

Why Governments Have Their Troops Trained Abroad: Evidence from Latin America

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Why do governments send their soldiers abroad for military training? Governments frequently expose their troops to training offered by other countries, although this may undermine military control and even lead to coups. Focusing on the demand side of security assistance, I argue that governments accept these costs to achieve diplomatic and military goals. Governments first send some soldiers abroad to substantiate their cooperation with the host country. Once this diplomatic commitment is made, governments increase training rates to counter threats using military skills unavailable at home. I test both arguments by studying training patterns at the most notorious US training facility: the School of the Americas. Using original data based on more than 60,700 course attendance records between 1946 and 2004, I find support for the proposed diplomatic and military logics of foreign training. Governments were more likely to send soldiers to the school after they had aligned their foreign policy with that of the United States, and only increased training in response to insurgent attacks. The findings demonstrate why and when governments are willing to cede significant parts of their political power to foreign-trained soldiers and other states. This has important implications for understanding military effectiveness and security cooperation.

If the empire teaches domination of the world from its military schools, we will learn from this school to free ourselves from imperial oppression.

—Former Bolivian president Evo Morales

Every year, thousands of soldiers from around the world receive training from foreign instructors. The United States alone annually trains around 100,000 foreign military and police personnel (AI 2002). Russia regularly provides training to troops in Central Asia and currently advises security forces in Venezuela (Gorenburg 2014; Roth 2019). France maintains more than a dozen military schools in Africa, while Great Britain, together with Canada, instructs soldiers in Ukraine (Drager 2016; Ljunggren 2019). Policymakers and scholars regularly point to the positive impact of foreign training programs on security and stability (e.g., Atkinson 2006; Gates 2010; Nye and Owens 1996). Journalists and nongovernmental organizations, on the other hand, criticize that foreign training may foster military behavior that is beneficial to sponsoring states but has repercussions for citizens and governments in the countries that receive such programs (e.g., Keating 2012; Turse 2017).

Numerous cases document how soldiers trained by foreign instructors or at academies abroad have ousted elected governments and violated human rights. For instance, officers from Bahrain and Syria who had graduated from the prestigious British academy at Sandhurst played a crucial role in the crackdown on protesters during the Arab Spring (BBC News 2014). And in Egypt, Gambia, Haiti, Mali,

Pakistan, and Thailand foreign-trained soldiers have staged coups and established regimes that showed little respect for democratic rules (Keating 2012; Turse 2017).

The examples highlight the risks that countries face when sending their troops abroad for training. Governments have little control over what external instructors teach their forces. In the worst case, foreign-trained soldiers may be incited to remove the political leadership at home from power (Savage and Caverley 2017). Such intentions seem to be a prime concern of leaders. For example, former Bolivian president Evo Morales, afraid of remotely controlled soldiers, even opened a military school specifically designed to counter the strong pro-American stance that years of US training had instilled within Latin American armies (Guardian 2016). Morales then “cut military ties to Washington and began sending officers through Bolivia’s newly christened Anti-Imperialist Military Academy,” which, among other factors, antagonized members of the armed forces (Otis 2019). In 2019, officers, some of whom had undergone training at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA), forced Morales to resign. If foreign training corrodes military control and may even motivate soldiers to carry out coups, why do governments send their troops to foreign academies in the first place?

Focusing on the demand side of security assistance, I argue that governments make two related decisions. First, they consider whether they want to send soldiers to foreign academies at all. I expect that this decision follows a diplomatic logic. Governments send soldiers abroad for training to affirm their cooperative relations with the host country. Since changing relations is likely to cause an uproar among foreign-trained troops, political leaders can utilize training to tie themselves to the host’s interests. Second, once this commitment is established, I expect that the decision on the amount of training requested follows a military logic. While remaining aware of the accompanying coup risk, sending governments demand more foreign training if it equips troops with novel skills that are unavailable at home but deemed effective against acute threats.

For testing both arguments, this study scrutinizes attendance at the SOA—one of the most notorious military

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academies of the twentieth century—to assess how diplomatic and military considerations shape foreign training patterns. The school's curriculum offered soldiers up-to-date education on topics ranging from military leadership to counterterrorism. Yet, numerous coups by its graduates and the school's clear anti-communist agenda made the institution infamous for educating future dictators. The potential benefits and costs of SOA training present a unique opportunity to empirically study why and when governments send their troops to foreign training facilities. Focusing on one military academy in one region allows me to comprehensively scrutinize the decision calculus of sending governments while holding host interests and contextual influences constant.

Using more than 60,700 unique records on course attendance and a two-stage modeling strategy, I analyze training patterns at the SOA for all Latin American countries between 1946 and 2004. I find that governments interested in substantiating their diplomatic relations with the United States were more likely to send personnel to the school. Once this commitment was established, governments only increased course attendance in response to insurgent activity, for which the SOA curriculum promised effective countermeasures. The results, supported by a plethora of additional tests, demonstrate that sending governments have their troops enrolled in courses that underpin their diplomatic commitment and that enhance the effectiveness of soldiers in their fight against domestic threats. Together, the findings demonstrate that governments carefully balance geopolitical interests and domestic military requirements in their request for security assistance.

This study makes three contributions. First, recent works have scrutinized the interactions between donors and recipients to understand the outcomes of security assistance (e.g., Bapat 2011; Ladwig 2017; Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker 2018). Research also shows that weaker states often manage to achieve their goals in interactions with stronger powers (Long 2015; Long 2017b). This study highlights the agency of recipient governments behind military aid. Building on the finding that foreign training can be politically risky for sending governments (Savage and Caverley 2017; Böhmelt, Escribá-Folch, and Pilster 2019), I analyze why leaders enter into aid relations that may increase the political leverage of soldiers and foreign states. Second, the study offers an original perspective on when military training programs can forge durable security cooperation. It shows that security assistance may not lead to international cooperation but rather results from it, as recipient governments utilize foreign training to underpin their reputation as reliable partners. Finally, the study also demonstrates that states are often careful about requesting excessive amounts of military assistance. Recipient governments anticipate the potential drawbacks of foreign training, which they only tolerate for direct improvements in military effectiveness. The findings show that such decisions are driven by concerns about domestic security rather than by geostrategic calculations.

The Costs of Foreign Military Training for Sending Governments

Research has scrutinized why and to whom donor countries give foreign assistance. Studies generally concur that countries offer aid to influence the behavior of recipient states (e.g., Alesina and Dollar 2000; Palmer, Wohlander, and Morgan 2002; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2007; Carter and Stone 2015). Such motives are also said to guide the

allocation of military aid, which includes foreign training programs (Sullivan, Tessman, and Li 2011). The provision of security assistance is particularly well understood in the case of the United States. During the Cold War, the US provided countries with military aid to contain communism while paying little attention to the recipients' human rights records (Poe and Meernik 1995). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States geared its aid policies toward assisting civil liberties and political democratization (Blanton 2000). When President George W. Bush declared the "War on Terror," Washington again started to support countries where it saw its security interests threatened rather than those most in need (e.g., Fleck and Kilby 2010; Boutton and Carter 2014; Heinrich, Martinez Machain, and Oestman 2017).

The case of the United States demonstrates how donor interests shape when and to whom military aid is offered. What is less well understood, however, are the incentives of recipient countries for accepting such offers. Most studies scrutinize recipient interests to understand under which conditions assistance programs improve security, democracy, and economic prosperity (e.g., Wright and Winters 2010; Boutton 2014; Dube and Naidu 2015; Carnegie and Marinov 2017). Findings suggest that military aid often fails because recipients disagree with the donors' goals (e.g., Bapat 2011; Sullivan, Tessman, and Li 2011; Ladwig 2017). The cases of Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate how diverging interests result in the squandering of military resources and a failure to improve local security (Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker 2018). Given that recipients often do not share the goals behind military aid programs, it seems paramount to understand why countries accept such assistance in the first place.

