For eight years I traveled and studied in seventeen of the twenty Latin-American countries. When I began, the voice of revolution was muted; the pleas of the privileged and the underprivileged alike were for massive economic assistance similar to that which we had extended to Europe under the Marshall Plan. Then suddenly the mood changed and the quiet rumble of discontent became a distinct drumbeat. Decades of suffering and frustration suddenly crystallized into a wedge of anger which split Latin America asunder.

Architects of our Latin American foreign policy were jolted into a perplexing dilemma. They quickly realized that orthodox methods of helping our southern neighbors achieve a better life were not sufficient—indeed, orthodoxy seemed to be abetting the growing anger and discontent. They recognized that swift social change had to be part of economic growth. But the problem was to stimulate social change without violating the sacred hemispheric policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations.

Optimistically, one may assert that the Act of Bogotá, the Charter of Punta del Este, and the Alliance for Progress constitute a modern Magna Carta of the Americas: land for the landless, tax systems that are fair and honestly administered, self-help projects to provide low-cost housing and better health facilities, concerted attacks on illiteracy, determined efforts to reduce economic instability that has long plagued the Latin American countries, and democratic institutions that protect freedom and the human spirit.

Pessimistically, many contend that this noble effort is doomed to failure because it is too late and because the oligarchs and Communists alike will not permit it to succeed, albeit for different reasons.

The United States has a crucial role in this drama. Our aid can be decisive in helping Latin Americans build better institutions, increase income, and purge injustice from their society. We must be swift and generous.

No one could spend a great deal of time with Latin Americans—political leaders, intellectuals, laborers, farmers, Indians, mestizos, whites, rich, poor, and dispossessed—as I have done without developing a genuine and abiding affection for them. They are the most engaging people I have met in a lifetime of travel to most parts of the world. They are not, as too many believe, concerned mainly with the siestas and the serenade. They are a hard-working people who cherish individualism and human dignity.

Knowing Latin Americans as I do, I believe that they will choose peaceful revolution, and that they will, in most of the republics, win the future without civil wars. I do not say this glibly, for I realize that the slightest spark could touch off flaming conflicts in a dozen different places in the hemisphere. I am aware of the harsh resistance that any effort for change will meet. I know the awesome dimensions of the problem that confronts the moderate Latin-American leader and the perils which he must negotiate to survive and triumph. But these things notwithstanding, I have faith in the peoples of Latin America and their cause. They have demonstrated a monumental patience in the face of abuse, and now that they are so close to a just and peaceful future, I think and pray that they will work for it rather than kill for it.

During the 1960s and 1970s, only Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela were spared periods of either direct military government or rule by a nominally civilian chief executive whose tenure in office depended on the support of the armed forces. The exact role of the U.S. government in the wave of military takeovers has remained a persistent question in the historiography of the period. In Guatemala in 1954, Washington secretly sponsored a golpe de estado (Document No. 73) but failed in its attempt to repeat that success in Cuba in 1961 (Document No. 84). In Chile in 1970, the United States secretly promoted a golpe to prevent the inauguration of the socialist president, Salvador Allende (see Document No. 103). In other cases of military takeovers, suspicions of U.S. involvement lingered for a long time. The constitutionally elected Brazilian government of President João Goulart was overthrown on March 31, 1964, Goulart (1919–1976), vice president under President Jânio Quadros, succeeded to the presidency when Quadros unexpectedly resigned in 1961. Goulart’s leftist policies provoked concerns about his reliability as an anti-communist ally, and the United States responded in 1962 by appointing one of the country’s most highly qualified soldier-diplomats, Col. Vernon A. Walters (1917–2002), as U.S. Army attaché. A fluent speaker of Portuguese (and four other languages), Walters had been the U.S. Army’s liaison officer with the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in Italy during World War II and from 1945 to 1948 served as U.S. military attaché in Brazil. In his autobiography, excerpted below, Walters wrote about his experience in Brazil from 1962 to 1964.

