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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: September 15, 1961

SUBJECT: Conversation between President Kennedy and Senator (former President)
Kubitschek of Brazil

PARTICIPANTS: The President of the United States, John F. Kennedy
Senator Juscelino Kubitschek of Brazil

Mr. Richard N. Goodwin, Assistant Special Counsel to the President
Assistant Secretary Robert F. Woodward
Mr. José DeSeabra, Interpreter

~~COPIES TO:~~

Mr. Oswaldo Maia Penido, Former Chief of Cabinet for
President Kubitschek
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After a brief preliminary exchange of pleasant greetings between President Kennedy and Senator Kubitschek during which Kubitschek expressed his great satisfaction in meeting one of the youngest chief executives in the world, President Kennedy said that since taking office in January he had been actively concerned with the strengthening of closer ties between the nations of the Hemisphere, as evidenced by the Alliance for Progress program, which was based on Operation Pan America. The Chief Executive expressed his gratification at having this opportunity to exchange views with Senator Kubitschek. Senator Kubitschek then said that all during his term of office he had been concerned with Hemispheric relations. In May of 1958, after the incident-marked journey of Mr. Nixon through Latin America, he had written to President Eisenhower urging a careful reappraisal of the situation in the Hemisphere and suggesting that the U.S. policies towards Latin American countries be reformulated. As an aftermath of this letter, the basic principles of Operation Pan America were announced by President Kubitschek. He went on to say that although both President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles showed interest and concern in his ideas, they never translated it into constructive action as President Kennedy was determined to do. Senator Kubitschek's great regret was that his and President Kennedy's terms of office could not coincide so that an active program could be carried out on foundations that were well understood by both parties. President Kennedy expressed his appreciation for Senator Kubitschek's words, then asking what were Senator Kubitschek's views on what the U.S. could do to carry out the obligations assumed under the Montevideo agreements, and to continue to implement the basic principles of U.S.-Latin American policy, namely, how to strengthen the economic, social and political stability of the Latin American nations. Senator Kubitschek replied

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replied that as far as Brazil was concerned, President Kennedy's administration had offered and promised substantially more than had been hoped for at the time that OPA had been formally discussed. Brazil still had many major economic development problems to solve, but with the promises received at Punta del Este, plus Brazil's own unique capacity (among Latin American nations) to take positive action in planning development programs, he was confident that Brazil was in a position not only to benefit fully from U.S. assistance, but even to help other countries to benefit to the maximum extent from the aid they would receive.

President Kennedy then analyzed the degree of potential development and receptiveness to development programs shown by Latin American countries, ranging from Brazil which has the technical resources for doing planning work and developing much of its potential through its own efforts, through countries that lack technical personnel and also look to the U.S. for help in surmounting difficulties that are enlarged by unstable political situations, down to countries like Bolivia that have limited resources and hardly any economic potential and therefore have to rely on subsidies rather than development programs as such.

Senator Kubitschek expressed his satisfaction at the clear understanding of Latin American problems shown by President Kennedy. He agreed that certain countries were still depending on a form of handouts. He pointed out how he had emphasized to Secretary Dulles the extent to which the spread of Communism might be aided by continued underdevelopment. Then he mentioned that Brazil in recent years had not only achieved a substantial degree of economic development but had also gained a true and widespread awareness of democratic processes. It was this confidence in the survival of democratic institutions that enabled the country to surmount the recent crisis, with the result that order was maintained and the Constitution continued to be respected. There remain, of course, many problems to be solved with regard to over-all economic development, particularly that of the Northeast, as Dr. Celso Furtado had the opportunity to inform President Kennedy. That area, which is in marked contrast to the other major areas of Brazil, such as the highly developed South Central area and the almost unsettled and sparsely populated Western zone, has a population of over 25 million which for the most part lives under serious hardship conditions. The help promised by the U.S. Government pursuant to the talks between Dr. Furtado and President Kennedy should be a decisive contribution to the eradication of factors that favor the spread of Communism in that vital area of Brazil. Senator Kubitschek then went on to say that he realized that the left-leaning policies of former President Quadros had given rise to certain fears in the U.S. of deterioration in U.S.-Brazil relations. In connection with possible deterioration in those relations now that Dr. Goulart is President, he stated that he knew Goulart extremely well--particularly since Dr. Goulart had been his Vice President--and could say that Dr. Goulart was a careful man and not a Communist. It was his conviction that Brazil would remain a truly democratic nation.

