Hidden Agenda: U.S. Influence in Latin America Through the School of the Americas

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Abstract
The intention of this paper is to demonstrate a continuing pattern of behavior on the part of the United States regarding Latin America, using the U.S. Army School of the Americas as the link between them. The United States has trained the militaries of Latin America in order to promote its foreign policy objectives in the region. These objectives have included the containment of communism, counter-insurgency, the war on drugs and, currently, the war on terrorism. The School of the Americas has been the vehicle for the endorsement of a military solution to these problems. It was employed by the United States to enlist the support of the Latin Americans in these endeavors and to impat1 a particular methodology for their resolution. The United States also advocated military means of obtaining its objectives in Latin America due to the fact that it was utilizing the School of the Americas, a military institution, to achieve its goals. Over the years at the School of the Americas, the changes in Latin America have been reflected in its student body, as well as in how it has structured its training programs. Additionally, the leaders of our armed forces have proposed military action in order to ensure the continuation of large-scale military programs and budgets.

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Hidden Agenda: U.S. Influence in Latin America Through the School of the Americas

A Master's Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of the Master of Science in International Studies Program

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Science in International Studies

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to demonstrate a continuing pattern of behavior on the part of the United States regarding Latin America, using the U.S. Army School of the Americas as the link between them. The United States has trained the militaries of Latin America in order to promote its foreign policy objectives in the region. These objectives have included the containment of communism, counter-insurgency, the war on drugs and, currently, the war on terrorism. The School of the Americas has been the vehicle for the endorsement of a military solution to these problems. It was employed by the United States to enlist the support of the Latin Americans in these endeavors and to impart a particular methodology for their resolution. The United States also advocated military means of obtaining its objectives in Latin America due to the fact that it was utilizing the School of the Americas, a military institution, to achieve its goals. Over the years at the School of the Americas, the changes in Latin America have been reflected in its student body, as well as in how it has structured its training programs. Additionally, the leaders of our armed forces have proposed military action in order to ensure the continuation of large-scale military programs and budgets.
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1. Introduction

The United States has always sought to exercise its hegemony over Latin America. With the creation in 1946 of the U. S. Army School of the Americas, the United States found a new vehicle for accomplishing its objectives. During the Cold War, students at the School of the Americas were schooled in the methodology of counterinsurgency, as well as the paranoia of a bipolar world which sought to root out any potential threats or opposition, often before they could even become a problem. The national security doctrine was the mantra inculcated into the minds of the Latin American students who coveted the opportunity to study at the School. Under the guise of keeping communism at bay, these students were taught that any means necessary were tolerable in pursuit of that goal. Many dictators in South and Central America, graduates of the School of the Americas, made good use of this training in consolidating their power. When the Cold War ended and the ready excuse for acting outside the law vanished, the United States changed course and focused its attention on the trafficking of illegal narcotics in the Andean region. In the name of the so-called “war on drugs,” the School of the Americas was justified in continuing its counterinsurgency training. A new generation of students would graduate from the School and go on to use violence to achieve their goals. Today, the war on terrorism gives us that same leeway and allows us the freedom to continue to flex our hegemonic muscle. The indoctrination of Latin American military officers with U.S. interests and military techniques took U.S. influence to a new level within Latin American society. It also created generations of “super soldiers” armed with violent tendencies and trained in United States intelligence methodology. We moved beyond external influence or intervention into the internal
society, where we enlisted locals to protect our interests. The essential aim of our training has remained the same, however as the global situation has evolved over the years, so too have our approach and tactics, as well as our targets. Though the circumstances may have changed, at the SOA, the tradition of promoting military solutions for our foreign policy objectives in Latin America continues.

Joining the debate over the School of the Americas, I found extensive documentation on the subject. I utilized some of it for background information, while the rest tended to lean towards one side of the argument or the other. Though much of the information already in circulation about the School of the Americas supports my view of it as a negative force, the majority of it also goes far beyond this premise. Many of the authors who have written on this topic have made the School out to be the root of all evil. I do not share this extreme view, as I feel it is only a tool used by the United States and that it reflects our policies and attitudes. I hesitated to note most of the army-based sources, as they tended to blindly defend their institution and simply regurgitate the party line. Little, if any, rationale was offered, and the government and military statements often contradicted themselves and the evidence. One of the most comprehensive texts I referenced was *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* by Lesley Gill. Gill has written previously on the subject of the Bolivian peasants, however this look at a premier military training institution was a departure for her. She traveled to the School and spent considerable time there and with the students. She has spoken with Colonel Weidner, the head of the School, as well as participated in the Human Rights Week activities since the metamorphosis of the SOA into WHINSEC. Though she may show some bias against the School, hers is by far the most moderate of
such stances that I have encountered, and she does give voice to the other side as well. This viewpoint fits nicely into what I was trying to prove, as it is rational and uses evidence and testimonials to make its point, as opposed to many, more radical works.

Although brief, the USARSA History document taken from the army's own website offers up a bit of a balance and some data whose accuracy the military has acceded to. The text by Richard Hillman, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America*, served to set the stage and paint the picture of the situation overall. It was from this book also, that the definitions of various policies and doctrines came. Though still reference material, the KUBARK Counterintelligence and Human Resource Exploitation training manuals proved extremely interesting and enlightening regarding what the United States deemed acceptable measures for accomplishing its goals. It was this type of material which earned the School its derogatory nicknames, such as the School of Assassins. The documents themselves are nonpartisan, but it is difficult for the reader to remain so after digesting their contents. *Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism, and the Search for Development* by Lois Hecht Oppenheim was my principal reference for the information on Chile in the 1970s. Though primarily background and factual details, even here one cannot help but plainly see the role of the United States in the Chilean tragedy. Once again, the interests of the United States won out and a regime was crushed for not falling into line with us. The article on Plan Colombia demonstrates that the policy pursued in Chile continues to be followed decades later and hundreds of miles away. I was also looking to understand what the plan entailed and what it meant for the Colombian people.
2. Development of U.S.-Latin American Relations

2.1 The Historical Relationship

The historical relationship between the United States and the countries of Latin America impacts how we regard them even today. "Historically and geopolitically, Latin America was thought to belong ‘naturally’ to the sphere of US influence."\(^{1}\) In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine declared the United States to be the leader of the Western Hemisphere, sending the message that European powers were no longer welcome. This statement went largely unchallenged, despite the fact that we did not have the military might at the time to back up our assertion. However, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, we were much closer to being in that position. In 1898, we participated in, and won, a war against Spain, presumably in the name of freeing Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. In spite of this stated goal, we did not leave these countries to self-rule. Puerto Rico was incorporated into our nation, we established a protectorate over Cuba, and we colonized Guam and the Philippines. Teddy Roosevelt expanded on this victory when he added his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904. He announced our intention to use our power to maintain order in this hemisphere, reserving the right, and responsibility, for us to intervene when we felt it was necessary. Following that remark were a series of military interventions and occupations. We claimed that they were needed to stabilize the region and protect U.S. hegemony. However, given that the occupations were of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama, it is not difficult to see that "the lessons in democracy meted out by U.S. officials seemed to

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breed more authoritarian than democratic impulses."² The United States felt its own security threatened by the possibility of European encroachment onto its side of the world, and thus made itself into the “unchallenged power in the Caribbean region.”³ Even then, our interests in the region were self-serving and not in the best interest of those we claimed to be helping. Many nations of Latin America continued to look to Europe as their model and mentor, however the days of European sway in the region were numbered.

