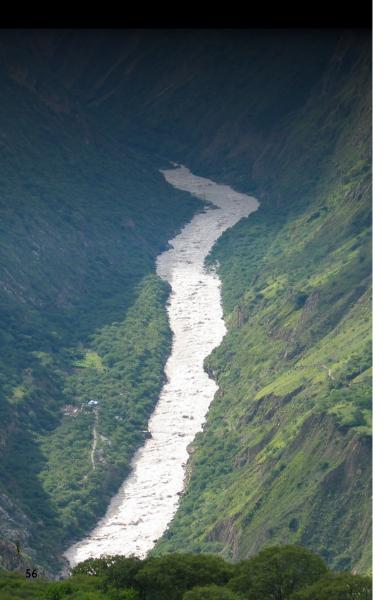
THE CTX INTERVIEW

General Manuel Alvarez, Peruvian Army, retired

Interviewed by Sally Baho, US Naval Postgraduate School



n 27 April 2021, Brigadier General Manuel Alvarez, retired, of the Peruvian Army, was interviewed virtually by Sally Baho of Global ECCO. They discussed General Alvarez's role in combating the violent revolutionary group Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso* in Spanish), starting in the early 1980s, and his observations on the current social and political situation in Peru. General Alvarez was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the Peruvian Army in 1973 and retired as a Brigadier General in 2006.¹

SALLY BAHO: Start off by telling us about your military career, which coincided with the domestic terrorism of the Shining Path.

GENERAL MANUEL ALVAREZ: My name is Augusto Manuel E. Alvarez Torres. I am a retired Brigadier General, having served in the Peruvian Army for 39 years as an active-duty officer. Following that, I was an intelligence instructor at the Peruvian Army War College for 16 years, which totals about 55 years of service in the Armed Forces.

From 1980 to 2000, Peru lived through a period of very strong terrorism, with two main terrorist organizations operating in Peru: the Shining Path and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. Even now, there is a remnant faction of the Shining Path that operates in the valleys of the Apurímac River.

The problem with the Shining Path began on 17 May 1980, when it launched its first attack in the town of Chuschi. On 24 April 1983, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement attacked the police station in Villa El Salvador, which is a district south of Lima. Faced with the different movements and attacks that were taking place, Fernando Belaúnde Terry, the president at the time, did not think that these were terrorist attacks; rather, he believed that they were carried out by cattle rustlers.² Later, he said that the attackers were guerrillas, and the Minister of the Interior agreed. Belaúnde Terry and his cabinet didn't know who they were facing; they did not know what the attacks meant or what those conducting the attacks wanted. As time went on, these types of attacks became more frequent and began to look like the attacks of terrorist organizations, as they targeted police stations, ambushed police patrols, and carried out an assault on the central prison of Huancayo to release prisoners detained for terrorism. It became clear that these attacks were more than just small crimes or guerrillas and bandits: this was organized crime.

Members of the Shining Path had been training since 1968. Although they began their armed fight in 1980, they had formed cadres during those 12 years of preparation. In April of 1980, they created the first Shining Path Revolutionary Military School, in Ayacucho, and the first course to train those who would lead the armed fight. This was the first and only graduating class of Shining Path commanders.

In May 1980, Shining Path began a war against the people by burning down a school that was serving as a polling place. They burned all the ballot boxes. Again, the government did not react, so the Shining Path continued to grow and spread through the Central Sierra, especially in Ayacucho. After numerous attacks, the Peruvian government mobilized the Armed Forces in December 1983 and declared Ayacucho to be in a state of emergency.

Here in Peru, we have an article in the constitution that gives the president the authority to determine a state of war in two cases. The first case is the "state of siege" and applies to an external war: in other words, Peru is at war with another country. The other, which is the "state of emergency," addresses a domestic insurgency or subversion. Both cases require Congressional approval. But I would like to clarify that in Peru, we do not use the word "insurgency" because insurgency is addressed in our constitution. The people have the right to rise against the government, but not against a de facto government elected by the people and supported by the Armed Forces. That is why those who try to overthrow a legitimately elected government and change the structures to a radical ideology are not called insurgents, but subversives. That is how it all started, and it is an important point to understand about the domestic terrorism of the Shining Path. Shining Path slowly gained influence over more and more of Peru. I say influence because they did not control these regions, but influenced them by terror. By 1988, Shining Path dominated 18 of the 23 regions of Peru.

