Use of psychological operations during the insurgency in Peru, 1970–1995: Limitations in a context of human rights abuses

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Abstract

The conflict in Peru, 1970–1995, provides a powerful example of the use of psychological operations methods. Both the government of Peru and the insurgent Shining Path used them. This era of Latin American history has been studied extensively. However, there has been no rigorous research into this specific aspect of the conflict, as is evident in the dearth of published material. This article is based on extensive archival research and oral history interviews conducted in Peru and initiates the scholarship of this subject. Though they were bitter enemies, we see some strategic parallels: both sides used psychological operations with some degree of success; both also engaged in human rights abuses that probably counteracted the effectiveness of these programs. The objective of the Peruvian government was to mitigate the Shining Path to the point that it was no longer a threat. The government used psychological operations as an adjunct to its counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies. While the government was slow to react in the early 1980s, it eventually developed and deployed a robust psychological operations capability. Unfortunately, the widespread abuse of power among the police and military possibly negated the successes. In the end, the government’s victory was likely more a result of the Shining Path’s extreme violence and terrorism than the government’s psychological warfare campaign. This article establishes a baseline of knowledge of this aspect of the conflict and demonstrates a correlation between human rights abuses and the negation of successful psychological operations.

Psychological operations are a critical, yet understudied, aspect of national power. The insurgency in Peru, 1970–1995, provides a powerful case study of the use of psychological operations methods. Both the government of Peru and the insurgent Shining Path used them. This era of Latin American history has been studied extensively. However, there has been no rigorous research into this specific aspect of the conflict, a fact that is evident in the dearth of the published material. The following is based on extensive archival research and oral history interviews in Peru and initiates the scholarship of this subject. Three trends surfaced during the research process. First, the Peruvian Army developed a robust psychological operations capability during the internal conflict, but its success was undermined by human rights abuses. Second, the Peruvian Army failed to assess the effectiveness of its psychological operations campaign. Finally, the Peruvian government’s victory was probably helped more by the Shining Path’s counterproductive extreme violence and terrorism than an effective psychological warfare campaign. This article will focus on the Peruvian Army’s psychological operations during the conflict and show how the human rights abuses of both sides likely deterred any prospect of positive impact by their respective operations.
Onset of the conflict

The ideology of the Shining Path coalesced during the 1970s while the underground structures and parallel hierarchy of the organization were formed in conjunction with the psychological indoctrination of the masses in Ayacucho. The authoritarian leader of the group was Abimael Guzman, an intellectual from the middle class. He formed the nucleus of the group at the National University in Ayacucho, a small city in the Andean mountains, in 1970. He exploited the university and the rural education system to build the organization in accordance with the principles of the Maoist people’s protracted warfare and focused on political indoctrination for the first 10 years. This initially provided hope to the ill-treated population in the Andes. Lurgio Gavilán Sánchez described in his memoir, Memorias de un Soldado Desconocido, the excitement and hope that the Shining Path brought to rural people in the late 1970s. This is consistent with political scientist Cynthia McClintock’s argument that most peasants supported the Shining Path because of economic inequality and government corruption. However, as the war progressed hope was replaced by coercion and rhetoric was replaced by terrorism.

The Peruvian Army monitored the development of the Shining Path, but only slowly began to prepare for the conflict. On 17 May 1980 the Shining Path conducted the inicio de la lucha armada (initiation of the armed struggle) by attacking a voting station in the remote village of Chuschi. The Shining Path repudiated the electoral process and focused on its strategic goal of overthrowing the government. Guzman promulgated a strategy of violence that was designed to purge Peruvian society so that it could begin anew. An intelligence assessment from August 1980 explained the Shining Path’s activities as “moving from a clandestine organization and have reached the necessary condition to begin armed conflict.” In spite of this information, the Peruvian Army did not aggressively develop psychological warfare options to counter its rise. The psychological operations section of the 1981 Memoria Anual del Ejército (Annual Review of the Army), the Peruvian Army’s annual year end publication of significant activity, did not specifically address the Shining Path. They did, however, conduct a significant re-organization of their psychological operations capability during 1981. This was possibly in anticipation of the military’s impending direct involvement in the conflict. On 1 January 1981 Peruvian Army document CAP No. 62–374 directed the activation of la Direccion de Operaciones Sicologicas (Psychological Operations Directorate, DIRAS) that combined the disparate capabilities into one central office located at the Army Headquarters in Lima. Under this consolidation, DIRAS was organized into four main divisions: the headquarters, the sub directorates of planning and intelligence, doctrine and instruction, and operations. This reorganization seems to have satisfied directive 009/4a that required the “normalization of the functioning of the Army’s system of psychological operations.”

