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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION
ACTION COPY

ACTION TAKEN.....DATE: March 5, 1968

SUBJECT: Carlos Lacerda, the Military and Ambassador Tuthill

PARTICIPANTS: Middle grade Brazilian Naval Officer — NAME?
John J. Mullin, Commercial Officer, Amembassy, Rio
Frank J. Haendler, Political Officer, Amembassy, Rio

PLACE: Rio de Janeiro

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The following observations were made to Embassy officers by a young, middle grade Brazilian Naval Officer who does not hesitate to admit that he admires Carlos Lacerda.

Lacerda still has a substantial following in the Brazilian Navy. In the Navy and in the other services, however, very few Lacerda backers are eager to boost him openly because of the extreme hostility between him and the Government. After all, these officers have their careers to safeguard and adopting political positions counter to those advocated by their service chiefs would not contribute to their advancement. Though many are not publicly backing Lacerda it must be borne in mind that most of the military from all three services enthusiastically supported and agreed with Lacerda for years. Lacerda was the intellectual father of the 1964 Revolution who at considerable personal risk opposed Goulart's regime from the beginning. All this has not been forgotten. Though Lacerda's present support is not what it once was, he still retains a good deal of military respect and sympathy. Many military officers, especially in the Navy and the Air Force, still agree with most of what Lacerda is saying.

It is true that many members of the armed forces opposed Lacerda's political alliances with Kubitschek and Goulart and subsequently cooled toward him because of them. This does not mean that their feeling toward him has been transformed to outright hostility. Most recognize that Lacerda made these alliances for purely strategic reasons and had little option

POL:FJHaendler:mv 3-7-68

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considering his isolated political position. Lacerda wants to take advantage of the popularity of Kubitschek in his quest for the presidency. No one believes that a Lacerda administration would be greatly influenced by either Juscelino or Jango. Despite his present alliances, it would not require much effort on Lacerda's part to recover most, if not all, of the military backing he once enjoyed. In the military, especially among younger officers, Lacerda is considered the most intelligent and courageous national figure in Brazil today. He is the only one really capable of providing the kind of leadership and administration the country needs. Fundamentally, the United States has nothing to fear from Lacerda. In his basic outlook, he is not really anti-U.S.

In close daily contact with top ranking Naval officers, he has heard absolutely no comment of any kind concerning Ambassador Tuthill's meetings with Lacerda. The press uproar is ridiculous. Maybe a few journalists, some administration politicians and a handful of high Army people close to the regime are interested in the subject. No one else is. What concerns his Navy colleagues is trying to make financial ends meet on their present low salaries. It is entirely understandable for the Ambassador to meet Lacerda who still has all his civil rights and has not been accused of any crimes. The Ambassador must understand the political situation in Brazil. Seeking Lacerda's views is a natural thing for him to do.

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