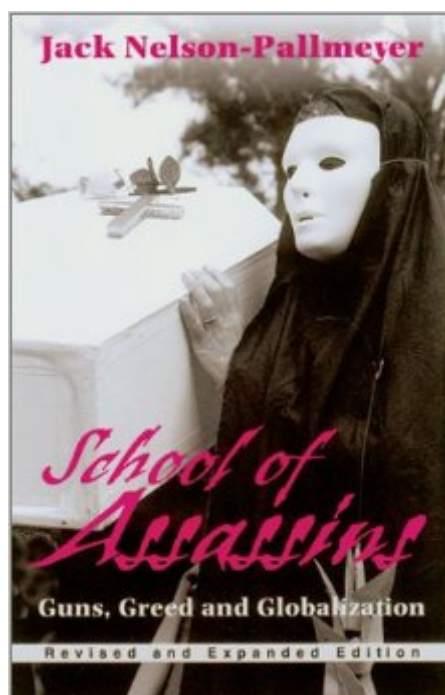


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# School Of Assassins: Guns, Greed, And Globalization



## Synopsis

Although the SOA has sought to change its image through a name change and sanitised curriculum, critics continue to call attention to a trail of suffering and death in every Latin American country where its 'graduates' have returned. In this updated and expanded edition, Pallmeyer reviews the case for closing the school and lays bare the case of its proponents. But he also shows how the school has functioned as an instrument of US foreign policy and spells out connections with globalization. Third World debt and the ongoing "war against the poor" around the world. The SOA has trained over 60,000 soldiers from Latin America in commando ops, psychological warfare, and counter-insurgency skills - all paid for by US taxpayers. These soldiers return to their home countries with the 'skills' to defend a socio-economic system that keeps a small elite very wealthy and the vast majority very poor.

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## Customer Reviews

Jack Neslon-Pallmeyer's new book, *School of Assassins: Guns Greed and Globalization*, brings the history and development of the School of the Americas, including its recent name change to The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, into perspective along with the developments of the global and national economies and militaries. In a time when the role of the SOA/WHISC is being seriously and persistently challenged, the name change and other cosmetic alterations represent a need to continue to build and strengthen the thoughtfulness and articulation

of the movement and voices that are calling for the school's closure. This book ties together many of the critical issues at play in the debate over the SOA/WHISC and puts it in the context of the role it has in the world today, as well as how it has developed and changed with the changing world and economy in which we all live. One of the key points stressed in this book is that the SOA/WHISC's role has never been stagnant or unaltered, but rather that it has and continues to change along with the goals of the United States foreign policy. The purpose and role that the SOA/WHISC fulfilled at its inception is not the same as the purpose it is serving today. The US foreign policy, beginning around the time the SOA was opened in Panama, has evolved throughout different stages, each trying to maintain a different balance between military and economic strategies and tactics to enforce and implement its goals. Beginning in a period of major military domination, the SOA was created at a time when military repression and power was the main way of enforcing and achieving the US foreign policy goals. However, economic tools and leverage, such as those achieved by the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank, began to gain momentum and strength as efficient ways of implementing foreign policy. The second stage of US foreign policy was thus a balance between the growing use of economic leverage and the lessening of the need for military repression. During the third stage that the SOA/WHISC functioned in, economic power implemented through the afore mentioned institutions and their programs (such as Structural Adjustment Programs), took the front line in US foreign policy. The decreasing role of the need for military and violent repression in this stage had a great impact. It threatened and concerned those in the military to seek ways to maintain the immense budget and importance of the military at a time when it was not really being used or was as necessary. This "military industrial complex" is another key issues at stake in Nelson-Pallmeyer's book, and plays a large role in the remilitarization that characterizes the fourth stage of US foreign policy. The SOA/WHISC's role in the present day is greatly founded on this remilitarization as an important tool in order to achieve the goals and stability desired by the US foreign policy. The new name given to the SOA represents a face lift, as many refer to it, which attempts to make the goals of the SOA/WHISC seem worthy of the absurd amount of money the US government budget allots the military. Nelson-Pallmeyer makes a point that the " 'any means necessary' foreign policy is possible when advocates are convinced that the means they employ, whether the torturer's hand or the banker's rules, are justified because they promote the common good or protect particular interests they represent" (98). Changing the name of the SOA to WHISC, along with the other cosmetic curriculum changes, is attempting to do just this; to create a new image of the school that is one promoting 'security cooperation' and human rights. As this book states, however, these changes do not represent any sense of remorse, accountability, or

