

RUSSIA FOREIGN POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA  
— CASE STUDY OF NICARAGUA

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

RUSSIA FOREIGN POLICY IN LATIN-AMERICA — CASE STUDY OF NICARAGUA, by Major Marc-André Watier, 67 pages.

In recent years under President Putin, the world saw Russia being highly active and aggressive in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Russian activities are not limited to those very high-profile regions. The Western Hemisphere is also an area of interest to Russia as it shows an interest in the newly open arctic channel in the North and in reviving diplomatic contacts and military exercises in Latin America. In Central America specifically, Russia is actively developing its relations with Nicaragua on the military, economic and diplomatic fronts raising the question whether Russia intends to insert itself openly in the United States' backyard.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Primary Research Question.....	5
Secondary Research Question.....	5
Importance of the Research .....	5
Qualifications.....	6
Limitations .....	7
Delimitations.....	8
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
Historical Background and Context.....	9
Theory of instruments of national power - DIME .....	12
Current Russian strategy.....	12
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	19
Case Study .....	20
Historical research .....	21
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS .....	22
Historical Background and Context.....	22
Soviet Union Strategy for Nicaragua during the Cold War.....	29
Instruments of National Power .....	34
Diplomacy.....	35
Information .....	36
Military .....	37
Economy .....	38
Current Russian Strategy for Latin America. ....	38
Current Russian Strategy for Nicaragua .....	41

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....	50
Russia's present objectives .....	51
Russia' strategic objectives in Latin-America .....	52
Recommendations.....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	55

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Cold War Perception.....	27
Figure 2. The Cold War in Latin America .....	29
Figure 3. Russian President Vladimir Putin is pictured meeting his Nicaraguan counterpart, Daniel Ortega.....	36
Figure 4. Nicaragua Canal Project .....	42
Figure 5. Russian Bomber Stops in 2013 .....	45
Figure 6. Russia and NATO posturing in Baltic Area .....	47
Figure 7. Russia seeks access to Bases in eight countries for its Ships and Bombers. ...	49



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years under President Putin, the world saw Russia being highly active and aggressive in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Russian activities are not limited to those very high-profile regions. The Western Hemisphere is also an area of interest to Russia as shown by interest in the newly open arctic channel in the North and in reviving diplomatic contacts and military exercises in Latin America. In Central America specifically, Russia is actively developing its relations with Nicaragua on the military, economic and diplomatic fronts raising the question whether Russia intends to insert itself openly in the United States' backyard.

The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 introduced a new unipolar international system with the United States of America (USA) as the dominating power. The First Gulf War in the Middle East was a clear demonstration of that new world order. Operation Desert Storm showed unrivaled US military and diplomatic capabilities to the world community.

A decade later, following the World Trade Center Attack in 2001, the USA initiated two major military operations to take down hostiles regimes, the Taliban's in Afghanistan in 2001 and Saddam Hussain's government in Iraq in 2003. Those two operations were successful initially to topple down those governments. However, they resulted in a long and arduous campaign that lasted over ten years, ending without a clear and unquestionable victory, eroding the US centric unipolar world order, and opening opportunities for challengers of the so-called order.

When the Obama administration pulled out troops from Iraq and a very unstable Middle East, some aspiring powers saw an opportunity to directly challenge that world order. “We are entering a period of unprecedented threat to the international order that has prevailed under American leadership since 1945. After eight years of President Obama’s retreat, the three major revisionist powers — Russia, China and Iran — see their chance to achieve regional dominance and diminish, if not expel, U.S. influence.”<sup>1</sup>

While Russia under President Vladimir Putin openly challenges US power in Eastern Europe and Middle East, it is also doing so in other regions of the world, such as the Western Hemisphere and Latin America. “Tensions between Washington and Moscow have intensified as Putin has pushed back hard against US power globally over the last eight years, annexing Crimea, sustaining a low-level conflict in eastern Ukraine, threatening NATO allies in the Baltics and backing Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, whom the US opposes.”<sup>2</sup>

### Problem Statement

While the Russian posture is clear in regard to some countries like Ukraine and Georgia in Eastern Europe and Syria in the Middle East, it is far less evident in Latin America. The Pan-American Post cited Luis Fleischmann, a consultant for the Center for

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “Final Days, Awful Choice,” *Washington Post*, 3 November 2016, accessed 7 November 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/final-days-awful-choice/2016/11/03/bd052402-a1dd-11e6-a44d-cc2898cfab06\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_no-name\\_opinion-card-c%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.95f79cae8805](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/final-days-awful-choice/2016/11/03/bd052402-a1dd-11e6-a44d-cc2898cfab06_story.html?hpid=hp_no-name_opinion-card-c%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.95f79cae8805).

<sup>2</sup> Nicole Gaouette and Elise Labott, “The Next US President Faces a World of Trouble,” *CNN*, updated 5 November 2016, accessed 7 November 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/05/politics/next-us-president-global-challenges>.

Security Policy as saying, “Given that Russia sees itself as a competing empire to the United States and the West, it is logical for it to aim to expand its influence in countries that have traditionally belonged to the U.S. sphere of influence.” Fleischmann believes his theory was strengthened after Putin’s last visit to Latin America. “The president focused on countries that are hostile (Cuba and Nicaragua), aspire to minimize U.S. influence in the region (Argentina) or jealously compete with the United States for global status (Brazil).”<sup>3</sup>

Another major player that challenges the unipolar world, China, showing great interest, mostly on the economic front, in Latin America. China wants to create this corridor exclusively per its own national rules and principles, a desire that is unlikely to find enthusiastic support from other participants. Undoubtedly, a discussion about the rules of the game will emerge about such promising logistics spaces as the Nicaragua Canal and the Northern Sea Route.<sup>4</sup>

Nicaragua revealed a plan to construct an artificial canal to compete against the Panama Canal. The canal has not yet started construction but is scheduled to be operational in 2019 and fully completed in 2029. Private interests in Hong Kong and China plan to pay for the Canal, and Russia plans to assure its security. Surely this

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Dolan, “Opinion: Russian Tank Deal with Nicaragua ‘Back to the Future’ Moment for US,” *USNI News*, 9 May 2016, accessed 9 November 2016, <https://news.usni.org/2016/05/09/opinion-russian-tank-deal-with-nicaragua-back-to-the-future-moment-for-u-s>.

<sup>4</sup> Dmitry Yevstafiev, “Caught in the Web of Archaic Policies,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, 17 June 2016, accessed 9 November 2016, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Caught-in-the-Web-of-Archaic-Policies-18244>.

contentious project involving two major powers right in the US backyard will arguably become an area of concern for the United States.

In April 2016, Nicaragua purchased 50 Main Battle Tanks T72B1 from Russia for 80 Million Dollars (a price that is higher than Nicaragua's annual defense budget), to allegedly fight against drug trafficking.<sup>5</sup> Considering the Cartels could easily buy anti-Tank Weapons for a fraction of the price of those T-72, the invoked reason of buying those tanks is questionable.

The Russian Foreign Affair policy is clear regarding of its stance toward Latin America. Russia will continue to comprehensively strengthen relations with the Latin American and Caribbean countries, given the region's growing role in world affairs. The development of strategic cooperation with Brazil, including within the framework of BRICS, as well as partnership relations with Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and other Latin American and Caribbean states will be focused on expanding political interaction, promoting trade, economic, investment, innovation, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, combined responses to new threats and challenges, securing the position of Russian companies in dynamically developing industrial, energy, communications and transport sectors of the region's economies.<sup>6</sup>

Russia will seek to consolidate its ties with Latin American partners at international and regional forums, expanding cooperation with multilateral organizations

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<sup>5</sup> Dolan, "Opinion: Russian Tank Deal."

<sup>6</sup> Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, "Key Foreign Policy Outcomes for 2016," 2016, Russian Foreign Policy, accessed 9 February 2017, <https://russiaeu.ru/en/russian-foreign-policy>.

in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Southern Common Market.

#### Primary Research Question

The international environment is highly complex, making every decision and action very important considering the potential global impacts they may have. It is crucial to understand Russian policy and objectives toward the region of Latin America. The research proposes the following as the Primary Research Question: What are Russia's strategic objectives in Latin-America?