Dollar diplomacy was typical of our treatment of Latin America. We used our economic power to further our foreign policy, and vice versa. Latin America was, and largely still is, a very poor region overall, and the lure of American aid was a key method of securing their cooperation. Even our proposal of pan-Americanism served this end, as what we were really proposing was for the entire region to come together in support of us and our interests. Latin America was inferior to us and we regarded its nations as children we could manipulate to our will. Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy was a departure from this modus operandi, designed to improve the image of the United States and foster cooperation within the hemisphere. Unfortunately, whether it was an aberration in U.S. behavior toward Latin America or the beginning of a new era will never be known, as its possible progress was interrupted by events in Europe. Whatever good it may have done was quickly unraveled once the Second World War began and it was back to business as usual. “Although the Good Neighbor Policy appeared to portend improved U.S.-Caribbean relations, the previous era of intervention

² Hillman, Richard and Thomas D’Agostino, Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), p. 73
³ See Hillman and D’Agostino, Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean, p. 70
and occupation left an inauspicious legacy. This legacy set the stage for the eventual rise of brutal dictators.\(^4\)

### 2.2 World War II Ends and the Cold War Begins

World War II was the true turning point in U.S.-Latin America relations, as well as the role of Latin America on the world stage. The European powers were occupied with the battles at home, and consequently had removed their attention from Latin America. This left a power vacuum in the region that the United States was only too happy to fill. After the war ended and the dust settled, only the United States and the Soviet Union were left standing. Ideological enemies, they immediately set about to ensure the destruction of the other and used the rest of the world as pawns in their zero-sum game. From the point of view of Latin America, the loss of European markets and military strength was a major blow. Left with two options for survival, they opted to side with their non-communist neighbor to the north. “Latin America’s international role would be defined in terms of its importance as an anticommunist bastion in the U.S. sphere of influence.”\(^5\) Paranoid about the threat of a possible communist infiltration, the United States set up certain insurance policies for itself. One such plan was the Rio Pact between the United States and many Latin American countries. It was a mutual defense treaty, intended to deter communist invasion, which stated that an attack on one was an attack on all. The United States also dominated another body set up around this time, the OAS or Organization of American States, and used it to further its attack on communism. The focus of this paper, however, is another institution created by the United States to protect itself and its interests - the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

\(^4\) See Hillman and D’Agostino, *Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean*, p. 74
In order to maintain U.S. domination and control of the raw materials in the Western Hemisphere, we needed stable governments willing to cooperate with us. This translated into a need to assist friendly governments in holding onto power and quashing any opposition. The specter of communism was a convenient justification for the anti-left stance taken by the U.S. prior to the Cold War to protect its corporate interests. The leftist elements, clamoring for reform, were labeled “subversives” and “communists” so as to receive public support for their eradication. We sought a path to Latin American cooperation with our imperialist plan to bring the hemisphere under our guidance. The logical choice for an ally was the military, as they had precedence of protecting regimes from “subversion.” The military in Latin America had been a key player since the violent colonization by force of the region by European powers. Initially after independence, they were employed by the regional caudillos trying to maintain and consolidate their power. The military was the guard dog of the ruling elite class, and fought to protect their interests. The elite, in turn, usually sided with U.S. interests, as they understood the importance of maintaining this alliance. In the twentieth century, the militaries of Latin America began to professionalize and formed almost a separate class within society. They continued to step in and take control for civilian leaders and acted as mediators to restore order when opposition threatened a coup. When a regime seemed on the verge of crumbling, the military was called in by the civilian government to take the reins, clean up the mess, and then hand the country back over to civilian leaders. After decades of such cycles of power, the military began to get a taste for political power.
3. The School of the Americas

3.1 The Birth of the School

U.S. officials felt that one way to entice the Latin American militaries to be more receptive to our practices was through the sale of arms, as we were on the cutting edge of military technology. We did find willing buyers in Latin America, most notably Argentina, and then the task left up to us was to train them to use these weapons. It was believed that if they felt confident with our arms, then they would feel confident about U.S. training. The Latin American Training Center Ground Division, or Latin American Ground School, was founded in 1946 in Fort Amador, a United States military base in the Panama Canal Zone. Panama was deemed a suitable location due to its convenient proximity in the midst of the countries which would be sending students and the presence of existing facilities. Ostensibly its purpose was to train Latin American military officers to fight communism, however the true motive was broader - the preservation of U.S. interests. Once we were able to win them over, the United States believed that they would also be receptive to our goals and values.

The School was born at a time when the anti-communist paradigm was taking hold and the United States was switching gears from a policy of open intervention to covert operations, as evidenced by the creation of the CIA and the NSA (National Security Agency) in 1947. Initially, enrollment was very low, as Latin American countries were accustomed to European training for their troops, which they held to be superior. The United States Army had to prove its ability to offer instruction of comparable quality. When they did look to the United States, Latin American militaries preferred to save up to send their students to well-known military schools in the United
States. Also, the United States government had not yet realized the potential advantages of having a hand in the training and arming of the militaries of our neighbors, and thus allotted very little money for the School. So in 1948, when the School offered a program to the Argentine officers in the use of the anti-aircraft guns they had purchased from us, the instructors knew that they had to make it a success. To that end, they played into the racial superiority that the Argentine officers felt towards their fellow Latin Americans and tried to paint the best possible image of U.S. society and culture. They also divided the classes to give separate instruction to officers and enlisted men. This type of policy was to become standard at the School, and the divisive attitudes and prejudices fostered would be taken back home by the students and would play a role in their zealous extermination of opposition. The programs showed enough promise that the School was permitted to continue its operations. In 1950, the School was renamed the U.S. Army Caribbean School and moved across the isthmus of Panama to Fort Gulick. Spanish also became the official language of the School at that time. The United States had succeeded in establishing an institution which would effectively transmit U.S. values to the military leadership of Latin America. This control of our own “backyard” was about to become very important as the Cold War was heating up.

3.2 The Ideology of the National Security Doctrine

If the Cold War was the perfect excuse for military training, then the national security doctrine was the perfect methodology. According to the national security doctrine, “military leaders viewed internal leftist subversion rather than external aggression as the greatest security threat confronting their societies. Acting under the premise that such subversion was fueled by a lack of social, political, and economic
development, military leaders...adopted a greatly expanded role that entailed long-term institutional rule as opposed to the brief interventions of the past."6 Though the concept was not new to many Latin American regimes, we schooled their students in the identification of "internal subversion" and techniques to rid their nation of it. Latin American militaries had already found themselves looking to internal enemies, as cause for external battles had been largely frozen by the Cold War. It was at the School of the Americas, however, that the officers learned to use the communist threat as justification for previously unthinkable acts. "This shift in military thinking made it more likely that progressive and nationalist governments would be perceived as threatening national security."7 During the late 1940s and the 1950s, suspected communists were denounced and detained, before they could convert others to their cause. The goal of this containment policy was to discourage communists from trying to take hold in the Western Hemisphere.

The turning point for the role of the military was the national security doctrine. "The national security doctrine changed [everything]. The new national security state was meant to do something quite other than repair and reestablish the political status quo. Thus, the military took on a new long-term 'ruler' role."8 No longer was the military merely a mediator. The enemy now lay within, and all attention was directed inward. All who demanded improved conditions, leftists such as workers, students, and peasants, were labeled "subversives," and were therefore stripped of their guarantee of humane and

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6 See Hillman, Understanding Contemporary Latin America, p. 86
8 See Hillman, Understanding Contemporary Latin America, pp. 117-18
lawful treatment. In its zeal to eradicate potential opposition, the military failed to take into account the role that repression played in fostering the very insurrection it sought to quell. As far as the military was concerned, the civilian leaders had proven themselves to be incapable of doing what needed to be done to impose order. “The rise of a perceived communist threat in the hemisphere marked the demise of a period of professional reformism as Latin American militaries, concerned about communism and economic growth, replaced civilians with generals.”