Research has paid surprisingly little attention to understanding why states demand security assistance. Scholars and practitioners commonly assume that military aid offers large benefits at low costs. This is particularly the case with foreign military training, which is seen as overly advantageous for recipient countries (Gates 2010). Training programs are said to professionalize security forces, teaching soldiers the skills to protect their citizens while respecting human rights, democracy, and civilian authority. For example, Mujkic, Asencio, and Byrne (2018) contend that foreign military training exposes soldiers to democratic values and the rule of law. Atkinson (2006, 2014) argues that the transmission of such norms fosters political liberalization. Omelicheva, Carter, and Campbell (2017) find that training programs reduce state violence. And Ruby and Gibler (2010) claim that professional education diminishes soldiers' willingness to intervene in politics. Given these benefits, we would expect governments to always take as much foreign training as they can get.

However, evidence suggests that demanding external training can have grave political costs for governments. It may erode control over the military and even lead to coups (Rowe 1974; Fitch 1979; Savage and Caverley 2017). To understand why foreign training can be dangerous, it helps to first look at domestic training. Military training uses indoctrination to inculcate soldiers with shared political preferences, and it relies on drills to generate strong social bonds among troops (Böhmelt, Escribá-Folch, and Pilster 2019). Both features increase the risk of the military intervening in politics. While indoctrination fosters obedience in some contexts, it can also motivate soldiers to turn against the government when they perceive their personal or professional interests to be in danger. Moreover, close social relations ease coordination during battle, but they may also assist soldiers in recruiting conspirators to plot against the

government (Böhmelt, Escribá-Folch, and Pilster 2019, 1118–20). Foreign training reinforces these risks.

First, foreign instructors commonly socialize trainees to external political norms and ideas (Atkinson 2006 2014). Being trained abroad, officers may therefore develop convictions that reflect the donor's agenda but run counter to the interests of the government at home (Wolpin 1972). As a result, soldiers may disagree with those leaders who do not share their new beliefs or goals. In the worst case, this feeds the soldiers' disposition to move against the government. Moreover, foreign training often fosters an elitist self-image among trainees. French training, for instance, convinced Argentine and Brazilian officers that they would be the better state administrators, motivating them to take over power. This sense of superiority may be particularly prevalent among graduates of prestigious training facilities. Returning from renowned foreign academies or staff colleges, soldiers are more likely to challenge civilian authorities when they see their interests as being at risk or perceive the government as a potential adversary.

Second, foreign military education also strengthens the ability to stage coups. Programs may teach soldiers "efficient communications, discipline in weapons handling, [and] the ability to operate in a decentralized command structure" (Savage and Caverley 2017, 545). Such skills are not only crucial for battlefield maneuvers, but also help soldiers carry out political takeovers. Additionally, foreign training often increases the influence of trainees over peers (Savage and Caverley 2017, 546). Having graduated from a renowned foreign academy, officers are likely to occupy influential positions in which they train subordinates (Atkinson 2014, 94–103). In extreme cases, foreign-trained soldiers use their status to recruit coup plotters and coordinate putsches.

Given the risk of military disobedience and illegal takeovers, having troops trained at foreign academies is a double-edged sword for governments. While it can strengthen military capacity, it may also ultimately increase the disposition and ability of soldiers to expel current or future political leaderships from power. Given these costs, why do governments send their soldiers abroad for training?

A recent study proposes several explanations for why countries rely on foreign instructors to train their military personnel. Savage and Caverley (2017, 547) suggest that governments may be simply unaware of the negative effects of foreign training, or overestimate their capacity to control foreign-trained soldiers, or gamble on the benefits of such training. My argument builds on the latter explanation and refines it. I posit that governments generally know about the coup risk from foreign military training, but carefully weigh up the costs and benefits when deciding whether and to what extent their soldiers should undergo external instruction.

Why Governments Have Their Troops Trained Abroad

The argument I offer in this section suggests that governments know about the coup risk of foreign training but accept it in order to achieve specific international and domestic goals. As shown in figure 1, I argue that the decision-making calculus of "sending governments"¹ involves a two-step process. Governments first decide whether they should send soldiers to foreign academies at all. I expect this decision to be based on a diplomatic rationale. Govern-

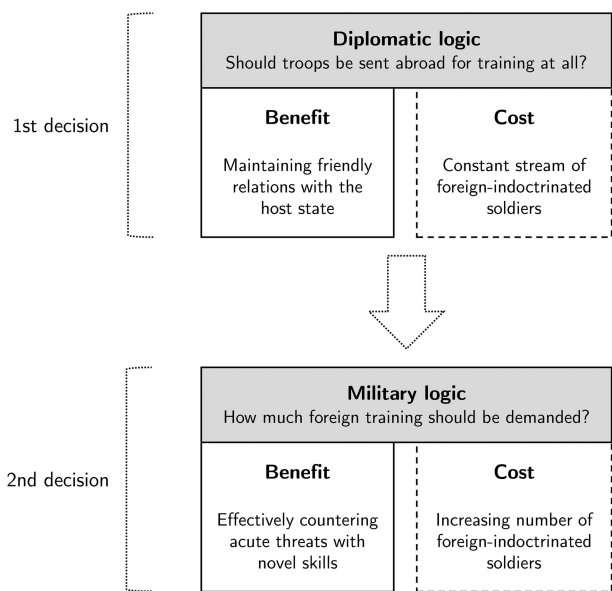


Figure 1. Sending governments' decision-making process

ments decide to send a few soldiers abroad to substantiate their friendly relations with the host state. I argue that once this diplomatic commitment has been made, the amount of training requested is determined by a military rationale. Since more foreign training increases the pool of potential coup plotters, I expect governments to only demand more external instruction if it allows soldiers to acquire novel skills for effectively countering acute threats.

Diplomatic Logic

Like flows of foreign aid, foreign training patterns result from the interaction between a host state, which offers to train foreign troops, and a particular recipient country, which accepts such an offer by sending soldiers abroad. Host states—which include the United States, Russia, and China—are commonly regional or hegemonic powers. They possess the capacity and resources to train foreign security forces at their academies in the hope of advancing their own interests (Wolpin 1972). Potential sending countries, on the other hand, usually have lower material capabilities.² They also hold interests that are difficult for hosts to observe *ex ante*, and may even change over time due to domestic or international developments (Ladwig 2017; Biddle, Macdonald, and Baker 2018). I argue that this constellation between the host state and a potential sending country gives rise to the diplomatic logic of foreign training, whereby the sender utilizes such education to demonstrate its shared interests with the host.

Host states usually have an interest in maintaining close and stable relations with other countries (Long 2017b). Cooperative diplomatic relations benefit trade, stability, and security. Allies promise uninterrupted flows of goods and services. Hosts often rely on international partners to sell military equipment and arms.³ Close political and military relations also allow hosts to project their security interests in regions of geopolitical importance. In times of crisis, committed partners facilitate coordinated responses and, if necessary, enable joint military action against adversaries

¹The term also covers governments with military officers. I assume that military cabinet members make choices similar to civilian ministers. See the Supplementary Information for empirical evidence.

²The relationship between host and sending country is commonly one of asymmetry (Long 2017a).

³Hosts may offer military foreign training in the hope of boosting arms sales.

(Heinrich, Martinez Machain, and Oestman 2017; Cordell 2019). To reap the benefits of international cooperation, host states depend on reliable partners.

The problem for hosts, however, is that they cannot be certain about the long-term interests of their allies. It is quite common for countries to change their international alignments (Holsti 1982; Hermann 1990). While allied governments sometimes decide to move toward greater self-reliance or international isolation, they often restructure their foreign policy to diversify or “switch partners” in the hope that this will reduce their country’s dependency (Holsti 1982, 4–6). The drivers for such realignments are manifold. For example, shifts in the international power distribution or declining approval ratings can motivate leaders to rethink their relations and move away from previous allies (Walt 1985; Leeds and Savun 2007). Alternatively, the election of new governments or popular revolutions may induce swift political changes that fundamentally alter a country’s international orientation (Hermann 1990; David 1991). Finally, states may threaten powerful allies with defection to achieve their international goals (Long 2017b).

