

Brutality during these house searches has been documented by returning soldiers, Iraqi civilians, and independent journalists (See #9 below). Schwartz suggests the aggressive “element of surprise” tactics employed by soldiers is likely resulting in several thousands of deaths a day that either go unreported or are categorized as insurgent casualties.

A February 2007 AP poll showed Americans gave a median estimate of 9,890 Iraqi deaths as a result of the war, a number far below that cited in any credible study.

2 ■ NAFTA on steroids

Coupling the perennial issue of security with Wall Street’s measures of prosperity, the leaders of the three North American nations convened the Security and Prosperity Partnership. The White House-led initiative — launched at a March 23, 2005, meeting of President Bush, Mexico’s then-president Vicente Fox, and Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin — joins beefed-up commerce with coordinated military operations to promote what it calls “borderless unity.”

Critics call it “NAFTA on steroids.” However, unlike NAFTA, the SPP was formed in secret, without public input.

“The SPP is not a law, or a treaty, or even a signed agreement,” Laura Carlsen wrote in a report for the Center for International Policy. “All these would require public debate and participation of Congress, both of which the SPP has scrupulously avoided.”

Instead the SPP has a special workgroup: the North American Competitiveness Council. It’s a coalition of private companies that are, according to the SPP Web site, “adding high-level business input [that] will assist governments in enhancing North America’s competitive position and engage the private sector as partners in finding solutions.”

The NACC includes the Chevron Corporation, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Merck & Co. Inc., New York Life Insurance Co., Procter & Gamble Co., and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

“Where are the environmental council, the labor council, and the citizen’s council in this process?” Carlsen asked.

A look at NAFTA’s unpopularity among citizens in all three nations is evidence of why its expansion would need to be disguised. “It’s a scheme to create a borderless North American Union under U.S. control without barriers to trade and capital flows for corporate giants, mainly U.S. ones,” wrote Steven Lendman in Global Research. “It’s also to insure America gets free and unlimited access to Canadian and Mexican resources, mainly oil, and in the case of Canada, water as well.”

3 ■ InfraGard guards itself

The FBI and Department of Homeland Security have effectively deputized 23,000 members of the business

community, asking them to tip off the feds in exchange for preferential treatment in the event of a crisis. “The members of this rapidly growing group, called InfraGard, receive secret warnings of terrorist threats before the public does — and, at least on one occasion, before elected officials,” Matthew Rothschild wrote in the March 2008 issue of *The Progressive*.

InfraGard was created in 1996 in Cleveland as part of an FBI probe into cyberthreats. Yet after 9/11, membership jumped from 1,700 to more than 23,000, and now includes 350 of the nation’s Fortune 500 companies. Members typically have a stake in one of several crucial infrastructure industries, including agriculture, banking, defense, energy, food, telecommunications, law enforcement, and transportation. The group’s 86 chapters coordinate with 56 FBI field offices nationwide.

While FBI Director Robert Mueller has said he considers this segment of the private sector “the first line of defense,” the American Civil Liberties Union issued a grave warning about the potential for abuse. “There is evidence that InfraGard may be closer to a corporate TIPS program, turning private-sector corporations — some of which may be in a position to observe the activities of millions of individual customers — into surrogate eyes and ears for the FBI,” it cautioned in an August 2004 report.

“The FBI should not be creating a privileged class of Americans who get special treatment,” Jay Stanley, public education director of the ACLU’s technology and liberty program, told Rothschild.

4 ■ ILEA: training ground for illegal wars

The School of the Americas earned an unsavory reputation in Latin America

after many graduates of the Fort Benning, Ga., facility turned into counterinsurgency death squad leaders. So the International Law Enforcement Academy recently installed by the U.S. in El Salvador — which looks, acts, and smells like the SOA — is also drawing scorn.

The school, which opened in June 2005 before the Salvadoran National Assembly approved it, has a satellite operation in Peru and is funded with \$3.6 million from the U.S. Treasury and staffed with instructors from the DEA, ICE, and FBI. It’s tasked with training 1,500 police officers, judges, prosecutors, and other law enforcement agents in counterterrorism techniques per year. It’s stated purpose is to make Latin America “safe for foreign investment” by “providing regional security and economic stability and combating crime.”

ILEAs aren’t new, but past schools located in Hungary, Thailand, Botswana, and Roswell, N.M., haven’t been terribly controversial. Yet Salvadoran human rights organizers take issue with the fact that, in true SOA fashion, the ILEA releases neither information about its curriculum nor a list of students and graduates. Additionally, the way the school slipped into existence without public oversight has raised ire.

As Wes Enzinna noted in a North American Congress on Latin America report, when the U.S. decided it wanted a training ground in Latin America, El Salvador was not the first choice. In 2002 U.S. officials selected Costa Rica as host — a country that doesn’t even have an army. The local government signed on and the plan made headlines. But when citizens learned about it, they revolted and demanded the government change the agreement. The U.S. bailed for a more discreet second attempt in El Salvador.

“Members of the U.S. Congress were not briefed about the academy, nor was the main opposition party in El Salvador, the Farabundo Martí-National Liberation Front (FMLN),” Enzinna wrote.

Now, after more than three years in

operation, critics point out that Salvadoran police, who account for 25 percent of the graduates, have become more violent. A May 2007 report by Tutela Legal implicated Salvadoran National Police (PNC) officers in eight death squad-style assassinations in 2006.

5 ■ Seizing protest

Protesting war could get you into big trouble, according to a critical read of two executive orders recently signed by President Bush. The first, issued July 17, 2007, and titled, “Blocking property of certain persons who threaten stabilization efforts in Iraq,” allows the feds to seize assets from anyone who “directly or indirectly” poses a risk to the U.S. war in Iraq. And, citing the modern technological ease of transferring funds and assets, the order states that no prior notice is necessary before the raid.

On Aug. 1, Bush signed another order, similar but directed toward anyone undermining the “sovereignty of Lebanon or its democratic processes and institutions.” In this case, the secretary of the Treasury can seize the assets of anyone perceived as posing a risk of violence, as well as the assets of their spouses and dependents, and bans them from receiving any humanitarian aid.

Critics say the orders bypass the right to due process and the vague language makes manipulation and abuse possible. Protesting the war could be perceived as undermining or threatening U.S. efforts in Iraq. “This is so sweeping, it’s staggering,” said Bruce Fein, a former Reagan administration official in the Justice Department who editorialized against it in the *Washington Times*. “It expands beyond terrorism, beyond seeking to use violence or the threat of violence to cower or intimidate a population.”

