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Mexican Administration Under Attack For Failing To Block President Bush's Choice For U.S. Ambassador

by John Neagle

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George Bush's choice for US Ambassador to Mexico is John C. Negroponte, whose close ties to intelligence agencies and previous positions in Vietnam and Central America make him objectionable to many Mexicans. A week after the Mexican Foreign Ministry formally accepted Bush's choice, the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari continues under attack for not having attempted to block the appointment. According to Mexican political scientist, and co-author of "Limits of Friendship: The United States and Mexico, Jorge Castaneda: "The Mexican government had various opportunities to express to the Bush team, in a discrete, indirect but efficient manner, its displeasure, amazement or open disagreement. It opted not to do so, whether out of diplomatic conservatism, fear of confrontation with the United States or just because it didn't occur to them." Mexican political analysts, foreign diplomats and many at the US Embassy are curious about what motivated the Bush administration to name a diplomat so closely identified with the Reagan administration's Central America policy, which Mexico strongly opposed. Negroponte served as Ambassador to Honduras, supervising US support for the contras, before assuming his current position on the National Security Council, where he is in charge of Latin American affairs. Samples of reactions to the Bush administration's choice for Ambassador in the Mexican press follow: *La Jornada* (02/02/89): The Negroponte appointment was described as an "ominous decision." At this time, Bush's plans for Negroponte were not yet public, but were nonetheless published by virtually all Mexican daily newspapers. *La Jornada* said that the diplomat's career, and his close working relationship with policies of "aggression toward other countries," are tendencies which do not bode well for the future of bilateral relations. International politics commentator Gregorio Selser described Negroponte as an "ultra-hawk" who entered the Latin American stage "in 1981 when Thomas O. Enders, his former boss in Cambodia, selected him as ambassador to the previously calm Republic of Honduras." *Uno Mas Uno* (02/02/89): A correspondent in Washington reported that US academics, government officials, and experts on Mexican affairs, former intelligence officials, called the appointment "a bad omen." Many of the persons interviewed, said *Uno Mas Uno*, described the diplomat as "implacable, relentless and Machiavellian." Negroponte, they said, will play hard-line policies and deliver US demands to the government of Salinas de Gortari. *El Dia* (02/02/89): Adolfo Aguilar, a native of Mexico who works with the Carnegie Foundation, told reporters that the imminent appointment of Negroponte could be a "great blunder," having "serious implications." *El Sol de Mexico* (02/07/89): "For both the US and Mexico, it is abundantly clear that bilateral relations... represent a top priority...Negroponte is virtually already the US Ambassador in our country. The SRE (Foreign Relations Secretariat) agrees with his presence in Mexico. It is useful nonetheless to emphasize some of the lines contained in the [Ministry's] communique to Washington indicating its acceptance of the appointment. Of importance are those which address the desire that Negroponte contributes to improved Mexican-US relations, as well as non-involvement in domestic affairs. If it turns out that such expectations are not fulfilled, especially regarding the second point, Mexico will exercise the right of admission as it has on previous occasions..." *Uno Mas Uno* (02/07/89): "Mexican public opinion's unanimous

rejection of...John Dimitri Negroonte as representative of the United States in our country is not a gratuitous reaction. Independently of how the government of his country values his diplomatic services, it is certain that Negroonte has participated, almost without exception, in the blackest chapters of US diplomatic history." (Basic data from New York Times, 02/14/89; Notimex, 02/02/89, 02/08/89)

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