One challenge raised in the documents was that DIRAS was only assigned the minimum number of personnel to complete their numerous mission requirements. Apart from the shortage of qualified personnel, and the lack of understanding of Maoist-style warfare, it appears that in 1981 the newly established DIRAS was prepared structurally for the upcoming war.

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6 Archivo de la Comisión Permanente de Historia del Ejercito del Perú (ACPHEP), Memoria Anual del Ejercito, 1981, 310–313.
7 ACPHEP, Memoria Anual, 1985, 407.
8 ACPHEP, Memoria Anual, 1981, 311.
9 Ibid., 313.
Many of the police and military personnel who were sent from the coastal region to Ayacucho despised the Andean locals, which, as we will see, had a direct impact on the effectiveness of the psychological operations. This was a result of a long-held culture of racism and ethnic discrimination of the mixed races on the coast against the Indians of the mountains that they referred to using the derogatory term *cholos.* It was also the result of an attitude that began with the highest levels of leadership in Lima. The Minister of Defense, General Luis Cisneros Vizquerra, was quoted as stating: “...for the police force to succeed they would have to kill *Senderistas* and non-*Senderistas*...They kill 60 people and at best there are three *Senderistas* among them.” Moreover, this sentiment was common knowledge among the locals who claimed that President Belaunde had stated, “If we kill 100 people in the mountains, three of them will be terrorists of the Shining Path.”

For many of the government personnel, a deployment to the central highlands was similar to travelling to another country. They neither understood the culture, nor they spoke the language; they were young, far from home, afraid, and were expected to fight an enemy they did not comprehend, who were using a method of warfare they were not prepared for. A Peruvian Navy veteran who used the pseudonym “Pancho” wrote a short memoir “Vietnam in the Andes” in which he described atrocities he observed and those in which he directly participated in 1982 and 1983. He refers to the Indians as animals and writes of sexual abuse, racism, and extrajudicial killings of *terrucos,* or terrorists, of the “dirty war” in a cold, detached style. Anthropologist Kimberly Theidon quoted a Quechan-speaking villager from rural Ayacucho who was describing an atrocity committed by the government forces, “It was the marinos [Peruvian Naval Infantry]. Instead of protecting us, they killed us.” However, the most feared government unit was the special police commando unit called the *Sinchis* who took their name from the Quechua word for warrior chief. In 1983, the *Sinchis* were responsible for massacres in Acocro, Chiara, and Socos. The human rights abuses and blatant racism of government personnel assigned to Ayacucho in the early phases of the internal conflict would anger the local populace and make it very difficult for future psychological actions to gain the support of the neutral population who might have been open to siding with them.

Information specific to the Peruvian government’s psychological campaign is not available for the period 1982–1984. However, two Peruvian Army propaganda leaflets that were preserved in the Gorriti collection of ephemera at Princeton University were used in Ayacucho during 1983. They provide evidence that the government was employing psychological actions. Both leaflets show a well-groomed soldier in pristine uniform complete with web gear, helmet, and weapon protecting local workers from scraggily looking Shining Path members. The soldier in both photos is larger than the local workers and towers over the Shining Path members. The first reads: “Ayachuchans, complete your daily work, the forces of order will protect you from the delinquent subversives!” while the soldier grabs the Shining Path member and asks him “Where are you going, son of Satan?” The second reads: “Ayachuchans, the forces of order protect you, reject the delinquent subversives of the Shining Path!” while the worker, holding a shovel in one hand and a Peruvian flag in the other yells, “Get out! Never come back!” (see Figures 1 and 2). Theidon confirmed the use of such leaflets, “Flyers were dropped throughout the countryside, warning villagers of the insidious threat of subversion.” While it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of such

12 Interview by Author in Ayacucho, 21 August 2014.
13 Martos et al., 329.
15 Theidon, 86.
17 Theidon confirmed the use of such leaflets, “Flyers were dropped throughout the countryside, warning villagers of the insidious threat of subversion.”
18 Theidon, 202, 212; *Caretas,* No 737, 1983.
Figure 1. Peruvian Army leaflet “Keep working without fear!” circa, 1983

Collection of ephemera from the Peruvian Insurrection. Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Reproduced with permission.
Figure 2. Peruvian Army leaflet “You will never defeat us!” circa, 1983

Collection of ephemera from the Peruvian Insurrection. Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Reproduced with permission.
attempts to sway the population to the government’s side, the multiple well-documented human rights abuses during this period likely had a great effect on the population, undermining any efforts to win their hearts and minds.