#### Secondary Research Question

To adequately answer the primary research question, the project needs to clarify and understand two additional secondary research questions.

The first one will be focusing on the case of Nicaragua and will aimed at highlighting Russians strategic objectives towards Nicaragua. From those, we will be able to extrapolate to the entire region.

The second question will establish an historical reference point by describing the Soviet era strategic objective for Nicaragua and Latin America and see if they are comparable with present day Russian objectives.

#### Importance of the Research

The importance of this research to understand Russian posture in the international environment is crucial to adopt a comprehensive and effective approach toward its ambition. The Russian invasion in Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 showed that Russia's will to support its national's interests cannot be underestimated.

That new posture will clearly affect the diplomatic, economic and the military relations in all regions of the globe. That understanding is key to validate the US regional strategy and if necessary to adapt it. The area of Latin America may not be the current main effort of the Russia and USA but recent history of Russia in Eastern Europe and Middle East under President Putin show that he tends to learn and exploit any small success into subsequent operations. Therefore, a successful intrusion in Central America may provide an opening to pursue that approach.

### Qualifications

The researcher is qualified to answer those questions based on two factors. The first one is the original field of studies for his bachelor degree. He studied in political sciences with a focus in international relations. That diploma exposed him to the basic theories of political science, both in theory and in application. Second, these studies have refined the interest and passion toward international politics. He maintained that passion since then and has been continuously trying to keep up to date with politics on the international scene. That high interest toward those questions allowed him to be sent to an Advance Combat Arms Intelligence Officer Course early in his career. After his platoon command and his first deployment in Bosnia, he became an Infantry Battalion S2 for a year before being deployed in Afghanistan for the first time.

That year as S2 (Intelligence Officer) allowed him to be deployed as a liaison officer for a multinational brigade in Kabul during which he was exposed to operational and strategic level matters in the slowly emerging Afghan government and National Army.

Recently, being posted to the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security and Cooperation (WHINSEC) allowed him to be exposed to many Latin American points of views. This exposure allowed him to get an additional understanding the regional dynamics. Especially the recent discussions with colleagues from Costa-Rica and Panama deepened the understanding of their countries' mutual interests and preoccupation. That preoccupation is centered toward that canal construction but also, toward Russian and United States actions and counter action that historically had major impacts on local countries and the region in general.

### Limitations

The research will be limited by the impossibility to travel to Central America, mainly to Nicaragua, and to Russia. That limitation will be mitigated by reading a variety of documents to get an adequate understanding of the region.

The research will be limited in time. The limited time, under a year, to complete the research will without any doubt, affect the depth of the research and the analysis. The project will therefore be limited in scope to analyze the relations between Russia and Nicaragua without inputting other international actors like the United States of America (USA), China or local actors like Costa-Rica and Panama.

Another implied limitation of the research is based on the lack of knowledge of Russian language by the researcher. The limitation will affect the ability to consult first hand Russian documents and only rely on documents that interprets to actual Russian strategy with involuntary Western biases. The mitigation will be done by consulting a variety of sources thru the entire political spectrum.

Finally, the research will not include any type of classified information and intelligence and will be limited to open sources of information. The mitigation measure will be to verify any information and evaluate its veracity by consulting different sources.

### Delimitations

As mentioned earlier, the research will focus mainly on two main actors, Russia and Nicaragua, to allow sufficient depth in the limited time available to complete the study. The delimitation will allow a deeper analysis compared to a project that would be focusing on the entire Western Hemisphere or the World.

The last important delimitation will be the decision to not include in the research other foreign power in the region such as Iran and more specifically, the People's Republic of China, which is a major player in that region especially on the economic side.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The research will be organized in three sections to facilitate the analysis. The first section will establish the historical foundation. That section will identify the historical links between Russia and Latin America in general and specifically with Nicaragua. In the case of Nicaragua, the focus will be put on the timeframe of the 1960s – 80s during the peak of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the USA, when Nicaragua was at the center of a proxy war between the two Superpowers.

The second part of the work will be to promptly examine the theory of the instruments of power of nation to facilitate the subsequent historical comparison and the analysis of the Russian strategy for the region.

The final section will describe the current situation and Russian strategy toward Latin America and specifically Nicaragua. We will then be able to compare it with the Soviet era strategy.

#### Historical Background and Context

There is plenty of documentation about Nicaragua and the region during the Cold War. Two books, written recently: “Cold War, An International History and A Century of Revolution Insurgent” and “Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America’s Long Cold War”, give a good overview, understanding, and analysis of the Cold War in general and its ramifications in Latin America. Part one of the second book has an article written by Jeffrey L Gould named: “El Porvenir”: Revolutionary and

counterrevolutionary in El Salvador and in Nicaragua.<sup>7</sup> It provides a very general understanding of the dynamic of the Proxy war between the two Superpowers and highlights mainly the political and military support provided by the Soviet Union.

The next relevant reference used to establish the historical background comes from a journal written at the end of the Cold War in the eighties. The journal *World Affairs* of the fall 1986 provides an understanding of the foreign policy and the actions of the Soviet Union for the Region. It is a compilation of many different authors on the subject. Without being specific for our case study of Nicaragua, it gives an overall deep analysis of that historical period. That journal is extremely useful to our research. It provide deep analysis with different perspectives from authors of different background.

Three articles clearly stand out for this research. The first one written by Robert Wesson named: “The Soviet Way in Latin America” is providing a great look on the way the Soviet Union was applying and projecting its power to achieve its objectives for the region and for Nicaragua.<sup>8</sup>

A second article of the same periodical is also of great importance for our project. The author, Davis C Jordan in his article “Soviet Strategy in Latin America”, makes an analysis that is directly aligned to the purpose of understanding the strategy of USSR for

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<sup>7</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph and Greg Grandin, *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America Long Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 88.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Wesson, “The Soviet Way in Latin America,” *World Affairs* 149, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 67-75.

the region and specifically for Nicaragua.<sup>9</sup> It is one of the articles that is at the central core of the historical foundation of the project.

The next article: “Soviet Perspectives on Latin America in the 1980s” is obviously, highlighting the Soviet Union perspective for the region. That article combined with another one named: “Soviet Activities and U.S. Interests in Latin America” are crucial to understand the perspectives of protagonists in the region. The concept of perspective is a key element in the research to understand the strategy and foreign policy. Likewise for the text by M Juan M. Del Aguila, who introduces the differences of viewpoints toward the region for both main protagonists, the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>10</sup>

The advantage of those historical documents is the depth they provide to the research. They are describing, in detail, events of that period but, most importantly provide an analysis of those event in the context of the Cold War.

Another great advantage is the multitude of authors that illustrate different point of views. That diversity of approaches is essential for all research but more specifically for the actual subject. We realized from the start that the Cold War between Soviet Union and the United States can be very emotional and is often biased and tinted by strong ideologies and preferences.

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<sup>9</sup> David C. Jordan, “Soviet Strategy in Latin America,” *World Affairs* 149, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 87-92.

<sup>10</sup> Juan M. Del Aguila, “Soviet Activities and U.S. Interests in Latin America,” *World Affairs* 149, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 93-100.

Another advantage of those publications is the fact that those texts are written by scholars and show rigorous methodology that will mitigate to a minimum that emotional characteristic of this subject.

#### Theory of instruments of national power - DIME

The second part of the research will be explaining of all theories foundation that will be utilized to describe and analyses the case study. The Joint Publication 1, the Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States will be used to explain the range of the Instruments of National Power known as the Diplomacy, the Information, the Military and the Economy.<sup>11</sup> The section covering the foundation of the doctrine in the first chapter describe clearly those four instrument of national power.

#### Current Russian strategy

The final section of the project is focus on the current relation between Russia, the region of Latin America and specifically Nicaragua. The Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union website is used to describe the Russian government official vision, policy and strategy toward Latin America. That source will allow to get a direct and clear idea of the desired relation with Nicaragua.<sup>12</sup> It gives us a very good starting point to identify the Russian foreign relation with the region. Of course, it is crucial to keep a very open mind considering that an official statement will

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<sup>11</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, “Key Foreign Policy Outcomes.”

usually be very idealist, diplomatic and politically correct. The actual action in the area might be a little more realistic. Other sources will obviously be required to confirm or not that idealistic vision.

