From:

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The Years We Lived in Danger

The Armed Conflict, 1980–1999

The night of 17 May 1980, in the small village of Chuschi in Ayacucho, a group of young people burst into the place where ballot boxes and voting lists were being stored for the national elections taking place the following day, and burned them in the public square. The news was published a few days later in some newspaper, lost among the avalanche of information about the first presidential elections to take place in Peru in seventeen years. In the following months, as the press reported the theft of dynamite in some mines, isolated petards started to explode in unlikely places: the tomb of General Velasco in Lima; a school parade in Ayacucho; a peasant assembly in the same city (DESCO 1989).[1] The situation acquired touches of sinister folklore when toward the end of the year, early rising *limeños* (residents of Lima) found dogs hanging from traffic lights with a sign around their neck that read: "Deng Xiaoping son of a bitch." The government as well as other political forces, including the parties that made up the United Left, downplayed the importance of these events.

If no one paid attention to the first war skirmishes, it was because up until 1980, Shining Path seemed like a small regional organization. It was not visibly present among the large social movements and national strikes that shook the country during 1976–79, hastening the military's return to the barracks. Even in Ayacucho, where Shining Path was born, its social influence appeared

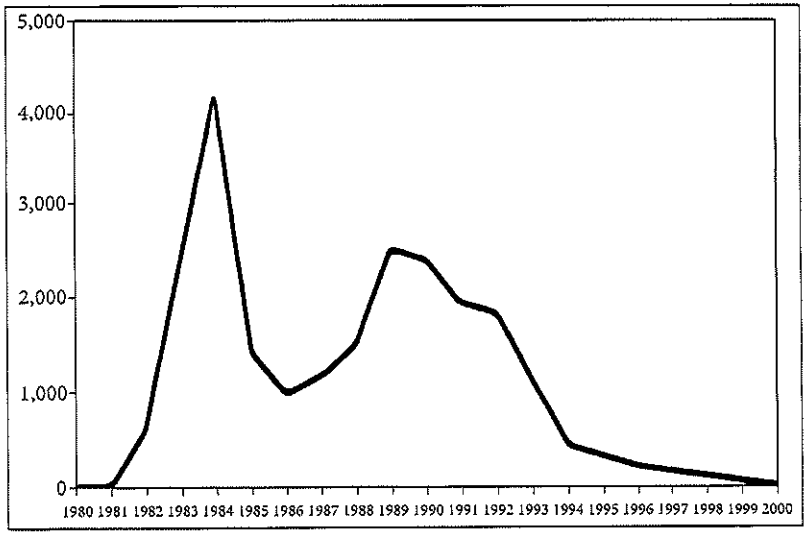
greatly eroded. Until the very moment it launched its armed actions, Sendero's backbone consisted overwhelmingly of professors, college students, and rural teachers. According to party documents analyzed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) and to conversations with Guzmán himself:

> They were always few in number. They wanted to be few.[2] There were 51 militants in the whole country and twelve in Ayacucho at the moment when the faction led by Abimael Guzmán . . . decided to follow its own path in 1970. Including militants and close sympathizers, there were 520 at the start of the armed conflict in 1980 and about 2,700 militants around 1990, without counting those in the Huallaga Valley,[3] when the violence reached its greatest expansion and intensity. (CVR 2003, vol. 2, chap. 1, 23)

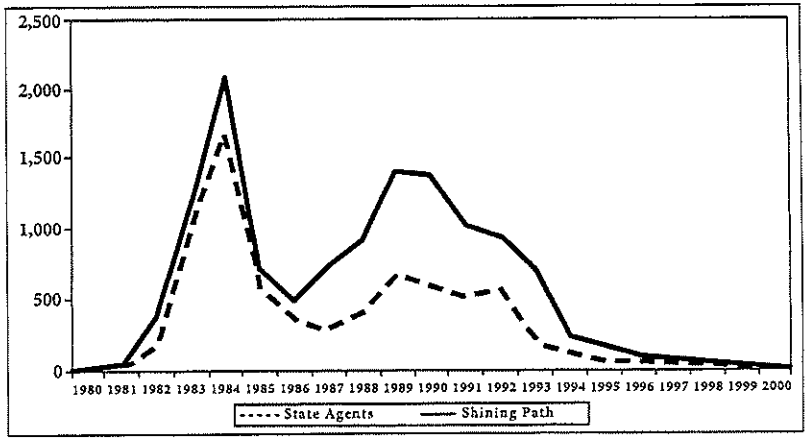
Nevertheless, twelve years later, Shining Path, which claimed that then-remote 17 May as the start of the "people's war" in Peru, had become the most important armed movement in contemporary Peruvian history and certainly the most unusual to arise in Latin America in recent decades. During 1980–82, Shining Path expanded vertiginously in the rural zones of Ayacucho.[4] In response, the civilian government of Fernando Belaúnde (1980–85) entrusted the counterinsurgency fight to the armed forces. In 1983–84, the military unleashed a brutal counteroffensive that resulted in about one-third of the victims killed in the entire conflict, most of them civilian (graph 1). Compared to similar conflicts elsewhere in Latin America, what is astonishing is that during this period, the two adversaries treated the civilian population with equal brutality, especially the indigenous peasantry, as can be observed in graph 2.