The Peruvian Army increases psychological operations

The year 1985 saw a clear ramping up of the government psychological operations. On 28 July 1985, Belaunde peacefully transitioned the Peruvian government to Alan García Pérez. The US State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research classified it as, “the first democratic succession in 40 years.” This was considered a victory for the legal left as García was a member of Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (Popular Alliance of American Revolution, APRA), which was a left of centre political party. He had campaigned on ending human rights abuses by government security forces and tighter civilian control of the military, but quickly learned that it would be very difficult to follow through on this promise. On 14 August 1985 an Army patrol massacred 47 peasants, 23 of them children, in the Accomarca village in Ayacucho province. The patrol was led by Lieutenant Telmo Hurtado who argued he was acting on the desires of his higher leadership, many of whom defended his actions. While this was very early in the Garcia administration and he initially was not held directly responsible for the atrocity, the fact that he dragged his feet during the investigation led to the disillusionment of his supporters and the general population. In spite of this incident, the US Embassy in Lima assessed that, “The Garcia administration has demonstrated that it is committed to improving respect for human rights.” And it added, “Independent observers agree that violations by government forces declined sharply in 1985.” On the economic side, hyperinflation and severe unemployment destroyed the initial popularity he enjoyed early in his term. The Garcia presidency did not move Peru forward or make any significant progress against the Shining Path.

The 1985 edition of Memoria Anual del Ejercito allocated a 24-page section to its psychological operations campaign. DIRAS remained essentially the same from the reorganization that was carried out in 1981 in anticipation of the pending conflict. Three sub-directorates were responsible for the majority of the workload: Planning and Intelligence; Doctrine and Instruction; and Operations. Each sub-directorate had a section covering its accomplishments for the year as well as its plans and recommendations for the upcoming year. The main points from each section will be examined in turn.

Accurate and timely intelligence is critical to the development of psychological operations plans as well as to the assessment and modification of operations. The mission of the sub-directorate of planning and intelligence was to “plan, evaluate and assess the psychological operations that the Army required for the completion of its mission appropriate for security.” The next paragraph elaborated on this bland mission statement and explained the development of plan “LIWI 85” that was meant to counter the Shining Path in the emergency zone. In order to accomplish this, an assessment team was sent throughout the emergency zone to meet with local radio and television stations to determine the feasibility of using these methods to disseminate information. In addition, the team wrote nine pro-army and pro-government articles which were to be distributed in the following government publications: Actualidad Militar; Los Cabitos; El Continela; and Boletines Informativos. Examples of the articles include: “The Inherent Personality Values of the...
Soldier”; “Participation of the Army in the Anti-subversive Fight”; and “Prevention Against Narco-trafficking and Smuggling.” The section concluded that the sub-directorate on planning and intelligence completed 100% of its assigned tasks with only 50% of allotted personnel and recommended that the remainder of the personnel be provided in anticipation of an increased workload in 1986. The trend toward greater planning and intelligence support for psychological operations signalled increased government resolve to respond to the threat.

The next section was devoted to the sub-directorate of doctrine and instruction. Its mission was to “plan, coordinate, effect and supervise the realization of activities instruction, doctrine production, and the study and development of psychological operations.” In support of this mission, they conducted a basic and advanced psychological operations course for the Army as well as conducting smaller sections of training for multiple military training courses. They also reorganized the instruction of the basic and advanced courses that were conducted at La Escuela de Operaciones Sicológicas in Lima, which was established in 1983. The curriculum included: psychology, sociology, research methodology, economics, anthropology, and communication methods. They made minor corrections to the 1984 version of ME 40–1 Conocimientos Básicos Para las Operaciones Sicológicas — Guerra Sicológica which was originally published in 1970. They rewrote and updated 80% of the 1972 manual: ME 40–2 Guerra Sicológica Operaciones, which was the basic tactical level doctrine of this aspect of warfare for the Peruvian Army. The most significant recommendation of the sub-directorate was to make psychological operations school a stand-alone organization within the Army that would “achieve its administrative independence and the consequent academic advantages.” As doctrine and training are crucial for military operations, the sub-directorate of planning and instruction appears to have been effectively filling its role in supporting this aspect of the internal conflict.

