The United States, Brazil, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962 (Part 2)

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Editor’s Note

This is the concluding segment of a two-part article. Part 1, published in the previous issue of the journal, discussed the context of U.S.-Brazilian, U.S.-Cuban, and Brazilian-Cuban relations from the late 1950s through the outbreak of the Cuban missile crisis in mid-October 1962. Part 2 looks in detail at the role of Brazil during the missile crisis itself, an aspect of the October 1962 confrontation that has never before received sustained attention.

The Crisis

As discussed in Part 1 of this article, the Kennedy administration in the spring of 1962 cautiously approved a secret Brazilian proposal to approach Fidel Castro to see whether he could be enticed to sever political-military ties with Moscow. Although some key U.S. officials, notably Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John McCone, had disagreed about the merits of the Brazilian proposal, the administration had tentatively decided to endorse it in light of evident tensions in Havana between Castro and pro-Soviet old-line Communists. As it turned out, however, Castro politely deflected the Brazilian initiative, and the matter had proceeded no further as of mid-October 1962 when American U-2 reconnaissance planes suddenly discovered that the Soviet Union was secretly installing nuclear-capable missiles in Cuba.

At the outset of the crisis, President John F. Kennedy and his advisers briefly considered, but then discarded, the option of sending a message directly to Castro to pressure him into seeking the removal of the Soviet mis-
siles.  


“this might be the issue on which Castro might elect to break with Moscow if he knew that he were in deadly jeopardy.” Rusk noted that other State Department officials were “very much interested” in testing the proposition by sending an “oral message” to Castro before the United States launched an air strike against Cuba. He then asked Martin to outline the contents of the oral message that would be conveyed through a third party to Castro. Martin explained that the message would indicate that the United States knew about the missile bases and would then point out the implications for U.S. security. It would characterize the deployments as a “breach” of Castro’s past promises, not only because the missiles were ground-to-ground weapons but also because they “obviously” were Soviet-controlled. The message would tell Castro that Moscow’s action gravely endangered him in two respects: first, because “the Soviets have threatened him with attack by the United States, and therefore the overthrow of his regime—used his territory to put him in this jeopardy”; and second, because “the Soviets are talking to other people about the possibility of bargaining this support and these missiles against concessions in Berlin and elsewhere, and therefore are threatening to bargain him away. In these circumstances, we wonder whether he realizes the position that he’s been put in and the way the Soviets are using him.”

The proposed message would conclude with a blunt 24-hour ultimatum: Unless Castro responded positively by then, “not only by statements—privately or publicly—but by action,” the United States would be “compelled” to act to remove the threat posed by the missiles. In the meantime, Washington would closely monitor the missile sites by overflights and would have to “inform our people of the threat that exists here.” Should Castro express concern that acting against the Soviet Union would “result in serious difficulties for him within Cuba,” the message would remind him that only two non-negotiable obstacles needed to be surmounted for Havana to establish a new relationship with the United States: eliminating the “Soviet tie and presence” and eschewing “aggression in Latin America.” It would even contain “a hint, but no more than that, that we might have sympathy and help for him in case he ran into trouble trying to throw the old-line Communists and the Soviets out.”

After Martin’s presentation, Rusk conceded that a separate message to Castro might prompt the Cuban leader to respond by beefing up the mobile surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) around the nuclear missile sites and to take other actions that would imperil U.S. aerial reconnaissance and hinder any
subsequent air strike. The message also would wipe out the potential military advantages of a surprise attack on the missile bases, an option then favored by many Excomm members. When Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara reviewed what he saw as the three major alternatives facing the Excomm later in the meeting (Kennedy had not reacted to the Rusk-Martin presentation), he quickly rejected the idea of sending an immediate message to either Khrushchev or Castro precisely because this “political course” would preclude rapid military action before the nuclear missile sites became operational. An “overt and open approach politically to the problem, attempting to solve it,” he argued, “seem[s] to me likely to lead to no satisfactory result, and it almost stops subsequent military action.” Instead, McNamara focused on the second and third alternatives for acting against Cuba—a blockade or direct military strike (an air strike followed by an invasion). When Kennedy chimed in with his own view after listening silently to the exchange of views, he tilted toward the idea of dispatching a message to Khrushchev but seemed to rule out a comparable communication to the Cuban leader, commenting, “I don’t think the message to Castro’s got much in it.”

With that, the concept of a direct overture to Castro receded as the Excomm secretly debated alternatives in the days leading up to Kennedy’s televised address of 22 October announcing the presence of the Soviet missiles and the imposition of a U.S. naval blockade of Cuba. Nonetheless, the idea continued to lurk in the discussions. On 17 October, several senior advisers, such as UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon, and CIA Director McCone submitted memoranda that fleetingly noted the possibility of sending an emissary or demand to Cuba seeking the removal of the missiles. On the same day, Martin more ambitiously considered the option of trying to “negotiate [a] coexistence pact with Castro on [the] basis [of] renunciation by him of ties to Soviets and aggressive designs in Latin America in return for Cuba’s return to the OAS [Organization of American States], inclusion in AFP [Alliance for Progress] and resumption of U.S. sugar purchases.” But having raised the issue, Martin dismissed it as unsatis-
factory. Although Castro might eventually consider such a deal, he argued, “the time has not arrived,” much of U.S. and hemispheric public opinion was not ready “to forgive and forget so soon,” and no testing period was feasible insofar as Castro could not jettison Soviet aid until a sure replacement was at hand. By that evening the alternative of a message to Castro seemed to have vanished from serious consideration. At the end of the meeting, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy summarized the major options as an ultimatum to Khrushchev (not Castro), a limited air strike without warning, a political warning followed by a naval blockade, a large-scale military strike after political preparations, or a full-scale invasion of Cuba. According to one official, the Excomm continued to discuss the possibility of sending the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Thomas C. Mann, “as a secret emissary to see Castro and try to persuade him that letting the Soviets set up missile bases in his country was a suicidal act,” but dropped the idea on 19 October because it was “not likely to succeed.”

Still, according to the minutes of a National Security Council (NSC) meeting on the afternoon of 20 October, the NSC held a “brief discussion of the usefulness of sending a draft message to Castro, and a copy of such message was circulated.”

The notion of some sort of direct communication to the Havana leadership lingered for another day, as a draft of President Kennedy’s speech to the nation alluded to a message to Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós. But on the afternoon of the 21st, the day before Kennedy spoke, the NSC decided to delete the reference.

Moreover, no approach to the Canadians took place at this stage of the crisis, despite Rusk’s initial suggestion of using the Canadian embassy in Havana as a communications channel. Intriguingly, by the morning of 22 October Rusk seems to have modified his thinking to view the Brazilians, not the Canadians, as the most suitable channel for a secret direct approach to Castro. During an Oval Office discussion shortly before noon that day, as Kennedy and a small group of aides polished a draft address for Stevenson to deliver to the UN, the president noted the possibility of recognizing a Cuban...
government-in-exile. In response, Rusk stressed the importance of remaining focused on the immediate military issue rather than deposing Castro, and added: “Because at the end of the day tomorrow, or the following day, we have in mind the Brazilians would go to Castro [unclear reference to passing a warning to Castro through Brazil] country back again.”\textsuperscript{13} Despite the garbled recording, it seems clear that Rusk had in mind a variant of the message that Martin had outlined several days earlier, a message that would implore Castro to take his “country back again” from the Soviet Union. What precisely had caused the secretary of state to shift from the Canadians to the Brazilians as a potential intermediary is unclear, though one may note that Luís Bastian Pinto, the Brazilian ambassador to Cuba, had visited Washington only a few weeks earlier and had evidently impressed State Department officials as a serious diplomat and reliable anti-Communist. Moreover, the Brazilian government had already shown interest in the general idea, and there would be difficulties of assuring secret communications through any indirect message (such as through the Cuban ambassador to the United Nations). Officials in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs considered the Brazilian envoy to Havana both “effective” and “one of the few people who could have quick access to Castro”—perhaps qualifications that, upon further reflection, they believed the Canadian embassy lacked.\textsuperscript{14} Although Rusk certainly would have preferred not to rely on the Brazilians (with whom Washington had repeatedly disagreed regarding Cuba), U.S. officials respected the professionalism of Brazil’s diplomats. No other state with an embassy in Havana had the attributes of Brazil, a country that was firmly embedded in the Western camp, was a major regional actor, and had a plausibly nationalist government that had worked hard to maintain its contacts and credibility with the Cuban regime (in part by defying Washington’s hard line).

Nevertheless, over the next few days as the confrontation with the Soviet Union burst into public view and rapidly intensified, Rusk and his associates apparently took no action to pursue the Brazilian approach to Castro. Despite Khrushchev’s decision not to challenge the blockade—which became evident on Wednesday, 24 October, when Soviet ships stopped and in some cases turned back as they approached the U.S.-declared 500-mile-radius “quarantine” line—the Soviet missile sites remained on the island, the two sides exchanged acrimonious charges at the United Nations, and pressure mounted


\textsuperscript{14} See paper prepared in the Office of Inter-American Affairs (ARA), State Department (Top Secret), n.d., in National Security Archive, Washington, DC (hereinafter referred to as CMC/FOIA/NSA).
on Kennedy to resolve the crisis through military action or a diplomatic settlement. In Kennedy’s view, however, grave problems seemed to accompany either alternative. On the one hand, an attack on Cuba (which would undoubtedly kill many Soviet troops and advisers) risked escalation by Moscow elsewhere. (At the time, Kennedy and his advisers were unaware of the presence of Soviet tactical nuclear-capable weapons and warheads in Cuba, a deployment that was not revealed until three decades later. U.S. officials also may have underestimated the likely scale of Cuban resistance and therefore were not especially concerned about military problems in Cuba itself.) On the other hand, accepting a deal that appeared to give too much to Khrushchev (and Castro) would expose Kennedy to additional accusations of appeasement from Republican opponents just before the midterm congressional elections, and possibly from NATO allies in the event of any trade of Soviet missiles in Cuba for U.S. missiles in Turkey (the deal Moscow did eventually offer in Khrushchev’s letter to Kennedy on the morning of 27 October).

The public phase of the crisis tested Brazilian-American relations at a particularly difficult juncture. After the apparently successful visit of Brazilian President João Goulart to Washington in April, U.S. officials, including Kennedy, had grown increasingly exasperated with the Brazilian leader. Over the summer they had authorized both covert CIA support to Goulart’s political opponents and a quiet beefing up of military contacts in Brazil (including the assignment of Vernon Walters as military attaché) to lay the groundwork for possible support of a coup to prevent the country from falling into Communist hands.\(^{15}\) In September and early October, even as political debate about U.S. policy toward Cuba intensified, Washington also was anxiously monitoring the acute political crisis in Brazil, as Goulart staged a controversial cabinet reshuffling amid rumors of coups, counter-coups, and even possible civil war in the run-up to parliamentary elections on 7 October. U.S. officials believed that “a political war of great importance” was under way in Brazil, and they blamed it to a considerable extent on Goulart’s “preoccupation with power intrigues.” They debated whether to cancel Kennedy’s upcoming visit to Brazil, scheduled for November 1962, and how seriously to take warnings from both

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American and Brazilian critics that Goulart was taking his country down the path to a "second Cuba."  

Mutual suspicions specifically related to Cuba also persisted. When Rusk had proposed what he billed as an “informal” meeting of inter-American foreign ministers to take place in early October (at the time of the UN General Assembly session) to discuss the Cuban issue, Brazilian diplomats had reacted warily. The Brazilians even suspected that Rusk was maneuvering to gain a hemispheric imprimatur for a subregional OAS military alliance of Central American and Caribbean countries which would lay the groundwork for a military strike against Castro. In late September, Goulart’s new prime minister, Hermes Lima, warned the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, Lincoln Gordon, that a Central American military strike on Cuba would be undesirable because “getting rid of communism in Cuba is not worth a world war.” In a remark more portentous than either man could imagine, Hermes added that he agreed with the U.S. goal of preventing a Soviet offensive base in Cuba, “though symmetrical view of cold war might justify [such a base] on ground of U.S. bases in Turkey and elsewhere on Soviet frontier.”  

Because Brazilian leaders were unable to block the foreign ministers’ session and were feeling “boxed into [a] corner” between the equally unpalatable alternatives of signing or not signing a final communiqué, they attended grudgingly (declining to send the foreign minister) and did their best to water down the joint statement, much to the dismay of U.S. officials.  

16. For a flavor of these warnings, see Gordon’s cables in JFKL, NSF, CF: Brazil, Box 13. See also memoranda to Rusk from Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) Director Roger Hilsman, esp. “President Goulart and Recent Political Developments in Brazil” (Research Memorandum RAR-37, 2 October 1962); “Showdown in Brazil” (14 September 1962); “Coup Possibilities in Brazil” (8 August 1962); and “Current Situation Report on Brazil,” enclosed with William H. Brubeck to McGeorge Bundy, 6 September 1962 in JFKL, NSF, CF: Brazil, Box 13.  

17. Embtel 705, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential), 25 September 1962, in NA, RG 59, State Department Decimal Central Files (DCF), Box 584, 371.04/9–2562.  

18. Brazilian Foreign Ministry (BFM) official Carlos Bernandes comment in Embtel 691, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential), 24 September 1962, in NA, RG 59, DCF, Box 584, 371.04/9–1662.  

19. For conversation memoranda of the 2–3 October 1962 “Informal Meeting,” see NA, RG 59, CF-2170, Executive Secretariat Conference Files, Box 299; and FRUS, 1961–1963, Vols. X–XII, microfiche supplement, docs. 310–313. The U.S. record notes that at the final session the Brazilian representative, former foreign minister Afonso Arinos, “generally attempted to blunt the impact of the wording of the communiqué.” For Arinos’s views, see Brazilian delegation to the OAS (hereinafter BD/OAS), Telegram No. 478 (8 p.m., 2 October 1962), in Brazilian Foreign Ministry Archives (Arquivo do Ministério das Relações Exteriores, or AMRE-B), Brasília, Brazil; Telegram No. 480 (6:30 p.m., 3 October 1962), in AMRE-B; and Telegram No. 481 (11 a.m., 4 October 1962), in AMRE-B. See esp. Brazilian delegation to the United Nations (hereinafter BD/UN), Telegram No. 38 (3:30 a.m., 5 October 1962), in AMRE-B, in which Arinos judged that his struggles, alongside Latin allies, had tempered the U.S. government’s “more egoistic objectives” and yielded a “less dangerous” document. All quotations from Brazilian sources are my unofficial translations from Portuguese.
zilian assessments of the entire Cuban matter was neatly encapsulated in the first line of a secret analysis cabled from Washington by Brazil’s ambassador alluding to the possible emergence of a “discreet interventionist scheme”: “The Cuban problem, which is in reality a North-American problem . . .”20

Despite grave concerns, however, Washington saw, at least for the moment, no plausible alternative to continuing to try to work with Goulart. Once Kennedy decided to reveal the discovery of the Soviet missiles and his plans to institute a “quarantine” around the island in his televised address on 22 October, the administration sought to win support throughout the hemisphere, beginning with a rapid vote at the OAS endorsing the blockade. Given the recent strains, U.S. officials were pleasantly surprised when Goulart initially expressed total support for Washington after he was informed by Gordon of the contents of Kennedy’s speech shortly before it was delivered.21 To brief Goulart, Gordon had made the first of what would be almost daily journeys during the crisis to the president’s official residence in Rio de Janeiro, the hilltop Palacio das Laranjeiras. On hearing a rough translation (rendered into Portuguese with the aid of the newly-arrived Vernon Walters), Goulart appeared “visibly shocked” by the discovery of the Soviet missiles. If the evidence showed that missiles were indeed in place, he declared, there could be “no doubt about Brazil’s solidarity with U.S.” Gordon reported that Goulart went so far as to express surprise at the “mildness” of Kennedy’s announcement. The Brazilian president suggested that “even stronger language” be included to condemn Soviet leaders (“who are always harshly threatening others”) and erroneously believed that a blockade against arms deliveries was already in place.

Goulart also expressed “intense” interest in seeing the intelligence photographs from aerial reconnaissance flights over Cuba. Given the strength of leftist opinion in Brazil, he argued, solid proof would be “critical” to his ability to back Washington firmly. He gave every indication that this was his intention, and he remarked that defending Cuba’s sovereignty and opposing foreign intervention—Brazil’s traditional stand—was one thing, but “that Russian offensive bases in Cuba, constituting [a] clear danger of aggression against other American nations, including faithful and old friend and ally U.S., was [a] wholly different matter.” Goulart declared that the Soviet Union


21. On 18 October, Kennedy had surmised that Brazil (along with Mexico, Chile, and “probably” Ecuador) would vote against an OAS resolution supporting a U.S. blockade of Cuba. Naftali and Zelikow, eds., Presidential Recordings, Vol. 2, p. 543.
had committed a “grave diplomatic error” and could not really risk war over
Cuba, and he wondered aloud why Washington did not seize the opportunity
to vanquish its Cuban nemesis. “Why don’t you blow the whole island out of
the water?” he asked, according to Walters. Similarly, Gordon reported that
Goulart said the United States was “stronger than [the] U.S.S.R. and could
obliterate Cuba in an instant. When I said course of action now proposed was
designed [to] avoid killing innocent Cubans, he replied ‘What and let Ameri-
cans get killed instead?’”