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But let me go back. In 1983, the Armed Forces began combating the Shining Path in the countryside. Because the Shining Path was unable to fight the Armed Forces, it moved to the cities. The group didn't capture or control the cities, but had a lot of influence in the big cities of Peru: Lima, the capital; Trujillo, to the north; in the south, Tacna on the border with Chile; and Moquegua and Arequipa on the border with Bolivia. In the Central

Sierra, Ayacucho, which is where the Shining Path originated, was considered its stronghold. It also had a presence in Huancavelica, and even in the Northern Sierra, the Ancash region, the Cajamarca region, and the Huánuco region. In the jungle, it controlled the central areas, the department of Cerro de Pasco and the region of Ucayali. It controlled very little in the Amazon. For example, it had very little influence in Iquitos, which is an important city in the Amazon but is surrounded by rivers, the main one being the Amazon. Iquitos is practically an island; the Shining Path couldn't "act" there because there would have been no way to escape. That is why the terrorism of the Shining Path was hardly felt in Iquitos. The terrorism felt in the other regions included massacres in Lucanamarca, where approximately 80 villagers died, including men and women, the elderly, and children.



During those two years, we fought the Shining Path at close range, in the middle of the jungle or in small towns. In one sector of the jungle, they had practically decimated the entire population by machete.

Also, there was the infamous "caravan of death" in Ayacucho. Comrade José, who was in command and drove the caravan of death, went from town to town assassinating people all the way to its destination, where the terrorists unloaded the 63 people they had brought on board, all with their throats cut. And so on.

All of these violent attacks made the government act by deploying the Armed Forces, but at the beginning there was a big mistake. President Belaúnde deployed the Armed Forces under the leadership of Brigadier General Noel Alvarez without any legal protection. In other words, there was no protection for intervention of these forces; the only legal protection we had was military justice. And while we won the military war, we have not entirely won the political war, because there are former Shining Path ideologists in our government who have the support of both domestic and international NGOs. Over the years, certain politicians practically dissolved everything that the Fujimori government had done: they released terrorists, redid all the trials, and began the persecution of soldiers who had intervened in different zones. But that is a story for another time.

As I mentioned before, when the Shining Path terrorists found themselves surrounded by the military forces, they began to move to the key cities. Can we say it was an urban war? No, it wasn't a war, but it was the confrontation of the Shining Path terrorist organization against the Peruvian government. We do not call it a war because it was not an internal war; it was not even an internal armed conflict. It was a violent confrontation by a group of terrorists with the government.

There is a difference of opinion on what subversion means. According to the doctrine, the Shining Path was born as a subversive group. It came to power by using terrorism as a method of subversion. Guzmán [Abimael Guzmán Reynoso] led the Shining Path as an organization against the nation of Peru and declared the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Peru, a communist guerrilla group following Marxism–Leninism–Maoism and Gonzalo Thought.³

BAHO: Can you tell me more about your experience in the two years that you served as a commander in the fight against the Shining Path?

ALVAREZ: In 1989, when I was a lieutenant colonel, I was appointed as a commander of both a counter-subversive [special forces] battalion and a battalion of commandos. It was a great honor for me because there were very few battalions of this sort. We received 111 specially trained troops who were highly regarded. The logistical and administrative support varied; sometimes we received support directly from the joint command, and sometimes directly from the division commander.

In my case, I was a reserve mobile force—in other words, I did not have an established camp; we set up in tents and waited for support to arrive in helicopters. We didn't have distinct special forces uniforms. Some wore the clothes of officers, helicopter pilots, NCOs, paratroopers—they all wore different clothes. When I arrived, the first thing we did was train and train through the months of March and April, until we were ready to move. We followed the terrorists to different areas, conducting counterterrorism operations that, for security reasons, I'm not going to list.

We used the French system of protecting the roads: we set up checkpoints and registered villages and towns, and if people said they were going to visit someone, they were asked why and where. Then we would often accompany them to find out if what they'd said was true. That is how we managed to capture many Shining Path terrorists. This may sound like interrogation, but we didn't have the power to do formal interrogations. Those captured were sent to the top echelon to be interrogated. We only did what is called "combat interrogation," the specialized interrogation that was allowed by the police and other law enforcement agencies.