Several chapters in this book analyze in more detail the reason for this egregious behavior. In this initial overview, I will expand only on the information provided by graph 2 with the justification offered by Abimael Guzmán after one of the first of the most brutal peasant massacres committed by Senderistas in Ayacucho, when the peasants in Lucanamarca (Ayacucho) rebelled against the Shining Path in early 1983.[5]

> Confronted with the use of armed bands[6] and reactionary military action, we responded decisively with one action: Lucanamarca. Neither they nor we will forget it, of course, because there they saw a response that had not been imagined. There more than 80 were annihilated, that is the reality, and we say it, here there was excess, as was analyzed in 1983, but everything in life has two aspects: our problem was to give a bruising blow to restrain them, to make them understand that the thing was not so easy. . . . The main point is we gave them a decisive blow and we reined them in and they understood that they were facing a type of combatants from the people that they had never fought before, this is what they understood;



Graph 1 Number of deaths and disappearances reported to the truth commission, Peru, 1980–2000



Graph 2 Number of deaths and disappearances reported to the truth commission according to agents principally responsible, Peru, 1980–2000

> the excess is the negative side. Understanding war and based on what Lenin says, keeping Clausewitz in mind, in war the masses in combat can be excessive and express all their hate, the deep feeling of class hatred, repudiation, condemnation, that was the root; that has been explained by Lenin, very clearly explained. Excesses can be committed; the problem is to reach a certain point and not go beyond it, because if you do you get off course, it is like an angle, up to a point it can open up, but not beyond it. If we were to give the masses a set of restrictions, demands and prohibitions, in effect we are keeping the waters from overflowing; and what we needed was for the waters to overflow, for the mudslide to come in, confident that when it comes in it will raze things to the ground but then go back to its course. . . . But, I reiterate, the principal thing was to make them understand that we were a hard bone to chew, and that we were ready to do anything, anything.

Ready for anything against unarmed civilians, one should add.[7] However, while Shining Path was boasting that "the party has a thousand eyes and a thousand ears" and knew where and who to hit, the military engaged in blind repression. As a result, in many parts of Ayacucho, the contradictions between Shining Path and the peasantry that had started to surface at the end of 1982 were deferred. Appearing to be the lesser evil, Shining Path was able to survive and break the siege in Ayacucho. It opened other fronts, especially in the central sierra northwest of Ayacucho, and the Huallaga Valley, which in those years was the principal producer of coca leaf in the world, as well as in Lima (see map 1). In 1986, Shining Path recovered from the massacre in the Lima jails of almost 300 militants accused of terrorism; and in January 1988, it held its first Congress. Soon after, having acquired the cult name "President Gonzalo," Abimael Guzmán gave a very long interview to *El Diario*, his official mouthpiece.[8] The following year, Shining Path started to talk about the transition to "strategic equilibrium" in its war against the "old State."

A Million Deaths to Seize Power

In the closing days of Alan García's government (1985–90), 32 percent of the territory and 49 percent of the population of the country were under military control (Senado de la República del Perú 1992). Hyperinflation bordered on 60 percent monthly, the economic crisis brought havoc to the population and was destroying the state and the social fabric with as much or more efficiency than the insurgency itself. In elections held that same year, the discredit of the political parties led to the triumph of Alberto Fujimori, an outsider whose hard-hitting neoliberal adjustment threw a significant part of the population into extreme poverty. "May the strategic equilibrium shake up the country more," declared Shining Path, which in 1991 believed to have reached such equilibrium. The Shining Path leadership then decided to accelerate the end of the war and to relocate the axis of its actions from the countryside to the city, increasing its pressure on Lima (PCP-SL 1991; Tapia 1997; CVR 2003, vol. 2, chap. 1).

