

Latin America's Terrorist and Insurgent Groups: History and Status

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With the exception of Colombia, with its long-standing *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) guerrilla groups, and Peru since the 2002 announcement of the return of its main internal foe, *Sendero Luminoso* (SL, or *Shining Path*),¹ one might be tempted to consider that revolutionary violence in this region has been consigned to the past. But it has not. Revolutionaries have been adopting new and subtle ways, new justifications, and new timeframes for implementing their goals.

The last decade saw what seemed to be a wave of economic liberalization in most Latin American countries, Chile in particular, and also a supposed strengthening of representative democracy. Both of these processes were thought to be planting the seeds of a new way of ideological thinking in the region: pragmatic, market-oriented, and strongly anti-leftist.

Despite momentary institutional setbacks in some countries, and even economic crises like Brazil's in 1998, the region was rejecting the old Marxist and leftist thinking that in the 1960s and 1970s swept many people away, mostly among the educated elites. This thinking in the end took the form of revolutionary war in "middle-class" countries like Argentina and Uruguay, countries that in Marxist terms theoretically were not poised for this. The *Montoneros* in Argentina and *Tupamaros* in Uruguay initiated a campaign of revolutionary violence that ended in an unselective repression against not only those who spearheaded the military actions, but also against those who gave or were suspected of giving passive support to the mostly urban guerrillas.

Chile was a different and special case, with Salvador Allende's democratic election as president in September 1970, an outcome that was favored by the division of the center-right and right parties. Three years later he would die in a bloody coup that was, among other things, a consequence of the internal contradictions and radicalization of segments of the leftist *Unidad Popular* alliance. The coup brought the country to the brink of civil war.

Since the mid-1990s, the danger that Latin America would return to this ideology remained real. Economically, the macroeconomic reforms were not being matched in the microeconomic realm. Harsh sacrifices were being asked of the peoples of those countries that were trying to modernize their economic bases so as to be in a better shape to deal with the challenges of globalization, and almost no concrete benefits were being felt. Politically, governance crises in countries like Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador caused concern about the possible ending of the democratic springtime.

Moreover, with the downfall of communism in the eastern European bloc, leftist movements were thrown into a temporary identity crisis. They sought to recycle themselves, forming and strengthening human rights and ecological nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), thereby receiving considerable funding from mainly Western European leftist counterparts. In practical

¹ See Alberto Bolívar, "[The Return of Shining Path](#)," in *FPRI Notes*, April 5, 2002.

The most active representatives of the NGOs involved in these issues generally either are former militants of extinguished Marxist parties or have links to those parties, as is happening in Peru with the close links between some environmental NGOs and the Marxist-Maoist *Patria Roja*, which is trying to mobilize entire populations against private investments in the mining sector.

This movement has also brought about the rebirth of the Teología de la Liberación or Liberation Theology, which was almost extinguished some years ago, but this time with a neo-Marxist discourse masked by environmental defense. In some places in Peru and neighboring countries, TLLT members openly lead protests, always well advised by the NGOs' activists, who generally remain in the shadows. Now one may talk of Conservation Theology, which in part has replaced the Liberation Theology. However, there is growing evidence of the link between one sector of the Catholic Church and *Patria Roja* to finance and organize anti-mining corporations in Peru's northwestern departments, Piura and Cajamarca.⁴

This strategic approach is a clever one that produces certain tactical political results, but in the end it will destroy democracy and development in the region, and more importantly cut most of the region off from not only U.S. but also Western influence.

The leftist and environmentalists' reasoning, at least in Peru, is that since state resources are limited, the state cannot perform its basic social welfare duties. If the state cannot perform its basic duties, it is due to the fact that the capitalist system encourages it. Then the racial or ethnic issue is brought into the discourse. Localities of large investment projects such as Las Bambas and Huancabamba in Peru do not receive any concrete benefits from those investments, thus native people must negotiate better terms. This is where environmental NGOs come onto the scene. They convince local leaders, who in time convince the population, to resist "capitalist exploitation." Mobilization of the population is widespread, and usually involves the use of some degree of violence against officials and facilities of the corporations, and sometimes murder of the officials, who are portrayed as vassals of the capitalist owners. (When police are killed, they are portrayed as repressors; but if the protesters die, they become martyrs.)

The movement is adept at public relations, making "informational" presentations in the localities. Soon, other localities follow the example. Sometimes, corporations reach or are forced to reach agreements that will benefit the local population; but often they decide not to invest, or even to retire personnel and equipment from the locality, due to lack of security. In the latter case, the state receives neither taxes nor royalties, which further impedes its ability to implement social welfare programs. In time, the NGOs and leftist organizations will mobilize the people because the state "is forgetting them," because it is a "bad, capitalist system" that must be thrown out. Thus, the perfect self fulfilled prophecy.

Probably the most important outcome of the actions of the NGOs and their allies is the creation of a *critical mass of legitimacy* (CML), a popular constituency, something that revolutionary groups always need to create in order to achieve their goals. The new ideological platform—ethnics and environment—is recreating throughout the region CMLs that in turn are being seen by the radical and violent organizations as entities to infiltrate, to coopt, and finally to use to bring the system to its knees.

⁴ *Correo* (Peru), 13 September 2005.

This is the reason why for the moment, violent groups are acting only covertly. Gaining CML support through peaceful and political means is more profitable strategically than using terrorist and guerrilla tactics that in a post-9/11 world could create the proper counterorganizations and countermeasures to thwart their intentions.

This is not to say that classic revolutionary violence is over for most countries of the region, but only that for the moment it is not convenient. Why do it in a region beset by economic crises, so that huge segments of the populations, disenchanted with democracy and free-market policies, are exacerbating the contradictions of the system? The task of most of today's radical and violent groups is not to perform classic revolutionary war. We are now witnessing a completely different process. In the last decades, revolutionary groups worldwide tried first to begin the armed struggle; second, to create the popular support (the CML) in the form of front organizations, and third, to apply a final joint military and political blow to the system. With the exception of Nicaragua in 1979, that theoretical approach never succeeded in Latin America. There, the revolutionaries are having the CML they always desperately wanted fall into their open arms. It is just a matter of patience and political skills.