Around June 1962 I began to hear rumors that I was going to be transferred to another post... [U.S.] Ambassador [to Brazil] Lincoln Gordon... had asked that I be transferred there since a dangerous situation was developing in which the military would obviously play a key role of some sort. And he wished to be

informed of what the military were thinking and what was going on. I reported to
the Ambassador in his office [in October 1962], I said, "Mr. Ambassador, here I am.
What is it you want of me?" He walked me to a chair, told me how glad he was
to see me again after so many years. He then described the deteriorating political
atmosphere in Brazil from both the point of view of Communist progress and the
steady cooling of relations with the United States. He then said, "From you I want
three things: First, I want to know what is going on in the Armed Forces; second,
I want to be able to some extent to influence it through you; and third, most of
all, I never want to be surprised."……

[Three] days later the Communist daily Novos Rumos came out with a long
story to the effect that Colonel Walters, "a Pentagon's chief specialist in military
coups, has just been sent to Brazil for the sole purpose of overthrowing President
Goulart and establishing a regime that would be a puppet of the U.S." The article
went on to say that I had been the artisan of the overthrow of King Farouk in
Egypt, President Frondizi in Argentina, President Prado in Peru, and that I had
threatened the Arab oil sheiks with coups to make them sign oil agreements ben-
ficial to the U.S. oil companies specifically and imperialism in general.……This was
but the first shot in a campaign against me that has continued sporadically until
this day. Its purpose then was to intimidate me and to make Brazilians unwilling
to talk to me.……

[I]t was clear that, if not Goulart, at least some of the far leftists in his immedi-
ate entourage were working hard to divide the Brazilian Armed Forces by encour-
gaging the non-commissioned officers of all three forces to take a strong political
stand against their officers. It was to be these efforts to divide the Armed Forces
and destroy their cohesion and discipline that would in the end bring about the
revolution and Goulart's downfall.……After a few months it became apparent to me
that in their frustration and fear for their country, a number of officers were begin-
nin to think about some sort of military action to prevent Brazil from becom-
ing another Cuba. This was done with extreme reluctance. Most Brazilian officers
were anxious that their country not give the impression to the world that it was
just another "banana republic." Successful revolutions have been extremely rare in
Brazilian history.……It was also clear to me that most of this thinking was isolated
and that the many small plotting groups were not yet in communication with one
another. There did not appear to be any sort of co-ordination at all.……

Inexorably the leftward drift continued in all areas.……A radical land-reform
bill was announced by Goulart that would seize and divide large properties.……Early
in 1964 from many friends I finally got the impression that some of the plotters
were beginning to get into touch with one another on a co-ordinated national scale.
Couriers began to travel. Contingency plans began to become more specific.
Directives and think papers began to circulate. Through friends I was aware of
this……[A] brigadier general I had known in Italy was extremely forthcoming
with me because he truly feared that his country would become Communist and
another Cuba. One night at his house I spent my "longest night." He had sent the
word that he wanted to see me. I went to his house, leaving my car several blocks
away. I was received by his wife, who told me he would be back shortly. Several
hours passed and still he did not return.……Finally he arrived with his aide and
said, "This is it. We have decided to go right at the beginning of next week." At
this moment, his phone rang and a friend told him that there would probably be a
police raid on his house at any minute. The house was a veritable arsenal. He had
submachine guns, rifles, hand grenades and ammunition. I could see the headlines
already. I had come there to be able to inform my government, not to participate in
any plot, but if I were arrested in the apartment, who would believe it? Yet I could
not flee at once or he would have thought me a coward. I said to him, "I will do
whatever you want, I will stay if you want me, or leave if you prefer." Somewhat to
my dismay he said, "I want you to stay." I stayed and was rehearsing what I would
say if arrested. The minutes and hours dragged by and nothing happened, and it
became clear that there was not going to be a raid. He said I could go and finally
at 3 A.M. I left, after what had seemed to me an eternity. This officer was a close
friend. He died not long after the revolution, and in his will he left me his ivory
and gold swagger stick. I knew then that he had appreciated my not running out
on him on that longest night.……

The leftists' efforts to set the non-commissioned officers against their officers
became more open and restlessness increased in all of the armed services. Still,
there was a continuing reluctance to do anything outside of the constitution with-
out extraordinary provocation.……

