

Rescue of the hostages in Peru: turning defeat into victory

by Manuel Hidalgo

When, on Dec. 16 of last year, 14 MRTA terrorists seized nearly 500 hostages at the residence of Japanese Ambassador to Peru Morihisa Aoki, with extensive international logistical and propagandistic backup, their London sponsors calculated that this would prove a devastating blow to Peru's anti-terrorist successes, in their view a dangerous model for nations throughout Ibero-America and the world facing the same narco-terrorist scourge. They believed that President Alberto Fujimori had little margin to maneuver left to him, and that he could be forced to capitulate.

On April 22, 1997, however, 126 days later, 140 commando troops from the Peruvian Army and Navy moved, in a highly surgical, lightning operation in broad daylight, to rescue the 72 hostages who remained in the terrorists' power. The lives of two Army commanding officers, and of a hostage who was wounded by the terrorists and who later succumbed, were the cost of the operation. All the terrorists died in the assault. President Fujimori stated that the rescue mission had been "the cleanest in history." Not only was the world ecstatic over the success of the operation, but it represented a shining victory for the concept of the sovereign nation-state versus the bestial oligarchy and its narco-terrorist minions.

How was defeat turned into a resounding victory, against all predictions? Under what principle was the maximum result achieved, with a minimum of casualties?

Successful strategy

Following the hostage-taking, the Peruvian government clearly established the state's parameters for dealing with the narco-terrorist plot: no yielding to blackmail demands—that is, the release of the more than 400 MRTA prisoners in Peru's jails—although the kidnappers could be offered a safe conduct out of the country, following their release of all the hostages.

Fujimori repeatedly insisted to all who would listen, that he would release no terrorists from Peru's prisons, despite the international pressures to capitulate. He further announced that he reserved the right to militarily intervene, should the life of even a single hostage be threatened. In the first few days of the crisis, the terrorists released a majority of the hostages, in order to win points with public opinion. However, after Dec. 31, the terrorists refused to free any more prisoners, and insisted stubbornly on their demands.

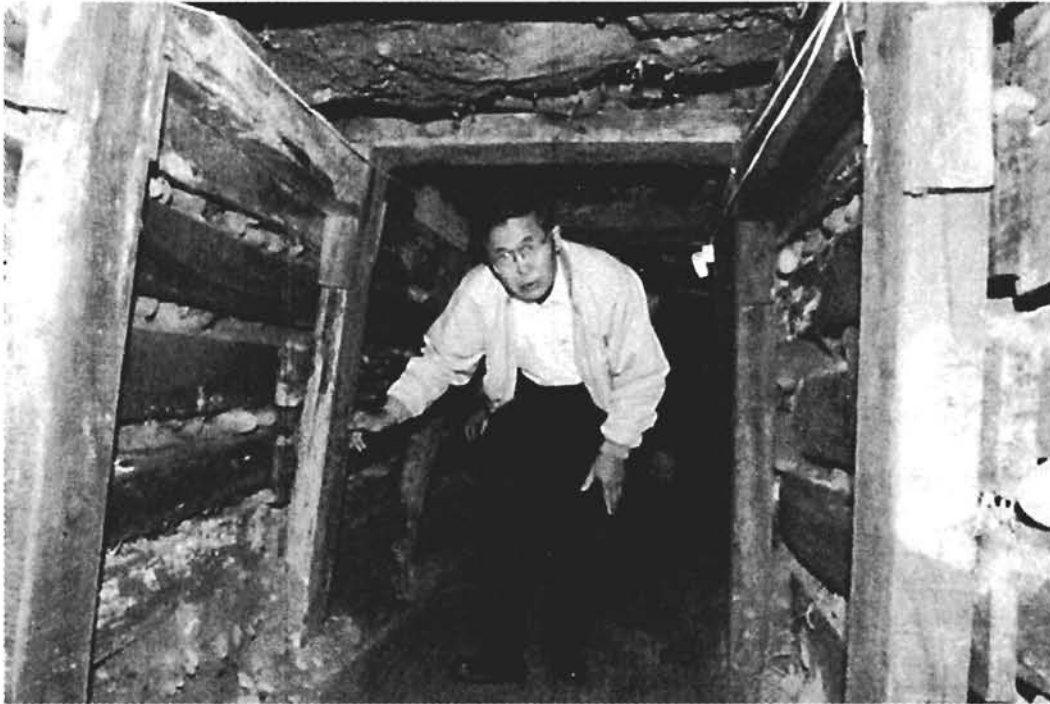
Today, we know that President Fujimori and the general commander of the Armed Forces and Army, Gen. Nicolás Hermoza Ríos, with the vital support of the National Intelligence Service (SIN), had been preparing, since Dec. 18, a contingency plan to rescue the remaining 72 hostages, among them ministers of state, congressmen, judges, Peruvian military officers, Japanese diplomats and businessmen, and the Bolivian ambassador to Lima.