The United States capitalized on this ideological shift to convert the Latin American officers to our cause. To demonstrate our moral and ideological superiority over the communists, overt military interventions were no longer the preferred method for influencing the course of a regime in a neighboring country. The new outlook of the militaries to the south provided us with a local tool for inconspicuously manipulating the leadership in these nations in our favor. During the 1950s, that role had been largely filled by the CIA. That was about to change. Panama was far from the eyes of the American media and public, which permitted the School to operate in relative anonymity and freedom. In the United States, the cause of containment was exploited to secure a large military budget for the training of the Latin American forces. “The cold war thus evolved into a permanent state of mobilization and vigilance against challenges to the status quo.” The involvement of the military in the politics of Latin America was a process that was already long underway. What the School did for them was to teach them the tools to hold on to the power they had historically shied away from. Most of Latin America sent students to the SOA, however it was logically the countries closest to

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9 See Hillman, *Understanding Contemporary Latin America*, p. 181
the Canal Zone that had the highest numbers of representatives. Interestingly, Costa Rica was one of the countries that sent a large number of students to the School. Since they dissolved their armed services in 1948, the courses their police force representatives were taking did not serve a military purpose. “[I]t is believed by far that the greatest contribution that [the Ground School] makes is that after attending, the students from Costa Rica come back and express to their countrymen the admiration and enthusiasm they feel for the United States. Particularly, they are impressed with the efficiency and the equipment of the United States Army.”¹¹ The case of Costa Rica demonstrates that despite its military emphasis, the School of the Americas primarily served to indoctrinate Latin America with U.S. values and convince them of the righteousness of our cause and methods.

3.3 The Effects of the Cuban Revolution

The Cuban Revolution was more than a change of regime in a small Caribbean island nation. It was the shot heard around the world, or at least the hemisphere. U.S policy in Latin America can be divided into two categories – before the revolution, and after it. What had been a vague and distant concern regarding communist invasion became an immediate and adjacent threat to capitalism and the national security of the United States. This feeling was enhanced by revolutionaries in Cuba declaring their intentions to spread the seeds of revolution to as many countries as possible. When Che Guevara moved on to Bolivia and Castro sent advisors around Latin America, it appeared that the seeds were already being planted. This, coupled with our lack of success combating the communists in Vietnam, exaggerated our response. Our worst fear had come true, and therefore “U.S. policy toward Latin America after 1959 was focused

¹¹ See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, p. 71
primarily on preventing a ‘second Cuba.’”12 The United States Army diverted its attention to Latin America and switched tactics to engage in covert operations, and the region found itself in the middle of a fight to the death between the U.S. and the USSR. “The reorientation of US military assistance programs in Latin America, after 1959, to focus on counter-insurgency reinforced the military’s preoccupation with the internal enemy and provided a doctrinal basis for interpreting that threat and relating it to the global East-West struggle and the Russian-Cuban strategy of ‘indirect aggression’ via revolutionary warfare.”13

While economic expansionism may still have been at the heart of U.S. motives in Latin America, the need for massive military action was accepted unconditionally by the American public when communism came knocking on their door. “The triumph of the Cuban revolution insured the institutional survival of the Ground School.”14 The reality of a permanent state of war necessitated the alteration of the nature of the current military forces in Latin America. As more aid, arms, and training were proffered to Latin American soldiers by the United States, it became imperative to create a permanent armed forces with professional officers whose lifetime devotion was the military. “U.S. ‘modernization’ of military, intelligence, and police forces during the Cold War served to strengthen the forces engaged in repression…to ensure U.S. influence…promote pro-U.S. attitudes, and to develop U.S. ‘assets’ – personnel loyal to U.S. interests.”15 While the central focus of our foreign policy objectives beginning in the 1960s remained the fight

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12 See Hillman and D’Agostino, Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean , p. 83
13 Fitch, “The Decline in US Military Influence in Latin America,” p. 23
14 See Gill, The School of the Americas , p. 73
against communism, the force behind this imperative increased tenfold and the line
separating acceptable from intolerable behavior blurred almost to the point of vanishing.

4. The First Wave of Graduates from the School

4.1 Counter-insurgency and the KUBARK Manual

President Kennedy instituted the Alliance for Progress in the early 1960s as a plan
to stimulate reform and economic growth in Latin America. The civic programs it
spawned were well publicized, but the Alliance also had a dark underbelly that was kept
hidden from the public. The civic programs were combined with the military use of
clandestine terror and massive violence to combat insurgency and subversion.

Many policymakers...believed that the military was the only institution capable of
maintaining domestic tranquility while simultaneously promoting economic growth.
Nevertheless, counterinsurgency doctrine’s emphasis on development and security
provided the armed forces with a rationale for intruding more deeply into the lives of
ordinary people, and its most striking feature was that it prescribed terrorism as a tactic
for fighting guerrilla insurgents.\(^\text{16}\)

The first counter-insurgency course was offered at the U.S. Army Caribbean School in
July of 1961 and it found an eager student base in Nicaragua, which began to send large
numbers of its senior officers there. These officers were later accused of egregious
human rights violations during the Sandinista revolution. The U.S. Army Caribbean
School was restructured after the Cuban Revolution and became the U.S. Army School of
the Americas (USARSA), more commonly known as the School of the Americas
(hereafter the SOA), in 1963. The name change was necessitated to reflect the presence
of the School (and the United States) in Central and South America in addition to the
Caribbean. Also that year, the CIA created its KUBARK (the code name the CIA gave
itself) Counterintelligence Manual, which was to become the basis of much of the
counter-insurgency training given at the School.

\(^{16}\) See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, pp. 74-75
KUBARK was the result of secret CIA experiments in the 1950s and 1960s on coercion and human consciousness with the intention of making victims feel responsible for their own pain and suffering. It would also become the model for subsequent training manuals and lesson plans, along with Project X material, whose genesis it inspired. During the 1960s, the “Army Foreign Intelligence Assistance Program, or ‘Project X’... supplied training material to allied militaries around the world.”

The intelligence training provided to friendly countries was based on clandestine operations of the type made popular by the CIA and KUBARK. With its new name, the goal of the SOA mutated to focus on fighting communist insurgency. These topics found their way into every course being given at the School as the focus of American policy sharpened.

While there is still controversy over the US role in promoting the Latin American military’s preoccupation with the ‘communist threat’ in the 1960s, there is little doubt that the emphasis on counter-insurgency doctrines in US training and manuals following the Cuban Revolution, the changes in the kinds of equipment available, and the prestige attached to the new special forces units and new doctrines all contributed to the shift toward greater concern with internal threats.

The techniques being encouraged, many of which were taken straight from the KUBARK manual, denied legal rights to anyone suspected of collusion with a “subversive” organization. It was largely the ninth chapter, entitled “The Coercive Counterintelligence Interrogation of Resistant Sources,” which drew the most attention. Military officers were being granted far-reaching power against civilian citizens for the purpose of rooting out subversives and maintaining order and control. Though certain lines have been erased, one of the more telling sections is found on page eight of the manual. It states:

Interrogations conducted under compulsion or duress are especially likely to involve illegality and to entail damaging consequences for KUBARK. Therefore prior Headquarters approval... must be obtained... under any of the following circumstances: 1.

