

COMPROMISSO AMONG VARGAS, GÓIS MONTEIRO, DUTRA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ESTADO NOVO

COMPROMISSO ENTRE VARGAS, GÓIS MONTEIRO, DUTRA E O ESTABELECIMENTO DO ESTADO NOVO

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RESUMO

O artigo examina o apoio militar ao Estado Novo. As Forças Armadas precisavam de armamentos, mas o pagamento da dívida nacional e os títulos vendidos a estrangeiros tornavam impossível a compra de armas. A realização do golpe e a declaração de uma moratória sobre os pagamentos de dívidas e títulos liberariam o financiamento.

Palavras-chaves: Forças Armadas; compromisso; plano Cohen; Rio Grande do Sul.

ABSTRACT

My purpose is to examine why the military supported the Estado Novo. They badly needed armaments, but the paying off the national debt and the bonds sold to foreigners made paying for weaponry impossible. Staging the 1937 coup and declaring a moratorium on debt and bond payments would free up funding.

Keywords: Armed Forces; compromisso; plano Cohen; Rio Grande do Sul.

RESUMEN

Examinaremos el apoyo de los militares al Estado Novo. Las Fuerzas Armadas necesitaban armas, pero el pago de la deuda y los bonos nacionales vendido a los extranjeros harían imposible el compra de las armas. La realización del golpe de Estado de 1937 y la declaración de una moratoria en el pago de deuda y bonos liberaría los fondos.

Palabras clave: Fuerzas armadas; compromisso; plano Cohen; Rio Grande do Sul.

A constant theme that ran through the army's post-imperial history had been its worry about the poor state of its arms and equipment, the difficulties of mobilizing and training sufficient soldiers to have adequate armed forces to defend the country against internal and external enemies. In 1903 Sergeant Getúlio Vargas had seen firsthand the precariousness of mobilization on the Mato Grosso frontier; the Revolution of 1930, the Paulista rebellion of 1932, and the communist barracks revolt of 1935 each revealed weaknesses in Brazil's army and navy. With the world stumbling toward some terrible, yet still unknown, crisis, Vargas linked the solution to Brazil's political predicament, with national defense. Governments in France, the United States, not to speak of Germany, Italy, Poland, and Portugal, were solidifying their control over national policy formation and execution. Why should Brazil not do so too?

Vargas and Dutra's worries about the army's possibly negative response to orders to intervene in Rio Grande do Sul, let alone to a change of regime, were behind the new code of military discipline imposed by executive order. The extremely detailed code cited "everything a soldier or officer has been known to do, everything it might occur to him to do, and quite a number of acts it probably never would enter his mind to do".¹ Various provisions aimed at keeping a social distance between officers and troops. The new rules would be subject to severe testing in the next few months.

For most of the 1930s Góis Monteiro had impressed on Vargas the desperate need for basic reforms. Brazil's fleet and its army had human talent and a full array of schools, but scarcely any arms, munitions, or modern vessels. This was not news, but the world panorama in 1937 was exceptionally frightening. The Spanish Civil War indicated that Brazil had been lucky in 1932 not to have attracted foreign intervention, but it likely would not have such good luck twice. The Soviet Union's involvement in the 1935 fiasco raised fears that it would try again, if the chance presented itself; and Nazi Germany had already been much too attentive to the status of German communities in southern Brazil. Argentina had just shown in the Destroyers' Affair that it was a "false friend." Old fears of losing rich, untapped, and often undiscovered natural resources gave Brazilian officers and knowledgeable politicians nightmares.

Back in March 1935, Ambassador Oswaldo Aranha had written from Washington to Góis that:

Our problem, my dear friend, consists only in giving military organization to the military to safeguard authority, maintain the unity and to defend the integrity of the country and, more, to improve the race and the land, to educate the people and to give liberty to Brazil. [...]. I confess that it seems that a regime of force would be useful to us. [...].

1 Executive Decree n. 1.899, 19 August 1937; Maj. Lawrence C. Mitchell, Rio, 8 September 1937: "New Discipline Regulations", Report. n. 1.973, 2006-161, 6300b, Military Intelligence Division (MID), War Department, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives and Records Administration (Nara).

The military organization of Brazil is an internal and external necessity. [...]. The world is getting mixed up and our continent is growing nervous.²

And he concluded: "Brazil can and should equip itself, if it does not, it will pay more than we can calculate".³ Similarly, in June 1937 Aranha wrote Vargas that "my opinion is that we must arm ourselves, making purchases abroad, whatever it costs. If we don't do so quickly and immediately, it will cost much more, materially and morally". He suggested a way to create a special defense fund.⁴

Vargas, Dutra, Góis, and Aranha agreed that Brazil had to modernize its armed forces. A modern army would hold the country together against the centrifugal forces of regionalism, and defend it against foreign enemies. It would also set an example of educated modernity for the Brazilian people. By September 1937 the first three were more or less in agreement as to the course they were following. In a sense Vargas had become a captive, he would have to carry out their plans or risk being deposed. The two generals could back down, but Vargas could not.

The arrangement was straightforward. Góis and Dutra were to give Vargas internal peace and security, and he would get them the arms and the modern industries that would support continued military development. On September 1st, 1937, Vargas presided over a meeting of the National Security Council, which included the cabinet ministers and the chiefs of staff of the army and navy. This was only the third time it had met since its formation in 1934, so it was an unusual event.⁵ They discussed the equipping of the armed forces and the need to create a source of revenue to pay for it.

