

# CORPORATE FAKE NEWS BEAT IN NICARAGUA

Media outlets like the *Guardian*, **NPR**, **BBC** and *The Washington Post* feign objectivity before their readers, presenting themselves as arbiters of truth in an era of fake news. However, in countries where Washington is pushing regime change, these same outlets have dispatched a corps of writers to embed with U.S.-backed opposition elements, provide them with publicity, and sell their goals back to the American public. Carl David Goette-Luciak is one of clearest embodiments of the disturbing trend.

An investigation for *MintPress* reveals that Goette-Luciak has forged intimate ties to the opposition, and has essentially functioned as its publicist under journalistic cover. Having claimed to work in the past as an anthropologist and “human rights defender,” Goette-Luciak operated side-by-side with activists from a U.S.-backed opposition party known as the Sandinista Renovation Movement. MRS is a U.S. government-funded organization supplied with millions of dollars worth of election assistance, and continues to fund its activists by funding their NGO’s and social media training.

Goette-Luciak lists himself as “director of investigations” for an obscure outlet called Radio Ciudadana that was founded a month before the chaos erupted last April. That outlet’s founder, Azucena “Chena” Castillo, is an outspoken member of the MRS party who has devoted herself to the government’s overthrow. Goette-Luciak’s social-media profile reveals intimate ties to numerous MRS leaders and, in a recently deleted podcast interview, he has described his own work to encourage indigenous opposition to the Sandinista front.

Prior to the unrest that swept across Nicaragua last April, there was little record of Goette-Luciak’s presence as a writer or journalist. He had written one piece for NPR on how Nicaraguans were not as happy as the World Happiness Report said they were. His co-author was Carlos Salinas Maldonado, a writer for the opposition magazine *Confidencial*, which is funded by the U.S. government’s regime-change arm, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Open Society Foundation.

In his byline, Goette-Luciak described himself as “an anthropologist in Managua.” He was listed in conference papers as a graduate student at the University of Virginia around that time, focusing his work on the Rama-Kriol and Miskito populations of Nicaragua’s eastern coast. These indigenous groups have been at loggerheads with the Sandinista movement since the civil war in the 1980’s, when the CIA cultivated them as U.S. allies. Ronald Reagan made the relationship a centerpiece of his administration’s Cold War crusade when he declared in a 1985 speech,

**“I am ... a Miskito Indian. I too, am a potential victim of totalitarianism.”**

A U.S. embassy cable — revealingly entitled, “MRS: We Want To Bring Ortega Down” — laid out some of those plans 12 years ago. Authored by U.S. Ambassador Paul Trivelli, the cable described a meeting between the ambassador and Israel Lewites, the nephew of MRS presidential candidate Herty Lewites, who had just died from a heart attack. Trivelli confirmed direct U.S. government support for the 2006 MRS election campaign, noting that 30 percent of its election

observers had been trained by the International Republican Institute, a U.S.-funded, Republican Party-run soft-power organization overseen by then-Sen. **John McCain**. “In all, the U.S. government contributed a whopping \$12 million in 2006 towards “election technical assistance, outreach, and observation” in Nicaragua’s election. In other words, it spent two dollars for every Nicaraguan citizen to defeat Ortega.

The MRS ultimately failed to prevent Ortega’s victory and wound up reaching out to the U.S. again as its domestic support base collapsed. In 2016, the MRS joined a delegation to lobby in Washington for the Nica Act, a bill proposing crushing sanctions on Nicaragua, posing on Capitol Hill alongside a cast of U.S.-backed activists and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a neoconservative Cuban-American Republican who was the main author of the sanctions bill.

MRS activists were at the forefront of the 2018 coup attempt that recently sought Ortega’s removal. Several participants in the protests described witnessing MRS leaders providing truck loads of supplies for opposition forces occupying university campuses. While the MRS performed its historic role as the knife in the FSLN’s back, it supplied Western media with a cast of English-speaking voices demanding regime change in the name of supposedly progressive values. Its most prominent voice was Gioconda Belli, an affluent U.S.-based poet and professional former Sandinista, who took to mainstream U.S. outlets to paint Ortega as a murderous dictator, as she has done for years. (Belli’s brother, Humberto, is a Catholic priest affiliated with the far-right Opus Dei cult and a client of the militantly anti-abortion American tycoon Tom Monaghan).

