

“A powerful contradiction to the present US narrative of the world... As shown here, fake news is thriving in Washington, DC.” —OLIVER STONE

THE PLOT TO SCAPEGOAT ★ RUSSIA ★

**How the CIA and the Deep State
Have Conspired to Vilify Putin**



DAN KOVALIK

**INTRODUCTION BY DAVID TALBOT,
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COLD WAR KID

SINCE CHILDHOOD, I HAVE BEEN FASCINATED by Russia. In my early years, I was, like many in this country during those Cold War days, quite fearful of Russia—then the USSR—and viewed it as the greatest threat in the world to democracy, freedom, and “our way of life.” I vividly remember thinking, as I enjoyed a day riding the roller coasters at the amusement park or watching my favorite television shows, “I bet they don’t have these kinds of things in Russia.” Such thoughts gave me a very warm feeling of comfort and moral superiority.

My fear of Russia at this time was indeed religious. As with many fellow conservative Roman Catholics at that time, it was my wont to say the Rosary for the purpose of asking Our Lady of Fatima for the “conversion of Russia.” Of course, what this meant was praying for Russia to be “converted” from its then-current state as the Communist Soviet Union to some type of “free,” “democratic” and free-market nation, like the United States. If this conversion took place, I certainly believed, the world would find itself at peace, and free from the threat of a nuclear holocaust which I was otherwise certain was forthcoming.

As I grew older, I came to find that life and geo-politics were much more complicated than originally thought. The war in Central America in the 1980’s was a huge eye-opener for me. It began to gnaw at me that the US was arming and training quite repressive military forces, in the

case of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, against the peoples of much weaker and poorer countries than ourselves.

My interest in Central America began in the fall of 1979, when two new students entered my small, and hitherto all-white middle school of St. Andrew's in Milford, Ohio, about a 30-minute drive to downtown Cincinnati. The two students were named Juan and Carlos Garcia. And, they had just moved to town from Managua, Nicaragua.

Juan and Carlos were huge kids, much taller and heavier than any other student at the school. Indeed, Juan ended up playing center for our middle school's basketball team. As anyone who has visited Nicaragua would tell you, the large size of these two boys was quite unusual for a country which, especially back then, was so poor and undernourished. However, Juan and Carlos claimed to be special: they were the grandsons of the President of Nicaragua who had just been toppled over the summer (on July 19 to be exact) by a rag-tag group of insurgents known as the Sandinistas.

Now, even I knew that the leader toppled in Nicaragua was named Somoza—Anastasio Somoza. However, it is certainly possible that Juan and Carlos had taken on different, and quite common, names to hide their notorious identity. Was it possible that these two affable boys were related to the famous dictator? This seems to me even today to be far-fetched, and my research has not borne fruit on this topic. In any case, the presence of these ostensible Somocistas at my school triggered a life-long curiosity about Central America.

Then, one evening at the age of 12, I was sitting alone in my parents' room with their tiny TV, watching one of my favorite shows—*60 Minutes*. On this particular night, *60 Minutes* focused on the rape and murder of four Catholic Church women in El Salvador and on the subsequent murder of the Salvadoran Catholic Archbishop, Oscar Romero. Shockingly, the gist of this segment was that those responsible for these crimes were not in fact the left-wing guerillas in El Salvador the US was fighting, but rather, right-wing forces, known as "death squads," aligned with the government and military which the US was

funding and arming. There must have been some sort of mistake or accident, I thought, as I squirmed at this revelation.

This *60 Minutes* episode caused me great cognitive dissonance. Why would the US—the most noble, righteous nation in the world, as I believed at the time—be supporting the killing of nuns and bishops? This was quite troubling to me, though I tried to slough it off, excusing our possible excesses as an unfortunate and accidental consequence of our otherwise righteous fight against Communism. But the damage was done. A seed of doubt was starting to germinate within me. And, when I studied the case of El Salvador further, as I did at that time for a school paper, my doubts only grew.

From my reading of history, the US appeared to be on the wrong side of every conflict in El Salvador dating back to 1932—supporting the few rich landowners over the vast poor who were struggling for what seemed to be a fair share of the land and resources.