The website covers the relations between the European Union and the Russian federation. By itself, that fact arguably show the interrelation between both areas saying that for Russia, Latin America policies seem to be somehow related to Europe policies. The research is highlighting that Russia, being a World power, must also be studied globally. A regional strategy is part of a wider global strategy. Similar as the Soviet Union strategy during the Cold War, Russia's activities in Latin America has a purpose, amongst other, to redirect some attention from European Theater to the Western Hemisphere area.

Another official website consulted is the Embassy of Russia in Nicaragua. That website provide a direct description of the bilateral relations between Russia and Nicaragua. A press Release "On a meeting of the Co-Chairs of the Russia – Nicaragua Intergovernmental Commission for trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and his Nicaraguan counterpart Luis Alberto Molina," illustrates the economic, scientific and politics nature of the relations between the two countries.<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "On a meeting of the Co-Chairs of the Russia – Nicaragua Intergovernmental Commission for trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and his Nicaraguan counterpart Luis Alberto Molina," Embassy News, accessed 11 April 2017, [http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/ni/-/asset\\_publisher/U5gRMLYukcn7/content/id/2481150](http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/ni/-/asset_publisher/U5gRMLYukcn7/content/id/2481150)

Those various embassy news articles give a good visualization of the depth of the relations between Nicaragua and Russia. The Embassy News Feed: “The visit to Nicaragua, The Russian Government Delegation Headed by Dimitri Rogozin reports that the official Russian delegation held talks with the Commander in Chief of the Army of Nicaragua and the head of the Nicaraguan Investment Promotion Agency. The delegation was also received by the President of Nicaragua, M. Daniel Ortega. That news feed demonstrates the politic and military relations between Nicaragua and Russia.<sup>14</sup>

Another news feed, “On signing the agreement between the fund “Russian World” and the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua”<sup>15</sup> is showing the economic and cultural relations. It is telling that a University in Nicaragua is now providing Russian Language courses. It shows a Russian incursion in the Nicaraguan society that will affect, potentially, generations.

Consultation of those websites permits gathering first-hand information depicting official Russian policies toward Nicaragua and Latin America. It also illustrates the overall goal of Russia in the international community. These websites give a general overview of the Russian Foreign Policy without providing many details on the way Moscow is achieving its objectives

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “The visit to Nicaragua, The Russian Government Delegation Headed by Dimitri Rogozin,” Embassy News, accessed 11 April 2017, <http://nicaragua.mid.ru/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “On signing the agreement between the fund “Russian World” and the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua,” Embassy News, accessed 11 April 2017, <http://nicaragua.mid.ru/>.

The research has included presents days' news articles about the region and Nicaragua. The opinion article written by Daniel Dolan: "Opinion: Russian Tank Deal with Nicaragua <sup>16</sup> 'Back to the Future' Moment for US" was one of the first articles read by the researcher about the subject of the tank deal between Nicaragua and Russia and the project of construction of transoceanic canal. It became the center of the research's motivation to understand ongoing Russian foreign policy in Nicaragua. It also identifies the possible correlation between Cold War and today's dynamic.

The next article was also at the center of the motivation to deepen the understanding of the current Russian foreign policy for Nicaragua and the region. The author Dmitry Yevstafiev wrote a very relevant article in Global Affairs titled: "Caught in the Web of Archaic Policies,<sup>17</sup>" Russia in Global Affairs. It shows the similarities between the USSR approach during the Cold War and current Russian actions in the same region. That article follow the same historical approach as our research, trying to use the past as a foundation to understand the current situation.

Another publication very useful for the work comes from a military-related document website, the Strategic Studies Institute. The document titled "Strategic Insights: From Ideology to Geopolitics, Russian Interests in Latin America" written by Dr José de Arimateia da Cruz, is extremely important to the analysis. It uses a similar approach to crosscheck the historical foundation with the current situation. It also highlight very

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<sup>16</sup> Dolan, "Opinion: Russian Tank Deal."

<sup>17</sup> Yevstafiev, "Caught Web Archaic Policies."

useful theories about different approaches and ideologies driving the international relations. The article also highlighted the long term impact of a change of ideology and approach in the international relations.

The research focus on finding all current news and events centered on Nicaragua. That exercise is allowing to clarify the actual situation. The main source of information is from online news outlets. Those article possess simple facts and will usually be tinted or biased by the underlying political position of the organization. Those sources need to be continuously evaluated and cross referenced with others to mitigate the bias.

The Washington Post on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2016 in an article written by Charles Krauthammer, named “Final Days, Awful Choice”<sup>18</sup> gives a description of current events and a view of Russian’s objectives from a US point of view. It is mostly centered on the complexity of the situation and makes reference to the importance of the perspective also in present days. Same optic for the next article by Nicole Gaouette and Elise Labott from CNN on the 5 November 2016, “The Next US President Faces a World of Trouble”<sup>19</sup>

Those sources are obviously reporting information from the US perspective with a certain bias, voluntary or not. They are offering almost raw information that will require an eventual deeper analysis.

Once the raw information has been gathered, the research will include sources of website dedicated to analyzing political and social matters. There are a lot of articles

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<sup>18</sup> Krauthammer, “Final Days, Awful Choice.”

<sup>19</sup> Gaouette and Labott, “Next US President Faces.”



analyzing the Russian strategic posture in the world, a little less covering that posture toward Latin America, and even fewer for Nicaragua.

A good article by Marcus Brooks named “Why the New World Order fears the Russian Bear” from the website News Wire 24 in March 2014, exposed clearly a vision of the threat posed to the current world order by Russia. It exposes the seriousness of Moscow trying to change the current global and regional dynamic and the way it is conducting that change.<sup>20</sup>

A recent document from the Dickson College by Simon G. Ciccarillo named: “The Russia - Latin America Nexus: Realism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, is one of the center piece of that part of the project. It describes and analyzes current foreign policy of Russia. It provides a good understanding of the global strategic objectives of Russia to release the NATO pressure felt by Moscow in Eastern Europe. That idea is at the center of the current situation and is recurring in many sources from all perspectives.

The NATO expansion up to the Baltics States and to former Soviet Republics is interpreted as the main motivation of the actual policy for Latin America to establish a serious presence in Latin America, so close to the United States. Additionally, the text exposes Russian global challenges to the current unipolar world order. Moscow hopes to regain its former prestige on the world stage while discrediting the United States dominance.

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<sup>20</sup> Marcus Brooks, “Why the New World Order fears the Russian Bear,” News Wire, 24 March 2014, accessed 16 February 2017, <https://newswire-24.com/2014/03/24/why-the-new-world-order-fears-the-russian-bear/>.

Another great article published by South Atlantic News Agency gives a regional point of view and analysis of the Russian's intent to get a permanent presence in Latin America. The article was published in 2014 and is named: Russia with plans for military bases in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela.<sup>21</sup>

The article highlight the importance of the regional strategy in the context of the global strategy. Russian Defense Minister Shoigu informed the project will get authorization to construct bases in Vietnam, Seychelles, Singapore, Algeria, Cyprus and other several countries. Again that shows that the Russian approach toward Latin America is part of a global strategy.<sup>22</sup>

A good aspect of the previous articles is that it breaks from the common underestimation of Russia as a world power that comes from the decade after the fall of the USSR and before the introduction of Vladimir Putin as the head of state.

The PanAm Post website is a great source used to get the current situation in Latin America. An article written by Elena Toledo titled "Russia Plans Controversial Military Exercises in Nicaragua"<sup>23</sup> is a good demonstration of the close relationship between Nicaragua and Russia.

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<sup>21</sup> Merco Press South Atlantic News Agency, "Russia with Plans for Military Bases in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela," MercoPress, 14 February 2014, accessed 8 April 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2014/02/27/russia-with-plans-for-military-bases-in-nicaragua-cuba-and-venezuela>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Elena Toledo, "Russia Plans Controversial Military Exercises in Nicaragua," PanAm Post, News and Analysis in the Americas, 10 April 2017, accessed 12 April 2017, <https://panampost.com/elena-toledo/2017/04/10/russia-plans-military-exercises-nicaragua/>.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will use the qualitative approach. The project is aimed at trying to understand the politics and actions of a main actor, Russia and two secondary actors, Nicaragua and the region of Latin-America, within the current context of international relations. The project will incorporate each actor's unique perspective of the current situation to depict an accurate description of the situation. "Qualitative, interpretive research is useful for describing and answering questions about participants and contexts. The researcher studies the perspectives of the research participants toward events, beliefs, or practices."<sup>24</sup>

Another reason for the use of the qualitative approach is the fact that the vast majority of the data collected will not be numeric but will be formed of text data. As seen in the literature review from the previous chapter, the project will be considering texts from history books, text from news websites and text from different magazines.

