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Bush names Negroponte as envoy to Iraq

By Pete Yost
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Bush named John Negroponte, the United States' top diplomat at the United Nations, as the U.S. ambassador to Iraq on Monday and asserted that Iraq "will be free and democratic and peaceful."

Bush announced the nomination in an Oval Office ceremony. At the United Nations, Negroponte, 64, was instrumental in winning unanimous approval of a Security Council resolution that demanded Saddam Hussein comply with U.N. mandates to disarm.

While the resolution helped the Bush administration make its case for invading Iraq, the Security Council eventually refused to endorse the overthrow of Saddam, opting instead to extend U.N. weapons searches.

"John Negroponte is a man of enormous experience and skill" and "has done a really good job of speaking for the United States to the world about our intentions to spread freedom and peace," said Bush.

Regarding Negroponte's new post, the president said there is "no doubt in my mind he can handle it, no doubt in my mind he will do a very good job, and there's no doubt in my mind that Iraq will be free and democratic and peaceful."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Dick

Lugar, R-Ind., supports the nomination and said he will work with Secretary of State Colin Powell to provide a prompt public hearing for Negroponte.

If confirmed by the Senate, Negroponte would head a U.S. embassy in Baghdad that will be temporarily housed in a palace that belonged to Saddam. When up and running, the embassy will be the largest in the world.

Negroponte would become ambassador in Baghdad when the United States hands over political power to an interim Iraqi government by a June 30 deadline. The current top U.S. official in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, is expected to leave the country once the political transition is completed.

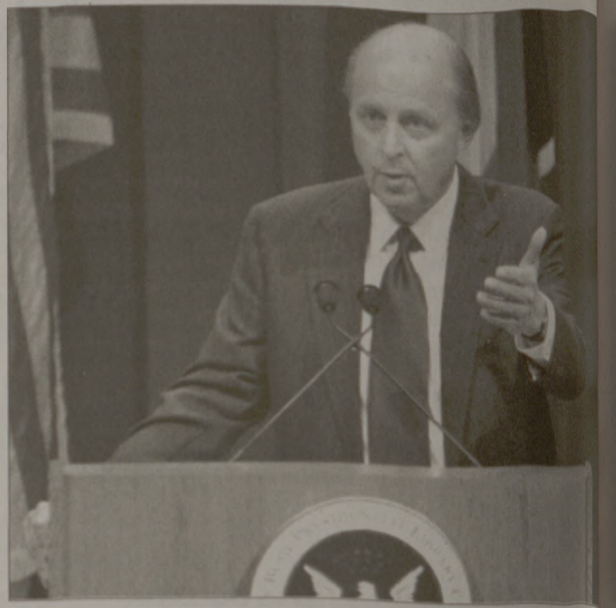
Thousands of U.S. troops will remain in the country even after the political transition is complete.

As U.N. ambassador in New York, Negroponte also helped win approval of a resolution to expand the mandate of an international security force in Afghanistan after the overthrow of the Taliban government.

Before that, he worked in private business.

Negroponte's nomination for the U.N. post was confirmed by the Senate in September 2001, but that confirmation didn't come easy.

It was delayed a half-year mostly because of criticism of his record as the U.S. ambassa-



U.N. ambassador John Negroponte, recently appointed ambassador by President Bush, spoke at the George Bush Library March 8.

dor to Honduras from 1981 to 1985. In Honduras, Negroponte played a prominent role in assisting the Contras in Nicaragua in their war with the left-wing Sandinista government, which was aligned with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

For weeks before his Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Negroponte was questioned by staff members on whether he had acquiesced to human rights abuses by a Honduran death squad funded and partly trained by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Negroponte testified that he

did not believe the abuses part of a deliberate Honduran government policy. "I do not believe that death squads were operating in Honduras."

"He's a diplomat's diplomat," said Bernard Aronson, the State Department's Latin America official in the first Bush administration. Negroponte was ambassador to Mexico.

"He's trusted, I think, the administration. He's certainly very close to the secretary of state and he's credible," Aronson said in a recent interview.

Fallujah leaders, U.S. call on fighters to turn in weapons

By Jason Keyser
Lourdes Navarro
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FALLUJAH, Iraq — Direct talks between the United States and leaders of the besieged city of Fallujah produced their first concrete result: an appeal for insurgents to turn in their mortars, surface-to-air missiles, rocket-propelled grenades and other heavy weapons, U.S. officials announced Monday.

In return, the U.S. military said it does not intend to resume its offensive in the Sunni Muslim stronghold so long as militants are disarming.

But with Marines encircling Fallujah and holding their positions inside the city, commanders warned that if the deal falls through, they could launch an all-out assault, which would likely mean a resumption of bloody urban combat.

"There is also a very clear understanding ... that should this agreement not go through, Marines forces are more than prepared to carry through with military operations," Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt told reporters in Baghdad.

He said the Marines were poised to take the city "in a very short order."

The agreement included only vague reference underlining the "need" to investigate the killing and mutilation of four American civilians in Fallujah on March 31. U.S. officials have said they want Iraqis behind the attack handed over.

Since the U.S. military got caught up in two fronts simultaneously this month — in Fallujah and against a rebel Shiite cleric's militia in the south, sparking the worst violence in Iraq since Saddam Hussein's fall — there have increasingly been signs that U.S. commanders are attempting to resolve them one at a time.

The standoff against radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr outside Najaf was effectively put on hold Monday. Al-Sadr's militia "has for the most part been contained in Najaf," Col. Dana J. H. Pittard said. "We can wait... They will still be there. Ultimately we still want Iraqis to solve this problem."

Najaf is part of an area in south-central Iraq patrolled by 9,500 peacekeepers from 23 countries including Spain.

On Monday, President Bush scolded Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero for his decision to withdraw Madrid's 1,300 troops from Iraq, and told him to avoid actions that give "false comfort

to terrorists or enemies of freedom in Iraq." Kimmitt said there would be no power vacuum as Spanish troops pull out of Najaf. He said officials had been discussing how to replace the troops since Zapatero won Spanish parliamentary elections in March after terror attacks in Madrid.

But the defense minister of Poland, which leads the multinational force, said he did not know how the place of the Spanish troops would be filled. Spain said the force would leave within six weeks.

American troops, meanwhile, killed 10 employees of the U.S.-funded television station Al-Iraqiya, the station announced. The military said it was investigating.

Correspondent Asaad Kadhim and driver Hussein Saleh were killed and another driver Bassem Kamel was wounded "after American forces opened fire on them while they were performing their duty" near the central city of Samarra, station announced.

Twenty-six Iraqi and foreign journalists and media workers have been killed in the Iraqi conflict by U.S. troops, according to a report from a committee of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

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