"Operation Chavín de Huantar," as the rescue mission was dubbed, was designed "to preserve the lives of all 72 hostages, without exception," and this depended on the element of maximum surprise, Fujimori later explained. The most important success, he declared, was the fact of having carried it off, despite international public opinion, which had been emotionally brainwashed by the Goebbels-like British media and their satellites globally. What was expected was an operation with many hostages killed, televised to insult the Peruvian state, its President, and its Armed Forces. The result was exactly the opposite.

The operation was launched with the selection of military personnel. Men were chosen in whom President Fujimori and General Hermoza had the highest confidence. The commander of the operation, Lt. Col. Juan Valer Sandoval, the key man in forming the Army unit, who had been chief of security for Fujimori's son Kenji, was charged with training the commandos. Lt. Raúl Jiménez Chávez, General Hermoza's bodyguard and also a member of Kenji Fujimori's security guard, was made second-in-command. The courage and spirit of sacrifice of all the commandos, and notably of Valer and Jiménez, at the cost of both their lives, was key to the success of the operation.

The commandos were to enter, not by air or by ground, but from underground, through three separate tunnels constructed since early January by teams of 25 miners each, miners from Peru's mountains, who built them with eight exits in different parts of the Aoki residence. The tunnels, equipped with electricity, ventilation, and other amenities necessary for a prolonged wait, also allowed them to penetrate the floor of the residence with miniature microphones, photographic lenses, and video cameras such as those used in laparoscopic surgery.

All of this was done, because it was necessary to enter the residence with precision, in order to avoid the deaths of the hostages. To accomplish this, it was necessary to know not



President Alberto Fujimori inspects one of the tunnels by means of which Army commandos entered the Japanese ambassador's residence, where the hostages were being held. "In no way can a country, a member of the international community, a state, yield to terrorist blackmail," said Fujimori. "That is why my government decided to stay both firm and yet patient, exhausting all peaceful means possible."

only the routine of the kidnapers, but where they—and the hostages—were at any given moment. The psychological profiles, and even the names of each one of them, were required. The Aoki residence, therefore, was “seeded” with tiny microphones, operated by the SIN and hidden in thermoses, bibles, guitars, paintings, even a crucifix. They were smuggled into the residence by SIN operatives disguised as paramedics, charged with administering to the health of the hostages. The SIN also surrounded the residence with ultramodern listening devices based on microwaves, provided, as were the majority of the high-technology instruments used, by friendly countries. According to some rumors, Israel and the United States had also provided the use of an “invisible” remote survey plane, which enabled detection of mines placed by the MRTA.

