

Elliot Abrams: defender of death squads to direct US “democracy” crusade

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On February 2, the same day he delivered his State of the Union speech vowing to “stand with the allies of freedom” in “ending tyranny in our world,” George W. Bush named Elliot Abrams as his deputy national security advisor. Nothing could more clearly expose the real aims of the US president’s worldwide crusade for “democracy” than this appointment.

Perhaps more than any other political figure, Abrams personifies the criminal, deceitful and thuggish character of the current US administration. He has been tapped to serve as Bush’s principal advisor on democracy and human rights.

A senior State Department official during the Reagan administration, Abrams was infamous for his lying on behalf of US-backed military dictatorships and his zealotry in attacking any regime that failed to submit to Washington dictates, as well as in defaming any individual who dared question the administration’s policies.

In 1991, he pleaded guilty to two counts of lying to Congress under oath in relation to the secret and illegal operation mounted by the Reagan administration to fund the CIA-organized contra mercenaries’ war on Nicaragua. Abrams entered the plea agreement in order to avoid a felony prosecution and potential jail time. Within little more than a year, Bush senior pardoned him together with others convicted in relation to the Iran-Contra conspiracy.

After he spent a decade as a fixture within right-wing Republican think tanks, the Bush administration called Abrams back into government, placing him on the National Security Council. In June 2002, he was given the NSC portfolio for the “Near East and North Africa,” including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

That choice was also a revealing one, as Abrams is an avowed right-wing Zionist and supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Likud bloc. Before his appointment, he had insisted that the US reject the “land-for-peace” formula that was the basis for previous Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. In a document drafted for the Project on the New American Century, he declared that Washington “should not permit the establishment of a Palestinian state that did not explicitly uphold US policy in the region.” He was also a key proponent of currying support among the Christian fundamentalists for Israel.

Naming Abrams as the key advisor on the Middle East was widely seen as a signal of unconditional US support for Israel’s military repression of the Palestinians and seizure of land in the occupied territories.

Abrams is a self-declared neo-conservative, part of a coterie of anticommunist and pro-Zionist Democrats—among them, current Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Pentagon advisor Richard Perle—who came into politics as aides to US Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson in the 1970s, and then followed their right-wing political trajectory into the Republican Party under Reagan in the 1980s.

Reagan named Abrams as director of the State Department’s Office for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. He was the Republican president’s second choice, after the nomination of Ernest Lefever, a hard-line cold warrior, was rejected in the Senate. Lefever had voiced open contempt for the idea that Washington should consider human rights abuses in its relations with anticommunist regimes and expressed sympathy in particular for the Chilean military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Abrams was a protégé of Lefever, who was the founder of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a right-wing think tank devoted to portraying US multinationals as ethical institutions. After his conviction for lying to Congress, Abrams became president of the center.

As the State Department official in charge of human rights, and later as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, Abrams’s main activity centered on the US organization of a counterrevolutionary army to carry out terrorist attacks against Nicaragua and the support of right-wing dictatorships in neighboring El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

He specialized in grossly exaggerating human rights abuses in Nicaragua—most particularly in a trumped-up campaign to portray the Sandinista government as a persecutor of the Miskito Indians—in order to justify support for the contra army, which killed some 10,000 Nicaraguans.

Meanwhile, Abrams contemptuously dismissed substantiated reports of massive atrocities by the US-backed dictatorships.

This was the case with the massacre of nearly 1,000 unarmed Salvadoran civilians by the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion in December 1981. When Raymond Bonner of the *New York Times* and Alma Guillermoprieto of the *Washington Post* published accounts of the mass killings, Abrams dismissed them as “nothing but communist propaganda.”

A day after the newspaper reports appeared, the State Department filed a report officially certifying that the Salvadoran regime was making “a concerted and significant effort to comply with internationally recognized human rights” and working “to

bring an end to the indiscriminate torture and murder of Salvadoran citizens.” Congress required the document as a condition for approving additional aid. Reagan later vetoed legislation extending the certification requirement.

