

December 26, 1961
Brazilian Foreign Policy toward the Cuban Issue - Secret Foreign Ministry Conclave - Meeting of the Planning Commission on Subjects Related to the VIII Consultative Meeting of the OAS

Citation:

“Brazilian Foreign Policy toward the Cuban Issue - Secret Foreign Ministry Conclave - Meeting of the Planning Commission on Subjects Related to the VIII Consultative Meeting of the OAS,” December 26, 1961, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, San Tiago Dantas Papers. 47(34) pacote 5 1961/1962, Obtained by James Hershberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115262>

Summary:

A meeting of Brazilian diplomats to discuss Brazil's foreign relations with Cuba and its bilateral relations with the United States.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from the Leon Levy Foundation.

Original Language:

Portuguese

Contents:

- English Translation

State Minister [San Tiago Dantas] – The reason for asking you to meet here was to discuss the matter brought forward at the VIII consultative meeting. I get the impression that we will have to get prepared to stipulate very clearly what Brazil's position is and examine all implications brought forward by it, not only with regard to the inter-American system but also the development of our bilateral relations with the United States.

So far there is no indication that the United States is committed to the bilateral relations maintained with our country, especially regarding financial help, to any kind of political attitude adopted by us concerning the large hemispheric problems, notably the Cuban problem. Nevertheless we cannot discard such an hypothesis in just a simple manner. However, we should be able to admit it and make use of such an element for study purposes, inasmuch as it is undeniable that the visit of President [John F.] Kennedy to two of the major countries in South America is an event that cannot be left unnoted.^[1] Moreover, we need to take into consideration that, at present, one of them has severed relations with Cuba, putting itself into a position of an anti-Cuban policy center, while the other has assumed the position of intermediary of the State Department at the OAS.

To this date the enunciation of our government policy towards Cuba has been very explicit and simple: unconditional respect to the principle of non-intervention; unconditional respect to the principle of nations' self-determination, considering that only people are the legitimate instrument for the choice of a regime, especially if such a regime is a democratic one. If the goal to achieve is the re-democratization of Cuba, whatever could be considered an imposition from outward would certainly represent a real contradiction to the democratic principles themselves, aside from being the violation of the self-determination principles.

It can be said that such is the line inherited from the Jânio [da Silva] Quadros administration [January – September 1961]. However, I have been insisting that there is a slight difference between what we have been trying to do and what characterizes Jânio Quadro's line towards Cuba. Along that line there seemed to be a slight trace of ideological sympathy and a systematic denial and sometimes a kind of evasive position to hold an opinion of the democratic character of Fidel Castro's government. This point was considered a matter of fact. Even Minister Afonso Arinos in one of his visits to the parliament, categorically declared that he had not seen any evidence that Fidel Castro's regime was a communist one, leaving the impression that the fact of such proofs existing or not could be of great importance. Moreover, attitudes such as awarding Commander [Che] Guevara with a decoration [in August 1961] showed that his sympathy had nothing to do with self-determination, rendering to such an official attitude a rather more controversial characterization than what we have been trying to notice.

Ours was an opposite idea. We started with the sincere recognition that the Cuban regime was not a democratic one. No matter whether it was either a communist or a socialist regime. This, because it is very difficult to define whether a regime is in fact a communist or a socialist one. What really mattered was to classify it as a non-democratic regime according to the Santiago's declaration pattern. Thus, the problem of ideological sympathy was eliminated. The Brazilian government is not in ideological sympathy with Fidel Castro's regime. Even though there might be political groups within the government, the latter has only sympathy with what is part of the Constitution or its treaties.

The non-intervention principle and the respect of self-determination have gained new force because they acquired more absolute character once the question of knowing whether the regime was a socialist or democratic one ceased to exert any influence on them.

From this point on we begin to look for a solution due to the increasing probability that the countries will be convoked for a consultative meeting. We were afraid of such a gathering as it was set from the start by calling upon the Rio de Janeiro Treaty and only for two purposes: either to find out a potential offense by the Cuban regime and, consequently, conform to violation of the Article 6; or else, characterizing the regime as a communist one. The latter being the case, as per Resolution 93 of Caracas, it is marked as an amplification or addendum to the Treaty of Rio de Janeiro,

namely, a presumed aggression. The simple fact of being communist and being affiliated to the international communism presumes the regime's aggression and brings forth the application of sanctions.

Based on our fears we started to develop a series of possible reasoning which con-substantiated, I believe, in the Meeting at Casa das Pedras.