Superiority of the republican militia

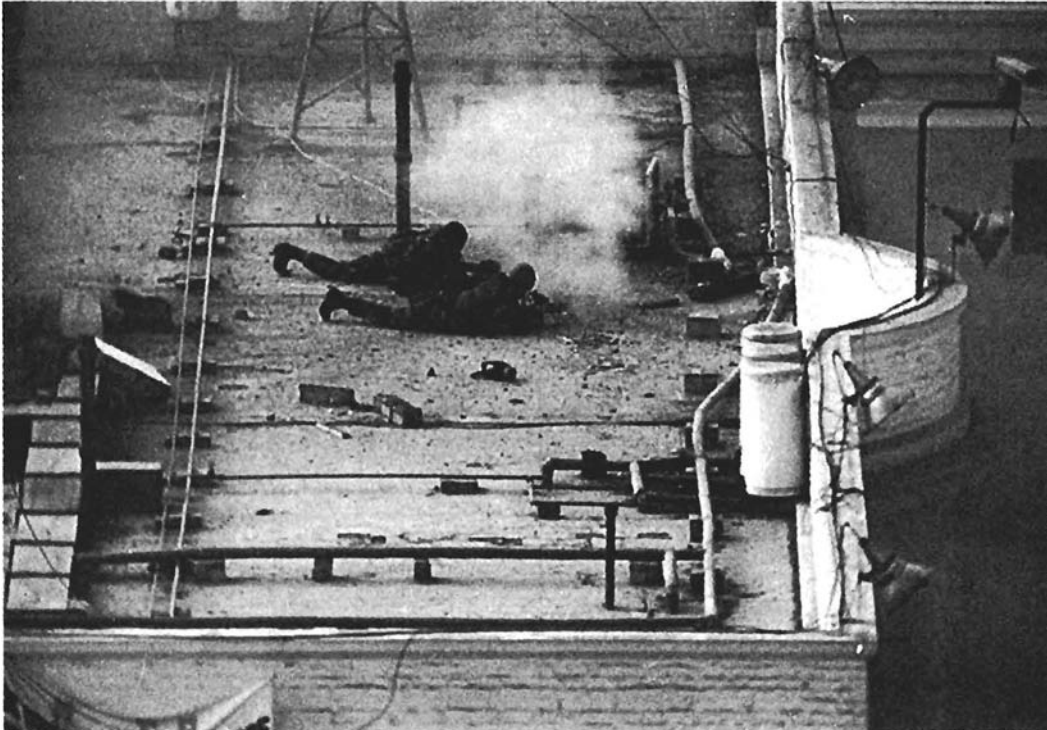
The advanced technology created the conditions under which President Fujimori could give the green light for the operation to commence with a reasonable expectation of success, but success depended on the commandos themselves, who were endowed with a quality which profoundly separated them from their opponents, an intangible quality which they all shared, and which was exemplified by the conscious self-sacrifice of Valer and Jiménez.

This quality was also shared by the other “commandos”: the hostages. Not only were the hostages not affected by the so-called “Stockholm syndrome,” but what happened to them was precisely the opposite: The hostages, and especially the Peruvian state officials, both civilian and uniformed, knew

that the chance of reaching a negotiated solution was minimal. Thus, they were prepared from the beginning for a rescue or, even, for a revolt from within against their terrorist captors. This group of hostages—exceptional witnesses to the terrorist

In this section

The following articles on the Peruvian government's successful freeing of 72 hostages being held by MRTA terrorists, serve as an appendix to Lyndon LaRouche's preceding analysis of the proposed expansion of NATO. As LaRouche notes, during the 1970s, virtually no self-respecting government spokesman from the “Western world” would have questioned President Fujimori's decisive action in defense of his nation's sovereignty. Yet today, Peru's action occurred in the face of heavy pressures for softness toward the terrorists, from certain European NATO-member governments. “Since there is presently no efficient consensus among NATO members for defending us in a decisive manner against such murderous strategic adversaries as today's burgeoning international terrorism,” LaRouche asks, “from what real-world adversary is NATO presently proposed to defend the sovereignty of member and allied nation-states?”



Peruvian Army commandos on the terrace of the Japanese ambassador's residence, April 22.

barbarism Peru has suffered for the past 17 years—maintained their combative spirits and their identities, and kept themselves both mentally and physically fit, with classes and debates on statecraft among themselves.

The 22 uniformed hostages retained their command order and military organization, under the command of Vice Adm. Luis Giampietri, the highest-ranking officer among them. Contact between the hostages and the outside world was maintained from the very first day, through a beeper that had been carefully hidden by Giampietri, by means of which they knew that they were being monitored from the outside, and would be receiving microphones and micro-receivers.

By these means, the hostages were also able to transmit crucial intelligence about the routine, profiles, and even the precise location of the terrorists whenever required; Giampietri was, in fact, the hostage who indicated the appropriate moment for the rescue operation to be launched.

In contrast with the hostages and their rescuers, the MRTA guerrillas, except for the four leaders, were all typical “cannon fodder”: adolescents, several of them illiterate, recruited either by force or by offers of money, in the Peruvian jungle. They had been trapped into participating in the hostage-taking, and protested this to the head of the MRTA kidnapers, Néstor Cerpa Cartolini. Cerpa came up with the idea of holding indoor mini-soccer games to defuse tensions among his people. A fatal error, as it turned out.