As Stanley Hilton has shown, during 1934-36, the army had been negotiating with the German Krupp Corporation and with the Swedish Bofors company for modern artillery to be paid for with natural resources (Hilton, 1975, p. 117-129). The navy engaged in similar activity with the Italian government for submarines and with the American government for destroyers.⁶ In his annual report to the president in May 1937, Minister Dutra had written, "it would be a lie to the Nation to say that we are armed, in condition to guard it and to defend its enormous patrimony. [...] It is sad, but true, to confess that we do not possess sufficient material resources to deal with even our internal requirements. [...] We cannot stand still while the rest of the world advances".⁷

2 Oswaldo Aranha to P. Góis Monteiro, Washington, 9 March 1935. Arquivo Oswaldo Aranha (hereafter AOA), FGV/CPDOC.

3 Idem.

4 Oswaldo Aranha to Getúlio Vargas, Washington, 4 June 1937. AOA, FGV/CPDOC.

5 Vargas (1995, 2: p. 189 [Letícia crisis], p. 347 [Chaco War and "nossa completa falta de recursos para enfrentar uma situação"], p. 427 ["precariedade do nosso material bélico"]).

6 On the destroyer deal, that would soon be torpedoed by Argentina and U. S. Congressional objections, No Name, Naval Attaché's Report, Rio, 18 August 1937: "Brazil-Navy; Ships, Destroyers", n. 912-800, Brazil 5900, G-2 Regional, MID, WD, RG165, NA; file GV 37.08.13, AGV, FGV/CPDOC-Rio; McCann (1973, p. 113).

7 EME (1937, p. 4), pelo GD Arnaldo de Sousa Pais de Andrade; Ministério da Guerra (hereafter MG), *Relatório apresentado ao Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil pelo general de divisão Eurico Gaspar Dutra, ministro de Estado da Guerra em maio de 1937* (EME, 1937, p. 37-38).

Vargas committed himself to arming and equipping the military and building a national steel complex in return for military backing of extending his presidency with dictatorial powers that would eliminate politics. The public implementation of this arrangement proceeded in the hesitant, indirect way in which Getúlio usually maneuvered. The signals that he flashed were certainly mixed. It is most common for historians to see his contradictory moves as deliberate diversions intended to confuse. It is more likely, however, recalling his behavior in 1930, that such moves really indicated his indecision and caution. In his September 7th address to the nation he asserted that it would be the last time he would commemorate “independence day” as chief of state. Was he serious or trying to lull opponents? The electoral campaign was becoming uncertain as José Américo’s speeches and attitudes were troubling supporters who talked of finding a substitute candidate⁸.

Then on September 13th the political scene exploded. Former Mayor of Rio, Dr. Pedro Ernesto, acquitted by the Supreme Military Tribunal, was released from jail. Rio de Janeiro erupted into an impromptu, out-of-season Carnaval. The city government declared a holiday and the crowds swelled with city workers. Praça Onze, the traditional gathering spot for samba groups, was so full of people that Ernesto’s car could not enter. To reach the Castelo Esplanade, where he was to speak, his car was pushed along by the cheering throngs. They passed directly in front of the Ministry of War, from whose windows officers, soldiers, and civilian employees watched the spontaneous outpouring of affection and loyalty. In his talk in the Esplanade he stressed that he had not been involved in the 1935 revolts, and he added: “I am not, was never, and will never be a communist”. Only days later, on September 29th, he announced his backing for Armando Salles. The outburst of support for Ernesto precipitated the coup planners to act (Conniff, 1981, p. 156-158).

During the next few days Vargas met with Valladares and Dutra. They agreed that a substitute third candidate was impossible to arrange. Extending Vargas’s mandate legally was also not possible. To this point it is likely that Vargas and his collaborators had been moving toward a congressionally-approved extension of his term, but from here onward they pursued an extra-legal solution. Such an interpretation would explain why Dutra could say that their discussion on September 18th was the first time Vargas had spoken openly with him about reacting “against the situation that was developing, by staging a revolution from the top down, that is, unleashed by the government itself”. The president complained that the congress had done nothing useful and opposed the executive’s initiatives. The only solution was to change the regime and reform the constitution. But the general said Vargas commented that “he would make the revolution” only if Dutra collaborated with him; Dutra was silent for a few moments and then replied that “he could count on him, but he could guarantee nothing regarding the army”. They would begin by eliminating Flores of Rio Grande do Sul. Feelers went out to Plínio Salgado that gave him the idea that by collaborating with a change of regime, *integralismo* would have a major place in the new Brasil (Camargo, 1989, p. 219).

8 Vargas (1995, 2: p. 68-69, 7-13 September).

Curiously, even as Vargas was moving to break the back of regionalism, he was willing to use, and thereby strengthen, a proponent of regionalism in the person of Governor Benedito Valladares. Because the conspirators assumed that there would be some resistance in São Paulo and Rio Grande, they had to have Mineiro state troops on their side. Valladares demanded two conditions in return for his support, namely that the army accept the revolution; and that the *Força Pública* of Minas, except for two battalions, not be federalized and remain under his command (Valladares, 1966, p. 157-166).⁹

On September 19th, Valladares called on Dutra saying that Vargas had asked Salgado to join the movement and offered him a ministry in return. The governor suggested that they limit the participation of Salgado and Góis. In another conversation the following day, Valladares lamented the impossibility of finding a third candidate, and affirmed strongly that their only path was “revolution” headed by Getúlio. He gave Dutra rough drafts of a suggested presidential manifesto and of the constitution that Francisco Campos was preparing. He pointed out that the latter would extend Vargas’ term for another six years (Silva, 1970, p. 455-456).

