Universiteit Leiden

Keeping an Eye on Our Backyard

The School of the America's Watch from 1990 to 2001

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Introduction

On November 16, 1990, Father Roy Bourgeois and brothers Charles and Patrick Likety came together at the gates of military base Fort Benning, Georgia. They trespassed onto the grounds and entered the building where the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA) was located, where they splattered the 'Wall of Fame' with their blood. The 'Wall of Fame' was a corridor inside the building where the school was located and where notable graduates are portrayed, among whom are human rights violators.[1] These include the Bolivian dictator General Hugo Banzer and Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, the leader of El Salvador's death squads in the 1970s.[2] Bourgeois and the Likety brothers received a sentence of sixteen months in federal prison.

This act against the School of the Americas was not the end of this movement; rather it marked the beginning of a decades-long protest. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the United States has been trying to extend its sphere of influence in Latin America. The administrations that were worried about Soviet influence after the Second World War started to take this more seriously, mostly because the U.S. did not want to lose its own proclaimed 'backyard'.[3] One of the examples of intervention in Latin America came in the form of military training institutions, of which the U.S. Army School of the Americas is one. The SOA was founded in the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone in 1946 and moved to Fort Benning, Georgia in 1977.[4]

The School is a U.S. government military institution that focused on training Latin American military officers. Over 80,000 officers from Latin America have received training

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[1] Virginia S. Williams, "Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace: Challenging U.s. Policies in Latin America in the Post-Cold War Era," *Peace & Change* 29, no. 3-4 (2004): 419–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0149-0508.2004.00297.x, 424.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War In Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.
[4] Marjorie Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas," Thomas Jefferson Law Review 35, no. 1, 2012, 2.

at this facility since its founding.[5] In 1996, the U.S. government acknowledged that part of the education that the School offered included the promotion of practices that were human rights violations, such as torture, extortion and execution. U.S. Defense Secretary William J. Perry claimed to be shocked by the contents of the manuals and promised that they would never be used again.[6] Because of widespread criticism, the School of the Americas was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) in 2001.[7]

The most prominent organization criticizing the School has been the human rights organization the School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch), which was founded in 1990 by priest Roy Bourgeois after the murders at the University of Central America in El Salvador in 1989, where Salvadoran soldiers killed six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter. More than half of the soldiers were graduates of the School.[8] The SOA Watch is "a nonviolent grassroots movement working to close the SOA / WHINSEC and similar centers."[9]

Scholars have dealt with human rights extensively and in many different ways. According to Kathryn Sikkink, "Human rights are ideas about how individuals are entitled to be treated merely by virtue of being human," which, over time, have evolved into a set of norms that both try to protect humans as well as provide them with the minimum level of conditions that are necessary to live in comfort, peace and dignity.[10] Historian Mark Philip Bradley describes the definition of bodily integrity as being essential to the growing human rights consciousness of Americans in the 1970s, which is a decade that has been researched

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[5] SOA Watch. "About." Accessed October 30, 2019. http://www.soaw.org/about/
[6] Linda D. Kozaryn, "Perry Bans U.S. Training in Inhumane Techniques," *American Forces Press Service*, October 9, 1996. https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=40682
[7] Marjorie Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas," Thomas Jefferson Law Review 35, no. 1, 2012, 2.
[8] Lesley Gill. *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, 49.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2004, 4-5.

the most extensively.[11] To add to that, anthropologist and historian Leslie Gill argues that the individual suffering of people, the culpability of the U.S. by having trained the graduates that caused it, and the spreading of information about that has played a major role in garnering support for the SOA Watch's cause.[12] Historian Tony Smith, among others, argues that the Reagan administration's definition of human rights was tied to democracy promotion and anti-communism.[13]

In this thesis I contribute to this body of work by examining human rights history in the 1990s, focusing on the case study of the School of the Americas Watch. This thesis approaches the topic from the discipline of history. It is qualitative research and it is based on a close reading of primary sources. These primary sources include articles from various newspapers published in the relevant time period, Congressional records discussing the School and an interview conducted with Craig Mousin, who is a long-time activist of School of the Americas Watch.

My thesis sets out to answer three interrelated questions: how do different perceptions on human rights motivate different parties? How did the SOA Watch use human rights rhetoric to attain their goals from 1990 until 2001, and to what extent were they successful? The first chapter analyzes the historiography concerning my topic, discussing the relevant scholars and their work on human rights and the SOA Watch. In the second chapter, I provide the historical background necessary to understand the circumstances the SOA Watch operated in, including U.S.-Latin American relations and a short history of human rights consciousness in the United States, as well as the founding of the School and the SOA Watch. In the third chapter, I contend that the SOA Watch activists believed that the U.S. was directly culpable in

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[11] Mark Philip Bradley. *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 137.
[12] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 199-200, 204-208.
[13] Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 268-269.

the human rights violations committed by SOA graduates, while the overall human rights consciousness shifted the blame away from the U.S. and blamed the governments of the countries the violations occurred in. I argue that the meaning the SOA Watch has given to human rights in order to advocate for the closing of the School is in line with the human rights ideas of the 1970s and 1980s while supporters of the School called democracy promotion human rights. Lastly, I argue that the SOA Watch was successful in lobbying Congress to reach their goal, however that, in the long run, the changes achieved may not have been very substantial. Through these chapters, I contribute to the existing scholarship by taking it beyond the well-researched 1970s and 1980s into the 1990s, stating how the human rights activism of the 1990s was similar and different to that of the human rights consciousness of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as how the SOA Watch applied this to lobby Congress and influence domestic policy.

Chapter 1: Historiography

In this chapter, I discuss the existing scholarship on human rights history, and how the meaning and uses can differ depending on who is making the claims. I argue that while there has been a growing amount of scholarly works on human rights, most scholars of the late twentieth century focus on the 1970s; growing amount of literature also exists on the 1980s. This thesis contributes to the discussion on human rights and social activism by analyzing human rights developments in the 1990s, with the SOA Watch as a case study. The concept of human rights is not a static one and has been interpreted differently by different parties, which might also depend on the goal they are trying to achieve by involving human rights into the conversation. I first discuss the scholarship that discusses the origin of human rights and the scholars who describe human rights as bodily integrity in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the way that the SOA Watch has taken up this interpretation to argue its case in the 1990s. Secondly, I will examine the scholarship on democracy promotion as an interpretation of human rights, as supporters of the School maintain the importance of democracy promotion as a key reason for the School to stay open. This will be followed by a discussion on the perception of human rights as being a foreign affair rather than a domestic one.

Since the early 1950s, when there was a rising suspicion of the influence human rights could have on U.S. sovereignty, Americans generally regarded human rights as a foreign issue instead of a domestic one. As discussed by historians Elizabeth Borgwardt and Lars Schoultz, a steep decline in popularity of human rights could be seen in the United States after the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.[14] This was as a result of the fear that an international rule of law would

[14] Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3; Elizabeth Borgwardt, ""Constitutionalizing" Human Rights: The Rise and Rise of the Nuremberg Principles," in *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History*, ed. Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde and William I. Hitchcock, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78.

arise from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that would infringe on the freedom that the Constitution promises to the U.S. citizens.[15] The fact that there was a large movement against human rights was reflected in the widespread support that the amendment that Senator John Bricker (R-OH) proposed during the Eisenhower administration in 1953. The Bricker Amendment, while it did not gain enough votes to pass in the end, cast human rights policies in a bad light as conservatives saw international human rights as a threat on American sovereignty.[16] Schoultz and Borgwardt convincingly demonstrate that human rights language was not very popular during the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the pushback against institutionalizing human rights.

One of the ways in which human rights has been defined is through bodily integrity: the idea that every human being has autonomy of their own body and any violations of that integrity is a human rights violation. This idea started with the rise of human rights consciousness the 1970s. Key in that decade was the suffering of the individual. Mark Philip Bradley argues in *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, "individual consciousness, lived experience, moral witness and testimonial turn became the keywords for activists of this era."[17] This was caused by the growing awareness of the Holocaust, which happened because of the focus on individual witnesses, who told their stories through eyewitness accounts.[18]

The emphasis on bodily integrity is also evident in the scholarship on the SOA Watch. Leslie Gill argues in *The School of the Americas*: *Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* that a big part of this is played by the first-hand experience the leaders of the SOA Watch have had. They had a better understanding of the suffering of people from Latin

[15] Borgwardt, ""Constitutionalizing" Human Rights," 78.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 137.
[18] Ibid., 139.

American countries whose leaders had been trained at the School because they had travelled or worked in the area, and thus felt a responsibility to prevent further human suffering caused directly or indirectly by the U.S. through training at the School.[19] Moreover, listening to first-person accounts of those who had suffered from these human rights violations committed by Latin American officers is what hardened the position of key figures of the movement, including Roy Bourgeois, Charles Likety and Reverend Carol Richardson.[20]

American presidents and their governments have maintained a different definition of human rights to base their policies on. President Carter was the first president to put such a strong emphasis on the importance of human rights in shaping foreign policy. Jimmy Carter's presidential election in 1977 signaled the start of the incorporation of human rights into mainstream politics.[21] He showed a reluctance to continue working with countries that were led by authoritarian regimes, saying they were not in accordance to his human rights policy.[22] Generally, as discussed by John Dumbrell, Carter's foreign policy strategy is perceived as being unsuccessful.[23] One of the main problems that had to be faced was that Carter struggled to define human rights in a clear way that could offer a structure to his foreign policy decisions. This struggle led to ambiguities in the human rights agenda, which led to problems in the execution.[24] This resulted in human rights policy during the Carter administration being very different and inconsistent depending on which region one looked at.[25]

After the first years of Reagan's presidency, where he distanced himself from Carter's human rights approach to foreign policy,[26] the Reagan administration appeared to be more

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[19] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 200.
[20] Ibid., 204, 208.
[21] William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 79.
[22] Smith, *America's Mission*, 268.
[23] John Dumbrell, "Jimmy Carter," in *U.S. Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama*, eds. Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet (London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 121.
[24] Ibid,, 123.
[25] Ibid., 128.
[26] Smith, *America's Mission.* 268.

alike to the Carter administration's approach to foreign policy, with both being very concerned with promoting democracy as a human rights approach. Tony Smith argues in *America's Mission*, "no administration since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson has been so committed to the tenets of liberal democratic internationalism as that of Ronald Regan."[27] Around the middle of the 1980s, Reagan embraced human rights as a major basis to shape his foreign policy around. He defined human rights as 'anti-communist', and used this definition as a way to push for the spread of democracy and neoliberal economy.[28]