The sub-directorate of operations was the largest and best resourced section of DIRAS. Its mission was straightforward, “to execute the psychological operations of the Army.” Under its small headquarters were two departments. The department of operations contained three sections: information; propaganda; and photography. The department of press writing contained three sections: audio-visual; radio; and TV-Cinema. At the strategic level in Lima, the following operations were conducted in 1985. Twelve articles were published in the Army magazine Actualidad Militar in September and November. Thirteen articles were published in Los Cabitos between January and October. Fourteen articles were published in El Cintenela between January and November. In addition to the Army publications, multiple pro-Army articles were published in mainstream daily newspapers including: La Republica; La Crónica; and El Comercio. Moreover, pro-Army broadcasts were inserted into the programming of various radio stations in Lima and television stations 2, 5 and 9. The purpose of these articles and broadcasts was to build espirit de corps among the soldiers and educate the general reader or listener about the virtue of the army in the conflict with the Shining Path in order to gain support of the population for the military. This section also noted the poor condition of audio-visual recording equipment as a shortcoming that restricted an increase in television broadcasts. Although it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these print and audio-visual products, the Peruvian Army employed a wide-ranging campaign at the strategic level.

In addition to the sub-directorate of operations personnel who worked in Lima, there was a section commanded by a psychological operations officer assigned to each of the five regional military commands that were responsible for the execution of operations in the respective regions. The

26 Ibid., 408.
27 Ibid., 409.
28 Ibid., 409.
29 CEHMP, Actualidad Militar, No. 312, December 1985, 32.
30 ACPHEP, Memoria Anual del Ejercito, 1985, 411.
31 Ibid., 411.
32 Ibid., 414.
second military region was responsible for Ayacucho and the surrounding region, and its headquarters was based in Los Cabitos military base next to the regional airport in Ayacucho city. Because of the importance of this region, the detachment was commanded by a lieutenant colonel, while the other regions had majors of captains. The detachment's mission was to “Plan, coordinate, execute and evaluate the psychological operations and civil action aspects in the Second Military Regions zone of responsibility countering the adversary’s campaign, strengthen the institution, and improving the unity and confidence of the assigned personnel.”

In order to improve the morale of the troops, they developed and implemented a plan to enhance the physical, mental, and spiritual health of the soldiers, which included challenging physical exercise and exposure to patriotic and nationalistic symbols. In order to “identify and integrate” with the community they supported the efforts of the Red Cross and the League to Fight Against Cancer, as well as conducted medical and dental clinics for the local population with military medical personnel. They also conducted a demonstration for “TV Panorama” that showed military personnel aiding the local population. Additionally, they provided economic and material support to the Pedro A. Bonifaz School and other local schools in order to build rapport with the local communities and win the support of children at a young age. They distributed printed material and used pro-Army and government announcements in local radio stations. Unfortunately, the detachment assigned to the Second Military Region did not provide an assessment of their actions as it was directed to in its mission statement, making judgment of the impact of these activities in their totality difficult.

The section concerning psychological operations in the 1985 edition of Memoria Anual del Ejercito provided some general conclusions and analysis. DIRAS functioned with 80% of assigned officers, 50% of assigned enlisted soldiers, and 114% of assigned civilian personnel. It satisfactorily completed all elements of the strategy, except for three that were being reprogrammed for 1986, which was significant considering the lack of personnel and functioning equipment. They estimated that they obtained 82.75 million Peruvian Soles worth of advertising and marketing from various newspapers, journals, and radio and television stations. The two main recommendations for 1985 were first that military personnel that completed the basic and advance psychological operations courses be assigned to DIRAS as a priority so that their training could be effectively employed. Secondly, that DIRAS elements and detachments needed equipment to replace the aging equipment. This would result in enhanced support to the overall counterinsurgency campaign. This recommendation was corroborated by an assessment in an April 1986 US Embassy report on the status of the Peruvian military and police. The report stated that the military was still focused on preparation for a two-front conventional war with neighbouring countries and the economic situation did not permit the procurement of equipment they “needed to carry out a successful counter insurgency campaign.”

Again, it is unfortunate that they did not provide an analysis of the overall effectiveness of DIRAS plans and operations for the year. In spite of this shortfall, the Peruvian Army had developed a comprehensive psychological operations campaign.

The 1986 edition of Memoria Anual del Ejercito shows a continuation, and in some instances an increase, in the 1985 activities of DIRAS and its sub-directorates. The sub-directorate of planning and intelligence continued to develop plans that were passed to the sub-directorate of operations. The sub-directorate of training and doctrine continued to review and update the ME 40 series of manuals and conduct training courses for officers and enlisted personnel. An updated version of ME 40–2 Operaciones — Guerra Sicología was published in 1986 which is significant because it had not been updated since 1972. Also in 1986, a US Army Major Davis Decker, a foreign areas officer assigned to the military attaché office at the US Embassy in Lima, wrote a report concerning Peruvian Army training and education methods while he was attending the Peruvian Army Staff
College. In the report, he described the use of rote memorization in the professional military education system for Army officers beginning at the academy, continued at the branch training courses and also at the staff college. The students purchased the answers for the exams from the previous year’s cohort, memorized the answers, and passed the course. There was no emphasis on critical or creative thinking or discussion; in fact this was discouraged. This training model could have had a significant negative impact on the psychological operations capability of the Peruvian Army, if this model was used in the psychological operations courses taught by the sub-directorate of training and doctrine. Successful psychological operations require critical thinking skills combined with advanced knowledge of the language, culture, and socioeconomic conditions of the target population. Moreover, they also require creative approaches to planning and execution of operations. At any rate, on the operational side of DIRAS there was an increase in activity.

