

Public Serpent Iran-contra villain Elliott Abrams is back in action

By Terry J. Allen

A nursing home aide earning minimum wage caring for Alzheimer's patients is an unskilled laborer. A grade school teacher pulling down \$25,000 a year in a crumbling inner-city school is barely a professional. But a politician reaping power, pay, perks and retirement packages is a public servant.

Calling George W. Bush and Jesse Helms "public servants" is like calling Iran-contra criminal Elliott Abrams an "outstanding diplomat"—which is precisely what White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer did when he announced Abrams' appointment as senior director of the National Security Council's Office for Democracy, Human Rights and International Operations. Fleischer conveyed Bush's faith-based assertion that Abrams is "the best person to do the job," which, happily for the appointee, does not require Senate confirmation.

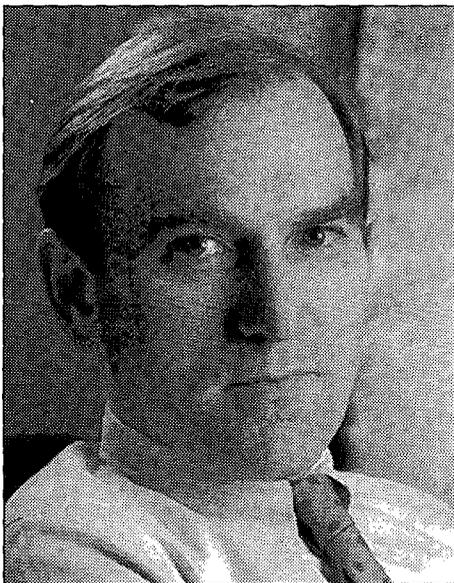
For those who don't remember, Abrams was one of the most odious participants in a particularly shameful chapter of U.S. history. In the '80s, he was Ronald Reagan's assistant secretary of state for human rights and humanitarian affairs and later the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs. In that post, Abrams, in his own words, "supervised U.S. policy in Latin America and the Caribbean."

That policy included backing the contras—a surrogate army dedicated to overthrowing the democratically elected Sandinista government of Nicaragua. It also involved funding the military thugocracy of El Salvador and supervising its war against a popular leftist rebellion. In his role as public servant, Abrams found time to cover up the genocidal policies of the Guatemalan government and embrace the government of Honduras while it perpetrated serial human rights abuses through Battalion 3-16, a U.S.-trained "intelligence unit" turned death squad.

Thick as thieves with Oliver North, Abrams helped evade congressional

restrictions on aid to the contras. When Congress—spurred on by protests and embarrassing press disclosures—grew wary of the Central American wars, the Reaganites sought other avenues for funding them. Ever eager to serve, Abrams flew to London under the alias "Mr. Kenilworth" to solicit a \$10 million contribution from the Sultan of Brunei.

In the congressional investigations that followed disclosure of the Iran-contra conspiracies, Abrams was never held accountable for the human rights violations backed, hidden and funded by the Reagan administration. Instead Abrams was accused of withholding information from Congress, a Washington euphemism for bald-face lying. In 1991, he copped to two counts of withholding information from Congress (and was granted a Christmas



"This snake is hard to kill," said Adm. William Crowe Jr., referring to Abrams.

Eve pardon a year later by President George Bush).

Abrams was none too pleased, even with this slap on the wrist. According to a May 30, 1994 article in *Legal Times*, he called his prosecutors "filthy bastards," the proceedings against him "Kafkaesque," and members of the Senate Intelligence Committee "pious clowns" whose *raison d'être* was to ask him "abysmally stupid" questions. (In the spirit of full disclosure: Abrams once called me a "rotten bitch" after I tactlessly noted that much of the world considers him a war criminal.)

Abrams' own "full biography," posted on the Web site of the Ethics and Public Policy Center—an oxymoronic think tank where he wiled away much of the Democratic interregnum awaiting the collective amnesia of the American public—omits his unpleasantness with Congress. In any case, as Fleischer said of Abrams' transgressions, "the president thinks that's a matter of the past and was dealt with at the time."

