

On January 17, 2001, the School of the Americas was replaced by the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. As a result of a Department of Defense proposal included in the Defense Authorization Bill for Fiscal 2001. The measure passed when the House of Representatives defeated a bi-partisan amendment to close the school and conduct a congressional investigation by a narrow ten vote margin. The amendment was sponsored by Representatives Moakley (D-MA), Scarborough (R-FL), Campbell (R-CA) and McGovern (D-MA). The following is a summary that compares the "new" school with the School of the Americas.

In a media interview last year, Georgia Senator and SOA supporter, the late Paul Coverdell, characterized the DOD proposal as "cosmetic" changes that would ensure that the SOA could continue its mission and operation. Critics of the SOA concur. The new military training school is the continuation of the SOA under a new name. It is a new name, but the same shame.

The approach taken by the DOD is not grounded in any critical assessment of the training, procedures, performance, or results (consequences) of the training program it copies. Further, it ignores congressional concern and public outcry over the SOA's past and present link to human rights atrocities.

COMPARISON OF THE SOA AND THE NEW SCHOOL

AUTHORITY:

School of the Americas:

- "The Secretary of the Army may operate the military education and training facility known as the United States Army School of the Americas." *U.S Code: Title 10, Section 4415*

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- Secretary of Defense authorized to "operate an education and training facility..."
- Secretary of a department of the military designated as the executive agent to run school

U.S. Code: Title 10, Section 2166.

Concerns and Comparison of Authority: The Secretary of the Army, under the direction of the Secretary of Defense, operated the SOA. After the new proposal, the Secretary of the Army, or another department of the military, still operates the school as an agent of the Secretary of Defense. The proposal offers no substantive change to the SOA.

PURPOSE and MISSION:

School of the Americas:

- provide "military education and training to military personnel of Central and South American countries and Caribbean countries." *US Code: Title 10, Section 4415*
- provide "military education and training to the nations of Latin America",
- "promote democratic values and respect for human rights; and foster cooperation among multinational military forces." *SOA Course Catalogue, 1998/99*

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- provide "professional education and training to eligible personnel of nations of the Western Hemisphere," defined as military, law enforcement, and civilian personnel "while fostering mutual knowledge, [...] and promoting democratic values, respect for human rights". *U.S. Code Title 10, Section 2166.* Pentagon officials state this will include counter-drug operations, peace support, and disaster relief

Concerns and Comparison of the Purpose and Mission: The purpose for the new school as described varies in scope and detail from the original language that authorized the SOA.

However, the current "working" mission of the SOA as reflected in the 1998/99 SOA course catalog combined together with the actual day to day practice at the SOA is consistent with a supposed changed mission statement for WHINSEC. In short there is no change in purpose between the new school and the SOA as its mission has evolved.

As with the "working" mission of the SOA, the purpose stated for the new school downplays the militaristic aspects of the training offered and focuses instead on "leadership development, counter-drug operations, peace support, and disaster relief." These courses existed at the SOA but have never been well attended.

The 2000 SOA Certification Report to Congress shows that in 1999 a scant 14% of SOA soldiers took the peace operations, civil/military relations and the like. Over 85% took the standard SOA fare: commando tactics, military intelligence, psychological operations, and combat training. A recent newspaper headline sums it up: "Bombs and Bullets Most Popular Classes at the US Army School of the Americas." Nothing in the Defense Authorization Bill makes a change to the attendance of classes at the new replacement school to reflect the "new" mission.

The new school allows for the training of police and civilian personnel. That practice was already in place at the SOA. Further, the new authorization allows any and all military training that has been central to the SOA, including advanced combat arms, psychological operations, military intelligence, and commando tactics.

The consequence of this kind of training has been at the heart of the public and congressional controversy surrounding the SOA. It hones the skills of Latin American soldiers who then can use what they learned against their own people. For example, some of the Salvadoran soldiers cited in the UN Truth Commission report for the massacre of six Jesuit priests and their women co-workers had just returned from taking the SOA commando operations course. The Jesuit massacre by all accounts was a commando-type operation.

CURRICULA

School of the Americas:

- No specific detail in original congressional authorization

- Practice: 8 hours human rights instruction tacked on

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- Includes "mandatory instruction for each student, for at least 8 hours on human rights the rule of law, due process, civilian control of the military, role of the military in a democratic society" *U.S. Code Title 10, Section 2166*
- No restrictions on type or amount of military training

Concerns and Comparison of the Curricula: The new school includes human rights instruction, but that is not new.

As the public outcry grew and congressional censure mounted, the SOA instituted first a four-hour human rights component and then upped it to eight hours in an effort to quell critics.

