

# Gaza turmoil: U.S. choosing sides again

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [June 12, 2007](#) issue

When Israel would not allow the Palestinian soccer team to practice in Gaza, the team held its practice sessions in Egypt. The documentary film *Goal Dreams* reminds us of the implications of that decision. Palestinians from Chile, New York and Spain who were trying out for the team arrived in Egypt with little difficulty, but Palestinians who had to travel the few miles from Gaza to Egypt were delayed for several days at the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt for “security reasons.”

The same Israeli-controlled border crossing was more hospitable to a recent group of Palestinians entering Gaza from Egypt. Fatah, the political party favored by the U.S. and Israel in the current Gaza internal conflict, was allowed to bring in as many as 500 troops. According to the *Washington Post* (May 18), these troops were trained in Egypt “under a U.S.-coordinated program to counter Hamas.”

The U.S.-trained Fatah forces are under the command of Palestinian national security adviser Mohammed Dahlan, who was appointed by President Mahmoud Abbas under pressure from the U.S. Tony Karon, a senior editor at Time.com, describes Dahlan as “the Gaza warlord who has long been Washington’s anointed favorite to play the role of a Palestinian Pinochet” (tonykaron.com)—a reference to the Chilean military dictator installed with the help of the U.S. after a 1973 military coup led to the overthrow and death of President Salvador Allende.

President Abbas, who is sensitive to vigorous internal Palestinian opposition to a U.S.-Israel alliance and eager to end fighting between Palestinians, agreed to form a Palestinian unity government with Hamas, the political party that controls the Palestinian legislature. Saudi Arabia hosted the talks at Mecca, where the agreement was reached.

The agreement, however, was favored by neither the U.S. nor its point man in the region, White House Middle East policy chief Elliott Abrams. Abrams is no stranger to

manipulating internal conflicts in developing countries; as assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, he was the Reagan administration's chief advocate on Capitol Hill for U.S. aid to the contra rebels in Nicaragua. As Reagan's Central America czar, Abrams provided U.S. backing for the overthrow of the democratically elected Sandinista government of Nicaragua, an action that resulted in personal legal problems for him.

Abrams pled guilty in 1991 to two misdemeanor charges of withholding information from Senate and House committees. He admitted lying about his knowledge of Oliver North's activities in assisting the contras. Church organizations at the time were harshly critical of Abrams because of multiple human rights abuses conducted on his watch in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Abrams was pardoned by outgoing president George H. W. Bush in 1991, then returned to government in 2001 by the current President Bush. *The Nation's* Washington editor, David Corn, described Abrams as "the guy who lied and wheedled to aid and protect human rights abusers."

Karon sees a clear link between Dahlan's ambitions and plans drawn up by Abrams "to arm and train Fatah loyalists to prepare them to topple the Hamas government" (tonykaron.com). He is referring to an "Action Plan for the Palestinian Presidency," a document described in *Asia Times* (May 16) by Mark Perry and Paul Woodward (codirector and managing editor of conflictsforum.com, a Beirut-based organization that studies political Islam). The Jordanian newspaper *Al-Majd* had planned to publish the 16-page secret document, which calls for replacing the Palestinian national-unity government with a government run exclusively by Fatah, but Jordanian officials blocked publication. A copy was leaked and reached Perry and Woodward.

The Western media have ignored the secret plan, focusing instead on its implementation with daily news reports of carnage between radical factions within Hamas and Dahlan's Fatah security forces.

Nathan Guttman, writing in the U.S. Jewish publication *Forward*, reports that when Abrams spoke to a gathering of Jewish Republicans in January, he said that the only successes he anticipated on the Israeli-Palestinian front were improvements in freedom of movement for Palestinians and efforts to strengthen Abbas's presidential guard.

The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* (May 20) reports that Major General Keith Dayton, U.S. security coordinator in Israel and Palestine, has been urging Israel to “strengthen Abbas loyalists” in Gaza to “improve the security situation” there—another indication that the secret plan is moving forward in preference to the peace plan that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has tried unsuccessfully to develop. The State Department denies any split between Abrams and Rice, but Abrams’s public statements and his relationship with Fatah strongman Dahlan contradict that denial.

The realities of U.S. military funding of Fatah and U.S. training of Fatah troops leave little doubt that the U.S. is once again choosing sides in another country’s internal conflict, and once again displaying the arrogance that led to disasters in Vietnam, El Salvador, Guatemala and Iraq.