



State Of Fear: The Truth About Terrorism

Director: Pamela Yates

Documentary

Rated: Not Rated

94 minutes

Reviewed by [Scott Tobias](#)

January 11th, 2006

Though it never explicitly mentions the elephant in the room, Pamela Yates' documentary *State Of Fear*, about Peru's bloody 20-year war against the Maoist terrorist organization Shining Path, is really intended as a cautionary tale for the current War On Terror. Some of the parallels are more relevant than others, but its central point is a powerful one: That eroding of democratic principles for the purpose of protecting them is not only ineffective in fighting terrorism, but leads to corruption and abuse of power at the executive level. Imposing media control and the heavy-handed use of the military, President Alberto Fujimori produced a climate of fear that was effective in controlling his people, but not necessarily effective in fighting the enemy.

Whatever its propagandistic purpose, *State Of Fear* draws out these contemporary resonances through a straightforward, four-square documentary style, patiently revealing its history lesson via the expected talking heads, archival footage, and photographs. Inspired by the Truth Commission, the independent council that sorted through testimony and evidence after the fact, Yates and her crew collect an oral history of their own: They interview a range of witnesses, from former Shining Path fanatics and military officials to the peasants who were oppressed and abused by both sides. Between 1980 and 2000, roughly 700,000 people were killed during the uprising, which started in the mountains and countryside as a Maoist revolution and gradually seeped into cosmopolitan Lima. Founded by Abimael Guzmán, whose power over his followers made him a figure of quasi-religious devotion, Shining Path flourished in an area where Peru's ostensibly democratic principles didn't reach. After Fujimori was brought to office in landslide election, he used his mandate to dissolve Congress and step up an aggressive security campaign that wreaked more havoc than it contained.

State Of Fear builds to a key point about the consequences of democracies fighting terrorism by erasing its central tenets, but in doing so, it doesn't underplay the horrors wrought by Guzmán's organization. Yates interviews a child soldier abducted into Shining Path's cause, a peasant woman who watched the revolutionaries burn her grandmother alive, and an imprisoned true believer who appears brainwashed to this day. Yet the film hits hardest when examining the Fujimori dictatorship, which continued to tighten its grip on the country even after Guzman's capture in 1992, using any terrorist activity as justification for its own atrocities. Fujimori exploited his extra latitude to bypass the rule of law, punish his political enemies, and bully a nation into choosing security over freedom. Remind you of anyone?