Fidel Castro could be, in his twilight years, the big winner. He is again the mastermind, the great inspiring character, the puppeteer behind radical leaders like Hugo Chávez and his petrodollars, which are probably financing (allegedly funneled through the Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana- Bolivarian Continental Coordinator) many of the CMLs that are being organized and mobilized in the region; and behind Evo Morales. Extra-regional actors such as Iran and China soon could become more involved, complicating the already troublesome situation.⁵

Classic revolutionary violence will likely be the exception and not the rule in the region for some time. Radical and violent groups just have to be patient. However, patience has never been one of their attributes. Therefore, we must be prepared to cope with several contingencies, which are not mutually exclusive.

Peru

Sendero Luminoso (SL, or Shining Path), which brought the country to the brink of collapse in the early 1990s, is the product of the 1964 split of the pro-Moscow Peruvian Communist Party. A pro-Peking faction considered the Soviets revisionists, believing that the correct ideological line came from China. *Bandera Roja* (Red Flag) tried to unify Maoist tendencies in Peru, but it split too in 1969 and gave rise to the birth of *Sendero*, headed by Abimael Guzmán, an obscure Kantian professor of the University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho. During the

⁵ Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has stated that he wants to deepen his links with Latin American "popular governments" who oppose the United States, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Early in January 2006 he telephoned those countries' presidents, offering Castro support in hosting the Non-Aligned Countries Summit in September 2006 and praising his "policy of resisting arrogant powers." Chávez invited Ahmadinejad for an official visit to Venezuela in mid-year. Ahmadinejad also expressed to Morales, then president elect, his desire to meet him to discuss issues of interest. Morales invited Ahmadinejad to his January 22 inauguration. (*La Tercera* [Chile], Jan. 6, 2006.) On a China visit, Morales declared his admiration for the Chinese Cultural Revolution and sought Chinese investment. (*Correo* and *El Comercio*, Jan. 9, 2006.)

1960s he traveled to Peking, where he was trained, and upon his return he pronounced that the time had come to prepare the beginning of the “people’s war” in his native Peru—a country he described as semifeudal, semicolonial, and with a bureaucratic form of capitalism. He added to Marx, Lenin and Mao an adaptation of the thoughts of José Carlos Mariátegui, a leftist writer of the 1920s, and in the next decade began to talk of “Marxism-Leninism-Maoism-Gonzalo thought” as the light that would lead to revolution in Peru.

If anything favored *Sendero*’s development and growth in its first phase (1968–75), it was Peru’s military regime. When the regime came to power in October 1968, it set about reshaping Peruvian society. Its members were traumatized by the 1965 *foquista* guerrilla movement, in which they were forced to kill other Peruvians, and which they saw as a product of injustice and poverty. So, according to its military and civilian theorists, in order to avoid another insurgency, socioeconomic change was needed. The regime of General Juan Velasco—one of Hugo Chávez’s role models—began what he considered a Peruvian Revolution that would improve the country’s status in South America, making it an exemplar of a “third option” for non-capitalist and noncommunist government. Peru’s leftists skillfully infiltrated the state structure and promoted a progressive, leftist treatment for all aspects of Peruvian life. Anything related to Marxism was welcomed. Velasco created state-sponsored organizations whose objectives were to deepen the revolution and fight the “counterrevolutionaries,” not realizing that he was indirectly creating a very dangerous monster: *Sendero Luminoso*.

The 1965 guerrilla war had been inspired by the doctrine and strategy of Che Guevara. The insurgents’ intention was to mobilize the peasants and lead them to an armed uprising. However, they lacked the organizational structure, ideological coherence, material means, and intelligence concerning the sociopolitical environment to do this. Insurgents were easily identified, infiltrated, and promptly destroyed by the security forces. Guevara became “a legend but not an example.”⁶

As Guzmán organized an armed party to revolt against Peruvian state and society, he kept in mind the mistakes of 1965. American counterinsurgency specialist William Ratcliff once called SL one of the most unusual guerrilla organizations in Latin American history. No Maoist guerrilla force has ever caused as much unrest and destruction as this originally provincial group from the Andes.⁷

Peruvian anthropologist Carlos Iván Degregori has written that most classic guerrilla groups underestimated the role of bureaucratic organization in making their movements and shaping society in general. Guzmán represented the culmination of a shift from romanticism to calculation. He built an authoritative organization and converted it, by its own definition, into a war machine. He coldly planned for mass death because the triumph of the revolution would cost

⁶ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Dynamics of the Armed Struggle* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 36.

⁷ William Ratcliff, “Revolutionary Warfare”, in *Violence and the Latin American Revolutionaries*, edited by Michael Radu (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1988), 25.

a million deaths, as he said in a televised appearance on September 24, 1992, days after his capture.⁸

He also developed two cults. One was a personality cult, a typical Maoist feature and one that would adversely affect the organization when Guzmán was captured; the other was a cult of intelligence. His organization had to be able to infiltrate not only the state, but all Peruvian society. “The party has one thousand eyes and one thousand ears” was one of his maxims. The right information at the right moment was key to its ability to pose a threat: “we know where, when, and how to hit.”⁹

The degree of infiltration of ministries, labor unions, and specially the state corporations associated with electric energy was high. In 1982, SL began to blow up electrical transmission towers, which caused serious blackouts, mainly in Lima. The great concern in the Peruvian government was that SL knew which ones would create a blackout, information that was supposed to be top secret.

In 1987, analyst Manuel Jesus Granado warned about an underappreciated aspect of *Sendero*'s infiltration efforts: they had moles in the middle and upper Peruvian social classes, including the sons and daughters of top officials of the government, the armed forces, the police, political parties, industry, and commerce.¹⁰ *Sendero*'s advance was facilitated by the almost complete lack of understanding of its doctrine, objectives and strategy by Peruvian political and military elites. That lack of understanding conduced to state vacillation, lost time, and a counterproductive and mistaken response.