During those two years, we fought the Shining Path at close range, in the middle of the jungle or in small towns. In one sector of the jungle, they had practically decimated the entire population by machete. They murdered pregnant women by cutting out their wombs. It was pure savagery.

I can't tell you that I had a battalion in a barracks or in a camp. No. We were a battalion that moved all over when we were required to use our force. We were a very powerful battalion, well-equipped, well-trained, and with all the weapons available to us. In other words, we were operational 24/7, which included combat operations, civic actions, patrolling, and checkpoints, as I mentioned before. My battalion also had the good fortune of having two helicopters assigned to it that could be used for positioning troops at any moment.

Unlike the battalion I commanded, there were fixed bases and from there, the men went out to patrol. They had reconnaissance patrols and combat patrols. And there were times where they had to do those at the same time. In effect, it was reconnaissance: a small force to be able to infiltrate and see what the enemy was doing. If it was combat, it was a stronger force able to make a defensive attack. The battalion had four permanent bases and various mobile bases in the central jungle. We operated in thirds: a third on patrol, a third on surveillance of the base, and a third in rest conditions but ready to go at any moment. Those resting often played soccer while the others patrolled the perimeter of the base.

That was the constant for two years. For a brief time, certain personnel were taken by plane to Lima for R&R [rest and recuperation]. They had to go by plane to avoid any problems on the roads.

The act of coexisting with the other officers was very special—we weren't on a handshake basis. We gave all of ourselves there, every one of us equal. It was brotherhood: brotherhood because you start to love these people as if they were your own children, and when one gets hurt in combat, you feel the love and pain that a father feels if he loses a child.

I am proud because I defended my country. But I never wanted war. I never wanted any confrontations, but those were the cards I was dealt. My daughter told my story in a photographic composition. She has a degree in communication sciences, specializing in photography and videography. She won first place for her photo composition of the photos that I gave her from this time. When she wrote to me, she never asked, "What did you do in the war?" but rather "Did you have to go to war?" It's true, I never went searching for it. But it's as if it came looking for me, like many other officers of my generation.

BAHO: Do you think that there is a threat from the current Communist Party in Peru right now? Or that the Shining Path has the potential to resurface?

In the original interview, which was conducted on 23 April 2021, BG Álvarez stated his concern about the continuing influence of Shining Path sympathizers in Peru, particularly in the area of education. Later that month, Pedro Castillo, who ran as a member of the Marxist-Leninist Free Peru (Peru Libre) political party, won the presidential election. Out of respect for the political situation in Peru, CTX chose not to include some of Álvarez's concerns about Castillo and the country's leadership. On 7 December 2022, however, Castillo was impeached, convicted, and removed from office for corruption and for attempting illegally to dissolve Congress, thus confirming Álvarez's skepticism. Castillo was later jailed and sentenced to 18 months detention on charges of sedition and rebellion. Increasingly active and violent protests by Castillo's supporters demanding his release subsequently spread across Peru, particularly in the regions where he had the most popular support. Twenty people had died as of 16 December 2022, as this issue of *CTX* was being finalized.⁴

ALVAREZ: That's a great question. There are several groups, and some are very radical, which could pose a threat to the democracy of Peru. Some political parties have Shining Path members in their ranks. There is a movement for the defense and amnesty of the human rights of the prisoners of war. They call them prisoners of war—Abimael Guzmán [who died in prison in September 2021] and all the criminals who are in jail—but they are not prisoners of war; they are incarcerated terrorists. There is a self-appointed radical faction, the National Reconstitution Committee of the militarized political party, which is a Communist-Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party—principally a Maoist party—that wants to rebuild with ideas from the Shining Path.

All the people feel resentful because for the past 20 years of democracy, there has been corruption. In the past 20 years, all presidents have either been put on trial or sent to jail. In the United States, name me one president who has been in prison. Here, the last four have been indicted. One is in jail and the other three have sentences that could lead to jail time. People are disillusioned by the corruption, and by the lack of work despite the gross domestic product, which is one of the highest in Latin America. Poverty has decreased, but there is inequality. Not like Chile: Chile's GDP is worth the same as ours, but here we have inequality and poverty. If we did not, we would be ahead, economically speaking, of Chile. Professor [José Pedro] Castillo has gained the support of the very people affected by the inequality: the poor.5 Why does he have the support of President Evo Morales of Bolivia? Because Castillo is supported by Maduro of Venezuela and by José Mujica [former member of Tupamaros revolutionary group, president from 2010 to 2015] from Uruguay.⁶

People are disillusioned by the corruption, and by the lack of work despite the gross domestic product, which is one of the highest in Latin America.