Finally, the open-ended question will also drive the use a qualitative methodology where the project will mainly use documents, observation and audiovisual data to analyze text and highlight theme and pattern.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, conduct one case study of Nicaragua deeper than the previous thesis. It relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature, filling in gaps and extending prior studies.

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<sup>24</sup> Lorraine R. Gay and Peter W. Airasian, *Education Research Competencies for Analysis and Applications*, 7th ed. (Columbus, OH: Merrill Saddle River, 2003), 163.

<sup>25</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative*, 45.

Within the qualitative methodology, the research will adopt two different approaches, a case study and a historical research.

### Case Study

The first approach of the methodology is the case study of Nicaragua. It is directly relevant to the purpose of this research, which is to understand Russian foreign policy in Latin America. The current situation described in the first chapter makes that country a good choice to explain the complex ongoing and probably discrete relations and action of Russia in the region. A qualitative study needs “conceptual structure composed of theory, and method provides the starting point for all observations.” The purpose of that case study will be to “develop possible explanations”<sup>26</sup> of the dynamic between Russia and the entire region. At the end of the study, the research will highlight the nature of Russian foreign policy toward Latin America in general using the inductive approach by studying the case of Nicaragua. Nicaragua is believe to be a representative actor for the region thus allowing the researcher the capacity to apply the model of that country to the entire region.

The induction is always a delicate and risky process. The case study may turn out to be not as representative as expected. To mitigate that risk, the research will continuously cross reference information of the region of Latin America and Nicaragua. That check will make sure that the case of Nicaragua is still aligned with the region.

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<sup>26</sup> Meridith D. Gall, Joyce P. Gall, and Walter R. Borg, *Educational Research an Introduction*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 439.

### Historical research

The second approach will be historical research to be used within the case study approach. The project will try to explain current events by examining data and trends from the past.<sup>27</sup> The combination of both past and current event study will provide a reference point to understand the current dynamic between the actors.

The researcher believe that the historical research is not sufficient to understand a complex social situation such as international relations between Latin America and Russia. The project will use other social perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The research will use the theory of Instruments of National Power. That theory, known as the DIME (Diplomacy, the Information, the Military and the Economy) will allow to incorporate the perspective of Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic, to identify how Russia is influencing Nicaragua and by extent, the region.

The project will deliberately use the date of 1991, the fall of Soviet Union as a reference date to differentiate policies toward Nicaragua and the region between current days 'Russia and Cold War Soviet Union.

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<sup>27</sup> Gay and Airasian, *Education Research Competencies*, 163.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Historical Background and Context

In this section, we will conduct a quick overview of the history between the Western Hemisphere and Russia with an emphasis on the Cold War era from the 1960's to the collapse of the USSR. Focusing on Soviet activities and relations with Nicaragua and the region, the research will highlight the Soviet's strategy specifically toward Nicaragua to identify the strategy and objectives for Latin America. We will then follow with a review of the national instruments of power to understand the ways Russia achieves its objectives for Nicaragua and by extension, for the region.

During the nineteenth century, Russia had ties with such countries as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay. At that time, the fact that Russia owned what is now Alaska made it a natural geographical player in the entire continent. Mexico had a direct geographical contact with Russian interests in North America in the nineteenth century. That position made diplomatic relations totally natural between Russia and the Western Hemisphere.

“Relations between Russia and Latin American nations goes back before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Imperial Russia had had a historical presence in the continent. Russian scientists and travelers visited many Latin American nations during the course of the nineteenth century; official political and economic ties were established between the Russian Empire and Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay by the 1890s,

and plans were made to expand that relationship at the beginning of the twentieth century.”<sup>28</sup>

Few studies and literature cover the history of the relations between Russia and that region during that timeframe. “Even though Russian and Latin American diplomatic relations date back to the eighteenth century, the history of this relationship was not studied until the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>29</sup>

When the Monroe Doctrine was declared in the nineteenth century by the United States of America, Russia had normal diplomatic relations with the Western Hemisphere. That reality, as we will see later, will become a foundation for the current Russian strategy in the region.

When the Cold War started and the “Iron Curtain” fell on Europe, the main focus of the Soviet Union was continental by nature with clear interest toward Eastern Europe, Middle-East and East Asia. Little effort was made toward the Western Hemisphere which was firmly and clearly identified as the United States of America’s backyard. Robert Wesson states: “After World War II the Soviet Union not only acquired control of Eastern Europe but showed interest in Iran and Sinkiang. Soviets had achieved nothing in the region until Castro turned to them for support in his quarrel with the United States.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Wesson, “Soviet Way Latin America.” 67-75.

<sup>29</sup> José de Arimateia da Cruz, Dr, “Strategic Insights: From Ideology to Geopolitics, Russian Interests in Latin America” Russian Interests in Latin America” (diss., Army War College, 24 March 2015), 1, accessed 20 March 2017, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/From-Ideology-To-Geopolitics/2015/03/24>.

<sup>30</sup> Wesson, “Soviet Way Latin America.” 67-75.

It took a little over a decade for the USSR to see an opportunity to reengage the Western Hemisphere. That event was the Cuban socialist revolution in 1961. As Robert Wesson describe: “proclamation of his revolution as "socialist" in April 1961 was a windfall that greatly encouraged the Soviets to see Latin America as a continent of opportunities.”<sup>31</sup>

It is difficult at this moment to consider the Russian incursion in the continent purely with a local and limited perspective. The confrontational nature of the relations of the Cold War between the Eastern Bloc led by USSR and the Western Block led by the USA will be subjacent to most of activities in the World and, for the purpose of our research, in the Western Hemisphere.

Despite that opening in the region for the Soviet, the Continent remained a secondary effort and a low priority for the overall Soviet strategy. “The region remains a decidedly secondary corner of their chessboard, with the lowest priority of all major world regions.”<sup>32</sup>

However, the objective of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy at that time for the region, became centered on the effect on its main opponent, the United States of America. “The Soviet objective has been simply the reduction of influence of the United States and the corresponding increase of the freedom of action of the Soviet Union, in Latin America as elsewhere.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 67-75.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



At the same time, any situation drawing U.S. attention to problems in Latin America means a decreased ability to react elsewhere in the world. Soviet policy to a considerable extent corresponds to national interests of Latin Americans; for example, Moscow would encourage them to be independent, to fight for advantageous prices in the market for their goods, and to “restrict the multinational corporations or to nationalize their holdings”, and so forth.<sup>34</sup>

In the seventies and eighties the Soviet Union had become a significant actor in Latin America. Its military presence in Cuba and Nicaragua for example increased, and so was the trade with the area. Moscow established and maintained diplomatic relations with almost all countries of the region. However, that expanded presence was limited by geography. The distance between continental Russia and Latin America was a natural barrier.<sup>35</sup>

Soviet strategy was geographically centered where it aimed at drawing attention away from continental Russia by putting minimal effort to affect area stability. Additionally, that pressure had the practical objective of affecting access and supply of critical resources. M. David Jordan explained that: “*Soviet strategy toward Latin America and especially toward Central America and the Caribbean. Having achieved the breach in U.S. doctrine, implanted clients in the U.S. base, diverted additional naval power from projection capability to resupply and communication purposes, Soviet strategy has also*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

*begun to undermine U.S. access to critical resources*".<sup>36</sup> To follow at global level:  
"Soviet strategy in Latin America is part of a larger one where the West must know in advance it will be defeated if it should ever go to war, where Western access to resources is Soviet controlled, where Western internal and social well-being and political will is subject to considerable Soviet influence."<sup>37</sup>

The Soviet strategy with regard with its own interest starts with the premise that Latin America is not as important as region of Eastern and Western Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. Latin America possess a strategic and importance for the Soviet Union because of its importance for the United States. The growth of Soviet influence in a given country or region is directly link with a United States decline of the influence in the same region.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jordan, "Soviet Strategy Latin America." 87-92.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-92.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebio Mujan-Leon, "Soviet Perspectives on Latin America in the 1980s," *World Affairs* 149, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 100-106.