In military terms, *Sendero* was an example of asymmetric warfare efficiently waged against a supposedly strong state. When SL began its peoples' war in May 1980, Peruvian armed forces and police had some 250,000 troops prepared to wage a two-front conventional war with Chile and Ecuador. SL began its military actions with some 300 members armed with less than 100 weapons and a few hundred sticks of dynamite.¹¹ Over the next quarter century it caused some 40,000 deaths and an estimated \$25 billion in damage.

President Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) recognized that the internal security problem was as important as the economic one. *Sendero*'s defeat owes to the political decision to cope with it in an integrated way, a doctrinal shift by the Armed Forces, implementation of an enabling legal framework, the reorganization of Peruvian intelligence system in the early 1990s, and the organization of civil defense committees in the countryside.

⁸ Carlos Iván Degregori, “After the fall of Guzmán”, in *The Peruvian Labyrinth: Polity, Society, Economy*, edited by Maxwell A. Cameron and Philip Mauceri (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 180.

⁹ Manuel J. Granados, *El PCP Sendero Luminoso y su Ideología* (Lima, 1992), 73.

¹⁰ Manuel J. Granados, “El PCP Sendero Luminoso: Aproximaciones a su Ideología”, in *Socialismo y Participación*, No 37 (March 1987), 21

¹¹ Alberto Bolívar, “Peru”, in *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of Ten Countries*, edited by Yonah Alexander (Ann Arbor: The Michigan University Press, 2002), 96-98.

After Guzmán's capture, *Sendero* crumbled like a house of cards, and by early 1995 it was reduced to being a mere nuisance.¹² A new process began within the organization. It acknowledged past mistakes, mainly the captured leader's propensity to the use of constant and indiscriminate terrorism in rural and urban areas.

The peasantry fought so fiercely and valiantly against the terrorists in the countryside because they had been subjected to merciless terrorism for almost a decade. *Sendero* threw the peasants into the arms of the security forces, which were already taking new approaches toward the rural inhabitants. The Peruvian Army in particular was divided about the prospect of giving arms to peasants organized as civil defense committees. Finally, Fujimori decided that this was expedient. Almost 350,000 men and women in arms were the real victors of the war, breaking the backbone of the terrorist organization. An entire legal framework was created for this purpose, and every weapon and bullet was accounted for by the Army and the police; something completely different from the case of Colombia (see below). SL's visible defeat in the countryside in the late 1980s forced Guzmán to shift the center of the war toward the cities.

SL's acknowledgment of the failure of its strategy in the countryside gave room to a new approach: no more executions of mayors and authorities. Instead, they publicly acknowledged that they were wrong and presented a more sympathetic face to the rural population, in what can be called the *MRTAcization* of SL.¹³ The Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru–MRTA was a pro-Cuban group that began its actions in 1984 and was less violent than *Sendero*. It is best remembered for the 124-day standoff following its takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima in December 1996. The standoff ended in a brilliant rescue operation performed by Peruvian special forces. From then on, its few dozen remnants began to be absorbed by SL.

In 1992 SL decided to go into hibernation until a good opportunity presented itself, following Guzmán's directive in his September 1992 press conference: "Esto es sólo un recodo en el camino" (This is just a halt in our way). They reorganized the non-military aspects of the party (especially the front organizations) and focused on the legal defense of imprisoned members and an international propaganda campaign aiming to "defend the life of Dr. Abimael Guzmán."

SL is back in business again because of the mistakes committed by presidents Fujimori, Valentin Paniagua, and Alejandro Toledo: Fujimori because he mistakenly thought that the 1993-94 crumbling of SL was final and disbanded the police intelligence unit that had captured Guzmán; Paniagua because he dismantled the intelligence system and the legal counterterrorist framework; and Toledo because he continued the politically correct approach, even after the 9/11 attacks and a bloody attack near the American embassy a few days before President Bush visited Peru in March 2002.

In Peru it is still politically incorrect to talk about the return of terrorism, let alone the need to take strong measures, as Fujimori did. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission created during

¹² Author conversation with American scholar James Zackrison, Washington, D.C., August 12, 1999.

¹³ Alberto Bolívar, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Peru, 1980-1990), *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Summer 1997, p.17.

Paniagua's administration¹⁴ inflated the fatalities of the internal conflict to almost 70,000. The armed forces are now demoralized by generalizations about the responsibility for human rights violations by some bad elements of the armed forces, national police, and self-defense committees.

In September 2005, Peruvian Prime Minister Pedro Pablo Kuczynski warned about Sendero's return. His statement was promptly attacked and mocked by members of Toledo's government and others. In the last two months of 2005, *Sendero* took the lives of almost twenty military and police personnel and civilians in ambushes in Peru's central and northern jungle.

Following an initial round of balloting on April 9, 2006, the second round of Peru's presidential elections will be held on June 4 between former President Alan Garcia and Ollanta Humala, who has announced that he will be part of the alliance with Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales. Whoever wins the election will have to cope with a reorganized *Sendero*, whose ranks are being swelled by those who have completed their jail sentences and are reincorporating themselves into the armed party. Most of those who were incarcerated are hardened war veterans. If only a few dozen reenter SL, trouble is guaranteed, recalling that when the war was initiated, SL had no more than 300 terrorists.

An additional problem is that *Sendero* is also back into the drug business, for the illicit growing of poppies and production of coca. There are also signs it is linking with Colombia's FARC. Its reentry into the drug business was facilitated by an April 2001 incident in which a civilian aircraft was mistakenly gunned down by the Peruvian Air Force in a drug interdiction action supervised by DEA and CIA. The halt to the interdiction campaign has resulted in growing coca plantations and Peruvian cartels' producing coca paste and cocaine. As in 1982, when it entered into this business, the huge amounts of cash it will receive will fund its reorganization.

