Human Rights and U.S. Training of Third World Police

by

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INTRODUCTION

Can U.S. training change the repressive behavior of Third World police? In the past, U.S. officials have claimed that they have tried to do just that. The U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of Public Safety (OPS), which the Kennedy administration established in 1962 and Congress discontinued in 1974, provided at least $337,000,000 worth of equipment, advisors, and training to Third World police.1 Byron Engle, OPS Director from 1962 to 1973, has claimed that the “most effective training for police officers” occurred at the International Police Academy (IPA) in Washington, D.C.2 IPA staff of former American policemen trained 5,000 policemen from Asia, Africa, and Latin America between 1963 and 1974. OPS officials claimed that IPA tried to persuade foreign policemen to protect rather than violate human rights.

This paper examines three aspects of this claim. First, the paper explains why the claim, even if not true, had some political utility. Second, the paper compares the claim with the emphasis given to human rights in IPA teachings. Third, the paper contrasts OPS officials’ explanation of why IPA training persuaded trainees to protect human rights given in support of the claim with the trainees’ reactions to IPA. Evidence for this study comes from interviews and documents. First, the author perused OPS documents and interviewed OPS personnel in Washington, D.C., between July 1972 and December 1973 and between November 1978 and June 1979. The author interviewed all major OPS officials as well as many other OPS staff members. Among those officials interviewed were Byron Engle, OPS Director from 1962 to 1973 and designer of IPA, Lauren Goin, OPS Director from 1973 to 1974, and Thomas Finn and John Lindquist, IPA Directors from 1969 to 1972, and 1972 to 1974, respectively. Second, the author interviewed IPA trainees in Washington, D.C. between July 1972 and December 1973 and former IPA trainees in Indonesia in January 1974. This paper concludes that OPS officials used the claim to counter growing criticism of OPS's identification with counterinsurgency, that the claim ignored the fact that IPA put a greater emphasis on order maintenance on behalf of existing governments than on human rights, and that the claim rested on an implausible explanation of why IPA persuaded police to protect human rights which trainees themselves refuted.

JUSTIFICATION

OPS officials used the claim that IPA tried to persuade police to protect human rights as a justification for the continued existence of OPS. During the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, U.S. counterinsurgency aid programs such as OPS had aimed at securing pro-American
governments in the Third World against what were alleged to be Communist or Communist-inspired insurgencies. U.S. administrations often claimed that such aid enabled the United States to reform the conduct of recipient forces. They viewed reform as a goal which if achieved would make insurgency-threatened governments more popular and thus dilute the appeal of insurgents. They also viewed reform as a palliative, helping to make counterinsurgency aid more acceptable to critics within the United States, and thus helping to dilute growing opposition to such aid. This was particularly true for OPS.

OPS and IPA were closely identified with counterinsurgency. For example, Supporting Assistance funds to shore up governments facing an immediate insurgency threat amounted to $288,023,000 or 67.5 percent of total OPS funding obligations between the fiscal years 1963 and 1973. OPS had its largest program in Vietnam. That program received $139,847,000 or 41.4 percent of all OPS funds between FY 1963 and FY 1973. Supporting Assistance amounted to $128,184,000 or 91.7 percent of the Vietnam program's funds. In FY 1969, for instance, the Vietnam program accounted for 56.3 percent of all OPS funds. Statements, too, indicated that OPS was a counterinsurgency program. In 1964, David Bell, AID Administrator, for instance, said OPS improved police capabilities to "counter Communist-inspired or exploited subversion and insurgency." AID General Notice November 30, 1962 noted that "police assistance programs directly serve the high priority objective of internal security." Internal security figured prominently in the IPA curriculum. Table 1 lists topics in the Internal Security portion of the 1967 curriculum.

