

GAO

Report to the Ranking Minority Member,  
Committee on National Security, House  
of Representatives

---

August 1996

# SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS

## U.S. Military Training for Latin American Countries



---

G A O  
**75** years  
1921 - 1996





United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-272054

August 22, 1996

The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on National Security  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Dellums:

The U.S. Army School of the Americas has been training Latin American military students for the last 50 years. In response to your request, we are providing information on (1) how the Latin American political, military, and economic environment in which the School operates has changed in recent years; (2) who the School's attendees are and how they are selected; (3) how the School's curriculum has evolved; and (4) who provides the instruction. Additionally, we are providing information on a recent Department of the Army study covering the School and on a Department of Defense (DOD) initiative to strengthen civilian institutions involved in defense and security in Latin America.

## Background

The U.S. Army School of the Americas, located at Fort Benning, Georgia, is a military educational institution that has trained over 57,000 officers, cadets, noncommissioned officers (NCO), and civilians from Latin America and the United States over the past 50 years. According to the State Department, the training provided by the School is intended to be a long-term investment in a positive relationship with Latin America. Today's School is derived from several predecessor institutions, beginning with a 1946 Army school established primarily to provide technical instruction to U.S. personnel, with limited training for Latin Americans. In 1987, under Public Law 100-180 (10 U.S.C. 4415), Congress formally authorized the Secretary of the Army to operate the School with the purpose of providing military education and training to military personnel of Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries. Appendix I provides a chronology of the School's history.

The School is funded from two sources: (1) the Army's operations and maintenance account, which covers overhead costs such as civilians' pay, guest instructor programs, supplies and equipment, certain travel expenses, and contracts, and (2) reimbursements from U.S. security assistance provided to Latin American countries, which cover costs associated with presenting the courses, including instructional supplies

---

and materials; required travel for courses; and support for the School's library and publications. In fiscal year 1995, the School received \$2.6 million from the Army's operations and maintenance account. In addition, the School's courses generated \$1.2 million from foreign militaries using U.S. security assistance grant funds.<sup>1</sup> The School retains about 35 percent of this amount to defray its costs for course offerings. Fort Benning uses another 37 percent to defray costs associated with infrastructure maintenance, and the remainder is transferred to Department of the Army headquarters.

---

## Results in Brief

The Latin American environment in which the School operates is undergoing radical political and economic change. Virtually all of the countries of the region have representative governments and are pursuing market-based economic policies. In addition, the role of the military in many of these societies is beginning to evolve from one of political dominance to a more professional model subordinate to the civilian authority. However, in some countries, civilian authority is weak and fragmented, and problems such as corruption within the government and human rights violations associated with government authorities, particularly military and police forces, remain as threats to the gains made over the past decade.

Although the School trains the majority of Latin American students that come to the United States for Army training, primarily because the curriculum is taught in Spanish, it provides a small percent of the training that the Army provides to foreign students from around the world. Virtually all of the 745 students attending the School in 1995 represented their countries' military or police forces, with few civilians attending the School. Country representation in the student population typically reflects the dominant U.S. interests at various points in time.

Many of the courses at the School provide instruction in military and combat skills, such as patrolling, infantry tactics, tactical intelligence, and battle planning. However, since 1990, the curriculum has been broadened to include courses addressing post-Cold War needs of the region, such as counterterrorism training, defense resource management, and civil-military relations. The length of the courses and attendance vary significantly, from a 1-week course that provides an overview of basic military skills to 162 Chilean cadets to a 47-week command and general staff officer course

---

<sup>1</sup>Sources of grant funds include International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Financing, and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement programs.

---

attended by 19 students from 9 Latin American countries and 19 officers from the U.S. armed forces, in 1995. The courses offered at the School are based on U.S. military doctrine, and foreign students from other regions receive basically the same courses at other Army training locations, with the exception of the School's emphasis on human rights.

Courses are taught by U.S. and Latin American military personnel and some civilian instructors. For fiscal year 1996, 83 instructors are assigned to the School—50 U.S. military personnel and 33 military personnel from Latin America. The Latin American instructors are nominated by their governments and are subject to U.S. approval.

A recent study contracted for by the Army to determine whether the School should be retained and why concluded that the School should continue but recommended a number of changes. DOD agreed with many of these recommendations in principle, and for those in its purview it is considering how best to implement them.

In response to the emerging post-Cold War need to strengthen civilian institutions in Latin America, DOD is considering establishing a separate institution to focus on civil-military relations and the development of greater civilian expertise in the region's defense establishments.