You know that Peru is a very important country to South America's wellbeing, one of the largest and most powerful. We find ourselves now in a situation where many countries in South America are socialist-leaning. Brazil fell to the left, as well as Argentina. Colombia has problems. So, they want to create the São Paolo Forum. They call it the Socialist Union of South America: in other words, the Soviet Union of South America.

BAHO: Do you think that those who have power will mobilize to make a Soviet Union in South America?

ALVAREZ: [Former Peruvian President Alejandro] Toledo was extradited for corruption and is now in the United States, and they can't bring him back. There's Alan García who committed suicide, a bad man who was being investigated for embezzlement. Pedro Pablo Kuczynski is under house arrest. Then there's Martín Vizcarra, who has been banned from Congress for having robbed the people.

BAHO: Are there other internal threats?

ALVAREZ: Yes. We have a big problem with the illicit trafficking of drugs, which is run by terrorist organizations. We are the second largest coca producer in the world, after Colombia. The Mexican and Colombian drug cartels are present here, and who controls the VRAEM [Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro: the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene, and Mantaro Rivers] is disputed. This is a severe security challenge in Peru; as such, the Armed Forces are deployed and are actively combating the drug trafficking and terrorism in the region. This is happening despite the fact that we have lowered cocaine production. In the midst of all of this, the police and the Armed Forces are practically entirely devoted to controlling the main threat Peru is now facing, which is COVID-19. I have to say, governments are in part guilty for this pandemic disaster. In Latin America, Peru has the fifth highest infection rate, after Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, and Chile.

BAHO: How is the government responsible with its response to COVID-19?

ALVAREZ: Thank you for the question. We want to use the word "guilty" because the government knew that this pandemic was coming in March 2020, or they had some background on it. They could tell from the money being spent. China and other countries began buying masks, various pills, and other medical supplies here in Peru, but it was too late to stop. Masks were bought for 20 cents on the dollar. The government did not realize or understand this acquisition from China, Russia, and the United States. Then, in March, the pandemic comes to Peru and what do government officials do? They lock us in for three months, until June 2020. But what did that do? They did not buy ICU beds. Peru only had 1,500 ICU beds for a population of 28 million people. We did not have enough hospital beds. It was the ultimate government deception. Hospitals were at 50 percent capacity and those who died the most were the doctors, who didn't have the proper material to cover and protect themselves. We reached a peak of 400 dead; 400 is enough. In the United States, 400 were dying each day. But that wasn't a lot, because you have 300 million people. We are only 28 million. And you have a hospital system, a wellestablished medical system. Imagine here, 1,500 ICU beds but no respirators, no oxygen tanks. Just now [April 2021] we are starting to get them, thanks to the Catholic Church.

So, they locked us up until June, when the cases dropped, and in July and August they continued to drop, but the government didn't take the opportunity to buy what they needed. I hope they can before the second wave comes next winter. We have gone from 1,500 ICU beds to 2,500, which is still not enough.

And now the government is inundated with vaccines. There was a total deception with the vaccines. We were told that the Peruvian government had bought 38 million Sinovac vaccines from China. Later, we were informed that I don't know how many more millions had been offered to Peru. We were even given a name—it was AstraZeneca—when in fact nothing was ever bought. Everything was a lie told by President Vizcarra, and then came [President Francisco] Sagasti. Now the government has bought millions of doses, but the vaccines are arriving little by little.