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17 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 49
18 Fitch, “The Decline in US Military Influence in Latin America,” p. 16
If bodily harm is to be inflicted. 2. If medical, chemical, or electrical methods or materials are to be used to induce acquiescence…20

Despite the origins of this manual with the CIA, one need only pick up any account of the dirty wars in the southern cone to find reference to electroshock used to torture the disappeared. There is no mention of any such implement prior to the graduation of officers who trained at the SOA after the KUBARK manual was released. The manual standardized the teaching of torture and introduced a new psychological element. The premise was to make the subject feel responsible for his own pain and suffering. Officers were instructed to hold subjects for as long as possible and to fully control their environment. Detainees were to be allowed no sense of normalcy or routine for the purpose of inducing regression, which would render confession more easily obtainable. Subjects were fed at irregular intervals, had their sleep constantly disrupted, and were dragged in for interrogation at all hours. Though extermination was not mentioned by name, the manual does mandate determining the likelihood of legal trouble a prisoner may cause upon release. Those who would be more apt to make public their mistreatment were the ones who did not make it back home. Eventually, most of the prisoners ended up in this category. These techniques were taught in courses at the SOA such as psychological operations, which included field training using actual prisoners.

As the United States Army worked to impart its military techniques and principles, the government was busy drawing a line in the political sand. The Mann Doctrine of 1964, penned by Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann, stated the intentions of the United States to protect its interests and promote economic growth while

20 “KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation Manual,” p. 8. Though a number three does appear under the second circumstance, it is unknown what the total number of instances given was, as all evidence of them in the declassified manual has been erased.
maintaining a neutral stance on matters of social reform or democratic institutions. In other words, our government would be blind to the type of regime it was dealing with, and focus solely on its economic goals. The only qualification for a country to be a U.S. ally was an opposition to communism. That same year, Brazil was taken over by a brutal military regime, and it was the first of many to come. A 1969 commission called by President Nixon confirmed that policy and announced that "the United States should be willing to cooperate with authoritarian regimes throughout the region"\textsuperscript{21} as long as they were not communist. He would make good on those words a few years later in Chile. The United States did nothing to end any of these coups as the mere fact that dictators were in power did not violate U.S. interests. As long as they did not threaten United States investments and interests, we would not intervene. "[T]he U.S. would help to put – and maintain in power – any government, no matter how repressive, that would give a free hand to American corporate interests."\textsuperscript{22} Those officers who had been to the School of the Americas during the 1950s and 60s had climbed the ranks and were now in positions of power within the armed forces at home. It was they who wrested control of their countries from the civilian leaders and suspended protection of human rights. These professional officers had become a class unto themselves, and they saw themselves as having interests separate from those of the general populace. Their interests often meshed with the U.S. interests they had been fed at the SOA and were guarded fiercely using all the instruction they had received there. The biggest nightmare of the people was about to become their own leaders, as the era of state terrorism was ushered into Latin America.

4.2 The Height of the National Security Doctrine

Enrollment jumped as Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Panama, and Peru sent large numbers of officers to be schooled in the use of state terrorism. "U.S.-backed military dictatorships ruled most of Latin America throughout the 1970s, and their security forces were well represented at the SOA." The United States Army was selective regarding who they would accept into the School as they were interested in choosing potential leaders. They felt that in this manner they would be able to "stack the deck" and ensure that officers who understood U.S. values and interests, were friendly to us, and would be receptive to our suggestions, would be in positions of power. U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Rand Rodríguez, on assignment to Bolivia, expressed it as "having an SOA graduate who understands what we're talking about and the way we do business is an asset for us. They help us convince [their militaries] of the way we do things." The men being educated at the school during those years would go on to become the top officials in their countries during the 1970s and 1980s. Studying at the School of the Americas was a fast-track path to promotion and choice assignments. Latin Americans vied for the chance to be sent to the School. "To be an SOA graduate was important for the personal and political ambitions of upwardly mobile officers." Their future behavior would depend largely on their rank upon entering the School and the courses they took while there. At least in Chile, there seems to have been a notable connection between students enrolled in the Basic Arms or Combat Arms courses and those who wound up leading the secret police for Pinochet. "Almost all of the Chilean officers who overthrew Allende had trained at a U.S. military service school prior to the coup; most

23 See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, p. 78
24 Ibid, p. 136
25 Ibid, p. 88
had attended the U.S. Army's prestigious School of the Americas. Other courses available at the School serviced both low-ranked soldiers and officers, including logistics, jungle operations, internal security, leadership training, irregular warfare, counterinsurgency training, and de-mining instruction. The CGS, or Command and General Staff Officer Course, catered to those officers showing enough promise to be thought of as potential future leaders of their countries. It was important that they be onboard with us in the event that they were one day in a position to become our allies.

Besides the type of course, the number of courses was also a determining factor of future actions. As demonstrated by a study by Kate McCoy at the University of Wisconsin, "students who took multiple courses at the school were almost four times more likely to violate human rights than their counterparts who took only one course." It was the greater exposure to the School which made the trainees more likely to abuse human rights. Although those who took only one or two courses were not the ones leading the brutality at home, their hands were not clean. The higher-ranking officer was the "man at the top" who strategizes and does not get his hands dirty. That is what the enlisted men were for. Those soldiers were the ones carrying out the vicious orders and following the lead of those above them. Every German soldier was not Hitler or Himmler, but great numbers of them participated in the occupation and extermination of so many countries and their citizens. It only takes a few who have a mission and the power to get the ball rolling, but it requires a large number of followers to achieve large-scale success. The soldiers trained at the SOA were those followers making it possible for the infamous graduates to carry out their "dirty wars." Additionally, the number of

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26 See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, p. 2
students a country sent to the School of the Americas was as telling as the number of
courses a student took. Those countries with the highest number of graduates were the
ones with the worst human rights records and the most violent of regimes. “More
Chilean soldiers trained at the SOA between 1970 and 1975 than from any other country
during the entire decade.” 28 This was especially relevant given the military coup which
took place in late 1973. Other such examples were Peru, which sent many students
during its 1970s military regime, Nicaragua, whose students were sent by Somoza to
uphold his regime, Honduras, El Salvador, Bolivia, and Colombia. These countries were
well represented until the 1980s, at which time the drug war took over and it was Bolivia
and Colombia which occupied center stage. One can detect the pattern of U.S. interest by
tracking the countries which were best represented at the School at a particular moment
in time.

4.3 The Chilean Case

The case of Chile is especially illustrative of the position of the United States
regarding Latin America. In 1970, a Socialist candidate, Salvador Allende, narrowly
obtained a higher percentage of votes, and was thus appointed president. This enraged
President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, because at their behest, the United States had been
working behind the scenes even before the election to prevent such an event from
transpiring. Kissinger was quoted as saying “I don’t see why we need to stand by and
watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.” 29 A
Marxist president in our own backyard was wholly unacceptable, particularly by 1970
when it was readily apparent that we would not succeed in extricating the Communists

28 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 79
29 Lois Hecht Oppenheim, Politics in Chile: Democracy, Authoritarianism, and the Search for
from North Vietnam. Nixon’s “visceral hatred” of Allende was fueled by the situation of the copper mines in Chile, most of which were owned and operated by U.S. corporations. Allende, in an effort to reform this gross inequity and put Chileans in a position to control and benefit from their own resources, initiated a program of nationalization. A major focus of this action was the mining industry, which Allende brought under Chilean rule. As if this were not enough to anger American business interests, he refused to reimburse the owners for the expropriated land. American companies had sabotaged or neglected the mines so that future production was compromised and significant repairs would need to be made in order to render them operable again. The Chilean government passed an amendment unanimously declaring that little or no money be paid to the foreign investors. Allende asserted that the American companies actually owed money to Chile, but he was willing to call it even. The American businessmen, not surprisingly, did not see it this way and demanded justice.