separation from the past policies and deeds that a truly new institution would need to be based on. The impact of corporate-led globalization is another key issue in *The School of Assassins: Guns Greed and Globalization*; and likewise, is a factor that plays into the remilitarization that characterizes stage four of US foreign policy. Although globalization, as stated by Nelson-Pallmeyer, is a reality, corporate-led globalization is not inevitable and is furthermore, undesirable. Corporate-led globalization undermines democracy, aggravates problems rooted in inequality, and is altogether destabilizing. This destabilization in turn becomes a reason for remilitarization, and a problem to be handled through military repression rather than systematic, economic, and global changes. Corporate-led globalization is not the beneficial development or progress that the myths make it out to be. Finally, the debate and struggle around the SOA/WHISC is but a glimpse at the greater picture, the tip of an immense iceberg. Nelson-Pallmeyer states that "the SOA is a window through which US foreign policy can be seen clearly" (xvii). The struggle and movement to close the SOA/WHISC is also fighting against many of the greater issues at stake in our foreign policy and international involvement and is only one of many battles to be fought. Closure of the SOA/WHISC will not appease or end the movement, just allow it to move on to the next battle. Many of the aspects of the US foreign policy that break down the false image of the benevolent superpower are brought in to focus through connections and impacts on the SOA/WHISC. The SOA/WHISC is like a case study of the many components and factors of US foreign policy and its goals. In exposing oneself to the SOA/WHISC debate, history, and struggle, it is inevitable to come to some greater understanding of the US's involvement and true goals in its foreign policy and international affairs. This book is articulate, thought provoking, and worth reading.

The US Army School of the Americas uses American tax dollars to fund its training of Latin American military thugs at Ft Benning GA. This book details the atrocities of the school's graduates--the massacre of 6 Jesuit priests in El Salvador, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the rape and murder of 4 US churchwomen, just to name a few--and explains the motives of SOA Watch, the organization aimed at closing the school down. Anyone interested in/concerned with US foreign policy in Latin America, the Roman Catholic Church, or the violent oppression of the poor should read this book. Each November, thousands gather in Ft Benning to hold a peaceful protest outside the school. Over 2300 (including myself) risked arrest there in 1998; read this book and you will understand why.

If you've never heard of the School of Americas or if you want to know why so many people gather

at Ft. Benning to protest it, you could do worse than begin with this book. The SOA is a U.S. run school whose mission is to train Central and South American military in the "arts" of anti-communism, counter-insurgency and keeping people in their place. The curriculum includes (along with trips to Disney World?) what we like to call (when our enemies do it) terrorism. Not only do the course materials detail specific methods, but some graduates have admitted what they have done. The SOA claims - after copies were leaked - that these materials have been trashed. How reassuring. The use of torture, rape and wholesale massacre by U.S. and U.S. trained troops did not begin, nor, unfortunately, will it end with the SOA, but the establishment of a school which teaches atrocity as an instrument of policy may count as one of the more grandiose fits of hubris by our government. The SOA even recruits soldiers who already have a history of ordering or committing atrocities. No wonder we (the U.S.) oppose the establishment of the War Crimes Tribunal. Then why the three stars? The book is too short. No one wants to hear their government is committing evil in their name. The proof is in the details and there just aren't enough here. Rather than presenting paraphrases of documents and testimony, the author would have strengthened the case by more direct quotes - or even reprinting all or portions in an appendix. We need to know which graduate of what class did what to whom when. Much additional information is available in other books. If you're new to this topic, start here. If you want more information, search under El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton etc.

The government behind the government that is always there no matter which party we elect. This was frightening and made me understand why the world hates our government but not necessarily us as citizens. They must think we are pretty naive to not know this is going on. I am sure most of us don't want to believe that our country is capable of this kind of underhanded meddling in world affairs.

Having bought this book for a final essay on the School of the Americas (SOA), I felt like I was reading more of a critique of globalization rather than an analysis of the School of the Americas because the author talked about the SOA for less than half of the book. Although the author's points are valid, they seem to be a cursory and hasty connection of ideas rather than a well-developed point of view. In addition, the author has a specific agenda having come from the religious movement seeking to shut down the school; he does not treat the topic very scholarly.

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