Although OPS's close identification with counterinsurgency had once gained it support, such identification became a liability; OPS officials increasingly used the claim of the protection of human rights to justify the need for OPS to critics. OPS officials pointed to IPA's attempt to teach trainees to protect human rights to counter criticism that OPS was helping Third World police to act as more efficient and effective instruments of repressive governments. To reduce the impression of IPA as teaching counterinsurgency, OPS revised the internal security portion of the curriculum, in part because of political pressures. In 1972, emphasis in the internal security section changed from countering Communist insurgency to protection of high officials from assassination, airline security, countering kidnapping, bomb threats, and robberies. Some of this shift away from counter-Communist activities amounted to nothing more than hiding that topic within other subjects. For instance, the subject "Communist Operational Views on Insurgency" (described in the curriculum revised in July 1969 as "A Review of Communist Strategy for 'Wars of National Liberation'") disappeared as a distinct topic only to re-emerge as part of another topic. In a 1973 statement IPA ended internal security as an area of study. Many of the matters included in the internal security area of the 1972 curriculum, however, resurfaced in the police operations area. Such cosmetic changes do not indicate a change in the IPA emphasis on internal security, though OPS officials hoped this would help defuse the charges made by critics. Lauren
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Goin, OPS Director from 1973 to 1974, thought that this shift away from counterinsurgency and toward human rights to justify certain training would allow OPS to survive. Even after Congress stopped overseas programs, he believed Congress would let the International Police Academy continue. In fact, OPS officials planned to expand the IPA program, Goin has claimed. The shift in justification, however, failed. OPS blamed a "left leaning turn" in Congress, helped by "news media having a similar bent," for the Congressional action which halted OPS.

TEACHINGS

In response to political pressures, OPS instituted cosmetic changes in the IPA curriculum to make it appear as if the counterinsurgency emphasis had been reduced and the human rights component increased. Although IPA teachings included human rights, IPA continued to give greater emphasis to ideas that expressed the need for police to maintain order. Yet, OPS officials played down this emphasis on order maintenance in IPA teachings when they claimed IPA tried to persuade police to protect human rights.

IPA offered both the General Course and a Senior Course. Most trainees attended the General Course. IPA designed it for middle level officers holding "supervisory positions in operations or administrative support elements" of police forces. Trainees needed a high school diploma and three years of police experience. The course consisted of thirteen weeks of general training followed by three or four weeks of more specialized training in one aspect of police work. IPA taught in English, Spanish, and French, giving fourteen courses each year on the average. Between 1964 and June 1972, 3,746 trainees came from 71 countries. Higher ranking officers took the Senior Officers Course, which trained policemen in "executive positions with responsibility for establishing policy, staff planning, or who command major operational elements" at the national, provincial, or municipal level. IPA accepted no one ranking lower than Senior Superintendent or Lt. Colonel. The trainees had a minimum of five years police experience and a high school diploma. The course lasted fourteen weeks, offered once a year in English and once a year in Spanish. Between 1964 and June 1972, 335 trainees came from 42 countries. John Lindquist, IPA Director from 1972 to 1974, has claimed that in both the General and Senior Courses IPA had the "best professional curriculum possible."

IPA taught ideas that OPS officials considered important. IPA did not try to teach "operational techniques," because most police forces of the world are "quite good" in teaching them, according to Engle. "We weren't involved in narrow subject matter," Thomas Finn, IPA Director from 1969 to 1973, has asserted, "but rather broad concepts." The OPS Program Guide declared that OPS tried to improve the "character" of foreign police. John Manopoli, Deputy Director of OPS from 1973 to 1975, asserted that "we were doing our best to change the direction of these police forces." IPA "corrected some bad habits" that foreign policemen had by "inculcating" IPA ideas as the guide to "proper
Manopoli could not "understand why liberals attack the program when it should be supported by them because it creates police forces to protect the natural rights of individuals." True, IPA did teach about human rights, informing trainees that police must protect "basic human rights," as Engle has claimed. However, what constituted basic human rights varied. OPS officials often explained human rights in terms of other ideas taught to trainees that they subsumed under the notion of the public service role for police. Engle said IPA emphasized the idea of "police as a public service." Police, in the public service role, respond to public needs and help create a more democratic and humane society. OPS claimed these ideas were "interwoven throughout the fabric of IPA instructions." Goin declared that "our doctrine is to turn . . . police around 180 degrees—to get the police to operate in a way that makes their role acceptable to the people." The "people are the police and have delegated their law enforcement functions" to them. Police, for example, protect the "right of dissent" and guarantee "popular participation in the political process," and Engle argued that IPA stressed that the police served not as a "repressive institution but as a protective institution." IPA taught police to "act democratically, to be the friend and protector of people," according to Engle. It is these ideas that OPS officials cited when claiming that IPA training taught foreign police to protect rather than violate human rights.