The largest U.S.-owned copper companies, Anaconda and Kennecott, went so far as to try to block Chile from selling its copper abroad. President Nixon, who had never liked Allende anyway, wasted no time in obliging. He set out to ruin Chile’s credit rating abroad, thus rendering it ineligible for loans or extensions on already existing loans. This plan of attack spring-boarded off of the concept of dollar diplomacy, as the United States used its considerable financial power and sway to support its foreign policy. Economic disgrace and ruin were only the beginning. Our actions also included the abduction of a top military officer, with the intention of blaming it on the Socialists. The plan went awry when the officer fought his would-be abductors, and was killed in the ensuing

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melee. Suspicion was never cast on the Socialists because the ploy was uncovered, along with the U.S. collusion in the tragedy. The United States earned a bad reputation internationally for bullying Chile, which deterred us from taking such an obvious part in any further action. And though no one was willing to oppose us in the economic realm either, the other world powers let it be known that they were onto our machinations there as well. However, no one stepped in to prevent us from keeping Chile in a permanent state of crisis. As luck would have it, we also had another option open to us.

Numerous Chilean military officers had trained at the School of the Americas, and had thus imbibed the appropriate dose of support for the United States. "The presence of the Chilean military at the School of the Americas had increased over the 1950s and 1960s, and by the 1970s, the impact of so many years of training on the Chilean officer corps was readily apparent...Chilean security forces confused the Chilean national interest with the interests of the United States." 31 Many of them had risen to positions of considerable influence and sided with the rising star General Augusto Pinochet. "There was a policy to strangle Chile economically by denying it all U.S. loans and credits except for aid to the Chilean armed forces." 32 Pinochet and his supporters were only too happy to accept U.S. aid to overthrow Allende and assume power. On September 11, 1973, that is exactly what they did. Allende was assassinated and the U.S.-backed coup ushered in one of the longest periods of brutal military rule that Latin America has seen. The important thing was that we had kept a Socialist president from redistributing our wealth to improve the lives of the Chilean people.

31 See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, p. 79
32 See Hecht Oppenheim, *Politics in Chile*, p. 106
4.4 Détente and the Carter Administration

American policy temporarily changed course when Jimmy Carter took office in 1977, while globally there was simultaneously a détente in the cold war. This meant that relations between the Soviets and Americans were thawing out and neither side was on the attack. The world was able to take a breath, and attention that was usually directed towards keeping communism at bay could now be refocused. President Carter, along with organizations such as Amnesty International, took up the cause of human rights abuses, which they brought into the international spotlight. The actions of several dictators in the Americas were called into question as state terrorism was in full swing. Interestingly, the U.S. ambassadors to the region, especially in Argentina, were wholly aware of the issue prior to the Carter administration and had kept documentation of the brutality all along. No action had been taken on these violations, however, until then.

As part of his effort to clean up the hemisphere, Carter discontinued intelligence training for Latin American militaries. "It was the understanding ... that President Carter had stopped intelligence training in Central America because of the escalating reports of human rights abuses. Carter was reportedly concerned that the training and the abuses were linked."\(^{33}\) Additionally, it was this administration which, along with Congress, suspended the use of the Project X material, for fear that it would contribute to violations. Carter also denied enrollment at the SOA for students from those countries with the worst records of human rights. For those countries, however, the damage had already been done, as it was the students who had already passed through the School that were wreaking havoc on democracy. This focus on human rights issues by President Carter and Amnesty International was ephemeral as Carter was not reelected and his cause was

\(^{33}\) Fitch, J. Samuel, "The Decline of US Military Influence in Latin America," p. 6
not picked up by the subsequent administration. When Reagan was elected in 1980, he declared his intention to undo all of Jimmy Carter’s work and it was under his direction that the School of the Americas got its second wind.

5. The Second Wave

5.1 A Return to the Cold War

Beginning in the 1980s, dictators and military regimes were on the way out. This meant that the School of the Americas would have to find a new way into Latin American society if it were to survive. U.S. military officials capitalized on the civil violence taking place in Central America, specifically Nicaragua and El Salvador. The détente in cold war relations had ended and the containment policy was back in full swing. With cold war politics back on track, counterinsurgency training found new life in the jungles of Central America. President Reagan was eager to resume those programs temporarily shut down by Jimmy Carter, and drafted the Reagan Doctrine to offer support to groups or individuals “fighting for freedom” against “tyrants,” thus keeping communists at bay. The Reagan administration claimed that the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN in Spanish) in El Salvador was being aided by the Soviet Union, which they professed was trying to expand its influence in the Western Hemisphere. Many of those officers educated at the SOA before the Carter years were moving into positions of power just as the human rights spotlight was being removed. In addition to resuming cold war programs, Reagan put a rush on the production of new training manuals. As the documents had previously been approved for foreign release, the personnel in charge of putting together new manuals reused a good deal of the Project X material, which had
already been written. The instructors at the School then incorporated existing lesson plans from their courses, adding the finishing touches to the final product.

The Human Resources Exploitation Training Manual of 1983, used in lesson plans at the School of the Americas, was merely an updated, edited version of the KUBARK manual of the 1960s. It was compiled as part of the Army’s Foreign Intelligence Assistance Program. The language had been modernized and sanitized, but the methods were the same, and some passages were even copied verbatim. All references to communism and the Soviet Union were replaced with more general terminology and locations. A page entitled “Prohibition Against Use of Force” was inserted after the table of contents, though all examples of forceful techniques were left intact. The military claimed that this was to instruct the trainees in what they should not do. Apparently it would not have sufficed to simply inform the students that the use of violent force was strictly prohibited. It was necessary instead to explain several methods completely, including tips and suggestions, for the edification of the trainees. Throughout the text, any language deemed not to be condemning of the violence was crossed out and stronger, handwritten language inserted. In many cases, the original words are still visible for example on page B-2, letter E, where it used to say that coercive techniques “always require prior hqs approval,” the quoted portion has a line through it and “constitute an impropriety and violate policy” was written below. The goal of the methods outlined within its pages was still to induce regression of a subject so as to obtain the desired information, and the tactics were nearly identical.

Additionally, the instructors at the School of the Americas used seven training manuals in the late 1980s and early 1990s which have been the focus of the debate over the teaching of torture. With names such as “Handling of Sources,” “Terrorism and the Urban Guerrilla,” and “Counter Intelligence,” these infamous seven army training manuals declassified in 1996 were also based on these old techniques.