At Casa das Pedras we worked out an idea based on a suggestion of Ambassador Leitão da Cunha which started gaining many improvements. I will recapitulate the idea notwithstanding the fact that is within the spirit of many of us. First we tried to postpone the consultative meeting the utmost. In consequence of said adjournment we tried a diplomatic move towards the United States to obtain from their government a compromise of a pledge for the non-use of violence against Cuba. At that time there were signs of a planned invasion of Cuba launched by Nicaragua or Guatemala, or both countries altogether. There was a great number of trained Cuban volunteers in the United States army; works or preparation at ports and airports in Guatemala that could be related to the new invasion attempt. There was also an extremely confidential information [report] that a prestigious governor had attended a conference with President Kennedy insisting on the idea of an invasion.

We were under the impression that Cuba feared such invasion twice as much: as one fears an invasion and because it knew that its possibilities of counting on a support of the Soviet Union were becoming smaller every day. On one hand, because from the USSR's economic point of view the purchase of more than a million tons of sugar for a country that has an excess of such a product was too expensive; on the other hand, because the Soviet Union never left any doubts in the air that it could not come to Cuba's defense. All it could offer would be a retaliation in a country close its boundaries or by adopting other more symbolic policies.

We were under the impression that should we manage to obtain from the United States a non-violence pledge, we would be able to count on Cuba itself to obtain from Fidel Castro's government a progressing observance of Santiago's Declaration. Said Declaration plays a very important role because it is the sole document signed by Fidel Castro's government in which the recognition of democratic principles is clearly indicated. We could ask Fidel Castro's government, strengthened by the non-violence pledge, to accept a gradual evolution for its observing the Santiago Declaration.

If such binomial non-violence vs. Santiago's Declaration could eventually take root, we would try to further develop the scheme and move in the direction of some kind of neutralization of Cuba, maintaining their basic social achievements, the establishment of a democratic state, and the break of their ties with the Soviet Union. This was the idea resulting from the meeting at Casa das Pedras and which was the subject of two good investigations. The first one with [US] Ambassador Lincoln Gordon, who praised such an idea. There was no written reaction of the State Department, but the ambassador conveyed a rather complete memorandum about the matter insisting, as he still insists, on the convenience of a personal understanding between the [US] Secretary [of State Dean] Rusk and myself. The second one was with Cuba's ambassador who also highly praised the idea and informed the Havana government accordingly.

This third stage, however, ended with Fidel Castro's speech with the well known statement of ideological affiliation which turned any kind of understanding based on Santiago's Declaration as something he could ever return to. So our scheme can be considered useless. The importance of that speech was not to reveal anything but to preclude a scheme of diplomatic action which was to make a return to free elections possible. It occurred sometime before the meeting of 4 December. Although having a small draft articulated with Argentina and Chile to postpone the meeting to allow some time for the understandings about violence, we took the decision not to present any draft at all and exerted upon abstention.

Here I have to open some brackets to cover the question of the remaining South-American

countries. During a trip to Buenos Aires our impression was that the position of Argentina, coincident with ours, has become much stronger. This because President [Arturo] Frondizi [Ercoli] fully agrees with it although if he encounters difficulties in sustaining same it is due the opinion among the military forces which is much more divided among right and left than ourselves. The fact of having had that agreement with us became a cause of strength in his hands. Thereafter, although we keep being reticent with regard to the duration of the Argentine position, we lack concrete facts pointing in the direction of weakness. With regard to Chile, Ambassador Vale was present shortly after the Buenos Aires meeting in Chile and had a productive conversation with Chancellor Martinez Soto Mayor. He shared the same tendency and Chilean attitudes have been firmly in line with ours. Mexico has adopted an independent line. We have only had the opportunity to establish coincidence. Uruguay's vote in favor of the consultative meeting was explained as voting against instructions received from the Chancellery. Bolivia shows the same position with a good left public opinion to support it. Ecuador is the one I consider, at this moment, the more dubious because the government is extremely unstable, characterized by a line of opportunism trying to take the support of Velasco Ibarra's government position. Also, according to some information the present Ecuadorian chancellor would have taken many initiatives with the ex-president of the Republic in favor of a severance with Cuba. This entire group voted for abstention, with the exception of Mexico that voted against and, in other words, left no doubt about its position contrary to the consultative meeting.