---

## The Changing Environment in Latin America

The last decade has seen remarkable change in Latin America as countries throughout the region have embraced political and economic freedom. Today, all Latin American nations, except Cuba, have democratically elected leaders, increasingly open economies, and increased political freedoms. It is within this changing political, military, and economic environment that the School of the Americas has been operating.

---

### Political Change

The end of the Cold War and the spread of democratic government around the world have accelerated dramatic change in Latin America. Over the past 15 years, the region has seen a significant shift away from dictatorships and military regimes. Today, virtually all Latin American countries have representative governments, although the democratic institutions in many of these countries are in their embryonic stage.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting the fragile nature of democracy in some countries, the 1991 Santiago Resolution of the Organization of American States called for the

---

<sup>2</sup>Abraham F. Lowenthal, and Peter Hakim, "Latin American Democracy in the 1990s: The Challenges Ahead," *Evolving U.S. Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1992).

---

preservation and strengthening of democratic systems and was reinforced at the 1995 Defense Ministerial of the Americas in Williamsburg, Virginia.

However, it remains unclear whether the democratic gains of the 1980s can be sustained. In some countries, civilian institutions are relatively weak and fragmented and are vulnerable to economic and social instability. Corruption within the governments, including military and law enforcement agencies, also threatens the continued stability of democratic governments.

---

## Changes in the Military Environment

The move toward democratically elected governments has caused the role of the militaries in Latin America to undergo significant change. The militaries were frequently political, and largely autonomous, actors in regional affairs and often played a dominant role in their societies. In recent years, however, the militaries appear to have become less prone to political intervention. The concern exists, however, that this inclination is not permanent, and that democratization is not irreversible. The recent coup attempt in Paraguay, while rebuffed, demonstrates the fragile nature of democracy in Latin America.

Further, human rights violations continue to be a concern in the region. The 1995 State Department report on human rights states that even though progress has been made, widespread abuses of human rights continue in some Latin American countries. For example, although progress was made in negotiations between the Guatemalan government and guerrillas and human rights activists were elected to the country's congress, serious human rights abuses continued to occur in Guatemala in 1995. In Mexico, serious problems also remain, such as extrajudicial killings by the police and illegal arrests.

Colombia is another country in the region that continues to face major human rights problems associated with its military, including killings, torture, and disappearances. The State Department has expressed concerns about human rights violators' impunity from prosecution. The State Department's recent report on Colombia noted that the military has usually failed to prosecute human rights abuse cases involving military personnel. Several sources, including the Organization of American States, have expressed concern about Colombia's human rights record. In response, during its 1996 session, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, of which Colombia is a member, authorized the High Commissioner on Human Rights to establish an office in Colombia—an

---

unusual step. The office is expected to monitor and assess the human rights situation in Colombia, including Colombia's progress in correcting its human rights abuses; provide assistance to Colombia to correct those abuses; and report its findings at next year's convention.

---

## Economic Change

Economically, the region is shifting from protectionist and statist economic models to free markets and export-oriented growth. Leaders throughout the region recognize the need to achieve macroeconomic stability, and many countries are enduring painful economic adjustments. In some cases, economic reforms have further exacerbated the concentration of income and wealth and thus widened the already large disparity between the rich and the poor. Although the region's total gross domestic product increased between 1991 and 1993, an estimated 45 percent of the people are living in poverty.

---

## Change in U.S. Interests

The end of the Cold War presented the United States with a new foreign policy opportunity in Latin America. The United States no longer needs to bolster the militaries to stop communism and has begun focusing more efforts on promoting economic and political freedom.

At the December 1994 Summit of the Americas hosted by the United States, 34 democratically elected leaders from Latin America gathered to commit their governments to open new markets, create a free trade area throughout the hemisphere, strengthen the movement to democracy, and improve the quality of life for all people of the region. The United States is working through multilateral institutions to further the goals of the Summit of the Americas. In recent testimony, for example, the State Department described how the Inter-American Development Bank is working for sustainable development and promoting specific Summit mandates in the fields of health and education.<sup>3</sup>

Consistent with the changing political and economic environment, the United States is approaching security issues in the region in terms of mutual cooperation. Today, the U.S. policy reflects the retreat of the Communist threat and the political transformation in the Latin American region. It emphasizes support for democratically elected governments, defense cooperation, confidence-building measures, and the mitigation of transnational threats such as narcotrafficking and international terrorism.

---

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Foreign Policy and the International Financial Institutions, statement by Joan E. Spero, Department of State, before the Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, House Committee on Banking and Financial Services (Apr.25, 1996).

---

The United States considers educating and training foreign militaries and civilians a critical part of its national security strategy to pursue the specific goal of promoting democracy in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Senior Army officials told us that international military training programs<sup>4</sup> expose students to U.S. military doctrine and practices and include instruction for foreign military members and civilians on developing defense resource management systems, regard for democratic values and civilian control of military, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and counterdrug operations.