Historian Hal Brands describes many ways in which Reagan attempted to promote democracy based on human rights. This includes "pressuring authoritarian regimes and protecting fragile transitions, by supporting reformers and promoting the development of democratic institutions, by helping moderates defeat radical challenges from both left and right, and by seeking diplomatic settlements conducive to democratization."[29] By using this interpretation of human rights, Reagan was able to root his anti-communist stance on a human rights basis and claim he was doing the right thing when intervening in or cooperating with authoritarian states. Reagan believed that democracy was the superior form of government, and that if all states in the world would be a democracy, the world would automatically become a better place and flourish.[30]

Reagan's definition of human rights set a standard that the administrations after him continued to live by. His view on Latin American authoritarian governments was explained by Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, his ambassador to the United Nations. She argued that the right-wing regimes the U.S. was on good terms with still had the capability to evolve into democratic regimes, whereas the left-wing communist regimes had no way of changing away from the

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[27] Smith. *America's Mission*, 268.
[28] Pee and Schmidli, *The Reagan Administration, the Cold War, and the Transition to Democracy Promotion*, 2
[29] Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 168.
[30] Smith, *America's Mission*, 268-269.

repressive, threatening regimes they were.[31] This explained Reagan's approval of some governments, such as President Duarte's repressive but anti-communist regime in El Salvador, and not of others, such as the socialist Sandinista government, to which he allocated funds to have overthrown.[32] This proves Tony Smith and Hal Brands' point that Reagan's definition of human rights was democracy promotion.[33]

The SOA Watch did not see democracy promotion as one of their concerns for human rights. Sharon Erika Nepstad argues that the activists who were involved in the SOA Watch "recognized that Latin Americans had to decide their own future with regard to impunity or indictments."[34] Impunity means being free from punishment. In the case of Latin America, as J. Patrice McSherry describes it, it meant, "acts of repression and abuse of power by the state against its citizens are shielded from judgment or accountability before national law.[35] McSherry agrees with the idea that the United States ought to take responsibility for the overt and covert interventions it has done over the past century, and that democratization in Latin America "will likely be achieved without substantive international support."[36] Nepstad contends that the SOA Watch recognized that, for the transition of Latin American countries to be truly democratic, this process should be done without outside interference. The goal of this human rights organization, as stated by Nepstad, is to close the School of the Americas based on the violations its graduates have committed on bodily integrity, not to promote democracy or prosecute the graduates.[37]

When Americans rediscovered human rights in the 1970s, they hardly ever used human rights terms to speak about domestic issues and the violations that would occur in that

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[31] Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 163.
[32] Ibid., 169, 173.
[33] Smith. *America's Mission*, 268; Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 168.
[34] Sharon Erickson Nepstad, "School of the Americas Watch," *Peace Review*, 12:1 (2000), 70. https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/10.1080/104026500113836.
[35] J. Patrice McSherry, "Military Power, Impunity and State-Society Change in Latin America," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1992), 470. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423900021429
[36] Ibid., 487.
[37] Nepstad, "School of the Americas Watch," 70.

sphere. Rather, Mark Philip Bradley contends, they embraced it to describe foreign issues.[38] Americans became more aware of the human rights abuses that were happening in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Latin America through individual testimonies.[39] The first-person accounts of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial murders put human rights as bodily integrity at the forefront of many Americans' minds.[40]

Lesley Gill argues that the SOA Watch's argument for closing the School is based on the fact that the U.S. is culpable in the human rights violations committed by graduates because the U.S. has played a part in training these officers. Gill writes, "Protesters accused the School and the U.S. government of sponsoring terrorism and called for the end of taxpayer-financed military instruction for Latin America security forces at the SOA."[41] Through naming the victims whose bodily integrity was violated by SOA graduates at the protests the SOA Watch organized, the organization managed to brand this institution of the U.S. Army as being incompatible with human rights.[42] They, similar to some other activists, came to the realization that the United States itself was culpable for these violations in Latin America through covert and overt operations.[43]

Even though different parties upheld different definitions of human rights and even though human rights were generally perceived as addressing foreign issues, NGOs did try to lobby Congress to gain more support for their causes. This did not always work out, but, for example, the 1975 Harkin Amendment put human rights near the center of foreign policy decisions.[44] NGOs also drew the people's attention to oppressive regimes and the human rights violations that occurred there, which had the ability to pressure the government to act

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[38] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 126.
[39] Ibid., 157.
[40] Ibid., 179.
[41] Ibid., 199.
[42] Ibid., 231.
[43] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 181.
[44] Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 67.

and make changes in dealing with these oppressive regimes, especially since some groups focused specifically on exercising influence on the legislative powers in Washington. This was especially visible with human rights organizations that put their focus on influencing the legislative branch of government, according to historian William Michael Schmidli.[45] Through documenting the violations and raising concern about them on a wider scale, as Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink argue, NGOs are able to increase the pressure with the governments involved to act on them.[46]

This shows that human rights can be defined in different ways that are not always in accordance to each other and that the different definitions can be used to support different motivations. Reagan defined human rights as democracy promotion to gain support for his foreign policy goals. Many human rights NGOs have defined human rights as bodily integrity to getting support for their organization and cause and fight the violations suffered by individuals. Moreover, human rights NGOs did have some sway in government when it concerned foreign policy, but the circumstances have to be right.

[45] Ibid., 74.
[46] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 116.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

The United States has upheld a centuries-long tradition of intervening in other countries, including nations in Latin America. The School of the Americas is only a part of this longstanding way of conducting foreign policy. In this chapter, I lay out a concise historical background necessary to understand the context that the SOA Watch operated from its founding in 1990 until 2001. First, I argue that the U.S. attempted to gain more power and control in the region in many different ways and through many different channels, starting in the last decade of the 19th century. This accelerated after the Second World War, when the United States prioritized preventing Latin American countries from becoming communist, especially after Cuba, and started overtly and covertly intervening.[47] Second, I contend that in the second half of the 20th century, foreign policy became intertwined with human rights to various degrees throughout the decades as the popularity of human rights activism and the number of NGOs increased dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. Thirdly, I argue that the School of the Americas is one of the institutions that existed in the domestic sphere but still facilitated U.S. intervention in Latin American through educating officers.

Early U.S. Involvement in Latin America

The U.S. has been involved in the affairs of Latin American countries for over a century. The U.S. drove Great Britain out of Venezuela in 1895 and, after the 1898 Spanish-American War, the United States gained control over the Panama Canal Zone and became 'protector' of Cuba.[48] The U.S. did not officially occupy Cuba as a colony, but they did implement the Platt Amendment, which allowed the U.S. to intervene in Cuban affairs

[47] Rabe. *The Killing Zone*, 6.
[48] Ibid., 1.

whenever they deemed it necessary.[49] At the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt started the 'Good Neighbor' policy, which meant that the American troops stationed in Latin America at the time were withdrawn and he prohibited military intervention in the 1948 Charter of the Organization of American States, which helped build a strong alliance during the war.[50]

At this time, there was the hope from Latin American states that the countries of the Western Hemisphere would work together as equals with their shared interests.[51] Latin American countries believed that the United States would become their partner in growing their economy after the Second World War. In reality, the United States expected their Latin American allies to follow them in their foreign policy decisions without questions. Were they to refuse, the United States would intervene in their domestic affairs and sometimes even establish a new domestic government. The U.S. argued that the fight against communism after the Second World War was more important than a country's sovereignty; it felt that it justified intervention in sovereign Latin American states.[52]

The Truman Doctrine of 1947 marked the beginning of the U.S. containment policy executed towards the Soviet Union and gave the priority to Europe and Asia. This meant that many Latin Americans' hopes for a good partnership with the United States was crushed; the fear of communism caused another era of U.S. intervention in Latin American countries. Most of the U.S. Cold War administrations became convinced that authoritarian regimes were best for maintaining the international order, for being allies to the U.S. and preventing Latin American countries' collapse into communism.[53]

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[49] Piero Gleijeses, "1898: The opposition to the Spanish-American war," Journal of Latin America Studies, 35 (2003), 718. DOI: 10.1017/S0022216X03006953.
[50] Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 15.
[51] Alan L. McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.: Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19.
[52] Ibid., 18-19.
[53] Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 21-22.

President Eisenhower approved of a policy, nicknamed the Rio Treaty, that would allow U.S. intervention whenever it was seen as appropriate and necessary to contain communism in Latin America in secret, which broke Roosevelt's nonintervention policy.[54] In 1954, the U.S. decided to openly break their nonintervention promise and helped overthrow the Guatemalan government of President Jacobo Arbenz because they were scared Guatemala was leaning towards becoming communist.[55] This intervention set the example for future interventions. The CIA applied tactics there that would later be found in the instruction manuals given to students of the School of the Americas: psychological warfare, infiltration of military units, religious organizations and more.[56]

When the U.S. saw Cuba become a communist state in 1959, the priority in the region became avoiding another state from becoming a 'second Cuba'.[57] President Kennedy announced his plan for Latin America in March 1961. It would be comparable to the Marshall Plan and it was called the Alliance for Progress. The idea was that this policy would be of such great benefit to the economy and modernization process that communism would not be an appealing option anymore. Unfortunately, it did not result in the level of meaningful change that many had hoped for. President John F. Kennedy started to judge governments on whether or not they had openly declared their disapproval of Cuba.[58] This is something the Brazilian presidents had not done, and Kennedy and Johnson encouraged the Brazilian military to overthrow them and take over.[59] President Johnson also removed Guyana's Prime Minister Jagan and under his lead, the CIA started to become more involved in manipulating the course and outcome of democratic elections in for example Bolivia and Chile.[60]

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[54] Ibid., 33.
[55] Ibid., 36.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 59.
[58] Ibid., 96.
[59] Ibid., 105-106.
[60] Ibid., 97.