Yet, under pressure from critics threatening the very survival of OPS, when it suited their purposes OPS officials tended to ignore the fact that IPA teachings subordinated concern for protecting human rights to the more important and urgent task of maintaining order. What IPA taught about the importance of order is illustrated by statements from OPS officials and IPA trainees. IPA taught trainees that "absolute chaos" confronts many countries, according to Finn. If the ordinary processes of governments are disrupted, he continued, there is "anarchy floating around." In a speech at an IPA graduation ceremony, one trainee said he learned that "a seething turmoil threatens, with alarming magnitude, the very foundation of society itself." Another trainee discovered that "police are up against a pervasive social sickness." Yet another trainee perceived police as preventing countries from being in a "state of chaos and beset by all sorts of disturbances." "It is evolution versus revolution," Manopoli asserted. Orderly change "portends progress." By being "agents of order" police are also "agents of change." Police responsibilities, according to OPS, range from traffic control and crime detection through riot control to urban terrorism countermeasures and paramilitary action. The policeman, Engle explained, is "much more than a queller of riots or restorer of order. At his best a policeman isolates problems before they develop and nips them in
the bud.”37 That IPA gave greater prominence and urgency to the duty of police to serve their government as effective instruments of order is illustrated by OPS’s own evaluation of its program in El Salvador, which included IPA training. Nowhere in the document is the notion of police as protectors of human rights mentioned as either a goal or an accomplishment of the program.38

EXPLANATION

In their efforts to prove the validity of their claim that IPA tried to persuade foreign police to protect rather than violate human rights, OPS officials often presented an implausible explanation of why such a change in behavior resulted from IPA training. In response to charges from critics that IPA trainees acted no better than the repressive governments that employed them, OPS officials attempted to show that police had some independence from their governments and that IPA could influence police. As a result of IPA training, Goin has written, “each officer carries back to his respective country new visions, ideas and ideals of professional law enforcement. And each, sowing seeds of humanity, honesty, dedication, devotion, and freshly gained knowledge.”39 To make such a claim seem credible, OPS officials used an explanation of how IPA changed police behavior that often miscast trainees as reform-minded, autonomous decision makers, underemphasizing the influence of local governments and cultures, and overemphasizing the universality of police work and the relevance of the American experience.

Take, for example, OPS officials’ statements that IPA taught universally applicable ideas which trainees recognized as superior to their own. Goin insisted “the concepts taught at IPA had universal applicability. There is a commonality of principles.”40 Manopoli claimed IPA taught “a philosophy applicable anywhere.”41 Goin argued that IPA training met “the needs common to police forces of the world,”42 for police work was essentially the same everywhere. “Regardless of what color policemen are, the suits they wear, what they call themselves, they are all the same. They are the same for the simple reason that a policeman exists in society as a behavior control mechanism. The basic principles of what is done, how it is done, and why it is done are the same.” Goin has said that “IPA’s real strength was in being able to deal with these kinds of subjects that are easily adaptable to the various locations, cultures, and laws throughout the world.” He has contended that “how police are able to do their job relates to the subjects of human relationships, supervisor-subordinate relationships, how you train a person to do something [are all] common concerns of any police organization.”43 Trainees “understood the superiority of IPA ideas. The ideas simply were more useful than what they were used to and they knew it,” Finn asserted.44