Loved ones of the thousand unarmed Salvadoran peasants, including 139 children, killed by U.S.-trained contra troops in the 1981 El Mozote massacre may be less inclined to let bygones be bygones. Abrams has been a consistent massacre denier, even calling Washington's policy in El Salvador a "fabulous achievement." He told Congress that the reports carried in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* a month after El Mozote were Communist propaganda.

In 1993, members of a Salvadoran Truth commission testified about the massacre in a congressional hearing of the House Western Hemisphere subcommittee. Chairman Robert G. Torricelli (D-New Jersey) vowed to review for possible perjury "every word uttered by every Reagan administration official" in congressional testimony on El Salvador. Abrams denounced Torricelli's words as "McCarthyite crap."

Eventually documentation emerged proving that the Reagan administration had known about El Mozote and other human rights violations all along. Abrams, however, carefully denied knowledge of the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, committed shortly after the cleric denounced government terror. "Anybody who thinks you're going to find a cable that says that Roberto d'Aubuisson murdered the archbishop is a fool," Abrams was quoted in a March 21, 1993 article in the *Washington Post*.

In fact, the *Post* notes, the U.S. embassy in San Salvador sent at least two such cables to Washington nailing d'Aubuisson, the right-wing politician who was the chief architect of the plot against Romero. The December 21, 1981 cable notes: "A meeting, chaired

by Maj. Roberto d'Aubuisson, during which the murder of Archbishop Romero was planned. During the meeting, some of the participants drew lots for the privilege of killing the archbishop."

Now Bush II has given Abrams a post that rewards his special experience. In the proud ranks of America's public servants, he will join other Iran-contra vets: Secretary of State Colin Powell; Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage; Otto Reich, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs; and presumably John Negroponte, awaiting confirmation as U.N. ambassador.

And who says you can't get help like you used to? ■

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AIDS Aid

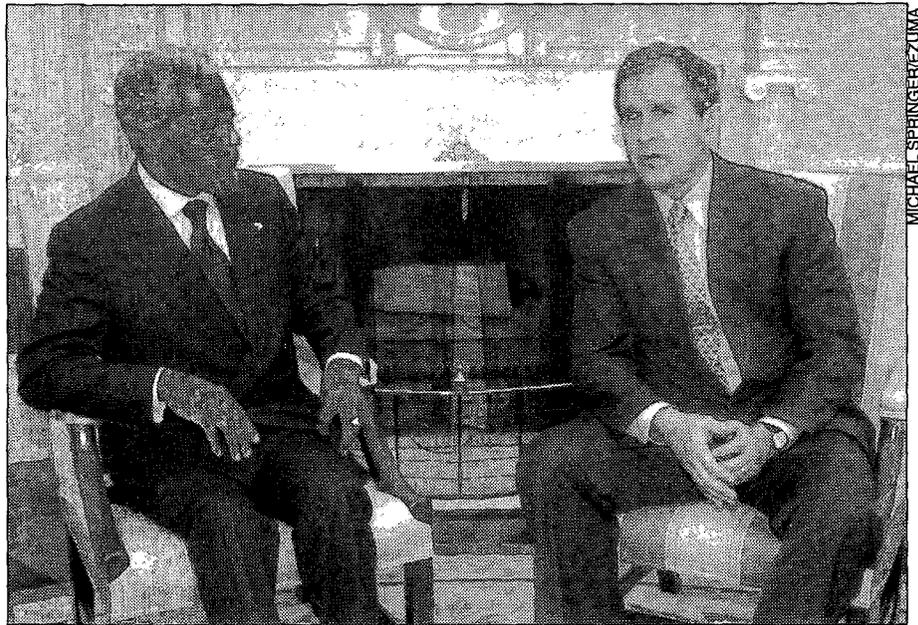
U.N. session collects the West's pocket change

By **Ben Winters**

UNITED NATIONS—Something funny happened on the way to establishing U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposed Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS: The community of nations forgot to bring their wallets.