As a result of this anti-communist stance, the United States showed implicit and explicit approval for many Latin American regimes that were committing human rights violations. An example of this is the approval of the right-wing Dominican junta, followed by president Joaquín Balaguer, who the U.S. helped to win the democratic election.[61] According to Rabe (2015), "From 1966 to 1978, Balaguer sanctioned political murders by the military and terrorist groups."[62] He estimates that 3,000 political leftists were assassinated."[63]

History of Human Rights Consciousness

The human rights consciousness in the United States changed drastically over the years, in part influenced by the developing overt and covert relationship between the U.S. and Latin American countries. After the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, a steep decline in popularity of human rights could be seen in the United States.[64] It reached a low as a result of an amendment proposed by Senator John Bricker (R-OH) during the Eisenhower administration in the early 1950s.[65] Bricker was just one Congressman in a broader backlash against human rights that included conservatives and southern democrats. The Bricker Amendment cast human rights policies in such a bad light that from that point on, human rights were mistrusted.[66] As a result, the use of human rights language was not very popular during the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, the U.S. hardly ever used human rights terms to speak about domestic issues and the violations that would occur domestically, even less than using them to

[61] Ibid., 97-99.
[62] Ibid., 103-104.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 3.
[65] Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 4.
[66] Elizabeth Borgwardt, ""Constitutionalizing" Human Rights: The Rise and Rise of the Nuremberg Principles," 78.

describe issues abroad.[67] The notion that human rights violations in other, sovereign countries should be the concern of others, including the U.S., was very uncommon.[68]

The general perception on human rights changed during the 1970s and there was space that allowed for a new structure in the political and economic world order, as well as technological advancements that allowed for information to travel at high speed.[69] Human rights gained prominence since the decrease in tensions near the end of the Cold War.[70] These so-called 'global' human rights transcend borders and validate the idea that humans everywhere are entitled to these rights.[71] The first transnational human rights court, the European Court of Human Rights, was set up.[72]

Even within Congress, human rights gained popularity and backlash against U.S. support of right-wing military regimes started showing. Senator Frank Church (D-ID), one of the biggest critics of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America, wanted to restrict the U.S. military assistance programs."[73] In 1971, Representative Donald M. Fraser (D-Me.) was appointed chair of the House Subcommittee on International Organizations. With the support of human rights scholar and activist John Salzberg, Fraser set up a series of hearings on human rights.[74] He conducted 150 hearings on U.S. foreign relations with other nations and their governments as the chair of the subcommittee.[75] The main sources of information on human rights were members of human rights NGOs.[76]

Support for human rights accelerated when, on September 11, 1973, the democratically elected Chilean government of the socialist president, Salvador Allende, was

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[67] Bradley. *The World Reimagined*, 126.
[68] Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 79.
[69] Ibid., 132, 135.
[70] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 3.
[71] Ibid., 5.
[72] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 134.
[73] Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 60.
[74] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 65.
[75] Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 65.
[76] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 102.

overthrown by the military.[77] Fraser introduced an amendment through which he successfully managed to institutionalize human rights in context of U.S. foreign policy, even though the Nixon and Ford administrations, especially Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, did not believe human rights to be a reasonable foreign policy goal.[78] Representative Fraser argued that the U.S. should be more critical in who they associate with.[79]

The growing human rights consciousness also was, in part, caused by increased awareness of Americans of the testimonials of victims of human rights violations of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Latin America.[80] These dissidents often took refuge elsewhere, from where they were able to share their stories with a wider public, often via NGOs.[81] Around a third of all news on human rights concerned Latin American affairs.[82] Americans' understanding of the world was changing from the superpower-driven Cold War, with only the U.S. and the Soviet Union standing at the top facing each other, to a more complicated world with multiple great powers.[83] There was also a shift in the meaning of who actually counted as "Americans" and who did not in the 1970s. Immigration from Latin American countries to the United States was growing, and many of the countries these immigrants came from were known for violating human rights and came into the spotlight for doing so.[84] Mark Philip Bradley contends, "it was the rising tide of torture, extrajudicial killing, and forced disappearances in Latin America throughout the 1970s, along with dissent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, that put human rights front and center in the American imagination."[85]

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[77] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 66.
[78] Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 65.
[79] Donald M. Fraser as quoted by Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 66.
[80] Ibid,, 156.
[81] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 108.
[82] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 157.
[83] Ibid., 158.
[84] Ibid., 162.
[85] Ibid., 179.

The amount of American human rights NGOs increased greatly since the 1970s, and they experienced a rise in influence over the years.[86] NGOs were essential in raising human rights concerns both for the public and in more official places, with U.S. foreign policy makers.[87] Much of the human rights activism that started in the 1970s was based on individual suffering and the testimonies that communicated these messages.[88] They put the story and experiences of one specific individual at the forefront of their campaigns, making it easier for the public to understand and relate to.[89]

Human rights activists became known for being quite effective with a large grassroots base and some influence in Washington over the course of the decade.[90] NGOs started lobbying to try and get more human rights policies approved. Activists inspired the public to write to their Congressional representatives to fight for more human rights legislations. They also contributed by providing the information on the acts of human rights violations and the ones who carried them out, to both the public and members of Congress. An effective way, as mentioned above, was through testimonials of the victims of these abuses.[91] Amnesty International was essential in this development, according to Lars Schoultz (1981), as he contends, "[Amnesty International] helped to create a receptive attitude among members of Congress to general human rights legislation and to country-specific reductions in foreign assistance."[92] According to Sikkink, NGOs have the tendency to be overlooked in their importance on working on improvements in human rights legislation because they tend to work behind the scenes.[93]

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[86] Ibid., 199.
[87] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 56.
[88] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 203.
[89] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 88.
[90] Ibid., 59.
[91] Ibid., 187.
[92] Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 84.
[93] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 56.

Even though President Carter put human rights on the agenda of the government in the late 1970s, grassroots human rights activism was still the norm for U.S. relations with Latin America.[94] Almost half of the organizations founded during the decade were preoccupied with human rights violations committed in Latin America, most often Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.[95] This came as a result of the support the U.S. gave to anti-communist, right-wing military regimes during the Cold War in the hope that this would create stability in the region, but these regimes were known to violate human rights.[96]

Still, human rights remained mainly a foreign affair in the eyes of the activists. Human rights violations were regarded as issues that were happening far from the domestic sphere of the United States. According to Bradley, "only infrequently in the decade were human rights deployed to advance rights at home."[97] Again, Bradley emphasizes the difference between the United States and other nations. The U.S. and its human rights traditions ignored domestic issues while almost everywhere else in the world, activists included the violations at home in their protests. He argues, "It was the suffering of strangers, rather than one's neighbors, that animated the movement."[98] Moreover, many of the activists were only focused on a small aspect or issue. In some cases, instances of human rights violations were actually framed as such, for example political and civil, in specific geographical locations including Latin America, while others were not, such as the genocide in East Timor.[99]

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[94] Ibid., 200.
[95] Ibid., 202.
[96] Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 9.
[97] Ibid., 201.
[98] Ibid., 224.
[99] Ibid., 220.

The School of the Americas

The rise in human rights consciousness was motivated in part by a growing awareness of the situations in Latin America and the involvement of the United States in these, of which the School of the Americas was one. The School of the Americas was originally founded as the Latin American Training Center Ground Division in 1946, at Fort Amador. This was located in the Panama Canal Zone, which was under U.S. control at the time.[100]. The U.S. took control of the Canal Zone in the beginning of the 20th century, after they supported a Panamanian rebellion against the Colombian government and made Panama a protectorate.[101] According to Army Public Information Officer William J. Ormsbee, the United States "noted the lack of an effective military training capability in various Latin American countries," and as a result, stepped in to fill this need.[102]

In 1963, the institution was renamed the U.S. Army School of the Americas and it was moved in 1984 from the Canal Zone as a result of the Panama Canal Treaty. SOA graduate Manuel Noriega became the ruler of Panama in 1983. His predecessor, Omar Torrijos, also a SOA graduate, had signed this Treaty in 1977, but only under Noriega's insistence did the U.S. adhere to it terms. They had to stop all their military operations in the Panama Canal Zone.[103] The School moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, where there already was an established military base.[104] The students that attended the School were usually from nations that received significant U.S. military assistance.[105]

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[100] Marjorie Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas,", 2.
[101] Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 6.
[102] William Ormsbee, "U.S. Army School of the Americas (USARSA) Profile of a Training Institution," (PDF). (1984). pp. 83–85. Archived from the original on November 6, 2019. Retrieved November 5, 2019, 83. https://web.archive.org/web/20191106052505/http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/Articles/school_americas_who_84.pdf
[103] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 60, 81.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Bill Quigley, "Torture and Human Rights Abuses at the School of the Americas-WHINSEC," in *The United States and Torture: Interrogation, Incarceration and Abuse*, ed. Majorie Cohn, 53-65. New York and London: New York University Press, 2011, 55.

The motive behind the education of Latin American military officers was to fight communism and internal subversion, in line with the National Security Doctrine.[106] This doctrine was committed to maintaining internal and domestic order in the Latin American countries by instructing the local security forces.[107] According to a report that Ormsbee wrote on the School in 1984, it is "committed to fostering and strengthening relationships between the United States and the countries of the Western Hemisphere and among those countries."[108]

Through following this course of action, no U.S. troops would have to be sent to the area to protect them from dangers, both domestic and foreign.[109] American leaders in high positions learned from the U.S. involvement and defeat in the Vietnam War and realized it would not be a strategic move to get overly involved in another conflict abroad, especially since "images of American soldiers returning in body bags increased opposition in the United States to the war."[110] The School continued to train officers even after the official end of the Cold War, when the fight against communism was as good as over. There was a shift in training goals. A spokesperson of the School, Captain Kevin L. McIver said, "The school began conducting counter-drug operations training in 1989 and it became a top priority in 1995."[111] The School has been much contested over its decades of existence. Criticism arose from Latin America itself, from Amnesty International, and, most notably, from the School of the Americas Watch.

The concept of human rights has grown hugely in importance over the years. Not just institutionally, but also in the form of nongovernmental organizations. The number of NGOs

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[106] Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas," 4.
[107] Ibid.
[108] William Ormsbee, "U.S. Army School of the Americas (USARSA) Profile of a Training Institution," 83
[109] Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas," 4.
[110] Ibid., 11
[111] Douglas Farah, "At School of the Americas, a New Mission," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1998, A20.

was growing exponentially in the 1970s as well as in the decades after that.[112] Maybe most noticeably for the Americans, it became clear that the United States itself had been responsible for and guilty of participating in human rights violations throughout an extensive history of intervention in Latin America. This caused human rights to become more established, in school systems, politics and general daily life.[113] However, while human rights NGOs have the capability to influence governmental policies that can lead to changes in human rights practices, it does take a certain set of circumstances to optimize this impact. The School of the Americas became the target of such human rights activism some thirty years after its founding.

[112] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 228.
[113] Ibid., 226.