Cerpa trusted that the “security guard” that had been mounted outside the Aoki residence by the British press and their allies, the Red Cross International and the other non-

governmental organizations, would suffice to deter any military action. Little did he suspect that such an action would take place in the light of day and from beneath the ground, instead of at midnight and from the air, despite the fact that on March 6, Cerpa exposed by means of a two-way radio left by WTN British television, the fact that a tunnel was being constructed underground, which he had learned about both through leaks from the outside, and when there was a cave-in during the tunnel excavation.

Despite all this, the surprise factor was absolute. When President Fujimori ordered the commandos, who had been waiting in the tunnels for hours, even days, to finally move, 11 terrorists were playing soccer on the main floor, including Cerpa and the three other leaders, while two terrorists were guarding hostages on the second floor and another stood guard on the terrace. The tunnel exits were opened by detonations of explosives, in a quantity precisely calculated not to affect the second floor, where the hostages were kept. The explosive used also stuns opponents. In the greatest explosion, four of the terrorists died; in the subsequent one, two more were killed, while Cerpa and another four were shot to death, surprised by commandos as they were racing up the staircase, intent on murdering the hostages.

On the second floor, those commandos charged with rescuing the hostages had already entered, headed by Colonel Valer and Lieutenant Jiménez. Valer was responsible for safeguarding the lives of the two hostages the terrorists had announced they would kill first if the government intervened: Ambassador Aoki and Foreign Minister Francisco Tudela.

Valer took the bullets and grenade meant for Tudela (later, Minister Tudela said, "They hunted me like a rabbit"), while Jiménez was killed while entering the room where a group of hostage judges was kept. One of these was wounded, mortally.

The situation was under control within 15 minutes, and not in the anticipated six, due to the fact that one of the armored doors intended as an escape hatch for the hostages, was blocked. Further, the residence was filled with mines that had been planted by the terrorists, and the hostages, once rescued, had to wait a bit longer for clearance to leave. As President Fujimori emphasized, and the hostages confirmed, the terrorists were armed to the teeth, and carried explosives, grenades, and other incendiaries on their bodies.

According to the hostages, the terrorists had conducted rehearsals of what they would do in the event of an assault on the residence, and made it clear that they would point their weapons not at the invading force, but at the hostages. The cost the government would be forced to pay would be in the lives of the hostages. Each terrorist was assigned a group of hostages to kill. The rescue commandos were prohibited from using machineguns, to avoid accidentally wounding any of the hostages.

Once the operation was complete, President Fujimori arrived on the scene, wearing a bullet-proof vest and in the midst of detonation of the mines that the soldiers were still deactivating. In an eloquent gesture, the hostages joined with their rescuers in front of their President, and sang the National Anthem of Peru.

British hysteria

Less than 24 hours after the operation, President Fujimori explained that the operation had been carried out with the intent of defending both the authority of the sovereign nation-state and human life, two commitments which were far from contradictory, as the narco-terrorists and their sponsors claimed. Before a hostile audience of journalists, especially foreign ones, Fujimori boasted of the secrecy of the rescue operation, which "not even the intelligence services, not even you journalists, with all due respect, knew about." Fujimori could not have stated more clearly that he saw the foreign press as an enemy of his nation.

Using a model of the Japanese ambassador's residence, Fujimori explained the details of the operation. The President justified the expulsion, six days earlier, of Swiss national Jean-Pierre Scharer, the Red Cross International's number-two man in Lima, whom one Peruvian journalist at the press conference called an "MRTA adviser," without being contradicted by Fujimori.

Starting on April 24, the British press services Reuters and the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC), and their colleagues, including Agence France Presse, unleashed the Goebbels-style lie that the two terrorists on the second floor had surrendered, and had been brought into the tunnels as if they were hostages, and were then executed. Fujimori insisted in numer-

ous international interviews that there were no executions.