After dashing back to the embassy and returning to Laranjeiras to relay
the official Portuguese translations of Kennedy’s speech and private appeal for
support to Goulart late in the evening on the 22nd, the Brazilian president in-
vited Gordon and Walters to join him and Hermes as well as other top advis-
ors for a wide-ranging conversation that extended well beyond midnight,
punctuated by telephone exchanges with Brazilian diplomats in Washington
and New York. One of those phone calls came from Roberto Campos, the
Brazilian ambassador to the United States, who had been trying to reach
Goulart for hours. In addition to attending a State Department briefing for
Latin American ambassadors on the discovery of the missiles and the plans to
convene the OAS Council the next day to seek support for a “quarantine,” the
Brazilian envoy had received a special summons to the White House to see
Rusk, who was conferring with Kennedy. Rusk gave Campos an urgent appeal
of “major gravity,” in the president’s name, to deliver to Goulart, declaring
that the crisis was a “vital question” for Washington and that a unanimous
OAS endorsement of the blockade was crucial to hopes for forcing the re-
moval of the missiles, which would not only threaten the United States but
give Fidel Castro the “power of blackmail” over Latin America. Rusk asked
worriedly whether Brazilian opinion would grasp “the gravity of the prob-

22. Embtel 899, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Niact/Elite Eyes Only), 22 October 1962, 10
p.m., in CMC/FOIA/NSA, Box “DoS Cuban documents released 4/92,” folder “CMC 8702119”;
U.S.-Brazilian encounter took place that same Monday evening between Celso Furtado, Goulart’s left-
ist planning minister, and U.S. Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, who were in Mexico City to attend
an inter-American development conference. Learning of Kennedy’s speech, Dillon cut short his visit
to return to Washington, but not before a courtesy call on Furtado that degenerated into a shouting
match. Furtado reported that after he had appealed to the U.S. official to remain at the conference at
least to hear the speeches of the Latin American delegates, Dillon “literally lost control, declaring, visi-
tibly upset, that the situation in Cuba was of such gravity that he could not say if there will be or not a
world nuclear war by the weekend.” The U.S. record, by contrast, makes clear Dillon’s strong impres-
sion of Furtado’s obstinacy, parochialism, and anti-Americanism. See U.S. conversation memo-
randum in JFKL, Ralph Dungan papers; and Brazilian Delegation to the Annual Conference of CIES,
Mexico City, Telegram No. 19 (Secret/Urgent), 9 p.m., 22 October 1962, in AMRE-B, “ANEXO
1962”).
lem,” eliciting the envoy’s assurance that despite the prior “David vs. Goliath” sentiment regarding the U.S.-Cuban confrontation, the missiles should significantly change the equation and inevitable howls from the extreme left should not prevent Goulart backing the quarantine, a “gradual and prudent” response. Filled with “extreme anguish and apprehension,” Campos had returned to the embassy and after several fruitless hours finally got the president on the line well after midnight, Rio time.

After hearing Campos’s account of the situation and Kennedy’s request, Goulart asked how great the danger of nuclear war would be if the Soviet Union tried to break the blockade. Campos assured him that a Soviet attack was improbable in light of U.S. nuclear superiority. More probable, he argued, was a “tactical retreat” and possible counterstrike in a theater in which the Kremlin enjoyed the strategic advantage, such as Berlin, Turkey, or Iran. Campos added, however, that “one could never predict human madness.” The ambassador emphasized that Washington believed a retreat would lead to “the demoralization of the Western defensive system,” and he warned Goulart that any attempt to refrain from cooperating with the United States would be “embarrassing” for Brazil and would risk leaving the country “totally isolated” now that Castro seemed “a much more concrete danger.” Goulart responded: “The senhor is authorized to promise the vote of Brazil.”

At 3:00 a.m. on 23 October, shortly after the late night session ended, Gordon cabled the State Department that the Brazilian leaders appeared to recognize that they had “no option” but to back Washington in its confrontation. He noted that Hermes Lima, like Goulart, realized the “gravity of the situation” and was aware that it posed the “most serious crisis since World War II.” Gordon also wrote, however, that the Brazilian leaders were “anxious to find means to soften [the] impact [on Brazilian] public opinion, especially labor, student, and other circles which have been Cuban supporters.” Consequently, they hoped the Kennedy administration would tone down the language and strictures of the proposals it was going to present the next day before the OAS in Washington. The Brazilians also hoped that a provision might be included calling for UN inspectors to visit Cuba “to verify existence or non-existence of offensive build-up” prior to adopting the full complement of sanctions in addition to the “quarantine” that the United States desired.

Unbeknownst to Gordon (or the State Department), Brazil itself moved quickly to seek a solution along these lines. In a 2:30 a.m. telegram to the
Brazilian OAS delegate Ilmar Penna Marinho, Prime Minister Hermes instructed him to support the U.S. request to transform the OAS Council into an “Organ of Consultation” empowered to take authoritative decisions and, consistent with the Punta del Este resolutions, to accept “measures to impede the commerce of arms”—a phase encompassing the proposed “quarantine.” But the foreign minister also ordered Penna Marinho to promote the creation of a UN commission that could verify the presence of “offensive warlike material” in Cuba so that the U.S. evidence would not be questioned or exploited in “a political or psychological sense.” The next morning, Hermes privately informed the Mexican ambassador that Brazil—both through Bastian Pinto in Havana and Cuba’s envoy in Rio de Janeiro—had urgently and secretly appealed to the Castro government to permit a UN investigative commission (composed of countries with “independent” credentials) to visit the island. A positive answer from Havana, the Brazilians hoped, would provide them (and the Mexicans, their long-time collaborators in resisting tough U.S. actions against Cuba) with ammunition to resist an OAS call for military action or other extreme measures until an investigative mission could report its findings. Hermes noted that when Cuba’s ambassador in Rio de Janeiro was asked point-blank by a senior Brazilian Foreign Ministry official whether missile bases existed in Cuba, the envoy responded negatively and agreed that UN inspections to verify their absence would be an “excellent” idea. In a further hopeful sign, when Brazil’s UN delegate, former foreign minister Afonso Arinos, transmitted the idea of an investigatory commission to the Cuban representative, Mario García Incháustegui on the afternoon of the 23rd in an informal conversation before the Security Council met, the Cuban stressed that he lacked instructions but expressed a positive “personal” reaction if the establishment of a commission would force Washington to suspend its naval blockade of the island. Much to Hermes’s exas-

25. BFM to BD/OAS, Telegram No. 220 (Confidential/Highest Urgency), 2:30 a.m., 23 October 1962, in AMRE-B, CX 362.
26. Memorandum of telephone conversation with Mexican ambassador to Brazil García Robles, 23 October 1962, 12:45 p.m., in Archivo de Concentraciones, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Mexico City, Mexico, expediente 31558-1ª parte, decimal III/210(729.1), topográfica III-5664-11 (1ª).
27. Embtel 949 (Rio) to State (Confidential), 9 November 1962, 10 a.m., in NA, RG 59, DCF 601.3735/11-962. In a press conference two days later, on 25 October, the envoy reportedly asserted that “Cuba will permit a commission of UN or of any country whatever to visit its territory and prove there do not exist nuclear arms or much less platforms erected to destroy U.S.”—a statement whose “obvious inconsistency” with Havana’s official position U.S. officials were at a loss to explain. Embtel 893 (Rio) to State (Unclassified), 26 October 1962, in NA, RG 59, DCF, Box 631, 325,37/10-2662. The senior BFM official, Carlos Bernardes, speculated that such statements had contributed to the Cuban diplomat’s arrest when he returned to the island in early November.
28. BD/UN (Arinos), Telegram No. 88 (Confidential/Urgent), 23 October 1962, 4:30 p.m., in AMRE-B, “O.N.U.—TELEGRAMAS— RECEB.-EXPED.—1962,” CX 365 [CONE]. After Arinos informed a member of the U.S. delegation of the exchange, Stevenson cabled the State Depart-
peration, however, Castro himself failed to respond positively and simply de-

nied that any missiles were present.29

Without a forthcoming response from Havana, Brazil followed through on the afternoon of 23 October by voting for the U.S.-sponsored resolutions at the OAS condemning the military deployments in Cuba and imposing a naval blockade on further deliveries. At the same time, Penna Marinho abstained on a paragraph calling for “forceful measures, including military action, to deal with the Cuban buildup.” Hints of Brazil’s efforts to distance itself from Washington surfaced after the vote when the government issued a public statement that same night opposing any use of force that violated the territorial integrity of another country and jeopardized world peace. Rumors also began to circulate suggesting—falsely, as the declassified Foreign Ministry instructions show30—that Penna Marinho had exceeded or violated official instructions by voting in support of the quarantine resolution.31

A U.S. State Department internal assessment, prepared after the crisis, complained that “the Brazilian official line abounded in equivocations and contradictions during the crisis week.”32 By all indications, most Brazilians favored Kennedy’s stand, but a loud minority (described by U.S. officials as

ment reporting the Cuban’s hint that “if U.S. held off on quarantine for day or so or at least until SC [Security Council] had acted, his personal opinion was Cuban Gover[men]t disposed accept inspec-
tion team visit.” U.S. UN Mission (Stevenson) to State, Telegram No. 1437, 24 October 1962, 3 a.m., in NA, RG 59, DCF, 737.56361/10–2462. When the first reports arrived the next morning that the Soviets had opted not to challenge the U.S. naval blockade, Rusk suggested that “this could fit” the Cuban delegate’s comments to Arinos, although he cautioned that “we can’t rely on that at all.” Excomm transcript, 10–11:15 a.m., 24 October 1962, in Zelikow and May, eds., Presidential Record-
ings, Vol. 3, p. 197. Evidently García Incháustegui’s comments were unauthorized, contradicting the prevailing militant atmosphere in Havana, and such comments may have contributed to his replacement a week later by Carlos Lechuga.


30. BFM to BD/OAS, Telegram No. 220 (Confidential/Highest Urgency), 23 October 1962, 2:30 a.m., in AMRE-B, CX 362; and BFM to BD/OAS, Telegram, No. 221 (Confidential), 23 October 1962, in AMRE-B, “O.E.A.—TELEGRAMMAS RECEBIDAS E EXPEDIDAS—1962.” The second telegram reaffirmed the first’s instruction to vote in favor of the arms embargo but added that Penna Marinho should abstain on the second paragraph, authorizing the use of force, pending the results of the UN investigation Brazil backed.


32. Hilsman to Rusk, “Subject: Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 5 November 1962. This sentence was sanitized from one declassified version of this memorandum.
“leftist” and “ultranationalist”), including some of Goulart’s political allies, strongly protested the blockade against Cuba and supported Havana’s right to defend itself against the “Yankee colossus” with whatever means it deemed necessary. Most likely, the largest segment of the Brazilian public opposed the Soviet deployment of nuclear weapons but was also against any direct military intervention that would violate Cuba’s sovereignty. A U.S. Information Agency survey on 26 October depicted a Brazilian government “torn between conflicting pressures.”

The State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) noted the same day that the position of Brazilian leaders during the crisis had “varied significantly, depending on the audience addressed.” Goulart and Hermes privately expressed support and understanding for U.S. actions while publicly stressing the virtues of non-intervention and the desirability of finding a peaceful resolution of the crisis. INR director Roger Hilsman judged that “the Brazilian Government recognizes it has no option but to side with the U.S. in the current situation, but, at the same time, it is anxious to find some means to soften the impact on leftist public opinion, particularly pro-Cuban student, labor, and political groups, of an anti-Cuban position.”

U.S. officials were especially miffed by Goulart’s “fence-straddling” on the OAS vote, and they scorned his efforts to please all sides as not only unfortunate and misguided but also unnecessary, given that Brazilian public opinion and news media “overwhelmingly” backed Washington. (Gordon reported on 24 October that Hermes, blaming “severe domestic public opinion pressures,” had given him a “somewhat sheepish” private apology for public comments that seemed to attribute the crisis to both superpowers’ “quest for prestige” and to backtrack from Brazilian support for the quarantine.)

By Thursday, 25 October, Goulart had decided to take a more direct role in the crisis. One step involved a secret letter to Kennedy, ostensibly in response to the U.S. president’s appeal to him (and other Latin American leaders) for support in responding to the Soviet missile deployments. Much to the irritation of Kennedy and his advisers, the Brazilian president expressed considerable ambivalence about the quarantine. Goulart underscored the need to avoid nuclear conflict and to refrain from violating national sovereignty and

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33. USIA, Research and Reference Services, “Overseas Reaction to the Cuban Situation (As of 3 p.m.),” R-125–62 (LA), 26 October 1962, p. 5, copy in National Security Archive Cuban Missile Crisis Collection (NSA/CMC).


35. See Embtel 886, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential), 24 October 1962, 8 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Box 13; and Hilsman to Rusk, “Subject: Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 5 November 1962.
the “principle of self-determination of peoples.” He seemed to chide Kennedy for taking firm action—a sharp departure from his comments to Gordon on the night of Kennedy’s 22 October speech. In convoluted language that seemed to warn against a U.S. invasion of Cuba in the absence of a clear military provocation, Goulart declared that

> any form of intervention in an American state inspired by [the] alleged incompatibility of its political regime is deeply displeasing to [the] conscience of [the] Brazilian people when this is for [the] purpose of imposing upon that nation a representative system by means of external coercion which removes its democratic character and validity.

Despite Brazil’s vote for the quarantine resolution, Goulart stressed his own “apprehension” and his people’s “dissatisfaction” that the OAS Council had been pressured to decide “without there being carried out, or even discussed, an on-the-spot investigation and without any attempt by means of negotiation, such as we proposed last February [sic: should be January—JH], to obtain disarmament of Cuba with mutual guarantee of non-invasion.” The letter implored Kennedy to eschew military measures against Cuba that might aggravate the situation. Goulart promised support only for actions that would “preserve peace without violating respect for sovereignty of peoples”—and he quickly went on to bemoan what he described as a disturbing trend in the OAS to “depart from the proper application of its own statutory norms” and move toward becoming transformed “into an uncompromising ideological [U.S.-led] bloc in which [right-wing military] ‘regimes of exception’ of a reactionary character find more kindly treatment.” After enumerating a few specific examples of what, in his view, were (U.S.-supported) OAS actions against Cuba that contradicted the organization’s purposes, he warned that such a tendency would alienate Latin American public opinion. Goulart closed the letter by alluding to the news he had received earlier in the day that Kennedy intended to cancel his planned return trip to Brazil the following month, supposedly because of his need to stay in Washington to deal with the Cuban situation. (In reality, U.S. officials seized on the crisis as a pretext to cancel the visit in light of growing displeasure at Goulart’s policies.36) The Brazilian leader wistfully observed that he had hoped to develop these considerations personally to the American president “during [the] happy occasion of your visit to Brazil.”37

Whatever the intention may have been, Goulart’s letter must have con-

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36. For Kennedy’s decision to cancel the trip, see Excomm minutes, 23 October 1962, 10 a.m., in *FRUS*, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 170.
37. For Goulart’s 25 October 1962 letter to Kennedy, originally secret, see Embtel 898 (Rio) to Secretary of State (Confidential/Naic), 26 October 1962 (2 sections), in CMC/FOIA/NSA, folder “CMC 8701667,” Box “DoS Cuban documents released 4/92.”
firmed to Kennedy and his advisers the wisdom of postponing the trip. As a CIA summary noted, the Brazilian leader had displayed “very little concern over the threat to the hemisphere of the missiles in Cuba.”38 In general, the document must have infuriated senior U.S. officials, and probably Kennedy himself when he had a chance to read it, and it undoubtedly eroded whatever good will Goulart may still have enjoyed. Hilsman attributed the letter to Goulart’s “extremist advisers’ views of the tactic best calculated to win Brazilian public support for his policy in the Cuban crisis”—an assessment that was reinforced when the gist of the letter was “immediately” leaked to Brazilian media outlets, “including the local Soviet news representative.” Hilsman also sensed Goulart’s pique at Kennedy’s postponement of the trip. Goulart had wanted to use the visit “to strengthen his [own] political position, to portray his government as the object of U.S. favor, and to seek further U.S. financial assistance to bolster the shaky Brazilian economy.” Hilsman also believed that Goulart, prodded by his “more extreme advisers,” was seeking to ensure left-wing and ultranationalist backing for an anticipated January 1963 plebiscite to return to a presidential system. In addition, the Brazilian president, Hilsman wrote, wanted to inoculate himself from domestic condemnation for uncritically supporting Washington in the event of military action against Cuba, a step that would spur mass protests in Brazil. Conversely, Goulart wanted to deflect criticism if Kennedy eventually backed down and accepted the missiles, suffering a hemispheric loss in prestige.39

With private appeals for restraint to both Kennedy and Castro, Goulart’s government searched for a way to position itself as a “somewhat neutral mediator” (in the words of a State Department analysis) between Washington and Havana, especially at the UN. The CIA reached that conclusion by the early morning of 25 October when it reported to the Excomm the interception of a message to the Brazilian ambassador in Havana (evidently the appeal from two days earlier described above) “suggest[ing that] Goulart hopes UN inspection of Cuba would afford an acceptable compromise” to end the crisis.41 In another diplomatic initiative, Brazil’s UN representatives began to

41. CIA Memorandum, “The Crisis[,] USSR/CUBA, Information as of 0600, 25 October 1962,” in CMC/NSA, p. IV-3; also in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vols. X–XII, microfiche supplement, doc. 396. According to a subsequent CIA report, when Bastian Pinto saw Roa on 25 October, the Cuban “flatly denied” the presence of “any offensive weapons in Cuba” and assured the envoy that “Cuba would be willing ‘even to dissolve its army’ if it could obtain effective guarantees for its integrity and sovereignty.” CIA Memorandum, “The Crisis[,] USSR/CUBA, Information as of 0600, 27 October
The idea of establishing a nuclear weapons–free zone in Latin America (and possibly Africa, in some variants), a step that would, inter alia, require the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. Brazil had first tabled a proposal along these lines at the General Assembly in late September, but it now pressed the matter with added urgency. From Brazil’s perspective, the proposed nuclear weapons–free zone had many pluses: It represented a possible means of extricating the United States (and the world) from the immediate crisis, and it would advance a concept that had already garnered wide support in the international community, particularly in the nonaligned movement with which Brazil was trying to develop closer relations. The proposal also dovetailed well with the idea of somehow “neutralizing” Cuba and shielding it (and Latin America) from the Cold War—an objective that Goulart knew would be popular in Brazil—and, if successful, would elevate Brazil’s international standing.

