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(FOLLOWING IS MATERIAL NOT FOR PUBLICATION)
NEWSWEEK ISSUE OF NOVEMBER 8 CARRIES A SIDEBAR STORY
HEADED: "OUR MAN IN TEGUCIGALPA."

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JOHN NEGROPONTE, THE U.S. AMBASSADOR IN HONDURAS, DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE UGLY AMERICAN. AT 43, HE IS TALL AND BALDISH; HIS MANNER IS STUDIEDLY BLAND. HIS DELIBERATE, PAUSE-FILLED CONVERSATION, SAYS ONE FREQUENT DINNER GUEST, "PROMPTS A KEEN DESIRE FOR COFFEE." BUT ANOTHER WHO KNOWS NEGROPONTE BETTER CALLS HIM "A MACHIAVELLI-ONLY SHREWER." HE IS STREET SMART. HE SPEAKS FLUENT SPANISH, FRENCH, GREEK AND VIETNAMESE. HE READS SHAKESPEARE. SAYS ONE HONDURAN OFFICIAL WHO HAS FOLLOWED HIS PROGRESS, "HE MUST LOVE 'JULIUS CAESAR.'"

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NEGROPONTE'S 12-MONTH TENURE IN HONDURAS HAS BEEN A BIT IMPERIOUS. AT THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT ROBERTO SUAZO CORDOVA LAST JANUARY--THE FIRST CIVILIAN PRESIDENT IN NINE YEARS--A MESSENGER HANDED THE NEW LEADER A FOUR-PAGE LETTER FROM THE U.S. EMBASSY DRAFTED BY THE NEW AMERICAN AMBASSADOR. ENCOURAGING A PROMPT "REVITALIZATION" OF THE AILING ECONOMY THE LETTER-USING THE IMPERATIVE FORM OF SPANISH-DIRECTED THE GOVERNMENT OF HONDURAS TO TAKE 11 SPECIFIC ACTIONS, SUCH AS REDUCING TAXES ON MINING COMPANIES AND LIFTING SOME PRICE CONTROLS. THE GOVERNMENT DUTIFULLY COMPLIED WITH MANY OF THE DEMANDS. NEGROPONTE'S INFLUENCE STEADILY GREW, AND, IT APPEARS, SO DID HIS INVOLVEMENT IN COVERT ACTION AGAINST NICARAGUA. "I'M NOT SAYING THAT THE GUY WHO GIVES ALL THE ORDERS HERE, EVEN FOR COVERT OPS, IS NEGROPONTE," SAYS A WESTERN SOURCE WHO KNOWS. "BUT THAT GUY WEARS NEGROPONTE'S SUITS AND EATS HIS BREAKFAST. DO YOU GET THE PICTURE?"

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NEGROPONTE'S ARRIVAL IN TEGUCIGALPA WAS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE. FEW EXPECTED AN AMBASSADOR OF QUITE HIS CALIBER. "ANYONE WHO THINKS THAT I'M EXTREMELY AMBITIOUS JUST DOESN'T KNOW ME VERY WELL," HE SAYS MILDLY. BUT NO ONE HAS EVER CALLED HIM AN UNDERACHTEVER. "KNOWING THIS ADMINISTRATION'S PREOCCUPATION WITH CENTRAL AMERICA AND ITS WORRIES ABOUT HONDURAS IN PARTICULAR, HE SET OUT TO MAKE A MARK IN HONDURAS THAT WOULD BE NOTICED ALL

Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
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THE WAY TO THE TOP," SAYS A COLLEAGUE WHO HAS KNOWN HIM FOR YEARS.

CAREER: EDUCATED AT EXETER AND YALE, NEGROPONTE JOINED THE FOREIGN SERVICE AT THE AGE OF 21 AND ROSE QUICKLY. HE WAS A FAVORED POLITICAL OFFICER IN SAIGON AT THE HEIGHT OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM. HE WAS SENT AS AN EMISSARY TO THE PARIS PEACE TALKS, WHERE HE INSISTED THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS GIVING UP TOO MUCH TO THE COMMUNISTS. THE YOUNG NEGROPONTE WAS REWARDED WITH A POST AT THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL. AFTER A FALLING-OUT WITH HIS ONETIME MENTOR, HENRY KISSINGER, WHO WAS THEN NATIONAL-SECURITY ADVISER, NEGROPONTE WAS EXILED TO ECUADOR AS POLITICAL COUNSELOR, BUT HE BOUNCED BACK TO BECOME U.S. CONSUL GENERAL IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE.

SINCE COMING TO HONDURAS, NEGROPONTE HAS WORKED HARD TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF AS SOMETHING MORE THAN OUR MAN IN TEGUCIGALPA. FELLOW ENVOYS ARE PARTICULARLY GALLED BY HIS HABIT OF SENDING UPBRAIDING CABLES WHEN HE DISAPPROVES OF THEIR ACTIONS. HIS EFFORTS HAVE NOT BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS HE MIGHT HAVE HOPED: HONDURANS IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH THE AMBASSADOR SAY HE WAS "DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED" AND "PERSONALLY HURT" THAT PRESIDENT REAGAN CHOSE TO MAKE COSTA RICA HIS ONLY STOP IN CENTRAL AMERICA DURING A PLANNED FIVE-DAY TOUR OF LATIN AMERICA AT THE BEGINNING OF DECEMBER. THE AMBASSADOR MAY BE IN FOR MORE DISAPPOINTMENT. "HIS OBSESSION TO GET TO THE TOP FAST WILL BE THE VERY THING THAT BRINGS HIM CRASHING DOWN," CONCLUDES A FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUE IN HONDURAS. "THE QUESTION IS WHETHER HE MIGHT NOT BRING A POLICY AND THE FRAGILE GOVERNMENT OF HONDURAS DOWN WITH HIM."

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