While the eight hours of human rights training is not harmful, it is minimal and inadequate for a school that touts its mission mandate as "promoting democratic values, respect for human rights." There is no requirement that the new school seek input from noted outside human rights specialists and no provision to modify the content to address specific human rights issues in particular countries (for example, paramilitaries in Colombia). In addition, there is no attempt to evaluate or to measure the effectiveness of the training through long-term monitoring of graduates or by any other means.

Although the bill is careful to minimize any mention of military training, the fact remains that, like the SOA it replaces, this is a military institution and Latin American troops will be sent there to learn military skills. The clearest proof of this is to ask how many soldiers would come to the school if it removed ALL combat-related training? We must also ask, if the primary purpose of the institution is to teach democracy and human rights, as claimed, isn't this more appropriately done in a civilian setting?

BOARD OF VISITORS:

School of the Americas:

- No mention of a Board of Visitors (BOV) in the original congressional authorization.
- 6-member BOV
- Not independent oversight board

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- BOV membership: 2 military officers; 1 person selected by Secretary of State; 6 people selected by Secretary of Defense including "to the extent practicable" members of the academic, religious and human rights communities; chairs and ranking minority members of House and Senate Armed Services Committees included on BOV
- meets at least annually to "inquire into the curriculum, instruction, physical equipment, fiscal affairs, academic methods, and other matters"
- Reports its actions and recommendations to Secretary of Defense
U.S. Code Title 10, Section 2166

Concerns and Comparisons of the Board of Visitors: In response to congressional and public criticism, the SOA instituted a six-member Board of Visitors (BOV) that was reconstituted in 1999. The BOV has been a handpicked group of SOA proponents that, according to the 1998 SOA Certification Report to Congress, focused significant energy on PR campaigns in the media and Congress to polish the SOA's image. Despite the illusion, the SOA's BOV does not provide independent, outside critical review or oversight of the SOA.

The authorization calls for a BOV, but gives the Secretary of Defense the broad authority to determine the composition and actual members of Board. Though a provision exists for the possible inclusion of members of the human rights, religious and academic communities, these communities are not defined, nor is any selection criteria established. Furthermore, nothing mandates the inclusion of independent human rights experts, religious leaders, and other potential critics. It is up to the discretion of the Secretary of Defense to determine whether or not it is "practicable" to include them. The Congressional make up of the Board of Visitors, limited as it is to members of the Armed Services Committees, would exclude many of the school's congressional critics. The Board of Visitors proposed would – like the SOA BOV -- be primarily a handpicked group of SOA proponents.

The problem persists: The new BOV does not provide for independent, outside oversight

or critical review of the school.

ANNUAL REPORT

School of the Americas:

- No provision in the original congressional authorization
- In recent years, Appropriations Committees have required report on school and "general assessment" of graduates

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- Within 60 days of meeting the BOV must submit to the Secretary of Defense a "written report of its action and of its views and recommendations pertaining" to the new school.
- By March 15 the Secretary of Defense must submit a report on the "activities of the Institute during the preceding year" to Congress *U.S. Code Title 10, Section 2166*

Concerns and Comparisons of Annual Report: While the SOA authorization did not mandate an annual report, in practice, the SOA has been required recently to make a report to the Foreign Operations Committee. The new provision simply codifies the current practice, but weakens even the minimal reporting requirements that have stood for the last few years.

The Annual Report – unlike the SOA Certification Report – does not require even the minimal tracking or monitoring of recent graduates that was called for in the SOA Certification Report. The proposed Annual Report **is not** an analysis, critique, assessment, evaluation, appraisal or examination with recommendations from an outside, independent source. It is simply "a report" of the "activities" of the school.

TRANSITION FROM US ARMY SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS:

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation:

- Secretary of Defense ensures that the Secretary of the Army provides for transition from SOA into new school
- The proposal calls for the repeal of original congressional authorization of the School of the Americas.

Questions and Recommendation: By repealing the original congressional authorization for the SOA, the bill closes the School of the Americas on paper. Inexplicably, however, it does so with no word of analysis. Why close a school that is without fault? Why open another that is, for all intents and purposes, identical except for name?

The DOD proposal to close the SOA and replace it with an SOA clone skipped over one vital step: Evaluation of the SOA model upon which it is based. The opening of the new school is not grounded in any critical assessment of the training, procedures, performance, or results (consequences) of the training program it copies. Further, it ignores congressional concern and public outcry over the SOA's past and present link to human rights atrocities.

At the very least, a thorough independent investigation and report on the SOA are warranted before Congress can adequately consider the merits of any new proposal for an SOA-like training facility.

A rigorous outside investigation of charges against the SOA is a reasonable approach to resolve the controversy over the School of the Americas or its replacement. The new school is substantially the same as the SOA it purports to replace. The issues raised by critics of the SOA are not addressed by the recently enacted changes. As the United States is pouring money, military hardware and military training into Colombia and SOA human rights abusers continue to operate with impunity in Colombia, Guatemala and elsewhere, these issues remain as crucial and immediate as ever.