Host states are likely to be concerned about the risk of diplomatic ruptures and weak commitments on part of their allies. Hosts usually grant partners exclusive access to their military know-how and equipment, often providing friendly nations with sensitive information about their capabilities. In the worst case, partner governments with intimate knowledge revoke their alignment, switch sides, and join an adversary or a competing alliance (Cordell 2019). Such changes may destabilize the very order that the host aimed to preserve. Hosts also have to worry about the high reputation costs should an aligned state reconsider its position. Realignments may signal the host’s weakness and its inability to uphold beneficial relations (Walt 1985, 29; Ladwig 2017, 43–44). Alignment shifts can trigger cascades, with other states consecutively rearranging their own partnerships. Such behavior is likely to deplete the resources even of powerful hegemonies, and may invite adversaries to challenge the existing order.⁴ Given the grave costs of unreliable partners, host states have a strong interest in working with like-minded governments that do not eventually relinquish long-term cooperation.

For aligned states, the host’s concerns regarding unreliable partners represent a problem. Only if they can convincingly demonstrate their commitment will they be able to fully benefit from intensified trade, better access to international loans, and protection against hostilities (e.g., Gowa and Mansfield 1993; Dreher and Jensen 2007). To enjoy these benefits, allied governments have to find a way of credibly promising close, long-term cooperation. I argue that sending soldiers to the host country for training can deliver such a promise. It allows sending governments to demonstrate the interest in maintaining cooperative relations with the host state.

A crucial component of foreign training is the socialization of soldiers with the host’s core interests (Wolpin 1972; Fitch 1979; Atkinson 2014). By employing such soldiers, sending governments demonstrate that they do not intend to reverse their alignment in the future. Foreign-trained forces are likely to oppose radical shifts away from the host’s position (Wolpin 1972). Soldiers may even attempt to oust the government if they believe this will preserve diplomatic

cooperation with the partner state. I claim that governments are aware of this risk. They send soldiers abroad for training if they agree with the host’s interests and intend to uphold long-term cooperative relations.⁵ In doing so, sending governments can overcome their commitment problem and enjoy the benefits of close partnerships.

I expect that in order to demonstrate their shared interests, governments will regularly send a modest number of soldiers abroad. The constant exchange of a few troops ensures that a small but steady group of foreign-indoctrinated individuals serves within the security apparatus. Experts concur that a few committed soldiers are sufficient to successfully carry out military takeovers (Singh 2014). For sending governments, this should suffice to credibly commit to the host’s interests while simultaneously keeping the overall coup risk at bay.

Proposition 1. *The more interested governments are in maintaining cooperative relations with the host state, the more likely they are to send troops to the host’s military academies for training.*

Military Logic

While diplomatic considerations should explain whether governments have their troops trained abroad, I expect that military considerations determine how much foreign training they demand. More foreign training increases the pool of potential coup plotters within the security apparatus. With more troops exposed to the host’s indoctrination over a longer period of time, a higher recourse to such training increases the risk that at least some soldiers will oppose the government. Nevertheless, utilizing more foreign training can be beneficial since it permits a greater number of soldiers to access military skills that are unavailable at home.

Foreign training teaches soldiers new skills “ranging from small unit tactics to grand strategy, enabling recipients to conduct military operations more effectively” (Savage and Caverley 2017, 545). Training programs are often tailored toward specific threats. For example, courses may teach soldiers how to fight militant groups with counterterrorism tactics. Sending more military personnel to foreign academies increases the number of soldiers educated in such skills. This is particularly attractive for sending governments if soldiers can acquire knowledge that is otherwise unavailable. In contrast to domestic training, which requires large investments in training facilities, foreign training can produce large numbers of skilled alumni without such expenses.⁶ Economic calculations are thus likely to reinforce military demand. Governments can spend the funds saved on arms or weapon systems in which their troops have been trained by the host. Boosting participation numbers is therefore especially attractive for those sending governments seeking to augment their troops’ capacity at low economic cost. I argue that this gives rise to the military logic of foreign training.

I expect that governments will request more foreign training if they feel threatened in their political survival. Most leaders, independent of whether they are accountable to the larger population or a small elite, strive to remain in office (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow 2003). To this end, leaders are often willing to tolerate high political costs (Roessler 2016). Whether governments feel threatened hinges on various factors. For example, leaders may hold distinct ideological convictions that make them

⁴International realignments may also impose high economic costs on hosts, since losing a trading partner impedes access to foreign markets and reduces economic exchange. It may additionally decrease the host’s influence in international organizations.

⁵Forward-looking governments may even send soldiers abroad for training to prevent successors from realigning the country.

⁶Additionally, graduates can train peers and subordinates to quickly spread the acquired knowledge within the military.

highly sensitive to specific forms of dissent (Kim 2018; Scharpf 2018). Alternatively, they may feel particularly intimidated by groups that have forced their predecessors out of office or endangered colleagues in allied states (Danneman and Ritter 2014). Whatever the reasons behind a specific threat perception may be, governments are likely to respond to imminent dangers by increasing the capacity of their security forces. Foreign training can be a crucial ingredient for swiftly increasing military capabilities.

The potential value of such training depends on how well the acquired skills match the threat faced. For example, soldiers require different skills to prevail in pitched battles against foreign armies than for hunting down evasive insurgents. Only if leaders are convinced that training offers useful strategies or tactics against an acute menace will they be willing to increase participation in foreign training. Doing otherwise would increase the coup risk without security benefits. I therefore expect that sending governments demand more foreign training if they believe that their troops will acquire skills otherwise unavailable but useful in countering an acute threat.⁷

Proposition 2. *Sending governments increase training at foreign academies if they deem it helpful in countering an acute threat to their political survival with novel skills.*

Empirical Case

For the empirical analysis, I draw on the most notorious foreign training facility in Latin America during the Cold War: the SOA. This case has three key advantages. First, it offers a unique opportunity to empirically probe decision-making on whether and to what extent governments send military personnel abroad for training. Embedded in the Latin American context, the case helps me hold constant a plethora of variables that might confound cross-region analyses. With the United States as the dominant supplier of foreign training in the Americas, I can shed light on the Latin American governments' interests in having soldiers trained abroad.

Second, the SOA exemplifies the political risks of foreign training. As I will outline, the school's graduates underwent strong socialization, served as US informants, and frequently plotted against their governments. The political costs generated by such behavior allow me to scrutinize the cost-benefit analyses behind demanding external training.

Third, focusing on the SOA allows me to derive clear-cut, testable hypotheses from the general propositions. For Proposition 1, I scrutinize the motivations of Latin American governments to have their soldiers trained at a US military academy with a clear anti-communist bias and a strong political agenda. For Proposition 2, I identify the most feared threats by Latin America governments and assess how these were addressed by the SOA curricula. I then leverage fine-grained information on attendees and course types to systematically test the hypotheses, assess the findings' robustness, and provide evidence on the proposed mechanism.

The School of the Americas

The United States has offered education to foreign soldiers for more than a 100 years. In 2010 alone, it trained 67,100 students from 159 countries (Atkinson 2014, 58). At the core of America's training efforts stands the International

Military Education and Training (IMET) program.⁸ It intends to socialize foreign students through interactions with US soldiers, increase the recipients' cooperation with the United States, and strengthen the capabilities of foreign countries (Atkinson 2014, 60). Designed as a grant program, IMET enables foreign soldiers to attend around 150 US training facilities without charge. One of these academies is the SOA.⁹ While this facility is only one "among the many Army schools and installations offering courses to foreign military students, it [has been] the predominant training choice for Latin Americans" (GAO 1996, 6).¹⁰

There is probably no training facility that has led to such heated debates about US military assistance as the SOA. Founded in the Panama Canal Zone in 1946, the school trained more than 57,000 Latin American soldiers during the Cold War (GAO 1996, 1). Offering courses in Spanish, it trained Latin American security personnel across all military ranks in both conventional and unconventional warfare (SOA 2019). The SOA repeatedly made headlines because its alumni engaged in repression and coups, leading to its notorious reputation as the "School of Dictators" or the "School of Assassins" (McCoy 2005; Blakeley 2006). For Latin American governments, training at the SOA came with both great political benefits and high potential costs. The school promised to foster security and economic prosperity (SOA 2019). The courses, which lasted from 2 to 49 weeks, offered students access to up-to-date military skills. Applicants went through a simple admissions procedure, and fees for courses and accommodation were covered by the United States.¹¹

However, the school's graduates also became part of an exclusive club that cultivated strong pro-US identities and instilled officers with a sense of superiority. Many alumni—including Guatemalan Colonel Julio Roberto Alpírez, Panamanian dictator General Manuel Noriega, and Venezuelan General Ramon Guillen—served as informants or CIA conduits, offering the United States exclusive access to Latin American centers of power. Other graduates, such as Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala or Hugo Banzer Suárez in Bolivia, did not hesitate to overthrow their governments when they disagreed with policies or political agendas. By conservative estimates, SOA alumni actively participated in military coups in at least eleven of the thirty-three countries (SOAW 2018).¹² In order to analyze why countries demanded SOA training despite these risks, the following section outlines international and domestic developments in Latin America during the Cold War era.