According to Brazilian documents, one reason for Goulart’s optimism in putting forward the proposal was a hint of support from Moscow. One of Khrushchev’s top aides, Frol Kozlov, had endorsed the concept in a lunch with the Brazilian ambassador, Vasco Leitão da Cunha, who had formerly been the envoy to Cuba. “A UN decision to internationalize the question would permit Cuba [and] the Soviet Union to save face diminishing the dangerous direct confrontation,” Campos cabled from Washington on 23 October as he urged that Brazil formally raise the Latin America denuclearization proposal at the UN. The next day, he reiterated his advice, noting the “urgent necessity for creative formulas that, avoiding humiliation for both sides, reduce the tension.” He pointed out that in the event of a Security Council veto, Brazil could “lead the pro-denuclearization movement, certainly [including] all of Latin America and the neutralist world” (with the possible exception of Egypt given Gamel Abd al-Nasser’s nuclear program), in the General Assembly. By that evening, after speaking with Campos, the Brazilian UN delegate, Afonso Arinos, had drafted a denuclearization resolution.
covering both Latin America and Africa, with provisions for verification. He began circulating it, in the guise of a "suggestion," to US, Soviet, and other diplomats.45

Somewhat surprisingly, the Brazilian document appealed to some U.S. officials, who were growing increasingly desperate to find any acceptable exit from the immediate crisis. Normally, Washington had rejected proposals for a nuclear weapons–free zone in Europe (an idea put forth most prominently in Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki’s eponymous plan in the late 1950s), but Rusk now showed a degree of enthusiasm in presenting what he called this “very interesting possibility” to the Excomm on Thursday morning, 25 October. He speculated that it could put “enormous pressure...around the world and I think on the Soviet Union.” Kennedy, for his part, seemed less impressed and merely asked a few clarifying questions before curtly moving on to other business (“Okay. What else’ve we got?”).46

Even before U.S. officials learned of Goulart’s new diplomatic ventures, they were already reconsidering the possibility of a direct approach to Castro to see whether he might be willing to expel the Soviet troops and their missiles in exchange for a U.S. non-invasion pledge and Cuba’s reentry into hemispheric organizations.47 An analysis apparently drafted by the NSC staff on 24 October proposed that the United States, before taking military action against Cuba, could send the Cuban leader a four-part message:

a. Point out to him that just as the Soviets lied to us, they lied to the Cuban people; they are not going to bail him out. b. He, therefore, is under an obligation only to the Cuban people. c. There is only one course open to him—to expel the Soviets and their weapons, and make his peace with the OAS under their terms. d. He has only a short time to act.48

A handwritten note, found in NSC staff member Robert Komer’s file, summarizes the idea: “Get word to Castro once ships turn back that if he kicks out Sovs we can live w. him.”49 To enhance the pressure on Castro, the memoran-

47. Sorensen notes in passing that on 25–26 October the Excomm again explored “ways of reaching Castro directly,” but he fails to discuss the decision actually reached: to employ the Brazilian channel to transmit a proposition to the Cuban leader. See Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 802.
49. Handwritten note, author unidentified, in JFK Assassination Records Collections, NA, folder “NSF Robert Komer Cuba, General, 10/1/62–10/25/62,” Box 415 (material from JFKL, NSF, Box 21).
dum suggested that a private message sent via “a Western Hemisphere diplo-
mat” could be “followed immediately by USIA Spanish-language broadcasts
which would spread the word to all Cubans, of whatever persuasion,” and
perhaps stimulate a military coup to “do the necessary cleansing job.” The
State Department’s Bureau of Inter-American Affairs advocated a similar mes-
sage “for Castro’s ears only” and recommended that the “best channel” of
transmission would be Brazil, not Canada as originally envisioned (especially
because Ottawa’s response to the crisis had not been as supportive as the Ken-
nedy Administration desired). The bureau praised Bastian Pinto as a suitable
candidate for the job.

The State Department officials calculated that a secret message to Castro
would best coincide with a tightening of the blockade, or at least with strong
hints of a 24- to 48-hour ultimatum threatening an expansion from the exist-
ing quarantine on arms deliveries to a total naval blockade (and a “graphic”
account of the economic consequences that would ensue). The message, they
believed, would exploit what was presumed to be the Cubans’ “growing
awareness” of Latin American opposition to the missile installation and the
Soviet Union’s unwillingness to risk war on Havana’s behalf. Trying (rather
bizarrely, given the U.S. role) to empathize with Castro’s potential feelings of
betrayal toward Moscow for leaving him in the lurch if Washington were to
force the issue or for using the missiles as a bargaining chip, they suggested
that the secret appeal “emphasize the degree to which he is a puppet of the So-
viet Union, the Soviet Union [sic] desertion of him and discussion of use of
his position in Cuba as a bargaining point for concessions elsewhere.” The
officials recommended that the message even imply, or perhaps state directly,
that the United States would be willing to help Castro evacuate Soviet mili-
tary forces or overcome resistance by them or by old-line Communists who
would oppose any sudden rapprochement with Washington. Moreover, even
if Castro rejected Washington’s terms for resolving the crisis, the United States
could deliberately leak details of the initiative, or Castro’s response to it, to
foment “splits in the regime.”

The idea of approaching Castro via the Brazilian ambassador in Havana
was elaborated in a State Department options paper submitted to the Ex-
comm on 25 October. The paper noted that “if the Castro Government con-
siders that it has no freedom to act because of the presence of Soviet techni-
cians, we would be prepared to undertake to deal with this problem. We
would have to give some assurances, regardless of whether we intended to

50. On U.S.-Canadian tensions during the missile crisis, see Knowlton Nash, Kennedy & Diefenbaker:
51. Paper prepared in the Office of Inter-American Affairs (ARA), State Department (Top Secret), in
carry them out, that we would not ourselves undertake to overthrow the regime or support others trying to do so.” 52 At another Excomm meeting late that afternoon, Rusk returned to the idea of using the Brazilians as mediators. With the president out of the room, Rusk not only again alluded favorably to the nuclear weapons-free zone proposal (arguing that “many Latin American States would support this zone, along with many other UN members, and the Soviets would have a difficult time opposing it”) but also resuscitated the notion of trying to drive a wedge between Cuba and the Soviet Union by sending a direct message to Castro:

Secretary Rusk called attention to the relationship between our quarantine and Soviet-Cuban relations. The Cubans, who would not be able to survive in political isolation, must henceforth rely entirely on the Soviets. He suggested that we might ask the Brazilian Ambassador in Havana to tell Castro that there was little for Cuba in being tied permanently to the Soviet Union. An appeal might be made to Castro to step aside so that a new government might break this complete dependence from here on out on the Soviet Union.53

By the next morning—Friday, 26 October—the CIA (evidently on the basis of intercepted cable traffic from the Brazilian embassy in Washington) was reporting to the Excomm not only that the Brazilians were actively pressing their scheme to make Latin America a nuclear weapons-free zone but that they believed they had received positive signals from Moscow:

Brazil sees itself as a peacemaker in the Cuban situation, proposing that the UN undertake denuclearization of Latin America. Rio feels this would permit Cuba and the Soviet Union to save face, thus diminishing the danger of direct confrontation. The Brazilian Ambassador in Washington cabled his foreign ministry that “according to reports” USSR Deputy Foreign Minister Frol Kozlov supported this idea.54

State Department officials supported the Brazilian denuclearization plan at the UN, but it drew mixed reviews, especially from the military, during an extended discussion in the Excomm on the morning of the 26th.55 Defense

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55. Excomm discussion, 26 October 1962, 10 a.m. Several versions of this discussion are available. Partially sanitized minutes were declassified in 1988 and published in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 177–183; a fuller version appears in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, pp. 221–226; and a transcript can be found in Zelikow and May, eds., Presidential Recordings, Vol. 3, pp. 289–321.
Secretary McNamara was willing to back a nuclear weapons–free Latin America if it included the removal of the missiles from Cuba, but he acknowledged that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) remained “very cool” to the proposal. The new JCS chairman, General Maxwell D. Taylor, confirmed that the chiefs were “very sceptical as to its efficacy” and were concerned that it might distract attention from the Soviet missiles and possibly endanger the defense of Panama (a U.S. nuclear storage and transshipment point) as well as anti-submarine warfare activities in the Western Hemisphere. They also worried that if the zone were extended to Africa, it would provoke French opposition in light of Paris’s nuclear-testing facilities in the Sahara. Rusk conceded that the proposal might “hinder the transit by air of nuclear weapons in Latin America” and bar the storage of nuclear warheads in the Canal Zone, but he suggested that Puerto Rico (and possibly Panama) might be exempted and that, if necessary, the United States could allow the French to test their nuclear weapons at American facilities if a deal for a nuclear weapons–free zone encompassed Africa as well as Latin America.56 Rusk argued that, despite these problems, it would be “wise” to back the Brazilian plan because a nuclear weapons–free zone represented a “face-saving” means for Moscow to withdraw the missiles. If Moscow refused to accept the proposal, its rejection would be on the record before Washington resorted to military action against Cuba. Presidential speechwriter Theodore Sorensen also expressed interest, noting that an endorsement of the plan by the OAS would legitimate U.S. military action to destroy the missiles if Cuba refused to go along.57

Kennedy’s own reaction to the idea was revealing. The crisis had raised the basic issue of whether the United States was willing, in the final analysis, to live with the Castro regime—a concession that the president and others in his administration remained loath to make. Although scholars have disputed whether Kennedy was in fact moving toward some form of military action against Cuba even before the discovery of the missiles in mid-October,58 there is no question that the administration had been stepping up the “Mongoose” sabotage operations. As recently as late September, Rusk had told Latin American foreign ministers that although the United States did not inherently object to Cuba’s internal social and economic system, Castro’s ties with Moscow

56. The foregoing discussion of the Brazilian denuclearization plan’s military implications was deleted from the minutes when they were declassified in 1988. Compare versions in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 180; and FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 224.
57. Excomm transcript, 26 October 1962, 10 a.m., in May and Zelikow, eds., Kennedy Tapes, p. 456.
and promotion of subversion in Latin America meant that the United States was "not prepared to accept [the] Cuban situation as permanent" and that "military action remains [an] eventual possibility" as a last resort.59

At the Excomm meeting, Kennedy listened to the discussion of the Brazilian proposal and then inquired whether, in addition to mandating a nuclear weapons–free zone in Latin America, the plan would require the United States to accept the territorial integrity of all countries in the region. According to the minutes, the president wondered "whether we could commit ourselves not to invade Cuba."60 He then added: "Well, . . . obviously we're going to have to pay a price in order to get those missiles out without fighting to get them out." The implication was that a "guarantee" for Cuba would be a reasonable concession if it brought the removal of the missiles without a war.61 Rusk readily assented, noting that in the absence of some violent provocation the United States, as a signatory of the 1947 Rio Treaty as well as the UN Charter, was already formally bound to respect Cuba's territorial integrity.

At that point, having noted a legal obstacle to a potential invasion of Cuba, Rusk raised anew the option of a direct diplomatic approach to Castro. He gave Kennedy a draft cable he proposed to send to Gordon in Rio de Janeiro for transmission to Havana via the Brazilians.62 In essence, the message proposed a simple deal: If Castro broke with his Soviet allies (who were betraying him and endangering the revolution in any case), evicted their missiles, and disavowed the promotion of revolution in Latin America, the United States would abandon its plans to attack Cuba and would consider "many [other] changes" in its policy toward Havana, implicitly meaning an acceptance of the continuation of socialist rule on the island and the dropping of the U.S. economic embargo and anti-Castro diplomatic campaign. Rusk read aloud the text of the proposed instructions to be passed via the government in Rio de Janeiro to the Brazilian ambassador in Havana, who would then relay to Castro as a Brazilian message the following:

The world now knows without any question and in great detail the nature and size of the buildup of Soviet offensive missile capability in Cuba. There can be

62. Rusk's proposal to use the Brazilian channel to communicate the message to Castro is censored from the version of the Excomm minutes printed in Chang and Kornbluh, eds., Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 181.
no valid question in anyone's mind on this point. The action of the Soviet Union in using Cuban soil as sites for offensive nuclear missiles capable of striking most of the Western Hemisphere has placed the future of the Castro regime and the well-being of the Cuban people in great jeopardy.

The countries of the Inter-American system have unanimously called for their removal and approved and are participating in the measures being taken to eliminate this Soviet threat to all of them.

The Soviet Union is turning around its cargo ships in face of the U.S. blockade which the countries of the hemisphere have authorized. Not only is the Soviet Union failing to support Cuba on this matter, but numerous feelers have been put out by high Soviet officials to allied governments for exchanges of their position in Cuba for concessions by the NATO countries in other parts of the world. Thus you are not only being used for purposes of no interest to any Cuban, but deserted and threatened by betrayal.

It is also well known that work is proceeding rapidly to complete and make operational the offensive nuclear missile installations and to assemble the IL-28 bombers. The threatened countries clearly cannot sit still while the threat against them is being increased in this fashion. Further steps will have to be taken against Cuba and very soon.

Castro might recall that President Kennedy has said publicly that only two issues were nonnegotiable between Castro and the U.S.—the military-political ties to the U.S.S.R. and the aggressive attitude toward the internal affairs of other Latin American countries. This view will be shared by other members of the Inter-American system. Of course this means giving up the offensive nuclear capability being established in Cuba and sending home Soviet military personnel, on which help can certainly be given if needed. From such actions many changes in the relations between Cuba and the OAS countries, including the U.S., could flow.

Time is very short for Cuba and for Castro to decide whether to devote his great leadership abilities to the service of his Cuban people or to serving as a Soviet pawn in their desperately risky struggle for world domination by force and threat of force.

If Castro tries to rationalize the presence of these missiles as due to Cuban fear of a U.S. invasion, Ambassador Ba[s]tian [Pinto] should reply that he is confident that the OAS would not accept an invasion of Cuba once the missiles were removed and that the U.S. would not risk upsetting Hemispheric solidarity by invading a Cuba so clearly committed to a peaceful course.63

Treasury Secretary Dillon noted that Rusk's proposed message had dropped two provisions from an earlier draft (probably the draft by Martin) in line with the Treasury Department's suggestions: (1) a prediction that the

most likely next U.S. measure would be an expansion of the “quarantine” to cover petroleum products, an action that, in light of the island’s utter dependence on Soviet oil, “would quite quickly force the Cuban economy to a complete stop and the people of Cuba to a desperate hand-to-mouth existence”; and (2) a warning that Castro had “perhaps not more than 24 hours” to make up his mind—an idea whose drawback, as Rusk acknowledged, was that if “you pass the 24th hour without having taken the action, then you’ve undermined the whole message.” 

Rusk told Kennedy that he would like to “get this off right away” to Gordon to pass to the Brazilians, but Kennedy reacted skeptically to the idea that Castro would respond to the “pretty clumsy” and “rather insulting” claim that the Soviet Union was betraying Cuba. Rusk responded, rather lamely, that it would be the Brazilians saying it, not the Americans. Before the president could render a final judgment, the proposal for a deal with Castro provoked a reprise of Rusk’s argument with CIA Director McCone the previous spring and again at the Special Group (Augmented) in August. “One thing I don’t like about this, and that is that it would sort of insulate Castro from further actions,” McCone objected.

Long before these missiles were there, his link with the Soviet Union and the use of Cuba as a base for operations to communize all of Latin America was a matter of great concern to us. Now what this does is more or less leave him in that position. The missiles aren’t there, but still this situation that has worried us so much for the last two or three years goes on.

McCone said that although it was important “to get rid of these missiles,” it was equally important “to have the Cuban people take over Cuba, and take it away from Castro. This [Rusk’s proposal] does not involve a break between Castro and the Soviet Union.” Rusk retorted that the message would repeat Kennedy’s statement asserting that Washington would not tolerate Cuba’s continued military-political ties with Moscow or actions against Latin American countries—but at least “if Castro were, through some miracle, to get his militia together and turn on the Soviets, on these missiles, then this problem is solved, John, as far as the Soviets are concerned.”

“That’s a very big ‘if,’ though,” McCone responded.

“Yeah,” Rusk agreed, “it’s a very big ‘if,’ but that’s . . . It’s on that off chance. That’s the purpose of this operation, if possible, you see.”

64. Excomm transcript, 26 October 1962, 10 a.m., Cabinet Room, in Zelikow and May, eds., Presidential Recordings, Vol. 3, pp. 307–308; and handwritten draft message to Castro in NA, RG 59, DCF, Box 1631, 737.56311. The draft is unsigned, but a subsequent cable (see fn. 69) indicates it was drafted by Edwin M. Martin.