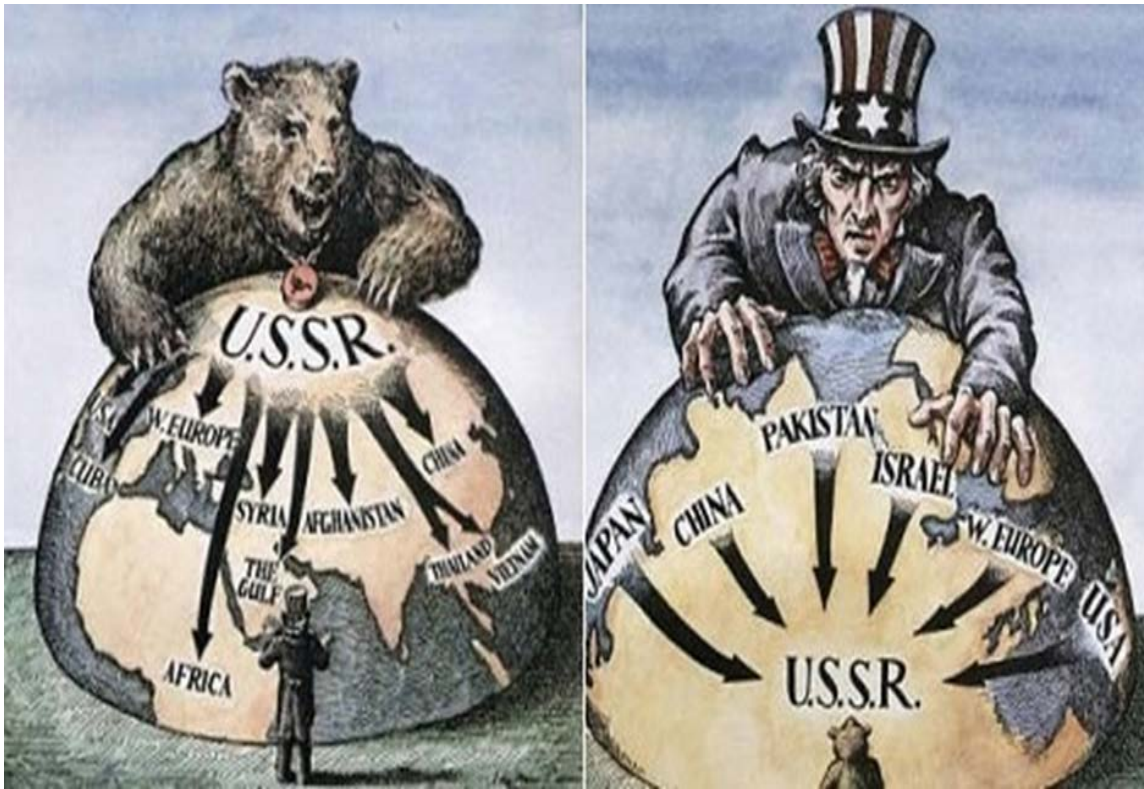


Figure 1. Cold War Perception

Source: Cold War Imperialism, [http://www.a-w-i-p.com/media/blogs/articles/1/1/I/cold-war-imperialism\\_US\\_USSR\\_77.jpg](http://www.a-w-i-p.com/media/blogs/articles/1/1/I/cold-war-imperialism_US_USSR_77.jpg).

Figure 1 shows clearly the perception of the confrontational relation between the USSR and the West. First it shows the United States of America focus to push back the continental USSR thru Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It is easy to visualize the pressure felt by USSR all along its border. Also easily understandable, the intent by the USSR to relieve pressure by trying to divert part of the effort and attention of the US toward Latin America.

More than this obvious representation, it is notable to identify the absence of Latin America except for Cuba. Somewhere it shows the limited impact and importance

that region has in the big scheme of the Cold War. From that absence, one can draw the minimal importance of the region for both protagonists.

That absence also illustrates key considerations for both USSR and Latin America. It can illustrate the regional objective to be recognized and considered seriously on the international scene in another way than being the United States backyard.

We saw the effect of opening relations with non-US actors usually achieves the effect of getting more attention from the US and USSR to provide leverage to any subsequent negotiations by those countries. Also, the way the US responded to some of those countries opened the doors to the Eastern Block and created the backbone to the anti-US ideology still present in the region.

Figure 2 is a map of Central and South America that shows from the US perspective the accumulation of all those Soviet influenced countries in the region, which forced the US to notice that area of interest and forced them to allocate efforts to stop the progression of Communism incursion and push it back.

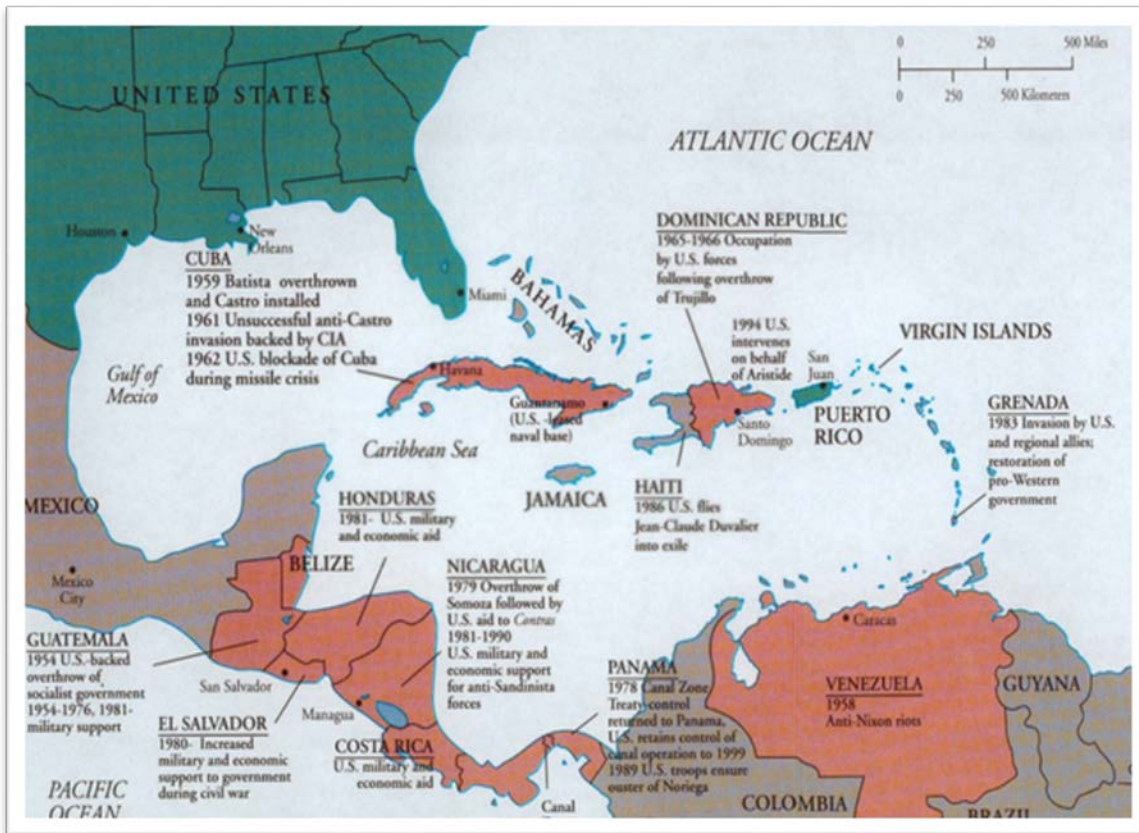


Figure 2. The Cold War in Latin America

Source: The Cold War in Latin America, <https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/the-cold-war-in-latin-america>

### Soviet Union Strategy for Nicaragua during the Cold War

At this stage of the historical background description, the research identified the Soviet foreign policy or its approach toward the region during the Cold War. We can now begin to examine the specific Soviet strategy toward Nicaragua during the same timeframe.