I had been aware of some U.S. contingency planning for an upheaval in Brazil.
After all, the world was in great measure polarized into two camps and any gov-
ernment would fail in its duty if it did not plan for all eventualities. Apparently,
in the United States this planning received the code name "Brother Sam." The first
time I ever heard this expression was in January 1977 when some of the papers
were made public.……The publication of such contingency plans has been used to
try to show that the United States was in some way connected with the Brazilian
revolution of 1964. It was not in any way. Ambassador [Lincoln] Gordon once said
under oath when testifying before Congress, "The Brazilian revolution was not 99
per cent Brazilian. It was 100 per cent Brazilian." I would be happy to make the
same statement under oath at any time. The Communists and their friends see the
need to denigrate those who have defeated them. So they spread the word that the
Americans were really behind the Brazilian, Chilean or any other revolution they
don't like. Unfortunately many guilt-ridden Americans naively believe them. The
United States' uncontrollable urge to tell everyone about everything reveals con-
tingency planning for this or that contingency and that is then used to document
U.S. complicity.……

In March 1964 events began to take an ominous turn. On the thirteenth
Goulart's brother-in-law, Leonel Brizola, in the President's presence, made a
highly provocative speech. President Goulart appointed a scoundrel who had been
cashiered out of the service as commandant of the Brazilian Marine Corps and the
President himself made an extremely provocative speech to the Sergeants' Club.
Navy mutineers carried the Marine admiral in the streets in triumph. I told the
Ambassador on Sunday March 30 that all of my information pointed to imminent action by those Brazilian officers who feared that further delay would create an irreversible situation. I told the Ambassador that I felt the provocation the plotters had been awaiting had just been given by the President in seeking to disrupt the discipline, unity and hierarchy of the armed services.

[On the morning of March 31] General Mourao Filho announced that he was marching on Rio... Guanabara State Police occupied key posts including the headquarters of far-left unions and the national student federation. As I moved around the city, I realized that Fort Copacabana and the various military schools in the Praia Vermelha area had gone over to the rebellion. In the late afternoon, I went to the Embassy to report to Washington on what was occurring. Darkness found me still there. As I attempted to return home and left the Embassy driving my own car, several shots were fired. The Marine guard at the Embassy ran out into the street and waved me back into the garage. I spent the night in the Embassy, and during the night I received information that Goulart was preparing to leave the city and fly to Brasilia [the capital]. It was also apparent that the Fourth Army in northeastern Brazil had also joined the rebels. All that remained was for General Amaury Kruel and the Second Army to join forces with the rebellion. This occurred in the early hours of the morning of April 1, and from then on the outcome was never in doubt. Late in the morning of April 1, Goulart left Rio and his supporters simply fell apart. Goulart, who would not believe that his support had evaporated, blamed the CIA for the situation. This was absolute nonsense. The CIA was following developments, not leading them. This was also true of my office, which was not part of the CIA. We, too, were trying to follow events and, if possible, trying to alert our government as to what was to come. Any American attempt to interfere in developments would have been bitterly resented by the Brazilian military, who felt and proved that they were quite competent at handling their own affairs. They did so, taking over the whole huge country almost without bloodshed...

The United States, fearing a prolonged civil war and possible Soviet intervention in it, had done extensive contingency planning that foresaw a much longer duration of a conflict. I had shared the Brazilians' belief that either the movement would succeed almost immediately or it would fail... Much has been made of the speedy U.S. recognition for the new Brazilian government. The United States was well informed of the likelihood of a change in the government. The United States did not participate in any way in this change. It clearly welcomed it after the fact, since it had been obvious that Goulart's belief that he could use the Communists was naive and unrealistic... Goulart was basically a good man with a guilty conscience for being rich...

A regime basically unfriendly to the United States had been replaced by another one much more friendly. Some may regard this as bad. I do not. I am convinced that if the revolution had not occurred, Brazil would have gone the way of Cuba. Perhaps there have been some excessive shows of zeal under the present regime. They are very small alongside of what would have happened if Brazil had