The sub-directorate of operations increased its activities from 1985 levels, while Lima remained the primary focus of its activities. They produced 14 TV programs, of 3 or 15 minutes, that were distributed to and televised by various channels in Lima and throughout Peru. They continued extensive use of radio broadcasts and print media in government and main-stream daily, weekly, and monthly publications. One significant publication was an article in Revista Militar del Perú concerning the implementation of psychological operations in support of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategy. The article, which was reprinted from the US Army journal Military Review shows that the Peruvian Army was attempting to distribute knowledge of psychological operations more widely to military personnel beyond the influence on those at formal training courses held in Lima. Additionally, the DIRAS detachments assigned to the regional commands continued to conduct psychological activities and warfare against the Shining Path in their respective areas of responsibility. A US Embassy assessment of the internal conflict on the propaganda front found that “even more than other Latin countries, Peru is heavily oriented towards its capital city” which corroborates findings in Memoria Anual and the Army’s focus on Lima. This report continues:

SL [Sendero Luminoso, i.e. Shining Path] attacks [in Lima] contain a large psychological and propaganda ingredient and build pressure on the government of Peru to react — with psychological measures if nothing else. (A sad commentary on Peru is that the Lima elite generally is blasé about numerous deaths of peasants and rural officials but is deeply disturbed by less important attacks closer to home.)

This assessment explains why the sub-directorate of operations was focused on conducting its psychological operations in Lima.

The 1987 version of Memoria Anual del Ejercito detailed some minor internal reorganization and showed a continuation of 1986 operations. The Comisión Permanente de Historia del Ejercito del Perú (Permanent Commission for History of the Peruvian Army, CPHEP) was established to study the history of the army and write articles and other publications concerning the past heroic efforts of the nation’s soldiers. These writings would be used to improve the morale and esprit de corps of the Army. The sub-directorate of training and doctrine was divided into two sub-directorates called “Training” and “Doctrine, Research, and Development.” The sub-directorate of training completed a basic psychological operations course that was attended by 20 captains and an advanced course that was attended by 20 majors and lieutenant colonels. They also conducted a testing and selection process of candidates for the 1988 courses. The sub-directorate of planning

44 DNSA PE00316, 66.
45 CPHEP, Memoria Anual del Ejercito, 1987, 274.
46 Ibid., 265.
and intelligence began two studies into the psychological profiles of the soldier and the subversive that were designed to gain a better understanding of their target audience. In 1986, the sub-directorate of operations placed more emphasis on supporting the military forces in the emergency zones outside of Lima by increasing the number of short television and radio programs in those areas. Personnel levels reached 81% for officers, 60% for enlisted, and 130% for civilian personnel, which was a slight improvement over previous years.\footnote{Ibid., 267.} In contrast to the self-congratulatory tone of the 1987 report, the US Embassy concluded, in an assessment of the situation in Ayacucho, that “Civic action and Psyops programs are nearly absent.”\footnote{DNSA PE00385, “Embassy Visit to Ayacucho: A Closer Look at the Insurgency,” 11 May 1988, 3.} Moreover, once again there was no evidence in the 1987 edition of Memoria Anual del Ejercito of a concerted effort to assess or evaluate the on-going psychological operations for the year as DIRAS was directed to do. This is a concerning trend, because the military and government leaders were allocating significant resources to DIRAS, but there was no accounting for the impact on the battlefield which would have allowed them to adjust the campaign and make it more effective.