Almost 750,000 Peruvians have already been vaccinated with the first dose and 500,000 with the second dose. It is expected that all those over 80 years old have already been vaccinated. On the first of May 2021, everyone from age 70 to 80 will be eligible for the vaccine. And in June or July it will be ages 50 to 70, and so on. But that was also a lie by the government; President Vizcarrra was dismissed by Congress

and it wasn't until President Sagasti took office that he began to purchase the first vaccines for COVID-19. The people have felt deceived with regards to medical supplies and vaccines, and also the response by the government to combat the pandemic. They were deeply unhappy by the number of deaths due to the pandemic. If the government officials knew about the pandemic problem, they could have lightened the blow. The government locked us up because they didn't buy the supplies they said they bought. They bought lousy masks and lousy equipment, so the real threat in Peru is corruption. On top of that, the congressmen were the first to get vaccines, but this was hidden from the people. Corruption is an endemic evil. That is the problem. So Free Peru [Perú Libre: a Peruvian Marxist political party] has taken advantage of this, has advocated for the poor, telling them to go get their vaccine and calling out how poorly the current government handled the vaccine situation.

BAHO: Are you comparing COVID-19 to terrorism, the Shining Path, or the response from the government?

ALVAREZ: Yes. I think that with the terrorism, the government did not act with the necessary promptness. Like I told you before, President [Fernando] Belaúnde said "No, no, they are not terrorists: they are cattle rustlers; they are guerrillas." When he realized they were terrorists, they had caused a loss of more then \$28 billion dollars, more than 250 transmission towers destroyed, more than 100 bridges blown up, more than 38,000 people murdered.

We won the military war, but the political war was lost because Fujimori fell and a socialist government entered.

But as I told you, we won the military war, but the political war was lost because Fujimori fell and a socialist government entered, with socialist ministers who wanted new trials. Of the 24 people who were serving life sentences, only six remained; the rest were released. Those released were given positions, and they work for the state now. So the old people like me are unhappy with this. But the young guys, they think, "What a beast that Guzman is." They admire that old revolutionary because the Ministry of Education is leftist, and so that's what they teach the youth.

BAHO: You have addressed this a little, but I want to ask the question directly. What have been the longstanding effects of the Shining Path on Peruvian culture?

ALVAREZ: During their heyday, Shining Path realized what the people wanted, so the popular culture favored



the revolutionaries. But from the perspective of the Armed Forces, they won no favors with us. Maybe the Armed Forces lost a little bit of their popularity for serving under the Fujimori government. But it was restored after two or three years, due to the actions that were carried out by the Armed Forces in their new role of helping the people. The Armed Forces come in during disasters and threats, and they have helped the people with helicopters and trucks, going out to the hospitals in the countryside to face COVID. This made the Armed Forces the third most trusted group in Peru: first, the media, then the Catholic Church, and third, the Armed Forces. So, the Shining Path, instead of lowering the trust in the Armed Forces, actually raised it, because we did not make a peace accord. We did not make any peace agreement. We fought to the end. It affected the culture because people were afraid. There was excess on our part, as well, and those officers who committed those acts are in jail.

But now we have the population divided about the Communist Party, especially among the young, between 18 and 25 years old, who did not live through the terrorism. For them, there was no terrorism; there was no internal war; they deny that the terrorists massacred people. They say the terrorists are political prisoners, and to that I say no, I'm sorry, they are prisoners of war. It's like denying the Holocaust, as Iran does. It's the same for these youths:

Fortunately,

not very many politicians are members of the Shining Path. But it is still something. Isn't it dangerous that there are members of the Shining Path still working for government institutions?

they deny it, with the help of the government, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture. The schools do not teach what they should teach; instead, they favor their leftist interests. Here in Peru, we call them "caviar." A caviar is a leftist person who lives very well, in the best areas of Lima.

BAHO: Am I understanding correctly that there continues to be a division

between those who support the Armed Forces and those who support the Shining Path?

ALVAREZ:

Shining Path did not just pop up out of nowhere. Everyone knows what it did. But, as I told

you, it is the sector



Shining Path School

of youth that we call *pulpines*. They don't know what terrorism is. They think the Shining Path is a political party because that is what their teachers instilled in them. But people 30, 40, and older know all about it and not one of them wants the terrorism to return. There has never been a case as divisive as this: supporters of the guerrilla movement versus supporters of the Armed Forces. No, here the support for the Armed Forces has always been strong.

BAHO: Are the political parties in Peru polar opposites, or binary?

ALVAREZ: Thankfully no, not here. There is a variety of parties. But the problem is that people don't care. In the primary elections, many people, instead of voting, went to the beach; they went and had their BBQs; they sunbathed; they didn't care; and then they are surprised by the results.

BAHO: What are the Armed Forces or the National Police doing currently to combat the Shining Path? What has been successful?

