

Pompeo Puts Elliott Abrams in Charge of Regime Change in Venezuela

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Pompeo named Elliott Abrams as special envoy for Venezuela Friday. The Guardian [reminds us](#) of Abrams' awful career serving in previous Republican administrations:

Abrams is widely remembered in Central America, but particularly from his time in the Reagan administration, when he tried to whitewash a massacre of a thousand men, women and children by US-funded death squads in El Salvador, when he was assistant secretary of state for human rights.
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He shrugged off the reports as communist propaganda, and insisted: "The administration's record in El Salvador is one of fabulous achievement."

Abrams also helped organise the covert financing of Contra rebels in Nicaragua behind the back of Congress, which had cut off funding. He then lied to Congress about his role, twice. He pleaded guilty to both counts in 1991 but was pardoned by George HW Bush.

More than a decade later, working as special Middle East adviser to former president George W Bush, Abrams was an enthusiastic advocate of the Iraq invasion. He was in the White House at the time of the abortive coup in 2002 against Hugo Chavez. The Observer reported that Abrams gave the green light to the putsch, another an inspector general enquiry found no "wrongdoing" by US officials.

That was not enough to erase his reputation as the assistant secretary of dirty wars. The message sent by his return to the front rank of US diplomacy will not missed in Caracas.

Putting Abrams in charge of any aspect of U.S. foreign policy is a horrible mistake. Putting someone with such a well-known, appalling record in charge of a regime change effort in Latin America confirms critics' worst suspicions about this intervention in another country's internal political dispute. It is a measure of how completely hard-liners now dominate Trump administration foreign policy that a vocal Trump critic can be brought on to lead a high-profile foreign policy initiative. Venezuela policy has been designed by Rubio and Pompeo, both of whom are notoriously hawkish, and it is going to be carried out by a neoconservative with one of the bloodiest and ugliest foreign policy records of anyone that has served in government over the last forty years. All the while, Bolton couldn't be happier with what has been happening. Trump is letting his foreign policy be conducted by some of the very worst people in the Republican Party, and it is just a matter of time before it blows up in his face at great cost to the U.S.

The message that the Abrams appointment sends is the worst imaginable that the U.S. could send right now. Here is an official with a long record of supporting violent abuses, civil wars, and coups in Latin American countries and a backer of forcible regime change in other parts of the world, and he is being put in charge of an effort to “restore democracy” to Venezuela. That should be setting off every alarm bell there is. Pompeo could scarcely have chosen a person with a worse, more sullied reputation in the region, and by putting him charge of Venezuela policy he has all but announced that our policy is the cynical and destructive one that its opponents have feared it will be.

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