Chapter 3: The SOA Watch

The School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch) is a human rights organization that was formed in 1990 by Father Roy Bourgeois. This chapter will examine the actions of the SOA Watch, their definition of human rights, their belief in the culpability of the U.S. and their lobbying Congress. Firstly, I will argue that the SOA Watch considered the role of the United States in the human rights violations committed by Latin American officers to be a direct one, rather than the more commonly perceived indirect role the U.S. usually played in the eyes of human rights organizations. Secondly, I contend that the human rights activism and its definition of human rights as bodily integrity that was visible in the 1970s and 1980s was continuing on in the 1990s and early 2000s, as shown by the actions of the SOA Watch, as well as the opposing definition of human rights as democracy promotion by the U.S. government and supporters of the School. Lastly, in this chapter I argue that the SOA Watch developed into an effective human rights lobbying organization.

Roy Bourgeois was a Navy officer who served in the Vietnam War during the 1960s, where he almost died when a Viet Cong suicide bomber drove into the building where he was sleeping. It is in Vietnam where he found his religion, thinking, "If I make it out of here, what should I do?"[114] He returned home, started volunteering at an orphanage and then became a Maryknoll priest. Maryknoll is a non-profit mission movement of the Catholic Church that is focused on promoting social justice abroad. Through the Maryknoll Order, Bourgeois learned about liberation theology of the Catholic Church, which told him that the right thing to do was to side with the poor and oppressed and fight for social justice and equality. He did not see it as an abstract theory as others might have done; instead he put it into practice by applying it

[114] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Peter Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," *The Washington Post*, November 29, 1998, F4.

to his belief in fighting for equality and justice in Latin America, where he also saw the influence of the U.S.[115] The Maryknoll Order supported Bourgeois in his efforts, publishing anti-SOA books and paying his salary.[116] Liberation theology, as described by SOA Watch activist Craig Mousin, is a "message of working with base communities, being with the people, as compared to working with the government."[117]

Bourgeois got firsthand experience with the human rights violations committed in Latin America when he went to Bolivia as a missionary in 1972.[118] He worked in a very poor neighborhood, until he was labeled a threat to the public order in Bolivia by the military.[119] While working on organizing a health clinic, among other projects, he realized how the people were being treated under the military regime of Bolivia. He saw students and union activists being locked up and disappearing. He started helping the families of these political prisoners, which led to Bourgeois himself being taken away and abused one night.[120] He was threatened and expelled after he spoke out against the repressive regime of General Hugo Banzer for committing human rights violations.[121] The officials made it clear to him that he had the choice to either leave Bolivia, or die. Bourgeois made the choice to leave.[122]

Bourgeois became an outspoken critic of the military aid the U.S. gave to El Salvador as a result of the rape and murder of three nuns and a missionary, executed by Salvadoran soldiers in 1980. Two of these nuns, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, belonged to the same order as he did: the Maryknoll order.[123] He went to El Salvador in 1981, where he visited the mountains where the leftist guerrillas were. When he returned to San Salvador, he openly

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[115] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 203-204.
[116] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[117] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[118] Bill Broadway, "Activist Priest Tells Of Raid for Peace," *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1994, C7.
[119] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 204.
[120] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[121] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 204.
[122] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[123] Roy Bourgeois, "Let's Shut Down Our School For Salvadoran Killers," *New York Times*, May 28, 1993, A28; Peter Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," *The Washington Post*, 29 November 1998, F4.

criticized the military junta that was in power and the U.S. for supporting this regime. Bourgeois' outspoken protests, again, led to him being a target for the Salvadorans and he had to return to the United States to ensure his own safety.[124]

In 1983, Bourgeois started his protests against the School of the Americans when he went into Fort Benning with Oblate Father Larry Rosebaugh and Linda Ventimiglia, dressed in U.S. Army uniforms.[125] They climbed into a tree standing outside the barracks where 500 Salvadoran officers were residing at the time.[126] They played a tape on a boom box that contained the last sermon that was given by Oscar Romero, the Archbishop in El Salvador, who was assassinated by a right-wing death squad in 1980. In this sermon, Romero stressed the importance of peace and the plea for Salvadorans to lay down their weapons and stop fighting.[127] Romero was a well-known advocate for liberation theology as well, which connected Bourgeois and his fellow activists to the case even more.[128]

For the activists, the murder of Oscar Romero showed a clear connection between U.S. responsibility and human rights violations, as two of the three officers cited for the murder of the Archbishop had received training at the School of the Americas.[129] By broadcasting Romero's peace message, Bourgeois was able to make a memorable statement, which he described as, "one of those sacred moments."[130] Army officials quickly arrested the three on grounds of impersonation of Army officers and trespassing on government property. As a result of this, Bourgeois and his two fellow protesters served 15 months in federal prison.[131]

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[124] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[125] Linda Cooper and James Hodge, "SOA Watch keeps speaking out," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 21, 2014, 8.
[126] Broadway, "Activist Priest Tells Of Raid for Peace," C7.
[127] Religious News Service, "Priest Barred After Women Join in Conducting Mass," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 1990, F11.
[128] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[129] Nepstad, "School of the Americas Watch," 69.
[130] Broadway, "Activist Priest Tells Of Raid for Peace," C7.
[131] Religious News Service, "Priest Barred After Women Join in Conducting Mass," F11.

The forming of the SOA Watch was a direct result of the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 16-year-old daughter at the University of Central America in El Salvador on November 16, 1989, which also confirmed for the activists that the U.S. role in these abuses was undeniable and unacceptable.[132] It happened at the Pastoral Center at the Central American University in San Salvador. The Jesuit priests had been very involved in liberation theology and had been spreading the message of condemnation of human rights violations committed by the regime, which explains why Bourgeois felt personally involved.[133] Twenty-six soldiers, of whom nineteen had followed courses at of School of the Americas, carried out the assassinations. Three of them had also followed a course on human rights at the School.[134]

This massacre in El Salvador especially sparked anger in the activists towards the United States for playing a part in educating the people who committed these abuses. In September 1990, a little less than one year after these brutal murders, Bourgeois and nine others started their protest at the gates of Fort Benning.[135] Among the other protesters were Patrick and Charles Likety. Charles Likety also served during the Vietnam War and had returned his Medal of Honor to protest U.S. foreign policy.[136] He had already been active protesting U.S. support for repressive Latin American states, as well as the Nicaraguan contras.[137] They held a hunger strike that lasted for thirty-five days.[138] In November the same year, Bourgeois and the Likety brothers trespassed the grounds of Fort Benning and smeared the portraits of graduates in the School's Wall of Fame with their blood, receiving a sixteen-month prison sentence.

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[132] Roy Bourgeois, "We're Still Training Salvadorans to Kill," *New York Times*, November 7, 1991, A28.
[133] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[134] Amnesty International, "Unmatched Power, Unmet Principles: The Human Rights Dimensions of US Training of Foreign Military and Police Forces," Amnesty International USA Publications, 2002, 4
[135] Williams, "Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace," 424.
[136] Cooper and Hodge, "SOA Watch keeps speaking out," 8.
[137] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 204.
[138] Williams, "Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace," 424.

The 1990 protests marked the beginning of the effort organized by the SOA Watch to call out the culpability of the U.S. in human rights violations happening in Latin America. The annual protest took place on the second or third weekend in November, around the time of the anniversary of the Jesuit assassinations.[139] The early years were mostly dedicated to address the fairly unknown School and to spread the word about the human rights violations committed by graduates.[140]

Believing in U.S. Culpability

What sets the SOA Watch apart from many other human rights NGOs is that it protests a domestic issue, holding the U.S. responsible for actions committed abroad. It is protesting a domestic U.S. Army institution because activists were unequivocally of the opinion that the U.S. military was directly culpable in the human rights violations committed in Central and South America because of the School.[141] Historically, human rights have been regarded as a foreign issue by Americans, especially when the violations happen elsewhere. In the 1970s, Bradley argues, Americans felt compelled to act through the human rights violations in other countries they heard about.[142] The School of the Americas existed to educate and train Latin American officers to maintain internal and domestic order in their respective countries. It is in those countries that the violations of human rights took place.[143] Supporters of the School attempted to shift the responsibilities to these graduates, whereas the SOA Watch put the responsibility on the School itself. The SOA Watch did not attempt to

[139] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 224.
[143] Cohn, "Teaching Torture at the School of the Americas," 4.

shape policies in the countries that sent their officers to train at the School. This shows that the fight against the School of the Americas took place in the domestic sphere.[144]

The SOA Watch attempted to decrease U.S. influence in Latin America through advocating for closing the School, whereas often, human rights NGOs addressed issues with their governments that concern foreign policy or policies in other countries.[145] The SOA Watch has been, in a way, influencing foreign policy by protesting a U.S. military institute that trains foreign officers, but not conventionally. The SOA Watch protested the existence of the School because of the foreign consequences it appeared to be responsible for, believing that it made the U.S. culpable in the committed human rights violations.

Vicky Imerman started researching the School's activities in the base library in 1991 while Bourgeois was in prison, where she found a list of graduates of the School who had committed human rights violations as well as the curriculum. These included "commando operations, sniper training, psychological warfare, military intelligence and a counterinsurgency program based on low-intensity warfare, which espoused using 'any means necessary' to maintain internal security and suppress domestic dissent."[146]

The protest movement was growing slowly through the activists' different efforts to spread information on the actions of the School's graduates. The comparison between a list of School graduates, obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, and publications of the names of officers involved in human rights violations was published on the website of the SOA Watch to spread the word.[147] Bourgeois also continued to write letters to newspapers in which he, among other things, cited the human rights abuses committed by graduates of the School. These included the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the El Mozote

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[144] Gregory Weeks, "Fighting to close the School of the Americas: Unintended consequences of successful activism," *Journal of Human Rights*, 16:2, 178-192, DOI: 10.1080/14754835.2015.1103167, 181.
[145] Ibid., 181.
[146] Bourgeois, "We're Still Training Salvadorans to Kill," A28, 8.
[147] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 211.

massacre.[148] The latter was a massacre of almost a thousand citizens committed in El Salvador by the Atlacatl Battalion, led by Colonel Domingo Monterrosa in 1981.[149]

The activists put emphasis on the tax money that funded the School to educate the American people about who was culpable in this situation. In a letter to *The Washington Post* published in 1996, Bourgeois wrote, "With the Cold War behind us, there have been many changes in Latin America, but it is business as usual at the Pentagon and at the School of the Americas. At a time when budgets for schools for our children are being cut, the SOA is costing us millions of dollars. This is shameful!"[150] He continued, "The fact that the Army continues to train Latin America's military at the SOA (…) is an embarrassment to our country's commitment to the rule of law and a horrible waste of taxpayer funds. It is time to close this school of assassins."[151] According to SOA Watch activist Craig Mousin, "We might not be able to control who the president of El Salvador is, but we should be able to at least impact how our tax money is being used to publish a manual on how to torture and execute civilians."[152]

Many people did not share the SOA Watch's opinion that the U.S. carried a responsibility for the violations their graduates committed; instead, they argued that there were simply a few bad apples among the graduates. Representative Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) defended the School after the introduction of the amendment that would cut its funding by Representative Joseph P. Kennedy (D-MA) in 1994 by arguing that its graduates included "10 presidents, 38 ministers of defense and state, 71 commanders of armed forces."[153] What Bishop failed to mention is that none of these ten presidents were elected democratically.[154]

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[148] Roy Bourgeois, "Let's Shut Our School For Salvadoran Killers," *New York Times*, May 28, 1993, A28.
[149] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 6.
[150] Roy Bourgeois, "School for Assassins," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, A18.
[151] Roy Bourgeois, "School for Assassins," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, A18.
[152] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[153] Cooper and Hodge, "SOA Watch keeps speaking out," 8.
[154] Ibid.

