

## 17. The media's obscene promotion of the MRTA

To hear most of the international media talk about it, the MRTA are not drug-running murderers out to annihilate the nation-state, but socially concerned “rebels,” “thoughtful activists,” or, as the *Wall Street Journal* pronounced, “the thinking man’s guerrilla group.” Especially insidious has been CNN’s blatant propagandizing for the narco-terrorists; for example, their “interviews” with the MRTA’s “international spokesman” in Hamburg, Germany, Isaac Velazco, who can be seen regularly on CNN, sitting comfortably in his armchair while issuing the MRTA’s blackmail demands. The following is a brief compendium of this criminal promotion campaign:

*New York Times*, editorial, Dec. 24, 1996.

“The scene—Latin American Marxist guerrillas holding Government officials and foreign diplomats hostage—has so far been a replay of the M-19 guerrilla takeover of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Colombia in 1980. . . . Like the man who led Colombia in 1980, Julio César Turbay, Mr. Fujimori has marred his presidency with an authoritarian style and unhealthy closeness to the military. . . . The Tupac Amaru guerrillas, who have a history of attacks designed for maximum drama, have attracted world attention and shamed a Peruvian government that was boasting it had beaten terrorism. Like the M-19 fighters, they should recognize that they have achieved important goals and can gain nothing by killing hostages.”

London *Times*, “Revenge of the Incas,” by Matthew Parris, Dec. 19, 1996.

This column claims that the horror stories about MRTA and Shining Path terrorist methods are “legends,” “myths,” and “fanciful versions.” Peru’s problems “are not ideological, but ethnic,” insists Parris, who concludes that Peru suffers from apartheid. Thus, while MRTA may not have mass support in Peru, “they are able to find shelter. As a young Indian once told me, nobody likes the Government in Lima. Nobody supports the terrorists either. But some people ‘understand’ them.”

London *Financial Times*, editorial, Dec. 19, 1996.

“The attack by leftwing guerrillas on the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Lima is a severe blow to the prestige of President Alberto Fujimori. It calls into question the government’s boast that the country’s terrorist groups are a spent force. . . . [Fujimori’s] achievements are accompanied by

significant political failings. He has concentrated power in himself and a small coterie, and has undermined all potentially competing authority in the country. As a result, the rule of law has little meaning—the president dissolved congress and temporarily shut down the judicial system in 1992.

“Moreover, Peru’s inadequate government institutions—such as its poorly functioning and corrupt judiciary—make it almost impossible for ordinary citizens to win redress when wronged. The government has tolerated human rights abuses by army, police and intelligence services in their fight against the guerrillas. All this weakens the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of citizens; it gives fuel to guerrilla movements. . . .”

*Financial Times*, by Stephen Fidler and Sally Bowen, Dec. 19, 1996.

“The audacious attack on the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Lima by members of a guerrilla movement apparently written off as a serious force has revealed intelligence shortcomings that come close to home for Mr. Fujimori. . . . According to Mr. Michael Shifter, a Peru expert at the Inter-American Dialogue thinktank in Washington, the attack occurred while senior military and intelligence figures were apparently looking in the other direction—attempting to discredit General Rodolfo Robles, a retired army officer who has been an outspoken critic of human rights violations by the army.”

*Reuters* news service, “Peru’s MRTA—The Gentlemen Guerrillas?” by Paul Hughes, Dec. 24, 1996.

“It is not often that a group of gun-toting hostage-takers have received such glowing praise. Almost to a man, captives released by about 20 Marxist guerrillas from the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Peru have painted a picture of determined but decent young rebels. Psychologists say hostages held for long periods often end up sympathizing with their captors. But in Lima hostages released on Sunday praised the gunmen after just five days of captivity. More than half of the 225 men set free as a Christmas goodwill gesture shook hands with the gunmen as they left, some even wishing them good luck. . . .”

*Wall Street Journal*, by Matt Moffett, Dec. 25, 1996.

“Tupac Amaru, the radical movement holding 104 hostages, has always been the thinking man’s guerrilla group. Lacking both the mass support and the lust for blood of Peru’s more well-known Shining Path guerrillas, Tupac Amaru has specialized in spectacular and ingenious gambits designed to maximize headlines more than body counts. Tupac Amaru’s track record leads many analysts to speculate that the group desires a peaceful way out of the eight-day-old crisis at the Japanese ambassador’s residence here.”