Based on the previous analysis, the Soviet Union interest toward Nicaragua had the objective to release US pressure on the continental USSR by opening or creating an

area of concern for communism expansion in Latin America. In that aspect, Nicaragua was and still is very well located geographically to directly concern the USA. “The Soviet Union's interest in Nicaragua stems primarily from its impact in a region which is of military and strategic importance to the United States. From the Soviet point of view, such problems as presently exist in Central America are very useful in compelling a reduction and modification of the U.S. force projection elsewhere, especially in Western Europe and in the Pacific Basin.”<sup>39</sup>

Nicaragua at this moment was seen by the USSR as a component of a bigger regional and world strategy to fight the West. The effect aimed by the Soviet Union was wider than the ideological proliferation of socialism and communism. It had clear economic and strategic impacts such as destabilizing the oil supply from the area and affecting lines of communication from the continental US toward the rest of the world. David C. Jordan explained that: “Consolidation of the Marxist regime in Nicaragua will assist the insurgency in Guatemala and Mexico in making oil fields vulnerable there and will embolden the several groups in Colombia and Venezuela to threaten those nations' oil fields as well.”<sup>40</sup>

The research highlights the Soviet approach toward Nicaragua as a low profile and subtle incursion mainly thru commerce and trade, selling oil and military equipment. That approach showed an understanding that any direct or high profile support would face a heavy counter action from the United States. The Soviet Union knew very well if it

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<sup>39</sup> Jordan, “Soviet Strategy Latin America,” 87-92.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 87-92.

was the case, they would not be able to match US power in that area. But more importantly USSR didn't have the intent to escalate confrontation, because the objective was to divert the maximum of the United States' focus from the continental Soviet Union toward Latin America with a minimum of effort of Moscow. Soviet Union made that reality very clear to Nicaragua, telling them not to expect any kind of high profile support, such as direct military operation to defend and support to the regime.<sup>41</sup> They used trade, such as oil imports, military equipment and military aid to support the government of Nicaragua.

In a 1986 report issued by the U.S. Defense Department, Nicaragua had the support of some seventy Soviet military advisers and the country acquired Soviet weaponry such as military helicopters. That kind of equipment goes in hand with the underlying intent of the Soviet in the area. It provided a good resource to fight guerrillas without providing a decisive offense weapon that could be interpreted being so aggressive that would have required a direct counter reaction from the US.<sup>42</sup>

On the economic side, Nicaragua was getting between eighty (80) and ninety (90) percent of its petroleum requirements from the Soviet Union in the eighties,<sup>43</sup> mostly from satellite countries of the Soviet bloc. On the other hand, Nicaragua's exportations to the Soviet bloc were negligible.<sup>44</sup> That trade in balance shows well the nature of the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 87-92.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 87-92.

<sup>43</sup> Robert K. Evanson, "Soviet Economic and Military Trade in Latin America: An Assessment," *World Affairs* 149, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 75-85.

<sup>44</sup> Mujan-Leon, "Soviet Perspectives Latin America," 100-106.

relation between those two actors. Moscow was arguably maintaining that relation for political and strategic reasons, not for gaining trade advantage, but for gaining an ally in the region.

Juan M. Del Aguila captured well the dynamic: “ At a relatively low cost, Moscow has penetrated Central America, and could become a major player in regional politics. But the Kremlin will provide enough military resources so that Nicaragua could wield political leverage in the region and maintain pressure on its neighbors.”<sup>45</sup>

Along with the economic effort, the Soviet Union noticed an anti-United States omni-present sentiment present in Nicaragua but also present in the entire region of Latin America. That sentiment emerged from the resistance or at least a criticism of overall American policy in Latin America, and was amplified by the debt crisis and the crisis of the Pan-American system. Naturally, the Soviet Union seized the opportunity and exploited the developing rupture between the United States and Latin America.<sup>46</sup>

Simultaneously, the Soviet Union was building bilateral relations with Nicaragua and the region at other levels as well. Other sectors of Latin American life such as education and organized labor for example were of interest for Moscow and were directly supporting the subtle and non-confrontational incursion in the fabric of Latin American societies.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Del Aguila, “Soviet Activities U.S. Interests,” 93-100.

<sup>46</sup> Mujan-Leon, “Soviet Perspectives Latin America,” 100-106.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-106.



Mr. Eusebio in his article, the Soviet Perspectives on Latin America in the 1980s, captured very that long term objective mindset. “We must think in terms of the long run—the Soviets' slow, patient efforts at establishing a presence in the infrastructure of Latin America through the various tactics described above. The Kremlin's long-range goal in Latin America remains the same: to isolate the United States and end its influence in the region” and again in the same article, “The Soviet "peaceful" offensive in Latin America, aimed at driving a sharp wedge between our neighbors to the south and the United States, is conducted by various diplomatic, economic, and cultural means.”<sup>48</sup>

Let’s summarize the previous elements. Russia and Latin America have had diplomatic and economic relations well before the Cold War and even before the Bolshevik revolution. That history between both actors existed well before the East–West confrontation during the Cold War. We also highlighted the limited literature covering that fact.

We then exposed the common perception of threat both superpowers felt toward each other. That perception drove the overall strategy globally but also in the region of Latin America. We also underlined the regional perception of being seen as a simple instrument in that confrontation East-West. Specifically, the Soviet perception of being geographically surrounded by Western allies created a strategic pressure that needed to be neutralized or countered. One of the ways chosen to achieve that pressure release was to divert the United-States attention to another area of the World, namely Latin America,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

the US backyard. The region started to be vocally critic about the traditional regional US policy and became open to search for other international avenues and support.

At that point, both the Soviet Union and Latin America objectives coincided for different purposes. The United States made extremely clear that any direct military confrontation would not be accepted. Cuba and the multiple US overt and covert military operations in Panama, Grenada, and Nicaragua etc. constituted a very clear message and posture.

The Soviet Union understood that limit and initiated a long term subtle strategy for the region. Using mainly economic means but also diplomacy and information, they intended to destabilize the region to affect strategic lines of communication, supply and diminish the United States' credibility in the region. That policy of "entropy", creating a political disorder and instability, was an efficient way to draw US attention to the area for a low effort and commitment from the Soviet Union.

Now that we showed the Soviet strategy for the region and before we analyze the present Russian strategy, let's explain rapidly the multiple instruments that a Nation possess to implement its strategy in the international environment.

#### Instruments of National Power

From the previous section the research was able to identify the strategic objectives of USSR for Nicaragua and for the region. It showed that the USSR used many different means or instruments to advance their national interests. The Joint Publication 1 - Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the 25 March 2013 of the United States describe those government instruments known as the DIME for Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economy. The use of that concept will provide a comprehensive understanding of the

relations between Russia and Nicaragua and Latin America. It will also facilitate the comparison of the Cold War and current foreign policies.

Those instruments are part of a whole of government approach and usually will be utilized simultaneously to support each other. The next section will explain the basic theory of those instruments so we can get a better view of the strategy of Russia to achieve its current goals in Nicaragua and in the Region.

### Diplomacy

The first instrument is Diplomacy. It is the main instrument to establish and maintain relations with other States to promote a country's own interest and agenda.<sup>49</sup> It is the instrument organizing alliances and coalition with other actors, state or non-state. That instrument normally is driven by the Department of State or Foreign Affairs ministry. The figure 3 below shows a recent meeting between the President of Russia and Nicaragua. The meeting is a very strong and important diplomatic action.

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<sup>49</sup> Department of the US Army, JP-1, 12.



Figure 3. Russian President Vladimir Putin is pictured meeting his Nicaraguan counterpart, Daniel Ortega

*Source:* Chris Summers, “Is Moscow preparing for new Cold War? Russia agrees to build spy base in Nicaragua and prepares to deploy missiles on Polish border,” Daily Mail, April 1, 2017, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3656494/Is-Moscow-preparing-new-Cold-War-Russia-agrees-build-spy-base-Nicaragua-prepares-deploy-missiles-Polish-border.html>.