And, the US's support of the rich and powerful in that country had disastrous consequences, with mass killings by the US-backed Salvadoran Army, such as in the case of the El Mozote massacre in 1981 which claimed 800 victims, mostly landless peasants and indigenous people.

As Noam Chomsky explains in his introduction to the book *Colombia: The Genocidal Democracy*, by Father Javier Giraldo (now out of print), the violence inflicted against the Salvadoran population by the army trained and funded by the US was “religious” in nature—many of us would say, though he does not, satanic—but was hardly ever covered in the US press. As Chomsky explains:

The record of horrors is all too full. In the Jesuit *America*, Rev. Daniel Santiago, a priest working in El Salvador, reported in 1990 the story of a peasant woman who returned home one day to find her mother, sister and three children sitting around the table, the decapitated head of each person placed on the table in front of the body, the hands arranged on top ‘as if each body was stroking its own head’ The

assassins, from the Salvadoran National Guard, had found it hard to keep the head of an 18-month-old baby in place, so they nailed the hands to it. A large plastic bowl filled with blood stood in the center of the table.

Two years earlier, the Salvadoran human rights group that continued to function despite the assassination of its founders and directors reported that 13 bodies had been found in the preceding two weeks, most showing signs of torture, including two women who had been hanged from a tree by their hair, their breasts cut off and their faces painted red. The discoveries were familiar, but the timing is significant, just as Washington was successfully completing the cynical exercise of exempting its murderous clients from the terms of the Central America peace accords that called for 'justice, freedom and democracy,' 'respect for human rights,' and guarantees for 'the endless inviolability of all forms of life and liberty.' The record is endless, and endlessly shocking.

Such macabre scenes, which rarely reached the mainstream in the United States, are designed for intimidation. Father Santiago writes that "People are not just killed by death squads in El Salvador—they are decapitated and then their heads are placed on pikes and used to dot the landscape. Men are not just disemboweled by Salvadoran Treasury Police; their severed genitalia are stuffed in their mouths. Salvadoran women are not just raped by the national guard; their wombs are cut from the bodies and used to cover their faces. It is not enough to kill the children; they are dragged over barbed wire until the flesh falls from their bones while parents are forced to watch."

When confronted with the fact that my own government was behind such horrors, my response was muddled. I concluded that though possibly mistaken in its historical support for those who oppressed the poor in El Salvador, the US nonetheless had to stay the course against the greatest evil in the world—the Communist menace which, as I recognized, was awakened in El Salvador as a direct consequence of the

US's prior bad policies. In other words, I openly advocated the continuation of a wrong policy to confront a threat created by that policy to begin with—a natural position for a child desperately clinging to a dogma that didn't make sense (though also a common position for adults trying to justify the worst types of crimes).

My complete and final break with my once-held belief in the inherent goodness of American foreign policy came with the realities I learned about the war in another Central American country—Nicaragua. During my freshman year of College, still under the sway of my anti-Communist ideology, I had very mixed views about Nicaragua. On the one hand, I understood that the Contras were filled with ex-members of the brutal Somoza regime, and that, true to their roots, they were gross human rights abusers. At the same time, I was skeptical of the Sandinistas for what I was told was their strong ties to the Soviet Union and its “client state,” Cuba, and for what I was led to believe was its own human rights abuses.

At the beginning of the summer of 1987, I was reading *The Nation* magazine when I saw a small ad which caught my eye: “Travel to Nicaragua. Learn about the realities of the revolution while helping Nicaragua grow on a reforestation brigade.” This was an ad placed by the Nicaragua Network which hosted regular delegations to Nicaragua.

I thought to myself that joining such a trip was what I needed to deal with my ambivalence over Nicaragua. I had to see for myself what was happening in that country. Reading opposing narratives of the Nicaraguan experience was simply not helping to resolve the conflict I was having within me over the war in Central America as well as the greater question of the real role of the United States in the world. So, I resolved to travel to Nicaragua in September—the first month of my sophomore year at the University of Dayton.

Professor Pat Donnelly, Chair of the Sociology Department, gently warned me before my trip that the enthusiasm which was motivating my adventure, though admirable in some ways, was also potentially dangerous. He strongly suggested that my enthusiasm

bordered on gullibility (which was probably true to some extent) and cautioned me to be careful lest I fall under the sway of the Sandinistas too easily.