It was around this time that Shining Path also started affirming that the triumph of the revolution would cost a million deaths. It is very possible that one of its objectives was to provoke the armed forces into reproducing the bloodbath that took place in Ayacucho in 1983–84 to an even greater extent, so that Sendero again could appear to the population to be the lesser evil. In any case, the military left them literally "out of the game" when instead of increasing indiscriminate repression they developed a strategy of selective repression, which could be defined as "non-genocidal authoritarian" (Degregori and Rivera 1993). This change of strategy did not signify the end of the dirty war. For three years (1989–91), Peru ranked first in the world among the countries that reported detainees/disappeared. Nevertheless, since the end of the 1980s, this more selective repression was accompanied by a new policy of rapprochement toward the peasantry, which started to or wanted to organize itself into Comités de Autodefensa (Self-Defense Committees, CAD). This rapprochement was difficult, especially because of the military's mistrust of the peasantry and its desire to subordinate it to the strategy of the state.[9] This time it was the armed forces that appeared to be the "lesser evil," and the CADs multiplied over vast areas of the Andes and Amazonia. Thus, Shining Path would suffer its first strategic defeat at the hands of whom it least expected: the poor peasantry, who should have been the "natural" ally of the revolution. This strategic weakness was not noticed in its entirety because of the pressure that Shining Path started to exert over the cities during those same years.

The year 1992 was possibly the worst year in Peruvian contemporary history. Along with the economic crisis, the Shining Path violence increased exponentially. Scores of peasants organized in CADs were massacred in Ayacucho and other Andean provinces. In the cities, the murders of community leaders and local authorities choked and paralyzed social organizations, already very weakened by the crisis. The explosions of powerful car bombs, in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods as well as in poorer areas, "Beirutized" the capital and facilitated the success of the so-called armed strikes, during which Shining Path used panic to immobilize Lima, a chaotic metropolis of some 7 million inhabitants in whose poorest neighborhoods there were more than 100,000 people displaced by the conflict.

Concern about the situation began to transcend Peruvian borders. There was talk of Shining Path or pro–Shining Path cells in Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, and Colombia. Sendero, for its part, started to imagine/wish/warn about a possible North American intervention. Graffiti with the slogan "Yankee go home" appeared on walls in various parts of the country, although in reality the Yankees had not arrived.[10] In March, the U.S. Congress held hearings on the Peruvian situation, during which the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Bernard Aronson, warned about the danger of the "third genocide of the twentieth century" if Sendero prevailed.[11] Shortly after, in a report for the Rand Corporation, one of the witnesses at the hearings, Gordon McCormick, announced the possibility of a siege of Lima and the collapse of the government. In his overblown words: "Whether Shining Path triumphs or fails in this effort will depend much more on Shining Path as an organization than any realistic set of responses on the part of the Peruvian government, which has shown scarce understanding of the insurgency and even less ability to stop it" (McCormick 1992, 78).

As if to prove McCormick right, on 22 and 23 July, a fierce armed strike shocked Lima. Sendero's cells all celebrated a toast to the "consolidation of strategic equilibrium." Days later, during an interview for the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, the spokesman for Shining Path in Europe, Luis Arce Borja, declared euphorically: "We are about to take power. The enemy is demoralized . . . cornered. There is no choice but to surrender unconditionally. There is nothing to negotiate."

Shortly before, on 5 April 1992, the besieged Peruvian democracy had teetered, pushed by the president, who dissolved Congress with the support of the armed forces, and took over the judicial branch and regional governments, concentrating power.

In August 1992, energized by its advance in the cities, which papered over its Achilles' heel in the countryside, Sendero's Central Committee approved the initiation of its Great Military Plan VI, which would lead them to "fight for power in the whole country" and to "consolidate the strategic equilibrium at the national level." On the political plane, this meant "making the country ungovernable."[12] Submerged in a kind of fatalistic paralysis, Lima awaited the new Shining Path offensive, which was programmed to coincide with the elections for a new Constitutional Congress that President Fujimori had been forced to convene under pressure from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United States.