The manuals blurred the distinction between armed guerrilla insurgents and unarmed peaceful protesters, and they made no reference to the law when instructing Latin American militaries to spy on and infiltrate political parties, unions, and communist organizations, as well as to ‘neutralize’ them. Although they were compiled from training materials used by the United States military in programs around the world, the ‘torture manuals’ were linked publicly only to the School of the Americas.\(^{37}\)

Although seemingly unique, these seven merely expanded on the previous documents, going into much more detail and separating each step into its own chapter. As J. Samuel Fitch wrote in the early 1990s, “despite the new terminology, current US military writings on counter-insurgency appear to have changed little since the 1960s.”\(^{38}\) When the seven manuals were declassified to the public, the government and military claimed that proper procedure was not followed and that the material was not made available in English, thus preventing the mistake from being caught at that time.\(^{39}\) However, this was not the case. When Reagan commissioned new material to be put together as soon as possible, it was Project X which was referenced for much of the information. Project X, as the title would suggest, was in English. When the assembled documents reached the SOA, a few different instructors there, most notably Captain Victor Tise, submitted them to Washington for approval, signaling the presence of objectionable material. They were

\(^{37}\) See Gill, *The School of the Americas*, p. 212

\(^{38}\) Fitch, J. Samuel, “The Decline of US Military Influence in Latin America,” p.25

sent back approved and unchanged.\textsuperscript{40} Given the consent of their superiors, the officers proceeded to use the material for training and dissemination throughout Latin America.

5.2 The School Moves Stateside

Around this time, in 1984, the SOA closed the doors on its Canal Zone operations, and the School moved stateside. The principal motivation behind this action was the agreement between the United States and Panama for the eventual turning over of the Canal Zone. As Panama was expected to assume control over the area before the turn of the century, the United States decided to allow plenty of time to relocate many of its military outfits. Thus, the School of the Americas found a new home in Georgia. Even this decision was not independent of U.S. economic interests, as two Cuban-American businesspeople lobbied to get the School moved to Columbus, Georgia, in part due to the financial benefit they expected their town to gain. They were also staunch supporters of the School as they detested Communist Cuba and were convinced of the indispensability of the instruction received there in the fight to keep the hemisphere free. Though Fort Benning was originally slated as a temporary location, in 1987 the move was made permanent. Being located in the continental United States would prove a vastly distinct experience for the Latin American soldiers coming for instruction. It also erased the distance between the School and the eyes of the American public. In this way, the move to Georgia contributed to the decline in reputation of the School and the birth of the protest movement.

Since the first years at the School, soldiers and officers were treated differently and were taught different things. The routine for the soldiers, for whom their countries of origin were not willing to pay much for their studies abroad, involved spending little time

\textsuperscript{40} Morales, “Bush Nominates Terrorist for Nation Intelligence Director.”
at the School. They typically took few courses, of the type which last only a few weeks. They had only enough time to come to the School, take their course or two, see a few sights, and then return home, perhaps with some American goods they could buy cheaper there than at home. Their experiences could be equated with tourism, complete with souvenirs, with a bit of educational value and indoctrination tossed in for good measure. The experience of the officers at the SOA was much more than a holiday stay. Many of the officers sent to the School lived there for a year, and they brought their families along with them. They took lengthier courses, and more of them, and actually lived in town and experienced American life firsthand. Although many of them were financially compelled to live in poor neighborhoods, the majority still found the standard of living to be higher than at home. The premise here was to get them to identify with American values, so that when they returned home, they would continue to uphold and defend them. One is much more likely to stand up for an ideal when one has seen its relevance up close and lived it for an extended period of time, as opposed something explained from a distance. The move to the United States transported the Latin American officers from familiar surroundings and plopped them down in the middle of white America. In Columbus, Georgia, they did not have the distractions of the Canal Zone in Panama, nor the easy access to neighboring countries. Thus their only diversion was the School and American life in the town around it. This was intentional, as it would compel them to conform to their American surroundings. Host families at the base were provided to officers to facilitate their transition into American society. They rendered assistance to the visiting trainees in navigating American customs and regulations, but also gave each officer a warm, friendly face to paint onto his mental image of the United States.
5.3 The War on Drugs

Definitive as the struggle against communism was, its heyday had passed and this path was coming to an end. The military was going to have to find a new cause to rally around. Instantly, a perfect opportunity presented itself. When the Soviet Union fell and the cold war raison d’être vanished from the global radar, the war on drugs offered up a threat almost equal in proportion. By the 1990s, authors such as Brophy and Zirnitz could look back and proclaim that the “collapse of the Soviet bloc has brought little change...U.S. policymakers now perceive drug traffickers, not communist insurgents, as the greatest regional threat.”41 The continuation of the School of the Americas would be assured with another enemy so great that there would be little chance of completely wiping it out for at least a couple of generations. The student body at the SOA reflected this shift in ideology, as more students from Central America, Bolivia and Colombia arrived at Fort Benning. Many South American countries had moved beyond a military need for the School, and other institutions, such as the IMF, filled their economic requirements. Countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile were either already firmly in the grip of a dictatorship which did not need any further instruction, or else struggling to make their fledgling democracies succeed. At any rate, the need for military training there had passed, and it was the Andean countries that found themselves in a predicament useful to our objectives. As instruction at the School was resuming, “the same violent counter-insurgency strategy [was] continuing into the post-Cold War period, especially in Colombia where a vicious drug war has replaced anti-communism as the rationale for the

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41 Brophy and Zirnitz, “U.S. Military Training for Latin America”
Approximately two-thirds of the killings were traced to the government troops and the paramilitary, which were trained and backed by the United States.

U.S. policy adapted and modernized to keep up with the changing world reality, however the core of its work remained unaltered. "The drug trade and the rise of very powerful cartels and narcotraffickers also constituted a new threat to the interests and external security of a host of Latin American countries." The international drug trade jeopardized the U.S. plan for a Free Trade Area of the Americas, as well as its investments abroad. By the 1990s, the center of the drug traffic had shifted from Bolivia to Colombia, where a civil war had been raging for decades. The American public was concerned about the narcotics entering their country every day from the Andean nation, and the military was more interested in its historical mission to quash insurgency. Conveniently, in Colombia these two disparate aims were lumped together and a new, and invented, category of “narcoguerrillas” was created. This allowed the Colombians, and the Americans aiding them, to link Colombia’s two greatest problems together and kill the two birds with one stone. The creation of the misleading term “narcoguerrilla” was a stroke of genius that gave both sides what they wanted.

However, it did not look good for the guerrillas or the narcotraffickers. The efforts to exterminate them were now doubled. Prior to this policy they had little contact with each other; although they continue to be at odds much of the time, they have banded together at other times to fight a now common enemy. The “subversives” were now the narcoguerrillas, though it was the peasants who grew coca or other low-level workers that

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43 See Hillman, Understanding Contemporary Latin America, p. 186
44 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 158
were the ones being captured or killed. It was not in the best interest of the United States to wipe out the drug trade, as with it would disappear the justification for waging war and training military officers at places like the SOA. So, the military saw to it that just enough was done so that the public would continue to support the cause. They knew that this was a battle that could not likely be won for a long time, at least not without major social and economic reforms which were not to their advantage. In the meantime, the counter-narcotics training enabled the U.S. Army to achieve its post-cold war goal of fostering closer ties with the armed forces of Latin America.