Peruvian Army success at the tactical level

At the tactical level, there is evidence of successful psychological operations by proactive and professional military personnel. The lowest level of command structure and government representation in the rural areas of the Andes was the Army commanders at the bases contraterroristas, or counterterrorist bases.\footnote{Martos et al., 336.} These bases were generally manned by an infantry company, which consisted of three Platoons, and were commanded by a captain. The bases were generally located near a village and on favourable terrain from a defensive military aspect and were modelled after American bases used in Vietnam.\footnote{CEHMP, “En La Selva Central: Ejercito Combate La Subversión,” Actualidad Militar, No. 312, December 1985, 22–26.} The commander of the base near Panchaconas, a small village of approximately 500 residents in Apurímac, the province just south of Ayacucho, was never briefed or informed of the psychological operations strategy. However, he conducted psychological operations activities at the local level grounded in training he received in 1977 at the School of the Americas which was run by the US Army at Fort Gulick in Panama. He employed the three platoons under his command on a rotational schedule: one platoon was on patrol in the area of operations; one platoon provided security for the base; the final platoon conducted civil action projects in support of the local community. These projects included construction, road maintenance, painting, planting and harvesting crops, and participation in community events and festivals. They were designed to endear the military to the locals. One soldier even married a young lady from Panchaconas. The commander also acquired and distributed Video Home System tapes of Hollywood movies to the locals so they could learn about American culture, which was meant to counter the Marxist propaganda of the Shining Path and win over the mothers and young children. He also enforced rules that his soldiers never take anything from the locals or abuse or demean them in any way.\footnote{Interview with a retired Peruvian Army Colonel in Lima, Peru on 8 August 2014.} Psychological operations implemented at the local level by proactive commanders were likely an adjunct to the strategic campaign.

Unfortunately in late 1989, the government decided to close the base in Panchaconas and move the forces to another area that was deemed to be more important. The Shining Path quickly returned and took over the village. In early 1990, following a “People’s Trail” the Shining Path members executed a female Judge named Felicites de Rodas, local leader Rodas Arquino Tienta Alcalde, and a third local leader in the town square. They later rounded up 14 young men and informed them that they were now members of the Shining Path and took them off into the mountains to join a guerrilla column. On the first night of the forced march after departing the village, two of the young men escaped. The following day, they located an Army platoon patrolling the area and led the platoon to the guerrilla column’s location. The Army patrol attacked the column and killed or...
captured the Shining Path members and returned the young men to the village. The base was then re-established to provide security for the inhabitants of Panchaconas. The response of the Panchaconians was positive and they were very thankful of the Army action and provided a high level of support for the military from that point until the end of the war.\(^52\) This is an example of how the immediate response of the Peruvian government quickly solved a security issue for the local population.

Another example of psychological actions at the local level is recounted in *En Honor a la Verdad*, by retired Brigadier General Carlos Bardales Angulo. While he was serving as the commander near the village of Pampa Cangallo in Ayacucho province, he used psychological operations techniques to build rapport with the local population. In an assessment of the nearby village, they noted that the inhabitants were very religious and that the village church was in a bad state of repair and that this may be an opportunity to improve the tenuous relationship with the locals. Working with the church staff, they began a civil action project to rehabilitate it by painting the walls, cleaning, and neatly arranging the interior. A few weeks later the church leader, Monsignor Richter, appeared at the military base and said that upon reflection he wanted to have a closer relationship with the personnel at the military base. They then expanded their relationship and Bardales sent officers to teach in the village school, and Richter and other church members provided religious services at the base.\(^53\) Theidon found that community integration with nearby bases was positive and wrote, “Even though civil-military relations were tense and frequently exploitative, villagers cite the instillation of the base as a key factor in reducing the level of fear.”\(^54\) Bardales’s story is a good example of psychological operations at the local level. While it is difficult to quantify, such activities by proactive commanders certainly were a positive contribution to the war effort. Could they have been a critical component of victory? These examples suggest that could have been possible, had they not had to overcome insurmountable obstacles of human rights abuses on the part of government forces.

The Peruvian government fine tunes its psychological operations capability

In May of 1988, a group of nine Peruvian military officers travelled to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, to work with members of the US Army’s first Psychological Operations Battalion. The effort was known as “Project Inti” and aimed to enhance the psychological operations campaign of the Peruvian military against the Shining Path. During the project, the participants conducted a detailed target analysis and evaluated the vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of the general population and the Shining Path members and potential members. Project members determined that the two susceptibilities that they could potentially exploit successfully were “fear of family safety” and “fear of personal safety” which was based on the analysis that the government abuse of the population was declining while the Shining Path’s violence was becoming more indiscriminate.\(^55\) Based on this, the project members developed print propaganda products which depicted Guzman oppressing the indigenous Andean population. One of the Shining Path’s prominent propaganda posters was modified by a US Army artist and showed him holding the population in chains with one hand and a communist flag in the other, with the staff stabbing and killing a peasant. The words on the poster were changed from “Eight years of popular war” to “Eight years of popular lies” (see Figures 3 and 4).\(^56\) The team also produced a high quality motivational video that glorified the Peruvian armed forces, which according to a US member of the team, was greatly appreciated by the Peruvians who stated that it would have a significant

