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Abstract: This article profiles Abimael Guzman, founder of the Shining Path terrorist group in Lima, Peru. Guzman was born in 1934, in the department of Arequipa. He attended a Roman Catholic high school and San Augustin University in the city of Arequipa. There he studied law and philosophy and earned degrees in both subjects. In the 1950s, Guzman and many other university students in Latin America found inspiration in the communist revolutions of the Soviet Union and China. In 1959, a communist fighter named Fidel Castro led a small but dedicated band of followers into the city of Havana to overthrow the government of Cuba. Castro became a hero to many people in Latin America, including Abimael Guzman.

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9: Abimael Guzman and the Shining Path

The city of Lima is a sprawling capital of six million people that lies near the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The capital of the South American nation of Peru, Lima attracts thousands of new residents each day. Most of these new arrivals are poor people from the countryside. They live in shantytowns and build their homes out of cardboard and thin sheets of metal. They have no bathrooms, electricity, or running water. Many make their living as thieves or beggars on Lima's downtown streets.

Residents of Lima, whether they are rich or poor, have seen many strange and terrible events. But on a December day in 1980, they woke to an unforgettable sight. As the sun came up, dozens of dogs were found hanging from the city's streetlamps. The dogs were strays that had been shot or strangled. Small cardboard signs carrying political slogans about the communist leaders of China were hanging around their necks. Also written on the signs was the name of a shadowy underground group--Sendero Luminoso, or the Shining Path.

Sendero Luminoso was born in Ayacucho, a department (state) of Peru that lies high in the Andes Mountains. Ayacucho is an isolated place with a large population of Peruvian Indians, who are descended from the ancient Incas. Ever since the conquest of the Incas by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, Ayacucho has been the site of many Indian rebellions. During the twentieth century, Ayacucho and other remote areas of Peru also became the scene of warfare between the Peruvian government and guerrillas fighting in the name of communism.

Shining Path was not the creation of Indians, nor was its founder--Abimael Guzman--a guerrilla. Guzman was born in 1934, in the department of Arequipa. He attended a Roman Catholic high school and San Augustin University in the city of Arequipa. There he studied law and philosophy and earned degrees in both subjects.

In the 1950s, Guzman and many other university students in Latin America found inspiration in the communist revolutions of the Soviet Union and China. In 1959, a Communist fighter named Fidel Castro led a small but dedicated band of followers into the city of Havana to overthrow the government of Cuba. Castro became a hero to many people in Latin America, including Abimael Guzman. Inspired by Castro's example, Guzman joined the Communist party of Peru, an organization founded by Jose Carlos Mariategui.

Guzman was a brilliant and hardworking student. His future, his teachers believed, lay in the academic world. In 1962, he became an assistant professor at the National University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga in Ayacucho. Although he was a philosophy professor, his classes discussed only politics. He described his dream of remaking Peru in the image of China--a society in which there were no rich and poor fighting for money and jobs, and where the communists were said to have ended poverty and crime. Guzman saved his highest praise for Mao Tse-tung, the ruler of Communist China.

During the next few years, Guzman gained a large and loyal following of students and fellow professors. As a reward, he was promoted to director of personnel. In this job, he managed gradually to take over the university. He hired only those professors who agreed with his political beliefs and used his position to recruit new members to his group. He fired all those who disagreed with him or who became his rivals for power within the Communist party or the university.

At the same time, China and the Soviet Union were becoming rival powers. The Soviet leaders had made changes in their society--changes that Mao harshly criticized. In 1964, Guzman left the Communist party to join Bandera Rosa (Red Flag), a group loyal to Mao's ideas. In the 1960s, this "Maoist" party sent Guzman to China, where he learned how to make a communist revolution in the countryside.

After returning to Peru, Guzman began criticizing Bandera Rosa's leaders, who favored a revolution in the cities among factory workers and the urban poor. Instead, Guzman saw Peru's future revolution taking place in the countryside, where most of Peru's peasants and Indians lived.

In 1970, the leaders of Bandera Rosa expelled Guzman from the group. Guzman struck out on his own, calling his new organization the "Communist Party of Peru for the Shining Path of Jose Carlos Mariategui." Guzman and his followers--Sendero Luminoso--claimed to be following the "path" intended by the founder of Peru's Communist party.