In the United States the reaction to this attitude is not sympathetic. Ambassador Gordon is an ambassador of exceptional value, an intellectual, a man concerned in making a good-will diplomacy which has positive and negative aspects. One of the negative ones is that he hides from us a little the hostile reactions in the American environment with respect to our attitudes. Very kindly he insinuated that our consultations reiterated with Argentina, Chile, and other American countries had been considered by the State Department as an effort of our chancellery to sabotage the consultative meeting. In fact, up to now the North American reaction to our attitude consisted of two notes, both giving strong support to the Colombian proposal and both duly retorted by us with other notes in which we clearly demonstrated that the Colombian proposal is unacceptable.

As far as the present is concerned: the meeting is set for 22 January in Montevideo and our long elaborated plan at Casa das Pedras is out of use. What we now have to do is to set a line of conduct and the impression is that we have first to set it under the form of an internal philosophy for the motivation of our own conduct. Secondly, under the form of tactical measures to be adopted at the consultative meeting. It is about the aforementioned that I would like the Planning Commission integrated by the Working Group organized for the consultative meeting to meditate, by means of intensive meetings so that we could altogether reach a very clear definition. If we succeed such a definition would be taken to the Cabinet at one of its meetings, in a written form to be submitted to the President of the Republic, to the prime minister and finally submitted for the approval of the Cabinet. The next step would be running the risks of its execution.

The following is what I have been thinking about the subject. I think that the Meeting of Consultation comprises many dangers. The first due to the fact that it was convoked based on the Rio de Janeiro Treaty which means, minimally, to deliberate on sanctions. We already go to it with 13 American countries having their relations with Cuba broken off and a great probability that Ecuador will be the 14th. We already have a two-thirds majority necessary to make decisions mandatory. It is evident that countries like Brazil, Argentina, Chile as well as Mexico, cannot go to the meeting just to be presented with an already taken decision and to be bound to a legal norm without having had any possibility to re-discuss it. The second risk has to do with a preliminary which already involves the value of the subject. This is the difference we have to make between obligation and aspiration within the American system. Every system has developed in the sense that there are defined obligations in treaties and aspiration in defined declarations. It has been admitted as a development of the regional international law that normally aspirations are the prior forms or else, a period of germination of future obligations and that the system develops while changing aspirations into obligations. The principles of non-intervention and of self-determination are the field of obligations and are not only of regional obligation as they belong to the world's

public international law. Commitment to the democratic representative government belongs to the aspiration field instead.

I do not believe that Resolution 93 might have changed that. It is a resolution of difficult legal interpretation. Santiago's Declaration that came thereafter reaffirmed that the principles it enunciated were mere aspirations and qualified itself as an instrument of public opinion for educational action over the nations of the hemisphere.

What happens when a Latin American country breaks a commitment to the organization? If the break causes aggression or danger of aggression it is within the scope of the Rio Treaty for a sanction to be found. If not there, in any other text.

And what happens if a country strays from the common aspiration defined in Article 5 of the treaty or Santiago's Declaration? This is the Cuban case. We have to reason about it as an example because we are not free from seeing other American countries becoming socialists in the next years. Conditions do not seem calm enough to prevent us from witnessing similar movements in other countries. We are taking Cuba as an experimental case. The decision taken will be for all.

The first hypothesis would be that when a Latin country would become or declare itself communist, with risk to the hemispheric democratic unity, the remedy would be to defeat the government by force. If this were true there would be no difference between aspirations and obligations. To this legal argument political arguments should be added as well: the loss of moral authority of the inter-American system, the automatic conversion of the independent regional system into a satellite system, the low capacity to think of seriously developing the inter-American system. Moreover, the severance of relations is not justified, at a time when Brazil re-establishes relations with socialist countries as other countries do maintain relations.

At the moment the idea that seems worthy of a study would be:

The OAS is a regional organization. Not necessarily all countries of this hemisphere are its members due, in the first place, for reasons of geographical location. There are also other conditions for a membership. Canada, FIO [not further identified—ed.] are not members, for example. Other countries could also share the same status. It is an organization based on obligations and aspirations. The obligations are the ones that no country can fail to comply with. The charter, in its Article 5 indicates the membership purposes, and thanks to it conditions of cooperation between OAS countries that are difficult to accept by countries that have different social and economical goals have been accepted. It is understandable that between Brazil and the Soviet Union might exist a change of commercial relations, but said regime is communist: what is given is what is received. On the other hand, within the inter-American system it has been admitted that the most developed states should give more than what they receive in the benefit of the strengthening of social and economic characteristics that belong to the system's aim. A country that gives up such an aim declaring itself as communist and adopting an anti-democratic government and economic pattern cannot possibly have its government defeated by force. It cannot as well be condemned to diplomatic isolationism by means of its relations being severed. However, there is a speculation to be made about the repercussion caused by such an attitude within the Organization mainly with regard to the share in rights and advantages which are the result of the common search of a democratic life and government level. We have to admit the possibility of a socialist country in America. The idea that the emergence of a socialist country involves a military action or economic blockage to discard it is practically unsustainable due to the internal structure of all the other American countries' public opinion.