### Information

Information is the second instrument of national power. Any communication whether it is an image, written or verbal will be of course, communicating the intent of a government to create strategic effects. It can be as simple and direct as a propaganda as illustrated below or issued thru an official statement, discourse or press conference. This relatively simple instrument needs to be carefully synchronized with the others so the

message is aligned with the action. The overall credibility of the strategy depends on that. The Former President Obama’s “Red Line” about chemical weapon usage by the Syrian Government in its civil war is a great example. The apparent lack of action following the alleged usage of chemical weapons had an impact on the overall perceived US strategy in respect with the conflict and the region. “Real or perceived differences between actions and words (the “say-do” gap) are addressed and actively mitigated as appropriate, since this divergence can directly contribute to reduced credibility and have a negative impact on the ability to successfully execute current and future missions.”<sup>50</sup>

### Military

The third instrument, the Military, is relatively straight-forward. In support of national security goals, Armed Forces will fight and win the Nation’s wars. “Fundamentally, the military instrument is coercive in nature, to include the integral aspect of military capability that opposes external coercion. Coercion generates effects through the application of force (to include the threat of force) to compel an adversary or prevent our being compelled. The military has various capabilities that are useful in non-conflict situations (such as in foreign relief).”<sup>51</sup> For our work, considering what we previously identified as the Soviet unwillingness to directly confront the US, the threat or demonstration of force might be the key usage of that instrument.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>51</sup> Department of the US Army, JP-1, 13.

## Economy

The final Instrument of power is the Economy. A strong domestic economy will be the key enabler to project power. It will capacitate the others instrument mainly the military and diplomacy. Clearly, that power, in synchronization with the others, can support National strategy toward a region or a country.<sup>52</sup> The previous section showed that the Soviet Union used commerce as a tool to influence local government and achieved its goals. For example, Russia, being part of the BRICS, has a capacity to directly influence others with the combined economic weight of those 5 countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa). The organization provide an alternative to the World Bank and can be easily used to promote members' agendas.

### Current Russian Strategy for Latin America.

The first two sections of this documents exposed at first the historical background of the relations between Russia and Latin America with a focus on Nicaragua. We then explained the National Instruments of Power. We will now be analyzing the current relation between Russia and Nicaragua and the region using the Instruments of Power and comparing it with the relation the former Soviet Union had with Nicaragua and the region.

The fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, was a shock and took the world by surprise. "No one expected the powerful Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to come to an end as uneventfully as it did."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>53</sup> da Cruz, "Strategic Insights."

One of the first and clear effects of that event was the transformation of the bipolar or bi-centric world toward a unipolar world with the United States of America at the center unopposed and unchallenged. The first Gulf War in 1991 was a good example of that new world dynamic.

On its part, Russia entered a difficult period of its history where it reorganized itself while trying to find its place among the nations of the world. The question was to see if Russia was still a superpower or it had lost that status with the fall of the USSR.<sup>54</sup> We can argue that the common perception in the decade following the fall, that Russia was seen as a fallen superpower. However that perception started to change with the election of a new President, Vladimir Putin.

The arrival of Vladimir Putin as head of Russia was characterized by the intent of finding Russian's proper place in the world in what he described as a polycentric world order.<sup>55</sup> Kremlin's economic adviser, Sergey Glazyev said in 2014: "I believe that European countries should pull out of NATO and form their own independent military force. In an increasingly multi-polar world, the United States is using NATO for its own economic interests and not for Europe's national interests."<sup>56</sup>

Russia's foreign policy is active in Latin America and the Russians are making it really clear that region is a very important partner. This is especially true ever since the Secretary of State John Kerry under President Obama's administration said that the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Brooks, "Why New World Order."

Doctrine Monroe era was over. That message sent a signal to the region and gave to other players the impression that Washington's historical backyard was no longer that important and was now accessible.<sup>57</sup>

The end of that doctrine has created a vacuum that Russia, amongst others, is willing to fill. Latin American leaders see the US almost completely ignoring the region, causing either confusion or the idea that greater autonomy is a necessity if Latin America wishes to prosper further. Due to American inaction, Russia has filled the power vacuum that has been left.<sup>58</sup>

As Dr. Jose de Arimateia da Cruz wrote, Russia seems to be quite present in the area and is centered again on diplomacy and commerce. "This power realignment is quite disconcerting given the fact that Russian foreign policy is becoming increasingly anti-Western (i.e., anti-U.S.) and is imperialist in nature. As Russia replaces the United States as a traditional ally in the region, Russia will make extensive use of its soft power toward the region. Putin may have only a few diplomatic tools at his disposal, but the tools he does possess are attractive to Latin American leaders. Those tools include an abundance of natural gas reserves, the second largest coal reserves, and the eighth largest oil reserves."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> da Cruz, "Strategic Insights."

<sup>58</sup> Ciccarillo, Russia - Latin America Nexus.

<sup>59</sup> da Cruz, "Strategic Insights."



### Current Russian Strategy for Nicaragua

Now let's examine the current relations between present days' Russia with Nicaragua. Like in the eighties, Moscow is actively involved in Nicaragua. On the diplomatic side, the relation goes back to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) that has ruled the country since 1979. Today's President Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front refers to Russian President Putin as "his brother president."<sup>60</sup> His Sandinista regime were targeted for a decade in the 1980s by President Ronald Reagan and Ortega has remained friendly with Moscow since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

## Nicaragua approves canal project

Lawmakers approved a controversial deal Thursday allowing a Hong Kong company to build a waterway to rival Panama Canal

► Cost: \$40 billion

► Construction: starts May 2014

	Depth	Length	Draft
Nicaragua Canal	22 m	286 km	20 m
Panama Canal	21 m	82 km	12.3 m
Suez Canal	13.8 m	195 km	19 m



Figure 4. Nicaragua Canal Project

Source: Environmentalists Warn of Nicaragua Canal Disaster, <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-environmentalists-nicaragua-canal-disaster.html>.

The interoceanic Gran Canal project of Nicaragua is interesting for Russia as it would offer an alternate route to the Panama Canal.<sup>61</sup> The figure 4 show the location of the project and a comparison with the Panama Canal.

Regarding that highly controversial project, Moscow, Nicaragua and China signed an agreement that would see China paying for the project and Russia providing security principally against acts of terrorism. That role would provide an opportunity for Moscow

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

to establish a permanent security forces, certainly military by nature in a region historically totally dominated by the United States.<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, in 2015, Nicaragua allowed aircraft and warships to be present in Nicaragua's territorial's waters and to conduct patrols along the coastline on both Pacific and Caribbean sides.<sup>63</sup> On the economic front, Moscow signed some commercial agreements estimated at 40 billion US dollars that would see the construction of ports, an airport and a pipeline.<sup>64</sup> Russia has agreed to a deal to build an electronic intelligence-gathering base in Nicaragua, which will no doubt renew fears of a new Cold War. The deal between Moscow and Managua, which will also involve the sale of fifty (50) Russian T-72 tanks, come as President Putin's regime ramped up the pressure on NATO in Eastern Europe. Costa Rica's Foreign Minister Manuel Gonzalez criticized the tank sale, telling the La Prensa newspaper: "It is a matter of concern not because of a threat to Costa Rica...but because one country in the Central American region starts an arms race."

The nature of the relation seems to have shifted from less an ideological foundation during the Soviet Union to geopolitical reasons. In 2014, the Russian Defense Ministry communicated a new plan for the region. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

announced “Russian plans to build military bases in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela, marking Russia’s most forward endeavors in the region since the end of the Cold War.”<sup>65</sup>

That plan to construct military bases in the region is imbedded in a global plan that will allow Russia to expand its “permanent military presence outside its borders by placing military bases or seeking permission for navy ships to use ports in a number of foreign countries.” For the Latin America region, those countries include Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. A US State Department official said: 'While any nation has the right to choose its international partners, we have been clear that now is not the time for business as usual with Russia.’<sup>66</sup>

The picture below shows a clear application of Russian’s plan in action. The recent patrol in 2013 by a Russian nuclear bomber in Latin America with the stops in Venezuela and Nicaragua could be interpreted as such.

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<sup>65</sup> Merco Press South Atlantic News Agency, “Russia Plans Military Bases.”