Diplomatic Interests

The struggle for influence between the USSR and the United States turned Latin America into a hot spot of the Cold War (Brands 2010, 37). Both superpowers had a strong interest in tightening their grip on the region. The United States had always considered the Americas a special sphere of influence, but when Fidel Castro ousted the US-backed Batista regime in Cuba in 1959, Washington feared that a

⁸The States Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) programs also offer training funds for foreign students.

⁹The school changed its name to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in 2001.

¹⁰In 1995, the SOA trained 88 percent of all Latin American soldiers visiting the United States (GAO 1996, 6).

¹¹See the Supplementary Information for more information on the admission process.

¹²Including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

⁷Taking advantage of foreign training to counter threats shows the agency of weaker states in their dealings with more powerful ones (Long 2017a, 154–56).

large-scale communist expansion was imminent. For Latin American politicians, the fall of Cuba indicated the dwindling of US power. In the years that followed, the defeat in Vietnam, the crisis of the Bretton Woods system, and the oil shock added to the impression that American hegemony was in decline (Brands 2010, 131–34). When the Sandinista rebels took power in Nicaragua in 1979, the decline in United States influence seemed fully palpable.

Meanwhile, Latin American governments faced their own problems. During the 1960s and 1970s, economic recession and social inequality fueled political conflict across the Western Hemisphere. Unwilling to acknowledge their own mistakes, governments from both the left and the right were quick to blame dependence on the United States as the root of their problems. In search of more political and economic latitude, several governments started to forge political and economic ties with Moscow (Brands 2010, 130, 146). This included Salvador Allende in Chile and Peruvian dictator Juan Valesco, who bought Soviet military equipment and signed a trade pact with Moscow. Other governments including those of Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, and Brazil—the latter two of which were military regimes—also began to flirt with Moscow (Brands 2010, 135–36).

In Washington, the openness of Latin American countries toward the Communist East triggered fears of shifting allegiances. “The fact that it was not simply Marxist governments striving against U.S. hegemony, but non-Marxist even anticommunist regimes” (Brands 2010, 139) deeply troubled US administrations. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger even predicted that Latin America was likely to slide “into the non-aligned bloc,” thereby “compounding [US] problems all over the world” (Brands 2010, 145). For the United States, this increased the urge to stabilize relations with its regional partners, a process in which foreign training played a key role.

US training programs had the clear goal of preventing Latin American governments from falling to communism. Washington saw in them an “insurance policy” to protect US security and business interests (Wolpin 1972, 23). Policymakers thought of military training as the most efficient way to convince Latin American countries to “acquiesce in American policy suggestions” (Wolpin 1972, 11) and preclude international realignments. According to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, it offered “the greatest return,” as students were the “coming leaders of their nations” and therefore of “inestimable value to the United States” (Wolpin 1972, 29). Having like-minded Latin American soldiers in influential positions ensured the country’s pro-US stance while making broader interventions superfluous.

Based on this reasoning, the SOA became a key instrument for spreading attitudes favorable to the United States. The school’s courses had the clear goal of containing communist expansion. To this end, even technical courses such as “Automotive Maintenance” or “Medical Technician” taught students about the “Communist threat” and the nature of the “Communist world insurgency” (Wolpin 1972, 78–80). Moreover, the curriculum was designed to forge shared identities, deep trust, and close relations between Latin American and US students. These relations established personal communication channels through which Washington could transmit “how America operates and does business” while gaining exclusive access to influential decision makers (Gill 2004, 42).

The intentions behind US training programs did not go unnoticed by Latin American countries. Sending governments knew that SOA graduates would be “both amenable to influence and reliable sources of [American]

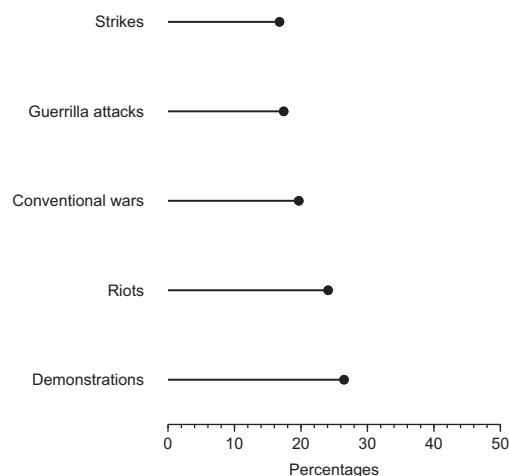


Figure 2. Threats in Latin America, 1946–2004

Note: Percentages give proportion of years with each resistance type. Data taken from Banks (2008).

intelligence” (Wolpin 1972, 32). By the time US-trained officers ousted Allende in Chile, Latin American governments were most likely aware of the political costs should they send soldiers to America for training but later reconsider their relations with the United States. In contrast, by having soldiers trained at the SOA despite these costs, countries could underpin their willingness to stick with the United States and prevent a “second Cuba”—a prime concern of Washington (Brands 2010, 48–9). Sending students to the SOA signaled that a government would not give in to leftist movements nor appease them with pro-Soviet policies. Based on these considerations, I derive the following testable hypothesis from Proposition 1.

H1: *The more interested Latin American governments were in maintaining cooperative relations with the United States, the more likely they were to send troops to the SOA for training.*

Domestic Threats

International developments aside, Latin American leaders also faced myriad domestic threats. As shown in figure 2, these included strikes, demonstrations, riots, guerrilla attacks, and interstate disputes. To US allies, insurgent activity was particularly worrying as it stirred fears of communist expansion. With the revolution in Cuba, leaders became convinced that the USSR would not engage in direct military confrontation but instead rely on irregulars to turn their countries into satellite states (Brands 2010, 47). Most governments interpreted guerrilla attacks as part of a larger subversion campaign that should be swiftly counteracted.

In response to the Cuban Revolution, the SOA curriculum focused heavily on counterinsurgency training. By 1964, courses were instructing students on all aspects of (counter)guerrilla warfare to thwart communist insurgencies (Weeks 2003, 17). The courses aimed to integrate anti-insurgent operations into a larger strategic context (Gill 2004, 116–67). The focus on irregular warfare remained unchanged when the SOA relocated from Panama to Fort Benning, Georgia, USA, in 1984. Only when the Cold War ended in 1989 did the United States reorient the school’s curriculum toward counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations (Weeks 2003, 20).

The heavy focus on counterinsurgency warfare closely matched the guerrilla threat. Most Latin American armies were well prepared for conventional wars but, with the exception of Argentina and Brazil, lacked strategic and tactical knowledge on combating guerrilla forces.¹³ SOA training offered skills in “Jungle Operations” and “Irregular Warfare.” Students learned about communist ideology, the threat of subversion, and how to eliminate insurgents. Teaching also included “Psychological Warfare,” “Intelligence Collection,” and “Interrogation Techniques” to foil subversive plots (Weeks 2003, 18–9). In some cases instructors even advocated the use of torture, illegal imprisonment, and assassinations (AI 2002, 4–5). For governments with close relationships to the United States, more SOA training promised a boost in the counterinsurgency capacity of their forces. Given the fear of guerrilla activity across the Western Hemisphere and the training’s strong anti-insurgent focus, I derive the following testable hypothesis from Proposition 2,

H2: *Latin American governments increased training at the SOA only in response to guerrilla attacks.*

Data and Method

To test the two hypotheses, I compile an original dataset on course attendance at the SOA for all independent Latin American countries between 1946 and 2004.¹⁴ I analyze these data using a two-stage regression model that accounts for the diplomatic and military logics of foreign training.¹⁵ In the first stage, I assess whether similarity between their own and US foreign policy motivated Latin American governments to send soldiers to the SOA at all. This stage takes into account countries such as Cuba under Castro, which had no interest in maintaining cooperative diplomatic relations with the United States. The second stage captures the willingness of governments to demand more training. It scrutinizes which threats significantly correlated with increased SOA attendance.