President Kennedy indicated that there had been concern about events in Brazil, on account of the vital importance of that country in Hemisphere affairs, and of the serious repercussions that happenings in Brazil could have on
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Latin American solidarity. The Chief Executive added that he did not as yet know Dr. Goulart and that it was his hope that close relations could continue to be maintained between the two countries. Although being fully aware of the fact that Brazil intended to pursue a fully independent and sovereign foreign policy, he nevertheless hoped that the two countries would be able to coordinate their approach to major problems.

Senator Kubitschek said that he felt sure that Brazil would favor such coordination. In his view, the borders of countries were no longer mere lines on a map, but rather frontiers where common principles and ideals were to be defended. He felt confident that Brazil and the U.S. would continue to walk shoulder-to-shoulder on the road to ever greater Hemispheric solidarity and unity. In connection with the U.S. concern over the Berlin situation, as related to the determination of the U.S. to defend democratic ideals, he would like to hear President Kennedy's views on the Berlin situation, also whether the U.S. Chief Executive thought that a major conflict might break out over Berlin in the near future.

President Kennedy then presented the Berlin situation and the U.S. position regarding the threats posed by the Soviet attitude with regard to the Western rights of access to West Berlin, the freedom and independence of West Berlin, Western Germany, the Atlantic Alliance, and even the rest of Western Europe. The U.S. would remain firm in its position of defending the rights of access to West Berlin, and while it was hoped that a peaceful solution could be reached, there remained the possibility of serious difficulties before the end of the year if the Soviets were not to yield on their demands.

Senator Kubitschek agreed that West Berlin was a true test case of the survival of the Western ideals. By the same token, if the U.S. were to yield its position on West Berlin, he felt that the Soviets would overrun Western Germany and impose their domination over Western Europe. That fear had also been expressed to him by a representative of Chancellor Adenauer. He understood fully the many responsibilities and weighty problems that rested on the shoulders of President Kennedy and agreed on the need for firmness.

President Kennedy pointed out that even the neutralization of Western Germany could have a definite weakening effect on the rest of Europe. Then the Chief Executive asked Senator Kubitschek for his comments on the Cuban problem and, specifically, what Senator Kubitschek thought the U.S. should do. Senator Kubitschek said that Cuba was a most serious problem for the entire Hemisphere, and it had become another Berlin for the more vocal and articulate left-wing elements in Latin America. One disturbing fact was that many people thought of self-determination only in terms of Cuba, never of Berlin. As for the best line of action to be taken by the U.S., it should be kept in mind that any act or even attitude on the part of the U.S. that could be construed as aggression would immediately bring about a strong anti-U.S. reaction from Latin American left-wing groups. At the same time, it is an obvious fact that Cuba can readily become a dangerous focus of political agitation in the Hemisphere. Senator Kubitschek mentioned next that he was in Europe at the time of the attempted

of the attempted invasion of Cuba and was keeping in close touch with events. He noticed that many Europeans and Latin Americans held the secret hope that Castro would be toppled. Instead his position and that of his supporters were much strengthened by the failure of the invasion. In an effort to forestall expansion of Castro-type movements, is it better to concentrate solely on assistance to underdeveloped countries or is it desirable in addition to contain or somehow blockade Cuba so that its revolutionary ideology cannot be exported to the rest of the Hemisphere?

President Kennedy commented that he realized that direct action by the U.S. or the OAS might easily be regarded as a positive threat to the independence, sovereignty and right to self-determination of nations in the Hemisphere. As for possible lines of action, one would be to stress the present general policy of ignoring Cuba, thus depriving Castro of the publicity on which he flourishes; another, to undertake appropriate political and economic action that would circumvent the danger posed by the Castro regime to the entire Hemisphere.