The statements of OPS officials were often inconsistent. On the one hand, OPS officials claimed IPA refrained from teaching about politics and America. IPA did not “superimpose the U.S. police system, geared to our country on other nations.” IPA did not attempt to apply American “solutions” to Third World police problems. “On the
Contrary, the programs are designed to emphasize essentials,"44 and so, Goin declared, "IPA did not consciously expound the virtues of the U.S. way of doing things. As a matter of fact, IPA consciously kept from it." He went on to say that "we did not philosophize about ideologies and political theories and this country's approach to a particular subject from a political basis .... It is, however, very tempting sometimes to tell them what to think." Initially, continued Goin, "it was a conscious effort not to praise capitalism and attack Communism," but "it became second nature for us at the academy to focus on the professional subject aspects and try to present these in a way that could be adapted to whatever police system."46 Manopoli concurred, saying, "Our whole approach was to stay away from things of a political nature."47 "Nowhere did IPA tell trainees how they should conduct themselves politically, only that they should conduct themselves in a proper and democratic way."48 Nevertheless, OPS officials maintained that the American experience was relevant to trainees' needs. IPA instructors did tell trainees about the Boston Tea Party and "our forefathers' fight against tyranny" to illustrate that American experience was relevant to Third World needs, according to Finn. Further, explaining the American judicial process proved to trainees the importance of the law and how police operate within it.49 Manopoli stressed that telling trainees about development in the United States during the last forty years convinced them of the need for evolutionary change, and IPA generally taught trainees a "philosophy of democratic decent government like we have in the United States."50

Some OPS officials had faith in training as an instrument of reform, and this faith influenced their explanation. Engle, for example, was greatly influenced by his experiences training Japanese police during the post-war Occupation, and he later applied the lessons he learned in Japan to IPA. According to his own account, he went to Japan with faith in the efficacy of training to reform police; as a former director of personnel and training for the Kansas City Police Department, he believed he had succeeded in training police there to act humanely. This effort led to the job retraining police for the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan. Although he knew little about Japan when he arrived there, he felt he soon understood Japanese police problems. The reorganization of the Japanese police, for Engle, amounted to "the best laboratory that anyone could be involved in," for "we could see how .... [American police experts'] ideas worked in an oriental atmosphere." As part of the U.S. imposed reforms on Japanese police, Engle proposed to train all police "to make them act humanely." He set up schools where American policemen trained 2,200 Japanese policemen who, in turn, trained the rest of the 93,000 man force. The training program was "really about changing concepts from an autocratic society to a democratic society," he asserted. "Out of the training program grew the concept of the police as servants of the people and as a reflection of the democratic system the Japanese police still hold to. The change in the police brought about [by] the training," he claimed, "was one of the major historical changes in Japanese history." From his experiences in
Japan, Engle drew the lesson that U.S. training could reform the behavior of foreign police by training trainers to train other policemen. This lesson and the model provided by his training program in Japan later became a basis for the IPA. Although the authority of the United States over Japanese police during the Occupation could not easily be duplicated elsewhere, Engle's experiences in Japan contributed to his faith in training and helped shape IPA training efforts. U.S. counterinsurgency policy and bureaucratic placement of the Office of Public Safety within AID enabled Engle to apply the lessons he had learned in Japan to the International Police Academy. President Kennedy had inherited a counterinsurgency police aid program established by the Eisenhower administration in 1954. Counterinsurgency programs for the administration meant more than just concern for increasing security capabilities of threatened governments; it meant reform, also. Kennedy ordered that "considerably greater emphasis" be placed on police aid and gave the responsibility for such assistance to AID, telling that body to set up an international police academy. The bureaucratic placement of OPS within AID had the effect of allowing Engle, as Director of OPS, to design the IPA training program based, in part, on his experiences in Japan and faith in training to reform police.