Another record of Goette-Luciak’s photojournalism existed at the Edge of Adventure website, which had published about 20 images he captured — one of which depicted him posing with an opposition gunman. The Edge of Adventure is a little-known media site founded by Adam Asher Wattenbarger, a self-styled travel journalist who is listed as an executive at the right-wing, Christian-oriented Salem Media Group.

This month, Goette-Luciak fell under sustained criticism from Sandinista supporters on Facebook for his one-sided coverage of the country’s political crisis. Many accused him of operating as a U.S. intelligence asset. The Edge of Adventure promptly deleted its podcast interview with him and scrubbed most of his photos from the site. Goette-Luciak then began cleaning up his own Facebook page, deleting his selfies with MRS party leaders.

Goette-Luciak also described to the Edge of Adventure having witnessed the so-called Mother’s Day Massacre, where several demonstrators commemorating those who had already died in the unrest were killed on May 30. The bloodshed that took place that day remains a source of heated contention. Violence had erupted across the country, with the opposition opening fire on a Sandinista caravan in the city of Esteli, killing one and wounding dozens. Opposition vandals burned the leftist Radio Ya station for the third time as well as parts of Managua’s Metrocentro complex. Videos show opposition gunmen opening fire that day on the streets of Managua and toting weapons near the Mother’s Day march. The opposition and Western media placed the blame squarely on Sandinista-affiliated elements for

sniping into the crowd of marchers, but have yet to produce clear evidence proving their case.

Speaking to the Edge of Adventure, Goette-Luciak conceded that he had left the march and was several blocks away drinking a beer when the shooting began. He said he returned after he heard shooting. “I witnessed two deaths. A young man standing a few yards from me was hit by a bullet in the head, and standing behind him, what I saw was the back of his head explode like a watermelon that got dropped.” Hours after the violence, a ferociously anti-government network known as “100% Noticias” published a grisly photo of a man supposedly killed by government forces whose brain was spilling out of his skull. The image was soon exposed as a fake and has since been deleted. In fact, it depicted a death from a separate conflict and had been taken years before.

Though Goette-Luciak said he had taken photos of the march, he has yet to publish any of the killings he said he witnessed. In a separate incident this June, Goette-Luciak appeared momentarily in a highly disturbing video filmed by *100% Noticias*. He could be seen taking photos of a mob of opposition thugs in the act of kidnapping and beating an aging Sandinista member they had found squatting on a local oligarch’s abandoned property. Oddly, Goette-Luciak published no photos of the incident and did not report on it.

There was virtually no mention of the opposition’s ongoing campaign of terror in Goette-Luciak’s June 23 report for *The Washington Post*, which he co-authored with Caroline Houck staff correspondent for the of the arms industry-funded web-site Defense One. There the gunmen are painted as valiant resistance fighters, promoting their call for the U.S. to send them heavy weapons: “Several asked a reporter whether President Trump would send support to the resistance,” he wrote.

On September 7, Goette-Luciak published an article in the *Guardian* claiming that the country had been brought to a virtual halt by a general strike by the anti-government Civic Alliance umbrella group. The Nicaraguan-born activist Camilo Mejia pointed out that contrary to the claim that the Civic Alliance interrupted the country’s economy with its general strike, Managua marketplaces were bustling that day and commerce proceeded as usual. As Mejia noted, the opposition had only managed to close the high-end businesses that supported its regime-change agenda.

The out-of-the-blue emergence of figures like Goette-Luciak as correspondents for legacy Western publications can not be viewed as an aberration or mistake. In Nicaragua, as in so many other countries targeted with regime-change operations, outlets like the *Guardian*, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* seem to demand on-the-ground coverage that reinforces the regime-change agenda. And so they credentialled opposition publicists as journalists, instilling in them the illusion of their own professionalism. “I think I’ve come to realize the value of objective and impartial journalism,” Goette-Luciak said in his Edge of Adventure interview, “and I no longer consider myself as an activist for or against any particular cause.”

**-Max Blumenthal  
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