The increasing poppy crops could bring in another extra-regional terrorist actor known for its expertise in this field: Al Qaeda. The implications of this are enormously dangerous.

Colombia

By early 1999, the likelihood of victory for Colombia's insurgent groups was high. After decades of violence, the Andrés Pastrana administration (1998-2002) was besieged by the guerrillas and national morale was at its nadir due to the continuing defeats the security forces were suffering in the hands of the FARC, and to a lesser degree by the ELN. A third violent actor, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*—AUC, had also come into being as a consequence of the government's peace negotiations with the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19), which ended with M-19's conversion into a legal political party and the enactment of a new Colombian constitution favorable to the guerrillas in 1991. In negotiating that constitution the M-19 guerrillas gained an advantage for all the remaining Marxist groups by having included a prohibition against the state's organizing the population against the guerrillas. This provision would have implications

¹⁴ In practical terms, half of the members of the commission were what in the 1980s and 1990s constituted almost the entire directive of *Izquierda Unida* (United Left), the alliance of Marxist groups that waited for many years after the war started in May 1980 to condemn the terrorism of SL.

in the escalation of violence in that country, which had no self-defense committees like those in Peru.

As Thomas Marks, professor of Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism at the National Defense University, has written:

Colombia's forces are numerically inadequate for a campaign in the geographical and human areas involved, nor do they have adequate operational funding. Ergo, we find ourselves back at the *autodefensas*, who—authorized or no, legal or not—have filled the gap and engaged in some of the most vicious fighting against FARC (and ELN). And they make no bones about their favored methodology: to go after the insurgent infrastructure. In internal war, there is no way around the reality that a vacuum will be filled. By refusing to mobilize the population, Bogotá ensures that their people's war is waged out of control in every nook and cranny.¹⁵

So desperate did the situation appear, diverse think tanks and war colleges in the region began to study likely scenarios, one of them international intervention before the guerrillas took power or split the country into “liberated areas.”

One of the many concerns regarding the potential breakdown of Colombian central government was about what conscripts in the security forces would do in the face of victorious guerrilla forces advancing toward a lawless capital, as had happened in Southeast Asia. If this happened, FARC could easily rise from its 15,000-20,000 strong to at least double that figure; the same with the 5,000-strong ELN. It could be an enlarged version of what happened in 1986, when FARC organized the *Batallón América*, a failed attempt to bring together cadres of several Latin American insurgent groups (including from the Peruvian MRTA) and prepare them for joint actions to “liberate” their countries. It was easily destroyed by Colombian armed forces. At 40,000 strong, they could be tempted to set into motion something bigger that could easily affect the security of at least four of Colombia's five neighbors: Ecuador, Peru, Panamá and Brazil. (Venezuela would be immune due to President Hugo Chávez's not-so-subtle provision of support to Colombian insurgent groups, something that has forced the U.S. to ban all arms transfers to Venezuela.)

Strategically located beneath Panamá and the Canal, bordering five nations, and being the fourth largest South American country, and the only really bi-oceanic one, Colombia, with its drug production, would not be a disaster for the United States as a failed state in its “backyard.” And yet it reached the brink of total disintegration and collapse. It has a long history of violence, the two main political parties, Liberal and Conservative, having had two major civil conflicts: the War of the One Thousand Days (1899-1902) and La Violencia (1948-65) which combined cost more than 400,000 Colombian lives. During La Violencia, the internecine political fighting became violent as the political parties followed the previous patterns of fighting civil wars to establish political supremacy. This time, however, a new element was introduced: Marxist communism as

¹⁵ Thomas Marks, *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College and the Dante B. Fassell North-South Center of the University of Miami, 2002), 26.

an ideology among some of the Liberal Party groups. When the main political parties colluded to make General Rojas Pinillas president, the communist guerrillas refused the offered amnesty and took to the hills to fight against the entire political system. These guerrilla groups later (in July 1964) coalesced into what is now known as the FARC.¹⁶

In January 1965 ELN was founded, and like FARC it was pro-Soviet. Two years later the *Ejército Popular de Liberación*–EPL (Popular Liberation Army) was founded, inspired by Maoism. In April 1970 the M-19 became operational, with middle- and upper-class members in its ranks. Its first important military action was conducted ten years later, in February 1980, when M-19 guerrillas seized the Dominican Republic’s embassy in Bogotá and held several diplomats for 61 days. The siege ended with a negotiation that allowed the guerrillas to flee to Cuba.

In 1982, FARC entered into the drug business--the same year *Sendero* did so in Peru--thus increasing its financial resources.

Defense analyst David Spencer estimates that in 1982 FARC was just a small organization of 15 fronts with perhaps 2,000 guerrilla fighters. By 1990 it had expanded its forces to 43 fronts with about 5,000 fighters. It now has between 15-20,000 combatants in 69 fronts and mobile companies (these formations range from 60 to 400 individuals). This has allowed them to move to mobile or maneuver warfare, as they did in 1996: the use of large units capable of directly confronting military units of equal size, overrunning military installations and smaller units.¹⁷

In May 1984 FARC declared a ceasefire in order to begin peace talks with the government of the conservative president Belisario Betancur, the first of many such “peace processes.” A dramatic event occurred in November 1985, when M-19 guerrillas took over the Justice Palace in Bogotá. The Army clumsily stormed the building, with the result that 115 people (rebels, military and the entire staff of Supreme Court justices) were killed. Paradoxically, this attack marks the military decline of M-19. From then on they began to work toward a negotiated solution with the state. In September 1989, the M-19 resolved to dispose of its weapons and become a political party in exchange for amnesty. This became reality the next year. But during the 1990 election campaign, presidential candidate of the Unión Patriótica (Patriot Union, FARC’s political front), Bernardo Jaramillo, and that of M-19, Carlos Pizarro, were assassinated by extreme right gunmen. FARC resolved to go on with the armed struggle.