In the U.S. Security Strategy for the Americas, DOD identifies the School of the Americas and two other military training institutions<sup>5</sup> as regional assets through which the United States can engage its counterparts in the region.

---

## Attendees of the School of the Americas

Although the School of the Americas is one option among the many Army schools and installations offering courses to foreign military students, it is the predominant training choice for Latin Americans. While the number of students at the School has decreased over the past few years because of reduced U.S. funding for international military training, School officials expect an increase this year due to increases in training funding for 1996. Students at the School come primarily from their countries' military or police forces, with a significant proportion from military or police academies. Although some countries have sent more students to the School than others, the predominant countries represented at the School typically reflect U.S. interests in the region at a particular time.

---

## School of the Americas Is Predominant Choice of Latin Americans

Of the 5,895 foreign students that came to the United States to attend U.S. Army training courses in fiscal year 1995, 842 (14 percent) were from Spanish-speaking Latin American and Caribbean countries. Of the 842, 745 (88 percent) of those attended the School of the Americas. The 97 Latin Americans that did not receive their Army training at the School attended courses at 24 other Army installations. Some of these students took

---

<sup>4</sup>Foreign militaries purchase training from the U.S. military using funds granted or appropriated through three U.S. foreign assistance programs—Foreign Military Financing, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, and IMET. In 1995, over 18,000 students received training through these programs; about 2,600 were from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>5</sup>The other institutions are the Naval Small Craft and Technical Training School, located in Panama, and the Inter-American Air Forces Academy, located at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The schools are operated by the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force, respectively, and provide training in Spanish to students from Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 1963, about 4,500 personnel have attended the Navy school, and almost 30,000 have attended the Air Force school since 1943.

---

courses not offered at the School, while others took similar courses but received their instruction in English.

The 745 students who attended the School in 1995 represented a reduction in enrollment. Between 1984 and 1993, an average of 1,371 students attended the School each year, with attendance ranging from 996 in 1985 to 1,763 in 1992.<sup>6</sup> According to School officials, a reduction in funding for international military training contributed to the decrease in the number of students. The IMET program funds allocated to the Latin American region were reduced from the 1993 level of \$11.3 million to about \$5.1 million in 1994 and about \$4.8 million in 1995. This reduced allocation reflects the reduction in total IMET funding for those years—from \$42.5 million in 1993 to about \$22.3 million in 1994 and about \$26.4 million in 1995. However, officials at the School project an increase in the number of students for 1996 since IMET funding for the Latin American region for 1996 was increased to \$9.1 million.

School officials said that the effect of the reduction in international training funds was further compounded by increases in the cost of the courses. Inflation particularly affected certain cost components, such as ammunition, flight support, course-related travel, and the publication of training materials. According to School officials, the cost of some courses has doubled over the past 5 or 6 years, in large measure because of increases in the cost components. As a result, foreign militaries could not afford to send higher numbers of students to the courses.

---

## How Students Are Selected

According to School officials, because the curriculum is taught in Spanish, Latin American and Caribbean military forces can select students based on their military training needs without considering their English language skills. This allows the countries to save funds that might have to be spent for preparatory English language courses. Candidates are identified by foreign military officials and approved by U.S. officials at the U.S. embassies in Latin America. Instructions issued by the Secretary of State in January 1994, require U.S. officials to review records of prospective students for all U.S. schools to identify any past actions or affiliations considered undesirable, such as criminal activity, human rights abuses, or corruption. According to School officials, all prospective foreign students

---

<sup>6</sup>The School maintains attendance records based on the calendar year, and the Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) maintains records on a fiscal year basis. We adjusted the 1995 calendar year attendance to fiscal year attendance for comparison with the overall Army data but could not adjust the attendance back to 1984. Therefore, we are comparing the fiscal year attendance in 1995 to calendar year average attendance between 1984 and 1993.

---

are subject to the same screening and selection criteria and procedures, whether they will attend the School or other U.S. military training institutions.

Virtually all of the students selected for the School of the Americas have been members of their countries' military or police forces, with less than one percent civilian students. Officials at the School said that even though courses intended for civilian participation are offered, increasing civilian attendance is difficult for two reasons. First, government departments in many countries tend to be understaffed, and it is difficult for key civilian officials to leave their positions for several weeks to attend courses in the United States. Second, some foreign militaries and defense ministries prefer to spend available military training funds on members of the armed forces rather than civilians, despite encouragement from U.S. officials to select some civilians for relevant courses.