Senator Kubitschek agreed that any direct military action against Cuba would rouse vast areas of public opinion against the U.S. He himself would favor some form of indirect action. With reference to public opinion in Brazil, Senator Kubitschek pointed out that the Brazilian press was infiltrated by Communist sympathizers, and even in the more conservative dailies there were writers who consistently presented the Cuban regime in a favorable light. He felt that some understanding was needed among nations in the Hemisphere with a view to taking some action with regard to Cuba that would not be construed as an aggression that in turn would build up Castro as a martyr or hero. A small committee could be set up to sound out the Latin American governments on what to do about Castro. He went on to add that there was no serious Communist threat in Brazil. Out of a population of 70 million, there were 20 million voters, and no more than 500,000 Communists or Communist sympathizers, which are at worst an active minority. In his view, the bulk of the population is anti-Communist and essentially friendly to the U.S. Therefore, a well-thought-out plan of indirect action would probably receive a good measure of popular support, even though Dr. Goulart has taken a stand favoring Cuba. Senator Kubitschek mentioned in passing his talks with Prado of Peru and Frondizi of Argentina on the need for discreet action to isolate Cuba.

President Kennedy indicated that Colombia was also concerned about the Cuban situation. All in all, it was a difficult choice to make regarding the course to be followed because even indirect action might precipitate a reaction that would rouse Castro to hurl more challenges at the U.S. The crux of the problem is to limit Castro's influence while avoiding direct controversy. It will be necessary therefore to weigh in the balance the advantages to be gained by direct action, as contrasted to the disadvantages that would ensue if Castro were put in a position where he would be the voice of revolution and independence, all of it aimed against the United States.

Senator Kubitschek

Senator Kubitschek commented that President Kennedy had stated the issues in very clear terms. He felt that even the most indirect and discreet action called for the greatest care. He then went on to review the recent events in Brazil, asserting that Quadros was a man of great nervous instability--as shown by his sudden resignation--who had been moving ever closer to Cuba. Under Quadros' administration Cuba gained prominence in headlines. There was a growing reluctance to accept his pro-Communist and pro-Cuban policies on the part of the military, the whole situation coming to a head with the much-publicized decoration of Che Guevara. The present administration is fully aware of the military's attitude and is expected to move warily, even taking a few steps backward from the extreme positions reached by Quadros. He added that in Brazil the situation had definitely taken a turn for the better. In conclusion, he said that he had been most happy to have had this opportunity to meet President Kennedy, whom he knew through his books and his brilliant career, and for whom he had the greatest admiration. He voiced the conviction that President Kennedy, with his youth, vigor and intelligence, would provide sustained leadership in the defense of the ideals of the Western World.

In reply to a query from President Kennedy about his trip, Senator Kubitschek said that he was going on to Japan, India, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, and possibly Italy. He emphasized the contributions of Japan to the industrialization of Brazil (steel, shipbuilding) and mentioned that he was visiting the aforementioned countries to see how they were solving the crucial problems of economic development. He added that Brazil still had a long way to go, but with the tremendous progress achieved in the last five years the prospects for the future were very bright. He ended by saying that he was always very glad to come to the U.S. where there was so much to learn about development and true democracy.

So much for the formal meeting in the President's office.

Outside on the office porch, Senator Kubitschek carried on a brief private conversation with President Kennedy, delving into the following points:

- on his own political future, it was too early to say exactly what his role would be in the present administration. He felt, however, that he would be running and hoped to be elected in 1965. Confident that President Kennedy would still be in the White House, he commented that the two could still do great things together.

- on Quadros: Senator Kubitschek was disappointed that Quadros did not turn out well as the other "young" President. He stated that Quadros had a streak of madness (there was insanity in the family, according to Senator Kubitschek) and unbalance, that in his moving to the left he carried even staid conservative Foreign Minister Arinos, that he was planning a coup to seize more power, hoping to be recalled by an enthusiastic population which would not accept his resignation.

- to President Kennedy's query about Dr. Goulart and how best to deal with him,

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with him, Senator Kubitschek replied that Dr. Goulart is basically different from Quadros, that with his background as a wealthy land-owner, he would lean towards more conservative policies.

- he also voiced the hope that President Kennedy would soon visit Brazil, where he would receive an enthusiastic welcome.

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