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COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER 97

## **Fake History?**

# **The Case of the "Falsified" (?) Letter: US-Argentina Relations, 1961-1962: John F. Kennedy, Arturo Frondizi, and a "Hopping Mad" US Ambassador**

By James G. Hershberg, January 2024





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**Christian F. Ostermann and Charles Kraus, Series Editors**

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# Fake History?

## The Case of the "Falsified"(?) Letter: US-Argentina Relations, 1961-1962: John F. Kennedy, Arturo Frondizi, and a "Hopping Mad" US Ambassador

James G. Hershberg\*

What follows is a diplomatic history mystery at the height of the Cold War. In 1961, as US President John F. Kennedy faced off against Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev, the importance of Latin America in American foreign policy spiked as the confrontation over Fidel Castro's Cuba intensified--highlighted by the humiliating failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in April. As the Kennedy Administration tried to rally the Organization of American States (OAS) behind its anti-Castro campaign, Washington focused in particular on maximizing support from the large Southern Cone countries, including Argentina. On the surface, relations between Washington and Buenos Aires, and between JFK and Argentine President Arturo Frondizi, appeared cordial, and in many respects they were: despite some visible tactical differences, Argentina, in principle, opposed communism and favored prime US Cold War aims such as freedom and democracy. On a personal level, JFK hosted Frondizi to two meetings in the United States, which were described as friendly and productive.

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\* An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Southeastern Council for Latin American Studies (SECOLAS) Annual Conference, Antigua, Guatemala, 25 March 2023. For assistance and comments, the author thanks Vera de la Fuente, Departamento de Archivos - Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires; Prof. Paula Alonso (George Washington University); Prof. Piero Gleijeses (Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies); the George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs for supporting the trip to Buenos Aires; the staff of the National Archives at College Park, the John F. Kennedy Library, and the DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University; Thomas S. Blanton and Malcolm Byrne, National Security Archive; Kai Bird; Prof. Mark Kramer (Cold War Studies Project, Davis Center, Harvard University); Prof. Renata Keller (University of Nevada, Reno); and Prof. Alan McPherson (Temple University).

Yet the tale related here reveals hidden tensions between the United States and Argentina, and between US officials and Frondizi and his circle, during JFK's first year in the White House. These strains, exacerbated by Cuba, were also connected with murky internal political maneuvering in Argentina, including rifts between Frondizi and military brass, that would culminate in early 1962 in a military takeover that led to more than two decades of increasingly brutal and repressive dictatorship. Part of the mystery probed in this paper regards Frondizi's concern--and charge, which he communicated directly to Kennedy-- that US embassy officials in Buenos Aires--agents of the Pentagon, the CIA, and even the ambassador himself--were plotting, perhaps in defiance of JFK's own wishes, with hardline Argentine military conspirators to pressure and even overthrow him.

At the heart of the story was Washington's ambassador to Argentina as 1961 began. In histories of the Cold War in Latin America, and in particular the US confrontation with Fidel Castro's Cuba, State Department aide and diplomat Roy Richard Rubottom Jr. usually makes a cameo appearance in the latter years of Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency, when, as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (1957-60), he was (judged historian Thomas G. Paterson) the "official most responsible for defining US Cuba policy."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most often remembered is his participation in the classified process that led to Ike's approval in March 1960 of the covert operation to overthrow Castro's revolutionary regime that evolved into the Bay of Pigs debacle a year later, in April 1961, under John F. Kennedy.<sup>2</sup>

Less often recalled, but examined in this paper, is the next phase of Rubottom's State Department career: his tenure as US ambassador to Argentina, from the summer of 1960 to the autumn of 1961. In Buenos Aires, he was first Eisenhower's and then

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 78; quoted in Douglas Martin, "R. Richard Rubottom, 98, U.S. Diplomat When Cuba Was on the Cusp of Revolution," *New York Times (NYT)*, 20 December 2010, p. A26.

<sup>2</sup> Rubottom participated in the meeting with Eisenhower at which he approved the plan. Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington, March 17, 1960, 2:30 p.m.; *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1958-1960, Vol. VI: Cuba* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), doc. 486.