Between 1990 and 1995, about 41 percent of the students were cadets<sup>7</sup> from Latin American military or police academies. Cadet-level courses are not new; they have been offered at the School as far back as the 1950s. According to School officials, instructing cadets is consistent with the mission of the School, as these students represent the next generation of military officers. Also, some countries have identified their military or police cadets<sup>8</sup> as a top training priority. Since 1991, Chile has sent cadets to the School for an 8-day course specifically developed for them. According to School officials, Chile used a large proportion of its IMET funds for this one course in 1995.

---

## Which Countries Send the Most Students to the School

Students from 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries have attended courses at the School of the Americas since its inception.<sup>9</sup> However, about half of those students have come from five countries—Colombia (17 percent), El Salvador (12 percent), Nicaragua (8 percent), Peru (7 percent), and Panama (6 percent). The countries that send more students to the School are generally the same countries receiving a higher level of U.S. military assistance, which can be used for training. For

---

<sup>7</sup>Cadets are typically in their early twenties and have completed their second or third year of their national military or police academies. Their countries of origin have predominantly been Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Honduras. The cadets have primarily been male, although some female cadets have attended the school.

<sup>8</sup>In Colombia, Honduras, and Chile, the national police are an arm of the Ministry of Defense.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. military members attend some courses at the School, with 1,557 attending since 1946. In 1995, 19 U.S. military personnel attended the command and general staff officer course, and were principally foreign area officers or Spanish language specialists expecting future tours of duty in Latin America.

---

example, when the United States was providing large amounts of foreign assistance, including training, to El Salvador's military to counter the insurgent threat in the 1980s, about one-third of the students at the School came from El Salvador. Between 1991 and 1995, most of the students at the School came from Colombia, Honduras, and Chile.

---

## Evolution of the Curriculum at the School of the Americas

The curriculum of the School has changed from its early days, when automotive and radio repair, artillery mechanics, and cooking were taught along with infantry, artillery, and military police courses. By the 1970s, the curriculum included courses on counterinsurgency operations to train Latin American armed forces in their efforts to confront insurgencies in the region. The current curriculum encompasses a variety of courses that enhance combat and combat support skills, encourage the development of appropriate civil-military relations, and strengthen defense resource management techniques.

Since 1990, the School has added nine new courses that reflect current U.S. interests in the region. Two of the new courses—democratic sustainment<sup>10</sup> and civil-military operations—along with the existing resource management and command and general staff officer courses—meet DOD's criteria for the Expanded IMET program.<sup>11</sup>

Other new courses were developed to meet unique or urgent needs in the region. For example, at the request of the Organization of American States, the School developed a countermine course to train students to recognize, detect, and neutralize minefields and to be able to train demining teams in their countries. Since 1993, 25 students from nine countries have taken the course, and DOD officials told us that this training is currently being used in demining operations in Central America. According to DOD, the new Peace Operations course was developed in response to the expanding presence of peacekeeping operations around the world and to present U.S. doctrine and policy for peacekeeping to the Latin American forces. In 1995, 21 students, including 5 civilians, from nine countries attended the course. Other new training includes the executive and field grade logistics, border observation, and computer literacy courses as well as cadet-level intelligence and counterdrug courses.

---

<sup>10</sup>First offered in 1996.

<sup>11</sup>In 1990, Congress expanded the focus of the IMET program to include training foreign civilian and military officials in managing and administering military establishments and budgets, creating and maintaining effective military judicial systems, and fostering respect for civilian control of the military.

## Current Curriculum

In 1996, the School at Fort Benning is offering 32 courses, 23 of which are targeted toward noncommissioned and junior to mid-level officers. The remaining nine courses are targeted toward cadets—eight for military cadets and one for police cadets. While none of the courses are intended solely for civilians, 10 courses include civilians in the targeted audience. The Helicopter School Battalion at Fort Rucker, Alabama, is offering 20 courses in helicopter flight operations and maintenance. Table 1 provides a brief description of the courses offered in 1996 and the number of students that attended these courses in 1995.