It is said of the ground-breaking rock and roll band The Velvet Underground that while they only sold 25,000 albums in their career, everyone who bought an album started their own band as a result. A similar thing can be said of the relatively few who travelled to Nicaragua during the 1980s—they would carry the impression of Nicaragua and the revolution for the rest of their lives and would be life-long activists against US intervention abroad. This was certainly true of me.

For a guy whose only foreign trip was to the Canadian-side of Niagara Falls, Nicaragua was a jarring experience. The first night my delegation of about 12 landed in Managua, there was a black-out in the part of town where we were staying. This was a part of the daily rolling blackouts which were a consequence of the Contra war. While the Contras never controlled one centimeter in Nicaragua, and never gained anything but the most marginal support amongst the population, they were able to succeed at their chief mission—they wreaked havoc in Nicaragua, completely undermining the economy and sewing seeds of fear among the population.

Pretty early on into the war on Vietnam, the US determined that it could not “win” the war by vanquishing the liberation forces, so it instead adopted a program through which the US would bomb Vietnam back to the Stone Age, leaving the liberation forces with a pile of rubble to govern over. Similarly, the US determined that in Nicaragua, the only realistic option was that of terrorism. The goal was not to overthrow the Sandinistas—they were simply too popular and too organized to allow for that. Instead, the US would try to turn Nicaragua into an economic and social basket case—as an example of what other would-be revolutionaries in the region and around the world had to look forward to should they prevail.

Speaking to us in a small restaurant by candle-light, the Nicaragua Network representative based in Managua gave us an introduction

to our journey. She explained to us that we would be travelling by bus to Ocotal, a small town on the border with Honduras. While this was technically a “war zone,” the Sandinistas had things well in hand. Therefore, we would be safe.

She gave us a bit of background on the revolution and what the Sandinistas were trying to accomplish—including battling the huge illiteracy problem they inherited from the Somoza years, as well as bringing health care and a better standard of living to the remotest parts of the country. She explained how, in trying to accomplish these goals, the Sandinistas had made mistakes. For example, they had tried to bring development to the Mosquito coast of Nicaragua, inhabited by English-speaking members of the Mosquito Indian tribe, where they met resistance by the residents who believed that they were unduly interfering with their region and culture. The Sandinistas reacted in a heavy-handed way, which ended up backfiring. A number of those in the region ended up supporting the Contras in reaction, though the Contras proved to be so violent and abusive that much of this support had, by then, dissipated.

She also told a wonderful anecdote about Sandinista leader Tomas Borge, who was simply called “Tomas” in Nicaragua, just as Fidel Castro was known as simply, “Fidel.” Tomas was infamous in the US at that time, labeled as enemy number one by President Reagan who portrayed him as a hard-line Marxist-Leninist who would usher Communist reign into Central America if not stopped. You could say that Tomas served the same role, though on a smaller scale, as Putin does today—as the bogeyman under the bed we needed to be afraid of. In truth, he was a communist, but a Christian as well, and he was also one of the founding members of the Sandinistas back in 1962, earning his credentials as a life-long fighter against the Somoza dictatorship which the US supported until the bitter end.

Tomas was also, as I learned, “the most tortured man alive” according to Amnesty International. During the Somoza years, Tomas had been caught and captured, along with his wife, by the notorious

National Guard. As they were wont to do, either as National Guardsmen or as their later incarnation as the Contras, the soldiers raped and killed Tomas's wife in front of his eyes. They then turned to physically torturing Tomas himself, castrating him in the end. However, they made the mistake of leaving Tomas, who vowed vengeance against these soldiers, alive.

Tomas not only survived, he went on to help topple the Somoza regime in 1979. And, now, as he vowed, it was time for revenge. Shortly after the "triumph" over Somoza, Tomas learned that some of his torturers had been captured and were in prison. Tomas himself told what happened next in his book, *Christianity and Revolution: Tomas Borge's Theology of Life*: "[a]fter having been brutally tortured as a prisoner, after having a hood placed over my head for nine months, after having been handcuffed for seven months, I remember that when we captured these torturers I told them: 'The hour of my revenge has come: we will not do you even the slightest harm. You did not believe us beforehand; now you will believe us.' That is our philosophy, our way of being."

