

# Rebels resurface in Peru

## Wary government forces patrol shantytowns

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Special to the Chronicle

HUANCAVELICA, Peru — It's morning, and most of the 3,000 residents in this Andean town have just crawled out of bed. Their community, nestled in a valley along the Ichu River, is as serene as the steep, green, majestic hillsides that guard the town.

But the tranquil hills are deceptive. Lurking in them is a cluster of rebels, the leftovers of Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path, a Marxist-led guerrilla movement that has resurfaced in Peru.

In town, a young police officer patrolling the market points to a spot in the hills. At the moment, he says, a group of officers is roaming the hillside keeping an eye out for the rebels — all of whom have been identified and are gradually being captured, he insists. Like other officials of the government of Peru, he discounts the rebels, saying they do not pose a danger to the country.

The Sendero insurgency has diminished since its leader, Abimael Guzman was captured in 1994 and imprisoned for life, but the peace is precarious, analysts say. They say the country's centralized political system, controlled by President Alberto Fujimori, and an economic crisis could lay the foundation for a comeback or at least make the rebels a permanent fixture in Peru.

But for the moment, the atmosphere is calm, even though the local press from time to time tells of small-scale confrontations between police and the rebels. But this is hardly the same level of terrorism that gripped the country in years past, government officials insist. The political violence, they say, killed 25,000, orphaned 50,000 children and cost \$30 billion in economic losses during the course of 15 years. Still, leaders of non-governmental organizations say that the insurgents' activities have increased since December.

"Right at this moment, we are experiencing a return of Sendero," said Isabel Coral Cordero, president of the Promotion and Population Development Center in Lima. "It's taking advantage of people's discontentment. It's certain that the group is not going to return to the status that it had during 1991 and 1992, but without a doubt it can present a risky situation for the population."

Col. Danilo Guevara Zagarra, spokesman for the national police, denied that the rebels' actions have increased in recent months. Nevertheless, police forces aren't backing off. Nearly one-fourth of the country remains under emergency military control.

The group's strategy is to give people a false sense of security, then strike, observers say. "People forget. The armed forces forget," said Carlos Reyna Izaguirre, director of the data bank and documentation at the Center for Studies and Promotion of Development in Lima. "Three months pass, and the directors of Sendero go back out onto the street and kill another. And that's the way it works. It's a job done by everyone. Underground. Patient. Slow."



Chronicle file photo

Abimael Guzman, leader of the Shining Path insurgents, was captured in 1994 and imprisoned for life in Peru. But the peace is precarious, analysts say.

In Huancavelica, for example, the number of police officers has not diminished. Young police stand on street corners while communicating with walkie-talkies and watching the people pass by. At night, they patrol, looking for rebels who may have come down from the mountains under the cover of darkness.

An estimated 500 Sendero guerrillas remain, officials and analysts say. They are in the shantytowns around Lima, in the mountains in the province of La Libertad, in the valley of the Ene River in the central jungle, and farther north in the jungle in the Upper Huallaga Valley, where the group allegedly finances its operations with drug trafficking.

Police announced last week that they were pursuing a band of terrorists — their term for the rebels — along the Ene River, which resulted in the deaths of various soldiers and rebels. About 300 rebels were reported to have gathered in the area during the end of February.

In addition, a recent investigation by the government's anti-terrorism division found that the group is trying to disrupt the order in Lima's prisons where terrorists are held. The police also have detected infiltration by the rebels' agents once again in San Marcos University, the former site of a Sendero stronghold.

Also, the rebels killed a director of Huaycán, a shantytown near Lima, in March. The remaining community leaders who denounced her assassination received death threats from the group and fled the country last month. Now the rebels are

threatening their spouses.

Some of the town's 300,000 residents say that a band of about 25 rebels is training at night.

The people who live in the shantytown have not been able to forget the past so easily.

"There is still a mistrust, and they prefer not to speak about this subject," said Raquel Reynoso, a social worker at Suyasun, an association that helps families displaced by terrorism. "If you speak about it, you speak in a hushed voice so that no one hears you. No one knows who might be listening."

"Sendero is another one of the fears in society," Reyna said. "It is not something that they believe they have really, completely overcome."

Still, today's atmosphere in Peru is a far cry from the past. In Huancavelica for example, police say there were about 50 explosions a day during the group's height in the late 1980s.

"I was afraid to go out in the street," said Augusta, a middle-aged employee in a cafe in Huancavelica who has family members who were killed by the rebels. "There was dynamite here, dynamite there. They were killing the police, blowing up institutions. One day I went to the church, and they bombed it. The lights went out, and we couldn't leave."

The group began to lose power after the 1992 capture of its leader, Guzman, who was sentenced to life imprisonment. Once in prison, Guzman abandoned his hard-line violence, took a stricter political stance and, according to the government, wrote a letter to Fujimori seeking peace.

Some Peruvians thought it was a trick. The rebels who did not agree with Guzman's about-face formed their own faction under the leadership of Oscar Alberto Ramirez Durand, alias Feliciano. Feliciano's group is credited with the majority of the violence since Guzman's capture.

Police are trying to locate Feliciano, who they believe is hiding near the Ene River.

"Feliciano moves around a lot and protects his movements," Guevara said. "He is watching out for himself too much and distrusts his own followers."

Today Guzman is cooperating with the government to dismantle Feliciano's faction and has persuaded many of Feliciano's followers to join his side. Police allow him to meet with rebels who visit him in prison.

The group, government officials say, also lost strength because of a 1992 repentance law which encouraged its members to give themselves up in exchange for providing information about the group. About 3,000 to 5,000 people turned themselves in, Reyna said.

Most, however, were low-level rebels. Only about 10 were leaders, he said. Most served three to six months in jail while several of the leaders went overseas. To date, 303 rebels have been sentenced to life imprisonment, said Gen. Guido Guevara, president of the Supreme Council of Military Justice.

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