However, the idea of living in America with socialist countries may involve another consequence that cannot be overlooked, namely, that any relation that such a country might establish with the Soviet camp would cause a latent military danger. Thus, the presence of a socialist enclave in a hemisphere of countries strongly linked by defensive alliances of democratic basis would call for the need of neutralization. Here we have the Finland's parallel, which was mentioned during the

first phase of our studies at Casa da Pedra.

If in the socialist world a democratic enclave like Finland is accepted at the price of neutralization, it does not seem out of the question to admit that also in the democratic world may exist a socialist enclave protected by neutralization. Such a neutralization does not happen without a series of difficulties. From the Soviet point of view there seems to be no interest in maintaining a military commitment in Cuba. Neutralization is accepted and considered the best business such a socialist spear-head within the Eastern world. From the Cuban point of view I think there will be no major difficulties, although I would rather leave my comments for later on. From the American point of view there remains the problem that a neutralization may involve Guantanamo Base. Maybe through a constructive agreement one could find a solution similar to that of Bizerta, of a gradual retreat.

When [Cuban] Ambassador [Carlos] Olivares paid us a visit we were hoping to obtain some information or receive a proposal, but the conversation only showed interest in finding out how the consultative meeting was going to be carried out. From here he visited with President João Goulart and the next morning had an appointment with Minister Tancredo Neves. From both he obtained the same information, namely, that Brazil was inflexible with respect to the non-intervention principle; that we would not turn our backs on defending the inter-American system.

As far as the method in which that attitude would be converted into a diplomatic action was concerned, they would have to obtain that information from the Ministry of Foreign Relations. Neither the President of the Republic nor the Prime Minister offered a single word about this. On his way back Olivares showed sympathy with the idea of neutralization.

I gave Ambassador Gordon a general idea of that scheme. Although the ambassador was also favorably impressed by the idea he did not feel in a condition to discuss it any further here. He insists on the invitation he made to me in order to discuss it with Secretary Rusk in Washington. This is a point I leave to this group to speculate.

Ambassador [sic; White House aide Richard] Goodwin arrived two days ago. I will have a conversation with him today and it seems that he wishes to discuss the consultation.

We now have the problem of the line to follow at the consultation. At this point I must say that there are already signs that the American point of view is not favorable to the approval of the Colombian proposal. Instead, there is an interest in a document of sanctioning character which allows that after a period of time the conduct of the Cuban government be established with the help of a commission. Sanctions would be applicable thereafter.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the idea of invasion by neighboring countries has been declining in recent weeks. There are no signs of increased militarization and apparently what is expected is an internal revolution. It is possible that such a revolution may already have started at the time the Consultation Meeting takes place and in that case it will have to change all arguments conceived so far. We could follow the methodology described below:

Revise the philosophical line that I have recapitulated in general terms;

Examine the Consultation considering:

the possibility that when it takes place no revolution has yet broken out and

the possibility that the Consultation takes place after the revolution. For either hypothesis we must have at least an acceptable and flexible tactical solution.

Another point to check is about the suitability to proceed with the consultations around these practical suggestions.

Under-Secretary Renato Archer – It looks like the consultation should be preceded by a formal condemnation. Should Brazil, before declaring itself contrary, follow what others are doing might give the impression that we are willing to divide responsibilities.

Minister Carlos Duarte – Would appreciate it if Deputy Renato Archer were to provide clarification. Shall he speak now or during the Meeting.

Under-Secretary Renato Archer – This would indicate a type of behavior that would reward Brazil. At the time of President Jânio Quadros statements [they] took effect before any consultation. These statements strengthened Brazil's position which was firm and of its own regarding the involved subjects. He can carry on his conversations on the basis of a position he already has. Trying to divide the responsibility with other countries will weaken our position.

Ambassador Dias Carneiro – I would like to say a few words about a legal question. To what extent are obligations and aspirations conceptually different when included in the same Treaty?

State Minister – Sometimes the distinction is very easy, sometimes it is not. It depends on the reason why the subject is formulated. For example, in the case of the Santiago's Declaration it clearly enunciates that it covers aspiration. In the Rio de Janeiro Treaty it is an obligation. The OAS charter presents some doubts. Some subjects are explicit while others are dubious.

[1] Kennedy had recently visited Venezuela and Columbia.