In what has often been described as a cold and calculated series of events, there was actually considerable emotion. On September 22nd, the government declared a holiday, complete with the closing of commerce, and held a commemoration for the dead soldiers of November 1935. Vargas and the generals gathered at the grave site in Rio de Janeiro’s São João Batista cemetery for prayers and speeches. The event was odd in its timing and likely would have been forgotten except for what happened next. The Chamber of Deputies entered a prolonged debate over entering the grave side speeches into the official record of the chamber, which led General Newton Cavalcanti, commander of the 1st Infantry Brigade at Vila Militar, and key enthusiast in the army for *integralismo*, to charge that there was “a communist current or grouping within the National Congress itself” (Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 71). The debate expanded to examine the crisis in Brazilian democracy and rumors that Góis was plotting a coup. He issued a formal denial and asserted that in serving the *Pátria* his greatest desire was to put the army in condition to face any danger to national integrity (Camargo, 1989, p. 213).

In the following days Vargas showed his solidarity with the army by attending field exercises at the Gericinó maneuver grounds. He also delayed Pan-American Airways permission to open a new route from São Paulo and Curitiba to Asunción, Paraguay. The Military Airmail service carried mail over that route and was reluctant to give it over to a foreign company. Vargas understood the importance of keeping the aviators and bombardiers contented.¹⁰

On the morning of September 27th, Dutra convoked a crucial meeting in his office. Those invited were Góis, Almério de Moura (1st Military Region), José Antônio Coelho Neto (Director of Aviation), Cavalcanti, and Filinto Müller (police chief of Federal District). They had

⁹ Regarding the federalization of the states’ military police forces, see MG, *Relatório...*, op. cit., quarta parte, p. 13-14.

¹⁰ Vargas (1995, 2: p. 71); “Venceram os aviadores militares”, *A Nota*, Rio de Janeiro, 14 October 1937; Ministério da Viação e Obras Públicas (1937, p. 11-15).

received copies of the report on the Cohen Plan from Góis, which Dutra assured them was “not a government fantasy.” The Ministry of Justice’s actions were “fomenting” rather than repressing “the energies that are ready to explode.” Our laws, Minister Dutra asserted, were not working. “The armed forces, particularly the army, constitute the sole element capable of saving Brazil from the catastrophe ready to erupt”. He concluded that “it is necessary to act and to act immediately”. Cavalcanti, referring to the Cohen Plan document, declared that the communist intention was “to liquidate the army itself”. The undermining of the Congress was shown by its refusal to include in its record the speeches of a few days before. The looming of a new communist threat, he asserted, “required immediate action in defense of the army, of democratic institutions, of society, of the very family threatened with death. [...] it is necessary to act, *even outside the law*, but in defense of the corrupted law and institutions” (emphasis added). General Coelho Neto, the newest of that rank, observed that they had to involve the navy and Vargas himself. Several generals stated that the Chamber of Deputies must be purged of its reactionary, weak, and incapable members. Dutra and several of the others insisted that “the constituted authorities should be maintained. The movement will carry with it the President of the Republic, whose authority will be strengthened”.¹¹

In an aside, Góis charged that José Américo was bankrolling the fellow traveler newspaper *O Popular* (Rio de Janeiro), and Coelho Neto recalled that the candidate had not attended the grave side ceremony. He noted the communist plans required “a military movement that amounted to a coup d’état.” However, he added, their plans should be “a generals’ secret”. They should sign an agreement that “they did not want a military dictatorship”. Müller insisted “that the Armed Forces, conducting this movement, stay outside the government, to guarantee the operation and the constituted government”. He also suggested that arrests be summary with no right of defense and that forced labor camps be established. Cavalcanti declared that the two service ministers should direct the operation, at the side of the president, to secure for him, with force, the exceptional powers required. Success, he went on, “demanded an immediate return to a state of war without any restrictions, as well as declaring of Martial Law in all of its fullness”. Dutra chimed in that it should apply to the whole country. They should, he said, involve the entire army, and especially the air arm.

Cavalcanti defended himself against the charge of being an *integralista*. “I am not,” he said, he opposed political influence, even *integralista*, in the army. “Only use them, if needed, as enlisted troops, but never as [*integralista*] militia”. Góis and Cavalcanti seemingly summed up the group’s feelings: “We only wish to work for the Army and for the salvation of the *Pátria*”. The next day they all signed the minutes pledging themselves to the “exclusive purpose of saving Brazil and its political and social institutions from the disaster that was about to occur [...] excluding from their intentions any personal gain or any idea of military dictatorship”. It is ironic that on that day the Chamber of Deputies approved entering the celebrated speeches into the record of its debates.¹²

¹¹ The minutes of the meeting appear in both Silva (1970, p. 391-399) and Junior; Leite (1983, p. 231-238).

¹² *Idem*.

The next day General Dutra and Vice Admiral Henrique Aristides Guilhem (naval minister) went to Guanabara Palace to speak with Vargas about the need to resume the State of War. The two ministers agreed to provide an explanation that the president could send to the Congress. Later, at his office, Dutra told his colleague generals that this would be the “most viable way” for them to have some legal basis to attack communism, arrest congressmen and other such acts. On the 29th Vargas sent the ministers’ petition to the Congress. It is curious that in his Diary Getúlio’s references to the request distanced him from it. He wrote that he was forwarding the document “in accord with the request of the military ministers” (Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 72).