Borge then approached the man and hugged him, telling him that, for his punishment for torturing not only he and his family, but many of his fellow Nicaraguans, he was to be let free—free to see the Nicaraguans he had kept down for so many years learn to read and write and prosper. With tears streaming down his face, as well as that of the prisoner, Borge swung the gate of the cell open and ushered the man to walk out free into the streets.

It was this act of forgiveness and humanity by the "hardliner" Tomas Borge which characterized the Sandinista revolution. The Sandinistas, having studied and learned from the lessons and mistakes of the Soviet, Chinese and Cuban revolutions, and being motivated by the radical Christianity of Liberation Theology, were resolved to be different. No firing squads would they set up for the Somocistas. Rather, one of the first acts of the Sandinistas was to abolish the death penalty altogether.

The US would take advantage of the decency and benevolence of

the Sandinistas to undermine them. Right after the fall of the Somoza dictatorship, then-President Jimmy Carter airlifted hundreds of National Guardsmen to Honduras. These would later be organized by the CIA under Reagan as the Contras, a terrorist organization which would plague Nicaragua for years to come.

While I was in Octotal, a young man in the town was ambushed and murdered by the Contras, and my delegation was invited to the funeral. I stood by the father of the slain man near his grave, and as we put our arms around each other, I apologized for his son's death, which was just as surely the fault of my country as anyone's. I knew then that I would never think of the world quite in the same way again.

Meanwhile, even in a war zone, I saw very few soldiers of any kind. The few Sandinista soldiers I did see were armed with guitars as they serenaded the community from a balcony in the town square. I did see one Cuban soldier. He stood out as a towering, handsome figure. I also recall after seeing him, I asked a Nicaraguan in a community meeting we attended in Ocotal, "Aren't you afraid of the Cubans taking over Nicaragua; of the 'Cubanization' of Nicaragua," as Reagan termed it. This question was not only prompted by my encounter with the Cuban soldier but also what I had been taught by my dad and my government to fear in Nicaragua.

The answer to my question, though, was as direct as it was simple: "No, we are not worried about that. The Cubans are sending us teachers and doctors to help us. They don't try to influence our country; they just give us aid that we otherwise would not have. They are our brothers." This made a huge impression on me, and I began to wonder if in fact I had been hoodwinked about the true nature of my country's role in the world. And, indeed, the much-maligned Cuba continues to offer its "brotherhood" throughout the world, providing medical assistance to over 70 countries.

Sandinista guerrilla Omar Cabezas, in his memoir *Fire From The Mountain*, a book many of us were reading in the 1980's, recounts one of the galvanizing events of the revolutionary insurgency—an event,

as he notes, which was foolishly broadcast on nation-wide TV. As the whole nation watched, the repressive National Guard—a force created by the US to keep the Somoza dictatorship in power—surrounded the hideout of a group of top-level Sandinista insurgents, including the legendary Comandante Julio Buitrago. Cabezas, in a wonderful passage which deserves quoting, especially since his book is no longer in print, recounts how Comandante Julio wowed the nation by holding off the Guard single-handedly from a small house he was trapped in:

We couldn't take our eyes off the screen We saw the barrel of Julio's submachine gun at the balcony window, and the smoke of the gun bursts when he fired back. Then he was at the basement window, or at another window on the first floor, or at the door of the second floor that opened onto the street. Then suddenly Julio wasn't anywhere to be seen, and the Guard wasn't moving, and nobody was firing. The officers of the Guard were conferring outside. The Guard started advancing on the house. Then, Julio suddenly appeared, shooting from one of those places I mentioned, and the Guardsmen turned tail and shot off running in the other direction. . . .

There was a long silence . . . then the tank opened fire. Our eyes practically popped out of our heads when the tank shattered the wall, exploding it to pieces. 'Maybe they haven't hit him,' we said, 'maybe they haven't . . . ' When the tank stopped firing you could see the officers screaming for their men to advance on the house. Nobody answered from inside, and when the Guardsmen got really close, Julio started shooting. And the Guardsmen turned tail again, and the tank opened fire again, and it was the same thing all over. An endless silence followed. A small plane appeared. Then all hell broke loose—the whole Guard started shooting, and the tank, and the plane, almost grazing the roof, and in a matter of seconds the house was a pile of rubble. . . . We couldn't imagine how Julio could possibly be alive. But the Guardsmen were ducking; Julio's bullets were zinging past them; they fell down wounded; and then suddenly

something happened that moved us very much: we saw Julio come bursting through the front door, running and firing his submachine gun, and seconds later he started to double over; still firing he doubled over a little more, firing and doubling over until he fell to the ground. We felt like crying, but at the same time we felt that we had an indestructible force. . . .