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52 Interview with a retired Peruvian Army Colonel and a still serving Peruvian Army Sergeant Major in Lima, Peru on 8 August 2014.
53 ACPHEP, interview with Brigadier General (retired) Carlos Bardales Angulo in Martos et al., 315.
54 Theidon, 249.
Figure 3. El Diario "Eight years of popular war!" 7 February 1988

Collection of ephemera from the Peruvian Insurrection. Rare Book Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Reproduced with permission.
impact on the morale of the troops.\textsuperscript{57} Unfortunately, there is no information concerning first Psychological Operations Battalion support following the departure of the Peruvian officers as many of the US members were deployed to Panama shortly after the conclusion of Project Inti.\textsuperscript{58} One officer from the Battalion travelled to Lima in early 1989, but there is no analysis available as to the impact of the propaganda that was developed.

The Peruvian government applied psychological operations across military regions, but the major emphasis was on Ayacucho and Lima. A US Army psychological operations expert noted that “propaganda was developed and distributed willy-nilly and nation-wide based on the analysis of conditions in the heartland of the 1988 Emergency zone.”\textsuperscript{59} A review of the recently released DIRAS documents provides evidence to the contrary. DIRAS deployed detachments to each of the regional commands. These small teams were meant to provide tailored psychological operations support specific to the counterinsurgency efforts of each respective region.\textsuperscript{60} However, the focus on Ayacucho and Lima is clear. A 1990 US State Department report following a trip to Ayacucho by Embassy political officers observed, “the same public attitude toward the police and military in Ayacucho as in most other places in rural Peru. Most of the Quechua-speaking, rural peasants fear and despise the police and army.”\textsuperscript{61} The report continues that while 80% of the population in Ayacucho spoke Quechua, only 10% of the military did, which was a major detriment to psycho-

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\caption{Peruvian Army poster “Eight Years of popular lies!” circa 1989}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{57} Interview with US Army Major (retired) Jose Hernandez in New York on 12 July 2014.
\textsuperscript{58} Yaworsky, 663.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 655.
\textsuperscript{60} ACPHEP, Memoria Anual del Ejercito, 1985, 421.
logical operations in support of the counterinsurgency. The report suggested that while the population hated the police and military this was not a success for the Shining Path: “The army and police are not winning allies. But neither is Sendero Luminoso.”62 These comments justify one of the main strategic aims of the Army’s psychological actions which were to build rapport with the local population. While this is a basic and non-exciting aspect of the capability, it is critical for a successful campaign. The report quoted Mayor Rivera “Ayacucho, both the city and the department, is unimportant to Lima.” And the authors assessed, “The Army campaign in Ayacucho serves one purpose: To deny SL the psychological advantage of winning the department where the SL revolution was born.”63 The fact that much of the population in Ayacucho, and likely across the country, did not trust the government was detrimental to the psychological operations campaign.

The Memoria Anual del Ejercito provided a broad overview of the psychological operations campaign, but tactical operations require a more detailed planning document. One such document outlines a psychological warfare plan to “reduce and destroy the target,” namely the Shining Path leadership operating in Lima.64 By 1990, Guzman was spending much of his time in Lima due to a medical condition that did not permit him to be at high altitudes in Ayacucho or other locations in the Andean mountains.65 The seven-page document provided an analytical overview of the group, including its current condition, positive and negative attitudes, and level of effectiveness. The document then assessed the susceptibilities of the group and opportunities for psychological warfare against it. One of the goals of the plan was to create a wedge between the top leadership of the Shining Path who were debating Guzman’s extreme use of violence and sought to “demonstrate the inconsistencies between Marxist theory and the praxis of terrorism and sabotage.” DIRAS personnel then used their extensive contacts in the press to begin a media campaign to exploit these developments. The debate and internal fighting between senior Shining Path leaders surfaced in the press. While Poole and Renique assert that the success was overplayed,66 the Shining Path’s response through El Dario suggests it had an effect:

The extent to which the reaction lacks perspective in their fight against the People’s War is revealed every time the strategists and ringleaders of the counter-revolution launch their repeated, expensive campaigns of psychological warfare. In May 1990, they raised their humbug of “division” within the PCP-SL and the “surrender of the EGP,” a sequel to the earlier fiasco of their psychological war alleging the “strategic failure of Sendero.”67

This is a rare example of a direct feedback mechanism provided by the enemy and shows that the Peruvian Army may have sown discontent within the senior ranks of the Shining Path. Although the government cannot be fully credited with creating the infighting, the fact that they recognized the fissure and exploited it is impressive. As we tally the growing possibilities for the impact of psychological operations, we begin to get a sense of the costs of undermining them with the racism and violence detailed earlier.

