Thought was the notion that "human rights are contradictory to the rights of the people." Using brutal tactics against innocent civilians was therefore necessary and justified.[41] Accordingly, SL assassinated an official from the US embassy, stoned a *ronda* commander to death in Lucanamarca, and killed dogs and hung them from telephone poles in Lima.[42]

Moreover, Guzmán denounced President García, the IU mayor of Lima, and the Soviet Union, and SL assassinated leaders in other left-wing organizations.[43] Between 1983 and 1992, the group assassinated 268 union leaders, politicians, and community organizers that could

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36. James F. Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2020) 31–36.

37. Lewis Taylor, *Shining Path: Guerrilla War in Peru's Northern Highlands, 1980–1997* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

38. Lewis Taylor, "Counter-Insurgency Strategy, the PCP-Sendero Luminoso and the Civil War in Peru, 1980–1996," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17, no. 1 (January 1998): 35–58; and "Peru Rescues 39 'Slave Workers' from Shining Path Farm," BBC News, July 28, 2015.

39. Carlos Ivan Degregori, "A Dwarf Star," *North American Conference on Latin America Report on the Americas* 24, no. 4 (December 1990): 14–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.1990.11723187.

40. Edward Schumacher, "Insurgency in Peru: The Unarmed Are Dying," *New York Times*, June 8, 1983, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/06/08/world/insurgency-in-peru-the-unarmed-are-dying.html.

41. Author translation; original: Partida Comunista de Perú, "Sobre Las Dos Colinas: Documento de Estudio Para El Balance de La III Campaña," 1991, http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=699.

42. Degregori, "A Dwarf Star," 11.

43. Author translation; original: Partido Comunista de Peru—Sendero Luminoso, "Línea de Construcción de los Tres Instrumentos de la Revolución," 1988, http://www.solrojo.org/pcp_doc/pcp_lpg.ci.htm; and José Luis Rénique, "Apogee and Crisis of a 'Third Path': *Mariateguismo*, 'People's War,' and Counterinsurgency in Puno, 1987–1994," in *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980–1995*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 318, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822398059-010.

have been supporters.[44] Members also assassinated journalists from Lima that could have helped SL gain support.[45] Ultimately, without a political system to repress people to the point they would support Sendero Luminoso and without an effective strategy to gain new supporters, the capture of Guzmán dealt a serious, though not deadly, blow to the movement.

Recommendations

Drawing on the analysis above, this section proposes three recommendations essential to successful counterinsurgency: building and strengthening civil society organizations, improving civil-military relations, and driving a wedge between insurgents and potential recruits. These recommendations are intended to deprive insurgents of their ability to generate popular support and thus differ from traditional counterterrorist operations undertaken to prevent the successful employment of terrorist tactics.

Civil Society Organizations

The participatory nature of the political system and the presence of civil society organizations gives citizens the ability to exercise political power without resorting to violence. In situations where a robust civil society exists during an insurgency, counterinsurgents should work with civil society leaders to strengthen these organization and their appeal to potential guerrillas and to moderates within the rebel movement itself. If a functional civil society is nonexistent during an insurgency, counterinsurgents must identify influential people to build civil society organizations that can function as alternatives to taking up arms against the state.

Although counterinsurgents are generally military or police forces, diplomatic and development organizations such as the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the National Endowment for Democracy, or their international equivalents, are better suited to execute and coordinate counterinsurgent efforts working in concert with military and police operations.[46] Indeed, building and strengthening civil society organizations without military operations will not resolve an insurgency and may facilitate insurgent assassinations by making more identifiable targets. (Just such a scenario resulted in the SL killings of APRA and IU leaders.) But as was the case in the ethnic conflict in Serbia (1991–99), separatists clashes in Northern Ireland (1968–98), the anticommunist struggle in Nicaragua (1981–90), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front insurgency in the Philippines

44. Ron, "Ideology in Context," 583.

45. Bourque and Warren, "Democracy without Peace," 21.

46. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Interorganizational Cooperation*, Joint Publication 3-08 (Washington, DC: JCS, October 16, 2017), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_08pa.pdf?ver=2018-02-08-091414-467.

(1977–2014), civil society organizations can have a pacifying effect that complements military and police operations.[47]

Civil-Military Relations

The military's shift to population-centric counterinsurgency, restraint against wanton violence, and the creation of *rondas* helped boost its credibility and legitimacy in the emergency zones it controlled. With greater credibility and legitimacy, the military was able to win over peasants and more selectively target SL insurgents. Improving civil-military relations by refraining from indiscriminate violence and building relationships with civilians isolates civilians from insurgents and makes targeting insurgents easier. For example, Dotan Haim found civilian aid in the Philippines was more effective at countering insurgent influence and reducing violence in villages where civilians perceived the army as being a more credible institution than in villages where the army had less credibility.[48]

Practically, counterinsurgents will often be a mix of local security forces and foreign military forces that provide training and logistical support to the local force, as is the case in Afghanistan and Iraq. In such cases, foreign counterinsurgents should train local forces to build positive relationships with civilians and condition support for these forces on refraining from indiscriminately targeting civilians. When only one country's security forces act as counterinsurgents, they should gain credibility by liaising with civilians, protecting the civilian population from insurgent violence, and minimizing civilian casualties.

Insurgents and Potential Recruits

Counterinsurgents should also deprive insurgents of potential support. Sendero Luminoso was unable to garner popular support because its rigid ideology and brutal tactics alienated the population from which it needed support.[49] When rebels use brutal tactics against civilians, counterinsurgents should capitalize on the opportunity to portray the rebels in a negative light.

Counterinsurgents can also exploit differences in ethnicity, religion, social strata, or economic class between insurgents and their support base. Recent research demonstrates the least inclusive armies have been the least effective because they sow distrust and infighting; there is no reason to think this would not also be the case with rebel movements.[50] To create and highlight divisions between rebels and potential supporters, public affairs, psychological operations, public diplomacy,

47. Catherine Barnes, *Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War & Building Peace,* Issue Paper 2 (European Centre for Conflict Prevention/International Secretariat of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, September 2006), https://www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/Agents%20for%20Change.pdf.

48. Dotan A. Haim, "Civilian Social Networks and Credible Counterinsurgency" (working paper, University of California San Diego, 2019).

49. Ron, "Ideology in Context," 586.

50. Jason Lyall, *Divided Armies: Inequalities & Battlefield Performance in War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

and information operations experts must work together to identify differences between insurgents and their support base and develop a coherent messaging campaign to highlight those differences.

Conclusion

One of the most popular explanations for the decline of Sendero Luminoso is that the group was ineffective without its charismatic leader. But leadership decapitation theory does not fully account for this decline because the evidence for leadership decapitation generalizes across space and time. Such broad generalization ignores the political and social contexts that lead to the decline of individual groups such as the Shining Path. Accordingly, leadership decapitation does not explain why SL could not survive without Guzmán, only that it could not survive without him. Social movement theory instead provides a more thorough explanation for the group's sudden demise.

State-centric theory maintains revolutionary movements are unlikely to prevail in political systems where citizens can exercise political power without resorting to insurgency, and framing theory emphasizes the importance of the messaging rebels use to gain support. Peru offered citizens who embraced left-wing ideologies the ability to exercise political power. The country had been democratizing since 1968, there were political parties with Marxist orientations, and starting in 1990, the military worked to improve civil-military relations. Sendero Luminoso itself failed to attract the support of citizens because of the rhetoric and brutality it employed against other leftist groups and against indigenous communities. To be successful in future conflicts, counterinsurgents must build and strengthen civil society organizations, improve civil-military relations, and drive a wedge between insurgents and their popular support.