You can bet that every last person in Nicaragua with a TV set saw it. And people without a set saw it too, because Somoza was stupid enough to keep showing it for several days on television. People went over to their neighbors' to see it. They saw the Guardsmen shaking in their boots; they heard them screaming through megaphones for Julio to surrender. They saw the tanks—I remember now, there were two tanks. One plane and two helicopters. And Julio, all by himself.

It was such a heroic act, a true example of David versus Goliath, that helped to galvanize the Nicaraguan people against the Somoza dictatorship—a dictatorship which the US had installed and supported even beyond the dictatorship's end.

The David/Goliath myth is maybe one of the most over-used and misused myths, especially by the United States. I cannot emphasize too much how the US, despite its many times claiming to be a David fighting in the face of Goliath, has, with very few and quite remote exceptions, never in fact been, or even supported, the David in biblical battles.

Rather, as in the case of Nicaragua, it was clear to me that the US, which always portrays itself as the underdog in a world of bullies set upon its destruction, has been the Goliath trying to crush David by sheer, overpowering violence. Sometimes the US is the Goliath wielding the club, and other times, it is supporting mini-Goliaths, like Somoza, in attempting to vanquish the Davids. In Nicaragua, David, in the form of everyday people, sometimes wielding only bricks and stones against National Guardsmen armed by the US with machine guns and tanks and airplanes, was the victor. And the US

simply could not tolerate such a result—thus, its support of the murderous Contras.

It was just such a realization, which Nicaragua gave me in spades, that led me to the realization, as Malcolm X famously stated, in words he could have said to me: “You’ve been hood-winked, you’ve been tricked, you’ve been bamboozled.” I would never be the same. It now dawned on me that, as Martin Luther King said much better than I could in denouncing the US war in Vietnam, “The US is on the wrong side of the world-wide revolution.” Daniel Ellsberg, the former RAND Corporation analyst who leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1971, went even further, saying, “The US is not on the wrong side; it is the wrong side.”

Of course, the strong implication being that the Soviet Union, which was supporting the liberation struggles we were trying to suppress, was on the right side. Indeed, King said in the same speech, without actually endorsing communism, that, nonetheless, “Communism is a judgment against the US way of life; against its materialism, against the poverty it tolerates in the face of great wealth, against its constant insistence on war, and against our failure to make democracy real and follow through on the revolutions that we initiated.” As he explained, “[I]t is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the anti-revolutionaries.” This is undeniably true. A speech that I heard Hugo Chavez give at a meeting in Caracas in July of 2010 comes to mind. He said something that seemed quite profound to me and which has stuck with me ever since: that the 20th Century was not “The American Century” at all as the US claims, but it was indeed the Century of Revolution—for example, the Mexican, Russian, Chinese, Cuban, Vietnamese and Nicaraguan Revolutions—and the US violently opposed every single one of these.

I would soon come to realize that the Cold War, at least from the vantage point of the US, had little to do with fighting “Communism,”

and more to do with making the world safe for corporate plunder. As I describe further below, the US would, for example, destroy democracy in Guatemala in order to protect United Fruit's interests there; overthrow a secular, democratic government in Iran to protect Western oil interests; and overthrow the oldest Constitutional democracy in Latin America—Chile—in the interest of numerous corporate interests there, such as the International Telephone & Telegraph Company (ITT). And, the US would do so all in the name of fighting communism and protecting democracy.

One bit of evidence that the *casus belli* of the Cold War was mere pretext was that the US was up to the very same type of Third World interventions even before Russia's 1917 Revolution. As Major Smedley Butler, the commander of a Marine unit landing in Nicaragua in 1909 and 1912, opined after his years of US military service,

I spent years being a high class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1902-1912. I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1916. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for National City (Bank) boys to collect revenue in. I helped in the rape of a half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.