In August that year, the EPL announced its intention to demobilize itself and reintegrate into the civil life as a political party.

In December 1990, Liberal Party president César Gaviria ordered a military offensive to dislodge the general secretariat of FARC from a zone known as Casa Verde (Green House). From April 1991 until May 1992, the government held peace talks with FARC, ELN, and EPL in Venezuela and later in Mexico. Talks were suspended after the EPL kidnapped and killed former Liberal minister Argelino Durán Quintero. In October 2000, EPL consolidated with FARC.

¹⁶ James Zackrison, “Colombia,” in *Combating Terrorism: Strategies of Ten Countries*, edited by Yonah Alexander (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2002), 117-8.

¹⁷ Interviewed by Marks, op. cit., 7.

As noted above, former M-19 guerrillas participated in the 1991 National Assembly that drafted the new constitution, arguing for the provision that made the government's war against the other guerrilla groups more difficult.

The insufficient number of military and policemen forced the landlords in the countryside to begin to organize vigilante groups to act against the guerrillas and their allies. On April 1997 they forged a union and the AUC were born.

Manuel Pérez, a former Spanish priest and the top leader of ELN, dies of hepatitis in the jungle of northern Colombia. Five months later, that group began talks in Germany with civilian, not government, leaders.

One month before taking office, president-elect Andrés Pastrana met with top FARC leaders in the jungle and agreed to future peace talks. Once in office, in November 1998, Pastrana inexplicably ordered the demilitarization of 42,000 square kilometers, a demand requested by FARC negotiators. A 2001 study by Rand Corporation found that although the idea of negotiations enjoyed considerable support, Pastrana's approach entailed substantial political costs, including the resignation of Defense Minister Rodrigo Lloreda in May 1999, and created stress between the government and the military.¹⁸ Lloreda objected to the negotiating approach articulated by Pastrana's negotiator, which implied indefinite FARC control of the *zona de despeje*. Despite the government's concessions, FARC continued its attacks on government and infrastructure targets, kidnappings, and other acts of violence and disruption.

Located in the heart of the country, within easy striking distance of both the capital and other major targets, the demilitarized zone was ostensibly an area where military activity was prohibited. FARC not only violated such prohibition immediately but subsequently used the *Zona*, as it came to be called, as a coca production base and recruiting zone and as an unsinkable aircraft carrier from which to launch repeated strikes against government targets.¹⁹

FARC's mobile warfare strategy was a challenge for the Colombian military, which was still conducting counterinsurgency operations when its foe was no longer using guerrilla tactics. In general, says Marks, the Colombian security forces were unprepared for this development after more than 30 years of small-scale counterinsurgency operations. The police (100,000 strong) was dispersed throughout the country in small posts. The army had a dearth of battalions and rarely conducted operations of even battalion size.²⁰ As in Peru, it would need a new strategy.

Between July and September 1999, FARC suffered five defeats that cost it between 300 and 600 casualties.²¹ For the first time the Colombian people began to think about winning the war militarily. The Clinton administration's implementation of Plan Colombia in certain ways would

¹⁸ Rand Corporation, *The Colombian Labyrinth* (Santa Monica, CA, 2001), 3.

¹⁹ Marks, op. cit., 9.

²⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

²¹ 'Tirofijo' movilizó a 15 mil hombres para ofensiva, *El Comercio*, 13 July 1999. "Guerrilla sufre una de sus peores derrotas: 287 muertos", "Terminó ofensiva de las FARC con un saldo de 360 muertos", *La República* (Peru), 14-15 July 1999. 'Jojoy muerde el polvo', *Cambio* magazine (Colombia), 6 September 1999.

aggravate problems for the guerrillas, despite the strong leadership of president Alvaro Uribe since 2002.

After the failure of Pastrana's negotiations, the May 2002 presidential election clearly signaled a rejection of his legacy. President Uribe is his antithesis. Campaigning on a law-and-order platform, Uribe was swept into office with 53 percent of the vote and the mandate of a nation to deal decisively with FARC, with all forms of criminality, and to enforce the rule of law throughout the country.²² He was favored not only by the assistance provided within the framework of Plan Colombia, but also by the change in American attitudes after 9/11. In the mid-1990s, the U.S. Congress opposed using counternarcotics assistance in the fight against the guerrillas, not wanting to accept that narcotics traffickers and guerrillas are inseparable.

In the military field, Uribe continued the doctrinal changes his predecessor began, tackled corruption inside the security and intelligence forces, and achieved the demobilization of a large segment of AUC. The Constitutional Court has lifted the ban on consecutive terms to permit him to run again in the May 28, 2006 presidential elections, and he is campaigning for his *Plan Patriota*. For the first time in decades, the Colombian people sense the leadership needed to combat crime and terrorism.

However, the guerrillas are far from being defeated. They have also made tactical changes, as was proven in December 2005 when 29 Colombian soldiers of *Brigada Móvil 12* died in an ambush while protecting government workers in coca eradication projects in the Vista Hermosa area. The military were part of *Plan Patriota*, a long-scope military offensive in part financed by the U.S. that began in 2003. The ambush was the Uribe administration's major military setback and led to renewed criticism of his military strategy. Uribe and his military commanders promised to defeat FARC before his mandate is over. When *Plan Patriota* began, he stated: "We are going to pull them out of their den." Washington, which since 2002 has been sending \$700 million per year for Plan Colombia, extended its economic assistance for 2006, increased the number of American military advisers from 600 to 800, and lent helicopters and planes to fight the guerrillas. But FARC is intact, and only one of its top leaders, Simón Trinidad, has been captured.