**Table 1: School of the Americas 1996 Curriculum and Fiscal Year 1995 Attendance by Course**

Course title	Duration (weeks)	FY 1995 students	Brief course description
<b>Officer, NCO, and civilian courses</b>			
Battle staff operations	8	6	Battalion- and brigade-level staff planning and low-intensity conflict exercises
Border observation <sup>a</sup>	3	<sup>b</sup>	Joint border observation mission planning, information gathering, and area analysis
Civil-military operations <sup>a</sup>	5	13	Planning and conducting civil-military operations, including civil defense, disaster relief, and proper role of the military in support of civilian authority
Combat arms officer advanced	17	0	Study and planning of company- and battalion-level infantry tactics, including mechanized, airborne, and special operations
Command and general staff officer	47	19 <sup>c</sup>	University- and postgraduate-level combat service support tactics and doctrine, including strategic studies, military history, and joint operations
Commando	9	17	Combat and leadership training in difficult terrain and combat conditions, including demolition, patrolling, waterborne, airborne, and air assault operations
Computer literacy <sup>a</sup>	2	9	Familiarization with IBM-compatible database, graphics, word processing, and spreadsheet software
Counterdrug operations	11	50	Field operations in planning, leading, and executing drug interdiction operations, including weapons, infiltration, and surveillance techniques; patrolling; demolition; and close-quarters combat
Countermine operations	4	10	Recognition, detection, and neutralization of minefields and booby trap areas
Democratic sustainment <sup>a</sup>	6	<sup>b</sup>	Theory and practice of military and civilian leadership in a constitutional democracy
Executive and field grade logistics <sup>a</sup>	4	0 <sup>d</sup>	Army logistics functions, including contracting, acquisition regulations, material readiness, and inventory and financial management
Infantry officer basic	16	17	Basic military skills, including infantry tactics and principles, weapons, mortar employment, fire support, leadership, and internal defense and development
Instructor training	2	31	Training for prospective instructors to develop, prepare, present, and evaluate military instruction
Joint operations <sup>a</sup>	4	0 <sup>e</sup>	Decision-making and planning for multinational and joint services operations
Medical assistance <sup>a</sup>	6	25	Life-saving measures, field medical care, and civic medical services, including water purification, emergency childbirth, and minor surgical procedures
Military intelligence officer	10	24	Tactical and combat intelligence operations, counterintelligence, and enemy threat analysis

(continued)

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Duration (weeks)</b>	<b>FY 1995 students</b>	<b>Brief course description</b>
NCO training management	5	17	Planning, execution, and evaluation of small unit and individual training programs for NCOs
NCO professional development	11	15	NCO leadership training in weapons, training management, counterdrug operations, infantry tactics, engineer operations, fire support, communications, and battle staff operations
Officer training management	5	26	Planning, execution, and administration of small unit and individual training programs for officers
Peace operations <sup>a</sup>	5	21	Peace operation tactics, techniques, and procedures related to operations other than war, including civil affairs, psychological operations, rules of engagement, medicine, engineering, and logistics
Psychological operations <sup>a</sup>	8	15	Psychological operations doctrine, techniques, planning, analysis, and research methodology
Resource management <sup>a</sup>	4	12	Resource management techniques, concepts, and procedures, including quantitative decision-making, organizational dynamics, personnel management, and logistics
Sapper	8	9	Battlefield engineering, including demolition, minefield operations, obstacle placement, and breaching techniques
<b>Cadet courses</b>			
Artillery	4	0	Basic artillery skills, including fire support, battery operations, and fire direction
Branch qualification	8	43	Basic combat and leadership training and branch-specific training (artillery, infantry/cavalry, combat engineer, logistics, or intelligence)
Cavalry	4	0	Introduction to basic cavalry tactics, including reconnaissance techniques, scouting operations, troop-leading procedures, and assault operations
Chilean cadet	1	162	Basic military training for Chilean cadets
Counterdrug	4	50	Introduction to tactics and techniques used in counterdrug operations
Engineer	4	0	Familiarization with engineer combat operations, equipment, construction, and maintenance management
Infantry	4	0	Introduction to light infantry tactics and principles, including weapons, land navigation, and air assault operations planning
Intelligence	4	0	Introduction to tactical and battlefield intelligence, including operations other than war, electronic warfare, enemy threat, internal defense and development, and counterinsurgency operations
Logistics	4	30	Unit management tasks, quartermaster functions, logistics, and supply management
Helicopter school battalion	Varied	124	Helicopter flight operations and maintenance (20 courses)
<b>Total</b>		<b>745</b>	

(Table notes on next page)

---

<sup>a</sup>Includes civilians in targeted students.

<sup>b</sup>First offered in 1996.

<sup>c</sup>Does not include the 19 U.S. military personnel attending the course.

<sup>d</sup>Sixteen students attended this course in the first quarter of fiscal year 1996.

<sup>e</sup>Fifteen students attended this course in the first quarter of fiscal year 1996.

Source: U.S. Army School of the Americas.

---

## Curriculum Based on U.S. Doctrine

The School of the Americas' curriculum is based on U.S. military doctrine and practices and uses materials from courses presented to U.S. military personnel. School officials told us that it is like other U.S. military institutions' curricula, except that it is presented in Spanish. For example, the military intelligence officer course at the School uses doctrine and materials developed by the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, and the executive logistics course uses material from the Defense Logistics Command and the U.S. Army Logistics Management College at Fort Lee, Virginia. Further, U.S. military students who attend the command and general staff officer course at the School receive the same professional military education credit as the U.S. military personnel who attend the course at Fort Leavenworth.