The ministers’ document was addressed to Vargas and was so lacking in detail that it is difficult today to see it as a serious request for extra-constitutional powers. The ministers evoked the ghosts of the *Intentona* by declaring “just as in 1935 the threats are evident [...] many people are unbelieving, attributing the ostensive preparations to maneuvers of biased politics, fantasies of salaried authorities”. Despite the ministers’ efforts to counter the communist threat, the “crime against the *Pátria* committed in 1935 is about to be repeated with greater energy and more certainty of success”.

The armed forces cannot be silent. For them not to act is a crime [...]. The Armed Forces are the only element capable of saving Brazil from the catastrophe ready to explode [...]. The struggle will be violent without quarter. [...]. We have the example of Spain. [...]. Thus it is necessary to act, and to do so immediately, without stopping for any considerations. Above everything is the salvation of the *Pátria*. [...]. Speaking for the generals and admirals of the armed forces of Brazil [...] speaking for all of Brazil [...] [we] ask for an immediate return to the state of war.¹³

On September 30th, the government radio program *Hora do Brasil* featured an announcement about the General Staff’s “discovery” of the Cohen Plan, and the next day’s headlines took the story, and the government’s appeal to restore the state of war, to the streets and byways. During the previous days Daltro Filho had reported shipments of arms from abroad into Porto Alegre, information on the location of secret arms caches, and Flores’s expanding the numbers of *Brigada Militar* troops. As Vargas had commented in his Diary on September 27th, “things were becoming clearer” (Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 72).

On October 1st debates in the Congress centered on the legitimacy of the supposed dangers. Some deputies and senators naturally wanted to see the documents mentioned but not submitted. Others said that to ask for the documents would be to question the honesty of the armed forces chiefs, who would be held responsible by their colleagues in

13 Dated 29 September 1930, the text is in both Silva (1970, p. 403-409); Junior; Leite (1983, p. 239-244. For various details: “José Carlos de Macedo Soares”, DHBB, 4: p. 3.227-3.233. Macedo was the minister of Justice, 6 March – 11 September 1937, who formally sent the document to the Congress. On the 28th, according what Dutra told Hélio Silva in 1959; Vargas told the service chiefs that if Macedo Soares did not agree with request for state of war, he would remove him (Silva, 1970).

uniform and by history. The Chamber approved the measure 138 to 52 and the Senate 21 to 3. That night Vargas signed the decree re-imposing a State of War on Brazil. For the first time it was to be supervised nationally by a Commission, named on October 7th, made up of the Minister of Justice Macedo Soares, General Cavalcanti, and Admiral Dário Pais Leme de Castro. In the states the governors were in charge, except in São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, and the Federal District, where the authority rested with Generals of Division César Augusto Pargas Rodrigues and Daltro Filho, and with Captain Filinto Müller, respectively. The attitudes of the national commissioners were extreme. Pais told reporters that “anyone not against communism is a communist”, and Cavalcanti concurred saying that “the enemies of the *Pátria*” were “the communists and the indifferent”. The commission’s plan called for summary judgments, the detention “of all communist sympathizers” and the creation of a “Federal Police”. Even Masonic Lodges and spiritist centers were to be closed (Camargo, 1989, p. 219).

The decision not to have the governors in the two suspect states implement the state of war required that the *Força Pública* in São Paulo and the *Brigada Militar* in Rio Grande be placed under the commands of the two military regions. In the previous weeks considerable negotiation and maneuvering had placed army sympathizers in key positions. Dramas large and small took place as police officers weighed their options, loyalties, and futures. Neither police force was in the mood for civil war. But even so, tensions mounted and uncertainty hung in the air. São Paulo showed no resistance.

What would Flores do? *Gaúchos* were born and bred loyal to Rio Grande, could the governor marshal those sentiments? The Archbishop of Porto Alegre Dom João Becker discussed the impasse with Flores seeking an honorable way out short of violence. Flores recognized that the *Brigada* had gone over to the army, and that the Provisionals were listening to their *Brigada* officers. In a symbolic gesture of gallantry, he donned his uniform on Sunday morning, October 16th, and made the rounds of the *Brigada* barracks in Porto Alegre to make his farewells. Then in defiance and pride, he refused to sign a decree giving the *Brigada* over to the army. Instead the next day he resigned and took the waiting *Varig* aircraft to the Uruguayan frontier. There would be no more *gaúcho caudilhos* like him. On the 19th Vargas decreed federal intervention in his home state and named Daltro Filho as *interventor*. For a short time, until the general fell to a fatal illness in December, Rio Grande had an outsider, a Bahiano, at its head. Worry that the *Paulistas* might react against the intervention in Rio Grande led Dutra to order his old 4th Cavalry Regiment in Três Corações (Minas Gerais) to a position closer to the São Paulo line and to request Valladares to concentrate police in similar fashion. The *Paulistas* kept quiet. But in Rio Grande there were problems with the arms that Flores had ordered abroad and suspicious behavior by some *Brigada* officers. Daltro Filho’s chief of staff, Col. Cordeiro de Farias, commented that it took thirty days to get the situation under control (Silva, 1970, p. 414-425; Júnior; Leite, 1983, p. 246-256; Camargo; Góes, 1981, p. 232).