The dependent variable measures the annual number of SOA courses in which security personnel participated.¹⁶ I use course counts rather than the number of trained individuals to capture heightened skills and increased indoctrination for students who participated in multiple courses.¹⁷ The measure is based on more than 60,700 unique attendance records, which I aggregate to country-years using course start dates. I obtained these records from the SOA Graduate Database (SOAW 2018). Figure 3 depicts the distribution of the dependent variable. Note that the excess number of zeros is indicative of a two-stage process, with some countries consistently rejecting SOA training.¹⁸

For the statistical analysis, I use zero-inflated negative binomial regressions.¹⁹ The model consists of an inflation and a count equation, which allows for the simultaneous modeling of the diplomatic and military logics (Long and

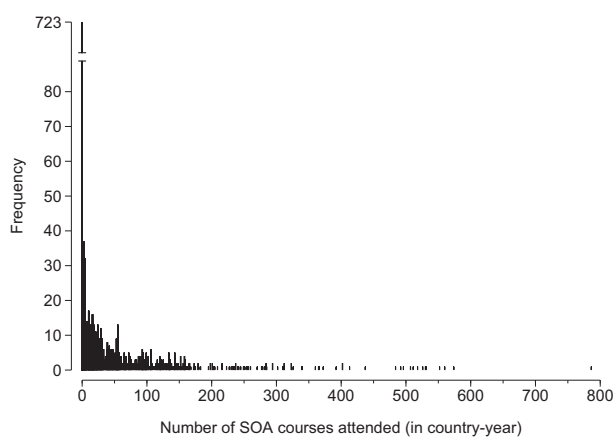


Figure 3. Distribution of the dependent variable

Freese 2006, 394–96). The inflation equation is based on a logit regression and captures governments’ decision to send personnel to the SOA. Statistically, it predicts values of zero of the dependent variable. Thus, in contrast to the conventional interpretation, negative (positive) coefficients indicate higher (lower) probabilities of attending at least one course at the SOA. The count equation reflects the military logic and models the yearly course attendance numbers using a negative binomial regression model. Positive coefficients indicate more courses attended.

The key independent variable for testing Hypothesis 1 is *Similarity with US foreign policy*. It measures the congruence in policy positions based on voting patterns in the UN General Assembly, with larger values indicating more similar positions (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017).²⁰ If Hypothesis 1 is correct, Latin American governments with positions closer to those of the United States should have had a greater interest in demonstrating their diplomatic commitment and should thus have been more likely to send soldiers to the SOA. We should therefore observe that higher values of similarity are correlated with a higher likelihood—that is, a negative coefficient—of soldiers participating in at least one SOA course. For robustness, I also employ two alternative measures to proxy for a pro-US foreign policy stance: stationed US troops and military dictatorships. Both military regimes and countries hosting US troops should have been interested in upholding their friendly relations with the United States and thus have demanded SOA training (Blanton 2000; Flynn, Martinez Machain, and Stoyan 2019).²¹

I add several control variables to this model stage.²² In addition to similar international interests, strong economic relations with Washington may have increased the probability of countries sending troops to the SOA. *Trade relations with United States* measures the sum of annual exports and imports with the United States as a percentage of a country’s overall trade volume (Gleditsch 2002). I include the variables *Carter* and *Reagan* since US foreign policy changed significantly under the two presidents. Moreover, countries with high military capacity could have afforded to remain neutral and might have been less inclined to utilize US training. *Military capacity* measures military expenditure

¹³Argentine and Brazilian forces had received French counterrevolutionary training in the 1960s.

¹⁴See the Supplementary Information for a visualization of the dataset depicting years with SOA attendance.

¹⁵The modeling choice resonates with studies that employ two-stage selection models (e.g., Blanton 2000; Boutton and Carter 2014).

¹⁶See the Supplementary Information for summary statistics and a spatial visualization of the dependent variable.

¹⁷The variable is based on attendance by officers and enlisted ranks. The results remain unchanged if separate models are run each attendee type.

¹⁸Results are not driven by outliers, as shown in the Supplementary Information.

¹⁹To account for temporal dependencies, I cluster standard errors on countries.

²⁰I inverted the original measure, which is based on the absolute differences in the ideal points between Latin American countries and the United States, obtained from a latent variable model. See Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017).

²¹Results are shown in the Supplementary Information.

²²Results remain unchanged when controlling for time since last coup, as shown in the Supplementary Information.

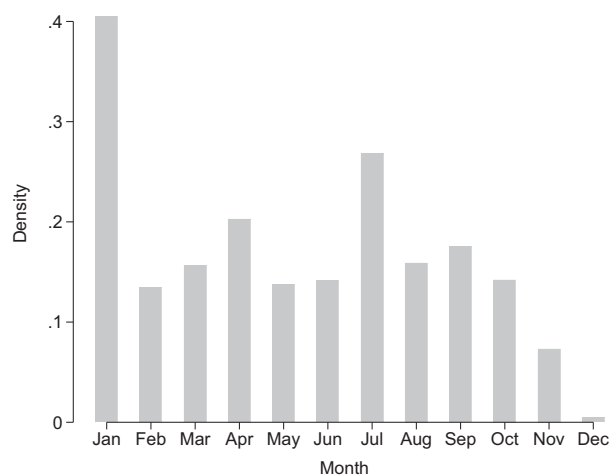


Figure 4. Distribution of course start dates

relative to population size (Gleditsch 2002; COW 2010). Finally, I include the variable *Post-Cold War* to account for a structural shift in SOA attendance after 1989.

The key independent variable for testing Hypothesis 2 is *Guerrilla attack*. It measures “[a]ny armed activity, sabotage, or bombings carried on by independent bands of citizens or irregular forces” (Banks 2008).²³ Since the variable might also capture attacks not perpetrated by guerrilla groups, I also employ two alternative measures on insurgencies (Lyall and Wilson 2009; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). The results are robust and shown in the Supplementary Information. Furthermore, I include the variables *Strike*, *Demonstration*, *Riot*, and *Conventional war* (Banks 2008; Palmer et al, 2015). If Hypothesis 2 is correct, these variables should not be significantly correlated with course attendance.

I add several control variables to the military stage. *Troop quality* measures military expenditure per soldier and proxies for the sophistication of the sending country’s training (CoW 2010). Since anecdotal evidence suggests that soldiers were eager to attend the SOA to borrow US dollars and protect their savings from high inflation rates at home, I also include *Inflation Rate* (Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer 2015).

Finally, figure 4 indicates that many SOA courses started in January. I therefore lag the independent and control variables by one year to avoid posttreatment bias and to account for delayed effects due to the school’s admission procedure.

Results

Table 1 displays the results of the main statistical analysis.²⁴ Results for the diplomatic logic, indicating when governments decided to send personnel to the SOA, appear in the inflation equation. In line with Hypothesis 1, *Similarity with US foreign policy* is negative and statistically significant. Keeping in mind that this stage predicts zeros, the results indicate that the more a government agreed with US foreign policy, the more likely it was to have soldiers trained at the SOA.

The results also demonstrate that governments were less likely to demand US training during the Carter presidency. Carter emphasized human rights in foreign policy decisions, which particularly alienated pro-US, right-wing regimes. The statistically significant, negative coefficient for *Post-Cold War* suggests that countries were more likely to participate in training after the collapse of the USSR, when instruction

was less ideological. Finally, the results show that *Trade relations with the United States* are not significantly correlated with the decision to send troops abroad. This underlines the diplomatic rationale for accepting foreign training.

