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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### *School for Assassins*

Shouldn't the Sept. 21 front-page article "Army Instructed Latins on Executions, Torture" give reason enough for Congress to close the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA)?

I am a Catholic priest with the Maryknoll Order writing from the federal prison in Atlanta, where I'm serving a six-month sentence for a nonviolent protest against the SOA. I was among 13 arrested, including a 74-year-old nun, a Jesuit priest, a lawyer, World War II veterans and a mother of eight. The SOA, located at Fort Benning, Ga., trains hundreds of soldiers from Latin America each year in combat skills at U.S. taxpayers' expense.

The school, established in 1946, quietly has trained more than 60,000 troops from Latin America. Consis-

tently, those nations with the worst human rights records sent the most soldiers to the school. Bolivia under Gen. Hugo Banzer, Nicaragua under the Somozas, El Salvador during the bloodiest years of civil war—all were top clients at the SOA in the heydays of their military abuse.

We now are 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. In El Salvador, SOA graduates were responsible for the massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter; the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero; the rape and murder of four U.S. church women; the massacre of

El Mozote, where more than 800 men, women and children were killed; and many other atrocities.

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!

The fact that the Army continues to train Latin America's military at the SOA, even with changes in the curriculum, 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.

THE REV. ROY BOURGEOIS  
Atlanta