
The
PRESIDENTIAL
RECORDINGS
JOHN F. KENNEDY

→→→ *THE GREAT CRISES, VOLUME ONE* ←←←

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Goodwin: Has he changed a lot of commanders, military commanders in the garrisons?

Gordon: He's changed a number and he's threatening to change others. How far he goes on those changes depends a little bit on the resistance of the military.

I think one of our important jobs is to strengthen the spine of the military. To make it clear, discreetly, that we are not necessarily hostile to any kind of military action whatsoever if it's clear that the reason for the military action is—

President Kennedy: Against the Left.

Gordon: —he's giving the damn country away to the—

President Kennedy: Communists.

Gordon: Exactly. And there is a lot of evidence that Goulart, willingly or unwillingly, has been [*unclear*] that.

A few weeks ago just after Dantas was defeated in Congress,³⁵ he [Goulart] had a specific plan, which he told Kubitschek.³⁶ Kubitschek told me this firsthand. A plan to nominate a cabinet of his own without a prime minister. He told the Congress that he wouldn't expect this Congress to ratify [it], but he hoped the next Congress would, which is going to be elected in October. And to call for a plebiscite now for a return to a presidential regime in October.

Kubitschek took this to thirty high military officers and they told him unanimously that this was obviously unconstitutional and if Goulart tries it, they would oppose him. He asked whether he could tell Goulart that. They all said yes, and some said, "Well, it would be better to sign our names to a statement." And he went back to Goulart and Goulart withdrew.

You see the kind of thing that's in his mind. This is . . . he's thinking actively about a kind of white coup, as they call it. And if the military are too frightened . . . if they feel that there is no support anywhere, inside or outside, especially outside—which means us—if they take action, then they . . . They were, I am told . . . I was unfortunately sick in bed the week before last, just gradually getting on my feet—

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Gordon: —this last week before I came up on Wednesday. I did man-

35. In June, the Brazilian Congress had refused to accept Francisco San Tiago Dantas as prime minister.

36. Former president Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira, arguably Brazil's most popular politician, could not succeed himself in 1960 but remained a strong future contender for the presidency.

age to see Goulart, and the new foreign minister and the prime minister Tuesday night, and Walter Moreira Salles on Sunday.

Eleven seconds excised as classified information.

Gordon: The military, I can see that they are very friendly to us: very anti-Communist, very suspicious of Goulart. And they expressed great dismay at our position on Peru.

Well, I can explain to them what the political circumstances are. I think it's important that we should make it clear, to these friendly people, the ones we really know are friendly—

President Kennedy: But by the—

Gordon: That the Peruvian case is not necessarily—

President Kennedy: Yeah. But by this week we'll be right back recognizing the Peruvian government.

Goodwin: Well, I think it—as long as they understand that a military action to save constitutionality—

President Kennedy: [*Grunts*]

Goodwin: —is fine. Then I think that that's why we can't have the OAS meeting because this would really discourage the military.³⁷ If you start getting all these countries together and—

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Goodwin: —passing resolutions against—

President Kennedy: That's what I want to say today at this [*unclear*].

Goodwin: Because we may very well want them [the Brazilian military] to take over at the end of the year, if they can.

Gordon: We have that military front. And as I see it their function is first to keep Goulart on the rails—

President Kennedy: What kind of liaison do we have with the military?

Gordon: Well, it's pretty good.

The military's not united. This is one of the things that make it complicated. There are a few officers who are strong left-wingers themselves, including a couple in quite high positions: commander of the first army, which is in the city Rio de Janeiro . . . a very dangerous fellow. Goulart toyed with the notion of making him minister of war and then withdrew because there was a hell of a lot of [*unclear*].

President Kennedy: Do you think if Goulart had power—

You know you get into these fights with Congress and just about use anything to get your way.

37. The abbreviation OAS stands for Organization of American States.

Goodwin: I think, strengthen our relations with the military; we're making our position fairly clear to them. Maybe McNamara ought to review the people he has there and see if he can [unclear].³⁸

Gordon: Well, we need, we need a new Army attaché badly.