Political expediency, naturally, contributed to OPS officials' implausible explanation of certain procedures. As OPS became increasingly under threat from opponents, OPS officials became less willing to acknowledge publicly any private doubts about the validity of the explanation. They needed to make it appear that IPA's impact on foreign police would come more quickly and more decisively than perhaps even the OPS might have believed. Since so many of the governments that received OPS assistance appeared repressive to critics of OPS, officials of that office needed to indicate that police could be somewhat independent of their governments and that IPA could persuade police to moderate their behavior. Thus, for political reasons, OPS officials needed an explanation that made IPA appear to alter, rather than reinforce, police behavior.

To prove the validity of their explanation, OPS used two flawed methods of assessment. First, OPS officials interpreted trainees' enthusiasm for the whole training experience, including travelling to and living in the United States, as indicating trainees' adoption of IPA teachings, including human rights. Second, OPS used subsequent promotions of former trainees as a measure of IPA persuasiveness. Here, of course, OPS assumed trainees returned home as active agents on behalf of the protection of human rights and that their police forces supported their individual efforts. Trainees, however, saw their role differently, and they refuted the explanation offered by OPS officials concerning the methods and reasons that IPA persuaded foreign police to protect rather than violate human rights.

Specifically, trainees refuted claims of what the two kinds of assessment proved. First, the trainees interviewed by the author indicated their considerable enthusiasm for the trip to the United States and their
subsequent sojourn there. They simply ignored IPA teachings they did not like, want, or understand, feeling that a show of interest in IPA teaching was a small price to pay for their more pleasurable activities. Second, the trainees knew that promotions were more likely to measure their ability to conform to the ideas espoused by their superiors within their home countries. This might well include rejecting the concept of human rights. According to trainees, instead of persuading police to protect rather than violate human rights, IPA training reinforced trainees’ commitment to the police system and the police leaders at home. High-ranking police officials used IPA training as a reward for loyalty. Only those approved by the ranking officials in each country’s police force received approval to attend IPA. Potential trainees who had been, or might be, trouble-makers never got past the selection committees. Many trainees expressed the feeling that IPA training symbolized the satisfaction of police authorities with their conformity. Trainees said they could not adopt ideas inconsistent with their police leaders’ interpretation of police work and had neither the power nor the inclination to introduce new ideas to their police forces. They did not understand how OPS officials could expect them, as middle-ranking officers, to be reformers. Possessing neither authority nor responsibility for change, they could only be conformers.

CONCLUSION

Three points arise from an examination of the claim that IPA training tried to persuade repressive foreign police to protect rather than violate human rights. The claim, even if not true, had some political utility for OPS officials trying to counter criticism that OPS was too closely identified with counterinsurgency. It ignored the fact that IPA teachings placed greater emphasis on maintenance of order than on protection of human rights and rested on an implausible explanation of why IPA persuaded foreign police to protect human rights—an explanation that IPA trainees themselves refuted.