Even the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee, Tom Lantos (D-CA), who had jurisdiction over issues of human rights, still supported the School: "I'm convinced that many more would have participated in human rights violations if they had not attended that school."[155]

Moreover, some expressed their doubts at the reflection that human rights abuses committed by graduates have on an institution, arguing that actions done after graduation have little to nothing to do with the education at all. Sanford Bishop represented Georgia, the state where the School was located, in the House, and argued, "We might as well abolish the University of Pennsylvania because [convicted fraudster] Michael Milken graduated from the Wharton School."[156] Representative George Darden (D-Ga.) argued in favor of the School that year too: "We simply can't close an institution because a small percentage of the participants are bad or get off on the wrong track. If we did that and closed every institution in which that happened, none of us could come to work Monday because Congress would have to be closed."[157] Similarly, in 1994, Nunn argued that the School of the Americas should not be held responsible for the "behavior of all of its graduates, including those who commit human rights abuses. (…) You can find criminals in every ilk who graduated from Harvard, Yale, Princeton." But, Nunn said, "No one advocates closing those institutions because of the crimes of some of their graduates."[158]

The SOA Watch felt that they received indisputable confirmation for U.S. culpability in the human rights violations committed by Latin American graduates when Pentagon officials released the results of an in-house investigation into the School of the Americas in

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[155] Tom Lantos as quoted by Kenneth J. Cooper, "School of Americas Backed," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1994, A13.
[156] Sanford Bishop as quoted by Kenneth J. Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" *The Washington* Post, May 19, 1994, A19.
[157] George Darden as quoted by Cooper, "School of Americas Backed," A13.
[158] Sam Nunn as quoted by Colman McCarthy, "U.S. Finishing School for Latin Thugs," *The Washington Post*, May 10, 1994, D18.

April 1996, where they presented their findings in the use of manuals in the courses.[159] A report in the *National Catholic Reporter* suggested that they published them as a result of a claim made by SOA Watch's Carol Richardson and Bourgeois that they had talked to a human rights activist from Paraguay who said he had been tortured by officers who had used manuals obtained from the School.[160]

The Foreign Intelligence Oversight Board from the Defense Department obtained the manuals through Freedom of Information suits.[161] They were looking into the CIA's involvement in 1992 in Guatemala when they found out about them, and according to journalist Dana Priest, "spokesmen for the school denied the manuals advocated such extreme methods of operation, which were in violation of Army policy and law at the time they were in use."[162] Yet the Intelligence Oversight Board concluded, "The Army School of the Americas used training materials that condoned 'executions of guerrillas, extortion, physical abuse, coercion and false imprisonment."[163] The report stated, "It is incredible that the use (…) since 1982 (…) evaded the established system of doctrinal controls."[164]

These manuals were used from 1982 to 1991 and they include information, instructions and practices that, Amnesty International contends, are "inconsistent with US and international law and stated Pentagon policies."[165] These include "motivation by fear, payment of bounties for enemy dead, false imprisonment, use of truth serum, torture, execution, extortion, kidnapping and arresting a target's family members."[166] They were put together using the information and lesson plans that had been in use since 1982, which were

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[159] McCarthy, "U.S. Shouldn't Be True to This School," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, C9.
[160] Cooper and Hodge, "SOA Watch keeps speaking out," 9.
[161] Mary McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," *The Washington Post*, September 26, 1996, A2.
[162] Dana Priest, "U.S. Instructed Latins On Executions, Torture," *The Washington Post*, September 21, 1996, A9.
[163] The Foreign Intelligence Oversight Board as quoted by Mary McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," *The Washington Post*, July 4, 1996, A2.
[164] Priest, "U.S. Instructed Latins On Executions, Torture," A9.
[165] Amnesty International, "Unmatched Power, Unmet Principles," 4
[166] Amnesty International, "Unmatched Power, Unmet Principles," 5.

based on material from the 1960s.[167] The Pentagon acknowledged that the content of the manuals was "clearly objectionable and possibly illegal."[168] The manuals were taken out of circulation when an internal investigation concluded that there was objectionable material in them. Pentagon spokesman Arne Owens said, "The problem was discovered in 1992, properly reported and fixed. There have been a lot of great changes at the School of the Americas."[169] The Army did state that they were unsure if they were able to retrace and retrieve all copies, which should be around as many as 1,000.[170]

Demands to close the School intensified after the publishing of these manuals, critics becoming more vocal and more heard.[171] "The Pentagon's findings verify the charges made in the past six years by protesters at Fort Benning," journalist Colman McCarthy wrote. "While the truth was being told by Bourgeois, Bischel, and last summer by 450 Catholic nuns who came to demonstrate, Pentagon cosmetologists have consistently beautified the facts, as if powdering a corpse."[172] Bourgeois was "vindicated and angry" after hearing the news of the investigation into the School.[173] "They lied. They have kept on lying about it as recently as last month. The commandant of the school in an interview with the Columbus Ledger talked about 'the small percentage of graduates who have done some terrible things; we cannot take responsibility for those who have gone astray.' He denied there was a manual."[174]

For the activists, the publication of the manuals felt as a confirmation of U.S. guilt and a confirmation that they themselves were doing the right thing protesting the School.[175] Bourgeois calls the human rights material that was included in the manuals "a joke and an

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[167] Steven Lee Myers, "Be All That You Can Be: Your Future As An Extortionist," *New York Times*, October 6, 1996, E7.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Arne Owens as quoted by Priest, "U.S. Instructed Latins On Executions, Torture," A9.
[170] Myers, "Be All That You Can Be: Your Future As An Extortionist," E7.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Colman McCarthy, "U.S. Shouldn't Be True to This School," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, C9.
[173] McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," *The Washington Post*, September 26, 1996, A2.
[174] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," A2.
[175] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.

insult."[176] He spoke to Representative Joseph P. Kennedy (D-MA), who had introduced an amendment to close the School several times, on the phone from federal prison, where he said, "I have hope that when people know about his they will end it. (…) I think the wall is beginning to crack."[177] Representative Kennedy, who had introduced amendments to cut funding for the School multiple times since 1993, said, "[The School of the Americas] ends up giving the imprimatur to these types of human rights abuses. It gives the impression that America has somehow blessed this kind of activity."[178] This argument is centered around domestic policy and the idea that the U.S. is making itself culpable in violations of human rights by educating the Latin American officers.

The SOA Watch perceived the U.S. to be directly culpable in the human rights violations committed by graduates of the School, regardless of the protests of the supporters of the School. The protests against the School and the belief in its culpability were increased when the so-called torture manuals were published. The goal of the multiple amendments to cut funding for the School over the years, as opposed to many other human rights considerations, was not to change other countries' human rights legislation;[179] it was to change the role of the United States in these, prioritizing the culpability of the U.S. playing a part in these human rights violations being committed elsewhere, framing it as a domestic issue.

Defining Human Rights

The use of these instruction manuals confirmed for the SOA Watch that the U.S. played a part in educating Latin American officers to infringe on the bodily integrity of the

[176] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," A2.
[177] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[178] Joseph P. Kennedy as quoted by Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[179] Weeks, "Fighting to close the School of the Americas," 181.

citizens of their respective countries, in line with the human rights activism that was visible in the 1970s and 1980s. In these earlier decades, the idea of bodily integrity became intertwined with the human rights consciousness and it became a key definition, as a result of the growing Holocaust awareness and the stories told by survivors of abuses in Latin America, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.[180] The human rights violations the SOA Watch was protesting were mainly infringements on bodily integrity in the form of torture, disappearances and executions. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the discourse around human rights of the SOA Watch was a continuation of the human rights activism that was visible in the 1970s and 1980s. U.S. government officials and supporters of the School often defended the continued existence of the School by defining human rights as democracy promotion, with the School playing a key part in promoting democracy in Latin America.

The SOA Watch made use of individual testimonials by survivors of the infringements on bodily integrity committed by SOA graduates in building their support, similar to the human rights activism of the 1970s and 1980s. This was already visible in the start of the movement, where the activists made the human rights issues more personal through showing the story Archbishop Oscar Romero in the protest in 1983. This was a method that was used ever since the 1970s, when personal testimonials showed the wider public what was really going on inside a country.[181] According to Bradley, what played a large role in shaping human rights imagination and, with that, organizations, were the spreading of information about the torture and killings that were happening in Latin America.[182]

The testimonials got many people feeling sympathetic for the SOA Watch's cause. Roy Bourgeois was especially committed to this, as he went travelling around the country to spread the message of the SOA Watch by telling personal stories, both his own experiences in

[180] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 139, 157.
[181] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 156.
[182] Ibid., 179.

the countries he visited and those of others.[183] Through the telling of these individual accounts, he was able to rouse support for their cause and spread the word.