65. Excomm transcript, 26 October 1962, 10 a.m., Cabinet Room, in Zelikow and May, eds., Presidential Recordings, Vol. 3, pp. 307–308. The minutes paraphrase McCone more pithily: “Mr. McCone
Some desultory discussion ensued. Robert Kennedy wondered whether the United States would still be free to act against Cuba if Castro continued to send weapons to Venezuela or Colombia or if an uprising erupted on the island. Rusk assured him that the draft message would not protect Castro from “any kind of rascality.” National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and Kennedy himself cut the talk short and resolved the argument in Rusk’s favor. The “very simple, basic structural purpose of this whole enterprise,” said Bundy, “is to get these missiles out. Castro is a problem. If we can bring Castro down in the process, dandy. If we can turn him in on other people, dandy. But if we can get the missiles out . . .”

“I wouldn’t worry yet,” Kennedy interrupted. “If we can get the missiles out, we can take care of Castro. My God, if they do something in Berlin, we can always say, ‘Well, this changes our commitments.’ So I think we ought to concentrate on the missiles right now.” That settled the issue, at least for the moment. Although Kennedy expressed skepticism that the message would have any effect (“It probably won’t get anyplace”) and impatience that “time’s running out for us” (because work on the missile sites was accelerating), he agreed that the cable should be transmitted to Gordon after “one more look.” Soon after the meeting, the State Department forwarded to Bundy a “revised draft” of the message—actually, despite the objections Kennedy had raised, it was essentially unchanged from the version read to the Excomm—for presidential review.

Kennedy gave his approval, and at 2 p.m. on 26 October the State Department, over Rusk’s name, transmitted the eight-point message to the U.S. embassy in Rio de Janeiro. The cable explained that the president had concluded that “the time has come for [a] representative of a friendly county to discuss with Castro alone RPT alone predicament in which Soviet actions have placed him,” and that Bastian Pinto seemed the best candidate for the job. The cable instructed Gordon to stress to the Brazilians that they must handle the matter with the “greatest discretion” and that American fingerprints on the initiative must be assiduously concealed. Rusk told Gordon that the “approach to Castro should be handled in such [a] way as [to] make absolutely clear to Castro it is solely [a] Brazilian initiative.” Because Rusk evi-

expressed his dislike of a situation involving continued control of Cuba by Castro. Even if the Soviet missiles are removed, Castro, if he is left in control, will be in an excellent position to undertake the Communization of Latin America.” Minutes of 6th Excomm Meeting, 26 October 1962, 10 a.m., in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 224.


67. Ibid., pp. 309–310.

dently was aware (from CIA reports that were citing intercepted Brazilian diplomatic cable traffic) that the security of Brazil’s high-level communications had been compromised, he emphasized to Gordon that in the interest of preserving “complete secrecy” and “absolute accuracy” the Brazilian government should deliver the U.S.-drafted instructions to Havana “by special courier in [a] special airplane as soon as possible” and above all avoid any Brazilian cables.69

For the moment, however, the secret overture to Castro was held in abeyance. Although Rusk’s cable had instructed Gordon to pass the message to Prime Minister Hermes “as soon as possible” for transmittal to Havana, the U.S. envoy, for reasons that remain unclear, did not act on these instructions immediately after they reached him in the early evening of the 26th.70 One possible reason for the delay was that Rusk that afternoon had been presented with a new option for a potential diplomatic channel to communicate directly with Castro, this one involving Canada.71 The Canadian ambassador in Washington, Charles Ritchie, saw Rusk at 3:30 on Friday afternoon and informed him that on Thursday Cuba’s envoy to Canada had called on Foreign Minister Howard Green to declare Havana’s readiness to “fight to death” if the Americans invaded. But the Cuban envoy added that Cuba was ready “at any time to negotiate its differences with the USA, but the USA apparently continued to be unwilling to negotiate.” Although the envoy defended Cuba’s right to possess any weapons it required for its own protection and reiterated Castro’s rejection of UN inspection of Cuban facilities, he hinted that this refusal to allow inspection might be flexible “under certain circumstances.”72

On seeing the report, Rusk responded vaguely that “the State Department had been receiving similar indications from other capitals to the effect that the Cuban Govt would be willing to discuss their differences with the USA through the UN,” and he reaffirmed the two standard preconditions: an end to Cuba’s “military connection with Moscow” and an end to “communist

69. Deptel 1055 to Rio, 26 October 1962, 2 p.m., in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, pp. 228–229; also in NA, RG 59, DCF, Box 1631, 737.56311. The passages quoted in the final two sentences here were deleted when the document was first declassified but were included in the FRUS volume published in 1997. Compare with version declassified in 1988 in NSA/CMC.
71. This Canadian-Cuban episode is briefly noted in Martin, Kennedy and Latin America, p. 431.
72. For the Canadian report of the conversation with the Cuban ambassador in Ottawa, which Ritchie showed to Rusk, see Outgoing Message, EXTERNAL OTT to PERMISNY/WASH DC, No. XL-106, “Cuban Position on the Crisis” (Confidential), 25 October 1962, in National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (hereinafter NAC), RG 25, Vol. 4184, File 2444–40, pt. 10.
penetration from Cuba into the Western Hemisphere." Although Rusk did not mention the simultaneous Brazilian initiative, he used similar language to indicate that there would be "no problem" in opening negotiations with Havana "if the Cubans could find a way to get rid of the missiles." He added—in a foreshadowing of Kennedy's offer to Khrushchev the next day—that the United States could offer a non-invasion pledge if that were required to help get the missiles out. Moreover, he suggested that there "might be some advantage" in asking the Canadian ambassador in Havana to "probe the actual Cuban position," especially if he were able to see Castro alone, perhaps during a social occasion. Although Rusk acknowledged that the odds of success were only "a chance in a thousand," he argued that "one could not always be certain that Castro was a total instrument of Moscow" and that "it would perhaps be unwise to assume categorically that Castro would always react in direct response to the Moscow line." Nonetheless, Rusk's "tone," according to Ambassador Ritchie, "implied skepticism as to the likelihood of the Cubans acting independently on major issues." At an aide's prompting, Rusk grudgingly agreed that it would be useful for the Canadian envoy in Havana to let Castro know that the Cuban leader "was on a losing wicket and that the real question was the elimination of the missile bases." But because Rusk’s references to Canadian probing in Havana were, according to Ritchie, "not at all emphatic or precise," the Canadian ambassador did not get the impression that Rusk was "much interested in the possibility of exchanges with the Cubans proving fruitful in the present situation."

The attempt to arrange Canadian mediation proved stillborn, but the sudden prospect of it may have prompted Rusk to put the Brazilian initiative on hold temporarily. Even though many U.S. officials were annoyed at Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker for what they regarded as his grudging and halfhearted backing during the missile crisis, they apparently trusted Ottawa more than Rio de Janeiro on matters pertaining to Cuba. As a reminder of the lingering suspicion about the Brazilian government's inclination toward neutrality, Rusk's cable to Gordon on Friday afternoon containing the secret message for Castro had crossed paths with a message from Gordon to Washington reporting on a conversation the previous day with San Tiago Dantas, the former foreign minister, who had "apparently regained his position as

73. For Ritchie’s report of his October 26 conversation with Rusk, see Canadian Embassy in Washington (Ritchie) to External, No. 3166, "Cuba" (Secret), 27 October 1962, in NAC, RG 25, Vol. 4184, File 2444–40, pt. 10. See also the State Department memorandum of the Ritchie-Rusk conversation, "Cuban Situation" (Secret), 26 October 1962, 3:30 p.m., in NA, RG 59, Secretary's and Under Secretary's Memoranda of Conversations 1953–1964, Box 25, folder "October 1–5 1962 to January 1963," Lot 65D330, Entry 1566.
Goulart’s principal foreign policy adviser.” Gordon summarized Dantas’s view, which appeared to represent the position of the Goulart administration: Because of the inevitable “bitter and violent” Latin American reaction (and not only among Communists) to a U.S. military attack against Cuba (an attack that, Dantas insisted, would cause “lasting and profound” damage to U.S. interests), the United States was best advised ultimately to negotiate the dismantling and departure of the Soviet missiles. Ambassador Gordon noted that Dantas basically was returning to his “favorite theme”—an idea he had pushed at the Punta del Este conference the previous January—of “some form of neutralization” of Cuba. Under this scenario, Havana would drastically cut its armed forces (from 400,000 to 20,000) and eliminate the corresponding weapons, and it would stop its subversive activities in Latin America (training guerrillas, exporting funds, broadcasting denunciations of other governments) in exchange for a formal non-invasion pledge from the rest of the hemisphere, above all the United States.

Gordon did not dispute Dantas’s stated intention to pursue this plan in the “UN lounge,” but the ambassador’s final comment reflected Washington’s general aversion to “neutralism” at this stage of the Cold War:

My guess is that, like [Indian leader Jawaharlal] Nehru, Dantas is living in [a] dream world of [his] own creation. At [the] same time, [it] might be very useful to have GOB [Government of Brazil] effort to seek such terms, which would certainly be great improvement over situation of last 12 months if accepted, while if rejected—as [is] likely—would help educate GOB through process of frustration.74

Back in New York, Brazilian delegates spent the day working out a draft resolution for the denuclearization of Latin America and Africa and lobbying for its acceptance. The Cuban delegate to the UN, García-Inchaustegui, informed his Soviet colleague, Valerii Zorin, that the plan had achieved “great currency” among Latin American countries, which were planning to present it to the acting UN Secretary General, U Thant. The Brazilian envoy, Arinos, told his Cuban counterpart that the plan also represented a way for Havana to “avoid humiliation” if it were forced to give up the missile bases, but García-Inchaustegui (giving his “personal opinion”) retorted that the scheme should cover all foreign military bases, including the U.S. base at Guantánamo, not just nuclear weapons.75 But Gordon warned Dantas that any Communist attempt to include Guantánamo would scotch the deal, and the Brazilian

74. Embtel 890, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential/Eyes Only), 26 October 1962, 3 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuban Cables, Box 41.
agreed, noting that he had warned Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós the previous January that trying to push the Americans out of the naval base was “simply fighting cold war and not seeking settlement.” By early Friday evening, two conflicting versions had emerged of the likely fate of the Brazilian plan: The KGB (citing Argentine embassy sources) was telling the Soviet Presidium that the United States had rejected the idea, whereas Brazil’s delegate at the OAS in Washington was reporting optimistically that both U.S. and Soviet officials were showing positive interest in the denuclearization plan as a possible way out of the crisis.

The optimism expressed by the Brazilian representative was not shared back in Rio de Janeiro. Earlier that day, the Brazilian government had received a “quite grave forecast of the current situation” from its envoy in Washington, who warned that the crisis might soon escalate dangerously. Ambassador Campos said that although the blockade so far had been successful in preventing further shipments of offensive arms to Cuba without resort to violence, the U.S. government was “gradually preparing the ground” to achieve its second aim, namely, the removal of the missile bases. He predicted that Washington would soon issue a clear ultimatum to stop work on the installations, and, if the Soviet Union failed to heed the warning, the U.S. military would either bomb the sites, expand the blockade, or launch an outright invasion, sparking an unpredictable Soviet reaction. It was even possible, he speculated, that Moscow was deliberately continuing work on the missile bases to goad the United States into an attack, an action that would give Moscow the political upper hand for action elsewhere. “Faced with such possibilities,” Campos concluded, “the only hope is still to intensify the diplomatic pressure on Havana and Moscow” to make concessions that would alleviate the crisis, perhaps by accepting the denuclearization scheme. Although the cable gave no precise timetable, Campos also apparently relayed to Goulart a report that the U.S. government had decided to take military action unless work on the missiles in Cuba halted within the next two days.

76. Embtel 890, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential/Eyes Only), 26 October 1962, 3 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuban Cables, Box 41.


78. BD/OAS (Barreiros), Telegram No. 515 (Confidential), 26 October 1962, 6:30 p.m., in AMRE-B, “O.E.A.—TELEGRAMAS RECEBIDAS E EXPEDIDAS—1962.”

79. BE/W (Campos), Telegram No. 795, Friday, 26 October 1962, noon, in AMRE-B, “MD—WASHINGTON—TELEGR.—CARTAS—RECEB.—EXPED.—1962 (7aX11).”

80. Goulart alluded to this “rumor” from Campos—“that U.S. had given [a] 48 hour ultimatum to Cuba to stop base construction under pain military action”—in a conversation with Gordon on Satur-
Together with other ominous signs, Campos’s alarming cable prodded Goulart and his aides into further action. At 5:45 p.m., Rio time, on Friday, Hermes urgently sent the following message to Bastian Pinto in Havana:

We are holding information that in case the work that is becoming realized in the construction of the launch platforms for the teleguided [missiles] will not be suspended within the next 48 hrs, the American Government will take measures that include the utilization of armed force. In case to the contrary [that] works will be suspended there would be a propitious climate for conversations of high level to follow for the Secretary General of the United Nations. Your Excellency should immediately [take] action [to contact the Cuban] Government appealing for the suspension of works on the launch platforms and assuring that this in our view is the only manner to block the opening of hostilities. In the conversations of the leadership we will use all our influence [with] the American Government [to assure that] the integrity and the political institutions of Cuba will be respected. We would be grateful to be informed of the result of the action.81

As the Brazilian Foreign Ministry dispatched this message to Havana, the Brazilian ambassador there was reporting that low-level U.S. reconnaissance overflights were fanning Cuban fears of a U.S. military assault at any moment. Citing the Yugoslav envoy as his source, Bastian Pinto quoted an “extremely perturbed” Dorticós as predicting that it would be a “miracle” if a U.S. attack “does not come this evening, repeat this evening.” The Yugoslav envoy also reportedly claimed that Dorticós had assured him that the Cuban government was “ready to negotiate any solution, including the disarmament, the denuclearization, and the neutralization, repeat the neutralization,” of Cuba, so long as it did not involve the island’s “surrender with tied hands to the United States of America.” Bastian Pinto urged the Brazilian leadership, in parallel with actions being taken by Yugoslavia, to contact Castro to urge a peaceful resolution to the crisis.82

day morning, 27 October. See Embtel 899, Rio (Gordon) to State, 27 October 1962, 2 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuban Cables, Box 41.
82. BE/H (Bastian Pinto), Telegram No. 347, Friday, 26 October 1962, 6 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Oct. 1962.” In his own report of the conversation with Dorticós, which appears essentially consistent with what he told Bastian Pinto, the Yugoslav ambassador quoted the Cuban president as expecting an “inevitable” U.S. attack, probably that evening, and expressing an apparent readiness for previously unacceptable concessions so long as Cuba’s security were safeguarded by international guarantee. The envoy’s cable does not cite Dorticós as having explicitly referred to neutralization as one of those potential concessions but states that the “very upset” president had said that Havana was “ready for everything”—including, the envoy inferred, “many things that were out of discussion in the near past”—so long as its security were guaranteed. Yugoslav Embassy, Havana (hereinafter VE/H) (Vidaković), to Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs (YMFA) (for President Tito and
The new message sent by Hermes and presumably approved by Goulart gave Bastian Pinto the opening he sought. Rushing to the presidential palace Friday evening, the envoy presented the warning to Dorticós. The Cuban president in turn relayed the assessment to Castro, who, according to an aide, “took it fairly seriously.”83 Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko (who, citing a Russian document, imprecisely describe a personal message from Goulart to Castro rather than the message conveyed via Bastian Pinto) write: “Castro had been extremely worried all day, since receiving the intelligence from New York [of a possibly imminent U.S. attack], and the Brazilian warning served to magnify his concern.”84 According to senior Cuban Communist sources, the Brazilian warning helped spur Castro later that evening to write his secret (though now famous) cable to Khrushchev predicting that a U.S. assault would come within 24 to 72 hours and that it would signal the beginning of an all-out war between socialism and imperialism. Castro urged the Soviet leader to use any means, including nuclear weapons, to respond to a U.S. attack. Khrushchev later said that this missive from the “young and hot-headed...very hot-tempered” Cuban leader convinced him to take the steps needed to defuse the missile crisis before it spun out of control.85

To reinforce Brazil’s urgent message, Hermes had been (as he later told Gordon) “peppering” Bastian Pinto with instructions and telephoning as late

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83. Pedro Alvarez Tabío (Cuban presidential aide and historian), interview, Pinar del Rio, Cuba, 13 October 2002.
85. Tabío, interview, 13 October 2002. See also the 1995 interview with Jorge Risquet in Luiz Alberto Monti Bandeira, De marti a Fidel: A revolução Cubana e a América Latina (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1998), p. 464. For Castro’s 26 October 1962 letter to Khrushchev, first published in Granma (Havana), 23 November 1990, see James G. Blight, Bruce Allyn, and David Welch, Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), pp. 474–491. Khrushchev’s recollection of his concerns about Castro’s hot-headedness and willingness to escalate to nuclear war at the climax of the crisis were long kept secret but were published in Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes, trans. and ed. by Jerrold L. Schecter, with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), pp. 170–183. In a contemporaneous record, Khrushchev reported that Castro had “proposed that we ourselves should be the first to start an atomic war,” adding that, “Only a person who has no idea what nuclear war means, or who has been so blinded, for instance, like Castro, by revolutionary passion, could speak that way.” Record of conversation between Khrushchev and Czechoslovak Communist Party delegation, Moscow, 30 October 1962, in Central State Archive, Prague; obtained by Oldřich Štúra, trans. Linda Mastalir in Conference Briefing Book: Primary Source Documents, Vol. 1 (The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Political Perspective after 40 Years,” Havana, 11–12 October 2002).
as 3 a.m. on the morning of 27 October to tell the Cubans “that they must accept UN observers and must dismantle bases, and that if this [were] done, [the Brazilian Government] would do all in [its] power to assure [the] political and military safety of [the] regime,” thereby allowing the Cubans “to pursue their revolution in tranquility as [a] purely domestic concern.”86 (In reality, because of communications problems, the telegram sent by Hermes to Bastian Pinto at 1 a.m. on Saturday morning along these lines—urging Cuba to permit UN certification of the dismantling of the missile bases but expressing “full support” for guarantees of Cuba’s territorial integrity—failed to reach the Brazilian envoy until late Saturday afternoon, after he had seen Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa and urged acceptance with “maximum speed” of a UN inspection commission.87)

By the evening of the 27th, Kennedy was growing desperate to find a political solution. That afternoon, an American U-2 reconnaissance plane had been shot down over Cuba, and the pilot was missing (and in fact dead). Although Kennedy had vetoed a retaliatory strike against the SAM site that brought down the aircraft, the action struck some U.S. officials as a sign that Moscow had decided to risk escalation. Meanwhile, a hardline public letter from Khrushchev had arrived proposing a trade of U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the Soviet missiles in Cuba—a proposition Washington publicly rejected as an unacceptable concession to blackmail. As U.S. military forces massed in the southeastern United States and in the Caribbean around Cuba, and as aerial reconnaissance photographs indicated that construction work on the missile sites was accelerating, pressure mounted on Kennedy, especially from the JCS, to order an invasion. Day-long discussions within the Excomm yielded a decision by Kennedy to send Khrushchev a letter that ignored the demand for a swap for the Jupiters in Turkey and agreed to a deal in which the Soviet Union would withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. non-invasion pledge.