Kennedy's envoy to the government of President Arturo Frondizi, who had taken office in May 1958 in the turbid aftermath of the overthrow three years earlier of dictator Juan Perón (who, from exile, after murky indirect negotiations, purportedly ordered his supporters to vote for Frondizi). As president, Frondizi presided over generally good US-Argentine relations, holding cordial summits with Eisenhower in the United States in early 1959, and in Argentina a year later. While domestically pursuing a "developmentalist" economic policy, seeking strong internal growth and rapid state-aided industrialization, Frondizi generally remained, in Cold War terms, a loyal US ally, opposing communism generally and in Cuba in particular, and in turn sought increasing US economic, financial, and technological help on assorted fronts.<sup>3</sup>

At this point, I am going to depart from normal scholarly form and talk a bit about how I came to write this paper, which I absolutely did not plan to do. In December 2021, in my first plane trip during the pandemic, I flew from Washington, D.C., to Buenos Aires, Argentina, to conduct archival research related to my manuscript on Brazil, Cuba, and the Cold War in Latin America in the early 1960s; Argentina had collaborated with Brazil on various mediation efforts between Washington (both under Eisenhower and Kennedy) and Fidel Castro's Cuba, and I thought some useful Argentine materials might have recently opened up in Frondizi's presidential papers in Argentina's national library, the *Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno*. Sure enough, during a week of research in Frondizi's collection and in Argentina's foreign ministry archives, I found many useful records pertaining to the topic I had come to investigate. However, my attention was diverted when I encountered the following document:

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Celia Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-62* (London: MacMillan, 1993).

EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY HAND

American Embassy,  
Buenos Aires, Argentina,  
May 2, 1961.

PERSONAL AND STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Dear George:

Excuse my breaking in on you this way. I know this is not in your particular bailiwick but there is a storm brewing here which has me on edge and can turn out to be a nasty affair in general.

It seems that Frondizi has sent up a sharp note claiming that I have been meddling in Argentine domestic affairs, etc., etc. Pending confirmation from the Department and a chance to state my case at length, here is a short summary of the situation to use as you think best. If you can get J.F.K. directly interested, so much the better.

A couple of weeks ago Frondizi called me in and bawled me out for attending a meeting of senior army officers. In effect, this amounted to accusing me of complicity in the plot by General Toranzo Montero to overthrow his Government.

I did the best I could to calm him down, explaining what I considered my rights and duties to be. At this he blew his top and practically threw me out of his office.

Frankly, I had a feeling that a showdown was coming. According to instructions, I had repeatedly told Frondizi that we were ready to increase our aid program by a substantial amount, but we expected him to break relations with Cuba and to urge Brazil, Chile and Uruguay to follow suit. However, at no time could I get a clear commitment from him.

I am convinced Frondizi is playing a tricky game with us. He is definitely giving priority to building up popularity with the voters before the next congressional and gubernatorial elections. As a result, he is making dangerous concessions to leftist groups and pro-business elements.

The Honorable  
McGeorge Bundy,  
Special Assistant to the President,  
The White House.



- 2 -

We lost a good friend last week when he fired Alsogaray who headed the Ministry of Economy. The new people at the Ministry are closely connected with Argentine exporters tied up with European markets and with an eye on new markets in Asia and Africa. A good part of the press now blames the continuing economic distress on Alsogaray and pulls no bones in linking him up with American investments.

A day or so later Frondizi dismissed Foreign Minister Taboada. The new man, Mujica, is a conservative, but he is definitely not running the show. Frondizi is now practically his own Foreign Minister, with Camilion, Deputy Foreign Minister, and Musich, an economic adviser, as his mouthpieces. These fellows put on the blackmail act every time we ask for cooperation on Cuba, but Frondizi is actually pulling the strings.

Other new Ministers, like Urien (Agriculture), Blanco (Industry) and Acevedo (Public Works) cannot be relied upon, even though they are General Aramburu's people. The General is dead set against Toranzo and this tends to pull him toward Frondizi. In fact he is now supporting the President's economic program.

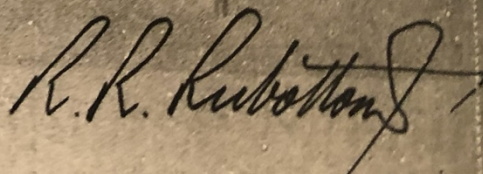
These are the highlights of present developments. If we don't put a stop to this trend, we can kiss our Argentine policy good-bye, and with it lose our South American anchor. It is crystal clear to me that our big headache is not ~~Cuba~~ in Brazil, but Frondizi right here.

Whether I stay on the job or not, I see no other way for the United States except to continue putting pressure on Frondizi by encouraging Toranzo and other dissident groups, particularly in the Navy where the top brass is on our side. Clement, Minister of the Navy, and Vago, Chief of Naval Operations, have told us in so many words that they would favor participation of the Argentine fleet in any joint action against Cuba. My staff and I are continuing to maintain contact as discretely as possible. We are taking a calculated risk but I see no other way.