The activists also used the personal testimonials of the violation of bodily integrity as a way of expressing themselves in protest. This could be seen, for example, in early 1996, when fourteen demonstrators went onto Fort Benning property, where they acted out the 1989 assassinations of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.[184] The activists have held funeral processions to represent all the victims that had been killed by graduates of the School.[185] While acting out a funeral march, the activists recited the names of the people killed by graduates and planted white crosses for the victims on the grass on the grounds of Fort Benning.[186] Activist Craig Mousin describes the vigil as "the sacred moment that concludes the weekend. That reminds us again that there's people that can't be with us because they have disappeared due to the violence."[187] During a protest organized by the SOA Watch in early May 1999, 55 activists were protesting on the steps of the Pentagon. They were blocking the entrance and spilling red, blood-like substance on the steps to remind people of the bloodshed caused by SOA graduates.[188]

The publication of these instruction manuals inspired more support for the cause of the SOA Watch, because now it was proven that the School played a part in instructing Latin American officers in committing human rights violations, by violating the bodily integrity of the victims. At this point, the activists of the SOA Watch had served more time in prison than any of the graduates who had committed human rights violations after attending the

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[183] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 210.
[184] McCarthy, "U.S. Shouldn't Be True to This School," C9.
[185] Steven Lee Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," *New York Times*, November 22, 1999, A18.
[186] Laurie Goodstein, "Sibling Nuns Will Go to Prison for Protesting at U.S. Military School," *New York Times*, June 24, 2001, 10.
[187] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[188] "55 Protesters Arrested on Pentagon Steps," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1999, B2A.

School.[189] In a letter to *The Washington Post*, Bourgeois wrote, "We are now told by the Pentagon that SOA manuals taught Latin America's military how to torture, execute and blackmail. What we are not told is that the targets were the poor and those who dared to speak out on behalf of the poor."[190] Together with the publication of the manuals and increased attention for the cause after activists trespassed on Fort Benning in 1995, creating a tradition of crossing the line at the annual vigil, attendance at the SOA Watch protests increased massively.[191]

Where the SOA Watch activists defined human rights as bodily integrity, supporters of the School often defined human rights as democracy promotion. Since the Reagan administration, this main definition of human rights that surfaced is used frequently in the U.S. government.[192] It gave a strong moral base for defenders of the School to argue that the School was necessary to teach Latin American officers about democracy and, by doing so, human rights, in order to improve the living conditions in Latin America.

The difference in defining human rights between the SOA Watch and the U.S. government and Army officials was clear, because even though the negative attention for the School of the Americas was growing, it continued to enjoy widespread support from many different corners, including Congressional support. Many of that appeared to stem from the idea that because the U.S. was training these Latin American officers, it was inherently a good thing because the U.S. was spreading their values to 'their backyard', including democracy. Some supporters rooted their argument in the idea that attendance the School of the Americas has increased democracy and human rights in Latin America. Undersecretary of the Army Joe R. Reeder argued that the school "deserves more recognition and support as an invaluable

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[189] McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," A2; McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[190] Roy Bourgeois, "School for Assassins," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, A18.
[191] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 208-209.
[192] Tony Smith, *America's Mission*, 268-269.

contributor to human rights and democracy." To say that the school "teaches or encourages nondemocratic values is unconscionable."[193]

The definition of human rights being directly linked to the idea of democracy promotion was often used as an argument to keep the School open. Representative Sanford Bishop (D-GA) also argued that the School stood in line with and promoted human rights and representative governments in Latin America through its training of officers. He said, "an overwhelming majority of the graduates have worked for democracy when they returned home."[194] Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) had been an outspoken supporter of the School since the protests started in the early 1990s. He claimed that Latin America has "a whole lot more democracy and a whole lot more sense of values and human rights."[195]

Supporters of the School held onto the democratic values of the School. In response to a letter published in *The New York Times* written by Bourgeois, Under Secretary of the Army Thomas J. Begines wrote in February 1996: "The majority [of the graduates] have exemplified the democratic and human rights values of the school. They have assisted the transition in our hemisphere from dictatorships to democracies. No fewer than ten former Latin American presidents, 39 cabinet members and 100 service people are alumni of the school. Yet Father Bourgeois focuses on those few graduates cited for action contrary to the school's instruction and values."[196] Begines sent in this letter to *The New York Times* before the School's instruction manuals were published in April that year.

Even after the publication of the manuals, some stood firm in their support for the School. Representative Sanford Bishop (D-GA), who has expressed his support for the School many times since people started to speak out against it and who represents the district where

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[193] Joe R. Reeder as quoted by McCarthy, "U.S. Shouldn't Be True to This School," C9.
[194] Sanford Bishop as quoted in Congressional Record – House, June 5, 1996, H5889.
[195] Sam Nunn as quoted by McCarthy, "U.S. Finishing School for Latin Thugs," D18.
[196] Thomas J. Begines, "School of Americas," *New York Times*, February 27, 1996, A22.

Fort Benning is located, said in September 1996 that he had received the information from the Army that "only 199 students of 60,000 were ever exposed to the manuals, which had not been used for four years, and may never have read them."[197] While Bishop did acknowledge the training manuals, he defined them as "a mistake that was corrected years ago."[198] According to journalist Mary McGrory, "Rep. Bishop and a sufficient number of like-minded colleagues in the House believe that the school has been instrumental in promoting democracy and human rights in Latin America."[199]

Indeed, the idea that the School had played an integral part in helping Latin America become more democratized played a big part in the defense for the School. Representative Bishop argued that the training the officers received "includes extensive indoctrination in the principles of human rights and representative democracy."[200] He also mentioned, "The school's contribution to the transformation of Latin America from totalitarianism to democracy has been tremendous," and that many of the graduates "will tell you that the values they studied and discussed during their stay at the school influenced their political thinking and motivated them in their country's fight for democracy."[201]

Even amendments and bills to close the School were introduced, it continued to receive outspoken support out of many corners, many coming from the idea that the School was essential in promoting democracy. Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) expressed his opinion that closing the School would not be the solution, and that "Like Senator Durbin, I believe that the United States has a special obligation to promote democracy throughout the world, and most especially in our own hemisphere," emphasizing that it is very important that the U.S.

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[197] McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," A2.
[198] Congressional Record, Extension of remarks, September 4, 1997, E1661.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Sanford Bishop as quoted in Congressional Record, Extension of remarks, September 4, 1997, E1660.
[201] Sanford Bishop as quoted in Congressional Record, Extension of remarks, September 4, 1997, E1660.

provides the Latin American militaries with proper training.[202] Moreover, even Senator Durbin himself mentioned the importance of U.S. aid in shaping Latin America's future. He argued, "This region contains some of the most fragile democracies which need our support in encouraging democratically elected governments, the role of civilian institutions and economic stability." [203]

Supporters of the School expressed a necessity for the U.S. to be continuously involved in Latin America. Nicholas Britto, a School spokesman, said in 1999, "We have only one country in Latin America that is not a democracy, and that's Cuba, so I think we have had an impact on encouraging democracy in Latin America. We have more human rights classes than any other military school."[204] Representative Floyd Spence (R-SC) argued that the School was still an integral part of promoting democracy in Latin America and that closing the School would be "a regrettable step backwards and would disregard the significant contributions of our military in fostering democracy throughout America."[205] Representative Cass Ballenger (R-NC) also rose in opposition to the amendment because he believed that the School was an integral part of educating Latin American officers on democracy and, through this, became "our friends of the future."[206]

Even Congressmen who were supporters of the cause of the SOA Watch still believed the U.S. had a responsibility toward Latin America. Representative Joe Moakley (D-MA) stressed the human rights argument when trying to garner support for his amendment to cut funding for the School by saying that the infringements on bodily integrity of SOA graduates stood in the way of U.S. democracy promotion elsewhere in the world. He argued, "Put simply, the School of the Americas has trained some of the most brutal assassins, some of the

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[202] Chris Dodd as quoted in Congressional Record – Senate, July 16, 1997, S7590.
[203] Dick Durbin as quoted in Congressional Record – Senate, June 27, 1997, S6741.
[204] Nicholas Britto as quoted by John Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1999, A3.
[205] Floyd Spence as quoted in Congressional Record, House, May 17, 2000, H3351.
[206] Floyd Spence as quoted in Congressional Record, House, May 17, 2000, H3353.

cruelest dictators, and some of the worst abusers of human rights the western hemisphere has ever seen. If we don't stand for human rights down in Georgia, how can we possibly expect to promote them anywhere else in the world?[207] Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) does not speak out against the training of Latin American officers in general, just against the School specifically, arguing, "This school's reputation has been irrevocably tainted by the blood of the victims of its graduates," and that its closing is the only way forward.[208]

Representative Moakley argued that, while the School of the Americas training military officers had the opposite effect they were looking for, "Latin America needs us. They need us to help shore up their judicial systems. They need us to strengthen their electoral system. They need us to work with their police."[209] Representative Bruce Vento (D-MN), also a supporter of the amendment, spoke in favor of continued involvement in Latin America too, albeit in a different way. He suggests reform in the shape of, among other things, "alternatives to military aid, such as economic assistance, microcredit loans."[210]

The SOA Watch activists have spoken out against the idea that the School promotes democracy in Latin America. Roy Bourgeois, during a 40-day water-only fast on the steps of the Capitol in April 1994, said, "It's a grave injustice, a crime against humanity to have a school like this on American soil."[211] He continued, "If the threat of communism ever justified America's involvement in this [program], both the threat and the rationale are now gone. Today we are teaching Latin American dictators and military officers the skills they need to repress their own people."[212] Craig Mousin argued, "When your premise is to train the

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[207] Joe Moakley as quoted by Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," A3..
[208] Dick Durbin as quoted in Congressional Record, Senate, September 1, 1998, S9727.
[209] Joe Moakley as quoted in Congressional Record, House, May 17, 2000, H3351.
[210] Bruce Vento as quoted by Congressional Record, House, May 17, 2000, H3352.
[211] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[212] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Martin Walker, "US army's 'coup school' faces calls for closure," *The Guardian*, 12.

military, you've already done something that threatens democracy," as he argues that training human rights should start with the civilians and the civic institutions.[213]

The realization that the U.S. was directly or indirectly culpable in human rights violations clearly got people's attention, which was even more heightened as the personal stories from the victims who had suffered from these abuses caught people's attention that raised awareness for the issue at hand.[214] As speakers from Latin American countries affected by the human rights abuses committed by SOA graduates, including Guatemala, Colombia and Chile, described the acts of torture committed by the graduates, support for the SOA Watch cause grew.[215] U.S. officials, whether they support the SOA Watch cause or not, still generally express the opinion that the U.S. has a responsibility to help guide Latin American countries on the area of human rights as democracy promotion.