5.4 The U.S. in Colombia

U.S. strategists and their Colombian counterparts were less interested in cocaine traffickers and paramilitaries than in limiting the growing financial, military, and strategic power of leftist insurgents. Since the cold war, they had viewed the guerrillas as threats to U.S. interests and the dominant status quo in Colombia...U.S. officials understood that the Colombian government would only commit its military to the drug war if it could use U.S. aid to fight the guerrillas and Plan Colombia supported a similar political project.45

Through such institutions as the SOA, the United States has supplied countries such as Colombia with military equipment and training to aid them in their fight. Plan Colombia was the United States’ newest strategy for transforming their society. Our government agreed to send large amounts of aid to Colombia, 80% of which was to be used to strengthen the military and police forces. “The economic component of the Plan consists of neoliberal policies that open up Colombia’s markets and resources to foreign investors while cutting government social spending.”46

Our own pilots have flown the planes over the coca fields, destroying animals and food crops, the only source of income for many rural workers along with the coca plants

45 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 180
(which are almost immediately replanted). The United States extorted Colombian acquiescence to the presence of American pilots on board these dangerous missions. The Colombian government gave in because not to would result in the intolerable loss of aid. In return, the Colombian military received top-notch American aircraft, including one OV-10 Bronco airplane and six UH-1H helicopters.\textsuperscript{47} For a while, the government tried to coerce the peasants into relinquishing their coca crops in exchange for assistance in setting up other means of support and protection from fumigation of their crops. Unfortunately, the promised aid was slow in coming, when it came at all, and the crops could still be fumigated anyway. Thus the people feel that they have no options, and are prone to vigilantism and violence. The government, in turn, cracks down on the violence, making the situation worse and the upward spiral of escalation continues. Interestingly, the United States has not contributed to the peace process in Colombia, as it has in the Middle East and Ireland. "The miniscule amount of aid going to support this process clearly illustrates that the U.S. Government has little interest in a negotiated settlement to the conflict and is willing to spend huge amounts of U.S. taxpayer dollars to protect its economic interests through a military solution."\textsuperscript{48}

Little headway has been made, as each time drugs are impounded at one site, plenty more manage to find their way into our country from another. Another reason for the half-hearted effort was that the heads of the cartels were often partners in crime with those in power. For instance, "some of the military officers being recruited to combat


\textsuperscript{48} "Plan Colombia," p. 8
drug trafficking have been closely linked to the trade. Keeping alive the tradition of impunity for the ringleaders, the Colombian drug lords stumbled upon a new group of patsies – minor children. They are used to commit violent acts and transport narcotics; if they are caught, they are too young to be sent to jail. These officers, including 97 known human rights abusers linked to the School of the Americas, also have the power and the means to intimidate judges and witnesses, affording them total impunity. Since the people are too terrified to talk, as anyone labeled a snitch will be killed, the abusers are emboldened by the lack of consequences. It creates a sort of Orwellian situation, thus aiding the repression. “The intent of Plan Colombia is to eliminate the FARC in order to preserve the political and economic status quo that has served the Colombian elite and foreign business interests so profitably throughout Colombian history.” Nonetheless, those fighting the so-called war on drugs had to continue to show enough progress until attention could be diverted by another cause. Early in the new millennium, such a cause was to present itself, but not before the SOA faced its own mortality.

6. The Current Situation

6.1 Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation

In 2001 the School of the Americas was “closed” due to protests over its record of producing so many violators of human rights. It “re-opened” that same year with a new name, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, abbreviated either WHINSEC or WHISC. Its website gives the date of its creation as that year, but it is the SOA reincarnated. In an attempt to skirt the negative reputation attached to the so-called “School of Assassins,” the United States government closed the SOA, but in name only.

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49 Brophy and Zirnite, “U.S. Military Training for Latin America”
50 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 187
51 “Plan Colombia,” p. 9
The most important item of note about the renaming was that those responsible for the previous violations were never held accountable or punished, nor was the role of U.S. policy in the abuses ever discussed. It is extremely difficult to escape one’s bad reputation while never acknowledging any wrongdoing or undertaking any reform. Even a prisoner will not be granted parole if he does not demonstrate remorse. Attempting to appease the critics and justify its continued existence, the School feebly engaged the issue of human rights. The officials at WHINSEC brag about the democratic emphasis at the School and the inclusion of mandatory human rights instruction, but it seems that the alterations are merely superficial. “Human rights instruction at the SOA is less about curbing the atrocities committed by security forces than shoring up the legitimacy of a discredited institution and obscuring the brutality of U.S. foreign policy.”

All officers attending the School are required to take between eight and forty hours of human rights instruction covering a variety of topics. For those who take the maximum, it is still too little, too late. The discussions are limited to specific cases and groups, much of which is irrelevant, as it has passed or does not include the major targets of violations, such as the situation of the Bolivian and Colombian peasants, scapegoat victims of the drug war. In fact, references to Latin America were curiously absent at the Human Rights Week events at the SOA. “The actions of Human Rights Week silenced and distorted the past, justified the training of armed forces that remain largely unreformed, and rationalized the continued militarization of the Americas. The most important message was not respect for human rights, but the high value of good public relations.”

Any involvement on the part of the United States is also conveniently

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52 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 138
53 Ibid, p. 149
absent. On account of the conscious omission of the role the United States played in these abuses, as well as the responsibility of the associated (military) actors, the pattern will only continue. Until the perpetrators admit fault and are held accountable for their actions, nothing will change. The students, therefore, do not take the instruction seriously and return home to countries where human rights are still violated as a matter of practice and the impunity reigns. In the case of Colombia, which has sent thousands more students to the SOA than any other country in Latin America, “the U.S. aid is going to a military that...still maintains close ties to paramilitary forces that continue to wage a dirty war against the rural peasant population.”54 In addition, the military outsources killings to paramilitary and other groups to avoid a direct connection. Even if the human rights element were significant, “the SOA also taught human rights classes, but still produced graduates who murdered, raped and tortured others who spoke out against trade and economic agreements with the U.S.”55

The officials at WHINSEC also purport to have removed any objectionable courses from their catalog. In the case of the Psychological Operations course, they removed the course from the catalog only to create a new course, called Information Operations, of the same substance. Sniper training had to be removed from the SOA, however it can still be obtained at Fort Benning, just down the road from the School. Offering a course and having students sign up for it are also two very different things. There are courses which focus specifically on human rights; however few, if any, students choose to take them. These superficial alterations are not enough for many groups, most notably the SOA Watch, which “not only linked alumni to some of the

54 “Plan Colombia,” p. 8
55 See Hentges, Rochelle, PA Group urges Rep. Hart to help close WHISC
worst atrocities of the Latin American dirty wars; it also connected them to crimes that continued to occur long after the signing of peace accords in Central America and the replacement of military dictators with civilian rulers.56 As so many leaders have done before them, when dissent is high, it is time to divert attention externally. In September of that same year, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon stirred the vengeful fires of American sensibilities. A new enemy had presented itself, and military funding and training received a boost. Our latest cause also functioned to silence some critics of military action and protesters of the SOA, though it also spurred discussion of torture and a newfound distaste for it, no matter the justification. Since the war on drugs was stalling and support dwindled as it dragged on, renaming it the war on terrorism relit the fuse of American heroics. Though we have sensibly not disengaged completely from the war on drugs (never burn bridges), the war on terror occupies the forefront of American foreign policy under George W. Bush. For now, the “terrorists” are the “subversives” that our militaries must defeat.