ALVAREZ: In the year 2000, through the famous pacification strategies, it was possible to defeat the Shining Path. But that policy was not continued because the Toledo government had many leftist members. They abolished what the military judges had done. This goes to show the important role that political wars play in support of military wars. Lately, there have been very well-done operations by the Armed Forces where they have captured or neutralized elements of the Shining Path in the VRAEM. The latest one was the Shining Path's second in command, who died of wounds and a kidney problem. Not to mention the reconnaissance and observation actions of the Armed Forces in the VRAEM: in two separate police operations, 72 and 56 members of the Shining Path who had infiltrated MOVADEF were arrested. But most were released by the Public Ministry. They said it was due to a lack of evidence.

So, there are operations that are successful, but the circle is not closed because the Public Ministry sometimes does not comply as it should. So the operations that are carried out by the police and Armed Forces look a bit forced, or calculated. Fortunately, not very many politicians are members of the Shining Path: maybe only four or five. But it is still something. Isn't it dangerous that there are members of the Shining Path still working for government institutions? Another problem is that universities are being infiltrated by Shining Path members and they are practically brainwashing young people again. Not to mention that the Court of Justice in the Hague ordered Peru to compensate each terrorist who is released from prison who had not been tried.

BAHO: Thank you for your time, General Alvarez.

Sally Baho is a member of the Global ECCO project and a faculty research associate in the Defense Analysis department of the US Naval Postgraduate School.

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NOTES

- This interview was conducted in Spanish and translated by Sally Baho. It has been edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the US Naval Postgraduate School, the US Department of Defense, the US government, or any other official entity.
- The word in Spanish is abigeos, which means "cattle rustler" in South America.
- "Gonzalo Thought is a social and political theory originated by Abimael Guzman (also called 'Gonzalo'), who was the chairman of the Communist Party of Peru-Shining Path. It proposes following the military line of struggle, by militarization and concentric construction of the party. Gonzalo also believed that such a revolution in a single country could spark a world revolution." Urban Dictionary, s.v. "Gonzalo Thought," last modified 29 January 2022: https://www. urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gonzalo%20 Thought

- Augusto Álvarez Torres, "Crónica de un suicidio por Augusto Álvarez Torres (OPINIÓN)" ("Chronicle of a Suicide by Augusto Álvarez Torres, OPINION") (in Spanish), Diario Correo, 12 December 2022: https://diariocorreo.pe/ opinion/cronica-de-un-suicidio-por-augusto-alvarez-torresopinion-noticia/; Marco Aquino, "Peru Declares State of Emergency, Seeks 18-Months Jail for Castillo," Reuters, 14 December 2022: https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/ perus-top-court-mulls-detaining-ex-president-castillo-18-months-2022-12-14/; and Caitlin Hu and Claudia Rebaza, "Peru's Ex-President Castillo to be Jailed for 18 Months as Protesters Declare 'Insurgency," CNN, 15 December 2022: https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/15/americas/peru-castillodetention-intl-latam/index.html
- José Pedro Castillo Terrones, known as "El Profesor" because he had been a schoolteacher, was elected as Peru's president and took office in July 2021.
- Pedro Castillo won the presidential election in July 2021. He was impeached and removed from office on 7 December 2022 on charges of corruption and after attempting illegally to dissolve parliament. Castillo was arrested on 14 December as he tried to flee the country and remains in custody. Marco Aquino, "Peru declares state of emergency, seeks 18-months jail for Castillo," Reuters, 14 December 2022: https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/ perus-top-court-mulls-detaining-ex-president-castillo-18-months-2022-12-14/
- President Francisco Sagasti was in office from November 2020 to July 2021.
- The word *pulpin* comes from a Peruvian labor law that addressed 18- to 24-year-olds in Peru. The word derives from a box juice called "Pulp," and refers to the segment of the population that grew up drinking this juice. In this context, it refers to the newest wave in the labor and voting population, which did not experience the violence of the Shining Path.
- MOVADEF, the Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights, is a political organization that has been linked to the Shining Path. See, for example, Lauren Villagran, "Is Peru's History of Terrorism Coming Back to Haunt It?" Christian Science Monitor, 5 August 2013: https:// www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0805/ Is-Peru-s-history-of-terrorism-coming-back-to-haunt-it