The point I want to get across, George, is that my problem with Frondizi stems from the over-all problem of implementing the Department's policy at the present time. Yet I am convinced it is a correct policy and must be carried out as vigorously as possible, if we are to prevent Frondizi from double crossing us.

Thanks and regards.

Faithfully,



[US embassy letterhead]

BY HAND

American Embassy,  
Buenos Aires, Argentina,  
May 2, 1961.

PERSONAL AND STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Dear George:

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The Honorable  
McGeorge Bundy  
Special Assistant to the President,  
The White House

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Thanks and regards.  
Faithfully,

R.R. Rubottom [signed]

The letter was located in a section of Frondizi's papers containing materials from Argentina's intelligence agency, S.I.D.E. (*Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado*; Secretariat of State Intelligence).<sup>4</sup> I immediately doubted its authenticity ("real?" I

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<sup>4</sup> Código 03.3.9.2.2., [SIDE Intelligence information--international], UC1, Subfondo Presidencia Arturo Frondizi, Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno, Buenos Aires, Argentina [hereafter AF, BNMM]. This and all translations from Spanish-language Argentine documents is unofficial.

jotted). First, it was addressed to "George"--and I knew (and his biographer, Kai Bird, later confirmed to me<sup>5</sup>) that McGeorge Bundy's friends called him "Mac"; later in the letter, he was addressed as "George" again, precluding that the earlier moniker had been a typographical error or distorted dictation.<sup>6</sup> Second, as I examined the letter, one adjective repeatedly occurred to me: "undiplomatic." Putting in writing such candid, even incriminating thoughts about conspiring with "dissident groups" in Argentina's military to pressure an ostensibly friendly foreign leader, blatantly interfering in Argentina's internal affairs, seemed aberrant, especially for an experienced diplomat; Rubottom had joined the foreign service in 1947, rose up the ladder in foreign postings (Bogota, Madrid), then served for more than three years in the high-level job of assistant secretary for inter-American affairs.<sup>7</sup> I immediately wondered who might've had the motive to damage US-Argentine relations, or Rubottom in particular, in such a manner. On the other hand, if a forgery, the letter contained considerable information that might be corroborated, or, conversely, refuted, in declassified US records, and I resolved to check when I returned home.

The next day, elsewhere in Frondizi's files,<sup>8</sup> I found a Spanish translation of the 2 May 1961 Rubottom to Bundy letter, with a handwritten Spanish-language notation at the bottom:

*"Vi copia fotografica de la carta.-  
- Todo es lo venia en esa carta  
simple que entró al país.-"*

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<sup>5</sup> Kai Bird, e-mail to author, 4 February 2023.

<sup>6</sup> An issue also arose over the letter's closing signature. I found many letters Rubottom sent to State Department colleagues and he signed them all "Dick," not "R.R. Rubottom" (which is typed below the handwritten signature) as is written here. These include a letter dated the same day, 2 May 1961: Rubottom to O'Connor, 2 May 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, "113 ARGENTINA 1961 US Ambassador" folder, box 2, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives (NA). Could a forger have had access only to a carbon copy rather than an original of a Rubottom letter? Of course, it's *conceivable* he would correspond more formally to a senior official he did not know well and sign the letter differently.

<sup>7</sup> Rubottom biographical sketch enc. to L.D. Battle (Melvin L. Monfull), State Dept., to Ralph A. Dungan, White House, "Call on the President by Ambassador Rubottom," 15 May 1961, in "Argentina: General, 1961" folder, box 111, President's Office Files, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), Boston. Also see R. Richard Rubottom, Jr., as told to Janis Williams, *Lifelong Diplomat* (Waco, TX: Nortex Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Código 03.4.7.5, Caja 35, AF, BNMM.

*La carta simple fue destruido por SIDE.-"*

"I saw a photographic copy of the note.  
- All of this came in a simple letter that entered the country.-  
The simple letter was destroyed by SIDE.-"

Although the author of this handwritten note was not indicated, it seemed to suggest SIDE involvement with the "simple" (original?) letter, perhaps its interception (creation?) as well as its destruction.

Since finding that letter--and other documents in Frondizi's papers about his ensuing campaign to convince JFK to replace Rubottom--I have reviewed State Documents in RG 59 at the US National Archives in College Park, and in the National Security Files (and a few others) at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, seeking relevant contextual documentation. The results were mixed.