The goal of the special session on HIV/AIDS in late June was two-fold: to adopt a U.N. Declaration of Commitment, setting specific goals for an increased response, and to inaugurate a fund of at least \$7 billion to pay the bills. "Money is needed for education and awareness campaigns for HIV tests, for condoms, for drugs, for scientific research, to provide care for orphans, and of course to improve our health care systems," Annan said, announcing the fund in Abuja, Nigeria in April. "\$7 billion sounds like a lot—and it is a lot."

In the end, "a lot" may have been too much. Before the session began, the Bush administration ponied up the first pledge, for an underwhelming \$200 million. The United States also



George W. Bush plays host to Kofi Annan in the Oval Office.

sent Secretary of State Colin Powell to the conference—along with Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, who kept a low profile—to vaguely suggest that there may be more to follow: "More will come from the United States as we learn where our support can be most effective," Powell said.

After the United States anted up, France and Britain dutifully made their commitments, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation kicked in \$100 million. More pledges came from the usual suspects like Canada (\$73 million) and Norway (\$110 million, or the more impressive-sounding 1 billion kroner).

Uganda chipped in a symbolic \$2 million, but in general the fund is expected to work on the Robin Hood system: Money will come from rich nations to be distributed among needy countries in the developing world. More donations are expected in the months to come, but by the end of the session Annan seemed like the beleaguered host of a TV telethon, waiting hopelessly for pledges as the hours dragged on.

The final tally: \$644 million pledged to the Global Fund as of the end of June. The fact that only a small fraction of the hoped for amount could be cobbled together led to some rhetorical dancing around the \$7 billion figure; U.N. spokesmen now suggested that the amount represents what is needed for

the worldwide AIDS response, of which the fund is to be the cornerstone.

The hesitancy of member nations to kick in may stem from the many issues still up in the air regarding the exact purpose and organization of the fund. Not yet decided is who exactly will administer it—thus far it is envisioned as a private financial entity housed under the World Bank—or what the application process will be for the distribution of its funds. There will be a "nimble secretariat" to actually receive applications and cut the checks, and a "governing body" to be comprised of delegates from both donor and receiving countries, and representatives of civil society groups and the private sector.

This private sector presence suggested to some activist groups attending the session—including members of ACT UP and the Health GAP Coalition, who stole the spotlight with a raucous press conference and demonstration on day two—that the fund will be unhealthily skewed toward a big-business perspective. Will the fund withhold donations to nations trying to purchase those cheaper generic drugs loathed by the pharmaceutical companies? There was an audible murmur of skepticism when a U.S. delegation spokesman was asked whether any pharma groups will have a seat on the fund's board. He suggested that they "probably won't want the headache" of being involved.

A London-based nonprofit group called Christian Aid released a statement asking whether the fund is simply a giant red herring, and direly predicted that it will only divert donations from existing and effective channels: "The fund will attract little more than a token amount of money, and it is certain that a new, global bureaucracy will be required to administer it."

But if the rich nations of the world can't pony up for action on HIV/AIDS, who will? MTV, of course. Bill Roedy, president of MTV Networks International and chairman of the Global Business Council on HIV/AIDS, noted that the business of

business—"the organization, communication, delivery systems"—uniquely suits it to "play a tremendous role" in the fight against AIDS.

Roedy's statement was followed by a frank admission from former U.N. ambassador Richard Holbrooke, newly appointed CEO of the Global Business Council: "Whatever business has done so far has been grossly inadequate."

