Written by SOA Watch

The Honduran Supreme Court voted 12-3 on October 20, 2011, to reject abuse of authority charges against now-retired Generals Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, Luis Prince Suazo, Venancio Cervantes, Miguel Garcia, Juan Pablo Rodriguez and Carlos Cuellar. The charges stem from the 2009 coup in which the democratically-elected president, Manuel Zelaya, was overthrown and flown to Costa Rica.

As a result of the case, SOA Watch has been able to determine that of these six generals officia lly
linked to the orchestration of the coup,
4 were trained at the notorious School of the Americas
. These are Generals Romeo Vásquez Velásquez, Luis Prince Suazo, Miguel Angel García and Carlos Cuellar.

The ruling comes from the same Honduran Supreme Court (considered the "most corrupt institution in Latin America" by Larry Birns of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs) that reinstated General Vásquez Velásquez to his post as Commander of the Honduran Armed Forces shortly before the June 28th coup.

General Vásquez Velásquez is currently the head of Hondutel, the Honduran telephone company. He recently announced that we will seek the presidency of Honduras in the 2013 elections[1]. (In Guatemala, another SOA graduate implicated in the genocide of that country's indigenous people, Otto Perez Molina, is slated to win in the run-off for the presidency on November 4. His campaign slogan is Mano Dura, "iron fist").

Then commander of the Honduran Army, Gen. Miguel Angel García defended the coup, claiming that the Honduran Armed Forces had prevented the arrival of socialism to "the heart of the United States"[2].

According the Honduran Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained (COFADEH), between 2009 and 2011, 463 people have been killed or disappeared[3]; these include students, farmers, unionists, journalists and LGBTQ activists. A month after the coup, femicides rose 60%
[4]
. The armed forces, led by SOA graduate General René Arnoldo Osorio Canales, have been suspected of supporting death squads linked to powerful businessman and cocaine trafficker Miguel Facussé in the Aguán Valley
[5]
.

On October 21, gunmen killed university students Rafael Alejandro Vargas Castellanos, 22, and Carlos David Pineda Rodríguez, 23, after they left a party at the house of the sister of Enrique Flores Lanza, Zelaya's lawyer, who has been under house arrest since returning to the country with Zelaya on June 1, 2011[6]. Vargas Castellanos, who had in the past worked for COFADEH was the son of the rector of the national university. Julieta Castellanos, his mother, was also a member of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which presented a report this year about the facts around the 2009 coup.

The Honduran Minister of Security (and SOA graduate), Pompeyo Bonilla, admitted on October 26th that members of the police force were possibly behind the killings of Castellanos and Rodríguez[7].

The Obama administration, while at first condemning the coup, reversed its decision, and supported elections in November 2009, paving the way for continued impunity for the top general s and business elite involved in the coup.

Before leaving the country on June 28, 2009, the plane carrying Manuel Zelaya made a stop at the US base in Soto Cano. The United States continued training Honduran soldiers at institutions like the School of the Americas (renamed Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation, WHINSEC, in 2001) following the coup, and has increased military aid to the country. Honduras now spends $172 million on defense, up from $63 million five years ago[8]. Public and private figures put violent deaths in Honduras at 20 per day
[9]
.
The United States has trained thousands of Honduran troops at the SOA/WHINSEC. During the Contra War against Nicaragua in the 1980s, while the US base at Soto Cano housed CIA operatives and planes that transport weapons and paramilitaries across the border, Honduran troops trained at the SOA established the death squad known as Battalion 3-16. Nineteen members and three generals who operated Battalion 3-16 were trained at the SOA.

The SOA/WHINSEC has continued to play a fundamental role in US domination of Latin America, and the continuation of neoliberal policies that target students, unionists, farmers, theologians and political dissenters. Graduates of the institution have directed coups, massacres, disappearances, torture and displacement, from Chile to Bolivia to Colombia to El Salvador and Mexico. The SOA Watch continues to demand the closure of the school and a complete investigation into the atrocities carried out by its graduates. From November 18-20, 2011, the movement will converge to protest at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, where the SOA/WHINSEC is housed. www.SOAW.org

1. http://www.elheraldo.hn/Pa%C3%ADs/Ediciones/2011/10/27/Noticias/Vasquez-se-postulara-por-el-Alianza-Patriotica
2. http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/2253-honduran-coup-regime-erects-superficial-reality-around-elections
3. *Informe: Situación de derechos humanos en Honduras*. COFADEH, 2011
4. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/29/honduras-blind-eye-femicides
5. http://www.thenation.com/article/164120/wikileaks-honduras-us-linked-brutal-businessman
6. http://www.soaw.org/about-us/partnership-america-latina/212-delegations/3709-reportback-from-zelaya-return
6. http://www.centinelaeconomico.com/2011/10/26/policias-estarian-detras-del-asesinato-de-hijo-de-la-rectora-de-la-unah/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=policias-estarian-detras-del-asesinato-de-hijo-de-la-rectora-de-la-unah
7. http://insightcrime.org/insight-latest-news/item/1745-more-military-spending-in-central-america-giving-rise-to-old-and-new-fears
8. http://www.centinelaeconomico.com/2011/10/26/policias-estarian-detras-del-asesinato-de-hijo-de-la-rectora-de-la-unah/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=policias-estarian-detras-del-asesinato-de-hijo-de-la-rectora-de-la-unah