Although US-Argentina relations were considered good at the outset of the Kennedy Administration, I had known from my prior research that strains arose in March 1961 over Cuba. Of course, this was in the run-up to the Bay of Pigs invasion in mid-April, and the Kennedy Administration was ardently seeking maximum backing from key Latin American countries for its strong anti-Castro stance. In late February/early March, senior JFK aide Adolf A. Berle visited Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil to rally support (without, of course, disclosing the planned attack). Amid this diplomatic build-up, on February 23, Cuban foreign minister Raúl Roa sent a 25-page-long letter in Latin American counterparts complaining of US aggression and, *inter alia*, expressing a willingness to accept possible mediation to start exchanges between Washington and Havana. US officials, seeking to destroy, not negotiate with, Castro's regime, and again insisting that the dispute with Cuba was not bilateral but hemispheric, had zero interest in Roa's overture and felt confident that US friends in Latin America, including Argentina, fully agreed. On February 28, Rubottom saw Frondizi's foreign minister, Diogenes Taboada, to discuss Roa's note, which Taboada (who admitted to only skimming it) attributed to Cuba's "economic asphyxiation" and internal political pressure. He assured Rubottom his government had no intention of responding

favorably to Roa, since mediation now was pointless unless both sides agreed to it (which was clearly not the case).<sup>9</sup>

Yet on March 4, to Washington's chagrin and rude surprise, Argentina suddenly offered its "good offices" (*amistosos oficios*) to, as Taboada simultaneously wrote Cuban Foreign Minister Roa and US Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "resolve or alleviate" US-Cuban "tension." To advance this aim, Buenos Aires proposed to send special emissaries to Washington and Havana.<sup>10</sup> To Rubottom's distinct annoyance, the Argentines, after beseeching Washington not to make any move on Cuba without consulting Buenos Aires beforehand, had acted "without so much as a tip of the hat."<sup>11</sup>

Taken aback by the apparent shift, sensing that Argentina feared an assault on Castro by Washington-backed Cuban exiles would roil the hemisphere, US officials argued that the Cuban note was obviously sent "in desperation" and Argentina's action would only help prolong Castro's rule and—the real underlying concern—"hurt action [by] anti-Castro Cuban groups." However, when confronted with such arguments by US chargé d'affaires Henry A. Hoyt (Rubottom was in Tierra del Fuego on March 4 but returned to Buenos Aires the next day), an Argentine foreign office economics advisor believed close to Frondizi, Arnaldo T. Musich, "just brushed question aside." US complaints that Argentina, by its move, seemed to endorse Cuba's contention that its

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<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Rubottom-Taboada conversation, 28 February 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, "321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 66, 28 February 1961, 320 Cuba Mar 1961, box 122, Classified General Records, 1941-63, U.S. Embassy, Rio de Janeiro, RG 84, NA. On Kennedy, Frondizi, Cuba, and U.S.-Argentine relations, see, e.g., Edwin McCammon Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), esp. pp. 265-78; Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), esp. pp. 56-65; and David M.K. Sheinin, *Argentina and the United States: An Alliance Contained* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), esp. pp. 113-121, 134-138.

<sup>10</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1011, 11 pm, 4 March 1961, and Taboada to Rusk, 4 March 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol. X: Cuba, January 1961-September 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997), docs. 52-53. Since Rubottom was away on March 4, Frondizi aide Arnaldo T. Musich informed chargé d'affaires Henry A. Hoyt "in confidence" of Argentina's action, but the offer was already being publicly reported.

<sup>11</sup> Rubottom to Thomas C. Mann, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, 29 March 1961, Central Decimal Files (CDF; all references are to CDF 1960-1963) 737.00/3-2761, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

conflict was bilateral with Washington, rather than with the hemisphere as a whole, merely elicited a denial and “banalities re desire to be helpful.”<sup>12</sup> Sheepishly yet “stubbornly,” Taboada insisted on March 7 to a disconcerted Rubottom that Argentina had not changed its basic stand on Cuba—it still considered Castro a “blotch on Americas and hopes for his downfall”—yet defended the overture as a step toward eventual Organization of American States (OAS) action after Havana rejected mediation and in any case preferable to unilateral US military intervention.<sup>13</sup> The foreign minister, Rubottom reported, was “evasive” when pressed on why Argentina had flip-flopped after the assurances Taboada had given him on February 28.<sup>14</sup>