In contrast, to the average Shining Path militant, Guzmán truly appeared capable of interpreting the laws of history and of molding it with the precision and ease of a virtuoso. The revolutionaries had found the fourth sword; they

were on track to make an irreversible revolution that would not repeat the mistakes of those who preceded them. The retreats, the partial defeats, the strategic mistakes, and the geological faults of the Sendero project were not noticed or were ultimately left as the smooth edges of what looked like the curve of an ever-increasing slope. Within that long march, Guzmán was placed at the highest peak. He was "the most grandiose fruit of conscious matter, engendered and forged by the class, by the communist proletariat: the leader of the worldwide revolution . . . synthesis of a million wills, light, teacher and guide of communists and revolutionaries that make up the people . . . leader of the oppressed and the exploited to their emancipation" (*El Diario*, 13 December 1991).

Gonzalo appeared not only as the interpreter of the laws of history but also as the military leader unreachable by the repressive apparatus of the "old State." He was everywhere and nowhere: "They looked for him simultaneously abroad, among the workers, peasants, intellectuals, everywhere. But he can be found in every Shining Path cell, in every unit of the Popular Guerrilla Army (EGP), in every People's Committee. . . . He is personally directing the revolution, he is presiding over the Popular Republic of Peru that advances towards the final victory."

And then, the night of 12 September, Abimael Guzmán was captured without a single shot being fired by agents of the National Counterterrorism Directorate (DINCOTE), a specialized branch of the National Police.[13] Never in contemporary Peru did the fortune of a single individual change in such a sudden and profound way, literally overnight, the mood of the country. The sensation of relief that swept over Peru, in all its geography and social diversity, was proportional to the fear and demoralization experienced until the day before. Because by then, with the exception of very discrete demographic and geographic pockets, Shining Path had been repudiated by the vast majority, especially due to its increasing violence against the peasantry in the countryside (graph 2) and its terrorist acts in the cities.

With Guzmán fell two of the three members of the Permanent Bureau of the Central Committee, the highest level of leadership, as well as voluminous party archives.[14] In the following months, the captures proceeded in rapid succession. At the end of 1992, nineteen of a total of twenty-two members of Shining Path's Central Committee were in prison.

In twelve days, Guzmán was convicted and sentenced to life in prison by a military tribunal under draconian laws, not recognized by the international community, that had been promulgated by Fujimori's government after the self-coup of 1992.[15] On 24 September, the government's clumsy psychological warfare maneuver of showing the convict to the press inside a cage wearing a

striped prison uniform was taken advantage of by Guzmán to harangue his followers to ratify the application of the Great Military Plan VI: "May the strategic equilibrium shake the country!" After the speech he was taken to a high security prison to spend the remainder of his life.

Defending the Life and Well-Being of President Gonzalo

As proof of their stubborn political will, by early 1993 the national leadership of Shining Path had been rebuilt to some degree. Subsequently, and in much smaller waves than in the previous months, they reinitiated military actions, but their political and psychological impact was not the same. The elections to the Constitutional Congress were held without incident in November 1992; in good measure, so were the municipal elections in January 1993. Sendero was similarly able to mobilize its small but active international solidarity network.[16] "Committees for the defense of the life and well-being of Dr. Abimael Guzmán" were formed in various places.

In September 1993, Shining Path mobilized to mark the first anniversary of the capture of its leader. While its military apparatus attacked in different areas of the country, several cities in Europe and the United States held solidarity meetings for the "most important political prisoner in the world."[17] Although it did not reach the level of the 1992 actions, the offensive served to lift the spirits of the followers of Gonzalo. "What good has it been for the puppet Fujimori, twisted oriental snake, to imprison the greatest living Marxist-Leninist-Maoist? Nothing, since the popular war advances unstoppably," they declared defiantly (*El Diario Internacional* 1993).