Back in Rio de Janeiro, Góis and Cavalcanti were showing Vargas documents accusing the governors of Bahia and Pernambuco of having plotted with São Paulo and Rio Grande

against the federal government. Cavalcanti also complained that Minister of Justice Macedo Soares was not cooperating on running the state of war commission with Admiral Pais and him. One can imagine Vargas (1995, 2: p. 75-76) groaning to himself as he wrote in his Diary: "A crisis is created, or rather a new crisis".

From October 20th onward, Dutra met or spoke with Vargas on a daily basis. Curiously, Vargas did not note all of these conversations, but Dutra, who was now using the fateful term "coup d'état", kept a record. On the 21st, they talked about replacing Macedo Soares with Francisco Campos, and on the 23rd they disagreed about intervening in São Paulo; Dutra was fearful that it could cause a wide-spread reaction, even in the army. He preferred leaving São Paulo alone, and intervening instead in Pernambuco and Bahia. In the end all three were intervened. In these days too, in addition to the federalization of two battalions of *Mineiras* troops, the military police forces of the other states were taken over by federal authority (Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 74; Brandi, 1983, p. 119; Júnior; Leite, 1983, p. 257-258).

The next major step was to delude Salgado and his green shirts into thinking that they would have an important function in the new regime. Campos, who was writing the new constitution on the model of the Polish and Portuguese documents, had developed a friendly relationship with the ostensible Brazilian Führer and went so far as to get his comments on the draft document. On Sunday, October 24th, in his Guanabara Palace residence, Vargas met with the core conspirators, Minister of Justice Macedo Soares, Minister of Labor Agamemnon Magalhães, Governor Valladares, and Generals Dutra, Góis and Cavalcanti, to discuss how to carry out the "constitutional reform". They talked about military measures to control Pernambuco, Bahia, and São Paulo, the likely "nonconformist states". They did not reach consensus regarding how to legalize the new constitution. Cavalcanti contended that the Congress should approve it. Others preferred that the government declare it effective and subsequently submit it to a plebiscite. Dutra noted in his diary (perhaps referring to a separate conversation) that he and Vargas had agreed to present the draft constitution to the National Security Council, followed by a presidential manifesto to the nation. Two days later, Vargas met with Salgado in the home of a mutual friend. They got on well, Vargas regarding him as a "shrewd and intelligent hick." The president gave Salgado to understand that in the reorganized government the Education Ministry would be his.¹⁴

Emissaries from Valladares and Vargas winged their way to get agreement of the state governors for the change of regime. They skipped Pernambuco and Bahia whose governors would be deposed. Some unidentified generals were "conspiring" to mount a counter action. Such plotting, which unfortunately for historians has left few traces, may have motivated Dutra to take the precaution of face-to-face meetings with certain generals and to do some shifting of regional commanders. On October 26th he visited artillery units getting ready to proceed to Pinheiros, São Paulo, and then he went to Vila Militar to be assured that Cavalcanti

14 Vargas (1995, 2: p. 77-78, 574). Dulles (1967, p. 165) wrote that Vargas told Salgado that "the Armed Forces had decided to 'change the regime' and that he had agreed with them". His source is not clear.

was convinced of the necessity of their moves and would cooperate fully. On Sunday the 31st he was in Juiz da Fora talking with 4th Military Region commander Esteves who he found securely committed to the government. While in Minas, Dutra stopped by some army units and two state police units. The tension he felt exploded when General Valdomiro flagged down his car on the highway back to Rio. Vargas and uncle Valdomiro had been at a barbecue at a fazenda near Petrópolis and the general had made some suggestions of measures he might take as Inspector General of the group of military regions that included São Paulo. Vargas told him to submit the ideas to Dutra. Instead, in their beside-the-road conversation, Valdomiro presented them as if they were the president's orders. The minister got so upset that he wanted to resign then and there. Getúlio had to return to Rio the next day to "put things back in place". One can imagine that he and Dutra must have had an interesting exchange about uncle Valdomiro (Junior; Leite, 1983, p. 258-259; Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 79).

The next day, All Soul's Day, was a public holiday, but even so it was a busy one at Guanabara Palace. Vargas met with *gaúcho* allies, federal Deputies João Neves da Fontoura and João Baptista Luzardo, bringing them up-to-date. Luzardo then left for Rio Grande, where he told political colleagues that the coup was set for November 15th and that Vargas wanted them to behave as if nothing was about to happen. Finance Minister Souza Costa, who was the architect of the government's finances, was arguing for an end to the artificial support of coffee prices via government purchase and burning or dumping into the sea of millions of tons. Months before in May he had negotiated an agreement with the Roosevelt administration that allowed Brazil to separate United States and European foreign-debt negotiations, thereby facilitating a repayment plan and he had obtained guarantees of U. S. \$60 million to finance a Brazilian central bank. Because an important part of the plan for regime change involved suspending foreign-debt payments to allow arms purchases, Souza Costa's views carried considerable weight with the conspirators. Müller and Campos put in appearances, with the latter the president went over some changes in the language of the constitution and of the accompanying manifesto. Generals Dutra, Cavalcanti, Deschamps, and Daltro Filho made their reports and heard the latest on the "coming political and constitutional reform".¹⁵

On November 5th, *Correio da Manhã* broke the news that serious intrigues involving the government and the armed forces were afoot. Vargas wired Valladares, who had sent Deputy Negrão de Lima to inform the northeastern governors of the impending coup to put out the story that Negrão's mission had been to search out possible "legal political solutions". After trying to calm worried congressmen, he received a letter from Macedo Soares wanting to resign his post. The generals had long been impatient with his efforts to maintain a liberal attitude toward human rights and the regime's facade of the rule of law. The day before, Cavalcanti had complained to Vargas that he could no longer work with the minister. And later Macedo Soares came by the palace to say that he was worn out and suggested that