Paradoxically, Juan Carlos Garzón from the Fundación Seguridad y Democracia reports that 2005 saw more FARC attacks than prior years. The guerrillas conducted 342 attacks that year, hurting both the military and public opinion. They attacked military bases, causing several casualties, took entire populations, such as in Toribio; organized armed strikes, one of which immobilized for several weeks the oil-rich department of Arauca. It is therefore the end of FARC's crease.²³

Mexico

²² Luz E. Nagle, *Plan Colombia: Reality of the Colombian Crisis and Implications for Hemispheric Security* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College and the Dante B. Fassell North-South Center of the University of Miami, 2002), 12.

²³ Susana Abad: "Las FARC siguen vivitas y coleando", *El Comercio*, 8 January 2006.

The *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*-EZLN is an armed Marxist revolutionary group that originated in 1983 in the southern state of Chiapas, one of Mexico's poorest states, in 1983. It was formed by old members of various leftist groups, some of them devoted to armed struggle, and was initially ignored by the central government. Despite being founded by natives, it sees itself as part of a broader anti-capitalist, anti-globalization movement. It is opposed to the liberal economic policies Mexican presidents have been pursuing since 1982. The group takes its name from the nineteenth-century revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and see themselves as the heirs of "five hundred years of Indian resistance against imperialism." While its revolutionary project is rooted in the injustices suffered by the indigenous population of eastern Chiapas, the EZLN calls for the reorientation of Mexican economic policy along traditional socialist lines and the transfer of political power from elites to the mass of poor Mexicans.²⁴

EZLN considers itself different from other revolutionary groups in that, with the exception of its 1 January 1994 uprising, which lasted for two weeks, there is no evidence it uses of weapons or bombs, and it has confined its activities to Chiapas. In its early days it rejected legitimate participation channels to present demands and reach solutions, feeling that those channels had failed both Indians and the rest of the Mexican people for too long. Hence their motto: *¡Ya basta!* (Enough!)

The 1994 uprising began on the same day the North America Free Trade Association- NAFTA among the U.S., Canada and Mexico entered into force. EZLN occupied the municipalities of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Altamirano, Ocosingo, Oxchuc, Huixtan and Chanal. The Mexican army was called in, and fighting ensued for 12 days. Representatives of leftist groups from all over the world began to pour into Chiapas to press Carlos Salinas de Gortari to put an end to the military actions against the rebels. A ceasefire was established and the government entered into negotiations with EZLN's hooded representative, Subcommander Marcos – Rafael Sebastián Guillén, a Jesuit-educated Caucasian who, through his excellent use of the media, became a living legend.

One of EZLN's demands was the creation of Autonomous Indigenous Regions, something that perhaps is the most profound expression of the nationalistic aspirations of indigenous peoples in Mexico, aspirations which had been expressed in the numerous marches, manifestos, and legislative proposal prior to the uprising.

After 3 years, the two sides reached the San Andrés Agreements, which called for modifying the Constitution to provide more power to the Indian peoples. A commission of Congresspersons formed the Comisión para la Concordia y Pacificación (COCOPA), which in turn modified drastically what the EZLN wanted. EZLN returned to the mountains and president Ernesto Zedillo increased the military presence in order prevent the expansion of the rebels' area of influence.

On 5 December 2000, newly elected President Vicente Fox sent the COCOPA Law to Congress, as he had promised during the campaign. After a march through seven states, EZLN –without Marcos-addressed the legislative branch. The Partido de Acción Nacional-PAN refused to attend the meeting. Finally the changes were approved on 14 August 2001.

²⁴ Van Cott, *Defiant Again*, 66.

Some analysts consider EZLN to be not a guerrilla group but just a pressure group. As such, its future could be as a local self-defense political organization and spokesgroup for the demands of Mexican Indians.²⁵ On 20 November 2005 EZLN's central committee issued a communiqué announcing its decision to dissolve the *Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*–FZLN, a political, civil, and peaceful organization formed in 1996 (a front organization of EZLN), that politically probably was enjoying more success than Marcos and his people.

Marcos has recently attempted to regain his old media splendor, embarking on 2 January 2006 on a six-month tour throughout the 32 Mexican states, to precede the July presidential elections. He is travelling unarmed, with a 60-car caravan, and riding a motorcycle, recalling *Che* Guevara's similar campaign in South America in the 1950s. Marcos calls it *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign). He is no longer Subcommander Marcos, now he is *Delegate Cero* (Delegate Zero). He appeared on national TV, in his ski mask, on May 9, denouncing recent police brutality against rioting, machete-wielding farmers, and accused the government of provoking the violence. But his tour has drawn little attention. Latin American leftists have a new hero of the indigenous peoples, Bolivia's Evo Morales. The times have passed Marcos by, notes National Action Party candidate Felipe Calderon.²⁶ (The other two candidates are populist Andres Manuel López Obrador and Roberto Madrazo of the Institutional Revolutionary Party.)

In short, for the time being, the EZLN is no longer an armed national security threat for Mexico or its neighbors.

Paraguay

In January 2005, Paraguay was shocked when the body of Cecilia Cubas, daughter of a former president kidnapped in September 2004, was found. The kidnappers has received the requested \$800,000 ransom but killed her anyway.²⁷ Police investigations led to members of *Patria Libre*–PL (Free Fatherland), a small radical party that in the 2003 presidential elections received only 4,549 votes, 0.3 percent of the vote. Importantly, the investigation uncovered a connection between in and Colombia's FARC.

A group of activists and "social leaders" formed the *Corriente Patria Libre*–CPL (Free Fatherland Current) in February 1990 as a patriotic, revolutionary, and socialist political alternative. Two years later, CPL became a national political movement and changed its name to *Movimiento Patria Libre*–MPL (Free Fatherland Movement, and in December that same year it registered in the Electoral Court in Paraguay as *Partido Patria Libre*–PPL (Free Fatherland Party), with the goal of forging a revolutionary mass movement at the national level and regrouping the Paraguayan socialist parties and sympathisers. Its ideology embraces an international socialist project and the scientific socialist postulates of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel.

²⁵ Mauricio Laguna Berber, "Los escenarios políticos del EZLN", *La Crisis*, 24 December 2003.