Taking up this last point, the reactions of trainees to IPA training should not be surprising; they reconfirm the aphorism that it is easier to reinforce than to change the behavior of others outside one’s control. After all, IPA trained middle-ranking foreign policemen for periods of only thirteen to seventeen weeks. To put it into perspective, OPS officials claimed that IPA could accomplish with foreign police that which many observers have asserted the American government could not accomplish with U.S. police forces even given more time, money, and manpower. The lesson of IPA training reveals it is easier for the United States to reinforce behavior of foreign police than to change it. Applying this insight to U.S. attempts to persuade foreign police to protect rather than abuse human rights leads to the conclusion that attempts to change repressive behavior by U.S. training must fail. At best, the United States could reinforce the behavior of Third World police determined by the context within which police operate. If police abuse human rights already, it is unlikely U.S. training alone will reverse that without changes within the police operational context.
This point should be remembered when judging the merits of recent recommendations that the United States begin training to persuade Third World police to protect rather than violate human rights. Without acknowledging in its report that the United States once had such a program and that lessons might be learned from an assessment of its effects, the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America chaired by Henry Kissinger has recommended that the United States provide training to police in Central America. It claimed, implicitly at least, that if the United States were to revive aid to police—now banned by Congress in Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act—the United States would be able to train repressive police to protect human rights. The Commission further implied that if the U.S. trained El Salvador’s internal security forces, where there has been “no training to professionalize and humanize operations,” the U.S. would be able to reform their behavior. To help correct human rights violations, the Commission recommended that Congress consider lifting the ban on aid to foreign police, arguing that this “blanket legal prohibition against the provision of training and aid to police organizations has the paradoxical effect, in certain cases, of inhibiting our efforts to improve human rights.” Among the many questions that should be asked when assessing the Kissinger Commission’s recommendations are the three questions suggested by this paper’s examination of the claim that IPA training persuaded police to protect rather than violate human rights. Does the recommendation that the U.S. provide training to repressive police serve as a palliative, making aid more acceptable to critics concerned that such assistance may strengthen repressive police? Would training place greater emphasis on maintenance of order than on protection of human rights? Is there any real assurance that such training would change rather than reinforce the behavior of police that violate human rights? Based upon the IPA experience, these questions deserve careful consideration.
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<th>TABLE 1</th>
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<td>INTERNAL SECURITY SECTION OF THE IPA</td>
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<td>CURRICULUM FOR 1967</td>
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| Introduction to internal security |
| Nature of insurgency |
| Basic framework for counterinsurgency policy |
| Communist operational views on insurgency |
| Introduction to civil disturbances |
| Records and internal security |
| Planning for riot control |
| Riot control formations |
| Photography in civil disturbances |
| Special equipment for control of civil disturbances |
| Workshop in control of civil disturbances |
| Police baton |
| Chemical munitions |
| Explosives and demolitions |
| Counterinsurgency intelligence |
| Police and resources control |
| Terrorist counter measures |

**For General Course only:**

| Internal security services |
| Threat to Latin America |
| Tactical communications in control of civil disturbances |

**For Senior Course only:**

| Environmental factors of insurgency |
| Historical views on Communism |
| Economic views on Insurgency |
| Legal considerations in crowd and riot control |
| Crowd and mob psychology |

Endnotes


5. U.S., Congress, Senate, Hearings before the Senate Committee on Appropriations on Foreign Assistance and Related Agencies Appropriations for 1965, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., 1964, p. 72.


15. Interview, Bethesda, Maryland, May 8, 1979.


27. Interview, Bethesda, Maryland, May 8, 1979.


38. In “Termination Phase-Out Study: Public Safety Project, El Salvador,” OPS has claimed that “U.S. Public Safety Assistance has been provided to the Government of El Salvador to develop the managerial and operational skills and effectiveness of its civil police forces” (p. 1). Since aid to the National Police started, for instance,” considerable strides have been made. It has advanced from a nondescript cuarte-bound group of poorly trained men to a well-disciplined, well-trained, and respected uniformed corps. It has a good riot control capability, good investigative capability, good records, and fair communications and mobility. It handles routine law enforcement duties well” (p. 3). U.S., Agency for International Development, Office of Public Safety, “Termination Phase-Out Study: Public Safety Project, El Salvador,” May 1974.


55. Kermit Gordon, for example, has observed that “in 1967 the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice reported serious deficiencies in police personnel and emphasized that ‘widespread improvements in the strength and calibre of police manpower . . . are the basic essentials for achieving more effective and fairer law enforcement.’ Yet the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968—a landmark recognition of the federal role in strengthening the nation’s police forces—did little to improve the qualifications and preparation of police personnel.”