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5. Russian Bomber Stops in 2013

Source: Image from Bing,  
<http://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=dOiYfZP2&id=175BC2EE4D2766026423A21C657BB46BFD183925&q=Russia+Bombers+in+Nicaragua&simid=608020804762863067&selectedIndex=1&adlt=strict&ajaxhist=0>

Specifically to Nicaragua, a recent article published in PanAM Post is reporting the plan to conduct joint military exercises involving Russian Nicaraguan forces. The following quote from the author is revealing: “Russia has lost great regional influence in Latin America in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet

Union, but Vladimir Putin has sought to increase Russian influence of late, seeking to bolster cooperation with such nations as Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba.”<sup>67</sup>

President Vladimir Putin has launched a massive military modernization program and sought to demonstrate Russia's global reach by sending navy ships to the Mediterranean, Latin America and other areas.<sup>68</sup> Russia said it would be deploying nuclear-capable missiles in the Kaliningrad enclave, close to the Polish border, by 2019 and may even site them in newly annexed Crimea. Putin has refused to back down after economic sanctions were imposed on Russia following the annexation of Crimea and has ramped up its military facilities around the world.

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<sup>67</sup> Toledo, “Russia Plans Controversial Military.”

<sup>68</sup> Merco Press South Atlantic News Agency, “Russia Plans Military Bases.”



Figure 6. Russia and NATO posturing in Baltic Area

*Source:* Merco Press South Atlantic News Agency, “Russia with Plans for Military Bases in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela,” MercoPress, 14 February 2014, accessed 16 February 2017, <http://en.mercopress.com/2014/02/27/russia-with-plans-for-military-bases-in-nicaragua-cuba-and-venezuela>.

The previous image, Figure 6, show again the continental pressure Russia is feeling with the expansion of NATO and the eventual deployment of units at the border on Russia in the Baltics states. That situation looks very identical of that one during the Cold War. The actual situation in Europe is arguably repeating itself. “A quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War a new arms race is under way in Eastern Europe

with Poland and the Baltic states having switched sides and the Kaliningrad enclave could be crucial.”<sup>69</sup>

NATO forces’ increased training and naval reconnaissance missions around Russia’s borders are where Latin America’s strategic position begins to enter the context of events in Europe and the Middle East. Russia had begun to look for new economic opportunities to counter the negative impacts of a loss of markets in Europe. It also seeks political allies as a way to further justify its actions in Eastern Europe amongst members of the international community, as well as retaliate against perceived encirclement by NATO. This immediate foreign policy issue, combined with the realist policies Russian leaders possess to create a stronger Russia internationally makes Latin America an extremely effective outlet to perform everything the Russian government is seeking.

Similarly, Russia is planning to expand its presence in Latin America with the construction of military bases in Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela.<sup>70</sup> Again, that intent must be put in a global context. Russia has also openly shared its intent to open new military bases in others region of the world for its Navy and Air Force. Figure 7 shows a global representation of such a plan.

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<sup>69</sup> Merco Press South Atlantic News Agency, “Russia Plans Military Bases.”

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.





Figure 7. Russia seeks access to Bases in eight countries for its Ships and Bombers

Source: Patrick Goodenough, “Russia Seeks Access to Bases in Eight Countries for Its Ships and Bombers,” *CNS News*, February 28, 2014, accessed April 2 2017, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/russia-seeks-access-bases-eight-countries-its-ships-and-bombers>

Revived Russian activism within the past two years portrays a new Russia, intent on pursuing a policy that benefits its strategic and national interests, one of the most important of which is increasing its power relative to the United States, similar to the position of the USSR during the Cold War.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ciccarillo, *Russia - Latin America Nexus*.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The research will now answer the research questions based on the analysis completed throughout the thesis. This section will first establish the Soviet Union's objectives toward Nicaragua and Latin America during the Cold War and will follow with the Russian's current objectives for Latin America and Nicaragua.

#### The Soviet Union's objectives during the Cold War

The research established that Soviet Union developed an active interest toward the region of Latin America following the Cuban Revolution in 1961. The area became an opportunity for the Soviet Union to expand its presence and influence outside of the Continental Europe.

The socialism ideology was the driving force that motivated USSR to establish and maintain relations with left wing regimes in the area. The strategic objective behind those relations was to draw United States attention away from the European theater by creating areas of concern in the US backyard. USSR established a presence in Cuba, and a smaller one in Nicaragua.

In the case of the latter, USSR had an ideological affinity with the left-wing Sandinistas government. However, the nature of the relation went beyond the ideological aspect. The economy and trade played a major role where the Soviet Union was the main supplier of oil and military equipment to the regime. The two actors maintained basic diplomatic relations. Finally, the direct military support was very minimal and consisted of a few military advisors. The overall objective in Nicaragua was to establish a platform from which the USSR could support opposition forces in Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela

and Colombia. Those area of instability would affect the United States resource supply, mainly oil in the area. The strategic vision of the USSR in the area was to maintain a very delicate balance of influence, threatening enough to concern the US but not threatening to the point of creating a direct confrontation between Soviet and US forces, or challenge US dominance of the area. A strong Soviet military presence in the area would arguably have crossed that line as the Cuba crisis showed in the sixties.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had a relatively strong economic and information. Little less active diplomatic strategy and a minimal military usage in Latin America.

#### Russia's present objectives

Some key events must be exposed before highlighting the current dynamic. The arrival of president Putin in Russia saw the return of an active Russian role in the world. The Russian intervention in Syria and Ukraine are clear examples. The long and intensive US campaign in Iraq and Afghanistan created a relative vacuum in other areas such as Latin America. That situation along with the official end of the Monroe Doctrine in recent years sent a message that the Latin America wasn't a priority for the US. That perception created an opportunity for other global actors in the area. It also created an opening for countries in the region to look for other support than the traditional US.

On the diplomatic side, Russia and Nicaragua have a strong and open relation up to the presidential level. Moscow is no longer limited to left-wing ideology and seems to be driven to exploit anti-US sentiment present in the country.

They both are maintaining strong economic and trade relations. The recent acquisition of Russian Main Battle Tanks for an amount bigger than the annual

Nicaraguan defense budget is a good indicator. The trade factor can also be explained by the necessity to find new economic market to compensate the economic sanctions imposed for the Ukraine invasion.

Joint military exercises are being conducted and the 2013 landing Russian Nuclear bombers in Nicaragua sent a strong military message in the area. Another good military indicator is Russia's intent to establish a permanent military base in Nicaragua as part of a global Russian military expansion. The plan for Russia to assure the security of the eventual transoceanic canal is also revealing of the intent to establish a strong and permanent presence in the country.

Finally, the strategic objectives in Nicaragua must be included in a global context. The situation in East Europe, in the Baltic states especially must be considered. The expansion of NATO toward Russia and the geographic pressure felt by the latter in the area is driving the same goal it had during the Cold War, to divert Western effort and attention to other regions in the world such as Latin America.

Using DIME, the biggest difference between the Cold War era and present days is the stronger use of the military instrument of power. The official plan to establish permanent presence in the country can be interpreted as a direct challenge to the traditional dynamic of the region.

#### Russia' strategic objectives in Latin-America

The main research question was: What are Russia' strategic objectives in Latin-America? The research can now directly answer that question. The main objective is to counter the Eastern Europe NATO pressure toward Continental Russia by creating a

major area of concern in the United States backyard with the establishment of permanent and significant military presence in the area.

### Recommendations

The following section will provide recommendations for future research on the subject. It is crucial to understand the Russian's objectives clearly in order to adopt an appropriate response. It is also important to note that the answer might not be only of a confrontational nature. Common objectives could become a foundation for collaboration. In a developing globalized and integrated world, such collaboration would benefit all parties.

First and foremost, the necessity to include first-hand Russian documentation would be a great addition. The research relied on analysis and interpretation of Russian vision at global and regional levels. Russian documents might provide a more accurate Russian perspective to the research.

Russia is a global power and should also be analyzed in a comprehensive way. The recommendation would be to analyze its global or world strategy and objective by examining the Russian influence in the other part of the world. It is difficult to analyze regionally a country that has capacities and intention located at global levels. Every region of the world is a part of a global strategy.

However, the scope of such a research would be enormous. To facilitate the process, futures case studies of similar countries in the region could also be another good way to understand the ways Russia is consolidating its presence in the region. By doing so, it would facilitate the understanding and would also allow anticipating next actions from Moscow in the region. From there, another comparison can be made with another

region, such as East Asia, to verify if the Latin America incursion model can be also applied to other region of the World.

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