Turning to the second stage, the results also lend support to the military logic. In line with Hypothesis 2, only the coefficient for *Guerrilla attack* is significantly correlated with the number of courses attended. Other threats including strikes, riots, demonstrations, or interstate disputes are not significantly linked to SOA courses. Governments only requested significantly more training in response to insurgent activity. Moreover, the barely significant coefficient for *Troop Quality* underlines the unique skill component of SOA training. Even by investing in the domestic education of troops, governments could not significantly decrease foreign training rates.²⁵

For ease of interpretation, I next calculate marginal effects for the diplomatic and military logics.²⁶ Figure 5 shows that governments with foreign policies fully in line with that of the United States were highly likely to send soldiers to the SOA. This suggests that Latin American governments drew on foreign training to underline their strong international cooperation with Washington. Moving to the military logic, figure 6 shows that governments only increased SOA training to counteract insurgent groups. A guerrilla attack led to almost 60 additional SOA courses per year.

Together, the results offer strong support for the diplomatic and military logics of foreign training. Governments have their troops trained at foreign academies to substantiate their friendly relations with the host. Once this diplomatic commitment is established, governments only demand more training to counteract acute political threats with military tactics unavailable at home.

Probing the Mechanism

This section offers additional descriptive and statistical evidence on the diplomatic and military logics.

Distinct Logics

The first test probes the qualitative difference between the diplomatic and military logics. If foreign policy interests influence the decision to accept external training and military considerations determine the amount thereof, then the key independent variables of the diplomatic and military logics should only exert influence on their respective stages. The results in table 4.1 (Supplementary Information) show that this is the case. *Guerrilla attack*, like most other threat variables, is not correlated with the decision to send troops to the SOA, and *Similarity with US foreign policy* does not influence the amount of training. This supports the idea that training patterns result from sending governments’ distinct political goals.

Structural Changes

The second test exploits two historical developments to provide further evidence on both logics. First, the school’s curriculum had a strong counterinsurgency focus between 1964 and 1989. Second, in 1984 the SOA moved from Panama to Fort Benning. If the proposed two-stage mechanism was at work, then the strong counterinsurgency focus should have positively affected the governments’ military considerations

²³I employ binary threat variables. Results remain unchanged for count measures, as shown in the Supplementary Information.

²⁴See the Supplementary Information for descriptive evidence.

²⁵Finding replicates when controlling for domestic military academies.

²⁶Calculations are based on Model 3, with all other variables held at observed values.

Table 1. Results for course attendance at School of the Americas, 1946–2004

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Inflation equation: diplomatic logic</i>			
Similarity with US foreign policy	−0.636*** (0.138)	−1.356*** (0.306)	−1.117** (0.393)
Trade relations with the United States		0.026 (0.023)	0.023 (0.028)
Carter administration		1.131* (0.443)	1.267** (0.468)
Reagan administration		0.555 (0.376)	0.597 (0.368)
Military capacity		−0.442* (0.215)	−0.050 (0.354)
Post–Cold War		−0.705* (0.347)	−0.893** (0.313)
Constant	1.303* (0.542)	3.964** (1.372)	1.980 (2.052)
<i>Count equation: military logic</i>			
Guerrilla attack	0.875** (0.269)	0.813** (0.276)	0.876** (0.279)
Strike	−0.214 (0.139)	−0.231† (0.132)	−0.155 (0.129)
Demonstration	−0.014 (0.116)	−0.048 (0.113)	0.088 (0.115)
Riot	−0.071 (0.157)	−0.034 (0.160)	−0.150 (0.167)
Conventional war	0.167 (0.134)	0.047 (0.141)	0.022 (0.138)
Troop quality			−0.130† (0.073)
Inflation rate			−0.244 (0.195)
Constant	3.937*** (0.160)	4.032*** (0.170)	5.993*** (1.162)
<i>Dispersion parameter</i>			
Ln(Alpha)	0.553** (0.179)	0.537** (0.207)	0.489* (0.199)
AIC	10747.36	9148.22	8529.33
Clusters	33	33	28
Observations	1532	1255	1061
Zero observations	676	518	356

Note: Results from zero-inflated negative binomial regressions. Coefficients with robust standard errors, clustered on countries. Inflation equation predicts zeros, with *negative coefficients indicating a higher probability* of attending at least one course. Positive coefficients in count equation indicate a higher number of courses attended.

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

but should not have mattered on the diplomatic stage. Moreover, when the school was based in the United States, sending soldiers probably demonstrated added diplomatic trust, since it was more difficult for governments to observe what SOA instructors taught soldiers. The results in table 4.2 (Supplementary Information) support both expectations. The strong counterinsurgency focus is correlated with significantly more training but remains insignificant on the diplomatic stage. In contrast, the school's relocation increased the likelihood of governments demanding courses while actually decreasing the overall amount of training. The results lend further support to the dual considerations of sending governments.

Temporal Dynamics

This test disaggregates the data on SOA attendance to descriptively scrutinize two further implications. First, if the decision to send soldiers abroad for training follows a diplomatic logic, then new regimes interested in cooper-

ative long-term US relations should have briefly increased training to demonstrate their commitment. I assess this expectation by plotting attendance rates around the most common form of regime change in the Western Hemisphere: from democracy to military dictatorship. Figure 7 shows that SOA attendance indeed spiked right after military regimes took power. The pattern supports the argument that pro-US regimes drew on foreign military training to substantiate their cooperation. Second, if the amount of training is guided by military considerations, we should not observe a spike but an increase in the level of SOA training after the outbreak of insurgencies. Figure 4.1 (Supplementary Information) shows that sending governments indeed consistently demanded more SOA training to increase the skills of their troops when faced with armed uprisings.

Leader Changes

The diplomatic logic suggests that governments send soldiers abroad for training to credibly commit themselves to the host's interests. An alternative argument might be

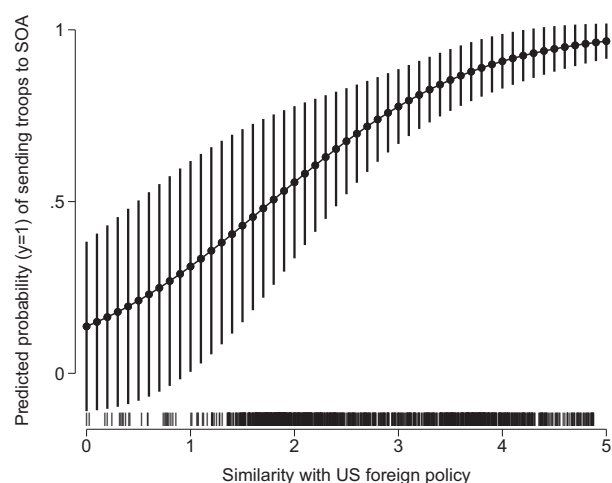


Figure 5. Marginal effect of foreign policy similarity on the decision to have troops trained abroad

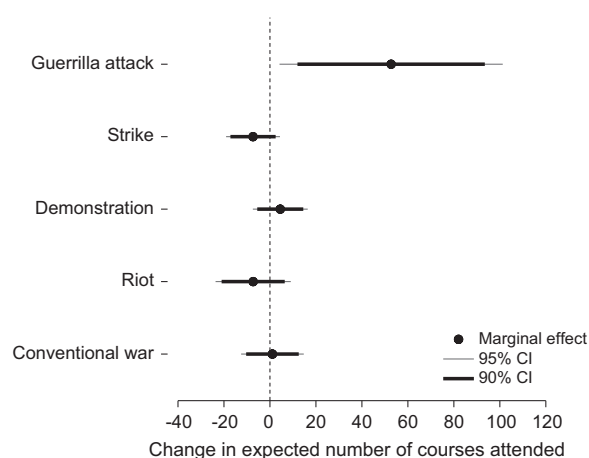


Figure 6. Marginal effects of threat types on the amount of foreign training demanded

that the sending decision simply reflects ideological affinity. However, if this argument was correct, we should observe that leader changes within an aligned regime do not alter training patterns, since the sending regime's ideological orientation remains unchanged. In contrast, if the proposed diplomatic logic holds, we should observe that new leaders in an aligned regime temporarily send soldiers abroad to assure the host of their continued cooperation. Probing these competing arguments requires studying a regime that is clearly aligned with the host country, that experiences several leader changes, and that has only modest internal conflict. Given these requirements, I draw on Brazil's military dictatorship. Between 1964 and 1985, the Brazilian government was a close US ally, held a strong anti-communist stance throughout, had five different presidents, and experienced relatively low levels of armed resistance.²⁷

Figure 8 depicts all leader changes and attendance at the SOA during Brazil's dictatorship. In line with the diplomatic logic and in contrast to pure ideological affinity, almost all presidents sent soldiers to the school right after assuming office. The case of Brazil offers several cues on why leaders were interested in assuring the United States of their diplomatic commitment via SOA training. For the military, the

²⁷Guerrilla groups did not pose a "major threat" and "by Latin American standards [...] were unimpressive" (Skidmore 1988, 117).