Officials at the School pointed out that because all international training courses are based on U.S. doctrine, foreign students from other regions receive training in similar subjects as the students at the School. For example, in 1995, the U.S. Army Ranger course was provided to 43 foreign students from 17 countries, which exposed those students to similar training and exercises as the 17 students that attended the School's commando course. Similarly, the Army's infantry officer basic course was taught to 44 students from 21 countries, and similar training was provided to 17 students from Latin America at the School. (See app. II.)

Instructional staff at the School can customize segments of the courses to incorporate case studies and practical exercises relevant to Latin America. For example, officials at the School said that civic action exercises conducted in Central America by U.S. and Latin American armed forces are discussed in the civil affairs segment of the command and general staff officer course.<sup>12</sup> The course also includes 24 hours of instruction on the

---

<sup>12</sup>These exercises have been conducted in several countries to provide a realistic training environment for U.S. armed forces and to assist local populations improve their public facilities and services.

---

historical perspective of the roles of the family, church, government, and military in Latin America—instruction not included in the U.S. course.

Reflecting the history of the region, School officials emphasized that the School provides instruction on human rights principles to all students. This human rights instruction is not presented at any other Army school. All of the School's courses, except the computer literacy course, include a mandatory 4-hour block of instruction on human rights issues in military operations, including law of land warfare, military law and ethics, civilian control of the military, and democratization. This instruction is expanded in some courses. For example, the command and general staff officer course devotes 3 days of instruction to the subject, and uses the My Lai massacre in Vietnam as a case study. School officials told us that they consider this case study an excellent illustration of issues related to professional military behavior, command and control, and changes in U.S. military attitudes and acceptance of the principles of human rights. They said that incidents in which Latin American militaries have been involved, such as the El Mozote massacre of hundreds of peasants in El Salvador in 1981, are also discussed.

---

## Instructors at the School

Courses at the School are taught by U.S. and Latin American military members as well as some civilian instructors. The School requires that instructors possess the appropriate skills and military background in such areas as logistics, infantry, engineering or helicopter operations. All instructors must also pass a special human rights instructor program before teaching any course.

Instructors from Latin America are involved with all of the courses in the curriculum and work with U.S. instructors to develop and prepare instructional materials and teach segments of the courses. The School identifies the requirements for each foreign instructor position, including rank; branch qualifications, such as combat arms or airborne; and other prerequisites, such as graduation from a command and general staff officer college. The School sends these requirements to the U.S. embassies in Latin America to solicit nominations of foreign military members that meet the requirements. Like the process used to nominate students, the foreign militaries identify prospective instructors, who are subject to approval by U.S. officials at the embassies.

Officials at the School said that the Latin American instructors have become increasingly important over the past several years. These

---

instructors provide additional opportunities for the students and other instructors at the School to establish valuable military to military contacts. Salaries of the Latin American instructors are paid by their home country.

While the School's staff levels fluctuate throughout the year, as of October 1995, a total of 239 staff were assigned to the School at Fort Benning, including 50 U.S. instructors and 33 instructors from Latin America.

---

## Recent Army Study of the School

In 1995, TRADOC contracted for a study to analyze and develop recommendations concerning the future need for the School of the Americas and what purposes the School should serve. The study examined the issue of whether providing Spanish-language instruction to Latin Americans is still a valid requirement of the School. In addition, the study examined the appropriateness of organizationally placing the School under TRADOC, given the School's role as a foreign policy tool and different focus compared to other TRADOC installations.

The report, issued in October 1995, concluded that the School is strategically important to the United States and supports short- and long-term U.S. economic, political, and military interests in Latin America. The report acknowledged that Spanish language instruction was an important factor allowing the School to contribute effectively to implementing U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and said that the Army should reaffirm Spanish as the language of instruction. However, it noted that concerns about the continued need for the School in the post-Cold War period have surfaced, driven in part by adverse publicity over human rights violations associated with past students of the School.

The study recommended that responsibility for the School be transferred from TRADOC to the U.S. Southern Command because the School's role as a foreign policy tool makes it significantly different from other TRADOC installations. The study also acknowledged that negative publicity about the School would probably continue and that a new name for the School may be an appropriate way to break with the past. It suggested that the Department of Army provide additional opportunities for lower- and mid-grade civil servants from Latin America and make this an important thrust of the School. It also suggested that the Departments of Army and State study the desirability of establishing a Western Hemisphere Center for research, study, and instruction. This center would incorporate the

---

School and other Spanish language military training schools and would be affiliated with the Inter-American Defense College.

