

Army's Project X Had Wider Audience

Clandestine Operations Training Manuals Not Restricted to Americas

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Until the early 1980s, the U.S. military ran an intelligence training program in Latin America and elsewhere using manuals that taught foreign officers to offer bounties for captured or killed insurgents, spy on nonviolent political opponents, kidnap rebels' family members and blackmail unwanted informants, according to recently declassified Army and Defense Department documents.

The manuals, known as Project X, were written by U.S. Army experts starting in 1965 for use by

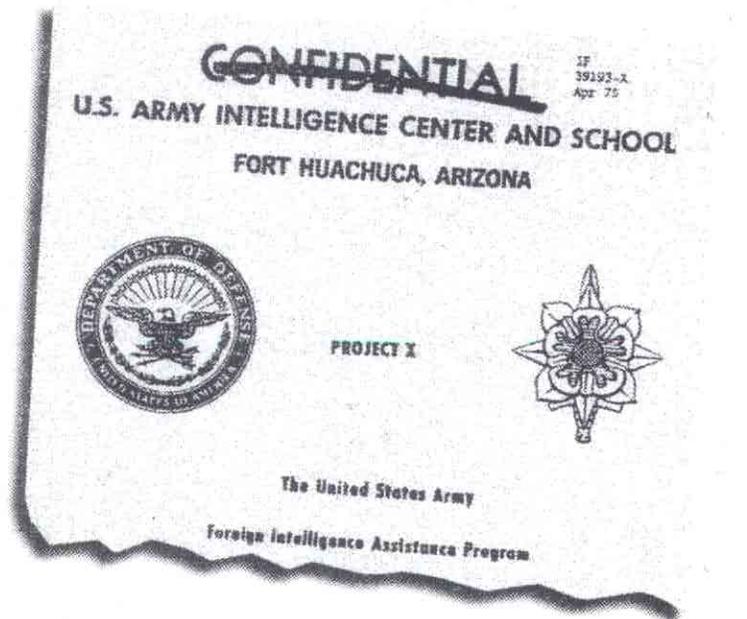
the U.S.-funded Joint Foreign Intelligence Assistance Program. Portrayed by the Army as instructional materials to help friendly governments fight Cuban- and Soviet-inspired rebels in Latin America, the manuals were "in fact a guide for the conduct of clandestine operations" against domestic political adversaries including peaceful ones, according to a panel of Army experts that later reviewed some of the material.

The Pentagon disclosed last year that training manuals using Project X materials were distributed at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, now at Fort Benning, Ga., which

trains Latin and Central American military officers. The new documents, released after petitions filed under the Freedom of Information Act, show that the original manuals were used much more widely, by U.S. military personnel working in a variety of foreign countries.

The foreign intelligence assistance program as a whole, of which Project X was a part, probably ended in the early 1980s, the new documents indicate. But some of the Project X manuals continued to be used off and on, both at the school and in Latin and Central America.

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Project X Clandestine Operations Manuals

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Use of the manuals stopped in 1991, when the Defense Intelligence Agency raised legal and ethical questions and ordered the manuals taken out of circulation.

Army officials were unable to provide details about the intelligence assistance program, such as the date it ended or the countries where it operated. It's also impossible to tell how the use of the training manuals may have influenced the actions of foreign militaries.

The intelligence assistance program was first used in 1965 to train Vietnamese and other foreign nationals at the then-U.S. Army Pacific Intelligence School on Okinawa, Japan, and also operated in Iran in the late 1970s, according to the records.

The program's history is difficult to trace in part because Defense Department intelligence oversight officials, after seeing what the manuals contained in 1991, ordered that the original documentation be destroyed. The ostensible reason was so the materials could never be used again. A 1991 Defense Department memo said "computer disks, lesson plans and 'Project X' documents" had to be destroyed because they were obsolete.

But Pentagon sources, who asked not to be named, said they suspect that the documents were destroyed to hide an embarrassing chapter in the military's conduct abroad.

It is illegal to destroy federal documents without the approval of the National Archives, which has opened an inquiry to find out if such approval was granted.

The new documents cast light on the U.S. military's Cold War role in instructing foreign governments in tough tactics in the battle against what was viewed as leftist subversion. Related but distinct controversies have arisen over the CIA's work in such matters.

By the mid-1970s, the intelligence assistance program was operating in nearly every Latin American country, said a retired Army colonel who managed the program for the U.S. Southern Command until the early 1970s.

"Latin American militaries had no role in the defense of their country [against foreign threats]. The only real role they had was internal defense," he said. "So how do you help them? You can't help them get big airplanes to shoot each other. You can't help them get big tanks. You can help them with information."

"The militaries we were training were right-wing, not liberals," the retired colonel said. "It sounds like Cold War hooaha, but that's where it was at back then."