They did not suspect that on 1 October 1993, fate, or perhaps "the laws of history," had a new surprise in store for them. In his speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations, Alberto Fujimori read a letter sent to him by Abimael Guzmán, addressing him as President of the Republic and asking for peace talks. The letter stated:

> Mister President: We come to you as leader of the Peruvian State to ask that you convene talks that lead to a Peace Accord, the implementation of which may lead to the conclusion of the war that the country has endured for over thirteen years. We take this transcendent step based on our class ideology and class principles, securely confident in its historic need and with a clear understanding that it reflects what has become the need of the Peruvian people, nation and society as a whole. Please, Mr. President, consider and accept our request / Callao Military Naval Base, September 15, 1993. / (Signed) Abimael Guzmán R. (President Gonzalo) and Elena Albertina Iparraguirre Revoredo (comrade Miriam). (various Peruvian dailies)

The request to initiate talks was absolutely unexpected considering that one of the pillars of Shining Path's identity was to consider any negotiation synonymous with treason. To address Fujimori as president was also exceptional, since Sendero never recognized his legitimacy; they considered him a representation of the "old State" in contrast with the authentic "President Gonzalo."[18]

Shining Path's response was as fast as its battered logistical machine would allow. In a Declaration dated 7 October, the new leadership rejected the letter as an "absurd and ridiculous story that no one with half a brain could take seriously and that will vanish like its predecessors in the whirlwind of the People's War." At the same time, with even greater hyperbole they stood by their recognition of "our beloved, heroic and respected President Gonzalo, the greatest Marxist-Leninist-Maoist living on earth . . . [who] with his unfading light, the almighty Gonzalo Thought . . . has brought us here and leads us to the golden and resplendent communism with a firm and secure hand" (PCP-SL 1992b).

By then, however, a second letter had appeared, in which Guzmán not only reaffirmed his request to establish peace talks but also recognized the merits of the self-coup of 5 April 1992. This second letter started by justifying the Shining Path insurgency against "a state system of bourgeois pseudodemocracy and outmoded parasitic political parties; a society from whose oppression and exploitation the people have suffered for centuries." He then criticized the government of Belaúnde, who "after calling us 'cattle thieves' unleashed a bloody repression of the people"; and Alan García, who "after saying he would not fight 'cruelty with cruelty' followed a genocidal path all the same, plunging the country into the worst economic crisis in its history." Next, the greatest of surprises:

> And then you come to power. And the facts show that your management has achieved objective advances, especially after the events of 5 April 1992, a situation that was clearly arriving as necessary for the Peruvian state, to which end the foundations for the economic process and for advancing the readjustment of the state have been established; and as far as what concerns us directly, from that date and under your political direction, it has developed a coherent and systematic strategy implemented at various levels, especially in the field of intelligence, achieving real successes, especially in the capture of cadres and leaders, including the signatories of this

letter, which is evidently the most important success of the Peruvian state under your leadership during these thirteen years of war. (*Caretas*, 14 October 1993, 12–13)

The letter, which criticizes the democratic governments and praises the authoritarian government resulting from the self-coup of 1992, in addition to illustrating how extremes can touch each other, suggests some sort of Stockholm syndrome with traces of masochism. As with the first letter, it was signed by Guzmán and Elena Iparraguirre, admitted that Sendero's situation could not be resolved for a long time, and ended by calling for "a new historic decision": fight for a peace accord, given that "peace has become a need for the people, the nation and Peruvian society as a whole" (ibid.).

The suspicions that Guzmán had been tortured psychologically and undergone "brainwashing" arose not only among Senderistas but also among opposition groups. In order to convince the nonbelievers, Abimael himself showed up days later on TV, leaner but healthy, wearing a Mao style jacket instead of his striped prison uniform, with beard and hair trimmed and apparently dyed. It was not enough. Some Shining Path leaflets talked about a double, a look-alike that was usurping the personality of president Gonzalo, who might well be dead. But the Red Cross was able to access the prisoner and confirmed that he was in good condition.

El Diario Internacional (September 1993) then published a special issue whose main feature was titled "President Gonzalo replies." In four pages of interview format, the arguments laid out in the letters were refuted based on texts that Guzmán himself had written between 1980 and 1992.

—What is dialogue for President Gonzalo?

—. . . dialogue is a sinister trade . . . [that] seeks to undermine the people's war. (Guzmán 1991c, 16)

—What would be Shining Path's condition for dialogue?

—. . . we do not want a Peru of the north and Peru of the south, we want one Peru. That is our condition, exact, complete, and absolute surrender. (Guzmán 1988)

—Is it correct to call the coup perpetrator Fujimori "President of the Republic"? Is it perchance a legitimate regime?