The letter purported to embrace the terms of the lengthy message Khrushchev had sent to Kennedy late on 26 October, but the U.S. president and his advisers, well aware that the Soviet leader had only implied such an ar-

86. Embtel 902, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Niac/ Eyes Only), 28 October 1962, 1 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41. This passage is deleted in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 278.

rangement, doubted that Moscow would accept the formula. Although they hoped that the military buildup would compel Khrushchev to back down, Kennedy also dreaded taking any violent step that might trigger an uncontrollable escalation, including Soviet retaliation against West Berlin or possibly Turkey. At this key moment—a moment of profound concern, anxiety, even dread—the president was ready to consider almost any gamble, no matter how implausible, that might provide an alternative to war. Outside the Excomm’s awareness, it appears, Kennedy authorized three separate secret diplomatic initiatives that evening in a last-ditch effort to secure a political resolution to the crisis. One of these overtures—Robert Kennedy’s meeting with Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin—has been generally known since shortly after the crisis, although fresh evidence from Russian archives has added important details. On the one hand, Robert Kennedy warned Dobrynin that his brother was under rapidly growing pressure to authorize a military strike; on the other hand, Kennedy provided a secret oral assurance that the United States would take out the Jupiters from Turkey within four to five months if Khrushchev withdrew the offending Soviet missiles from Cuba.

A second secret overture to Moscow at the height of the crisis was not revealed until 1987, when Rusk recounted it in a letter to the organizers of a scholarly conference on the crisis. The former secretary of state disclosed that Kennedy had secretly authorized him to transmit to Andrew Cordier, a former senior UN official who had become a law professor at Columbia University, a proposal to be given (without indication of its source) to U Thant. The proposal urged U Thant to issue, in his own name, an appeal to Washington and Moscow calling on them, in the interests of peace, to remove their respective nuclear missiles from Turkey and Cuba. This appeal would allow Kennedy to, in effect, accept his own proposal, but would sugarcoat the concession of a simultaneous public swap by having it appear to come from the international body.88

The Albino Mission

The third secret overture has been unknown until now. At approximately 9:45 p.m., Rio time, on 27 October, Assistant Secretary Martin telephoned

Ambassador Gordon—presumably with the approval of Rusk and the president—and directed him to follow up on the telegram sent the previous day outlining the terms of the deal that the Brazilians were to pass to Castro. Gordon quickly phoned Hermes and arranged to see him that night.\(^9\)

Carrying a Portuguese translation of the eight points relayed from Washington, Gordon visited the prime minister at his high-rise apartment in a swanky neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro. Arriving alone a half-hour before midnight, the U.S. ambassador began by saying that “this extremely important and sensitive initiative,” which Rusk and the president had personally authorized, required the “utmost secrecy” and would have a “vital bearing on peace.” Gordon then summarized the message to be passed to Castro, “emphasizing that [the] talk must be with Fidel alone” and that the “instructions must go by courier direct to Bastian Pinto” in Havana.\(^0\) He then gave Hermes the Portuguese translation of the eight-point message, which the embassy had “typed on plain paper” to conceal its origin.

After almost three years of ambivalent and even hostile U.S. reactions to Brazilian efforts to mediate between Washington and Havana, Gordon’s urgent midnight request to intercede with Castro was a striking departure for American foreign policy—and an equally dramatic opportunity for Brazil’s standing in the world. Hermes naturally welcomed the opportunity to play this potentially crucial role at the height of the most acute international crisis in many years—a role that would please both the United States and friends of Castro who wished to safeguard Cuban sovereignty and security. Successful mediation also would showcase Brazil’s “independent” posture.

After hearing Gordon’s proposition, Hermes first noted that his government had already been acting intensively to prod the Cuban leadership to moderate its position. He said he had promised the Cubans that if they agreed to remove the missile bases under UN inspection, Brazil would defend Cuba’s right to be secure against U.S. intervention. He said he had also told the Cubans that “in present world conditions” there was “no sense harping on infringement [of] sovereignty.” Hermes informed Gordon that a few hours ago he had received from Bastian Pinto a cable indicating that Roa had confided that the Brazilian government’s warnings and urgings had “heavily influenced” Havana’s decision earlier in the day to invite U Thant to Cuba to discuss the crisis.\(^1\) (Moreover, although Hermes refrained from saying so,}

\(^9\) The account that follows is based on Embtel 902, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Niact/Eyes Only), 28 October 1962, 1 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41. This is a complete version of the heavily sanitized cable in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. XI, p. 278.

\(^0\) This passage is deleted from the version in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. XI, p. 278.

\(^1\) Bastian’s report of his conversation with Roa was reported by Hermes to Gordon on the night of 27–28 October and relayed to Washington in Embtel 902, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Se-
both Arinos at the UN and Bastian Pinto—who believed that Castro’s acceptance of Thant’s visit offered “favorable possibilities” and hinted at willingness to make important concessions—had urgently recommended that Brazil undertake diplomatic action in Havana to encourage the Cuban leadership to cooperate with the UN Secretary General in order to end the crisis.92) That same day, in another sign of Brazilian diplomatic activism, Goulart had told Gordon he was considering sending Dantas to the UN to bolster Arinos’s efforts.93

Hermes assured Gordon that, in light of these earlier steps, the new U.S. proposal “was a perfectly natural supplement to what they had been doing and said he would undertake it.” Warily, the U.S. envoy “pointed out certain essential differences, notably [the] effort to appeal personally to Fidel to divorce himself from Soviet control, referring to our previous talks with Dantas and to evidence some months back of friction between Fidel and Russians”—a clear reference to the abortive attempt in April to capitalize on signs of a presumed split between Castro’s supporters and old-line Communists in the leadership. Hermes responded that he

understood fully, remarking that [a] position like [Yugoslav leader Josip Broz] Tito’s was far better for Fidel than that of [Hungarian communist leader] János Kádár or [East German communist leader Otto] Grotewohl, and that if Fidel had any statesmanship he would be most interested. [He s]aid that Lenin in similar circumstances would remove Soviet bases and Russian military personnel forthwith.94

Gordon stressed in response that Khrushchev’s proposal to Kennedy that day of a swap of missile bases “should be final proof to Fidel that Soviets were interested only in using Cuba to pursue [their] own security interests, while creating new dangers for Cuba.”

Turning to operational considerations for the message to Castro, Hermes suggested that the “best courier” would be General Albino Silva, the new chief of the cabinet’s military department (Casa Militar). He promised to speak

secret/Niact/Eyes Only), 28 October 1962, 1 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41. This passage is deleted from the version of this cable printed in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 278. However, the only cable from Bastian Pinto that Saturday evening located in the Brasília archives contains no such comment by Roa. See BE/H (Bastian Pinto), Telegram No. 352, 27 October 1962, 7:15 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Oct. 1962.”


93. See Embtel 899, Rio (Gordon) to State (Secret/Niact), 27 October 1962, 2 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Box 13.

94. This passage was deleted from the version of the documents published in the FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI.
early Sunday morning with Goulart (who was returning overnight from Brasília) and arrange to send Albino on a special plane “as soon as possible.” Although Hermes told Gordon it was likely that articles would appear on Sunday, 28 October, in the *The New York Times* (whose Latin America correspondent, Juan de Onis, maintained close ties with senior Brazilian officials) and in local newspapers about the “general line” of sending Brazilian representatives to Cuba (a disclosure that, he said, “would make follow-up by special courier seem natural”), he stressed that Albino’s mission “would not be publicized.” Gordon was concerned about the danger of leaks and was acutely aware of the political sensitivities at home. He “emphasized once again [the] extreme importance of avoiding any indication that this [was] our idea, and [Hermes] promised no word would be said to reveal origin.”95 Immediately after speaking with Gordon, Hermes telephoned Goulart in Brasília and gained his immediate assent both for Brazil’s undertaking the mission and for the use of General Albino as the messenger.96

Although Khrushchev’s agreement on Sunday morning to remove the missiles from Cuba under UN supervision alleviated the immediate crisis, the situation remained tense, and the secret Brazilian mediation effort went forward. That afternoon, a furious Fidel Castro, who was outraged at Moscow for what he regarded as an ignominious retreat under U.S. pressure and who was even more upset that Khrushchev had agreed to take out the missiles under UN inspection without consulting or even informing Cuba, publicly issued a series of non-negotiable demands. These “five points” would have required the United States to end its blockade of Cuba, to lift economic sanctions, to cease all reconnaissance flights, to halt subversive activities and “piratical raids” being staged from U.S. territory (including Puerto Rico), and, finally, to withdraw from and return to Cuba the Guantánamo Bay naval base occupied for more than half a century. Nevertheless, Cuban Foreign Minister Roa explained to Bastian Pinto (who had criticized the five demands, especially the evacuation of Guantánamo, as “excessive”) that Castro’s pronouncement had been “directed not only to the United States but also to the USSR, to show to both that Cuba is not a toy in the hands of the great powers and should be heard in the coming negotiations.” He assured the Brazilian envoy that “these demands would be, repeat, would be, an object of negotiation.” Referring “at length to the important and sympathetic role of Brazil in the present crisis,” Roa welcomed the proposed visit of Goulart’s special emiss-

95. Embtel 902, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Niact/Eyes Only), 28 October 1962, 1 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41. This passage is deleted from the version in *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. XI, p. 278.

sary (a visit that Roa mistakenly assumed was being arranged at the Brazilian government’s own initiative).97

Late Sunday evening, Hermes telephoned Gordon to inform him that General Albino, accompanied by the Cuban ambassador to Brazil, would fly to Havana on a special plane to deliver the message to Castro. (The same Panair Caravelle, which was scheduled to leave Rio de Janeiro at midnight on Sunday and arrive in Havana at 7:30 a.m. local time on Monday, would then continue on to New York City to “fetch” U Thant and his delegation to carry them to the Cuban capital for negotiations with Castro.98) McCone informed the Excomm on Monday morning that Goulart’s special emissary to Castro was on his way, but he did not give details of the mission and apparently did not mention that Albino was ferrying the message the Excomm itself had approved three days earlier. The handful of U.S. officials who had been informed of the covert diplomatic initiative anxiously awaited the outcome.99

By Monday afternoon, however, even before any report of the conversation with Castro came in, Gordon received what he considered a disturbing indication that the Brazilians were not properly handling the overture. Upon arriving at the Laranjeiras palace, the ambassador found Goulart in a celebratory mood. Goulart invited Gordon to the upstairs personal quarters and broke out “some whiskies to toast the American victory.” Not only had the confrontation ended with a triumph for Kennedy—a “tremendous propaganda opportunity for U.S. in showing Cubans how they were being used by Russians”—but the Communist defenders of Castro within Brazil were, as Goulart gleefully put it, “hiding their heads in shame.” Such warmly supportive comments from a leader whom Washington found increasingly mercurial and unreliable naturally gratified Gordon. But he was less pleased when Goulart informed him that Albino (whom U.S. officials regarded as “leftist” and “anti-American”)100, rather than Bastian Pinto, would be having the conversation with Castro. The Brazilian president explained that, in addition to

98. Embtel 906, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Niact/Eyes Only), 29 October 1962, 10 a.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41; and BFM to BE/H, Telegram No. 173 (Secret/Extremely Urgent), 28 October 1962, 10:00 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Oct. 1962.”
100. See Hilsman to Rusk, “Intelligence Note: The New Brazilian Cabinet” (Secret), 25 January 1963, in JFKL, NSF, Ralph Dungan Papers, Box 390A, folder “Brazil 1/63–6/63” (declassified at author’s request); and “Anti-Americans and Extremists in Brazilian Government” (Secret), n.d., in JFKL, NSF, Ralph Dungan Papers, Box 390A, folder “Brazil 1/63–6/63” (declassified at author’s request).
conveying the message that Gordon had given to Hermes, Albino had been instructed to tell Castro that Goulart personally was “astounded and dismayed” by Castro’s willingness to “put Cuba in [the] position of being mere merchandise of [the] USSR to be traded for Turkish bases regardless of Cuban sovereignty or Cuban popular desires.” Goulart added that Albino would also tell Castro that although the Brazilian president had tried to defend Havana’s position, it was impossible to do so when Castro had placed Cuba in the “obvious position of [being a] Russian satellite.”101 (Hermes Lima later wrote that Albino had been given “precise” instructions to tell Fidel the following: “We comprehend that Cuba would possess defensive armament, but we oppose the installation of Soviet offensive armament on your territory, because it puts at risk the security of the continent and even world peace.”102)

Gordon said the content of these instructions was “not bad in itself,” but he “would have far more confidence in Bastian than in Albino to get our desired message fully across. As it is we can only hope for results,” which Goulart promised to report to the American “promptly” on Wednesday morning (31 October) once Albino returned from Cuba. After the meeting with Goulart, however, Gordon’s patience with the Brazilian president, and his confidence in the Brazilians’ ability to serve as mediators for such a delicate initiative, dropped precipitously. “The best laid plans can go awry,” he began his cable to Rusk recounting the conversation.103

Despite Goulart’s promise to eschew publicity, word leaked out almost immediately that he had sent a personal envoy to Cuba on a mediation mission (though the American role was not mentioned). On Monday, the 29th, as pro-government newspapers in Brazil featured upbeat references to the mission—predicting “surprises in the next 24 hours”—the New York Times (in a de Onis story published on Tuesday) quoted sources close to Goulart as linking Albino’s trip to a formula whereby Cuba would vow to abstain from “exporting her revolution” in exchange for a U.S. non-invasion pledge. The story also quoted U.S. officials in Rio de Janeiro who claimed (misleadingly) that “Brazil’s diplomatic action had not yet taken the form of a proposal to the United States.” Former foreign minister Dantas called publicly for safeguards of Cuba’s security and sovereignty if Havana would abjure subversion in the

101. Embtel 909, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Priority/Eyes Only), 29 October 1962, 7 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Box 41, Cuba Cables; Gordon, interview, 5 February 1998; and Gordon, interview, 16 January 2003. References to Goulart in Embtel 909 were sanitized from the version of this document in NSA/CMC. The fully declassified cable is included in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vols. X–XII, microfiche supplement, doc. 456.


103. Embtel 909, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Priority/Eyes Only), 29 October 1962, 7 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41.
hemisphere. Hermes briefed seven parliamentary parties on the government’s diplomatic approach to the Cuban situation. Goulart, in turn, hinted broadly at what was afoot by releasing a letter to Tito in which he declared the Brazilian government’s readiness “to approach the Governments of Washington, Havana and Moscow in efforts to find a constructive solution capable of protecting the self-determination of the Cuban people and of reducing Cuban armament to a defensive scale, avoiding the renewal of any military threat.”

Such statements and leaks—on 1 November Gordon told his superiors in Washington that the Brazilian government “has been extensively advertising [its] role as a potential mediator”—only deepened U.S. misgivings about Goulart’s handling of the situation. Campos first sensed the emerging problem when he conversed briefly with Kennedy on 30 October at a White House reception for a delegation of visiting officers from the Brazilian Higher War College (Escola Superior de Guerra), an appointment Kennedy kept in “an hour so grave,” as he told the visitors, only because of Brazil’s “extraordinary importance.” After the Flower Garden ceremony, Campos writes in his memoirs, Kennedy summoned him into his private study and asked how Brazilian public opinion was reacting to the crisis. Campos told him that the revelation of the Soviet missiles had had a “dramatic effect” in “either disillusioning those who believed in the ‘nationalist’ character of the Castroist revolution, or frightening those who previously doubted the danger of the Cuban phenomenon in the context of the balance of power of Latin America.”