15 Vargas (1995, 2: p. 80); Carneiro (1977, 2: p. 208-210); "Artur Ferreira da Costa", DHBB, 2: p. 962.

either the general be removed or new commissioners named. Thinking on it for a night he had decided to quit. Significantly on the afternoon of the 5th Vargas met with the two service ministers, Góis and Müller, with whom he discussed the day's events. "After hearing them, I resolved to accept the resignation of the minister of justice" telling them that Campos would replace him. That night Campos accepted the post.¹⁶

On the afternoon of November 8th, opposition leaders met at the home of candidate Salles who told them that he was sending a letter to the military chiefs "denouncing the sinister conspiracy that was being hatched in official circles against [national] institutions". "If some powerful force", he warned, "does not intervene in time [...] a terrible blow suddenly will shake the nation to its deepest foundations. [...]. A long prepared plan is about to be executed by a small group of men, so small that they can be counted on one hand, intending to enslave Brazil. [...]. The nation turns to its military leaders: in suspense, awaiting the killing blow or the saving word". Apparently, Américo had declined to sign the manifesto, on the advice of friends, who thought it would likely hurt him more than do any good in stopping the coup. Ironically, at about the same time, Generals Dutra and Góis and Admiral Guilhem were at Campos's home going over the text of the new constitution.¹⁷

The next day, in the Chamber of Deputies, João Carlos Machado, an ally of Flores, read to the deputies Salles's appeal to the military to resist the coup. In the Senate, Paulo de Morais Barros, the nephew of President Prudente de Morais (1894-98), did the same. Luzardo, who had returned quickly from Porto Alegre, was on hand to witness the scene in the chamber. The "atmosphere was", he thought, "revolutionary". He hurried to the Catete Palace to inform Getúlio. He warned that "tomorrow the Nation will know everything. [...]. Either you stage the coup today, gaining the upper hand, or their revolution will be in the streets. Call Dutra and Góis. It has to be today". In the meantime the Salles manifesto was reaching the barracks and the lower officer ranks. As Dutra left his home he told his family: "Either Dr. Getúlio unleashes the coup today, or he won't be able to". In trying to stop the plot Salles succeeded in precipitating it.¹⁸

In the course of the planning Dutra and Góis strove to lower the profile of army involvement, perhaps due to what Getúlio called "the intrigue and division of the military". It was to that division and because D-Day was known to be the 11th that it was "necessary to precipitate the coup, taking advantage of surprise". With Müller, Campos, and Dutra, Vargas arranged the final steps. Dutra ordered the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Military Regions to stand ready, and alerted the other regions that highly important political events were about to occur and that they should be ready to act. However, it would not be federal troops stationed outside

¹⁶ Vargas (1995, 2: p. 80-81); on Negrão de Lima's mission see Carneiro (1977, 2: p. 208-210). Luzardo was Chair and Negrão was secretary of José Américo's election committee.

¹⁷ The manifesto's text appears in many places, I used Carneiro (1977, 2: p. 210-211). See also Scotten, Rio, 20 November, 832.00/1111 and /1106, RG 59, Nara and, on Américo's refusal to sign, Junior; Leite (1983, p. 267).

¹⁸ "João Carlos Machado", DHBB, 3: p. 1.989-1.991; "Paulo de Morais Barros", DHBB, 1: p. 331; Junior; Leite (1983, p. 269); Vargas (1995, 2: p. 82-83). Originally the plan was to stage the "reform" on Republic Day, November 15.

the closed houses of Congress, but the federal district's military police. At six a.m. Müller informed the acting president of the Senate that the Congress was dissolved, but *Mineiro* Pedro Aleixo, president of the Chamber of Deputies, suffered the embarrassment of being turned away by the police. Also in the early hours Dutra went to the São Cristóvão district to check on the readiness of the 1st Cavalry Regiment and the Guard Battalion. Vargas had Luzardo inform José Américo of the coup. Awakened very early by the head of his campaign committee, the candidate accepted the inevitable: "It wasn't I who failed; it was Brazil itself that was deaf" (Vargas, 1995, 2: p. 82-83; Carneiro, 1977, 2: p. 211-212).

On that overcast November 10th at ten in the morning, the cabinet, save for the dissenting minister of agriculture, signed the new constitution. During the day eighty members of congress sent congratulatory messages. Those associated with Salles were under house arrest. In the afternoon, the foreign minister called in the American ambassador to assure him that there would be no changes in foreign policy and that the government would be very liberal toward "foreign capital and foreigners who have legitimate interests in Brazil". That night at eight Vargas addressed the nation by radio. The political parties, infected by regionalism, he claimed, were subverting order, threatening national unity and endangering Brazil's existence with their polarizing rivalries and encouragement of civil disorder. To avoid Brazil's disintegration he had decided to restore the national government's authority. He reviewed the country's economic and military needs: suspension of foreign debt payments, construction of railroads and highways into the vast interior, and reequipping of the armed forces. All of which he linked directly to "the important problem of national defense". He emphasized that it was "urgently necessary to provide the armed forces with efficient equipment that will make them capable of assuring the country's integrity and independence". For those reasons there had been no other alternative to "installing a strong regime of peace, justice and labor".¹⁹

What did Vargas get from this army support? Clearly he kept the presidency until October 1945, but this meant more work and personal sacrifice. He may have loved power, but surely his motivations were more complex than enjoying being president. His thirst for power had other elements driving it. He and the generals shared a dream, perhaps not with the same details, but they dreamed of an important, flourishing nation spread over a splendidly magnificent portion of the Earth, living and producing in security and happiness. Vargas was dedicated to the improvement of Brazil and was confident in his ability to make the right decisions for his country. However, he was careful to seek advice and not to get too far ahead of the elite's opinion. He did not rob the treasury, and after his demise his family was not markedly wealthy.