²⁶ José de Córdova and John Lyons, "Subcomandante Marcos busca revivir su 'vieja gloria' con gira por México", *The Wall Street Journal-Americas*, Jan. 5, 2006; "Marcos Back in Public Eye in Mexico," *New York Times*, May 9, 2006.

²⁷ "Jefe de las FARC cooperó en el secuestro de Cubas", *El diario de Hoy* (El Salvador), 21 February 2005.

The Cubas investigators, with cooperation from their Colombian counterparts, learned that Raúl Reyes, the number 2 leader of FARC, knew that Cecilia Cubas was going to be kidnapped and coordinated with Rodrigo Granda, FARC's terrorist "foreign minister," to give military training to six MPL members. Emails among Reyes, Granda and MPL leader Osmar Martínez were published by the Colombian magazine *Cambio* in which the terrorist chief offers detailed advice on how to plan the kidnapping.

In one of the messages, Granda notifies Reyes that Martínez and another five persons would receive training with FARC in January 2004 and that the kidnapping plan was ready. According to *Semana*, four days after the kidnapping, Granda, who met Martínez in Venezuela in mid-July 2004, confirmed that the kidnapping had taken place and in code words requested instructions on negotiating the ransom.

Subsequent to the murder, MPL made a statement claiming that the kidnapers were "dissidents" who had expelled long before the kidnapping and subsequent murder of Cecilia Cubas.

FARC's interest in Paraguay is not surprising. The country is one drug smuggling route toward Europe and Africa, and drugs are one of the main businesses of FARC. Also, the "triple border" that links Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay has become a regional center of counterfeiting and safe haven for terrorists. International intelligence reports indicate that since the early 1990s Hezbollah has had a presence in the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este. Some sources think that the perpetrators of the terrorists responsible for the bombing of Jewish targets in Buenos Aires in March 1992 and July 1994 prepared the actions there. If Hezbollah has a presence in that zone, then there is the likelihood of Al Qaida also being there.

The FBI now has an office in Asunción, and the U.S. government is rumored to be pursuing opening a military base in Paraguay.

Chile

The *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez*-FPMR (Patriot Front Manuel Rodríguez) was formed in 1983 as a wing of the Chilean Communist Party, which gave the FPMR logistical support and most of its cadres. Its personnel had already received military training in Cuba, the Soviet Union (intelligence and counterintelligence), East Germany (strategic doctrine), and Hungary (forgery of documents). They gained combat experience in Central America as part of the Nicaraguan *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*-FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) which took power in July 1979, and the Salvadoran *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*-FMLN. They also received training in practical insurgency techniques in Libya, Angola and Mozambique.

FPMR's name comes from Manuel Rodríguez, one of Chile's founding fathers. Its early attacks were directed at trucks carrying food, which was given to poor people. It caused a national power blackout by blowing up four energy transmission towers (a sign that, like *Sendero* in Peru, it had good intelligence). The two following years were full of bombings, assaults, attacks on police stations and street demonstrations.

The year 1986 was supposed to be a decisive one, with two major actions: the smuggling of a large amount of weapons from Eastern bloc fishery boats (they were discovered in the Carrizal Bajo zone) and an assassination attempt on President Augusto Pinochet. Additionally, they wanted to organize a popular base for urban actions as part of a broader plan to provoke a national uprising.

In the political and military areas, the FPMR suffered several setbacks in 1987 that split the organization and led it to abandon the idea of fomenting a national uprising. Instead, they began to organize a *Fuerza Mapuche* (Mapuche Force), an early sign of the turmoil that would erupt years later into an autonomy movement among the approximately 1.2 million Mapuche Indians.

Raúl Pellegrin Friedman a.k.a. *Comandante José Miguel* (who would die on 21 October 1988 during an attack on a police station) traveled to Moscow to explain the reasons for the internal divisions and request continued political and economic support for the new entity: *FPMR-Autónomo* (FPMR-Autonomous). The other faction formed the *Movimiento Manuel Rodríguez-MVR* (Manuel Rodríguez Movement).

The most notorious FPMR-A act was the April 1991 assassination of Senator Jaime Guzmán, who was by then living in Chile, and the kidnapping of Cristián Edwards, a member of one of the wealthiest Chilean families. The ransom that was paid was supposed to serve for the revamping of the group.

In 1996 they analyzed their past mistakes, still rejected the system, and refused to accept an invitation to participate in politics. Even though currently they pose no apparent threat, we must remember their connection with the Mapuches, an ethnic group that has sometimes been violent in recent years. The Mapuche movement is a network of small groups, independent from one another, and differentiated by the methods it uses to achieve its goals and the *caudillismo* of their leaders.

Some of these groups support the political way; others aim for the complete rupture of the system. After a decade and the division of the Mapuche group *Ad Mapu*, which was linked to the Chilean Communist Party, Aucán Huilcamán became the leader of *Consejo de Todas las Tierras* (Council of All Lands), but his media-savvy conduct, his closeness to the government, and his appropriation of the Indian cause caused other leaders to reject him.

In 1998 the *Coordinadora de Comunidades Mapuches en Conflicto* (Coordinator of Mapuche Communities in Conflict) was born, first headed by the Tirúa mayor, Adolfo Millabur. It in turn also split, ceding to the rise of José Huenchunao, who would later head the already disarticulated *Coordinadora Arauco-Malleco* (Arauco-Malleco Coordinating Unit) when its leaders were apprehended in late 2002.

Currently, Millabur leads *Identidad Territorial Lafquenche* (Lafquenche Territorial Identity), which is strong in the coastal sector; Huilcamán operates in Panguipulli, Temuco, Galvarino and Alto Bío-bío. Galvarino Raimán heads another Nagche group near Lumaco. Another player is Julio Marileo, perhaps the most active of them, who usually heads violent protests through the *Coordinadora de Hogares Mapuches* (Mapuche Homes Coordinating Unit). With the

exception of the already disarticulated Arauco-Malleco, all the leaders use a double discourse. On one hand they dialogue with the government, and in the other they perform occupations of private lands or violent protests to press in the negotiations.

