

John Negroponte and the Latin Americanization of US politics

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Within the narrow confines of debate within the US political and media establishment over the various spying programs that have come to light in recent months, one basic fact is assumed by all participants: the Bush administration, whatever mistakes it may make or civil liberties it may transgress, is waging a war on terrorism, the basic aim of which must be supported by everyone.

On the one hand, the Bush administration insists that the American people must take the government at its word, that they must trust that the government is using the massive new spying powers it has arrogated to itself to target Al Qaeda. The government has released no concrete information about the nature of the various spying programs it has initiated, programs that are intended to accumulate databases of telephone and Internet communications of tens of millions of American citizens. There are any number of other programs that are still completely hidden from the population. This secrecy is supposedly justified on the grounds that any publicly available information would help terrorists evade detection.

On the other hand, the nominal opposition within the political establishment proceeds always from the basic assumption that the administration is prosecuting a “war on terrorism” that must be won. The *tactics* may be criticized, as to whether they are appropriate or necessary, but the basic *motives* are not even questioned. Typical was a statement from Patrick Leahy, the leading Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, who declared on Sunday, “We should be spying on terrorists, not on innocent Americans. I want us to be safe, but I don’t think this administration is doing it the right way.”

Besides accepting the basic premise of the war on terror, such statements are highly disingenuous, given the fact that the Democratic Party leadership was briefed on aspects of the NSA spying program long before they were reported in the media.

Is it not possible that the US government is spying on the American people for the express purpose of gathering names and information on potential or actual political opponents, is using the “war on terrorism” as an excuse to lay the foundations for the roundup of thousands of individuals because of their views in opposition to the war or other aspects of the policy of the American ruling class? To even raise this question would be denounced as a conspiracy theory, if it were not so studiously ignored.

The actual purpose of the administration’s actions, however, is evident in considering the individuals who have been tasked with carrying it out. In particular, it is worth reexamining the record of John Negroponte, the current Director of National Intelligence, who is in charge of centralizing and coordinating the various different American spy agencies. Negroponte has emerged as a critical figure in the vast expansion of US domestic surveillance.

Negroponte is generally considered to have played the critical role in forcing out CIA director Porter Goss, who resigned earlier this month. To fill his place, the Bush administration has nominated Michael Hayden, Negroponte’s deputy and a former head of the NSA.

Negroponte was nominated as DNI in February 2005. While the post was created in response to a recommendation from the panel set up to investigate the September 11 attacks, the real purpose of the position is to step up attacks on democratic rights and prepare for repressive measures against the American people.

It was for this reason the Negroponte was selected. One of his main qualifications was his role as US Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985. In that position, he helped oversee the American intervention in support of the “contras,” who were waging a vicious war against the nationalist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. During the course of the CIA-funded war, 50,000 people died and the right-wing contras employed brutal methods of

disappearances, torture and mass killings.

Negroponte also oversaw a massive increase in US aid to the Honduran military, which was supporting the contras. He praised the country's military regime as a model of democracy, and helped to cover up evidence of extrajudicial killings and torture. Shortly before a bipartisan vote in April 2005 by the Senate to confirm Negroponte in his new post, the *Washington Post* reported on new documents detailing his close ties to the Honduran military. Negroponte opposed any attempts to reach a negotiated settlement with the Sandinistas, and instead favored a policy of "regime change."

Negroponte campaigned for the Reagan administration to continue its funding of the contras even after the US Congress voted to deny further aid. This policy eventually led to the Iran-Contra scandal, in which it was revealed that the Reagan administration was secretly funding the contras through illegal sales of arms to Iran. This policy was fully developed, however, only after Negroponte left his post in 1985.

Prior to serving in Honduras, Negroponte held important posts in the Nixon administration and dealt especially with Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, he was a staunch opponent of any concessions to Hanoi. In the late 1980s and 1990s, he spent most of his time in various diplomatic posts, including as an ambassador to Mexico and later to the Philippines.

Then, in 2001, the Bush administration named him US ambassador to the United Nations, a post that he held until 2004. There he played a critical role in promoting the lies of the Bush administration used to justify the invasion of Iraq. During the run-up to the invasion, the US engaged in spying on other countries at the UN in an attempt to push through votes that would justify the invasion.

He left the UN to take post of US ambassador to Iraq in 2004, where he oversaw the escalation of violence against the Iraqi population, including the devastating siege against the city of Fallujah in November 2004.

Despite his past association with the Iran-contra scandal, Negroponte was confirmed with overwhelming support from both the Democrats and Republicans to all of the posts to which he was nominated.

Since becoming director of national intelligence, Negroponte has helped transfer to the US the anti-democratic and repressive measures he has overseen in other parts of the world, particularly in Latin America.

Along with other members of the administration, he has lied in an attempt to hide from the American people the vast scope of the attacks on democratic rights. A

Washington Post article on May 15 noted that Negroponte said on May 8 that the US was "absolutely not" monitoring domestic calls without warrants. Only a few days before the revelation of precisely such monitoring—in the *USA Today* article on the NSA's accumulation of databases of the phone records of millions of Americans—Negroponte declared, "I wouldn't call it domestic spying. This is about international terrorism and telephone calls between people thought to be working for international terrorism and people here in the United States."

In an interview with CNN at the time of his nomination to the UN, Negroponte sought to defend aspects of his own history in aiding military dictatorships in Latin America: "Some of these regimes, to the outside observer, may not have been as savory as Americans would have liked," he reasoned. "They may have been dictators, or likely to [become] dictators, when you would have been wanting to support democracy in the area. But with the turmoil that [was there], it was perhaps not possible to do that."

The statement reflects not only the attitude that Negroponte has toward the past, but also toward the present and future. The American ruling class is confronting ever-greater "turmoil" within the United States, with mounting opposition to the Bush administration and the entire direction of American policy. Social conditions for masses of people are deteriorating while social inequality increases. In an effort to secure hegemony on the world stage, the American ruling elite is planning further military aggression against Iran, China, Russia or any other country that poses a threat to its interests, even as domestic opposition to the occupation of Iraq steadily increases.

The turmoil that Negroponte discovered in Honduras and Nicaragua (and later in Iraq)—popular opposition to the policies of the American banks and corporations—is not fundamentally different from the turmoil that is now building up at home. For this reason, the same dictatorial forms of rule that the American government has for decades promoted and buttressed elsewhere will be increasingly applied within the United States itself.



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