“And the senhor, personally,” Kennedy asked, “how did it feel here in Washington, in the bulls-eye of the Russian missiles? I, at least, had the tunnels of Camp David.”

“I would take refuge in the cellar of the embassy,” Campos replied, “since I believe in the French proverb: ‘Between the calamity and the catastrophe there is always a place for a glass of champagne.’”

Kennedy laughed heartily, Campos recalled, and asked one of his assistants to jot down this all-too-apt bon mot.

However, another exchange, which Campos immediately recounted in a cable to Hermes but did not later mention in his memoirs, provoked less amusement. Kennedy voiced disappointment at having had to postpone his visit to Brazil, and he asked Campos about Albino’s “ideological inclination.”

105. Embtel 917, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Priority/Eyes Only), 1 November 1962, in JFKL, NSA/CMC; and NSF, CO, Box 41.
The Brazilian envoy vigorously defended Goulart’s emissary as an “anticommunist nationalist” who supported the principle of international inspection. Reporting the conversation in a telegram classified “secret-urgent,” Campos expressed concern that unidentified “White House sources” felt “suspicion” toward Albino’s mission, a sentiment he found “hardly comprehensible” in light of Ambassador Gordon’s awareness of and support for it. In view of such “rumors,” Campos urged Hermes to inform Gordon that a “misunderstanding appears to be emerging here.”

Campos’s anxiety was well founded. McCone had told the Excomm that Albino’s purpose had been, at least in part, to “ensure the integrity and sovereignty of Cuba,” and a CIA intelligence memorandum sent to Kennedy characterized Albino as “pro-Communist” and predicted that the general would seek “to restore the prestige of Castro in Cuba and Latin America by returning the Cuban crisis to the level of a bilateral US-Cuban problem”—a considerably more jaundiced view than the *New York Times* had conveyed in its description of Albino’s mission (citing Brazilian officials) as an effort “to explore the possibilities for negotiated settlement for Cuba’s relations within the hemisphere.”

Shortly after Albino arrived in Havana on the morning of the 29th, Castro came to see him at the Brazilian embassy. Multiple accounts of the conversation that ensued have now surfaced—from U.S., Brazilian, Russian, and even Yugoslav sources. Following the talk, which lasted more than an hour, Goulart’s envoy sent a cable to Brazil containing a terse account now available from the Foreign Ministry archives in Brasília. Albino’s telegram is consistent with, but far less detailed than, the version given by Hermes to Gordon in Rio de Janeiro two days later quoting from his own “full notes” of a sealed letter from Albino to Goulart reporting on the conversation. Gordon immediately relayed this account to Washington, and two weeks later he was shown Albino’s original fourteen-page handwritten text. The Yugoslav am-

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111. BE/H (Bastian Pinto), Telegram No. 359, “Question of Cuba” (Secret/Most Urgent) 29 October 1962, 11:30 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Oct. 1962.”
112. Embtel 915, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Priority/Eyes Only), 31 October 1962, 7 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41.
113. Embtel 1000, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Eyes Only), 23 November 1962, in NA, RG 59, Box 1226, folder 611.3722/10–2562.
bassador in Havana received first-hand accounts of the meeting from Bastian Pinto and Albino (before he departed the Cuban capital on 31 October), and, in the meantime, Brazilian Foreign Ministry officials briefed Tito’s envoy in Rio de Janeiro. The highly classified cables from these various sources are now available from the former Yugoslav Foreign Ministry archives.114 Another, far terser account was given by Castro to the Soviet ambassador in Havana, Aleksandr Alekseev, who relayed it to Moscow on 31 October in a telegram that has since been released by the Russian Foreign Ministry archive.115 Mysteriously, Alekseev’s cable reports that Castro had identified “da Cunha, a Brazilian general,” as the one who relayed the personal message from Goulart. Presumably this is a mistaken reference to Albino, rather than an indication that a separate meeting was held with the former Brazilian ambassador to Havana (who had since gone on to become Brazil’s envoy to Moscow).116

According to Albino’s account—as Hermes relayed it to Gordon—Castro listened to the general’s presentation (which stressed that Moscow had acted in its own interests and had undermined Cuba’s) and acknowledged that the Soviet agreement to withdraw the missile bases had been the “first USSR decision on any Cuban-Soviet matter taken without previous notice to Cubans.” (Albino later told the Yugoslav ambassador that Castro “did not conceal his outrage about [the] Russians.”)117 The general then put forth (with “military clarity,” Hermes later said) what he described as the Brazilian government’s “three essential conditions” to resolve the crisis and normalize Cuban relations.

114. See YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 239, 30 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67; YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 246, 31 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67; YE/Rio (Barišić) to YMFA, Telegram No. 412, 30 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67; and YE/Rio (Barišić) to YMFA, Telegram No. 415 (Very Urgent), 31 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67. Translations by Radina Vučetić-Mladenović.


116. Unfortunately, a summer 2000 trip to the Brazilian archives failed to settle the matter definitively. Searches of da Cunha’s papers at the Getulio Vargas Foundation Center for Research and Contemporary Documentation (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Contemporânea (CPDOC)—Fundação Getúlio Vargas) in Rio and of AMRE-B yielded no evidence that the diplomat, then ambassador to the Soviet Union, had been in Havana during the missile crisis. But there also appeared to be a gap from 29 October to 5 November in his dispatches from Moscow—conceivably time enough, if barely, to undertake an urgent secret mission to Cuba to assist the Brazilian mediation effort. No mention of such a trip appears in the contemporaneous Brazilian or Yugoslav documents or the account in da Cunha’s memoir, drawn from oral history interviews, Diplomacia em Alto-mar: Depoimento ao CPDOC (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Fundação Getulio Vargas, 1994), pp. 249–252.

117. YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 246, 31 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67; translation by Radina Vučetić-Mladenović.

with the rest of the hemisphere: (1) demilitarization (i.e., destruction) of offensive weapons and bases in Cuba that could threaten its neighbors; (2) a pledge by Havana to eschew any military buildup “exceeding needs for Cuban defense”; and (3) Cuba’s “abstention” from further attempts to export revolution (“ideological aggression,” such as propaganda or financial support of subversive movements elsewhere in the hemisphere).

Albino reported that “Fidel listened to this with close attention and a certain degree of receptivity,” but the Cuban leader lost his temper when Albino noted that “demilitarization would require international inspection.” An agitated Fidel “vehemently rejected” this idea “as constituting an insult to the pride of the Cuban people.” Albino had struck a raw nerve at a sensitive moment. In meetings with U Thant (who arrived in Havana the next morning on a Brazilian plane), Castro was “in a bitter mood” and angrily denounced proposals for international inspections of the dismantling of the Soviet nuclear missile installations as violations of Cuba’s sovereignty. After seeing the Cuban leader, Albino told the Yugoslav envoy that Castro resembled a “hunted wild animal” who was “afraid of all sorts of things.” To mollify Castro, Albino had “replied that such inspection could perhaps extend not only to Cuba, but also to other Caribbean countries to ensure that they too were not engaged in warlike preparations, including training Cuban exiles with a view to invading Cuba.”

Castro reportedly viewed the idea of mutual inspections “much more sympathetically.” But he added—in line with his “five points”—that a “condition” for any successful talks to normalize Cuba’s relations with the “hemisphere” (i.e., the United States) would be the evacuation of Guantánamo, “arguing that [the United States] no longer has real military use for [the] base and that insisting on its retention is humiliating for Cubans.” As the conversation ended, Hermes told Gordon, Fidel expressed understanding for Brazil’s position and stressed that he had “welcomed” Albino’s presentation and heard it “with great interest.” Hermes added that Albino, who was still in Cuba de-

119. U Thant, “Notes on my second meeting with Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba in Havana on the 31st of October, 1962,” in UN Archives, New York, Office of the Secretary-General, U Thant Papers, DAG-1/5.2.2.6.2–11. Also see U Thant, “Summary of my meeting with President Dorticos, Premier Castro and Foreign Minister Roa in Havana, October 30, 1962,” in UN Archives, Office of the Secretary-General, U Thant Papers, DAG-1/5.2.2.6.2–11; and “Summary of my meeting with President Dorticos, Premier Castro of Cuba and Foreign Minister Roa in [sic] 10:00 A.M., October 31, 1962,” in UN Archives, Office of the Secretary-General, U Thant Papers, DAG-1/5.2.2.6.2–11. In Havana, on 30 October, U Thant saw Albino Silva and Bastian Pinto in addition to other foreign diplomats. See U Thant, View from the UN (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 177–190; and Carlos Lechuga, Cuba and the Missile Crisis (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2001), pp. 105–106.

120. YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 246, 31 October 1962, in AMIP, PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67; translation by Radina Vucetic.
spite his earlier plan to leave on Tuesday, might see Castro again before leaving on Wednesday. The prime minister also said that when Goulart spoke that day by telephone with Bastian Pinto, the latter had confirmed that “Cuban popular support for Fidel and government apparently remains massive.” Gordon said he would report the conversation promptly to Washington, and he avoided an immediate response to the substance of Albino’s encounter with Castro—with one exception: He told Hermes the same thing he had said to Dantas—that the “injection [of] Guantánamo into discussions at this time would rule out any serious negotiations.”

Gordon’s warning proved to be fully accurate. As he and Hermes conversed in Rio de Janeiro, Albino, who apparently did not have any further meetings with Castro, was being seen off at Havana airport by Foreign Minister Roa. In a message for transmittal to Goulart (similar to one being sent to the leaders of nonaligned countries), Roa sought Brazil’s support in the UN for Castro’s five points, including the deal-breaking Guantánamo demand, as a basis for any negotiations to resolve the crisis.

The Brazilians’ accounts given to the Yugoslav ambassador generally accord with that relayed by Hermes to Gordon, but they offer additional insights. According to the Yugoslav documents, Albino had urged Castro to follow the example of Yugoslavia and non-alignment as the only plausible escape from Cuba’s predicament. Albino insisted that despite taking a tough stand on Guantánamo and inspection, Castro had been “very honest to him and grateful” for Brazil’s initiative. The general predicted that his mission would succeed in persuading Castro to adopt Brazil’s suggestions. The Yugoslav ambassador himself was considerably less impressed with Castro’s “empty phrases,” and, after a lengthy conversation with Albino, he described the general as “very naïve” and an “enthusiastic advocate of Fidel”—terms reminiscent of the negative reports reaching Kennedy.

The brief cable from Soviet Ambassador Alekseev to Moscow on 31 October referring to an encounter between Castro and a Brazilian envoy is roughly consistent with the account given by Hermes (aside from Alekseev’s reference, noted above, to da Cunha rather than Albino as Goulart’s representative), but it adds an important bilateral Cuban-Brazilian dimension.

121. Embtel 915, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Priority/Eyes Only), 31 October 1962, 7 p.m., in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 41.


123. See esp. YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 245 (very urgent), 30 October 1962, in AMIP PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67 (“very naïve,” “very honest . . . grateful”); and YE/H (Vidaković) to YMFA, Telegram No. 246, 31 October 1962, in AMIP PA (Confidential Archive), 1962, Kuba, folder F-67. Translations by Radina Vucetic.
Alekseev began by noting that in his meeting with Castro on Wednesday the Cuban leader seemed “more composed” and said “that da Cunha, a Brazilian general, had come to see him with a personal message from Goulart and suggested the good offices of Brazil in settling the conflict with the USA upon receiving from them non-aggression guarantees.” Significantly, Castro also told Alekseev that “da Cunha” had promised that “Brazil would not break relations with Cuba and would continue to trade.” According to Castro, the Brazilian envoy had held out the prospect of “gradual disarmament upon receiving guarantees”—presumably of U.S. non-intervention—and recommended that Havana “come forward with a statement about Cuba’s non-interference in the internal affairs of Latin American countries.” The Soviet ambassador reported that Castro had concurred with this approach and had described it as “the most appropriate one.” The Cuban leader expressed his acceptance of Brazilian mediation and his readiness to undertake the proposed measures—but (as Hermes had reported to Gordon) only “under the condition that the USA accepts the 5 points of the Cuban statement including that of eliminating the Guantánamo base.”

U.S. officials were unimpressed, though not especially surprised, by the outcome of Albino’s meeting with Castro, and they were taken aback when the general returned to Brazil on Thursday, 1 November, hailing his mission as a “complete success.” The New York Times noted (in a brief inside story the next day) that the Brazilian government had not disclosed the “precise nature” of Albino’s mission. The story quoted the general, who had flown from Havana first to Brasília to brief Goulart and then to Rio de Janeiro to confer with Hermes, as having declared: “I am satisfied that Brazil has been able to contribute to the preservation of peace.” In comments sure to rile Washington, Albino claimed that Brazilian mediation had made the difference in “sav[ing] Cuba from American internal pressure designed to adopt radical measures against Castro’s regime.” Senior State Department officials were annoyed at Albino for trumpeting what they regarded as an imaginary “success” and for violating pledges of discretion in handling the approach to Castro, and they wondered whether, after receiving “much clearer and firmer” evidence of Castro’s rejection of UN inspections, the Brazilians would be willing to undertake “stronger” action against Havana, such as breaking diplomatic

relations. (The U.S. administration at this point was unaware that Albino apparently promised Castro that Brazil would not sever its ties.)

The tough line adopted by Cuba during the Albino mission boded poorly for the success of Brazil’s other high-profile diplomatic initiative during the Cuban missile crisis. The proposal for a nuclear weapons–free zone in Latin America submitted by Brazil to the UN General Assembly’s Political Committee on 29 October called on all Latin American countries to “dispose forthwith of any nuclear weapons or nuclear delivery vehicles which may now be in territory under their jurisdiction” and (building on a resolution regarding Africa passed the previous November) exhorted member-states “to refrain from using the territory, territorial waters, or air space of African and Latin-American countries for testing, storing, or transporting nuclear weapons or carrying devices.”

Roger Hilsman regarded both the UN denuclearization proposal and the Albino mission as efforts by Goulart to “recoup some lost prestige” after his initial missteps early in the crisis when he underestimated U.S. determination and the degree of Brazilian public support for Washington’s stand. “These moves for mediation,” the INR director said to Rusk, are consistent with the “independent” foreign policy line on Cuba, the cold war, relations with the United States, and other questions marked out by President Quadros (January–August 1961) and followed subsequently by Goulart. However, under Goulart’s leadership, dependent as he is upon leftist and ultra-nationalist advisers, these policies might well carry Brazil toward an aggressively neutralist role in internationalist affairs and in the hemisphere.

The British ambassador to Brazil, Sir Geoffrey Wallinger, also linked the two Brazilian diplomatic initiatives. He reported that the main objective of Albino’s mission was “to persuade Castro to accept not only United States assurances but verification of the dismantling of offensive weapons by United Nations observers.” In an allusion to Brazil’s diplomatic ambitions, Wallinger noted that a breakthrough with a “recalcitrant Castro” would remove the obstacle to a U.S.-Soviet settlement, help safeguard the Cuban leader’s own regime, and pave the way toward broader acceptance of Brazil’s scheme for the denuclearization of Latin America. A breakthrough, he added, would also give a boost to the concept of inspections in general, thereby enabling Moscow and Washington to overcome one of the main stumbling blocks to a nuclear

127. Deptel 1082 to Rio (Priority/Eyes Only), 1 November 1962, in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 42.
129. Hilsman to Rusk, “Subject: Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 5 November 1962.
test ban agreement. Wallinger stressed the role of internal Brazilian politics in the whole affair. He attributed the Albino mission to “the ambitious mind of San Tiago Dantas”—whom the British envoy regarded as a devious éminence grise exerting a negative influence on Goulart’s foreign policy—as well as the general desire of “Brazil’s leftist Government...to care for the susceptibilities of the Cuban Government.”

The analyses of both Hilsman and Wallinger, however, were hampered by the fact that neither of them was aware of the American role in prompting Goulart’s approach to Castro. On 5 November, Hilsman speculated:

Although the exact nature of Brazil’s initiative with Castro is not known, Goulart seemingly is seeking the role of mediator between Cuba and the United States, perhaps by suggesting Cuba’s re-entry into the OAS with a Castro guarantee to halt subversive activities in neighboring countries in return for a U.S. non-invasion pledge.

Similarly, Gordon had declined to mention the U.S. role when he discussed Albino’s trip with Wallinger, who in his report on 1 November about Albino’s recently concluded mission had observed: “My United States colleague is tolerant of this Brazilian initiative, but shares my fears...that the Brazilians may allow themselves to be talked into unacceptable propositions.”

Gordon’s concerns, as noted by Wallinger, deepened considerably over the next few days. On 4 November, Gordon confronted Prime Minister Hermes about the Brazilian government’s handling of the missile crisis in general and the Albino mission in particular. (The ambassador also used the occasion to deliver a letter from Kennedy expressing “regret” at the “apprehension and dissatisfaction” voiced by Goulart in his letter of 25 October and steadfastly defending Washington’s policies and conduct.) During a three-hour


131. Wallinger to FO, No. 226 (Priority/Confidential), 1 November 1962, in UK National Archives, FO 371/162342. See also Marchant to FO, No. 545 (Priority/Confidential), 6 November 1962, in UK National Archives, FO 371/162396.