In Washington, scoffing at the Argentine offer, State Department aides steered reporters to JFK’s State of the Union address statement that, unlike economic and trade disputes, “Communist domination in this hemisphere can never be negotiated.”<sup>15</sup> Rusk and other aides pressed Argentina's ambassador for an explanation, especially after a recent insistence that the United States not take any important Cuba moves without informing or, better, consulting Argentina beforehand, but del Carril said he knew nothing beyond Taboada's "good offices" letter.<sup>16</sup> The sudden Argentine bid move reinforced the impression of Frondizi’s “caginess” that JFK aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. had discerned on a recent visit. While agreeing Castro’s regime was “essentially communist,” Frondizi was “exceedingly elusive” when asked what concrete acts Argentina might take or support, either by itself or through the OAS.<sup>17</sup>

Both in the Buenos Aires embassy and the CIA, US analysts attributed the surprise move to the traditional Argentina-Brazil rivalry, with Frondizi loathe to let

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1011, 4 March 1961, cited above.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1026, 6 pm, 7 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1032, 11 am, 8 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

<sup>15</sup> E.W. Kenworthy, “U.S. Will Reject Cuba Mediation,” *NYT*, 7 March 1961, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk-del Carril, 3:30 pm, 6 March 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA; O'Connor to Files, "Subject: Argentine Initiative to Mediate Cuban Problem," 8 March 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, box 2, 321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961), RG 59, NA.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, “Report to the President on Latin American Mission, February 12-March 3, 1961,” 10 March 1961, “Latin America, General, 1960-61” folder, box WH-40, Schlesinger papers, JFKL.

Brazilian President Jânio Quadros and his “independent foreign policy” take center stage.<sup>18</sup> US analysts believed Frondizi himself had engineered the gambit, together with a few aides. These included men such as Rogelio Frigerio-- the mysterious economist, newspaper publisher, and businessman with Marxist-Leninist past inclinations, a former Frondizi aide rumored to remain his "closest advisor," a figure US officials distrusted, and a large character in this story<sup>19</sup>--and Musich (the CIA procured his memo urging mediation<sup>20</sup>), who from a “nationalistic” (as the Americans viewed it) foreign policy perspective worried Argentina might miss the boat if Kennedy and Khrushchev resolved Cuba at the superpower level, or if Brazil and/or Mexico got the jump on mediation—and didn’t mind putting Washington on the spot.<sup>21</sup>

As for Rubottom, when he returned to Buenos Aires, he immediately began telling interested interlocutors, whether Argentine or foreign, that the United States had not been given any advance notice of the proposition, let alone that it had instigated Argentina to make the move (as some Frondizi aides were said to be claiming).<sup>22</sup> Though under instructions to clarify these questions "without indicating annoyance at Argentine initiative,"<sup>23</sup> Rubottom's straightforward retelling of the circumstances inevitably implied US displeasure at the lack of advance notice or consultation prior to the March 4 step. Nor was Rubottom averse to relating that only a few days beforehand, Taboada had assured him that Argentina had no intent to respond positively to Roa's letter, and a

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<sup>18</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1011, 4 March 1961, *FRUS. 1961-1963*, X: 112-114 (doc. 52); also CIA, Central Intelligence Bulletin, 7 March 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald C. Newton, "Frigerio, Rogelio (1914–2006)," in Jay Kinsbruner and Erick D. Langer, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture* (Vol. 3 2nd ed.) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008), p. 324.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), desp. 1169, “Subject: Document Setting Forth Rationale for Argentina Offer of Good Offices with Respect to Cuba,” 17 March 1961 (author MDR), CDF 611.37/2-161, box 1224, RG 59.

<sup>21</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1052, 9 March 1961, CDF 737.00, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., memorandum of conversation, Rubottom and (West) German ambassador to Argentina, 8 March 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, box 2, 321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961), RG 59, NA.

<sup>23</sup> Deptel 1358 to Buenos Aires, 9 March 1961, CDF 737.00, box 1610, RG 59, NA.



few days before that, Argentina had sought a US pledge that it would not make major moves on Cuba without telling Buenos Aires first.