This struggle to make the world safe for American business predated communism and has continued well after it—the “enemies” justifying this struggle have shifted and changed, but the goal has always remained constant. John Perkins, in his book *Confessions of An Economic Hit Man*, would indeed reiterate almost an identical story to Smedley Butler's in his modern recounting of his years working for the consulting firm of Chas T. Main, acting jointly with the National Security Agency. He explains how he and other Economic Hit Men helped pave

the way for corporate penetration of the Third World through all sorts of chicanery, including financial manipulation, rigged elections, sexual extortion and even murder. As Perkins relates, if such tactics failed, it was then up to the “jackals” of the CIA to come in and actually forcibly overthrow the target government.

I began to seriously question which side I should be rooting for in the Cold War struggle. I was impressed with the Soviet support of Nicaragua, for example its sending huge ships of humanitarian aid and then leaving the ships as well for the Nicaraguans. Of course, the Soviet support of Nicaragua would come at a huge price, for it would be just the justification the US needed to support a counter-revolutionary war there. And, indeed, Fidel Castro had warned Daniel Ortega of just this problem shortly after the Sandinistas took power. He told Ortega, from his own very difficult experience, not to cozy up too close to the Soviets. While Ortega tried at first, it became impossible at some point, for, as was the case in Vietnam, the US began to destabilize Nicaragua—mining its harbors, engaging in targeted assassinations, and cutting it off internationally—even before Nicaragua turned to the Soviets for help.

And the US continued such destabilization efforts well after the Soviets cared anymore about such far-flung nations. As I learned later from reading Chomsky, this was a common tactic of the US: while claiming it wanted to keep countries out of the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, it actually pushed newly liberated countries into the Soviet camp in order to justify violent retaliation against them. A classic case of this was Vietnam which, as I detail further below, would have gladly partnered with the US in lieu of the Soviet Union to throw off French Colonialism, but was unpleasantly surprised when the US, true to MLK’s words, intervened on the side of the French, and then took over for the French, to prevent Vietnamese independence.

In the end, the Contras managed to do much damage to the Nicaraguan people, with around 50,000 Nicaraguans killed during the Contra war (out of a population then of less than 3 million), along with

much civilian infrastructure—which the Contras specifically targeted—destroyed. Just to give you a bit of flavor of what the Contras—whom Reagan termed “freedom fighters”—were up to in Nicaragua, here is a quote from former CIA agent John Stockwell, which I listened to many times on that old cassette tape I mentioned above:

I don't mean to abuse you with verbal violence, but you have to understand what your government and its agents are doing. They [the Contras] go into villages, they haul out families. With the children forced to watch they castrate the father, they peel the skin off his face, they put a grenade in his mouth and pull the pin. With the children forced to watch they gang-rape the mother, and slash her breasts off. And sometimes for variety, they make the parents watch while they do these things to the children.¹²

President Reagan justified supporting these terrorists based upon his claim that we could not allow a Soviet beachhead a mere two-day drive (it's actually about a five-day drive, as I know from having driven there in 1988) from the Texas border. Reagan was even willing—after Congress pulled the plug on funding to the Contras through passage of the Boland Amendment in 1982, and then again in 1984, based upon concerns over the Contras' horrible human rights practices—to continue funding them illegally. His Administration hatched the brilliant plan of selling arms to Iran in return for cash which could then be used to fund the Contras. This was a particularly cynical move given that Reagan claimed Iran was a terrorist state and a threat to national security. Moreover, during the period in which this exchange took place, Iran was at war with our ally Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, whom we were also arming. In other words, the US ended up arming both sides of a brutal armed conflict for the purpose of supplying arms for another brutal armed conflict in Central America. And for what reason?

Certainly by the time I was in Nicaragua, the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev was pulling far back from foreign interventions

and calling for nuclear disarmament and détente with the US. By 1988, the USSR began withdrawing from Afghanistan.