—Fujimori has placed himself outside of the Constitution. . . . Article 82 of the Constitution establishes that no one owes allegiance to a regime that is unconstitutional and that the right to insurgency applies . . . (Guzmán 1992, 2)

—What is the position of Shining Path on Fujimori's military coup?

—. . . the *coup d'etat* of April 5 is one more step in the process of absolute centralization of the Peruvian reaction. . . . The genocidal dictatorship of today will sow more hunger and more repression against our people . . . (Guzmán 1992, 1, 4, 5)

—Could there be a political motive that would lead Sendero's leaders to stop and paralyze the revolutionary war?

—The leadership could be disappeared, in part, not all of it, but those who remain should and can continue with the plans, the fight, the people's war; we are forged in the revolution that does not stop, does not paralyze. (Guzmán 1993, 3)

—What would be the historical result of going back on the armed struggle?

—We have preached, call to arms. . . . Our voice has not fallen on the desert, the seed fell on fertile ground, it is starting to sprout. . . . Those to whom we said stand up, rise up in arms . . . they respond: we are ready, guide us, organize us—let's act! . . . Either we carry out what we promised or we will be a laughingstock, unfaithful traitors. And that we are not. (Guzmán 1990a)

The party can no longer develop any more but through war, through the armed struggle. (Guzmán 1990b)

Nevertheless, on 28 October 1993, on the eve of a referendum convened by the government to approve a new constitution, Guzmán appeared again on television.[19] This time he was accompanied by five members of the governing body of Shining Path, several of them moved to Lima from the high security prison of Yanamayo (Puno), at the far southern end of the country. The imprisoned command had signed a letter composed after a meeting with Guzmán in which they accepted their leader's turnabout and called on their free comrades not to fall into "provocations" and to "fight for a peace accord" (Lima newspapers and magazines).

This time the response came from the "Committee of relatives of political prisoners and war prisoners and the disappeared of Peru," which in a communiqué condemned "with categorical class hate, the sinister action of this handful of well-known and proven capitulators, informants, cowards of low morals that would not offer their lives, excrements of a revisionist bitch, lackeys of Yankee imperialism and of the genocidal and treasonous dictatorship . . . [who attempt] in vain to sow surrender in our heroic people, liquidate the party and annihilate the people's war" (Lima newspapers and magazines).

In the following months, however, reality in all its grayness started to impose itself over the Senderistas. Guzmán not only wrote letters but also apparently prepared documents for the celebration of a Shining Path Congress II (which could only take place with the acquiescence of the National Intelligence Service). In an extensive document that was leaked to the press, Guzmán expanded on the arguments of his second letter and called to "Accept and Fight for a New Decision and a New Definition" of similar importance to that taken by the party in 1980 when it decided to initiate the armed struggle: to fight for a peace accord and move on to a new stage of "political war" (Guzmán 1994b).

The letters of October 1993 and the "new great decision" to fight for a peace accord had a devastating effect among the Senderista ranks. Those who subsequently recurred to the law of contrition numbered in the hundreds, because by soliciting a peace accord—something that for any other armed group in Latin America would have been considered within the realm of possibilities, or at the very least would not be viewed as sacrilege—Guzmán brought to the foreground one of the most profound fractures within Sendero's identity as it was constructed in the 1977 to 1980 period: the intensification of a double register, simultaneously scientific and mystic.

Because what for Guzmán constituted, at least in part, an intellectual construct was assumed for thirteen years by the militants as a religious identity and lived almost as a mystical rapture. It was faith that in the final instance moved the Shining Path "war machine." In this context, the leader's imprisonment did not signify the end. Many divinities and many mythical heroes have spent "a season in hell." Nor was prison an irreversible condition. Sendero organized a brigade in charge of Gonzalo's rescue (*Semanario Sí*, 24 April 1993). Not even death would have meant the definitive defeat. *Gonzalo, el mito* (Roldán 1990, 53) would have fed the imagery of the hard-line Shining Path core a long time after his physical disappearance.[20] Thus the astonishment when the god of war decided to become a human being again, a run of the mill politician, to be more precise.

