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In July, an Italian appeals court sentenced 24 former officials from Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay to life in prison for their roles in Operation Condor — a brutal and extremely deadly US-backed operation in the 1970s and 1980s that targeted leftists, activists, social movement leaders, and others who spoke out. Operation Condor kidnapped, tortured, disappeared and/or murdered tens of thousands of people across South America. As reported in [an article on Common Dreams](#)

, 5 of the 24 former officials from South American dictatorships sentenced by the Italian court were trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

Italian nationals were among those who were kidnapped, forcibly disappeared, and murdered by Operation Condor, leading families of the victims to start this case in the Italian justice system two decades ago. A 2017 lower court ruling had sentenced 8 of the defendants but the others had been acquitted because of the statute of limitations. The appeals court decision this July reverses the acquittals. However, it is unknown if the sentences will be implemented as only one of the defendants was present; the majority were tried in absentia.

Declassified documents posted by the [National Security Archive](#) illustrate why it is vitally important to hold the United States responsible for its support of Operation Condor. A [six page cable from the US Embassy in Argentina](#) to the State Department in 1980 reported that the Argentine military would not stop using disappearance as a preferred tactic and attempted to explain why. A [CIA intelligence report](#) describes how the dynamiting of the bodies of 30 people executed in Argentina in 1976, scattering their remains widely, was meant to intimidate other so-called militants into being quiet just months after the military coup. Another [CIA report describes how Operation Condor targeted officials with Amnesty International and other human rights groups](#) and planned overseas missions in Europe to 'liquidate' 'targets'. There will not be true justice until the US government is also held to account for its role in financing, training, and supporting Operation Condor's atrocities throughout the Southern Cone.

The SOA graduates convicted by the Italian court are **Luis Arce Gomez** of Bolivia, who is already serving a 30 year sentence for genocide,

Luis Alfredo Mauren

of Uruguay,

Hernan Ramírez Ramírez

of Chile,

Pedro Antonio Mato

of Uruguay, and

Ernesto Avelino Ramas Pereira

of Uruguay.

These are not the only SOA graduates who have been in the news recently. Also in Italy, SOA graduate Walter Klug of Chile was detained. Klug was hiding from justice, and is accused of murdering 7 people and forcibly disappearing 16 others in the 1970s. SOA graduate Juan Miguel Fuente-Alba, also of Chile, was recently accused of embezzlement of more than 5 million dollars of public funds, and fellow SOA graduate Antonio Cordero Kehr was accused of emitting false invoices.

We are grateful to all those who continue to work day after day, year after year, to advance truth and justice for the atrocities committed during Operation Condor.