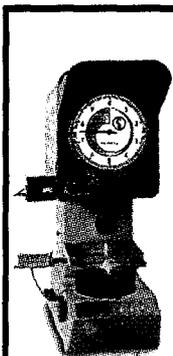
But if Annan's Global Fund doesn't begin with an effective mandate and a healthy bank statement—and if the global business community fails to turn strong rhetoric into day-to-day practice—gross inadequacies will continue to carry the day. ■

A Simple Plan

Democratic leaders plot how to take back the country

By Hugh Jackson

LOS ANGELES—Sounds simple enough. Democrats run a national campaign centered on expanding Medicare to the entire population. Roused from somnambulance, nonvoters head for the polls in droves, sweeping Democrats into Congress and the White House on a progressive plat-



Appall-o-Meter

By Dave Mulcahey

Here Comes the Judge 7.8

Some jurists are hangin' judges, others are just into B&D. Here are some highlights from the *National Law Journal's* annual survey of deviance in the halls of justice, drawn from state judicial misconduct commissions across the country:

- Judge Ellis "Beaudron" Willard of Sharkey County, Mississippi was suspended for fabricating evidence. Among other irregularities, Willard conducted court proceedings out of a business he owned, Beaudron's Pawn Shop and Tire Center. And he once arrested a clerk who insisted on going home at 11:30 p.m., subsequently sentencing her to probation.
- Truancy Court Judge Marvin Dean Mitchell of Amarillo, Texas quit the bench, but avoided prosecution for "official oppression." The judge, who was known to telephone kids on probation to check up on them, called one 15-year-old truant and demanded that she talk dirty to him, according to a complaint the girl filed. Three other teens came forward with similar stories.
- Robert E. Hollman, a Texas judge, resigned after his secretary complained to the EEOC of Hollman's propensity to tie her up. "Judge Hollman would bind [the secretary's] hands behind her back, tie her ankles together and gag her with a scarf," according to the complaint. "Judge Hollman would sometimes carry [her] bound-and-gagged ... around the office; other times, Judge Hollman would leave [her] tied to a chair or lying on the

floor for long periods of time." While she struggled to free herself, Hollman would often watch bondage videos. His lawyer claims these antics were consensual.

Greg Brady, Union Buster 4.1

You may remember him as Greg, the tidy and courteous elder son on *The Brady Bunch*. Or you may remember him as the washed-up TV star whose memoir changed forever the way you think of Florence Henderson. Barry Williams is many things to many people. To enemies of organized labor, he is a poster child.

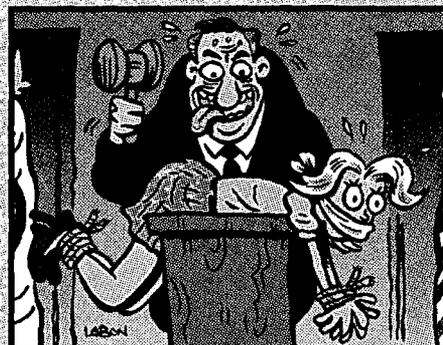
Williams is embroiled in a bitter dispute with the Actors Equity Association (AEA) over his role in a non-Equity production of *The Sound of Music*. The union has fined him \$52,000 for starring in the play, while Williams maintains that he resigned from AEA before signing on for the production. Union activists have picketed the show, carrying signs proclaiming "Greg Brady is a Scab" and chanting "Who let the scabs out?"

"In an attempt to make actors think twice about exercising their rights, AEA union bullies are making an example of Barry Williams," huffs Randy Wanke, director of legal information for the National Right to Work Foundation, in a press release on that organization's Web site. The foundation, a notorious antagonist of unions, is providing legal assistance to Williams' case against AEA before the National Labor Relations Board.

Chip of the Beast 5.8

The Digital Angel purports to be a godsend to the parents of abduction-prone children everywhere. It is a microchip that can be detected by military satellites no matter where it is, anywhere in the world. Implanted between the muscle and the skin of the forearm, the Digital Angel can tell you not only the whereabouts of your kidnapped loved one, but other key information, such as whether he/she is still alive. (That's a key bargaining advantage during ransom negotiations.)

Applied Digital Solutions, a Florida-based company, hopes to begin marketing the Digital Angel in October, according to a report in London's *Independent*. The company has one public relations hurdle to clear, however. The American Family Association, a prominent Christian group, has suggested that the Digital Angel is a portent of End Times. The chip, they say, is the "mark of the beast" mentioned in the Book of Revelation. For the time being, the company has prudently chosen to emphasize a wristwatch version of the chip.



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