The Last Temptation of President Gonzalo, or a (Partial) Return to Realism

And you leave, holy shepherd
your flock in this valley
deep, dark
with loneliness and tears
Fray Luis de León

In the wake of his letters there was talk about the presumed cowardice of Guzmán, about his incapacity to withstand solitary confinement; also about possible psychological tortures and brainwashing. Even if there was some truth in these statements, they fail to explain the core: his bureaucratic side, overshadowed for a long time by prophetic discourse and war, was what made Guzmán's great turnaround in prison possible. If we remember him in 1970, holed up in the university and employed by a regime that he labeled as fascist, some of his current behavior is apparent. Back then he talked about the "defense of the university"; today he writes about the "defense of the party." In both cases, it was also about the defense of his self. He wants to return to the tactic of the 1970s while disregarding thirteen years of *jihad* and the deification of his personality.[21] By manipulating Christian symbols and Marxist concepts he constructed a quasi-divine image,[22] fed it to the point of paroxysm, and when he judged it convenient, decided to leave it as if changing skin. He decided to come down from the cross, paraphrasing Nikos Katzansakis in *The Last Temptation of Christ*. That was possible because the prophet was never able to subordinate the Stalinist politician in him. Intellectual construction, manipulation, whatever the term and whatever the degree, the deification was always instrumental.

Mao's affirmation, "except for power, everything is an illusion," always had a central place in "Gonzalo Thought." If that were true, then the party, privileged instrument of the conquest of power, was the only real thing. Society became an illusion. That is why when he/Shining Path decide(s) that a peace accord is convenient, suddenly everything changes. The accord becomes "historical need of the people, of the nation, even of Peruvian society as a whole" (second letter to Fujimori, in *Caretas*, 14 October 1993, 12–13).

Imbued with a sudden realism, as if after a hallucinatory voyage, the cosmocrat appears at long last to see what was long clear to ordinary mortals. His interpretation of the critical world juncture is upended. Until 1991, Shining Path affirmed that we were living "the strategic offensive of the world revolution" (PCP-SL 1991). After 1992 it recognizes that the initiation of armed actions in 1980 was not the start of the strategic offensive of the world revolution (!) and that we are experiencing "an international context of a general imperialist offensive, of a general political retreat of the world proletarian revolution, that must be counted in decades, at least more than one" (PCP-SL 1993).

Guzmán's success in gathering his followers around the new great decision was uneven. It was better received among the imprisoned militants, not only because he had access to them directly or through his already convinced lieutenants but because prisons are the habitat par excellence for Guzmán, who never operated in open spaces. He was undefeated in debates and party

events attended only by small nuclei of leadership, unmatched in the handling of Stalinist teachings, and tireless in "pounding" ideas into the mind of militants until they were completely enclosed in circular arguments, trapped in the spider web of a closed discourse made with the sticky thread of confirming citations. It is there, moreover, where coercion of the group over individuals could be exerted with better success and where the superior could exercise in more direct manner his influence over the lower rungs of the hierarchy.[23]

Guzmán also had more success among followers who were the most committed to the vicissitudes of the political line. He was also successful among Sendero's old guard, especially those from the ancient Stalinist Peruvian Communist Party, heirs to the Communist Parties of the Third International, who, as is well known, were accustomed to the most abrupt turns and the most surprising pacts. Finally, Guzmán's new discourse enjoyed higher acceptance among those who were members of the party apparatus than among those who were part of the military apparatus. He could convince these groups not only because of his longstanding and undisputed leadership but because they shared an identity and the basic language that have remained unchanged.

The new great decision did not imply, in turn, an abandonment of the dogma. The turnabout took place within the frame of the strictest orthodoxy, resorting simply to other citations, to the Lenin of *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, for example. That is why Guzmán asserts that the peace accord "does not imply and cannot imply capitulation, surrender, much less reneging on our class ideology." The people's war has only been suspended "temporarily," since class war has two forms: "First bloodless: 'politics is war without bloodshed' and second: bloody, 'war is politics with bloodshed'" (PCP-SL 1993).

The shedding of skin would be, then, only an appearance. To his followers, he continued to be the cosmocrat, capable of masterfully interpreting the laws of history. It is history that commands now, through Guzmán's mouth, to wait a few decades. Those who do not understand him are "a handful of military punks hung-over on political adventures . . . spilling their drool of defeat [to President Gonzalo]" (Guzmán 1994b).