Contacting Congress

The SOA Watch activists recognized the importance of contacting Congress in achieving their goals in the domestic policy area, which was already visible in the earlier years of the movement. One of the ways the SOA Watch used to get attention for their cause was by learning the inner workings of the federal government and ways to contact representatives in the legislative branch, which started in September 1993, when Representative Joseph P. Kennedy (D-MA) introduced an amendment that would cut funding for the School for the first time.[216] It was Bourgeois himself who brought the issue under Kennedy's attention.[217] This first introduction caused a larger wave that garnered more and

[213] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[214] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 181-182.
[215] "Thousands Protest Army Training School," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 1999, C3.
[216] Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[217] McCarthy, "U.S. Finishing School for Latin Thugs," D18.

more support for the cause of the SOA Watch in Congress, leading to changes in curriculum of the School and, in the end, its closing.

Bourgeois piqued Representative Kennedy's interest when the two of them met on the Capitol steps, where Bourgeois was protesting the School with his fellow activists.[218] Before this meeting, Kennedy had never heard of the School.[219] He visited the School and was repulsed by the glorification of some of the graduates who had committed human rights violations in the "Hall of Heroes."[220] He took this initiative after talking to Charles T. Call, who gave lectures on human rights on behalf of the Washington Office on Latin America.[221] The House rejected Kennedy's proposed amendment to cut funding for the School by a vote of 256 to 184, which Kennedy blamed mostly on the unawareness of the House members to the issue and the School's history and records.[222] He was also of the opinion that many people did not vote in favor of his amendment not only because people were actually active supporters of the School. "I thought a lot of people did not know what this school was about last year," Kennedy said.[223]

The SOA Watch activists got more politically involved over the years and contacted their representatives to get closer to their goal. As journalist Terry Tracy writes, the activists "had taken the time to learn the labyrinth of Washington politics and combined their vigil with visits to their congressional representatives. They were aware of the politics of swing votes and the importance of grass-roots lobbying."[224] Tracy argued, "The fact that they speak and compel their representatives to listen demonstrates the persistence and conviction that leads to change. Such protesters remind Washington that many Americans are neither

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[218] McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[219] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[220] McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[221] Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[222] Joseph P. Kennedy as quoted by Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[223] Joseph P. Kennedy as quoted by Cooper, "Taking Aim At 'School Of Assassins,'" A19.
[224] Terry Tracy, "From the Outside Coming In," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1994, C8.

apathetic nor uninformed and that politics involves the nation, not just a few of us inside the Beltway."[225] An example of this is that in early 1994, 25 activists set up appointments with Pentagon officials to express their concerns and their wishes for the School to close. These officials received them, but, while they did acknowledge that some graduates have gone on to commit human rights violations, these formed only a small percentage of the total amount of students attending the School. Reverend Clinton Marsh said that the Pentagon officials claimed that it is "better to have friendship with the leadership [of Latin American countries] to influence true democracy,"[226] standing their ground in believing in the importance of maintaining the institution.

Representative Kennedy agreed with the SOA Watch activists and called the School "an ugly, unexposed relic of the Cold War"[227] that more and more taxpayers would realize was not representative of U.S. standards in 1994. Joseph Kennedy said that the manuals "show what we have suspected all along, that taxpayers' money has been used for physical abuse. The School of the Americas, a Cold War relic, should be shut down."[228] Almost 500 people attended a protest that lasted 40 days, advocating for the closing of the School in Washington D.C. in June 1994 in support for the amendment introduced by Kennedy that would cut the funding for the School from the Defense Authorization.[229]

Unfortunately for the activists, this amendment introduced by Representative Kennedy did not pass in 1994, but this time it failed with a smaller margin than it had when it was introduced the year before.[230] Journalist Colman McCarthy wrote a day after the results of the vote came out, "With Bourgeois outside the Capitol and Kennedy inside, this time the vote promises to be an informed one. The school is no longer the Army's dirty little secret. Now

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[225] Ibid.
[226] Clinton Marsh as quoted in Broadway, "Activist Priest Tells Of Raid for Peace," C7.
[227] Joseph P. Kennedy as quoted by Cooper, "School of Americas Backed," A13.
[228] Joseph Kennedy as quoted by Priest, "U.S. Instructed Latins On Executions, Torture," A9.
[229] Terry Tracy, "From the Outside Coming In," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1994, C8.
[230] Broadway, "Activist Priest Tells Of Raid for Peace," C8.

it's dirty, large and unsecret."[231] Even if the vote was lost this time, the (negative) attention the School was receiving was larger than ever, culminating in more support for the protest too. As journalist Terry Tracy writes, "The amendment failed, and the School of the Americas remains open. No doubt they will organize again next year and thereafter if needed."[232] Indeed, the activists were well aware that they were in for the long run; they knew it would take time to build a majority in Congress, especially since many people's livelihood depended on the existence of the School.[233]

When Foreign Intelligence Oversight Board from the Defense Department concluded that the School had educated the students in committing human rights violations through the instruction manuals, the criticism on the School increased.[234] This was visible in the increasing number of activists attending the annual protest. In 1997, over 2,000 people attended.[235] Around 7,000 people attended the annual protest in November in 1998.[236] In November 1999, a record number of 12,000 people attended the annual protest.[237] It was the largest protest against an institution of the U.S. Army in at least a decade.[238] Over 8,000 people attended the annual protest in 2000.[239] As Craig Mousin described, the activists were well aware that the battle they were fighting would take a long time.

It became clear that the report on the manuals had raised awareness in Congress too, convincing more and more people that something had to be done about the School. Representative Kennedy gained the support from some of his colleagues, including

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[231] McCarthy, "U.S. Finishing School for Latin Thugs," D18.
[232] Tracy, "From the Outside Coming In," C8.
[233] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[234] The Foreign Intelligence Oversight Board as quoted by McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[235] Linda Panetta and Randy Serraglio. "Training Assassins," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34, no. 3 (2000), 28-29, https://nacla.org/article/training-assassins
[236] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[237] Gill, *The School of the Americas*, 209.
[238] Duncan Campbell, "US students leave shopping malls to sign up for grassroots protests," *The Guardian*, November 20, 1999, 21.
[239] Laurie Goodstein, "Sibling Nuns Will Go to Prison for Protesting at U.S. Military School," *New York Times*, June 24, 2001, 10.

Representatives Caroline Maloney (D-NY), Martin Meehan (D-MA) and Sam Farr (D-CA). Maloney said, "This is not a school, this is a scandal."[240] In 1997, the amendment was introduced again in the House, and this time it failed to pass by a margin of only four votes. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced a bill to close the School of the Americas in 1997, arguing that the attempts made to change the curriculum have not been enough to make a clean break with the past. He argued that the School has become outdated since the end of the Cold War and there was no longer a perceived imminent threat of communism taking over Latin America.[241]

Even though the bills were failing in both the House and the Senate, concrete changes could be seen in response to the SOA Watch movement as since the Foreign Intelligence Oversight Board published their report on the use of the manuals at the School, the School introduced more human rights courses. According to journalist Douglas Farah, this ranged from four to forty hours of mandatory classes for all students, dependent on the total amount of courses they were taking.[242] "The U.S. military has always taught courses on human rights, but based on criticism that we were teaching Latin Americans and in some parts of Latin America there have been many human rights violations, we have beefed up and improved our human rights training," School spokesperson Captain Kevin L. McIver said.[243]

School officials maintained that the School was teaching even more human rights than before and never human rights violations. Commandant of the School at the time, Colonel Glenn R. Weidner, argued, "The school has never taught torture and never will."[244] He also contended that the School had changed a lot, as had the countries that the students came from. As Captain McIver said, Colonel Glenn R. Weidner contended that the School was providing

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[240] Caroline Maloney as quoted by McGrory, "Manual for Murderers," A2.
[241] Dick Durbin as quoted in Congressional Record – Senate, June 27, 1997, S6741.
[242] Farah, "At School of the Americas, a New Mission," A20.
[243] Kevin L. McIver as quoted by Farah, "At School of the Americas, a New Mission," A20.
[244] Glenn R. Weidner as quoted by Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.

courses on human rights, as well as some on disaster relief and peacekeeping.[245] Kennedy was not impressed with this implementation. "I don't think a few human rights courses will make a difference," he said. "The people the school attracts are not there to learn human rights. They come to learn how to kill people more efficiently," calling again for the School to be shut down."[246]

With the curriculum changes of the School and the persisting protests, changes also started to take place in Congress. In July 1999, Representative Joe Moakley (D-MA) proposed the amendment to cut funding for the School again, and this time it passed with 230 to 197.[247] Even though the amendment did turn out to be unable to hold ground once the House-Senate Conference Committee voted against it,[248] it was still a hopeful moment. Joe Moakley took over this legislation from Joseph Kennedy, who retired from Congress in 1998. Moakley led the investigation into the murders of the Jesuit priests in 1989, which resulted in the information that 19 out of the 26 assassins had attended the School at some point in their lives and which sparked the annual protest at Fort Benning by the SOA Watch.[249]

The amendment would have cut the School's alleged budget of $4,5 million with $2,5 million. The SOA Watch argued that the budget had to be at least $15 million to properly run it, but was supposedly hidden via other accounts.[250] Still, deputy director of the nonprofit research group the Washington Office on Latin America, Bill Spencer, said, "I think it sent a tremendously strong signal to the Army and the U.S. government as a whole that our relationship with Latin America ought to focus a lot more on democracy and human rights

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[245] Carlson, "The Priest Who Waged a War," F4.
[246] Joseph P. Kennedy as quoted by Farah, "At School of the Americas, a New Mission," A20.
[247] Joe Moakley as quoted by John Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1999, A3.
[248] Linda Panetta and Randy Serraglio. "Training Assassins," 28-29.
[249] Mary McGrory, "Hallelujah Time For Human Rights," *The Washington Post*, 8 August 1999, B1.
[250] Mary McGrory, "Hallelujah Time For Human Rights," *The Washington Post*, August 8, 1999, B1.

and a lot less on strengthening the nations' militaries."[251] If the amendment passed both the Senate and the House of Representatives, it would mean that the funds would be cut with such a significant amount that the survival of the School became unlikely.[252]

Interestingly, several days before the annual protest in November 2000, Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera announced plans to change the name of the School to the Centre for Inter-American Security Cooperation, as well as shift the focus from being a military school to more academic and to add even more human rights classes to the curriculum.[253] The students who attend the School for the longest possible time, a year, are obligated to also attend the annual "Human Rights Week" in February, which deals with several human rights abuses the United States has been involved with in the past.[254] Despite this promise to dedicate more time to human rights at the School, Bourgeois argued, "We are not here to transform this school. We are here – and we need to make this clear – to close this school."[255] Moakley argued that the subtle changes in the curriculum are like "putting perfume on a toxic dump."[256]