In the 1970s, Guzman began recruiting the Indians of Ayacucho to his group. Sendero members founded new cells of the organization in nearby departments as well as in Lima. The group carried out much of its recruiting in Peru's universities. Professors loyal to the Shining Path organized the students into study groups and carefully explained Guzman's ideas and plans. Many who agreed to join the Shining Path became messengers. Others became spies in regular businesses or in government agencies. New recruits also had to pass a final test--the murder of a policeman.

By 1980, Guzman was preparing to strike at the Peruvian government. Posters and graffiti calling for an armed revolution appeared on the walls of Ayacucho. Shining Path's first

operation took place on May 17, 1980, during the presidential elections. Guzman arranged the bombing of polling places in Chuschi, a village in the high Andes. The group also carried out attacks on government offices, power stations, and electrical transmission lines.

At first, Guzman and the Shining Path gained little notice from the government or the people of Lima. Sendero never took credit for its actions and remained underground and secretive. This secrecy allowed the movement to grow quickly. In remote regions where the government was weak, Sendero took over town halls, businesses, and farms.

Guzman had total control over Sendero's strategy and planned most of its operations. He based his program on the methods of Chairman Mao, the Chinese leader. After Guzman's revolution, Sendero would establish a new economy in which money would no longer exist and all transactions would be made in barter (an exchange of goods). The Shining Path also planned to abolish Peru's industry, banks, and foreign trade.

During the 1980s, the organization gradually grew stronger. In rural areas, Sendero guerrillas used torture, kidnapping, and murder to carry out Guzman's plan. They shot landowners and turned private land over to peasants in small parcels. All trade with other regions came to a halt, and the guerrillas forced farmers to plant only enough for their own families and for their villages. In this way, areas under Sendero's control became completely isolated from other regions of the country.

The central government finally took action in the Ayacucho region, where Sendero's bombings were throwing the city into chaos. In October 1981, the government declared a state of emergency in Ayacucho. The police enforced a curfew and arrested people without charging them or bringing them to trial. More than 1,000 soldiers of the Peruvian Civil Guard arrived in Ayacucho to impose order. The army of Peru responded to the Sendero threat with a terror campaign of its own--arresting, torturing, and murdering many civilians suspected of helping the Shining Path.

As the violence worsened, the prisons of Peru became centers of recruiting for Guzman. In March 1982, Sendero staged a raid on a Lima prison. The battle between the guerrillas and the prison guards lasted five hours. While many prisoners were killed, more than 200 escaped. Afterwards, Sendero began to step up its attacks on other cities and in the capital. The group bombed police stations, army barracks, and the palace of the Peruvian president. In August 1982, Sendero blew up transmission towers that carried electricity along the coast of Peru. For two days, half of the country's population had no electricity.

In Lima, teams of Shining Path guerrillas drove down the streets, hurling bombs into shops, banks, and public buildings. In another attack in December, four electric towers near the city were destroyed, and the lights of the capital fell dark. On a hill rising above the city, the communist symbol of a hammer and sickle, illuminated by hundreds of torches, burnt brightly. Without light, the residents of Lima could clearly see the symbol that Sendero guerrillas had lit to celebrate Abimael Guzman's 48th birthday.

The Shining Path had brought its campaign of terror to the capital. Movie theaters, restaurants, and shops were bombed. Sendero guerrillas gunned down police and civilians in the streets. In the countryside, Sendero targeted remote cities, moving its arms and men into a single region to create a "zone of liberation." It kidnapped and quickly executed government officials. On lampposts and on the walls of shops and homes, the guerrillas posted "death notices," listing all those whom they planned to round up and

bring to trial. Anyone finding his or her name on one of these posters fled the country as quickly as possible.

To pay for its arms and explosives, Sendero guerrillas staged bank robberies and forced rural villagers to make "donations" to their cause. Villages that refused to submit to Shining Path's demands suffered the consequences. One such place was Lucanamarca, a small village in the Andes Mountains. In April 1983, after the peasants of Lucanamarca refused to support his organization, Guzman ordered several dozen guerrillas into the village. Seventy people took refuge in a church in the village's main square. Shining Path soldiers entered the church and used axes and knives to murder everyone in it. The massacre of Lucanamarca was intended as an example to other peasants in the region. Anyone who resisted the Shining Path risked death.

Many villages that joined the Shining Path did so out of desperation. The economy of the country was a shambles, and the central government seemed to care little about regions outside of Lima. Schools fell into disrepair. Roads were impassable, and even water and electricity were scarce. Many peasants barely survived on meager incomes or charity.