The United Nations-sponsored Truth Commission published a documented account of the massacre in 1992, complete with the identities of over 500 of the victims and the results of forensic examinations of their remains. Many others were never identified. The summary of the report stated:

“On 10 December 1981, in the village of El Mozote in the Department of Morazan, units of the Atlacatl Battalion detained, without resistance, all the men, women and children who were in the place. The following day, 11 December, after spending the night locked in their homes, they were deliberately and systematically executed in groups. First, the men were tortured and executed, then the women were executed and, lastly, the children, in the place where they had been locked up....”

It has since emerged that the US State Department was fully informed about this slaughter at the time that Abrams was claiming it never happened and slandering journalists as communist “dupes.”

Similarly, Abrams had heatedly denied that Salvadoran rightist and death squad leader Roberto D’Aubuisson was involved in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who had called for an end to the repression in El Salvador. He denounced human rights critics who accused the administration of a cover-up. “Anybody who thinks you’re going to find a cable that says that Roberto D’Aubuisson murdered the archbishop is a fool,” he said. At the time, the State Department was in possession of two such cables from its embassy in San Salvador detailing the death squad leader’s role in organizing the killing.

Similarly, Abrams brushed off reports of massacres in Guatemala that the Catholic Church there described as “genocidal.” In one particularly grotesque incident, he dismissed the 1985 abduction, torture and murder of Guatemalan human rights activist Maria Rosario Godoy, who was killed together with her 21-year-old brother and her 2-year-old son. Their mutilated bodies were found in a ravine. It was evident that the young mother had been brutally raped and the child’s fingernails had been ripped off. Abrams insisted that there was no reason to disbelieve the Guatemalan regime’s official story that the three died in an auto accident.

Abrams made no effort to conceal his contempt for the ineffectual efforts of the US Congress to impose some restraint on the dirty wars Washington was waging in Central America. He described US legislators as “pious clowns” and “abysmally stupid.”

While he knew nothing of Latin America and did not even speak Spanish, he reveled in the covert operations surrounding the illegal war in Nicaragua. He played a direct and central role in creating a covert network for funding the CIA-organized contras after Congress had passed the so-called Boland amendment barring US military support for the mercenaries.

Working with Lt. Col. Oliver North, who was then a member of the National Security Council, he personally participated in obtaining illegal sources of funding, including making a flight to

London and using the alias of “Mr. Kenilworth” to obtain \$10 million from the Sultan of Brunei.

All the while, Abrams was testifying before Congress that the Reagan administration had no connection whatsoever to the supposedly private efforts to support the contras. He specifically claimed he had no knowledge that North had directed illegal arms sales to Iran and diverted the proceeds to the Nicaraguan contras.

The Bush administration brushed off questions concerning Abrams’s guilty pleas on the lying to Congress charges, claiming that they had been “dealt with.”

After joining the National Security Council, Abrams was implicated in the abortive coup attempt against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in April 2002. It was widely reported that he and Otto Reich, another veteran of the illegal contra operation appointed by Bush to the State Department, had met with the coup plotters and held detailed discussions on their prospects for success.

He was likewise tied to the Valerie Plame affair. A covert CIA agent, Plame was exposed to the press in an act of retaliation for the debunking of the administration’s claims on Iraq’s nonexistent nuclear weapons program by her husband, former diplomat Joseph Wilson. Abrams has been named as a prime suspect in providing the illegal leak.

This individual is the standard-bearer of Washington’s worldwide crusade for “democracy.” His appointment only underscores that the Bush administration’s vacuous rhetoric about “freedom” and “liberty” are merely window dressing for a global campaign of military aggression in pursuit of US imperialism’s strategic aims

Illegal wars, right-wing coups, death-squad terror and torture are the means associated with Abrams’s previous “democratic” crusade—combined with riding roughshod over democratic processes at home. These methods are now being revived on an even more horrific scale.



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