As Washington dallied replying to Taboada (despite Argentine nagging to receive a special envoy<sup>24</sup>), the Cubans soon eased US worries about getting enmeshed in lengthy diplomacy by brushing Buenos Aires aside: Roa had told a Brazilian diplomat he was “surprised and happy” at Argentina’s “good offices” offer, but on March 8 he wrote Taboada regretfully declining mediation, as US behavior rendered talks “lamentably useless” despite Havana’s “favorable disposition for such discussion.”<sup>25</sup> On March 22, Rusk also politely deflected the “good offices” proposition, embracing the idea only if Cuba showed its intent to split from the “Sino-Soviet bloc.”<sup>26</sup>

As the overture foundered, criticism mounted from Frondizi’s political rivals, not only major newspapers but also, ominously, military figures who denounced what they called an unwise divergence from hemispheric solidarity against Cuba’s tightening bonds with the communist world.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps most alarming to Frondizi's circle, Rubottom continued to make these points clear to senior military figures unhappy at the “good offices” offer even after Roa's March 8 reply to Taboada effectively mooted it. In one case, Rubottom spoke to War Secretary Rosendo M. Fraga, who said he could not

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<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Memoranda of Conversation, “Argentine Proposal to Use Good Offices in Cuban Problem,” 13 March 1961, and “Argentine Proposal of Good Offices in Cuban Problem,” 16 March 1961, both CDF 611.37, box 1224, RG 59, NA.

<sup>25</sup> “Cuba Bars Argentine Aid,” *NYT*, 9 March 1961, p. 10; “surprised and happy”: Canadian Embassy, Havana, tel. 94, “Brazilian Attitude towards Cuba,” 9 March 1961, file 2444-40 pt. 6, vol. 4183, LAC; Brazilian Ambassador, Buenos Aires (Fragoso), to Brazilian Foreign Minister Arinos, 24 March 1961, 920(22)(24h)—*RELAÇÕES POLITICAS E DIPLOMATICAS—EE.UU./CUBA—1960/1964/1966*, Brazilian foreign ministry archives (AMRE), Brasília; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires, tel. 1043, 9 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

<sup>26</sup> Deptel 1295 to Buenos Aires, 18 March 1961, *FRUS. 1961-1963*, X, doc. 67. Rubottom delivered Rusk's note to Taboada on March 22, and urged Washington not to receive, “under any pretext,” a special emissary if Argentina still insisted on sending one. US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1136, 4 pm, 22 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-2261, box 1610, RG 59, NA; “pretext”: US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1148, 2 pm, 23 March 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Brazilian Embassy, Buenos Aires (Fragoso), tel. 80, 8 March 1961, and tel. 92, 11 March 1961, both 920(22)(24h)—*RELAÇÕES POLITICAS E DIPLOMATICAS—EE.UU./CUBA—1960/1964/1966*, AMRE; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1037, 8 March 1961, and unnumbered tel., 10 March 1961, both CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA; Canadian Embassy, Buenos Aires, n.l. 128, “Argentina and the United States-Cuban Problem,” 13 March 1961, file 2444-40 pt. 6, vol. 4183, RG 25, LAC; and “Army in Argentina Criticizes Frondizi,” *NYT*, 15 March 1961, p. 13.

understand the failure to consult either US officials or "him and military colleagues" considering the step's import. Rubottom, conveying his belief that Frondizi was behind the move despite his momentary absence on a trip to the Antarctic, underlined to Gen. Fraga that good Argentina-US relations and mutual trust meant advance consultation on decisions "so vital to hemisphere peace and security."<sup>28</sup> Though suspicious of Frondizi (he would later resign to protest his August 1961 meeting with Che Guevara), Fraga for the moment preserved military support for Frondizi remaining in power, resisting maneuvering for a revolt from Army Commander-in-Chief Lt.-Gen. Carlos S. Toranzo Montero, who had triggered a comparable crisis the previous fall.<sup>29</sup>

Angered by the "good offices" move, which he thought "opens the floodgates to the crudest leftists," Montero since early March had spread the word that Frondizi should be overthrown, owing to his Peronista ties, corruption, and other sins.<sup>30</sup> A former US diplomat in South America who had just visited Buenos Aires related this in Washington to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas C. Mann, but said he had not discussed the matter with Rubottom; Montero, he related, thought Rubottom had an "unduly optimistic" view of Frondizi.<sup>31</sup> With tension high amid rumors of a military coup attempt, Montero, accused of having "dictatorial pretensions," was forced to resign, with Fraga taking his place.<sup>32</sup> Frondizi's position seemed safe, for the

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<sup>28</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), unnumbered tel., 10 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA. A few days later, Hoyt spoke to the head of Argentina's naval intelligence, who expressed his opposition to the Cuba "good offices" proposal "in quite strong terms," called it a "FRIGERIO-MUSICH move," and said the "military was not at all happy about" it. Memorandum of Conversation, Hoyt-Capt. Antonio REVUELTO, 13 March 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, "321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

<sup>29</sup> Re Fraga: "Regime Seen Backed by Argentine Army," *NYT*, 25 March 1961, p. 5; "War Aide Resigns in Buenos Aires; Secretary Protests Meeting of Frondizi and Guevara," *NYT*, 20 August 1961, p. 42. On Montero and the October 1960 crisis, see, e.g., Robert A. Potash, *The Army & Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962: Perón to Frondizi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), chap. 8, and Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-62*, esp. pp. 197-199.

