

The School of Assassins

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, located at Ft. Benning, Georgia, is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers. The school, until recently known as the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA), has been steeped in controversy for nearly two decades.

From 1946 to 1984, the SOA was located in Panama. Before it was kicked out of the country under the terms of the Panama Canal Treaty, a major Panamanian newspaper dubbed it "The School of Assassins." Being well-earned and well-documented, the name stuck. SOA-trained soldiers have left a trail of blood and suffering in every country where they have returned.



During its 54 year history, the SOA has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers. It continues each year to train hundreds of soldiers in combat skills such as commando tactics, mine warfare, military intelligence, and psychological operations. In 1996, the Pentagon was forced to reveal the existence of training manuals

used at the SOA. These manuals advocated torture, execution, and blackmail and targeted civilians for these tactics. The manuals have since been discontinued; but the strategy they embody persists.

SOA-trained troops continue to return home to wage war against their own people, with disastrous consequences. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, "disappeared," massacred, and forced into refugee camps by those trained at the "School of Assassins."

A graphic consisting of a stack of five dollar signs (\$\$\$\$) of increasing size from top to bottom, positioned to the left of the text.
Our Tax Dollars at Work...

Recent Pentagon reports place the annual budget for the SOA at \$4 million. This represents only the operating budget and excludes salaries and other expenses associated with the school. Previous official reports have shown that the total fiscal requirements for the SOA amount to \$18.4 million tax dollars annually. This includes operating expenses, "scholarships" for soldiers and salary expenses for military and civilian personnel. In a time when U.S. families are struggling to find resources for education and other basics, it is a crime to use millions of dollars of tax money on the School of Assassins.

Guns and Greed

A recent Pentagon report to Congress notes that combat training at the school supports U.S. policy towards Latin America, which "Seek[s] to develop stable, free market democracies throughout the region." The mission of U.S. Southern Command (encompassing the SOA) includes ". . . protecting the supply of strategic natural resources and access to the markets."

Protecting U.S. interests in Latin America has translated into creating a favorable business climate for U.S. corporations, one with rock bottom wages and environmental standards and weak or nonexistent unions. As the markets of Latin America open to "free" trade, the most vulnerable are driven ever deeper into poverty.

SOA graduates become the "enforcers" of these exploitative economic policies. Soldiers trained at the SOA consistently use their combat training against labor organizers, religious leaders, student activists and others who work for just wages, decent housing and other basic needs.

The economic rape of the poor that accompanies globalization could not stand without the repressive military apparatus that brutalizes those who rise up to resist.

Colombia and the SOA

Over 10,000 soldiers from Colombia have trained at the SOA, more than any other country. Reports issued in 2000 by the U.S. State Department and Human Rights Watch document the involvement of Colombian SOA graduates in kidnapping, murder, massacres and setting up paramilitary groups. 50% of the 247 officials cited in an earlier report were trained at the SOA. Some Colombians were featured as guest speakers or instructors or included in the "Hall of Fame" after their involvement.

~ **Major David Hernandez Rojas** and **Captain Diego Fino Rodriguez**, cited for the March, 1999 murder of the Antioquia Peace Commissioner and two other civilians as they tried to deliver ransom for a kidnapping victim.

~ **Col. Alirio Antonio Uruena Jaramillo** and two other SOA graduates were implicated in the gruesome Trujillo "Chainsaw" Massacres in which at least 107 prisoners were tortured and murdered.

~ **Major Jesus Maria Clavijo Clavijo** and another SOA graduate were linked to paramilitary groups through cell phone communications and regular meetings on military bases. Clavijo was implicated in the February 1999 paramilitary killings near El Carmen de Atroto.

Bombs and Bullets Still the SOA Mission... With the Same Chilling Results.



In response to growing criticism, the Pentagon has mounted a smoke and mirrors PR campaign to give the school a new image, changing its name for the third time since it opened in 1946. The "reformed" SOA, now called *The Western*

Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, supposedly focuses on human rights, democracy, peacekeeping, and counter-narcotics training.

The Pentagon touts a few new courses as evidence that the school has been reformed. A close examination of the course descriptions reveals that behind the new packaging, business as usual continues at the SOA.

An article on the SOA web page describing the "Humanitarian De-Mining" course states, "land mines left behind by soldiers continue to terrorize and destroy lives long after the fighting has ended." What's left out is that in a parallel course, the SOA continues to teach soldiers to lay landmines.

Likewise, in the deceptively titled "Peace Operations" course soldiers learn psychological operations, military intelligence and population control techniques like setting up roadblocks.

Through all of the cosmetic changes and supposed reforms, the SOA has remained a counter-insurgency (translation: anti-civilian) combat training school. Before the recent name change, the late Paul Coverdell, influential Georgia senator and SOA supporter, noted that the reforms were "basically cosmetic" and that the SOA would still be able to fulfill its purpose.



Across the Nation: SOA on Trial

- "If the SOA published a register of alumni, it would be a scary catalogue of the most notorious military assassins and human rights violators. Attempts to recast the school as an anti-narcotics center are so much hokum."

-- Chicago Tribune

- "With its history, the School of the Americas is hardly the vehicle that Washington should use today in an effort to strengthen ties with Latin America. Bury this relic."

--Los Angeles Times

- "An institution so clearly out of tune with American values...should be shut down without delay."

--The New York Times

- "...the decision [to close the US Army School of the Americas] should be an easy one."

-- The Atlanta Constitution

- "The SOA's best known products have shared a distressing tendency to show up as dictators or as leaders or members of death squads."

-- The Cleveland Plain Dealer

Here's What You Can Do

Learn more ... Order these resources

SOA: Guns & Greed. NEW VIDEO! This 20-minute video shows how combat-ready SOA graduates use their guns to protect the greed of large corporations & world financial institutions. \$8.95
Now in Spanish and Portuguese!

School of Assassins, Academy award- nominated 18-minute video, history of the SOA narrated by Susan Sarandon. \$13 English or Spanish.

SOA: An Insider Speaks Out. Award-winning video of former SOA instructor, Maj. Joseph Blair's testimony against the SOA. 16 min \$13

Crossing the Line. This 16-minute video captures the hope, commitment and solidarity of the movement to close the SOA. \$13

School of Assassins, paperback by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. Documents the story of the SOA and the foreign policy that drives it. 112 pages. \$13 Orbis books

Solidarity in Action, A handbook for starting a local SOA Watch group. Includes information on legislative work, media and more \$13 (\$10 for students)

SOA Watch

**PO Box 4566 ~ Washington, DC ~20017
(202) 234-3440 ~ www.soaw.org**

Organize

Come to Fort Benning or the Capitol for the annual vigil and nonviolent direct action. (Contact SOA Watch for details.) Organize a demonstration at your local federal building. Form an SOA Watch group in your area and start a local campaign to close the School of Assassins.

Call or Write Congress or the President

Tell them you want the School of Assassins (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) to close. Ask your congressional representative to co-sponsor HR 1810, the new bill to close WHISC.

The Honorable (name)

US House of Representatives

Washington DC 20515

The Honorable (name)

US Senate

Washington DC 20510

Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121

White House (202) 456-1111

Invite Fr. Roy Bourgeois to Speak

Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder and co-director of SOA Watch, speaks powerfully and from personal experience about why the SOA must be closed. Call to schedule: (706) 682-5369

Spread the Word ~ Distribute This Flyer

Order the videos and book on the SOA.

Speak to church and student groups, veterans' organizations and local unions.

Contact media in your community.