The evidence available does not make clear, whether the dictatorship was Getúlio's idea or that of the generals. Getúlio once joked with a friend, who was also a high-ranking officer: "In 1930 I made the revolution with the *tenentes*, in 1937 with the generals". His daughter said

¹⁹ McCann (1973, p. 46-47); Vargas (1937, 5: p. 19-32), quotations from 28.

that he acted to prevent a military dictatorship, but the minutes of the generals' meeting of September 27th stated that they did not want one.²⁰ Does it matter who first expressed the idea? Perhaps not, but it does matter why the army supported dictatorship. On a personal and institutional level the coup insured that Dutra and Góis would remain in charge of the army, allowing them to shape its continuing professionalization according to their ideas.

The army, represented by its top generals, wanted to safeguard the country. They believed that the army could not do so under the regime of 1934, so they toppled the constitutional government in the name of the higher good of the security of the *Pátria*. Vargas made a pledge, or *compromisso*, that he would equip and arm the armed forces so that they could carry out their assigned duty, in return they would provide the muscle for a regime of force and national development. On November 17th Vargas wrote Aranha to explain why he had changed the constitution and to say that he needed him in Washington to obtain American capital for a great reform and development program centering on "large acquisitions of material for our military and railroads".²¹

In a series of speeches in early 1938 he repeated the *quid pro quo* in various ways. In his New Year's radio address he said that Brazil had "a mission in America and in the world" of mobilizing the riches of half a continent, which "we cannot leave undefended. We are stubbornly working on the equipping and preparation of the armed forces, which bring together thousands of Brazilians disposed to sacrifice everything for the integrity of the *Pátria*". In Porto Alegre, a week later, he told an elite audience that he was happy to be back in his native Rio Grande, now safe from the dangers of civil war. Even more pointedly, in his address at the banquet offered to him by the 2nd Independent Cavalry Regiment in his hometown of São Borja, he declared that he had "tried always to enhance the prestige of the army, because the greatness of the country is founded on the army. [...]. I have counted on the army, principally, to put down the 'political bosses', who were attempting to set up a regional hegemony to supercede the authority of the central power, weakening Brazil. Today, all this is assured". The mission of the armed forces was to guarantee order, so that there would be public confidence. And then stating the *compromisso* succinctly: "Give me order and tranquility and I will restore the finances, develop the economy, and construct all that which our raw materials could give us; [...] the iron necessary for our industries and for our progress, from locomotives to aero-planes. [...]. For this [...] I need order. But I trust in you who are the Nation".²²

20 Nélson de Mello quoted in Lima (1986, p. 204); "Nélson de Mello", DHBB, 3: p. 2.191-2.194. Vargas's daughter Alzira Vargas do Amaral Peixoto told me this in an interview on 10 August 1969. There is a discussion of this question in my *Brazilian-American Alliance, 1937- 1945*, p. 43.

21 Getúlio Vargas to O. Aranha, Rio, 17 November 1937, AOA, FGV/CPDOC. He also stressed that he wanted to use American capital "so that we would be able to avoid accepting offers from other countries [read Germany?], that I have resisted and intend to resist".

22 Vargas (1937, 5: p. 127-128 (New Year), p. 145 (Porto Alegre)); rest is from Robert M. Scotten, Rio, 19 January 1938, Dispatch 272, 832.001 Getúlio Vargas 10/47, RG59, Nara.

The clearest statement of this *compromisso* was that of Góis in his general staff report for 1937. Góis charged that the 1934 law specifying that army reorganization was to be completed within three years had not been fulfilled. The army was, he said, “fragile, more fictitious than real”, its big units were “dismantled [...] incapable of being mobilized in reasonable time and employed in any situation”. The General Staff’s worries about Brazil’s military weaknesses, he wrote, had intensified with the news that Chile was renewing its army’s equipment and that Argentina was improving its armament, expanding its weapons industry, and generally developing its military capabilities. In the United States, Roosevelt was calling for the “prompt and intensive equipping of its armed forces”. The nations of the globe were preparing for war. “The violence in Abyssinia, China, and Spain were”, Góis asserted, “true practice wars to test the means of destruction and protection” in rehearsal for a great and decisive struggle. Neither pacifist illusions nor Brazil’s turn-of-the-century Krupp artillery would be able to protect it”. On Brazil’s very borders the “ex-belligerents of the Chaco, despite the interminable peace conference in Buenos Aires, had returned to the path of complete rearmament, in expectation of another appeal to arms”. Góis warned that “the moment, in which we are living, imposes a radical transformation of [our] military organism [...] [because] we remain paralyzed, about a decade behind”. These circumstances motivated Góis and Dutra “to solicit insistently from the President of the Republic all the measures required for the reform of our [army’s] structure”.²³