He denied the instructors taught the tactics detailed in its many training manuals. "It was rookie kind of stuff" that was taught, he said, adding that Latin American military officials often scoffed at how tame the material was.

Using documents obtained through the FOIA by The Washington Post, and separate materials gathered by Carlos Osario of the National Security Archive, a Washington-based nonprofit research group, it is possible to piece together the broad outlines of the intelligence assistance program that included Project X.

While few of the original Project X manuals exist, numerous Army and Defense Department documents indicate they were the basis for the material found in the later School of the Americas materials disclosed last year.

Bert Haggett, an Army security specialist in the counterintelligence and human intelligence division, said the Army agrees with a 1991 Defense Department intelligence oversight report that found that numerous examples of "objectionable" material from Project X were used in the school manuals.

"They were objectionable and we do not disagree with that," Haggett said. "It should not have been there. . . . That's one of the reasons we have an intelligence oversight office," he said. "Times were different."

The original manuals were written by experts at the U.S. Army Intelligence School, then located at Fort Holabird, Md., and approved for export by the Army deputy chief of staff for intelligence. They included les-

sons in creating "black, gray or white" lists of potential adversaries and in making block-by-block inventories of families and their assets to keep tabs on the population, the documents show.

A 1972 roster of Project X materials available for use included documents on aerial surveillance, electronic eavesdropping, interrogation, basic countersabotage measures,

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hiring and firing informants, lock picking, and censorship. The latter was described as "a general introduction to censorship to include reference to Armed Forces Censorship . . . and National Censorship."

Some of the material found later to be most offensive comes from manuals entitled, "Agent Handling" and "Counterintelligence." Summarizing those, Maj. Thomas Husband, assistant deputy director for counterintelli-

More Widely Used Than Believed

gence support, wrote in 1991: "Document contained several passages which provided training regarding the use of sodiopentathol [truth serum] compound in interrogation, abduction of adversary family members to influence adversary, prioritization of adversary personalities for abduction, exile, physical beatings and execution."

A 1968 manual called "Employee Procurement and Utilization" said, "The intelligence operative must recognize the vulnerabilities in the organizational structure . . . of the insurgent underground. . . . A defector can protect himself by the elimination of all other members of his cell."

The Project X material suggested militaries infiltrate and suppress even democratic political dissident movements and hunt down opponents in every segment of society in the name of fighting Communism.

Military intelligence should infiltrate a wide array of groups, including political parties, labor unions, youth and student groups, religious organizations, and publishing organizations. "Mass organizations . . . villages from which crops are being diverted, and groups of underprivileged people are all potential insurgent targets," says the Employee Procurement manual.

One manual even cast suspicion on the electoral process. Insurgents "can resort to subversion of the government by means of elections. . . . Insurgent leaders participate in political contests as candidates for government office," it said.

The first Joint Foreign Intelligence Assistance Program project was launched on Okinawa in 1965 as the U.S. ground and air campaign in Vietnam took off.

"This school is in an excellent position to meet requests for intelligence training submitted by" military advisers and attachés in "the Pacific and Southeast Asia area," a 1965 informational brochure on the program states.

One counterintelligence official told Army officials in 1991 that she believed the program might be linked to the Phoenix program, a U.S. military and CIA undertaking

that resulted in the assassinations of thousands of South Vietnamese suspected of disloyalty. Some of the Project X materials appeared to be the same as the Phoenix lessons, and the Army intelligence school was teaching a course on the Phoenix program at the same time that the Project X manuals were being written, she noted.

During the mid-1970s, after the intelligence school moved to Fort Huachuca, Ariz., the school "began exporting, on request, Project X material to MAAGs, MIL-GROUPS, defense attachés, and other U.S. military agencies participating in the U.S. advisory-training effort in friendly foreign countries," according to a short history of the program prepared in 1991.

Those acronyms refer to the various types of military advisory groups that existed as part of the U.S. government presence in foreign countries. In some countries, U.S. military personnel were located in the U.S. Embassy; in others they worked from offices in the country's defense ministry.

Sometimes lesson plans were sent to be used by U.S. military personnel already in the country. Other times, Army Intelligence Mobile Training Teams, small groups of military intelligence officers, were dispatched to do the training. Foreign officers were also allowed to take courses at U.S. intelligence schools here and abroad.

It is uncertain from the documents when the program ended. The 1991 memo by Maj. Husband said he believed the program was halted "by the Carter administration for fear the training would contribute to human rights violations in other countries."

But in 1980, President Jimmy Carter's last year in office, the annual review by the office of the assistant chief of staff for intelligence, then responsible for the program, noted that "major problems encountered [in the intelligence assistance program] were the revolution in Iran which degraded [the program] and other U.S. efforts; and further personnel reductions in attaché and security assistance organizations."