6.2 Look to the Future

As the war which began so many decades ago marches on under another name, military and business leaders alike rejoice in the continued sanctioning of their activities and a renewed smokescreen for their machinations in the name of national security. At the SOA, the term insurgent has been replaced with terrorist, but the methods imparted are the same. Ironically, at the moment when the School seemed to have discovered a renewed lease on life with the global war on terrorism (or the current watered-down version, the struggle against extremism), it is facing extinction. Protests from the SOA Watch have heated up enough to draw national attention, the very thing the army has

56 See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 211
worked to avoid. However, all may not be lost. Already the School has begun
outsourcing some of its more controversial courses to nearby facilities, including sniper
training it offers just down the road. Even if the opposition succeeds in closing the
School, the patterns of behavior being imparted will most likely continue to be taught,
simply in another location. The people embroiled in the fight against a perceived bad
seed would pat themselves on the back for its destruction and move on to another fight.
All the hatred of the government and military and disgust at their actions have been
channeled towards the convenient target of the SOA. Though some realize that “the real
problem...was U.S. political and economic hegemony in Latin America and the post-cold
war world,”\textsuperscript{57} it is much easier, after all, to target a tangible institution, rather than rail
against the entire system. Also, it will bring the protesters a measure of satisfaction to
see their efforts bear fruit and succeed in shutting down what they believe to be the rotten
branch of the system. Alas, what they do not see, or do not want to see, is that the School
of the Americas is a symptom, not the disease. “Defining Latin American war atrocities
committed by U.S.-sponsored security forces as the logical outcome of the behavior of a
predatory, imperial power and not the result of the flawed policies of a particular U.S.
president, or the actions of ‘rogue’ actors, clashed with the beliefs of many American
citizens.”\textsuperscript{58} The School has moved before and changed its name on other occasions.
Numerous Latin American military students may quietly begin amassing at another
military base and the instruction would continue as it has before.

\textsuperscript{57} See Gill, \textit{The School of the Americas}, p. 227
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 228
7. Conclusion

Spanning nearly sixty years of operations, over 61,000 graduates have passed through the doors of the School of the Americas. Since its inception, the School has implanted in the minds of its trainees the seed of collaboration with the United States. Though some may find its methods unsavory, the message imparted was fully consistent with U.S. foreign policy over the years. The United States has always considered Latin America as its backyard; property to control and do with as it saw fit. We went in and took over much of their economies, especially resources, which we expatriated back to the United States. This did not benefit the countries to which the resources rightfully belonged. The Latin American military was poised to take their role in politics to the next level; they needed only the proper guidance and a push. The Cold War presented itself as the perfect justification for indoctrinating Latin Americans with our ideals and crushing opposition, labeled communists. The School of the Americas was set up to give us an opportunity to influence Latin America at the “subatomic” level. The Cuban Revolution accelerated the process and brought a sense of urgency to the situation, which was fueled further by our mistakes and failures in Vietnam. We could not let communism sneak up on us again as it had in Cuba, or let it get the best of us as it seemed to be doing in Vietnam. The SOA schooled its students in the use of torture as a counter-insurgency tactic and trained military officers to see anyone asking for an improved standard of living as subversives who needed to be eliminated. Those who were officers at the SOA during the first wave went on to lead brutal armies and death squads or become dictators and their generals. Those who were enlisted men went on to serve the officers who were their fellow students and participate in the atrocities. They

never even needed to make use of the convenient precedent of the Nuremburg defense as they were never brought to justice for their crimes. The cover of preventing communist invasion from taking hold permitted the military to employ brutal and abusive tactics for the purpose of maintaining in power regimes in collusion with us to perpetuate our hegemony in the hemisphere.

There was a cool-down at the School of the Americas during the détente and the Carter administration, as human rights was temporarily the focus of international attention. Changes in practice were not made, however, and all training that was halted resumed full strength after Carter left office. When Reagan was elected, he was anxious to get back to business as usual and cold war policies were immediately reinstated. The focus was shifted closer to home, specifically Central America first and then the Andean countries, as the need for southern cone (and Caribbean) military training had almost completely dried up. In the 1980s, it was the contras, El Salvador and Panama that absorbed most of the efforts of the SOA and the Reagan administration. As the communist threat wound down, the war on drugs began to take center stage. The tactics employed remained largely the same; it was the target that was different. The new “subversives” were lowly people on the drug trafficking totem pole. Paramilitaries were used by the governments to capture or kill enough people to convince the America people that the war was justified, and that the enormous military budget and the School of the Americas were necessary to their safety. The body count was also the ticket into the School for many officers, as they took credit for the bloodbaths and crackdowns committed with their permission. “Enormous amounts of military aid for training and equipment are pouring into the [Andean] region, where the violation of human rights has
gone hand in hand with the strengthening of old, and the creation of new, security forces.\textsuperscript{60}

When it became apparent that the drug war was stalling, the attacks of 9/11 were a convenient diversion. Terrorists were the new “subversives.” Our efforts tightened even further as the scope of our training was limited to a few countries, close to home. These were the ones left non-democratic or with unresolved disputes or civil wars. Around this time, the School had to be shut down due to heightened attention to its record of graduating dictators and murderers. The WHINSEC is just the SOA with a new name; nothing below the surface has changed. The human rights instruction that the School boasts of is minimal and a joke to the students. How seriously can they take it when everything else that they are taught seems to contradict it and violations at home are expected? Those courses in the catalog deemed controversial were removed, only to reappear later with new names. The School has undergone many name changes and restructurings to elude shutdown and escape public view and criticism, but at its heart, it remains unchanged. While its continued survival is a constantly visible reminder of an ugly past our government is eager to have us forget, closing the School will not impact the policy which created it in the first place. Until the perpetrators of those past injustices are held responsible for their crimes and real reforms in the military and economic sectors are enacted, only the venue may change. Must we amend the list of post-nuclear war survivors to include both cockroaches and the SOA?

\textsuperscript{60} See Gill, The School of the Americas, p. 158
Chronology

1946  The Latin American Training Center Ground Division is created at Fort Amador in the Canal Zone of Panama

1950  The School is moved to Fort Gulick, on the other side of Panama, and is renamed the U.S Army Caribbean School

1959  The focus of the school’s instruction shifts after the Cuban Revolution

1963  The School is renamed the U.S Army School of the Americas to reflect its presence and influence in Central and South America as well as the Caribbean

1977  Intelligence training is temporarily suspended while Jimmy Carter was in office

1981  All training resumes and with more zeal when Reagan gets in office and increases the pace

1984  The School of the Americas closes its Panamanian facilities per an agreement regarding the handing over of the Canal Zone and moves to its new home at Fort Benning, Georgia

1987  The move is made official and permanent

2001  The School of the Americas is renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation
Infamous Graduates of the School of the Americas

Argentina  General Roberto Viola and General Leopaldo Galtieri dictators involved in the Dirty War (and its aftermath)

Bolivia  Dictator Hugo Banzer

Colombia  General Mario Montoya Uribe, the “military official responsible for Plan Colombia”; Hernán Orozco, complicity in Mapiripan massacre

Ecuador  Dictator Guillermo Rodríguez

El Salvador*  Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, commanded the Atlacatl Battalion; death squad leader Roberto d’Aubuisson; the assassins of Archbishop Óscar Romero; the 19 soldiers who killed 6 Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter; the multitude who took part in the massacre at El Mozote

Guatemala  Colonel Julio Alpírez, who tortured and murdered guerrillas, and an American citizen, while working for the CIA; Byron Lima Estrada, who murdered Bishop Juan Gerardi; dictators Efrain Rios Montt and Fernando Lucas García

Honduras  General Luis Alonso Discua, who commanded the death squad Battalion 3-16; General Regalado

Panama  General Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos, dictators

Perú  Juan Velsco Alvarado, dictator

*El Salvador is second in the number of graduates only to Colombia

61 www.sonw.org
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