

# Biden taps Elliott Abrams, champion of death squads, for US diplomacy panel

**Bill Van Auken**  
**8 July 2023**

The Biden administration this week quietly announced its selection of long-time right-wing Republican foreign policy operative and convicted war criminal Elliott Abrams to serve on an independent panel that oversees US diplomacy.

The announcement of Abrams' nomination to the the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) came on the eve of the July 4th national holiday, a news dump timed to receive as little media coverage as possible.

There was good reason to give minimal exposure to this appointment of Abrams to the commission, which is tasked with advising the government on its global propaganda operations. He is one of the most loathsome figures in the US foreign policy establishment, personifying the homicidal violence, thuggishness and hypocrisy that has pervaded Washington's global operations for the last four decades. His political record is bound up with the preparation and cover-up of bloody massacres, state terrorism and genocide, along with wars, coups and coup attempts, from Latin America to the Middle East.

While the appointment of Abrams has drawn pained expressions of moral outrage from scattered elements of the pseudo-left, no prominent Democrat, including those like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez affiliated to the Democratic Socialists of America, has uttered a peep.

Biden knows full well whom he has nominated. As a senator and leading Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee in the 1980s, Biden was intimately familiar with the crimes carried out by Abrams under the Reagan administration during the bloody counter-insurgency wars in Central America, along with the illegal CIA-orchestrated "contra" terror campaign to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Biden's role then was to seek "compromise" with the Republican administration based on the promotion of toothless "human rights" amendments to bills providing the funding that kept the carnage going.

This dove-tailed with Abrams' own cynical attempts to justify every crime carried out by US imperialism in the region in the name of "human rights," on the grounds that the greatest guarantor of these rights was the capitalist profit system, in whose defense any and all methods were permissible, including mass murder.

Abrams first came to national prominence as a senior State Department official during the Reagan administration, distinguishing himself for his shameless lying to cover up the crimes of US-backed dictators and terrorists, while slandering anyone daring to expose these crimes as communist "dupes".

In 1991, the lying caught up with him, and he was compelled to plead guilty to two counts of lying under oath to the US Congress in his testimony regarding the secret and illegal operation mounted from the Reagan White House to fund the CIA-organized contra mercenary war that killed at least 10,000 Nicaraguans. The plea deal allowed Abrams to avoid a felony conviction and jail time, and within little more than a year he was pardoned by the outgoing president, George H.W. Bush, along with others who were convicted in the Iran-Contra conspiracy.

Under the Reagan administration, Abrams was director of the State Department's Office for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs where he was a pioneer in waving the filthy and cynical banner of "human rights" to justify US imperialist war and support for US-backed dictatorships. He later assumed the post of assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs, where he utilized these methods in support of monumental crimes.

Among the most infamous of these episodes was the December 1981 massacre of nearly 1,000 defenseless men, women and children by the US-trained Atlacatl Battalion in the Salvadoran village of El Mozote. The government troops rounded up the entire population of the village, separating the men who were interrogated, tortured and executed. Women and girls as young as ten were raped and killed. And children were decapitated, burned and hung from trees.

Abrams, whose job was to defend the government carrying out these grisly acts as a paragon of democracy and to assure the continued flow of US weapons, money and advisers, viciously denounced journalists who confirmed the mass killings, describing their on-the-spot reports as "nothing but communist propaganda."

A 1992 United Nations-sponsored Truth Commission documented the massacre, naming 500 of the dead, while the mutilated remains of many more victims could not be identified. State Department cables also confirmed that the Reagan administration and Abrams were fully informed of the

mass slaughter when they were dismissing it as “propaganda”.

Similarly, Abrams brushed off reports of massacres in Guatemala that the Catholic Church there described as “genocidal”. He commended the US-backed dictatorship of Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, who came to power in a 1982 coup, for its human rights record. In 2013, Ríos Montt was convicted on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity for orchestrating a counterinsurgency campaign that killed and maimed thousands of members of the Ixil Mayan indigenous population, while driving tens of thousands more from their villages.

None of this, nor his conviction in connection with his direct role in creating and covering up the illegal operation to fund the Nicaraguan contras, prevented Abrams from assuming senior posts in various Republican think tanks after Bush senior was voted out of office, nor his subsequent appointment to the National Endowment for Democracy and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Returning to office after the installation of George W. Bush as president, Abrams joined the National Security Council, where he played a leading role in the abortive coup attempt against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in April 2002. He was among the most enthusiastic proponents of the war of aggression against Iraq. A fervent right-wing Zionist, he worked to overturn the 2006 Palestinian election and foment a civil war between its victor, Hamas, and the Fatah faction which Washington supported.

Under the Trump administration, Abrams was named special representative for Venezuela, overseeing the continued sanctions and dirty operations aimed at starving the Venezuelan population and ousting or assassinating President Nicolas Maduro. He subsequently took over the same portfolio in relation to Iran, becoming “special representative for Venezuela and Iran,” or more appropriately, special envoy for regime change.

Among the more revealing reactions to Biden’s nomination of Abrams for the US propaganda oversight panel came from *Jacobin* magazine, the semi-official voice of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

In an article titled “The Nomination of Elliott Abrams Is a Stain on Joe Biden’s Human Rights Record,” *Jacobin*’s Branko Marcetic described the appointment as “baffling,” an “unforced political error” and “yet another self-inflicted ding to the White House’s public image-conscious foreign policy.”

The nomination, Marcetic continued, “makes a mockery” of Biden’s attempt “to do a reset from the scandal-filled Donald Trump years” by “reframing US foreign policy as revolving around a global ‘battle between democracy and autocracy’ and upholding the ‘international rules-based order.’”

Who does *Jacobin* think it’s kidding? Its bleat of moral outrage came as the Biden administration prepared to send cluster munitions to Ukraine and continued its support for the

Israeli government in its brutal military assault on the population of the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank. It has imposed conditions of abject misery upon tens of thousands of refugees denied the right to appeal for asylum at the Mexican border and it’s plowing ahead with its attempt to extradite Julian Assange to face an espionage trial and possible death sentence for daring to expose US war crimes. The conception that one could even detect another “stain” on Biden’s “human rights record” is ludicrous.

More fundamentally, the appointment can only be “baffling” for those seeking to delude themselves and others as they line up behind the Democratic Party in the run-up to the 2024 election.

Ever since his election -- and even after the Republican-led attempt to overturn it on January 6, 2021 -- Biden has stressed his determination to work for “bipartisanship” and collaborate with his “colleagues” across the aisle. He has stated repeatedly his desire for a “strong Republican Party,” prepared to work with his administration in support of a common foreign policy directed at escalating both the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and aggression aimed against China, while pursuing domestic policies that force the working class to pay for the ballooning costs of American militarism.

Abrams, one of the “never Trump” Republicans who opposes the former president because of his insufficient enthusiasm for the war for regime change against Russia, is a valued partner in pursuit of this policy. Indeed, he is the fitting ugly face of US imperialism’s ongoing global war drive.

The DSA, a faction of the Democratic Party and a supporter of the US-NATO war in Ukraine, feigns outrage and “bafflement” over his nomination in an attempt to cover up this political reality and divert the growing left-wing opposition to capitalism and war within the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**