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School of the Assassins? Critics claim U.S. training helps church opponents

A growing number of critics are asserting that the United States has regularly trained Latin American military officers guilty of persecuting, torturing, raping and murdering Catholic church workers, religious and clergy in their own countries since the 1960s.

In particular, these critics have called for the closing of the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, located at Fort Benning, Ga., which trains about 1,700 Latin American soldiers each year in such activities as counterinsurgency — the suppression of armed rebellion against, and unarmed resistance to, an established government.

According to information from the Department of the Army, SOA "is a virtual pioneer (in the) exposure, training and conscience-raising of students on issues concerning human rights." Furthermore, the SOA "reinforces the concept of human rights while exposing the Latin American students to American culture and ideals."

But the training center's critics paint a far less benign picture of the effect SOA's human-rights promotion has on its students.

Efforts to install human-rights training at the school are a farce, according to Charles T. Call, a human-rights advocate from the Washington Office on Latin America. Call was invited to SOA to lecture on human rights there in 1993.

"(I)n spite of the new language about human rights and democracy, U.S. trainers appear to pay only lip service to these goals," wrote Call in the August 9, 1993 edition of *The Miami Herald*.

"Even more distressing, I found that the United States continues to invite soldiers accused of gross human rights violations to the school," he added, citing a Colombian lieutenant colonel enrolled at the school in 1992 despite being investigated for participating in a peasant massacre.

A former instructor who taught there from 1986-89, has also knocked the school for allowing an anti-Catholic atmosphere to thrive among its students.

"Latin American officers I served with or taught as students at the School of the Americas were openly critical of the Catholic church and especially the work of the Maryknolls and the Christian missionaries," claimed retired U.S. Army Major

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