**Downfall of the Shining Path**

On 20 December 1990, US Ambassador to Peru Anthony Quainton wrote in a cable to Washington, “One cannot appear neutral in Ayacucho and survive. If you are radical right, only SL tries to kill you. If you are a terrorist, only the police and military try to kill you. If you are in the middle, both the terrorists and the soldiers want you dead.”68 To add to this confusing milieu, Theidon inter-
viewed a group of women from Accomarca in Ayacucho Province concerning the military base withdrawing from the village. Their collective response is ironic considering the abuses they suffered from the military personnel: “Oh how we cried. We cried! The security they offered us — when the soldiers were here, we could sleep at night. When they left, we thought, who will protect us now?”

Whatever the limits imposed on the Peruvian military’s psychological operations, these pale in comparison to the gift handed to the government side by the gratuitous violence of the Shining Path.

Throughout its existence, the Shining Path used violence and coercion as a means towards its ultimate goal of rebuilding Peruvian society. The bloodletting that was unleashed by the Shining Path in the name of Gonzalo Thought would ironically give the Fujimori Administration the ability to capture the senior Shining Path leadership and end the conflict. The Global Terrorism Database attributes 210 terrorist incidents to the Shining Path between 5 April 1991 and 5 April 1992. Due to this, Fujimori was able to justify autocratic backsliding that culminated with an autogolpe, or self-coup, which suspended the constitution on 5 April 1992. In response, the Shining Path conducted its most significant car bombing on 16 July 1992, in the upscale Lima neighbourhood of Miraflores killing 25 and injuring 140. In Lima, sociologist Pedro Gibaja stated: “We are on the edge of a nervous breakdown.”

University of British Columbia political science professor Maxwell Cameron, author of Democracy and Authoritarianism in Peru asserted, “One of the most astonishing aspects of Peru’s departure from the rule of law was the breadth of popular support received by Fujimori.” An opinion poll shows a 54% approval rating for the presidency in September 1992, up from 42% in March, prior to the autogolpe. This is significant because it demonstrates that the Peruvian people accepted Fujimori’s action with the expectation that it would end the violence.

The result was a police and military that was able to aggressively pursue the Shining Path’s Central Committee. Soon after the autogolpe, police raided one of Guzman’s safe houses in Lima. He was not there, but the raid uncovered 4 tons of propaganda and documents as well as video tapes and pictures of high-level meetings. On 12 September 1992, Guzman was captured in another safe house in Lima, and many of the other top leaders were captured within the next few weeks. This facilitated a strategic governmental propaganda campaign that assisted in the disintegration of the Shining Path. On 24 September 1992, in Lima, the National Police invited journalists to photograph Guzman in captivity, and the pictures were widely circulated across the country in print media (see Figure 5).

The government’s theme following the capture of Guzman was that the Shining Path would never reach its goal of overthrowing the government of Peru, much less the larger aim of world revolution. This theme resonated with less dedicated Shining Path members and supporters who turned away from the organization when it was apparent that victory would not be achieved. While remnants of the Shining Path still exist in 2015, it never regained the momentum and level of threat to democracy that it had before Guzman’s capture. While not conclusive, the available evidence suggests that the government’s victory was aided more by the Shining Path’s extreme violence and terrorism than an effective psychological operations campaign.

69 Theidon, 348.
71 Ibid.
74 Charles Kenney, Fujimori’s Coup and the Breakdown of Democracy in Latin America (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 234.
75 Strong, 46.
77 McClintock, 309.
Conclusion

The use of psychological operations during the internal conflict in Peru with the Shining Path yielded conflicting results. The Peruvian government used psychological operations as an adjunct to its counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies. While the government was slow to react in the early 1980s, it did develop a considerable psychological operations capability. The research process did not uncover any assessments conducted by DIRAS that would have determined whether or not the psychological operations during the conflict were effective. Unfortunately, the widespread abuse of power among the police and military likely negated the potential for success. In the beginning, the Shining Path provided hope for a better life to the Andean peasants, but then quickly lost popular support, possibly due to its own increasingly indiscriminate use of violence and terrorism. Although this article establishes a baseline of knowledge of this aspect of the conflict, additional inquiry combined with quantitative analysis could show causality between human rights abuses and the negation of psychological operations. The key finding of this research is that psychological operations have their limitations and cannot generate popular support when combined with coercion and harshly oppressive measures. The blatant disregard for human life is well-documented on both sides, and it is likely the human rights abuses had a negative impact on the respective goals and objectives.

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