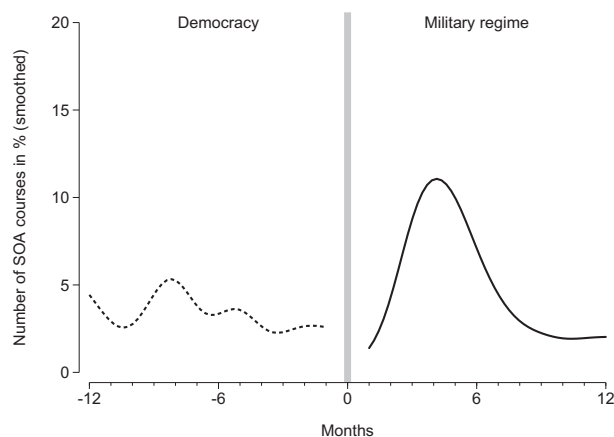


Figure 7. Regime change and training patterns
Note. Graph shows change in SOA training 12 months before and after regime changes. Regime data taken from Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2018).

selection of presidents was a complicated issue. Rumors and fierce behind-the-scenes bargaining between hard-line and moderate factions made it difficult to predict who would become president and how this would impact Brazil's relations with the United States (Skidmore 1988). For example, other than Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco, President Artur da Costa e Silva and his hard-line cabinet did not have close personal links to America (Skidmore 1988, 68).²⁸ For the United States, this probably made it difficult to gauge Brazil's future orientation and most likely increased Brasília's motivation for sending students to the SOA.

Moreover, in August 1969 an unpredictable event intensified uncertainty about Brazil's future alignment. Costa e Silva suffered a stroke, which forced the military to delay the succession process. Government affairs were temporarily in the hands of a junta. Only after intense internal negotiations did Emílio Médici, who most officers had not anticipated, finally emerge as successor (Skidmore 1988, 95–9).

Uncertainty over Brazil–United States relations peaked again in late 1982, this time during the presidency of João Figueiredo. Ernesto Geisel had already named Figueiredo as his successor in December 1977 (Skidmore 1988, 200). Since this gave the United States enough time to form expectations about the new president's policies, it may explain why Figueiredo did not need to send troops abroad in 1979. However, in 1983 his health problems, crumbling political support, and the popular demand for free presidential elections accelerated the regime's demise (Skidmore 1988, 240–4). The decision to send soldiers abroad before the military handed over power to a democratically elected government may be understood as Figueiredo's attempt to cement Brazil's future pro-US stance.

Military Effectiveness

The military logic suggests that recipient governments demand more external training if they believe that it helps their troops effectively counter acute threats. To corroborate this claim, I undertake an analysis on the military effectiveness of SOA training. To alleviate potential problems with selection effects and reverse causality, I exploit the fact that uprisings commonly start with isolated insurgent attacks, which may then spiral into full insurgent wars.

²⁸The spike in training under Castelo Branco corroborates evidence on democracy-to-military regime changes.

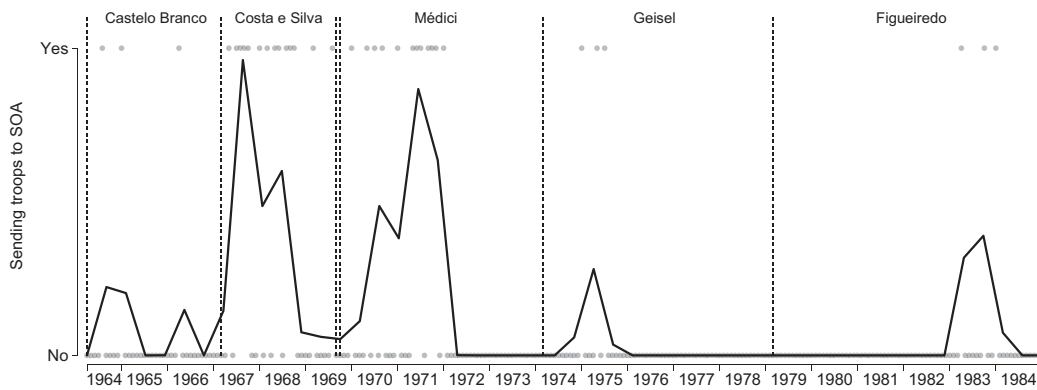


Figure 8. Leader change in Brazil and SOA attendance (monthly level)

Note. Solid line gives smoothed (local polynomial) trend in leader-specific, binary decisions to have soldiers trained at SOA. Dots depict sending decision per month. Dashed lines indicate leader changes. Data taken from [Geddes, Wright, and Frantz \(2018\)](#).

Datasets code the latter once they cause at least 1,000 battle-related deaths ([Lyall and Wilson 2009](#), 70; [Kalyvas and Balcells 2010](#), 417). I leverage the high cutoff to assess whether SOA training helped soldiers prevent the outbreak of insurgent wars. The dependent variable in the analysis is binary, measuring the occurrence of such a war in a given year.

Moreover, experts generally consider conventional tactics—designed for combating regular armies—to be unsuited for the struggle against irregular groups. I therefore use two independent variables to probe the differential effects of course content: One counts all conventional warfare courses attended whereas the other only includes counterinsurgency courses. Based on the military logic, I expect that only the latter transmitted the skills, knowledge, and tactics enabling SOA graduates to suppress insurgent wars. Figure 9 suggests that SOA counterinsurgency courses are correlated with a lower risk of full insurgent wars, whereas courses in conventional warfare are correlated with a higher risk.²⁹ This offers suggestive evidence on the skill-enhancing effect of SOA training and indicates that foreign training can produce effective counterinsurgents if course content matches threat type.

Threat Escalation and Course Selection

The military logic suggests that governments are strategic in their demand for foreign military training. Combined with the results for military effectiveness, this offers two additional implications on course selection. First, governments should demand counterinsurgency courses when facing isolated guerrilla attacks. Second, once governments confront a full insurgent war, they should turn to conventional warfare courses as these promise higher chances of victory against capable rebels.³⁰ The results in table 5.4 (Supplementary Information) support both expectations.³¹ In response to insurgent attacks, Latin American governments

²⁹Results are based on data by [Lyall and Wilson \(2009\)](#). See the Supplementary Information for tests with alternate codings.

³⁰Wars include the ones in Colombia (FARC), El Salvador (FMLN), and Nicaragua (FSLN), among others. See the Supplementary Information for the full list.

³¹The results also support the diplomatic logic. Governments were more likely to enroll soldiers in conventional warfare courses than in specialized counterinsurgency ones as part of strengthening cooperative relations with the United States.

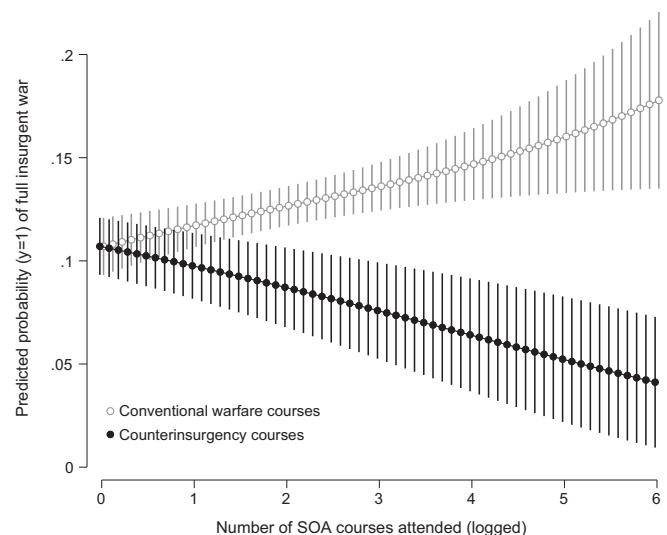


Figure 9. Foreign training and military effectiveness

only demanded more counterinsurgency courses. Once governments faced full insurgent wars, they predominantly enrolled troops in conventional warfare courses. As threats become more conventional, governments alter the courses in which they have their troops trained abroad.

