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Biden nominated Abrams, who has defended death squads and interventions, to serve on a bipartisan diplomacy commission.



Former U.S. special envoy for Iran and Venezuela Elliott Abrams testifies during a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on U.S. Policy in the Middle East on Capitol Hill on September 24, 2020 in Washington, D.C. Susan Walsh / Getty Images

President Joe Biden on Monday quietly [nominated](#) Elliott Abrams to serve on a bipartisan diplomacy commission, a move that human rights advocates condemned as outrageous given the longtime Republican official's past as a [defender](#) of Latin American death squads and cheerleader for [murderous](#) U.S. foreign policy interventions.

“A totally indefensible decision from Biden,” *MSNBC*’s Mehdi Hasan [wrote](#) on Twitter, pointing to Abrams’ [guilty plea](#) stemming from the Reagan-era Iran-Contra scandal and his broader record in Latin America.

Most recently, Abrams served as the Trump administration’s special envoy to Iran and Venezuela. During a 2019 House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing, Rep. [Ilhan Omar](#) (D-Minn.) [grilled](#)

Abrams on his role in the Reagan administration’s policy in El Salvador, whose U.S.-backed military carried out the largest massacre in modern Latin American history in 1981 in and around the village of El Mozote.

Omar noted during the 2019 hearing that Abrams “later said that the U.S. policy in El Salvador was a ‘fabulous achievement.’”

After recounting the appalling details of the El Mozote killings—in which around 140 children were murdered — Omar asked Abrams, “Do you think that massacre was a ‘fabulous achievement’ that happened under our watch?”

“That is a ridiculous question, and I will not respond to it,” Abrams fumed in response. “I am not going to respond to that kind of personal attack, which is not a question.”

Abrams attempted to downplay the El Mozote massacre shortly after it occurred, [telling](#) the U.S. Senate that news reports of the gruesome killings were “not credible” and were being misused by anti-government forces.

In response to news of the Biden administration’s decision to nominate Abrams to the State Department’s Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, former longtime Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth [wrote](#) that Abrams’ “most notorious public diplomacy

is downplaying the 1981 El Mozote massacre of 1,000 people by U.S.-trained-and-equipped Salvadoran military units.”

Raymond Bonner, a former *New York Times* correspondent in El Salvador, [wrote](#) for *The Atlantic*

in 2019 that “the Reagan administration, with Abrams as point man, routinely defended the Salvadoran government in the face of evidence that its regular army, and allied right-wing death squads, were operating with impunity, killing peasants, students, union leaders, and anyone considered anti-government or pro-guerrilla.”

“Abrams went so far as to defend one of the death squads’ most notorious leaders, Roberto D’Aubuisson, who was responsible for the murder of Archbishop Óscar Romero while he was saying Mass, in March 1980,” Bonner added.

The Biden White House predictably failed to mention the sordid details of Abrams’ record in its nomination [announcement](#), offering a sterilized biography that lists off the notorious figure’s previous government roles: Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, Human Rights, and Latin America under Ronald Reagan, a senior director of the National Security Council under George W. Bush, and special representative for Iran and special representative for Venezuela under Donald Trump, among others.

According to its [website](#), the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy is tasked with “appraising U.S. government activities intended to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics and to increase the understanding of, and support for, these same activities.”

Abrams must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve on the commission.

Slate journalist Alex Sammon [slammed](#) Biden’s nomination of Abrams for the position as “obscene” and “unconscionable.”

“Elliott Abrams, enemy of human rights, apologist for mass murder, should have no place within spitting distance of any Democratic administration in any capacity,” Sammon argued.

