

Taking Down the Tupac Amaru: A Personal Account

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See also <http://security.pr.erau.edu/search.php?query=tupac+amaru&searchtitle=1>

Abstract

This article was submitted by Cesar Gayoso, Policy Analyst and Editor of Taller de Psicología, who is affiliated with Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. He also is an IBPP Regional Editor and he desires commentary from readers. His article is a personal account of the political psychological effects of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement's (MRTA) takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru, the Peruvian government's operation to end the takeover and free hostages, and the operation's aftermath. Readers should also consult "Taking Down the Tupac Amaru: The Best and Worst of Counterterrorism" in IBPP, Vol. 2, No. 5, May 2, 1997.

Today at 3:20 PM, the residence of the Japanese ambassador, Morihika Aoki, has been rescued from the hands of the terrorist group, MRTA. For 126 days 72 persons, foreign and Peruvian diplomats, people of large Japanese enterprises, and Peruvian congressmen, were held. Three people have died in the surprise assault--two officials of the army and Giusti Acuna, member of the Peruvian Supreme Court. The lives of the Peruvian Foreign Affairs Minister, Francisco Tudela; the Japanese ambassador; and other diplomats--like the ambassador of Bolivia, Jorge Gumucio, formerly of the office of the United Nations Information Center--have been saved.

>From 3:20 PM to 7:30 PM, all the mass media in Peru--TV, radio--and other international channels like CNN were showing images around the world and commenting on the embassy assault. The Peruvian president, Alberto Fujimori, went to the residence and spoke in front of the main door--although minutes later the bombs continued exploding. Afterwards, he gave a press conference at the same site with information about the strategic plan Chavin de Huanta.

But what does the success of the rescue mean to a country like Peru? First, perhaps, there's an end to a certain degree of fear. The situation was creating a feeling of high sensitivity to the uncertainty among Peruvians. A feeling of insecurity was growing and a sensation of ungovernability was becoming stronger every day. It is symptomatic that delinquency was growing in Lima like never before in its history, and the President has had to talk about this problem.

Lima, like never in its history, is full of private police. The assault of the terrorist group has increased uncertainty and shown that the law can be broken. There is a paranoid silence and the people's sense of a private space is uniquely imbued with concerns for survival. A question of the middle class in Lima may be, "If there is no security in the houses of high decisionmakers, how is it going to be for me?"

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Second, the attack on the residence of the Japanese ambassador has had a high symbolic representation. There is vulnerability in the private space of the people--who can provide security and reinforce the respect for law? The absence of a good answer to this question over most of four months has produced the growing of paranoid images and the sense that it is easy to break the rules of the system without punishment. It showed the weakness of the Peruvian state and the strength of the informality phenomenon in an anomic society. So the image of the enemy grows with intensity.

The state was paralyzed in processing the growing international and domestic pressures--particularly President Fujimori who has almost always had authoritarian attitudes and perceptions. For there was significant Japanese government pressure and there was the threat to the life of his brother who was in the residence. The institutions of the state could not easily use force, although force is one of the real bases of law.

Never in the worst years of terrorism, in the fight against Abimael Guzman and the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso, has Lima ever been so full of security personnel. The situation at the Japanese ambassador's residence and the absence of an answer by the Peruvian state has had a high symbolic resonance.

The Peruvian has always used--like a mechanism of defense--the negation of reality, the "invisibility of danger", although he is highly conscious of it. (Peruvian citizens began to react with force against terrorism when after 10 years of bombs and murders in the mountain regions, a large bomb of the Sendero Luminoso exploded in an important commercial area in Lima--Tarata street in Miraflores.) He has closed off his intimacy, he has built great walls around him. Generally his life has moved within him. (To this I have to add that there is not much nightlife in Lima, unlike other cities of South America, although Lima has nearly 10 million inhabitants.) His security concerns have been drawn within his particular space--his house--and with the action at the the Japanese residence his security has suffered a great impact. This is especially true of the middle class.

Now security is not only a problem for other people; now it can really be a problem for oneself. His image of his private space and of his family has been affected and with this all his environment and future perspective.

Third, there are security concerns that the fight against terrorism continues, that terrorism has not been destroyed as the President had stated. Now there is a certain degree of security in relation to the mechanisms of the state. The fourteen terrorist have died, but the fear has not finished. Now the people are awaiting a new attack. This relates to the terrorists being dead--some via orders that there were to be no prisoners.

Fourth, there is a certain degree of different attitudes between people of the lower class who live in poor zones of Lima and the middle class. One indicator of this was the commentary on December 31, 1996 from three radio stations in Lima concerning a survey about who should be the Man of the Year. (The stations were Radio Libertad, Radio del Pacifico, and Radio Programas del Peru. The first radio station has a line

opposite the government.)The answer was Cerpa Cartollini, the commandant of MRTA--because "he was brave to give face against the liberal political economy" of the President at a moment when unemployment was growing. (The quote is from an administrative personnel of a university in Lima. Unemployment was near 51%.) Another indicator was a smaller number of Peruvian flags in the poor zones, while the residencial zones--Miraflores, San Isidro, La Molina--and others of the middle class--Pueblo Libre, Jesus Maria, and zones of the Cercado of Lima--were full of flags. These indicators reinforce a reality of two histories, of two peoples in Lima.

All this is in a context where the government has been frequently using the strategy of the intelligence services to make domestic politics. The psychological war has not finished. (See Fiske, A.P., & Tetlock, P.E. (1997.) Taboo tradeoffs: Reactions to transactions that transgress the spheres of justice. *Political Psychology*, 18, 255-298; Haney, C., Banks, C., & Zimbardo, P. (1973.) Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1, 69-97; Rouhana, N.N., & Korper, S.H. (1997.) Power asymmetry and goals of unofficial third party intervention in protracted intergroup conflict. *Peace and Conflict*, 3, 1-18.)(Keywords: Hostages, Terrorism.)