In the late 1980s, the government of Peru responded to the threat by sending army divisions into regions where the Shining Path was active. But the government was not able to field enough troops to wipe out the rebellion. Instead, the police raids and the imprisonment of many innocent people turned rural Peruvians against the government and into the ranks of the Shining Path.

Yet Guzman's own policies worked against the Shining Path. The leader refused to associate with any other guerrilla groups in either Peru or in neighboring countries. He gained no support from the communist nations of North Korea, China, or Cuba. His organization had to steal or force from villagers in the "liberated zone" the arms and money that it needed. Guzman also refused to join any of the country's many opposition parties. All those who associated with him had to give their complete obedience to the Shining Path. Guzman would not share power with anyone and did not prepare anyone to carry on his programs. His devoted followers were prepared only to follow him to victory-- or to death.

Shining Path eventually succeeded in creating a "liberated zone" that stretched all along the Andes Mountains, from north to south through the middle of the country. From this region, Guzman planned to undertake a campaign of terror that would cause an uprising in the countryside. From their strongholds in the mountains and valleys, Shining Path guerrillas would have surrounded and besieged the cities of the coast and the capital. A network of urban terrorists would bomb the cities, causing anarchy and, eventually, the fall of the government.

Gradually, the people of Peru began to despair of ever freeing themselves from Guzman's bloody revolution. The movement was attracting students, peasants, professors, labor leaders, and even lawyers and doctors. By the summer of 1992, Shining Path was planning a campaign of terror in the capital. In July and August, bombs exploded in Lima's streets, stores, and police stations. People were terrorized, and transportation systems were forced to close down.

The Shining Path seemed to be nearing its goal of completely disrupting the country. But the campaign also brought Abimael Guzman down into Lima from his hideout in the Andes Mountains. Helped by informants and by Shining Path guerrillas in captivity, the police began a massive search for him.

By mid-September, they had discovered a Shining Path headquarters in a middle-class Lima neighborhood. To watch the house, police agents dressed in plain clothes and posed as street-sweepers, residents, and passersby. One evening, a policeman spotted what he believed was Guzman's profile in a window of the house. A few days later, a group of Guzman's friends were spotted knocking on the front door.

The police were ready. Several drew their guns and rushed into the house. In an upstairs room, they found Guzman, unarmed and unprepared. The police also found several of his aides and his second-in-command. The founder and leader of the Shining Path meekly surrendered to the captain of the police, who promptly rushed his captive to a Lima prison.

For several weeks, the government tried to humiliate Guzman. His photograph appeared in many newspapers and on television. Peru's leaders, including President Alberto Fujimori, intended to portray Guzman to the members of the Shining Path and to the people of Peru as an overweight and powerless middle-aged man. Instead of leading a revolution, Guzman was now standing behind bars in a prison cell. In October 1992, Peru's highest court sentenced him to spend the rest of his life in a high-security prison.

The Shining Path has been weakened by the loss of its founder, but the terrorist organization has endured. Throughout the 1990s, even as the Peruvian government stepped up its efforts to capture the remaining members of Shining Path, the group continued to carry out its campaign of terror. In July 1993, for example, Shining Path bombed the American Embassy in Lima, causing severe damage to the building.

Nor has Guzman's imprisonment eliminated similar terrorist groups from operating in Peru. In December 1996, a group of terrorists stormed the residence of the Japanese ambassador to Peru during a party attended by many government officials. The terrorists then held these high-level hostages inside the Japanese ambassador's home. Although the terrorists were members of Tupac Amaru, a group not directly affiliated with Shining Path, they shared the political goals and violent methods of Shining Path. The hostage crisis lasted four months, until Peruvian counterterrorist forces assaulted the building. The government agents freed all but one of the remaining hostages and killed all the terrorists.

Abimael Guzman may remain in prison, but his ideas and methods have survived his capture.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Once a professor, Abimael Guzman of Peru's Shining Path terrorist group poses for this police mug shot.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Cuba's Fidel Castro (seated) influenced many revolutionary movements in Latin America. By the 1990s, his brutal dictatorship had brought extreme misery to the Cuban people.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): The teachings of Mao Tse-tung guided Abimael Guzman in his attempt to overthrow the Peruvian government, although he would never attain the vast following that the Chinese leader had enjoyed.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Near their hideouts in the Peruvian Andes, members of the Shining Path pose for the camera. Taken in 1984, this is the first known photograph of the group.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): His terrorist career apparently over, Abimael Guzman rants and raves in a Peruvian jail.

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By Thomas Streissguth

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