

spotlight on security

# The Evolution of American Security

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR JOHN D. NEGROPONTE

**YJIA:** Since 2001, in what way have the various roles you have played at the United Nations or as Director of National Intelligence differed regarding national security? How did you have to balance them?

Ambassador John Negroponte: Once you get into senior positions in the national security arena, they are all very complementary; it's not that hard to move from one to the other. Actually, the way the national security decision-making process is organized in our government, people in those positions meet each other all the time in the inter-agency process. This might be in National Security Council meetings chaired by the President; meetings chaired by the National Security Adviser; or those chaired by the Deputy National Security Adviser. For example, when I was Director of National Intelligence I attended all meetings of the National Security Council. In today's set-up under President Obama, the Ambassador to the United Nations is also there since the Ambassador to the U.N. in this administration is a member of the cabinet. So these people all relate to each other pretty steadily and consistently. They may not agree with each other; they didn't all get these jobs because they were shrinking violets or because they had timid personalities—most of them actually have very strong personalities. But there's only one agenda in the end and that's the President's. I think what the President really wants and expects is for people to have vigorous debate and discussion before he makes the decision. Once he makes his decision then everyone falls in line to help execute it.

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Ambassador John D. Negroponte is the Brady-Johnson Distinguished Senior Research Fellow in Grand Strategy and Lecturer in International Affairs at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University. Ambassador Negroponte served as the first Director of National Intelligence from 2005–2007 and the Deputy Secretary of State from 2007–2009. He also served as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations between 2001 and 2004 and is a four-time ambassador to Honduras, Mexico, the Philippines, and Iraq.

**YJIA: Do you think there's a high level of balance in terms of power-sharing across those roles?**

JN: Well, some people are more equal than others in this system. Clearly in the area of national security, the President is paramount and he makes the final decision. People take their lead from him. At the next level, probably the two most important cabinet officials are the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. After all, one of them is in charge of our international diplomacy and economic development, and the other is in charge of implementing our military and security policies. Between the two of them, that's most of what it is we do. The others, really, have support roles. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principle military adviser to the National Security Council, and the Director of National Intelligence is the President's principle intelligence adviser. The other actors are not the ones that make decisions, then. They may deploy resources but they're not actually the ones who order the deployment of these resources. So, there's a little triumvirate just below the President: the President's National Security Adviser, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State. I would say those are the three key people.

**YJIA: To what extent do you think the goals the United States set in Iraq in 2005 (when you were ambassador) have been realized today?**

JN: I think there's been progress in improving security, in building up the Iraqi army—there are certainly many more trained and deployed now than when I was there. In fact, when I first got to Iraq there was barely an Iraqi battalion. Now there are literally hundreds of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and policemen. So that's a big change. And they've had a couple of elections and they've drafted a constitution and improved it. The country is better off, and they've certainly pulled back from what looked to be the beginning of a civil war back in 2006.

**YJIA: Looking back over your entire career in government, how have you seen the U.S.'s approaches to security evolving?**

JN: The basic proposition remains the same: to keep people in America safe. That is the primordial objective of any national security policy. And the ways in which we do it have also been fairly consistent. By way of example, I would mention that we have important alliances around the world—and those alliances are very long-standing. Our alliance with NATO, our alliance with Japan, with South Korea: these are the pillars if you will of our national security policy. It hasn't really changed that much. Of course, the major development in my lifetime was the end of the Cold War, which

was a surprise to many of us. Some people saw it coming but certainly not many. That's been a significant difference. And the Cold War was a bit of an organizing principle for our entire foreign policy. But I would note that our alliances continue nonetheless. NATO has in fact expanded even since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet empire.

There are some new threats out there: nonproliferation, terrorism, and transnational crime. But I think we're well organized to deal with those. And those are great areas for cooperation with other countries. Probably the other big difference with the end of the Cold War is the growth of the rising powers, the so-called BRIC countries [Brazil, Russia, India, and China]—particularly China and India. In light of those changes, the United States more than ever needs to work with other countries. We can't deal with all the challenges the world faces by just thinking of ourselves as the sole remaining superpower. It's not going to be a useful model for addressing a lot of the complex problems the world faces; we have to work with others.

**YJIA: To what extent do you think the academic and policy perspectives of security are aligned? Is there a good understanding between these two communities?**

JN: First of all, there doesn't have to be a perfect understanding. You study what you study just for the intellectual benefit of having done that, the discipline of extensive reading which I'm delighted to again experience here at Yale. Then again, one of the reasons Richard Levin [President of the university] and Yale wanted me to come teach here was the notion that it is beneficial to have at least some professors who have a real practitioner background. So I think my presence here is in and of itself one part of the effort that Yale is making to help connect the students with the practical world. But based on the discussions I have had with students, the interests they have, the summer internships they have—I think that people certainly have every bit as much of an idea about what's happening out there in the "real world" as we did when I was a student here at Yale. Maybe better.

**YJIA: Looking out into the next decade, what would you highlight as the top five security concerns and how do you see the United States dealing with them?**

JN: I'm going to surprise you with the first one that I give you, which is that we have to get our economy straight. You have to ask yourself: how long can we play a leadership role in the world and be a great power if we're running these exorbitant deficits? We really just have to get that straightened out. You can't be bleeding deficits year in and year out with no end in sight. So the economy is the first issue that I would mention.

But then clearly we have some other issues we have to deal with. One of them is certainly tending to our alliances. You have to work on and develop these relationships, cultivate them, and keep them in good shape. It sounds like an easy thing to say but it requires time, patience, effort, dedication.

And there are some specific threats that we have to focus on. International terrorism is one of them. Also non-proliferation, which is a high priority for this administration. The latter is certainly in some way related to the terrorism threat because, of course, the nightmare scenario is if a terrorist gets a hold of some WMD capability. Although I don't think that's an imminent problem, you can't rule it out either.

There are also all kinds of transnational issues. One is the environment, which is very high on the agenda at the moment. The effort to deal with the global warming issue is going to be a priority for diplomacy definitely in the next ten years ahead. But one thing I would say on that issue of environmental diplomacy, having worked on it—I was once Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Environment—is that these issues take time. Just because the Copenhagen meeting wasn't a rip-roaring success doesn't mean we've failed. The only justification for being disappointed is if you think that was the last opportunity to deal with the issue. But it's not. We have to come back to it, we have to be persistent, and we have to be realistic. You can't get these things done in one conference, it takes time. I'm sure that, if we keep working at it, it will become part of the discourse between countries and over time we will internalize this environmental ethic and be more concerned about carbon emissions. We'll make progress. We already have China talking the right way; we just need to get a few others. Let's make it a part of the international vocabulary. Not all negotiations are about reaching agreements per se; some of it is just about getting people on the same page.

**YJIA: Final thoughts?**

JN: Threats are important to deal with but let's not forget we are a very secure nation. I don't think that needs any elaboration. ■