The USSR had even abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine by the early 1980s. Pursuant to this Doctrine, the USSR took the position that it had the prerogative to intervene militarily in any Communist bloc country in order to keep the government in power, and consequently, to preserve the security of the Warsaw Pact countries as well as the Soviet Union. This Doctrine was most famously put into action in 1968, when Brezhnev sent troops into Czechoslovakia to put down the reform government there and to nip the “Prague Spring” in the bud. The “Prague Spring” was a reform movement that aspired to continue socialism, but with a “human face.” Brezhnev feared that if this sentiment spread, the whole East Bloc might fall. In the end, the Soviet invasion of 1968 probably did more to quicken the end of the East Bloc than it did to prevent it. Given that I am Slovak and happened to be born in 1968, these events were always of great interest to me.

To this day, it should be emphasized, the US continues to reaffirm the Monroe Doctrine, pursuant to which it views Latin America as its “backyard,” in which it can intervene at any time to protect what it views as its interests.¹³ It also continues to abide by the (Jimmy) Carter Doctrine—indeed with reckless abandon—pursuant to which the US maintains the right to intervene in the Middle East at any time to protect its access to, or even control over, world oil supplies.

In the end, Poland, Hungary and East Germany peacefully left the Soviet orbit entirely by 1989, with Gorbachev making no move to keep them in. In light of the fact that the Soviet Union would not even intervene to protect its interests in Eastern Europe, it was obvious that they would not do so in Central America either. Therefore, the whole basis for the Contra War—fighting international Soviet aggression—seemed to be just a mere pretext for a cruel policy of keeping a poor country from pursuing its own path to liberation and development.

I should note that my feelings about the Nicaraguan conflict have

now been validated, as the Sandinistas whom we were fighting are now in power, and we get along with them just fine. Indeed, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas is the most stable and peaceful country in Central America, and is therefore not a source of refugees fleeing to the US, as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the US has never made reparations to Nicaragua for its terrorist war, and also for its mining of the Nicaraguan harbors (which, by the way, the US never even warned its allies about), as ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).¹⁵ One might recall that Nicaragua brought a case against the US before the ICJ—also known as the World Court, and created by the UN Charter for the peaceful resolution of international disputes—in the mid-1980s. The US, believing that international law is only for the weak and not for great countries like itself, did not even deign to show up to defend itself. The ICJ therefore proceeded with a hearing and rendered a judgment against the US *in absentia*, finding that the US had engaged in an unlawful act of aggression against Nicaragua, without any valid claim to self-defense or any other proper justification. The ICJ therefore found the US in violation of international law, including its bi-lateral treaty obligations with Nicaragua itself.

Soon after the judgment against it, the US withdrew from the jurisdiction of the ICJ altogether, making it clear to the world that while it would enforce its own version of justice throughout the world, and violently when it decided to do so, it would not be subject to any form of justice itself. Recall also that the US is not a party to the International Criminal Court (ICC)¹⁶—which, at least from experience so far, appears to only prosecute African countries—for the very same reasons.

While it may not seem so at first blush, the Nicaraguan Contra War is very relevant to many aspects of the current discussion of the Russian hacking claims, which has now blossomed into a full-blown scandal.

First of all, the Contra War demonstrated how much US government

officials—particularly in the CIA, which is one of the chief protagonists in the current “Russia-gate” saga—are willing to debase themselves, to lie and to undermine the security and well-being of American citizens, to pursue their own agenda. In the case of the Contra War, this agenda was greatly motivated by the old Cold War, while the current claims about Russian hacking are motivated by the new Cold War.

And so, in the case of the old Contra War, what we have known for a long time is that, to support terrorists in order to undermine a tiny, poor country in Central America, the US government was willing not only to illegally sell weapons to Iran, but was also willing to play a role in selling drugs to our fellow citizens, particularly poor and Black citizens. As Greg Grandin in *The Nation* recently wrote, “the Contras, backed by Ronald Reagan’s White House [and CIA], were turning Central America into a transshipment point for Colombian cocaine, using the drug revenues to fund their war on the Sandinistas” after the US Congress cut off funding due to human rights concerns.¹⁷ This cocaine was then sold in the US and “helped kick off South Central Los Angeles’ crack epidemic.”