Donor Interests and the Supply of Training

Finally, one might argue that the empirical findings presented in this study result from donor interests rather than from recipient considerations. In general, this is difficult to rule out. Fortunately, the case of the SOA offers some clues about why it is unlikely that the findings are driven by US interests alone. The finding for the diplomatic logic would only emerge if the United States systematically barred soldiers of nonaligned states from attending the SOA. However, this seems implausible for two reasons. First, the United States used the school to recruit foreign students as informants or spies. It therefore would have been especially lucrative for the United States to admit soldiers from nonaligned countries to gain better intelligence on its enemies. Second, given that several graduates assumed power through coups, training individuals from rival states would

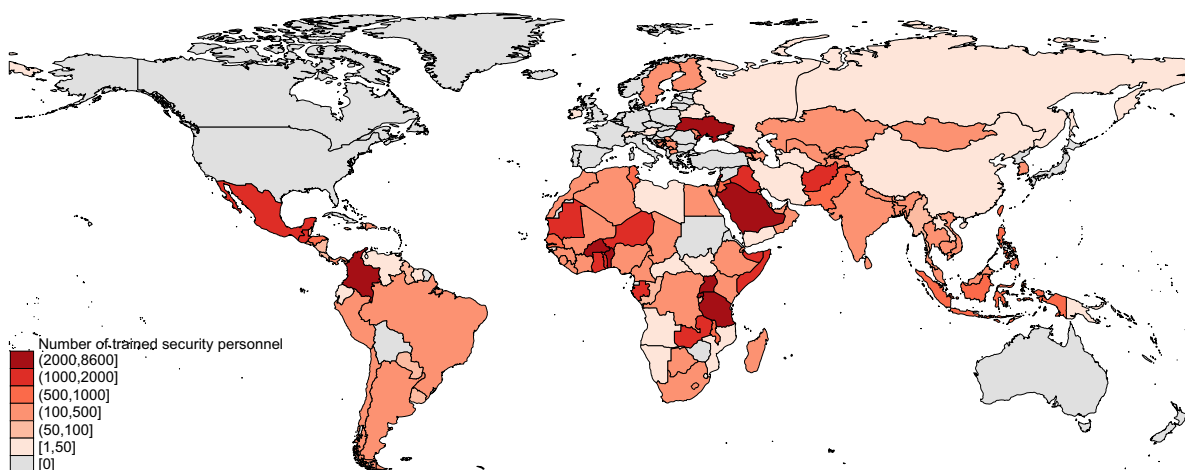


Figure 10. Recipients of US-sponsored military training, 2017
Note. Data taken from SAM (2018).

have been a cheap way for the United States to turn foes into allies. It thus seems unlikely that the United States was overly selective in admissions.³² Finally, it also seems implausible that the results for the military logic are solely driven by US interests. It is doubtful that the United States was able to exert enough pressure on friendly nations, otherwise utterly uninterested in increasing SOA training, to boost course attendance. It seems more plausible that the United States made sure to offer enough student slots for meeting the training demands by allied but threatened governments. The interests of recipient governments offer a more straightforward explanation for the empirical findings.

External Validity

Some may argue that this study is less relevant for the post-Cold War era. The fall of the USSR might have decreased the need for strong diplomatic alignments, let alone military know-how on waging war against communist guerrillas. However, figure 10 shows that a large number of countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America still draw on US-sponsored training programs—some of them extensively and despite the coup risk (Savage and Caverley 2017). The findings of this study may help explain why.

First, since the end of the Cold War, the international system has become more multipolar, with several states competing for influence. This has led to a proliferation of sponsors. Countries such as China, France, India, and Russia now also offer military training to pursue their strategic interests and co-opt international partners. The findings of this study imply that competition for influence incentivized countries with a pro-US stance to enroll their troops in American training. This diplomatic logic became even more pronounced with the War on Terror, which increased pressure on countries to visibly distance themselves from Islamist influences. Enrolling soldiers in US training programs in the aftermath of 9/11 likely helped governments such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan to demonstrate their commitment to countering radical Islam.

Second, both the Arab Spring and recent Russian interference have sparked fears among US allies of being unprepared for new threats. The popular uprisings in Tunisia and

Egypt sent shockwaves across the Middle East and North Africa. In line with the study's results, pro-US regimes such as Bahrain and Saudi Arabia responded to the upheavals with a heightened demand for US training in the hope of exploiting foreign expertise for crowd control and mass surveillance. Similarly, many US allies have felt threatened by Russian disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, and foreign-backed irregulars since the unrest in Ukraine. In line with the study's findings, alarmed governments such as those in Finland and Georgia have sought to quickly brace their security forces for cyber- and unconventional warfare, leading to a significant increase in US foreign training rates.

Finally, since the end of the Cold War, mobile training teams have become a standard feature of security assistance. The findings can also make sense of why governments allow such teams into their countries. With foreign instructors training soldiers on-site, it is easier for recipient governments to monitor what is taught to their troops. Moreover, mobile training programs often provide courses tailored to recipients' specific needs. Compared to training at foreign academies, close geographic proximity and customized content is likely to lower the coup risk emanating from such programs. This may explain why mobile training programs are so attractive to recipient governments. However, these lower political costs also imply that a recipient's demand for mobile training teams is only a weak signal of commitment. Mobile training therefore offers less guarantees of long-term security cooperation to donors than training foreign soldiers at their academies does.

Conclusion

Why do governments have their soldiers trained abroad? Every year, countries such as China, Russia, and the United States instruct troops from other countries in their academies. Such training can be very costly for the countries sending soldiers to foreign schools. Historical and contemporary cases suggest that host states indoctrinate soldiers, recruit them as informants, and sometimes even motivate them to stage coups. To understand why countries nevertheless demand foreign training, I have studied the sending governments' decision-making processes. I argue that the decision to send troops abroad for training is based on a diplomatic rationale, whereas the amount of training requested is guided by military considerations.

³²This is supported by the fact that systematic vetting of SOA applicants was only introduced after the end of the Cold War (AI 2002).

Governments send personnel abroad to demonstrate their commitment to the host. Once this diplomatic message has been transmitted, training volume is determined according to military goals, with governments demanding more training to fight acute threats using novel military skills.

The analysis of more than 60,000 individual course attendance records at the School of the Americas—the most notorious foreign training facility during the Cold War—supports both expectations. Governments sent soldiers abroad to underline their shared interests with the United States. Moreover, governments significantly intensified training in the aftermath of guerrilla attacks, but not in response to demonstrations, strikes, riots, or interstate disputes. Cautious of too many US-friendly soldiers within their security apparatus, Latin American governments only increased training when the skills acquired matched an acute threat to power. Together, the findings demonstrate that for recipients foreign military training is a foreign policy instrument first, and defense policy tool second.

One key implication of this study concerns the political tradeoffs for recipients demanding foreign training. Governments are known to pursue policies that reduce the risk of coups yet still increase the likelihood of uprisings (Roessler 2016). The findings presented indicate a reversed logic for security assistance. Governments and leaders appear willing to tolerate the risk of putsches if this allows for quick gains in military effectiveness.

A second implication points to how military aid can increase the political leverage of donors. The findings show that politicized training at foreign academies peaks when recipients face domestic crises. This may have two effects. Internationally, it should increase the influence of donor states over allies as more foreign-trained soldiers serve within the recipients' security apparatuses. Domestically, foreign training is likely to alter the power relations between recipient governments and their militaries, since externally trained soldiers can leverage the coup threat for greater influence. In the long run, crisis-induced peaks in external training may therefore tighten donor states' grip on sending countries.

A third implication relates to the paradox of building durable security cooperation. I have shown that foreign military training can increase military capacity, but for this to work recipient governments have to be interested in enrolling soldiers in training programs in the first place. For donors, this suggests a tradeoff where the provision of customized courses with little ideological bias is likely to increase demand but potentially decreases the recipient's long-term political commitment. By supporting today's partners with politically neutral training, donors run the risk of nurturing tomorrow's foes.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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