To an external observer, however, the religious superstructure built by Shining Path had crumbled. But in contrast to other experiences in Latin America or Eastern Europe, the Stalinist dogma remained as a geological bedrock. And it is here that as the prophet steps down from his pedestal, what remains is an antediluvian politician who speaks only of "the temporary suspension of the people's war" turning it for the time being into a "political war," and though he may well ask for a "peace accord," he confirms his rejection of elections and representative democracy (Guzmán 1994b).

In Search of the Fifth Sword

The division that, in spite of everything, was produced by "the new great decision" was a serious blow to a party that with Guzmán as a "cosmocratic" figure had achieved the feat of exacerbating the "fight between the two lines" of Maoist tradition to an unprecedented degree, and that at the same time had managed to avoid the classical divisions of the Left, forging instead a unity that appeared unbreakable, organic. As a grassroots militant in the 1980s affirmed:

> I do not think as a person any longer. One feels the party as oneself, I am the party . . . and everything we do and think is part of the party. Such is the political mutual understanding that we have, that we draw the same conclusions no matter how far we are from each other. It is the same thing in politics, and better still in the military realm. There may be a column that wanders off because the enemy besieges and divides it. Those two commands know what to do. The unit is so strong that we all have the same initiative. Without coordinating, we coordinate. (Roberto)[24]

Under the leadership of Alberto Ramírez Durand ("Feliciano"), the only member of Sendero's politburo who was not captured in September 1992, the dissidents called themselves first "Red Path" (Sendero Rojo) and later the faction "Carry On" (Proseguir). Red Path tried to continue the war under the worst of conditions: pursued relentlessly by the armed forces, infiltrated by the state intelligence apparatus, running against the demoralization that corrodes the periphery and even the cadres that remain free, with the fear of being denounced by members of Black Path (Sendero Negro), as those aligned with Guzmán are called, overwhelmed by the weight that he conserves after thirteen years of deification. "President Gonzalo is the armed struggle," according to the Shining Path hymn. No one can fill this vacuum, because no one could become a cosmocrat and accumulate so much symbolic capital in such a short time.

Feliciano's followers have proceeded to recast themselves timidly, attempting to delink "Gonzalo Thought" from the concrete man Abimael Guzmán. But this turns out to be very difficult since the "gonzalistas" answer that "only President Gonzalo is capable of generating Gonzalo Thought" and accuse those who want to continue the armed struggle of "committing a monstrous crime against the party, the class, the people and the revolution." Deaf to these criticisms, the felicianistas have tried to hide the sun with one finger and "continue the people's war . . . developing the strategic equilibrium for the conquest of power in all of the country" (*Semanario Sí*, 25 April 1994), as if

nothing had changed.[25] But any possibility of achieving this disappeared early on. According to reliable statistical indicators, already in 1994, Sendero's armed actions had dropped to 1982 levels (IDL 1994).

This sad reality filters through, in spite of all their precautions, into Red Path's documents; for example they reproduce a quote from Lenin that reads: "We march in a small united group along a rocky and difficult road, tightly holding hands. We are surrounded by enemies on all sides, and almost always we have to march under fire" (*Semanario Si*, 25 April 1994, 93). And we have become orphans, they should have added.

By the mid to late 1990s, Red Path became silent, concentrating all its strengths on mere survival. The silence became even denser after the capture of the national leaders surrounding Feliciano. Those who are taken prisoner are thrown like Daniel into the lion's den in the quarters of the "accordists" and, if necessary, are sent to President Gonzalo, who, with his new realism and the fascination that he still holds over his followers, proceeds to "hammer their hard heads until their speculations are shattered into pieces," until finally they are converted to the new great decision.[26] Thus, around September 1995, many long, monotonous self-criticisms by Feliciano's followers were broadcast on television—Margie Calvo, Rodolfo Cárdenas Ruiz—recognizing their errors like in an extravagant version of the famous Moscow show trials, in which the chief justice ends up being sentenced to life.

Those who do not die in combat or end up in prison will continue fighting; some isolated pockets of Red Path perhaps will prevail even after Feliciano's capture, like those Japanese soldiers lost in the islands of the South Pacific, who either ignored or refused to accept that the war had ended. But it will be impossible for them to serve as a basis to reconstruct a Shining Path project. Because it will be impossible in their lifetimes to find the "5th sword of Marxism." In Peru or anywhere in the world.