DOD officials told us they agree in principle with many of the recommendations in the study and are considering how best to implement some of them. For example, TRADOC has acted on the recommendation to establish a board of visitors, which met for the first time in May 1996, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense is considering establishing a security studies center for the region. For some of the recommendations on which DOD has agreed in principle, (1) the conditions prompting the recommendation have changed, (2) DOD is not the cognizant authority for action, or (3) organizational or legal hurdles impede action.

---

## DOD Considering an Inter-American Center for Defense Studies

DOD officials have recognized that the dearth of civilian experts in military and security affairs is a serious barrier to further democratization of Latin American defense establishments. In response, DOD is pursuing plans to open an Inter-American Center for Defense Studies in fiscal year 1998<sup>13</sup> to attract a new generation of civilians to careers in ministries of defense and foreign affairs as well as parliamentary committee staff. The Center intends to provide practical courses for promising civilians with university degrees, although military officers may attend. The curriculum would include courses on the development of threat assessments, strategic plans, budgets and acquisition plans, civil-military relations, and methods of legislative oversight. The Center would have features similar to the already established DOD centers for the study of regional security issues at the Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany, and at the Asia-Pacific Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

The Center is not intended as a replacement or substitute for the School of the Americas. DOD officials contend that the School will continue to provide important training and links to Latin American militaries, which remain influential forces even as their roles in their societies evolve from dominance to integration.

---

## Agency Comments

DOD concurred with our findings. Where appropriate, we have incorporated technical changes provided by DOD. DOD's comments are presented in appendix III.

---

<sup>13</sup>Five seminars will be offered as a pilot program in fiscal year 1997.

---

## Scope and Methodology

We developed information on the political, military, and economic characteristics in Latin America by talking to Latin American experts from both inside and outside the federal government, reviewing literature on the region, and using findings from other GAO reports. We discussed issues related to the School and the political, social, and economic environment with representatives from the Organization of American States, the Washington Office on Latin America, Demilitarization for Democracy Project, Latin American Working Group, North-South Center (affiliated with the University of Miami), Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center, Institute for National Strategic Studies, the Latin American Center of Stanford University, and area experts at the University of California, Irvine; American University; and the University of Colorado.

To obtain information on the operations of the School of the Americas, we met with officials at the School, including instructional and administrative staff. These officials provided us with documentation on the history and current operations of the School, including attendance, curriculum, and budget information. We performed a detailed review of course contents in order to understand instructional objectives. We also compared the course curriculum and attendance at the school with the student attendance of Army security assistance-funded training used by all other countries in the world. To develop the data on students attending the School, the courses they took, and the countries they came from, we relied on documentation provided by School officials. To develop similar data on the courses and students at other Army schools in fiscal 1995, we relied on automated data prepared by TRADOC in Hampton, Virginia.

We did not independently verify the accuracy of the data provided to us. We conducted our review from November 1995 to June 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

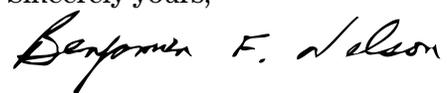
---

We plan no further distribution of this report until 15 days after its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the Secretaries of Defense and State and appropriate congressional committees. We will also send copies to other interested parties upon request.

---

Please contact me at (202) 512-4128 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin F. Nelson".

Benjamin F. Nelson, Director  
International Affairs and Trade Issues

---

# Contents

---

Letter	1
Appendix I Chronology of Key Events in the History of the U.S. Army School of the Americas	20
Appendix II Attendees at Two School of the Americas Courses and Similar Courses at the Army Infantry School (Fiscal Year 1995)	21
Appendix III Comments From the Department of Defense	23
Appendix IV Major Contributors to This Report	24
Table	Table 1: School of the Americas 1996 Curriculum and Fiscal Year 1995 Attendance by Course 10

---

## Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
IMET	International Military Education and Training
NCO	noncommissioned officer
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

---

---

---

# Chronology of Key Events in the History of the U.S. Army School of the Americas

---

1946	The U.S. Army established the Latin America Center-Ground Division in the Panama Canal Zone to provide instruction to U.S. Army personnel in garrison technical skills such as food preparation, maintenance, and other support functions, with limited training for Latin Americans.
1949	U.S. Army renamed the institution the U.S. Army Caribbean School-Spanish Instruction and identified a secondary mission of instructing Latin American military personnel.
1956	Increased Latin American interest in U.S. military training led to the elimination of English language instruction to focus on instructing Latin American personnel.
1963	The institution became the U.S. Army School of the Americas, with Spanish declared the official language of the School.
1984	The School relocated to its current location at Fort Benning, Georgia, due to a conflict between U.S. and Panamanian officials regarding the operation and command of the School. The Army reassigned operational control of the School from the U.S. Southern Command to the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.
1987	Under Public Law 100-180, Congress formally authorized the Secretary of the Army to operate the School with the purpose of providing military education and training to military personnel of Central American, South American, and Caribbean countries.
1991	A Helicopter School Battalion at the U.S Army Aviation Center, Fort Rucker, Alabama, was activated as part of the School to provide Spanish language instruction for helicopter pilots and technicians.