132. Hilsman to Rusk, “Subject: Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 5 November 1962.

133. Wallinger reasonably but incorrectly inferred that Khrushchev’s 28 October agreement to withdraw Soviet missiles had “provided [the Brazilian Government] the opportunity they were seeking” to “take some more positive stand, without seeming to abandon their ‘independent’ foreign policy,” by dispatching the special mission to Havana. See Wallinger to Earl of Home, Despatch No. 105, 9 November 1962.

134. Embtel 933, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Eyes Only), 6 November 1962, in JFKL, NSF, CO, Cuba Cables, Box 42.

135. See JFK to Goulart, in Deptel 1092 to Rio (Priority/Eyes Only/Confidential), 2 November
“tour d’horizon,” half of which was devoted to Cuba, Gordon delivered an “extensive lecture, polite but firm,” to explain the reasons for Washington’s “suspicions and concerns” regarding “many aspects” of Brazil’s behavior during the crisis. What triggered Gordon’s “lecture” was Hermes’s report that the Brazilian ambassador in Washington had reported “White House concern over General Albino’s mission,” including a question by President Kennedy “about Albino’s political orientation.” When Hermes “expressed great surprise” over the U.S. reaction to a mediation effort that had been inspired by the United States itself, the ambassador enumerated the Brazilian actions that had disturbed Washington: the “equivocal publicity” surrounding Penna Marinho’s vote for the blockade at the OAS, his subsequent “unexplained consultation visit,” Education Minister Darcy Ribeiro’s “unfriendly public statement,” the “petulant tone” of Goulart’s letter to Kennedy, and some of Hermes’s own statements “implying GOB support for Castro regime as such, despite condemnation” at Punta del Este.

Gordon also condemned the Brazilian government’s handling of the sensitive mediation attempt with Castro and its unwarranted attempt to present Albino’s trip as a great success:

I said our idea had been [a] quiet confrontation of Castro by Ambassador Bastian Pinto, who was already acquainted with him, in [an] effort to explore Castro’s reaction to clear statement of dangers and disadvantages of Cuban ties with USSR and possibility of better alternatives for them. Instead, GOB had given maximum publicity to sending of special emissary, with newspaper stories about mediation of a type which could well add to Castro prestige and perhaps fortify his intransigence. I pointed out that GOB had shared with us strong support of idea of UN inspection, but had not yet publicly criticized Castro’s refusal to accept it. I also found boasting of Goulart and Albino about success of mission quite perplexing, only explainable as design to mislead Brazilian public opinion, since in fact mission seemed a failure.

According to Gordon, “Hermes listened patiently and rather uncomfortably, interrupting on occasion to rebut a specific point.” Regarding Cuba, Hermes claimed to be “only defending [Havana’s] right . . . to organize socialist
society, and that he had once publicly condemned denial of civil liberties and other undemocratic Cuban practices.” Gordon reported that Hermes “still harbored [the] illusion” that Washington had pursued sanctions at Punta del Este “against the socialist regime as such, and seemed surprised when I pointed out that [the] anti-Cuban case turned entirely on links with Soviet Union and subversive activities in OAS.”

Looking ahead, Gordon stressed three immediate priorities: verification of the removal of the Soviet “offensive weapons” from Cuba, effective assurances against the reestablishment of the bases “perhaps underground,” and, finally, the “continuing problem” of Cuban subversion in Latin America. In response, Hermes expressed confidence that all three issues could be resolved. He said that Khrushchev’s emissary, Anastas Mikoyan, who had just arrived in Havana, would induce Castro to accept “some form [of] international verification,” if necessary by promising extra Soviet economic aid to Cuba. Hermes claimed that inspection of Cuba could be accomplished through some multilateral scheme, either to monitor a non-invasion pledge or as part of the proposed Latin America denuclearization plan. On the question of Cuban subversive activities, Hermes noted that this point had been an “essential part” of Albino’s presentation to Castro, who was told that he “must accept [an end to such activities] as [the] only way of ‘preserving his revolution.’” Hermes described the Albino mission “as only [the] first step in [a] continuing diplomatic effort which he hoped we would support,” although he did not specify what the next steps might be.

Gordon was dismayed by the prime minister’s roseate presentation, and he stressed in response that “Castro might be entirely intransigent, either because of effective Soviet control or because of megalomaniac conviction that he had mission to spread Fidelismo over whole of Latin America.” According to Gordon’s report, Hermes replied that Castro’s “deep annoyance” with Moscow would inhibit Soviet control, but the “latter alternative”—regarding Castro’s own ambitions—seemed to be an “entirely new idea.” Hermes’s attempt to downplay Soviet influence in Cuba and his seeming obliviousness to Castro’s hemispheric revolutionary ambitions only confirmed Gordon’s disdain both for the Brazilian prime minister and for the strain of naive, even dangerous, left-wing neutralism the U.S. diplomat believed he represented:

My overall impression was that Hermes is ingenuous and not overly intelligent, ignorant [of] Cold War realities, and unhappily trying [to] reconcile recent events with romantic [myth] that Castro [is a] mere Socialist reformer who may have key to what Latin America needs. As [an] old-fashioned academic Socialist himself, [he] finds it hard to believe that U.S. objection to Castro is not simply Capitalist aversion to Socialism. If GOB is going to play any constructive role in
future Cuban developments, I suspect that ideas will have to be developed with much more able and sophisticated San Tiago Dantas—bearing in mind his possible undependability—rather than Hermes.

Gordon reported to Washington that although the outcome of the missile crisis would probably have a salutary impact on Brazilian foreign policy, his immediate aim was “preventing Brazil from inserting itself in Cuban affair in way which might be detrimental [to] our interests and which might prejudice standing of Brazil in U.S. Congressional and public opinion.”

Nevertheless, Brazil did continue “inserting itself” into the diplomacy of the Cuban affair, especially at the UN. Behind the scenes in early November, the Brazilians inspired an attempt by U Thant to promote a compromise inspection formula whereby ambassadors from neutral (or relatively neutral) countries stationed in Havana—such as Brazil, Mexico, Switzerland, Sweden, India, and perhaps others—would serve on a commission to verify the dismantling and departure of the Soviet missiles. Such a move, it was hoped, would circumvent the Cuban government’s adamant refusal to allow a formal UN inspection committee. Arinos first advanced the idea informally to Cuba’s new UN ambassador, Carlos Lechuga (who gave a cautiously positive response), and then suggested it to Thant on 6 November, letting him circulate the proposal as his own to enhance its prospects. U Thant immediately did so, modifying it to suggest that five Latin American ambassadors carry out the inspection. At an Excomm meeting on 7 November, Rusk called the idea “a help but it is not complete,” and sent instructions requesting that the plan be beefed up to include, among other provisions, technical support, full freedom of action for the envoys, and the requirement that the Cubans not learn that the United States had proposed these stricter terms.

137. Embtel 936, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential), 6 November 1962, in JFKL, NSF, CO, Box 13. Gordon softened his judgment of the Albino mission later in the month, after Goulart showed him Albino’s 14-page handwritten report of his conversation with Castro. Although the full text, which had been dispatched by special courier from Havana airport, revealed no surprises compared with the summary Hermes had provided to Gordon, Gordon pronounced it “well-written, showing Albino to be man of high intelligence.” Albino had put “more relative emphasis” on accepting UN observers and “less on detaching from Soviets” than Washington might have preferred and in general had taken a “perhaps more cordial” tone than Bastian Pinto would have. But he did present the “main points” of the U.S. secret démarche. “On balance,” the Albino-Castro “conversation as described in letter certainly not seriously objectionable from our viewpoint. Manner which mission was exploited for domestic purposes here is something else again, on which you already have our views.” Embtel 1000, Rio (Gordon) to State (Top Secret/Eyes Only), 23 November 1962, in NA, RG 59, DCF, Box 1226, 611.3722/10–2362. Unfortunately, Albino’s handwritten report has not been found.


the next day that Thant had transmitted the proposal “as his own” and that it had been sent to Havana for study, giving no clue as to the likely outcome. The Brazilian envoy did note, however, that his Cuban counterpart “appeared fully satisfied.”140 But on 12 November, Stevenson told the Excomm that the concept of naming five Latin envoys as inspectors “has encountered Cuban objections.” He mentioned that an effort was under way “to sell the idea of choosing any five Ambassadors,” but the results were not yet known.141 Two days later it became clear that the follow-on effort had been unsuccessful. On 14 November, in response to a message from U Thant on 12 November urging acceptance of inspections by a mixed delegation of Third World ambassadors, Castro rejected any unilateral inspection as an intolerable infringement of Cuba’s sovereignty.142 Khrushchev himself had had “no objections” to the use of neutral ambassadors as inspectors “because we had no doubt about their good will toward Cuba,” but, to Khrushchev’s annoyance, Castro vetoed the idea.143 The issue was soon superseded, in any case, by the U.S.-Soviet arrangement to have the departure of the missiles monitored by U.S. surveillance planes.

Brazil labored far more aggressively to push its other diplomatic endeavor at the UN, the Latin American denuclearization plan, which, Brazilian leaders claimed, could allow the Soviet missiles to be removed and an inspection regime to be set up that would prevent reintroduction of the weapons. Despite the Kennedy administration’s disappointment with Brazil’s handling of the mediation mission to Havana, U.S. officials gave a cautiously positive response to the denuclearization effort, especially after the draft resolution was modified to take account of U.S. concerns such as the transit of nuclear weapons through the Panama Canal. The Kennedy administration even decided to rely on Brazil to assess Cuba’s reaction to the proposal. In an “eyes only” directive to Stevenson and McCloy in New York on 8 November, Rusk stressed the importance of urging the Brazilians to contact the Cubans to see whether they would be receptive to a denuclearization scheme. Rusk said that this should be done even before all the details of the proposal were worked out, adding, in an echo of the U.S. role in the Albino gambit, that the “Brazilians should un-

140. BD/UN (Arinos), Telegram No. 135 (Secret), 8 November 1962, 5:30 p.m., in AMRE-B, ”ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Nov.–Dec. 1962.”
142. Lechuga, Cuba and the Missile Crisis, p. 114.
derstand [that it would be] highly undesirable for Cubans to get impression that Brazilian explorations are at U.S. initiative.” 144 Two days later, Rusk informed Kennedy that the State Department was encouraging Brazil to move forward with the proposal and to seek Cuban acceptance of the provisions for international inspections, which, Rusk argued, would provide a “face-saving way for Cuba (and the Soviet Union) to agree to the long-term safeguards which we are demanding against the reintroduction of offensive weapons.” 145 The Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies seemed amenable to the idea. Not surprisingly, the Poles expressed strong private support to the Brazilians for raising a concept similar to the Rapacki Plan (and for attempting mediation, though warning that Castro’s “rigidity” constituted the main obstacle). 146 As before, however, Havana derailed the plan. In a speech on 29 October the Cuban delegate at the UN declared that Cuba was “very much in favor” of the “very correct” idea of “denuclearized or atom-free” zones, but he insisted that the concept should cover the entire planet. 147 Despite this problem, Bastian Pinto sounded an optimistic note after a conversation with Cuban Foreign Minister Roa on 9 November. The Brazilian ambassador reported that although Roa had insisted on the Cuban government’s “right” to present Castro’s five points “as a basis for discussion,” he indicated that the Cuban authorities, being “conscious of the gravity of the situation,” were “inclined to make concessions.” Bastian Pinto said that Roa had even “clearly insinuated” a willingness to drop the Guantánamo demand. 148 On 15 November, as the Brazilian proposal formally went before the UN General Assembly, Kennedy endorsed it in a letter to Khrushchev: “[A] verificated Denuclearized Zone in Latin America,” if Cuba and the rest of the continent went along, might even “in the long run offer an acceptable means to a broader approach” to disarmament problems. Kennedy was referring here to Soviet concerns about U.S. nuclear bases in Turkey and elsewhere along its own periphery as well as to the ongoing negotiations aimed at a verifiable nuclear test ban. 149

144. Deptel 1723 to USUN, New York (Top Secret), 8 November 1962, 5:38 p.m., in NA, RG 59, DCF, 620.0012/11–862.
145. Rusk to JFK, “Brazilian Proposal for Latin American Denuclearized Zone” (Secret), 10 November 1962, in JFKL, President’s Office Files (POF), CF: Brazil, Box 112, folder “Brazil Security, 1962.”
146. BE/Warsaw (Valente), Telegram No. 250 (Secret), 5 November 1962, 4 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Nov.–Dec. 1962.”
147. On Cuban reaction to the Brazilian proposal, see Lechuga, Cuba and the Missile Crisis, pp. 120–121.
148. BE/H (Bastian Pinto), Telegram No. 377 (Confidential/Urgent), 9 November 1962, 7:45 p.m., in AMRE-B, “600.(24h)—SIT. POL.—CUBA—novembro a dezembro de 1962/6223.”
149. Kennedy to Khrushchev, 15 November 1962, in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 462; and FRUS,
What the U.S. president did not know, however, is that Cuban intransigence had already doomed the Brazilian plan. On 11 November, two days after Bastian Pinto had given an upbeat assessment of his talk with Roa, the Cuban official (after consulting with Castro) sent a ciphered telegram to Lechuga listing a series of amendments to a proposed denuclearization agreement, all of which were clearly unacceptable to the United States. The amendments not only included the extension of the scheme to Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal Zone but also required the elimination of all military bases in Latin America, a demand that “evidently” covered Guantánamo.150 Although Roa instructed Lechuga to use “gentle and explanatory [gentil y explicativo] arguments and language” when informing Brazil, the tone could not disguise the significance of the Cuban reservations. On 14 November, the day before Kennedy wrote to Khrushchev endorsing the Brazilian plan, Roa presented the fatal amendments to Bastian Pinto. “Cuba does not give up,” replied the chagrined Brazilian diplomat, who had previously been “fairly sure” that Havana would drop the Guantánamo demand.151 On 16 November, Lechuga formally presented Havana’s position. Despite “extending [Cuba’s] goodwill” to the denuclearization concept, he listed all the revisions demanded by Cuba, essentially rendering the proposal a dead letter.152 Bastian Pinto found it difficult to comprehend why Castro repeatedly, if politely, spurned Brazil’s appeals and suggestions. “I consider very strange that, in the present circumstance, the Cuban Government has not taken advantage of the opportunities Brazil offered and our evident sincerity to help it on the path to a solution acceptable for Cuba.”153

In light of Castro’s rigid position and his angry complaints about Moscow’s handling of the crisis, the Soviet government began to align itself, albeit
unenthusiastically, with the Cuban reservations. Because Mikoyan’s ongoing secret talks with Castro had been exacerbated in mid-November by Moscow’s new insistence (under U.S. pressure) on withdrawing its IL-28 bombers from Cuba, Soviet leaders did not want to provoke an additional rift over the denuclearization issue. Khrushchev, who had been receiving daily reports from Ambassador Alekseev in Havana, made no mention of the Brazilian idea when responding to Kennedy on 20 November. That same day, Roa sent a cable to Lechuga at the UN instructing him to coordinate with the Soviet delegation regarding the Brazilian proposal. The foreign minister once again stressed that Lechuga must “insist with Arinos on the inclusion of our points of view,” including the amendments that were unacceptable to Washington. “In truth,” Roa added, “we are not interested in adoption of the Brazilian proposal”—in part because “we have [Soviet] tactical nuclear weapons, which we should keep.” (Coincidentally, Mikoyan two days later informed Castro that the tactical nuclear weapons also had to be removed, but the loss of those weapons did not alter Havana’s opposition to the denuclearization plan.) In a desperate attempt to rescue the foundering proposal, Arinos made a twelfth-hour entreaty to Castro via Lechuga, stressing that if the resolution were unanimously adopted Cuba would later have an opportunity to pursue its reservations at a Latin American conference to negotiate a treaty. But Arinos’s pleas went nowhere, prompting the frustrated diplomat to exclaim: “What surprises me most of all is the incomprehension of the Cubans of the advantages that the resolution would bring them.”

Rusk, for his part, also did not want to give up. He saw the concept of a denuclearized Latin America (with inspections) as a means to ensure against a repetition of the missile crisis. When Mikoyan passed through Washington at the end of November on his way back to Moscow from Cuba, Rusk prodded him to reconsider the idea. The secretary of state reminded Mikoyan that “we

155. Ciphered telegram (cifrado) No. 748, from Roa to Cuban UN Mission, 20 November 1962, in Documentos de los Archivos Cubanos: Segunda Parte, conference on The October [Cuban Missile] Crisis: 40 Years Later, Havana, 11–12 October 2002. The reference to the tactical nuclear weapons is blacked out in the facsimile of the Cuban document. However, the Cubans provided a copy to the Soviet delegation, which immediately transmitted it to Moscow. A Russian translation of the document was among the items contributed by Sergo Mikoyan for scholarly use at the October 2002 missile crisis conference in Havana. My thanks to Svetlana Savranskaya (National Security Archive) for locating and translating the document.
157. BD/UN (Arinos), Telegram No. 187 (Confidential), 21 November 1962, 8:15 p.m., in AMRE-B, “600.24h.—SIT. POL.—novembro a dezembro de 1962/.”
were seriously interested in the proposal for an atom free Latin America” and even offered to provide assurances regarding Cuban concerns about U.S. deployment of nuclear weapons in the Canal Zone and Guantánamo. Rusk declined, however, to offer similar assurances about U.S. nuclear rights in Puerto Rico or on vessels transiting the Panama Canal. Mikoyan argued that the original Brazilian draft had been good before being modified to accommodate U.S. concerns, and he expressed doubts about Rusk’s contention that the United States and the Soviet Union were really “not so far apart” on the matter.159

On 4 December, after a final appeal to Castro, Bastian Pinto telephoned Arinos at the UN to report Cuba’s unchangeable decision to abstain on the Brazilian proposal because of “fears that acceptance [of the plan] . . . would be interpreted as a weakening of [Cuba’s] position.” This decision scuttled the proposal, and the Soviet Union and its East European allies quickly followed suit. U.S. officials similarly informed the Brazilians that they, too, would have to abstain given Havana’s refusal to go along.160 Reluctantly, Brazil formally withdrew the resolution in mid-December without a vote, although Washington blamed Havana, not Rio de Janeiro, for its demise.