Goodwin: You see, is there anything else—

Gordon: The Army is much . . . that's the . . . most important [of the three Brazilian services]. This is the key fellow in the relationship.

President Kennedy: Our fellow, is he good?

Gordon: Our present fellow is . . . he's nice but fairly stupid.³⁹ I talked with General [unclear] about it.

President Kennedy: But, of course, we don't have many fellows who can speak Portuguese, do we?

Gordon: Well, there are a few around, not many, not many. But I think that McNamara—

President Kennedy: All right. Now let's have a—When are you going back there?

Ten seconds excised as classified material.

Gordon: Yes.

President Kennedy: When do we get a look at it now before we—so we know where we are going?

Goodwin: Well, you have the last—

President Kennedy: Like this Army—Who are you talking to about changing the Army attaché?

Gordon: I talked to General [unclear].⁴⁰

President Kennedy: Well now, is there any use in changing a fellow, when within three months you may be able—to have to—can he establish his links within three months?

Gordon: Uh, yes.

President Kennedy: Is there anybody that's ever been there before, that's had good relations we could send back?

Goodwin: What about this Eisenhower [unclear]?

Gordon: Dick Walters?⁴¹

38. Robert S. McNamara was U.S. secretary of defense.

39. Colonel Stanley N. Lonning was U.S. Army attaché in Brazil.

40. In an interview with Timothy Naftali on 3 August 2000, Ambassador Gordon recalled that before returning to Washington in July 1962, he had spoken with General Andrew P. O'Meara, the commander in chief, Caribbean, about changing the U.S. Army attaché in Brazil.

41. Colonel Vernon Walters. A linguist, fluent in seven languages, Walters had served in Italy during World War II as the U.S. Army's combat liaison officer to the Brazilian Expeditionary Force. He went to Brazil for three years after the war as assistant military attaché in Rio de

Goodwin: Dick Walters.

Gordon: He is in Rome.

President Kennedy: Does he know anything about Portugal?

Goodwin: He knows Portuguese fluently.

Gordon: Oh, he speaks Portuguese fluently. He's a hell of a good fellow; he's got a good political sense, too.

Goodwin: He was Eisenhower's interpreter down there, wasn't he?

Gordon: Oh yeah, oh yeah. He would be marvelous. He was—

President Kennedy: Now, what are you going to do about that? I mean, who are we going to get? We gotta get somebody down there who can establish liaison quickly . . . you got to speak Portuguese.

Goodwin: Why don't we talk to Ros Gilpatric or somebody.⁴²

President Kennedy: OK, well that ought to be done today.

Fifteen seconds excised as classified information.

President Kennedy: You say there's no need my writing Goulart again, to ask him to do anything?

Gordon: No. No.

Goodwin: You know, your brother sat in on the initial meeting that set up this political program. It was basically from his push that it got going anyways.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Gordon: Now.

President Kennedy: Is he going to be at the meeting tomorrow?⁴³

Goodwin: Might be a good idea.

President Kennedy: Would you, would you tell him? Yeah.

Gordon: There's one—there are two other little problems I have here on my plate.

Kubitschek has written you a letter, which I have here.⁴⁴

President Kennedy: Well, is he supporting Goulart?

Gordon: No, no.

President Kennedy: Is he disturbed?

Janiero. A stint with the Marshall Plan in Paris followed, where Walters met Lincoln Gordon for the first time. Joining General Dwight Eisenhower's staff at NATO headquarters in 1951, Walters later served as interpreter to President Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon. In July 1962, Walters was Army attaché in Italy.

42. Roswell L. Gilpatric was deputy secretary of defense.

43. Special Group (Counterinsurgency) meeting.

44. Gordon brought the original with him. Meanwhile the U.S. Embassy cabled to the State Department an informal translation of Kubitschek's letter to President Kennedy. "Informal Translation of Letter from Ex-President Kubitschek to President Kennedy," 25 July 1962, "Brazil" folder, National Security Files, Box 13, John F. Kennedy Library.