Many will remember—and a recent Hollywood movie called *Kill The Messenger*, made by and starring everyone’s least favorite Avenger, Jeremy Renner, reminds us—that this Contra cocaine scandal was most famously brought to light by the very brave journalist Garry Webb in his 1996 series, *Dark Alliance*. However, as Greg Grandin points out, Webb was not the first person to reveal these allegations. Earlier, in the 1980s, Robert Parry and Brian Berger reported on the story for the AP, and the allegations were then picked up by then-freshman Senator John Kerry, who in 1988 released an “extensively documented committee report” which demonstrated the truthfulness of these allegations. However, despite such strong, independent support for Webb’s claims, the mainstream press, led by the *New York Times*, went after Garry Webb in an aggressive campaign to try to debunk his story and assassinate his character, ultimately driving Mr. Webb to suicide.¹⁸

In the end, Webb was right, even more right than he knew, but

even to this day, the job done on him by the mainstream media lingers in the public's mind, leading many to believe that the Contra cocaine story was not true.

This is a relevant part of the story as well, for the new Cold War—or Red Scare (without the reds, of course)—and the Russian hacking story that is a small part of it, is being pushed hard, and nearly unanimously, by the mainstream press, which, for reasons that I do not fully grasp, is heavily invested in it. There is no room for debate on this issue. There is only one side of the story: Vladimir Putin is a demon; Russia is a rising giant set out to dominate the globe; Hillary Clinton lost the election because of Putin; and the US—the eternal victim of Russia (and now China too)—is just doing its level best to spread freedom and democracy around the world despite the best efforts of countries like Russia to stop it.

None of this story is true, and indeed, it is demonstrably false. But again, like the Contra cocaine story, the truth has been so submerged in lies that it is hard for it to see the light of day.

And, as in the greater Nicaraguan Contra story, it is Russia that is again assigned its typecast role as the bad guy in this story, and the foil on whom we can feel free to blame all of our collective failings. By raising the specter of Russia and the new Cold War, the government and media are tapping into deep-seated feelings that were hammered into us during the first Cold War, and that is why it is so easy to get people on board the latest Russia-baiting campaign. And that is why the old Cold War must be scrutinized as well.

I came to the understanding at a pretty young age that the old Cold War fears and hatred allowed the US to get away with the worst of crimes. Thus, after WWII, the US decided that, in order to gain advantage in its struggle against the Soviet Union and the East Block, it would partner with the most unsavory forces in the world—right-wing dictatorships, terrorist groups, and even neo-Nazis.

And, of course, the US courted the possibility of nuclear conflagration in this struggle as well, continuing to press forward with planning

and building the capacity to launch a nuclear first strike against the USSR while still being able to “win” the war. Reagan’s “Star Wars” program—the idea for which apparently came from the Death Star in the Star Wars films—was greatly feared as, in fact, a means to have such first strike capability. This program, which was developed by Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb and one of the inspirations for Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* character,¹⁹ was hoped to be able to allow the US to be shielded from oncoming nuclear missiles from the USSR while allowing the US to have a free shot at Russia with its weapons. Of course, even if such a project worked, the US would still suffer great casualties. But, as a recent article on recently-declassified documents shows, US officials were willing to take this risk. Thus, these documents reveal that, again reminiscent of the movie *Dr. Strangelove*, top US officials believed that a nuclear war that resulted in the deaths of 200 million Americans would still be a “victory,” for we would still have as many Americans as we did at the time of the Civil War.²⁰

The current demonization of Russia under Vladimir Putin, which has now broken out into a revived Cold War, is again putting the US and the world at equally great risk. Indeed, this is not just my belief. As was widely reported earlier this year, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the “Doomsday Clock,” the symbol created in 1947 to illustrate the danger of nuclear annihilation, ahead to two-and-a-half minutes to midnight.²¹ This is the closest to midnight we have been since 1953. In addition to the climate change crisis, the Bulletin cited increased tensions between Russia and the US, which together possess 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons, as the reason it was moving the clock ahead. In short, the Bulletin “says we are at the most dangerous moment since the height of the Cold War.”²²

Such alarm is certainly warranted. As investigative journalist Robert Parry explains, “[o]fficial Washington’s Russia hysteria has reached such proportions that *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman has even compared the alleged Russian hacking of Democratic emails

to Pearl Harbor and 9/11, two incidents that led the United States into violent warfare.”²³

This is obviously quite alarming, and it is of course meant to be.

Given the high stakes implicated by the new Cold War, and the subsidiary Russian hacking story, some rational thought on these issues, which I at least hope to give here, is certainly in order.