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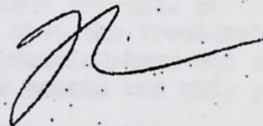
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April 9, 1969

Memorandum of Conversation with Carlos Lacerda

Attached is a memorandum of conversation with Carlos Lacerda in which Lacerda describes a right-wing coup in the making in Brazil.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: April 8, 1969

Subject: Military Coup in Brazil

Participants: Carlos Lacerda
Sergio Lacerda, son of Carlos Lacerda
Princeton Lyman, Chief of Title IX Division of USAID
Frank C. Carlucci, Political Counselor, Rio

Place: Sergio Lacerda's apartment, Rio

Sergio Lacerda invited me to lunch, subsequently informing me that his father had asked if he could intrude. For my part, I asked if Princeton Lyman could also attend.

Carlos Lacerda went straight to the point. He asked me for my interpretation of events in Brazil, particularly what was happening within the military establishment. I spoke in general terms about currents of thought and attitudes among military leaders and noted that the President was making a good effort to transfer some of the worst troublemakers out of Rio. Nevertheless, history had demonstrated that this tactic was only partially successful.

Lacerda said, "Let me be more specific. I have information, some of it factual and some of it rumor (informe), to the effect that the radical military are planning to depose Costa e Silva." It was common knowledge, Lacerda noted, that Albuquerque Lima was conspiring. Albuquerque Lima himself made no secret of this. What was new was that this conspiracy embraced a much wider group, including some of the President's most trusted advisers.

Lacerda said he had received an emissary sent by the conspirators. Lacerda had asked whether he had come to "advise him or warn him." The representative had replied, "Neither." Lacerda's reading was that the conspiratorial group was simply sounding him out to make certain that he would not side with Costa e Silva. He compared this sounding to the sounding Dona Yolanda had taken with him at the time her husband was maneuvering to become President. When Lacerda replied he would take no position, Dona Yolanda responded, "That's all I want to hear."

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The curious thing, Lacerda said, was that he had not been given this information in confidence. He had only been sworn to secrecy on the names of those involved. It was his understanding that the coup would take place some where between April and August. Costa e Silva would be replaced by a General.

Lacerda said that information from a variety of sources led him to conclude that those committed to the coup would be both anti-American and anti-communist. This would be a matter of tactics rather than convictions, since the movement had no real ideology. Local communists would be put away permanently and the Congress would be shut down. American aid, this group felt, was not important. At any rate, the Americans would eventually come around. Anti-Americanism would be used to increase the new government's popularity with the masses.

Lacerda did not know of any direct connection between events in Peru and this group's planning, but assumed Velasco's activities had served as an inspiration. On the other hand, he did know of connections between the Brazilian military conspirators and the Argentine military. They expected that Brazil and Argentina would lead the continent in a new style of military government.

In addition to the nature of their approach to him, Lacerda was puzzled by information to the effect that this group was reportedly receiving arms across the Brazilian frontier. He did not think the military would find real resistance to an armed coup from within, and could only interpret the importation of arms as a security precaution. He asked me if we had any information on this. I responded in the negative.

Lacerda concluded that Costa e Silva's tenure was limited. He thought it would be futile for anyone, including the U.S., to react to this information by trying to support Costa e Silva. "Some oxygen might be pumped into him, but this would only postpone the day of reckoning, and the later it comes the more radical the movement will be."

The unhappy choice which seemed to be facing Brazil, he said, is between the uninspiring and undynamic military who represent the status quo, and the radicals who are strongly anti-American. Lacerda suggested another alternative -- "a democratic opening." The essence of his proposal was that an effort be made to convince Costa e Silva that his only chance for survival is to reopen the political system. Lacerda said the U.S. could play an important role in this process. He was amused by a comment he had heard from a member of the "festive left" (esquerda festiva) to the effect that "only American imperialism can save us now." Lacerda said he had heard that we were exerting pressure on Costa e Silva to redemocratize the country and suggested that Governor Rockefeller should pursue this line directly with the President.

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I noted that our influence in political matters was considerably less than that usually attributed to us. Lacerda smiled when I asked him how he would react if he were President and an American visitor came in and told him what he ought to do in Brazil. I also noted the general problem of communication in a society which is caught up in political tensions. Princeton Lyman asked where Costa e Silva would find political support if he were to opt in favor of rapid redemocratization. Lacerda conceded that both of these were serious problems, but repeated that if some effort was not made the situation could deteriorate. He did not believe in the school of thought that said, "bad with Costa e Silva, worse without him." If matters continue as they are Costa e Silva will be out.

The rest of the conversation revolved around generalities. Lacerda felt our aid should not be used in support of this government, but recognized the dilemma in cutting off needed programs in such areas as education. At one point I asked him what he thought the situation in Brazil would be today had Castello Branco not died when he did. Lacerda reflected and said, "He and I would probably be the best of friends."

COMMENT:

Lacerda spoke as a politically alert man, giving no indication that his new status as a cassado had affected either his activities or his philosophy. In fact he spoke in quite objective terms about Costa e Silva. When I noted that if the "conspirators" were concerned that Lacerda might support Costa e Silva, the man who had deprived him of his political rights, they must indeed have a radical program, Lacerda simply nodded in agreement.

Lacerda, of course, is the type of man who never accepts defeat. The impression I had is that he is so convinced of impending political changes that he views his present status as temporary. He sees the military as a dominant political force for some time and harbors no illusions that he will be able to play a major political role in the immediate future, but the charisma and the driving political ambition are still there. He sees himself as a man of the future, not the past.

It is difficult to assess his statements regarding a coup. Lacerda is an exceedingly convincing person, and I do not discount the possibility that he was at least embroidering a bit in order to influence USG policies (at one point he even resorted to flattery by noting that we were far too intelligent to assume from what he was telling us that greater support should be given to Costa e Silva).

On the other hand, Lacerda seemed to be genuinely seeking information from me and was probably disappointed when I had so little to contribute. It is puzzling why the conspirators should bring Lacerda into their confidence

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a bitter feud with his brothers-in-law who own the DUCAL chain, which has only added to his anti-capitalist sentiments). He thought, however, that it was a big jump to go from Albuquerque Lima's conspiracy to a conspiracy involving other senior officials reportedly loyal to Costa e Silva. He did not discount the possibility, but reasoned that if Lacerda knew of the conspiracy so must the government, particularly since they were keeping such close tabs on Albuquerque Lima. Nevertheless, if true, José Luiz regarded the whole affair as very serious.

José Luiz commented that what Lacerda really wants is for Albuquerque Lima to be successful, since he thinks Albuquerque Lima would bring him into the government!

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