<sup>30</sup> "floodgates": Montero quoted in Potash, *Army & Politics in Argentina*, p. 329.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Mann-Adm. Arthur Ageton (ex-U.S. amb. to Paraguay), "Political Views of Argentine General Toranzo Montero," 17 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

<sup>32</sup> Edward C. Burks, "Aide in Argentina Said to Quit Post," *NYT*, 23 March 1961, p. 11; CIA, *Central Intelligence Bulletin*, 24 March 1961, p. 7, at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00975A005600210001-6.pdf>; Potash, *Army & Politics in Argentina*, pp. 328-31; Szusterman, *Frondizi*, p. 199.

moment, although the embassy sensed lingering discord and grumbling in the military camp.<sup>33</sup>

Studying the "good offices" affair, the US embassy in Buenos Aires perceived the resurgence of a "Frigerio clique," led by Frigerio but also counting in key slots Musich and ex-foreign minister Carlos Florit, recovering from what was now seen as a temporary loss of influence when Frondizi sidelined them some months before. A long mid-March Rubottom and Hoyt lunch at the embassy with Musich seemed to confirm his rising stock and sponsorship of the "good offices" initiative, which he ardently defended. The group was seen as seeking more US aid for Argentine economic development through the use of "demagoguery from time to time" and playing relations on a *quid pro quo* basis, to avoid letting Brazil "get ahead of it." The embassy worried that Taboada might be replaced by a "Frigerio man" and while the "Frigerio clique" around Frondizi seemed to be gaining sway, Economics Minister Alvaro C. Alsogaray's had "diminished considerably." "If Frigerio-Florit-Musich are calling the shots," the analysis observed, "United States interests will probably suffer a set-back." Conversely, if Alsogaray regained influence, the outlook improved.<sup>34</sup> In the same vein, that same day, March 17, Britain's embassy in Buenos Aires sent London a report that "the evil genius Rogelio Frigerio ... [had been] responsible for the ["good offices"] idea in the hope of putting pressure on the Americans for more aid while at the same time pleasing left wingers."<sup>35</sup>

Near the end of March, Rubottom wrote a fairly candid letter on his handling of the "good offices" business, not to McGeorge Bundy but to Assistant Secretary Mann.

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1193, 30 March 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Hoyt), desp. 1166, "Present Political Situation in Argentina and Possible Developments," 17 March 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA. Lunch with Musich: U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1101, 8 pm, 15 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA; memorandum of Musich-Hoyt-Rubottom conversation, 15 March 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, "321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

<sup>35</sup> British Embassy (Buenos Aires) to Foreign Office, 17 March 1961, FO 371/155823, The National Archives, Kew Gardens, England [hereafter TNA]; Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-62*, p. 201 and fn 162, p. 287.

His efforts, he explained, were mainly aimed "to convey enough surprise and unhappiness to try to deter [the Argentines] from similar action in the future," and to assume future relations on such important matters will return to their prior course. Recounting the affair's "stark facts," emphasizing the incongruity of the mediation attempt after prior conversations, Rubottom urged a "high-level official" approach to try to get Frondizi's government back into line.<sup>36</sup>

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Recall that in his purported May 2 letter to Bundy, Rubottom recounted that during a conversation a "couple of weeks ago"--in other words, around mid-April--Frondizi had "bawled me out for attending a meeting of senior army officers" and effectively "accus[ed] me of complicity in the plot by General Toranzo Montero to overthrow his Government." Rubottom had tried to calm him down, he added, explaining his "rights and duties," but at this, Frondizi "blew his top and practically threw me out of his office."

I found no report from Rubottom of such a tempestuous, confrontational meeting with Frondizi, which surely would have justified a dramatic priority cable.

