

From Iran-Contra to Russia-Gate, Washington Scandals - I've Seen This Story Before

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The Iran-Contra scandal is branded into my consciousness. It happened during the years of 1983-1988 when the Reagan administration was violating Congressional mandates not to arm the Contras in Nicaragua who were trying to overthrow the elected leftist government in that nation. Reagan ignored the law and armed the Contras anyway leading to much death and destruction.

There are many stories linked to that time but two stand out for me. One is about a small Arkansas county prosecutor who went to then Gov. Bill Clinton and said he had clear proof that the CIA was running guns and drugs in and out of Central America from a tiny airport in his county. The prosecutor pleaded with Gov. Clinton to help him with state funds to take on the CIA. Clinton told the prosecutor to go home and he'd get back to him ASAP. The prosecutor never heard back from Clinton. Instead Clinton used the situation to help grease the skids for his eventual run for the presidency by showing he'd play ball with the CIA.

A second story is about a toy maker from Atlanta, George by the name of Bob Fletcher. Fletcher was a Republican small businessman who one day found himself with an offer he could not refuse. A man walked into his shop and offered him a large amount of money to buy his business and then paid Bob to stay on to run the operation. Soon Bob realized that the new owner had no interest in the business, it was collapsing, and instead very shady guys were coming in and out of the toy company and meeting with the new owner behind closed doors.

Eventually Bob challenged the new owner who opened a drawer and handed Bob a flyer for a Hellfire missile system and told Bob,

"This is what we are selling now and you'd better keep your mouth shut or you will be dead."

Bob figured he'd better get the hell out of town right away and moved to Orlando, Florida where I was living and working for the Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice.

By then the Iran-Contra hearings were going full bore in Congress and one day Bob was watching a retired general testify before the investigating committee and recognized him as one of the men who would come to the Atlanta toy business to meet the new owner behind closed doors. Knowing that his business had been turned into a CIA weapons front operation Bob called the FBI in Miami and told them the whole story plus he had lots of documentation to back it all up. The FBI set up an interview with Bob and copied all his documents - they

told him to go home and they'd get back to him right away. He waited and never got a call. Eventually Bob called the FBI back and they told him they had lost all his documents and his testimony.

At that point Bob really began to suspect that the entire Iran-Contra Congressional hearing process was a sham. By this time I had met Bob and organized a speaking tour for him around Florida with various peace groups. You can hear his story [here](#).

Bob next tried to get Iran-Contra special prosecutor [Lawrence E. Walsh](#) to listen to his story. Walsh had Bob meet with his staff but nothing ever came from the meeting. Bob became quite disillusioned with the entire process, realizing that the congressional hearings were rigged, and decided to run for Congress against right-wing Rep. Bill McCollum who himself was heavily involved in funding the whole US covert war in Central America. I remember doing some phone banking for Bob's campaign right before the election. For a relatively unknown guy Bob did pretty well but still lost the election.

In the end the Iran-Contra hearings found that the sale of weapons to Iran was not deemed a criminal offense but charges were brought against five individuals for their support of the Contras. Those charges, however, were later dropped because the administration refused to declassify certain documents. The indicted conspirators faced various lesser charges instead. In the end, fourteen administration officials were indicted, including then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Eleven convictions resulted, some of which were vacated on appeal. The rest of those indicted or convicted were all pardoned in the final days of the presidency of George H. W. Bush, who had been Vice President at the time of the scandal. The Iran-Contra Affair and the ensuing deception to protect senior administration officials including President Reagan has been cast as an example of post-truth politics.

So the bottom line was that no one went to jail – no one really faced any repercussions – in fact Col. Oliver North (who had helped to run the entire guns/drug operation from a cash filled safe in his White House office) became a hero in the right-wing community and got a well paid job on FOX News.

Bob was so disgusted that he moved to Montana and joined the militia. Years later I saw him on TV news one night being interviewed about the militia's opposition to the US government. A search on the Internet reveals that still today Bob is tilting at windmills – telling his story and trying to get the public to see that our government is corrupt.

As I watch the current version of the Iran-Contra hearings in Washington – this time the so-called Russian influence peddling story – I can see that it is really nothing more than a big distraction and in the end few, if any, will pay any real price. The big boys are always protected either by having charges dropped or by a presidential pardon.

Our government is run by a corporate criminal syndicate. They ensure that both parties are protected from any real prosecution for their criminality. The rest of us – the so-called 'little people' – are the ones that are held to the letter of the law.

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