**U.S.-Brazilian Ties after the Crisis**

By the time the denuclearization proposal was retracted, U.S-Brazilian ties had deteriorated sharply compared to the brief high point during the missile crisis.161 The situation in Brazil, Kennedy told a visitor, “worried him more than that in Cuba.”162 U.S. officials had been increasingly angered by what they considered Goulart’s unprincipled flip-flopping on key issues, his appeasement of leftist extremists, and his inability to make tough but necessary decisions that might irk vocal minority constituencies. The Kennedy administration began, more seriously than before, to consider supporting a military coup, especially after a series of alarming cables from Gordon sparked concern that Goulart was flirting with an economic, political, and even military

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160. BD/UN (Arinos), Telegram No. 207 (Secret), 5 December 1962, 5 p.m., in AMRE-B, “ANEXO Secreto—Cuba—Nov.–Dec. 1962”; and other telegrams from Arinos in the same folder.


swerve to the East, as reflected in Brazil’s receipt of Polish helicopters and the aid offered by Khrushchev.163

Space limitations preclude a detailed recounting of the mostly secret U.S.-Brazilian crisis that came on the heels of the Cuban crisis, but some intersections between the two are worth noting.

First, as Michael Weis notes, “the [Cuban missile] crisis reduced Kennedy’s obsession with the island and increased the importance of relations with Brazil. After the crisis, CIA officials considered Brazil to be the most urgent problem in Latin America.”164 (Kennedy’s nightmare was Khrushchev’s dream; the Soviet leader told a Cuban visitor in December that although Washington could not be trusted, Kennedy’s promise not to invade Cuba would remain valid for at least six years—the time he expected Kennedy to stay in office—and that during those years “the correlation of forces will become favorable to us. Perhaps Brazil and other countries will enter into revolution.”165)

Second, Goulart’s “very ambivalent” conduct during the crisis had caused an even further decline of his reputation among U.S. officials, who remained convinced that Brazil yearned to “help Cuba to reenter the inter-American community, and build up Castro as a true Latin American revolutionary.”166

Third, the precipitous loss of face suffered by the militant left in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America as a result of the missile crisis spurred some U.S. officials to urge a rapid showdown with Goulart in order to exploit Washington’s enhanced credibility. Gordon told Goulart at one point in late November that “we [the United States] had not yielded to Soviet blackmail and would certainly have no disposition to yield to Brazilian blackmail.”167 Gordon suggested to Rusk that prompt, tough action against Castro would “further demonstrate U.S. resolve and power” and might even stimulate

167. Embtel 1046, Rio (Gordon) to State (Secret/Priority), 28 November 1962 (2 pts.), in JFKL, POF, Box 112, folder “Brazil Security, 1962.” See also Embtel 1056, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential), 29 November 1962, in JFKL, NSF, CO, Brazil Cables, Box 13.
anti-Goulart forces to act on their own “without explicit and inherently some-
what risky action to force on their attention.”

Fourth, Kennedy relied on some of the same tactics and structures vis-à-vis Brazil that he used during the missile crisis to deal with the Soviet Union and Cuba. On 11 December, the Excomm, which was originally formed to handle the missile crisis, reviewed policy toward Brazil and decided “to seek to change the political and economic orientation” of Goulart’s government. Kennedy and his aides considered, but ultimately rejected, attempting to enlist “Brazilian elements hostile to Goulart with a view to bringing about his overthrow.” They eschewed this option not because of moral objections, but because of the lack of “either (a) effective military or civilian opposition leadership in Brazil in a position to act promptly; (b) an organized opposition movement with a present capacity and will to overthrow the Goulart government; (c) a near-future U.S. capability to stimulate such an operation successfully.”

Instead, Kennedy decided to proceed with Gordon’s recommendation to send an “especially authoritative presidential emissary” to “confront” Goulart and urge him to take needed steps to regain U.S. support and confidence, warning him that the United States would be gravely concerned if Brazil went further “on road down which Cuba went.” Kennedy chose his brother to carry out this mission. The president had relied on Robert Kennedy many times over the past two years when sensitive questions arose about Cuba, such as the intensification of Mongoose and the back-channel diplomacy with Dobrynin during the missile crisis. After hurriedly making arrangements, the younger Kennedy flew to Brasília and met Goulart at the Palacio de la Alvorada on 17 December. The three-hour conversation merely reinforced the U.S. administration’s growing belief in the futility of collaborating with Goulart. Robert Kennedy came away convinced that Goulart was a “Brazilian Jimmy Hoffa” who would hand Brazil over to Communism unless stopped—an impression that he undoubtedly conveyed to President

168. Embtel 977, Rio (Gordon) to State, 19 November 1962.
169. Regarding the 11 December 1962 Excomm meeting, see documents in FRUS, 1961–1963, Vol. XII, pp. 479–485; and in JFKL, NSF. CO. References to the overthrow option (“Alternative B”) quoted here were deleted from these versions but were released in response to an appeal by the author on 15 February 2001 (NLK-99–160A, Case Control No. 199901403).
170. Embtel 977, Rio (Gordon) to State, 19 November 1962.
Kennedy.172 “I didn’t like Goulart, nor did I trust him,” Robert Kennedy recalled.173

Despite some tentative improvements in U.S.-Brazilian relations in early 1963, the Kennedy brothers’ calculated “political confrontation” with Goulart had no lasting effect and was merely a precursor to still more clashes and turbulence that would culminate in Goulart’s ouster via a military coup in the spring of 1964. A December 1962 memorandum for the Excomm had proposed that, if developments warranted, the United States should be “ready to shift rapidly and effectively to . . . collaboration with friendly democratic elements, including the great majority of the military officer corps, to unseat President Goulart.”174 The extent of Washington’s involvement in the 1964 golpe remains disputed, and anti-Goulart forces might eventually have moved on their own regardless of any U.S. role.175 U.S. officials were heartened by Goulart’s overthrow, and, as Rusk told Gordon, they were not going to let themselves “be paralyzed by theoretical niceties” if forced to choose between a military takeover and a Communist-dominated government.176

Although Brazil’s various attempts to pursue an “independent” foreign policy were not the only reason for the growing antagonism between Washington and Rio de Janeiro, U.S. officials soon came to believe that Goulart was espousing a form of neutralism that bordered on appeasement of Communism and the Soviet bloc. When Brazil repeatedly tested the limits of U.S. tolerance—for example, by siding at least tentatively with the nonaligned movement (at the height of its prestige), by establishing economic and political ties with the Eastern bloc, and by playing a more prominent diplomatic role on high-profile international issues such as disarmament—the Kennedy administration became increasingly worried about a country that it considered a vital ally in its own sphere of influence.

174. See n. 171.
The Kennedy administration’s irritation at Brazil for its refusal to go along with measures to isolate and penalize Cuba (and its supporters within Brazil) exacerbated U.S.-Brazilian relations. Far from bridging the gap between Washington and Havana, the attempts by Goulart and his predecessors to mediate the U.S.-Cuban conflict were notable mainly for the adverse effect they had on ties between Washington and Rio de Janeiro. This was true in large measure because as far back as late 1959 U.S. officials had concluded that it would be impossible to live with Fidel Castro’s regime and were intent on getting rid of the Communist government in Cuba rather than reaching an accommodation. That was the case in 1960, when Eisenhower and his administration politely turned down Brazil’s repeated offers of mediation and “good offices” to help resolve the U.S.-Cuban dispute. It remained so during the first year of the Kennedy administration in 1961, when Brazil’s attempt to devise a “Finlandization” neutrality formula for Cuba, its good-offices gambit alongside Mexico and Ecuador, and then its brokering (along with Argentina) of the conversation between Che Guevara and Richard Goodwin, all led nowhere. The same position apparently still held in the spring of 1962, when Rusk, despite having cautiously given a green light to Dantas to find out whether Castro would be willing to split with Moscow in exchange for being welcomed back into the hemisphere’s good graces, was still inclined to seek Castro’s “disposal” afterward—an outcome that, if achieved, would have double-crossed both Castro and the Brazilian government.

Only under profound duress, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, did the Kennedy administration genuinely embrace Brazil’s readiness to serve as a channel to Castro. At that point, the administration seriously considered cutting a deal with the Cuban leader, albeit while using Rio de Janeiro as a deniable “cut-out.” The Albino mission to Havana at the height of the crisis constituted a minor mystery at the time. “The purpose of the general’s visit has never been made entirely clear,” noted the *New York Times* a week later, observing that the trip had “had the effect of neutralizing criticism from the far left of Brazil’s qualified vote in favor of the United States arms blockade.”177 The event was further obscured by the Cuban authorities’ refusal to permit correspondents based in Havana to make any reference to Albino’s presence.178 Even within the U.S. government, some senior officials were puzzled. On 5 November, Hilsman wrote to Rusk that “the exact nature of

Brazil’s initiative is not known,” and he speculated that Goulart’s desire to 
assume the role of mediator had inspired the trip.179

Today, more than four decades later, confusion about the initiative per-
sists. Over the years, Portuguese-language Brazilian works have alluded to 
the genesis of the Albino mission, but these sources have had little influence 
on the English-language historiography.180 A passing mention in the most au-
thoritative scholarly study of U.S.-Brazilian relations, by W. Michael Weis, 
accurately states that the Brazilian “mediation . . . accomplished nothing” and 
provoked “a torrent of criticism from supporters of the United States,” but 
Weis mistakenly claims that the visit “had not been requested.”181 Actually, as 
this article shows, the mediation had been requested and indeed had been 
carefully planned by Washington—and was then conveyed to the Brazilian 
government during the late-night meeting between Lincoln Gordon and Her-
mes Lima. Former Assistant Secretary Martin, who played an important part 
in these events, erroneously declared in a 1994 study that the proposal to draft 
a message and give it to the Brazilians for transmittal to Castro—a proposal 
that he characterized as “a bold idea but without much chance of succeed-
ing”—was “not tried” because “full Brazilian support seemed dubious.”182

The account here shows that the proposal certainly was tried—and indeed 
that Martin himself conveyed Rusk’s authorization for it during a telephone 
conversation with Gordon on the night of 27 October. Even though changes 
in the situation and Brazil’s handling of the mission did mean that the mes-
sage was not conveyed precisely as Washington had intended, the basic pro-
posal unquestionably was implemented.

The historiography of the Cuban missile crisis has been equally mislead-
ing in its references to Brazil. Contrary to the implications of assertions in 
1997 and 2001 by Ernest May and Philip Zelikow that the U.S. plan 
on 27 October for Brazilian mediation was “overtaken by the events” of the

179. Hilsman to Rusk, “Subject: Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 5 November 1962.
180. See, e.g., Hermes Lima, Travessia (memórias), p. 268; Moniz Bandeira, O governo João Goulart: As 
Rodrigo Amado, “Foreign Policy of João Goulart,” in Se senta anos de política externa brasileira 
Internacionais da USP, 1996), p. 292; Bandeira, De marti a Fidel, pp. 462, 476; and Moniz Bandeira, 
Relações Brasil–EUA no contexto da globalização: II—Rivalidade emergente, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Editora 
Senac, 1999), p. 73; De marti a Fidel, the most detailed account, correctly notes the U.S. role behind 
the Albino Silva mission but erroneously dates the midnight conversation between Gordon and Her-
mes Lima to the night of Friday, 26 October, whereas contemporaneous documentation indicates that 
it instead occurred—after an unexplained delay—the following night.
following day (i.e., Khrushchev’s announcement that he would remove the missiles), the initiative did in fact produce the Albino mission and a conversation that might have led to the opening of a Brazilian-mediated dialogue between the Kennedy administration and Castro’s government.

As it turned out, Castro’s insistence on an end to the U.S. military presence in Guantánamo prevented any movement toward a deal and guaranteed a negative U.S. response. Moreover, at this critical juncture in U.S.-Brazilian relations, Goulart’s handling of the matter, especially his decision to entrust the mission to Albino rather than Bastian Pinto (the preferred U.S. intermediary), further darkened the Kennedy administration’s impression of the Brazilian president and his inconsistent behavior during the crisis as a whole.

Would Kennedy’s message have had any chance of success if it had been delivered when and how Washington had desired? The answer, undoubtedly, is no. At a scholarly conference in Havana in October 2002, I gave Fidel Castro the text of the message approved by Kennedy forty years earlier for transmittal to the Cuban leader on the evening of 27 October. Castro had not previously known about the intended communication, but he recalled, “That day we were fighting,” firing at low-level U.S. reconnaissance flights and preparing to resist an American invasion. He said that if he had received such a “threatening message” as that given to the Brazilians to convey to him, he would have rejected it and “treated it with disdain.” (As Kennedy suspected, the “pretty clumsy” and “rather insulting” section claiming that Moscow threatened Castro with betrayal would hardly have impelled him to jump from the arms of an un Dependable ally to those of an outright enemy.)

In the event, the Albino mission that reached Havana on 29 October, after Khrushchev had decided to remove the missiles, made no lasting impression on Castro—who, after all, had no idea that the Brazilian’s sudden visit had actually been instigated by Washington and that the visit there might conceivably have led to the US-Cuban dialogue that Castro had long desired. Nonetheless, the odds seem remote that even if Castro had known of


184. Fidel Castro, interview, Havana, March 2001; Fidel Castro, interview, Havana, October 2002; and Fidel Castro, comments at “The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Political Perspective after 40 Years,” Havana, 11–12 October 2002. In January 1968, Castro secretly declared that Khrushchev in October 1962 “should have forced the yanquis to dialogue directly with us and they would have put them in the most super uncomfortable situation that they would have ever found themselves in, because they
Washington’s interest he would have moved quickly to drop one of his sacred five points, the one regarding Guantánamo, as a precondition for any direct dialogue. Apparently, the grounds simply did not exist on either side for fruitful or even mutually respectful negotiations.

Brazil, for its part, felt somewhat burned by the entire episode. Its attempt to mediate and its denuclearization proposal both came to naught, in large measure because of Castro’s hard line. In that respect, the crisis and its aftermath may indeed have served to “educate GOB [Government of Brazil] through process of frustration,” as Gordon had anticipated. On the other hand, Brazilian diplomats claimed that the crisis vindicated their long-standing and ultimately futile efforts to mediate the U.S.-Cuban confrontation before it reached a boiling point. “It is not too much to repeat that if we had been listened to when we proposed to neutralize Cuba, this entire episode could have been avoided,” da Cunha lamented from Moscow.185

The affair, in addition to raising further doubts in Washington about Brazil’s diplomatic finesse and competence as a mediator, seems also to have convinced U.S. officials that any contacts with Castro in the future should be undertaken directly (or at least using American intermediaries), rather than going through third countries. This would explain Kennedy’s preference in 1963—even as his administration was still pursuing covert operations, assassination plots, and serious contingency planning for military action against Castro—to rely mostly on U.S. channels to communicate secretly and unofficially with Havana and to begin, gingerly, to explore possibilities for improving U.S.-Cuban relations.186 Subsequent U.S. administrations engaged in similar direct contacts, even in the absence of normal diplomatic relations. The contacts became even more frequent after the establishment of “interests sections” in the Cuban and American capitals in the late 1970s.187 Even during periods of acute tension between Washington and Havana, a sporadic direct dialogue has been held behind the scenes. In late 1981, for example, after

would have had to talk at length with us and that would have eased the tension.” James G. Blight and Philip Brenner, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba’s Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 48.

185. Embtel 890, Rio (Gordon) to State (Confidential/Eyes Only), 26 October 1962; and BE/Moscow (da Cunha), Telegram No. 237 (Confidential), 9 November 1962, 7:30 p.m., in AMRE-B, “MOSCOW—CTS—TELEGRAMAS—RECEBIDOS E EXPEDIDOS—1962/63/64.”


the Reagan administration threatened to “go to the source” to stop alleged Cuban aid to insurgents in Central America, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig met secretly in Mexico City with Cuban Vice-Premier Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and promised to open a secret dialogue with Vernon Walters as the U.S. representative.188

Contrary to what the Brazilians later argued, there is little reason to believe that a genuine opportunity existed in 1962 for a U.S.-Cuban settlement that would have included Castro’s split with Moscow and his eschewal of attempts to promote revolution in the hemisphere. The acrimony between Washington and Havana at the time was too entrenched. Despite the very real tension that erupted between Havana and Moscow in 1962, Castro represented the more militant and uncompromising party in that dispute. The Cuban leader’s bellicosity hardly made it likely that he would have suddenly veered toward the “bourgeois” Latin American governments, not to mention the United States. A firm conclusion requires additional research in U.S., Brazilian, and (above all) still-closed Cuban archives. This article, however, seeks to provide one piece of a murky history of secret U.S.-Cuban diplomacy during the Castro era. The article also is intended to highlight the link between the missile crisis and the quieter crisis in US-Brazilian ties, the most significant and perilous relationship that Washington conducted in Latin America during this stretch of the Cold War.

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