In December 2000, the news broke that the School of the Americas had closed, which was the goal of the SOA Watch. However, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), which opened only a month later in January 2001, replaced it. Army Secretary Louis Caldera continued to defend the School shortly after its closure was announced. "Do you truly believe that an American school of our U.S. armed forces located on American soil would not reflect our most deeply held values?"[257] he said. "Any soldier in Latin America who had even the most remote connection to the School of the Americas, who

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[251] Bill Spencer as quoted by Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," A3.
[252] Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," A3.
[253] Campbell, "US students leave shopping malls to sign up for grassroots protests," 21; Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," A18.
[254] Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," A18.
[255] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," A18.
[256] Joe Moakley as quoted by Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," A18.
[257] Louis Caldera as quoted by Reuters, "School of the Americas Closes," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2000, A11.

has ever committed a human rights violation, did so in spite of the training they received at the School of the Americas and not because of it."[258] Caldera admitted that the School closed due to the increasing criticism and publicity. "Some of you and your representatives in Congress could not even abide by the name of this School of the Americas itself, and said that no amount of reform of this institution could ever redeem it in your eyes. Today you can rejoice that the school is closed."[259]

Yet, even though the School had officially closed, the SOA Watch was not satisfied. "This movement has not been fooled by the name change," Bourgeois said. "This is not a human rights academy. This is a military school where soldiers learn combat."[260] Activist Craig Mousin recalled that the activists first felt surprised when WHINSEC opened so shortly after the School closed, so he argued that it was hard to celebrate that they were able to close the School and had thus succeeded in their goal, because they reopened it again a month later.[261]

Even Mark Morgan, Colonel at the School, admitted that the name change was purely cosmetic and did not change what the School actually was. Right before Congress would vote on whether to close the School or not, Morgan informed the Department of Defense of this, saying, "Some of your bosses have told us that they can't support anything with the name 'School of the Americas' on it. Our proposal addresses this concern. It changes the name."[262] Georgia Senator Paul Coverdell, who also fought to keep the School open, said it was "basically cosmetic."[263]

Even after the official closing of the School of the Americas in 2000, the SOA Watch continued. When Bourgeois was asked what would happen if the School closed, Bourgeois

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[258] Louis Caldera as quoted by Reuters, "School of the Americas Closes," A11.
[259] Louis Caldera as quoted by Reuters, "School of the Americas Closes," A11.
[260] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Reuters, "School of the Americas Closes," A11.
[261] Craig Mousin, in conversation with the author, September 8, 2020.
[262] Mark Morgan as quoted by George Monbiot, "Backyard terrorism," *The Guardian*, October 30, 2001, 17.
[263] Paul Coverdell as quoted by Monbiot, "Backyard terrorism," 17.

said, "First, we'll all gather at the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, and have a fiesta to celebrate our victory!" Continuing, he said, "Beyond the SOA is a life-long struggle, and our struggle is connected to the problems of Latin America."[264] The SOA Watch was resolved to continue with their protests until the School, renamed or not, would finally close.[265] The Congressmen continued too, with a bipartisan group of members proposing a new resolution, House Resolution 1810, to close the School of the Americas forever, whichever name it may have.[266]

Provided that it was surrounded by the right circumstances, human rights NGOs have the ability to shift the Congressional vote on certain issues, as it appears happened here. As argued by Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, the increased pressure on the government that comes with increased attention on the issue can influence policy decisions.[267] The exponential growth in support for the SOA Watch and increased attendance at protests the organization organized, as well as more support within Congress, eventually led to enough Congressional support to close the School.

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[264] Roy Bourgeois as quoted by Williams, "Grassroots Movements and Witnesses for Peace," 426.
[265] Reuters, "School of the Americas Closes," A11.
[266] Goodstein, "Sibling Nuns Will Go to Prison for Protesting at U.S. Military School," 10.
[267] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 116.

Conclusion

To summarize, the SOA Watch was unlike human rights NGOs of the 1970s and 1980s in that they perceived direct culpability of the United States in human rights violations committed by graduates of the School of the Americas. A way in which the SOA Watch was similar to human rights NGOs of the 1970s and 1980s is that it defined human rights mainly through bodily integrity, and the contrasting view of human rights as democracy promotion acted as a justification for supporters in Congress for the continued existence of the School, even with its tarnished reputation. Moreover, increased interest in the cause for the SOA Watch pressured the U.S. government to act and eventually, the School of the Americas was closed.

Firstly, the SOA Watch considered the directly U.S. culpable for the human rights violations that were committed by graduates of the School. What could be seen in human rights activism in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s is that human rights were considered to be a foreign issue.[268] Not many domestic issues that could have been described in human rights language was actually described that way. The SOA Watch did consider human rights to be a domestic issue, as they were protesting an institution that they believed made the U.S. directly responsible for the occurring human rights violations. This was clearly visible from the start, when Roy Bourgeois started protesting the School after the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the founding of the SOA Watch after the murder of the Jesuit priests.

This perceived culpability was indisputably confirmed in the eyes of the activists when the Pentagon released the report of an investigation into instruction manuals that were used from 1982 until 1991 at the School. An article in the *National Catholic Reporter*

[268] Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 224.

suggested that the investigation took place because of pressure from Carol Richardson and Roy Bourgeois.[269] Even though some employees of the School and Congressmen continued to defend the School, arguing that the human rights violations committed by graduates were exceptions, the SOA Watch's support grew as more people became convinced that the U.S. bore culpability for the abuses committed by SOA graduates.

Secondly, the School of the Americas Watch is a human rights organization that considered bodily integrity to be the key definition of human rights from its founding in 1990 to 2001, in line with the general idea of human rights by American human rights NGOs in the 1970s. Their protests are centered around the idea of spreading the testimonies of victims of violations of bodily integrity, shown by the activists acting out the massacres committed by School graduates and the pouring of blood over portraits of the graduates. After the 1996 publication of the manuals used to train officers at the School it was clear that the U.S. was directly culpable in instructing human rights abuses such as torture and execution. Support for the movement grew as the wider public began to share the opinion that the School of the Americas should be closed.

The use of the violations of bodily integrity as human rights violations could also be seen in the method of protesting the SOA Watch activists used. Over a decade of demonstrating, they have acted out the 1989 murders of the Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, as well as holding funeral processions for victims who had been killed by people who had received training at the School, calling their names and planting crosses with the victims' names on them.[270]

Through the same time period, before and after the publication of the manuals and even after the School was officially closed, there were still many supporters of the School.

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[269] Cooper and Hodge, "SOA Watch keeps speaking out," 9.
[270] Colman McCarthy, "U.S. Shouldn't Be True to This School," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1996, C9; Laurie Goodstein, "Sibling Nuns Will Go to Prison for Protesting at U.S. Military School," *New York Times*, June 24, 2001, 10.

Many of them used the argument of the School being an integral part in the relation with many Latin American countries that it should stay open. Officers of the U.S. Army and Congressmen have argued that the School aided in the democratization of Latin America, which, since the Reagan Administration, has been a key definition of human rights that the U.S. government has maintained. In this, the difference in meaning that the two sides of this argument gave to human rights is clear.

Thirdly, the activism from the SOA Watch was able to exert influence in Congress and shape domestic policy decisions. This started in 1993, when Representative Joseph P. Kennedy (D-MA) introduced an amendment that would cause the School to close after meeting Bourgeois during one of the SOA Watch's protests.[271] The activists contacted their Congressional representatives to argue their case and to garner more support for policy changes that could cut the funding for the School.[272] Provided that there was enough attention for a cause, policies have been known to be influenced by human rights NGOs through increased pressure on the government.[273]

The lobbying sometimes fell on deaf ears. The School maintained many supporters in Congress who claimed that the School played a hand in promoting human rights in Latin America. School spokesman Nicholas Britto contended that the School was very successful and should stay open because Cuba was the only communist country in Latin America, which he viewed as proof that the School played an important part this.[274] Moreover, both supporters of closing the School and supporters of the School still believed that the U.S. had a responsibility in promoting democracy around the world, and that the School was an essential part in this. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), who introduced a bill that would cut funding for the

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[271] McGrory, "The Price of Freedom," A2.
[272] Terry Tracy, "From the Outside Coming In," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 1994, C8.
[273] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, 116.
[274] Nicholas Britto as quoted by Lancaster, "House Kills Training Funds For School of the Americas," A3.

School, argued, "This region contains some of the most fragile democracies which need our support in encouraging democratically elected governments, the role of civilian institutions and economic stability."[275]

Still, the direct appeals to Congress and growing pressure caused changes in the School of the Americas that were unparalleled. The School introduced and improved human rights courses after the increased protests after the publishing of the manuals.[276] In 1999, it was announced that the School would take a shift to becoming more of an academic school instead of a military school.[277] In December 2000, the School of the Americas closed officially because the name of the institution had been permanently tainted and had received too much negative attention to continue existing due to the increasing SOA Watch activism.

While the closing of the School was the goal of the SOA Watch, they were disappointed when the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) opened in January 2001. Many admitted that WHINSEC was exactly the same institution as the School of the Americas, it had just received a new name and no longer acknowledged its past. This proved that under the right pressure, the U.S. government would listen to the concerns of human rights activists. However, in this case, the School, while renamed and teaching more human rights classes than before, still remains open and unwilling to be held accountable to its past. The fight of the SOA Watch appears to be far from over.

Through these arguments, I contributed to the existing scholarship researching the actions of a human rights organization in the 1990s, adding to the well-researched 1970s and 1980s. By researching the activities and beliefs of the SOA Watch, I was able to state where the human rights activism of the 1990s was a continuation of that the previous decades, and

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[275] Dick Durbin as quoted in Congressional Record – Senate, June 27, 1997, S6741.
[276] Kevin L. McIver as quoted by Farah, "At School of the Americas, a New Mission," A20.
[277] Campbell, "US students leave shopping malls to sign up for grassroots protests," 21; Myers, "Protesting War School for Foreigners," A18.

where it differed, as well as how the SOA Watch applied this to lobby Congress and influence domestic policy. Further research can be conducted to confirm my conclusions. This could expand on my research by introducing new primary sources on the SOA Watch, include a focus on a different human rights NGO active in the United States in the 1990s or a focus on a different time period.

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