The British media lies were transparently absurd, since the priority had been to save the lives of the hostages from terrorists armed with AKM rifles, pistols, grenades, and "Russian cheese" bombs. In other words, the terrorists were veritable human bombs. The kidnappers, led by 15-year veteran terrorists, had mined the residence, possessed grenade launchers, and had each been assigned to kill a select group of hostages, beginning with the most important. Each terrorist could kill many hostages, in a matter of seconds, as they did with Judge Carlos Giusti.

In total, six hostages (and 14 commandos) were wounded, and four required surgery to save their lives. Reuters would no doubt have preferred to have saved the lives of the two terrorists, perhaps at the cost of many dead hostages, but the truth is that the terrorists died in combat, and in a just war.

As it turned out, of course, the "sources" for the slanders were all impossible to verify: MRTA members with remote microphones, unidentified "former hostages," and even Peruvian "naval intelligence sources." These sources said, according to Reuters and BBC, that they "heard," in the midst of incessant detonations to which the entire world is witness, the words of the terrorists supposedly trying to surrender. The only hostage cited by name as a supposed witness to the "surrender," absolutely denied the story attributed to him, describing it as "absurd."

Documentation

'You are the founding fathers of a new Peru'

A letter by Lt. Col. Juan Valer Sandoval

Below is the text of the letter written by Peruvian Lt. Col. Juan Valer Sandoval, one of the two Army officers killed in the April 22 commando raid on the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima. The letter, addressed to his wife and Army comrades, was found in his pocket after he was killed by an MRTA terrorist during the rescue operation. He was posthumously promoted to the rank of colonel:

If tomorrow you read this letter, it will be because I have died in the operation to rescue the hostages in the Japanese ambassador's residence. I have no other guide than my extraordinary love for this blessed land called Peru; and you know that I become a fury when they touch my Nation, and this is what the terrorists have done; by taking the residence, they have placed us before the eyes of the world, attempting to alter the pacification process which has cost us so much effort in the past.



The commander of the operation to free the hostages, Col. Juan Valer Sandoval (center, with mustache), who, together with Lt. Raúl Jiménez Chávez, died during the mission. Both have been declared National Heroes.

If I am not with you, I want you to remember that I went joyfully, fighting for an operation which we planned together, taking hours away from studies at our beloved Superior War College—an operation which unites us more than ever, and which we shall see triumph.

Accept that I am at peace. I only want it said: Valer was a good man. May God bless you all. [Signed] Operations Commander “Valer.”

From President Alberto Fujimori

Below are excerpts from the speech given by President Fujimori, at the April 24 funeral service for the two officers killed during the April 22 commando raid to rescue hostages held by the MRTA. The funeral service was broadcast on nationwide television:

When a soldier dies in defense of the Fatherland, a hero is born; he does not die, but lives eternally in the grateful memory of his countrymen. . . . [Lieutenant Colonel Valer’s and Lieutenant Jiménez’s] deaths were not in vain; their sacrifice freed the country, in which peace and democracy shall always reign. They have given their lives, which is the most precious thing a man has, so that we, their countrymen, may continue to live in peace and build Peru. They prepared to defend, even at the cost of their physical integrity, their flag

and their Fatherland, faithful follower of that model of our Army, the immortal Col. Francisco Bolognesi. . . .

[To the families:] Consoled by their Christian faith, they should also be comforted by the pride of being related to a hero of Peru. Captain Jiménez was the first to go in to free the hostages, and died in defending them. Colonel Valer foresaw his death, as can be seen in the letter he wrote to his wife Marina, in which he said that sacrificing himself would not be in vain, because it would stop terrorist barbarism.

My son and I feel this great loss. But [Valer’s] example of valor and courage is also *the clearest demonstration that our Armed Forces are the greatest guarantee of our national sovereignty*, and that democracy shall always prevail in Peru, over any totalitarianism. Peace and glory rest with those who today, are national heroes.

