

**In 2002, journalist Aaron Shuman visited the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/ WHINSEC) and obtained a document detailing the SOA/ WHINSEC's public relations offensive—its 2002 Strategic Communications Campaign Plan (SCCP).**

He writes:

“The main objective for the Army to open WHINSEC was to have the U.S. public forget the negative history of the SOA and to suppress votes against its closure, and as more information becomes publicly available, there is a growing body of evidence to support this.

“In fact, none of the so-called changes commonly cited by SOA/WHINSEC defenders--human rights instruction, a Board of Visitors, Department of Defense oversight--are new ideas; they were developed years ago and have been hyper-propagandized as WHINSEC ‘reforms.’ Many key figures at the SOA—such as Joe Leuer, who developed the school’s first human rights coursework, and Ken LaPlante, who developed the school’s Commando course—played pivotal roles in the formation of WHINSEC and in attacking critics.

“According to the SOA's official history, written by staffer Joe Leuer and published in the school magazine *Adelante 2000*, the school developed a plan in 1992 (then rejected) ‘to convert the U.S. Army-controlled SOA into a more visible Department of Defense-level institute that would have broad appeal and high-level support’ (p23). The SOA began developing human rights coursework by the end of 1993 ‘to attack the very concerns that lay at the heart of the protest movement’ (p23) and by early 1994, developed an Interagency Working Group to defend the school (p24).

“A 1995 Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) study determined ‘that negative publicity about the School would probably continue and that a new name for the School may be an appropriate way to break with the past;’ it also suggested that the Departments of Army and State study the desirability of establishing a Western Hemisphere Center for research, study, and instruction.

“In her new book, *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*, Professor Lesley Gill dates the creation of a Board of Visitors to 1996 and writes ‘this effort to create greater transparency was just another public relations ploy,’ with most of the meeting she attended devoted to ‘how to bolster the SOA's public image, get additional funding for the School, market the institution more effectively in Latin America, and discredit Roy Bourgeois and SOA Watch’ (p222). She writes, ‘Proposed innovations, such as giving military training to policemen and providing human rights instruction were not new, but preserving the SOA did require something new: a public relations offensive that presented the ‘new’ School [WHINSEC] as an effective break with the past, admitted no guilt, and placated domestic critics without alienating Latin American commanders’ (p223).”

In a 2002 interview with journalist Aaron Shuman, Joe Leuer said he developed the initial human rights coursework at the SOA and that the school’s name change was done to cut “50 years of foreign policy baggage.” The name SOA “had been so sullied by the movement that it was carrying 50 years of foreign policy baggage that they didn’t want to argue about anymore.”

Shuman obtained a document detailing the SOA/ WHINSEC's public relations offensive—its 2002 Strategic Communications Campaign Plan (SCCP). The Plan called for extensive monitoring of the press and the travel schedule of Roy Bourgeois, the founder of SOA Watch. The Plan identified as goals:

- to reduce "the number of letters from constituents to Congress criticizing the WHINSEC"
- to "leverage appointments" to the school's Board of Visitors and to "leverage high-profile events at WHINSEC"
- to "create an academic atmosphere for all to see"

- to conceal the school's military training.

The Plan described the need for "a consistent, programmed, proactive public affairs effort" coordinated from the level of WHINSEC up to the Departments of the Army and Defense "to maintain a continuous, systematic stream of public information releases" that would flush the history of the SOA.

Budgeted at \$250,000, the Plan maps out tactics such as the Army's Chief of Public Affairs reviewing and submitting letters to the editor; the Army's DAMO-SSR creating a monthly "Road Show (SOAW debate opportunity)" with staffer Gail DiNicolo and under the direction of Ken LaPlante; calling venues where Fr. Roy Bourgeois was scheduled to appear to get an Army representative on the bill and turn SOA Watch events into opportunities for Army messaging.