In early June 2004, the Coordinating Unit of Mapuche Communities in Conflict took credit for a series of bombings in southern Chile, stating: “We publicly reivindicat[e] these actions as part of our process of Mapuche resistance against the capitalist advance of national and transnational entrepreneurs in our ancestral territory, who, favored by the servile state, are worsening the poverty and repression of our communities.”²⁸ No other Mapuche groups had publicly claimed to be the author of an attack before.

It is possible there are deeper connections among the Mapuches and other regional indigenous groups, financed and coordinated by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, and that we will witness a more open, organized and violent ethnic conflict in Chile and the reemergence of FPMR.

Ecuador

Ecuador, along with Bolivia, Peru and Venezuela, is part of the “Andean instability arc.” In October 2005, the Ecuadorean newspaper *El Comercio* reported that a new insurgent group was being formed: Patria, Alfaro, Liberación-Ejército de Liberación Alfarista- PAL-ELA (Fatherland, Alfaro, Liberation-Alfarista Liberation Army). “Sebastián Sánchez,” the insurgents’ spokesman, expressed the conviction that the revolutionary armed struggle had not ended with the surrender of Alfaro Vive, Carajo!-AVC (Alfaro Lives, Damn It!) in 1989. He claimed that he and his 200 ELA colleagues represented the extreme left ideals that were active until the late 1990s. More representative of the extreme left were the Montoneros Patria Libre-MPL (Montoneros Free Fatherland) and AVC. Their financial means came from bank robberies and kidnappings.

These groups were dismantled during the administration of León Febres Cordero (1984-88). President Febres had surrounded himself with intelligence experts and was supported by security agencies from Israel and the United States. With this help, he formed excellent counterinsurgency groups. Febres signed an agreement with Washington and in the Austral summer of 1987, some 6,000 American reservists from the Army Engineers Corps was deployed to Ecuador to help construct a highway from Manabí to the coast. This gigantic “civic action” operation was actually aimed at preempting the growth of AVC. Operation *Blazing Trails* is one of the biggest deployment operations of American troops in peacetime, but it is little known.

Ecuadorean intelligence planted several informants in the irregular groups. The information they collected was key to the defeat of the insurgents. It is obvious that from the beginning Febres had in mind not only what was happening in Peru, but especially what necessary measures his southern neighbor never took. Some of those measures would be taken by Fujimori between 1990 and 1992.

²⁸ “Atentados: Recrudece la violencia en la Araucanía”, “Nueva agrupación entra en escena”, *El Mercurio* (Chile), 8 June 2004; “El rebrote de grupos violentistas mapuches”, *El Mercurio*, 10 June 2004.

According to intelligence reports, PAL-ELA the group was formed by a collection of former members of AVC, MPL and Sol Rojo-SR (Red Sun). The latter is of Maoist inspiration. (Red Sun was also one of the *noms de guerre* of Peru's Abimael Guzmán.)

"Sánchez" acknowledged that members of ELA had been trained in Colombia and Venezuela. An intelligence source quoted by *El Comercio* in 2005 stated that some members of ELA received training in those countries in physical-military, weapons handling, shooting, revolutionary intelligence and counterintelligence, conspiracy methods, urban operations and the knowledge of explosives. They stayed at an ecologic resort in the Venezuelan department of Táchira, bordering with Colombia. "Some of the subversives," said the source, "were indoctrinated in the ranks of ELN and FARC. Caracas has denied having any involvement in the situation."

The ELA has learned from the mistake of groups like *Sendero* in Peru: it has no single visible head, and its decisions are made by consensus.

The worrisome aspect of the potential reemergence of political violence in Ecuador, which has the largest and most organized Indian movement in the Americas, is that it comes at a time when the country is at the brink of collapse and division between the coastal province of Guayas and the Andean province of Quito.

Brazil

Brazil's *Movimiento Sin Tierra*-MST (Landless Movement) claims to speak for the peasants struggling for land and land reform in Brazil, an autonomous mass movement that is part of the union movement, but with no party or religious linkages. It is the byproduct of several socioeconomic developments that occurred from 1975 through 1985, most importantly the rise of agribusiness, which concentrated land ownership and the subsequent increase of peasants without it. MST acknowledges that the Church, especially the Comisión Pastoral da la Tierra (Pastoral Commission of the Land) encouraged the peasants to organize themselves.

MST is organized into a Commission of Bases in rural communities to organize the fight for the land, a Municipalities Commission, a State Commission, and a National Coordinating Commission. It is active in 23 Brazilian states and considers land reform as a social necessity. Its main tactics are massive street demonstrations, hearings with state governors and ministers, hunger strikes, the installation of provisional camps in the cities and in the fringes of the haciendas, and occupying public institutions and lands.

Committing themselves to the Sao Paulo Forum, now they are opposing MERCOSUR, ALCA, and globalization in general. Adopting such radical postures, they have clashed even with leftist Brazilian president Lula da Silva.

Brazil's MZT has linked up with the new Mexican MST groups. Mario Alvarez, leader of the new, pro-EZLN *Movimiento de los Trabajadores Rurales Sin Tierra de México* (Movement of the Landless Rural Workers of Mexico), acknowledged that "there exists a coordination with the Brazilian MST, we exchange things, we are part of those who arrived at the World Social

Forum. They send us material, we send them material, we are in solidarity with them; when we march, they come here. That is why we created the movement.” Brazil’s MST met with Marcos in Palenque in late 2005 and agreed to provide mutual support over his six-month Other Campaign. They also agreed to defend each other in the event of attack, not with weapons but with peasants’ mobilizations, road blockades and the taking of public buildings.

Conclusion

The existence of radicalized mass movements in Latin America’s most populous countries remains a matter of some concern, particularly in this volatile region.