He ended the report with a review of the “internal situation” in which he cast the struggle with Flores as the “extermination of *caudilhismo*”. He said that he had battled “with all of his soldier’s soul for inviolable national unity and for the prestige of authority”. In November 1935 “subversive elements [...] following instructions from Moscow”, he declared, had threatened that prestige. And finally, “the secret document captured last year” [Cohen Plan] had led “all the country’s classes, through their legitimate representatives, to agree that exceptional powers, in such emergency, should be given to the Sr. President of the Republic”. The need for the declaration of a state of war amounted, in his mind, to a condemnation of the 1934 regime as incapable of “promoting the happiness of the *Patria*”.²⁴

Góis had the “firm conviction that the action of November 10th responded to an inevitable national necessity and, at least, [was] a barrier against the political-military decomposition that had progressed to a well advanced degree”. The constitution of 1934 was proof, Góis lamented, that Brazilian statesmen had turned their backs on the “politics of reality”. They had evoked the ideas of other countries without paying attention to how those countries actually solved their problems. The 1934 regime had the trappings of constitutional rule without the mechanisms, mentality, and traditions that made such a government work. The army would do its part and “the government will do the rest,

23 EME (1938, p. 4-5, 8-9). “Hereditamos [...] um Exercito quasi que apenas nominal, desprovido do essencial e, portanto, imprestável para o campo de batalha”, (p. 5).

24 Ibidem, p. 37-39.

fulfilling the *compromisso* it assumed to equip the Armed Forces so that they can carry out the roles reserved to them”.²⁵

In May 1938, Dutra stated the *compromisso* more succinctly, writing that the government “only wished peace and tranquility to develop the country economically and financially. In order to carry out its program of national renewal the government depends on the army”. In his annual report to the president he affirmed that “the army no longer is interested in questions of party politics”. And clarifying somewhat, he assured Vargas, that if any rare intervention occurred, it would be “under the command of authorized chiefs to assure liberty, maintain law and order”. As a mere spectator of the political scene, following unfolding events from outside, “the army, every day more”, the minister assured the president, “constitutes the support on which the Government can count, anytime that noxious elements try to subvert order or attack the integrity of the *Pátria*”.²⁶

This moment changed the way the army thought of itself.²⁷ From 1937 onward the army, in the persons of its senior officers, asserted the institution’s right to be national moderator. Vargas’s *compromisso* opened the gate and the generals marched in.

Throughout the 1930s the general staff had pointed repeatedly to the United States as the best source of arms and of investments in industry. But just as Brazil was taking the turn toward more centralized and authoritarian rule, Germany was becoming an important market for Brazilian goods, particularly cotton and food stuffs, and an enthusiastic arms supplier. The famous pre-World War II American-German competition for Brazil had its origins not in ideology, but in the need of the Brazilian armed forces to arm themselves. In June 1935, the Vargas government had arranged an informal compensation trade arrangement with Germany that through elaborate exchange mechanisms allowed Brazil to use its natural or agricultural products to obtain German manufactures. The United States objected strenuously to this closed system that removed Brazilian-German trade from the broader international system based upon gold and convertible currencies. As a result of the close linkage between obtaining arms and Brazil’s international trade, the military were more than interested observers of foreign commerce; they were direct participants in the debates that shaped the government’s policies.

The Brazilian government’s attitude toward the United States prior to the turn of events of 1937 was to see the northern republic as a natural ally. After their cordial meeting in late 1936, Vargas proposed to Roosevelt that their representatives discuss full military and naval cooperation, including building of a naval base in Brazil for American use in the event of a war of aggression against the United States.²⁸ But Washington did not act and Brazilian leaders

25 Ibidem, p. 40-41.

26 MG, *Relatório...*, op. cit., p. 6-8.

27 It has been the view of scholars that with the overthrow of the Empire in 1889 the armed forces “assumed the function of the moderating power”. See, for example, Schneider (1991, p. 9).

28 Sumner Welles to F. D. Roosevelt, Washington, 26 January 1937, PPF 4473 (Vargas), FDRL. This contains Vargas’s message, which said in the event of an attack upon the United States “the vital interests of Brazil would necessarily be involved”.

turned to their own needs and solutions. The high American prices, unfavorable payment conditions, and neutrality laws led the Brazilians to turn to Europe, ordering artillery in Germany, light infantry arms in Czechoslovakia, and warships in England and Italy. In the United States they ordered aircraft and material to lay down some destroyers.²⁹

The Brazilian generals were painfully aware that their coastal artillery guarding the country's ports could not stop an Argentine, let alone a German, naval attack. According to Chief of Staff Góis Monteiro, it would take five years to make their defense plans operational.³⁰ It was to remedy the vulnerability of the ports and land frontiers that the army placed an order in Germany for [U. S.] \$55,000,000 in artillery and accessories in March 1938. The weapons were to be paid for mostly in compensation marks earned in the trade with Germany. From at least June 1936, Vargas had been worried about how to pay for the armaments. On June 15, 1936 he had noted in his diary that the only way to make the necessary purchases would be "a great reduction in payment of the foreign debt" and that could not be done under "the political regime that we are following" (Vargas, 1995, 1: p. 523-524). Ultimately, defense policy drove the Vargas-Dutra-Góis alliance that resulted in the authoritarian Estado Novo.

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²⁹ Oswaldo Aranha to Sumner Welles, Rio, 8 November 1938, AOA, FGV/CPDOC.

³⁰ Idem.

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Recebido em 10/3/2017

Aprovado em 25/4/2017