# Attendees at Two School of the Americas Courses and Similar Courses at the Army Infantry School (Fiscal Year 1995)

School of the Americas		Army Infantry School, Fort Benning	
Commando course	Number of students	Ranger course	Number of students
Bolivia	2	Canada	10
Colombia	8	Czech Republic	3
Ecuador	4	Georgia	1
Mexico	3	Hungary	1
		Italy	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	Jordan	1
		Lithuania	1
		Malawi	1
		Mexico	2
		Nepal	2
		Philippines	1
		Poland	2
		Singapore	4
		Slovenia	1
		Taiwan	3
		Turkey	2
		United Arab Emirates	5
		<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

**Appendix II**  
**Attendees at Two School of the Americas**  
**Courses and Similar Courses at the Army**  
**Infantry School (Fiscal Year 1995)**

<b>School of the Americas</b>		<b>Army Infantry School, Fort Benning</b>	
<b>Infantry officer basic</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Infantry officer basic course</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Colombia	8	Central African Republic	1
Ecuador	9	Colombia	2
		Egypt	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	Guyana	1
		Hungary	1
		Jordan	1
		Latvia	3
		Lebanon	8
		Maldives	1
		Malta	6
		Niger	1
		Papua New Guinea	1
		Saudi Arabia	1
		Singapore	2
		Slovenia	1
		Solomon Islands	1
		St Kitts and Nevis	1
		St. Lucia	1
		Taiwan	4
		Thailand	1
		United Arab Emirates	3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: U.S. Army School of the Americas and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command.

# Comments From the Department of Defense



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

2400 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-2400



INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY AFFAIRS

16 JUL 1996

Mr. Benjamin F. Nelson  
Director, International Relations and Trade Issues  
National Security and International Affairs Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Nelson:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS: U.S. Military Training for Latin American Countries," June 12, 1996 (GAO Code 711162), OSD Case 1171. The Department concurs with the report.

The report accurately describes the evolving nature of the School's instruction and its continued importance to U.S. foreign and security policy. As more fully described in the U.S. Security Strategy for the Americas, the core U.S. strategic objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean are to support the commitment to democratic norms in the region, foster military confidence-building measures, and expand and deepen defense cooperation with other countries of the region in support of common objectives like counterdrugs and international peacekeeping. The School supports these objectives by providing the latest U.S. Army doctrine to Latin American students on such subjects as counterdrug operations, democracy and human rights, resource management, joint operations, and peacekeeping.

The Department will continue to identify opportunities to refine and update the School's curriculum to conform to key U.S. objectives in the region. The School's new Board of Visitors, composed of former military commanders, diplomats and academics with extensive experience in Latin America, will play a key role in advising the Department on the School's evolution and the most effective way to direct the School's limited resources.

Technical corrections to the report were provided separately. The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

  
Franklin D. Kramer



# Major Contributors to This Report

---

**National Security and  
International Affairs  
Division, Washington,  
D.C.**

Nancy T. Toolan  
Muriel J. Forster  
Kevin C. Handley  
F. James Shafer  
Nancy Ragsdale

---

### Ordering Information

The first copy of each GAO report and testimony is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. Orders should be sent to the following address, accompanied by a check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents, when necessary. VISA and MasterCard credit cards are accepted, also. Orders for 100 or more copies to be mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent.

#### Orders by mail:

U.S. General Accounting Office  
P.O. Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015

#### or visit:

Room 1100  
700 4th St. NW (corner of 4th and G Sts. NW)  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC

Orders may also be placed by calling (202) 512-6000  
or by using fax number (301) 258-4066, or TDD (301) 413-0006.

Each day, GAO issues a list of newly available reports and testimony. To receive facsimile copies of the daily list or any list from the past 30 days, please call (202) 512-6000 using a touchtone phone. A recorded menu will provide information on how to obtain these lists.

For information on how to access GAO reports on the INTERNET, send an e-mail message with "info" in the body to:

[info@www.gao.gov](mailto:info@www.gao.gov)

or visit GAO's World Wide Web Home Page at:

<http://www.gao.gov>

---

**United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001**

**Bulk Rate  
Postage & Fees Paid  
GAO  
Permit No. G100**

**Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300**

**Address Correction Requested**

---