From Gen. Nicolás Hermoza Ríos

Below are excerpts from the speech given by Gen. Nicolás Hermoza Ríos, the head of Peru’s Armed Forces, during the April 24 funeral service for the two officers killed in the commando raid on the Japanese residence:

At every moment, our President had the situation under control, and showed his fine qualities as a statesman; from the first few days after the seizure of the residence, he set the political objectives, in planning for both a peaceful solution to the hostage crisis, or a military rescue. The possibilities for action were determined by the development of events, and by the profile of potential scenarios. Thus, with the objectives set for a probable military rescue operation, the Armed Forces took all the necessary steps . . . especially, the selection of military personnel . . . a select commando group, which . . . trained for months. . . . Such an important and crucial task required the support of the National Intelligence Service (SIN), which permitted us to have the intelligence required so that the military forces could successfully carry out the mission assigned them by the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. We were privileged witnesses as to how our commandos operated in rescuing the hostages, with a minimal cost to human life. . . .

We cannot fail to mention that the President’s first step was, and this is what he desired above all, to seek a peaceful solution which would save the lives of the hostages without sacrificing one millimeter of the points which are crucial for the preservation of the rule of law and the principle of respect for authority. However, despite all of the government’s good will, the obtuse intransigence of the head of the terrorist group, and his posing of unacceptable conditions, prevented a peaceful solution and freeing of the hostages.

Facing obvious deception which did not portend a peaceful outcome, and after four months in which he showed clear good will to reach a peaceful solution; after an objective analysis of the situation, taking into account the desperation of the [hostages’] families as well as the evident physical and emotional deterioration of the hostages themselves, the Presi-



President Fujimori pays his last respects to Lt. Raúl Jiménez. In the background is the closed casket of Col. Juan Valer. "In Peru, we will not accept terrorism," said Fujimori on April 22, "and we have given the international community an example of how terrorist blackmail must not be permitted, must not be yielded to. The Peruvian people have known how to carry out this task of exemplary pacification."

dent reached the painful but necessary conclusion that the rescue of the hostages was the only viable solution. Looking at the situation, which I'm sure was very difficult for him, given the implicit underlying risk and everything that was at stake, the President once again trusted in the Armed Forces, and the SIN, to assume responsibility for the rescue operation . . . and both institutions . . . proceeded to define the characteristics and circumstances under which the mission could be carried out, always taking into account, as a top priority, the protection of the hostages' lives. . . .

The mission has been fully carried out. The President himself selected D-Day and H-Hour. It was executed under the name of *Chavín de Huantar*, as a joint operation which, in the estimated time, and at minimal cost, successfully carried out the difficult task assigned. Nonetheless, this mission, which should be a cause for unanimous joy around the country, and whose execution should be a matter of analysis for specialists and experts throughout the world, has, sadly, been darkened by the death of an illustrious magistrate . . . of two of our Army officers, and of all of the terrorists who occupied the ambassador's residence.

Our fallen comrades-in-arms did their duty as soldiers. By sacrificing their lives, they decisively determined the success of this operation, and for that, deserve the respectful recognition of all Peruvian soldiers here represented. . . . I should make it known that Lieutenant Colonel Valer had as his mission, protecting the life and rescuing unharmed, the Japanese ambassador, His Excellency Morihisa Aoki, and our

foreign minister, Dr. Francisco Tudela. Offering an example of courage to our commandos, he placed himself at the head of the rescue team, and carried out his mission at the cost of his life. Similarly, Lt. Raúl Jiménez Chávez died valiantly, sacrificing his life to rescue the hostages to whom he was assigned. This example of our two comrades, so tragically killed, makes the Peruvian soldier proud, and shows the high level of professionalism and courage of our Armed Forces.

To them, our comrades, we express our deepest feelings of brotherhood and pain at their leaving us. . . . These men, prepared for war, gave their lives for the higher purpose so sought by our Fatherland. . . .

Lt. Col. Juan Valer Sandoval, Lt. Raúl Jiménez Chávez: Today this earth, this sacred piece of Peruvian soil, embraces you, as it has embraced so many of our heroes, who, from the time of our republican beginnings, have, like you, given their lives, for a higher purpose. . . . You are the founding fathers of a new Peru. A Peru in which homicidal violence shall be banned forever, and harmony, peace, fraternity, and solidarity shall reign among all those of us who live in this sacred Peru. Rest assured that your sacrifice has not been in vain. With the firmness of an oath, at this supreme moment of a painful good-bye, we promise you that we shall continue to work with the greatest boldness and commitment in the crusade of national pacification, and in the building of this new Perú, which we so deserve, and for which you so generously gave your lives.

My comrades in arms, may you rest in peace.