

Viewpoint: Another Iran-Contra figure in administration

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The invasion of garlic mustard

By Drs. Robert & Sonia Vogl

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By Joe Baker, Senior Editor

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The “compassionate conservative” has done it again with another “in your face” appointment of a cover-up artist from the Iran-Contra scandal to an important post in the Bush administration. George W. Bush has named John Negroponte as ambassador to Iraq. Negroponte has been our ambassador at the U. N.

Negroponte is one of the darkest and slimiest of the old guard Iran-Contra clique. In his new position, Negroponte will be instrumental in installing Bush-brand democracy in Iraq. In that capacity, he will have oversight of any human rights abuses. That, to those with any historical knowledge, is akin to putting Hitler in charge of Jewish freedom.

Negroponte was U.S. ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s when Reagan was waging war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. He served as Reagan’s point man.

According to a series published by the Baltimore Sun in 1995, the CIA organized, trained and

financed an army unit known as “Battalion 316.” This unit’s specialty was torture. It kidnapped, tortured, and killed hundreds of Hondurans. The Sun reported these soldier/terrorists “used shock and suffocation devices in interrogations. Prisoners often were kept naked and, when no longer useful, killed and buried in unmarked graves.”

Our embassy in Honduras was aware of these practices but did not want the information to become public, according to the newspaper. “Determined to avoid questions in Congress, U.S. officials in Honduras concealed evidence of human rights abuses,” the Sun said. Negroponte has denied any involvement in all of this. Before he was confirmed as U.S. ambassador to the U.N., he stated: “I do not believe that death squads were operating in Honduras.”

The Baltimore Sun stated flatly: “The embassy was aware of numerous kidnappings of leftists.” The paper said Negroponte had a key role in covering up human rights abuses.

“Specific examples of brutality by the Honduran military typically never appeared in the human rights reports, prepared by the embassy under the direct supervision of Ambassador Negroponte,” the Sun reported.

“The reports from Honduras were carefully crafted to leave the impression that the Honduran military respected human rights.”

Rick Chidester was an official serving under Negroonte in Honduras. Chidester said in 1982 he was ordered to remove any mention of torture and executions from his report on human rights in Honduras.

Negroonte served as ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985. In that time, U.S. military aid to that country soared from \$4 million to \$77.4 million. It is believed more than 100 people vanished in that period.

President Carter had appointed Jack Binns as ambassador to Honduras. Binns was appalled at the human rights violations and made numerous complaints to the Honduran military about them. He also complained to the new Reagan-Bush administration. Reagan replaced Binns with Negroonte.

Negroonte was in that post when the El Aquacante air base was established. That is where the U. S. trained Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s. The base also was a secret detention and torture center. In August 2001, excavations there turned up the first of 185 corpses, including two Americans, believed to have been killed and buried at the base.

Negroponete claims he knew nothing about these deaths or the doings of Battalion 316. With the mountain of evidence and testimony supporting the occurrence of these human rights violations, Negroponete would be required to have lived in a cave somewhere, with no human contact. The Honduras Commission on Human Rights has accused Negroponete himself of human rights violations.

Confirmation hearings on Negroponete's nomination to the ambassadorship in Iraq have been delayed by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations until they can obtain classified documents from the Iran-Contra era. Senators want to know why Negroponete did not raise concerns about Battalion 316 and about other instances of human rights violations. Human rights groups both here and in Latin America are petitioning the Senate to deny confirmation to Negroponete.

His first foreign assignment was in the mid-1960s at the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong. In 1964, he was assigned to the U.S. embassy in Saigon, Vietnam. From 1971 to 1973, Negroponete was the officer-in-charge for Vietnam at the National Security Council, reporting to Henry Kissinger.

Negroponete has some skills well-suited to a legitimate diplomat. He speaks four foreign languages—Greek, French, Vietnamese, and Spanish. He has served as ambassador to Mexico and the Philippines in addition to Honduras.

The latest appointment—if confirmed—will place him at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad which, when fully staffed with 300 officials, likely will be the largest in the world.

Sarah Wildman, assistant editor of The New Republic, said “human rights activists did a collective double take” when they heard of Negroponete’s nomination. She noted the nominee has a reputation both for “doggedly defending U.S. interests overseas” and for “making sure human rights don’t get in the way.” She thought the proposed appointment ironic because “one of the primary responsibilities of George W. Bush’s new ambassador to the U. N. had been to berate countries like China, Burma, and Afghanistan for their violations of human rights.”

In the Vietnam era, Negroponete was a mainstay in pulling Richard Nixon’s fat from the fire before the presidential elections. Now we have another mess in Iraq, created by George W. Bush and his neo-conservative colleagues.

Again, an election looms; and again, Negroonte is being positioned to aid in an attempted transition from chaos to some form of near-democratic government and the suppression of any negative aspects, such as human rights violations.

Are these the kinds of abuses that will be winked at by the man who names an insensitive functionary like Negroonte? Are we expected to believe that this Iran-Contra cover-up artist is worthy of trust?

Sources: geocities.com, intervention magazine.com, derechos.org, The Progressive.

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