Instead, I found Rubottom's reports on two April 1961 conversations with Frondizi. On April 6, they discussed the "good offices" approach. The exchange seemed polite, even cordial, at least on the surface, but also included moments of acute personal disagreement. In the midst of their half-hour talk on various topics, Rubottom related, Frondizi turned to him and raised "a matter that involved both my position as Ambassador and our personal relationship, which extended back to the time he had assumed office." (Along with Vice President Nixon, Rubottom had represented Eisenhower at Frondizi's inauguration in May 1958.) "The President," Rubottom continued, "removed his glasses and was smiling and good-humored during the discussion which ensued." Stressing Argentina's friendship and "clear and unequivocal alignment" with the United States, Frondizi said the "good offices" offer "had led to

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<sup>36</sup> Rubottom to Mann, 29 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-2761, box 1610, RG 59, NA.

certain misunderstandings which he hoped were now cleared up." Making a personal complaint, Frondizi said "he was aware of my discussions of the offer with certain of his Ministers who were not directly responsible for foreign policy matters" and "hoped that I would take up such matters in the future either with him directly or with the Foreign Minister [Taboada], since this would avoid certain internal problems for him."

Rubottom thanked Frondizi for his "frankness" and, responding on "the same basis of friendship," recalled that he had reported the president's and foreign minister's views to superiors, but given the "sharp departure from the [Argentine] government's previous position regarding Cuba," he had a duty to express US views "to senior officials in his government who raised the subject with me, and in similar circumstances I would do the same thing again." Rubottom told Frondizi of US official "concern" about his failure to inform Washington before proposing "good offices," though of course Argentina had a "sovereign right" to do as it pleased, and expressed hope that in the future, "effective consultation must be a two-way street," otherwise more difficulties would arise. He pointedly told Frondizi that Taboada had assured him shortly before the offer that Argentina's attitude toward Cuba had not changed, which magnified the resulting surprise four days later when it was made. To all this, Rubottom reported, Frondizi "did not respond" and the president, smiling, went on to other matters. The US ambassador said he assured Frondizi of his intent to retain close ties with him and the foreign minister and "placed a high premium on their confidence and friendship."

Sending this secret memcon to Mann, Rubottom addressed the factional struggle around Frondizi. He thought the "Frigerio-Musich-Florit group" was "under very heavy pressure as a result of the good offices business." The long talk he and Hoyt had with Musich on March 15 showed him "at his unruffled, dialectical best," while Florit, in three meetings, had ranged from "emotionally friendly to almost insulting." There was no hint he had met Frigerio, and he recommended that nobody "high in the Administration" receive him (he was visiting Washington and hoped to see JFK), since this would "raise

the specter once again of military pressure on the President [Frondizi] because of the Frigerio influence."<sup>37</sup>

This April 6 Rubottom-Frondizi conversation was almost certainly the one nominally referred to in the May 2 Rubottom-Bundy purported letter, since the only other April 1961 talk between the US ambassador and Argentine president, so far as I could determine, occurred on April 25--only a week before the supposed letter--and concerned less sensitive and contentious matters, such as Frondizi's recent summit with Brazil's president Quadros and future, post-Bay of Pigs Cuba policy (not the late "good offices" tempest).<sup>38</sup>

Unless Rubottom were being absurdly euphemistic in the April 6 memcon he sent confidentially to Mann (and did not cable or send to other State Department officials, which would mean wider circulation), there was no sign that Frondizi, while clearly upset that Rubottom had spoken to Argentine officials unrelated to foreign policy about US annoyance at the "good offices" offer, "bawled [Rubottom] out for attending a meeting of senior army officers" and effectively accused him of "complicity" in Montero's plot to overthrow him. (I found no evidence that Rubottom had met personally with Montero, but he, and Hoyt, did see some military figures angry at the "good offices" letter and conceivably involved in Montero's plotting.) That may have been implicit in his criticism of Rubottom's loquacity, but hardly in such hostile terms. Nor was there any indication that, when Rubottom tried to defend his conduct, Frondizi "blew his top" and "practically threw [Rubottom] out of his office."

Clearly, though, Rubottom's defense of his actions did not satisfy Frondizi. I found no sign of the "sharp note claiming that I have been meddling in Argentine domestic affairs, etc., etc." that Rubottom supposedly suspected Frondizi had sent. Yet,

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<sup>37</sup> Rubottom to Mann, 7 April 1961, enc. Rubottom-Frondizi memcon, 6 April 1961, CDF 737.00/7-2261, box 1617, RG 59, NA. Rubottom also recommended against receiving Frigerio at a high level in U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1238, 6 pm, 7 April 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>38</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1358, 8 pm, 25 April 1961, CDF 737.000/4-2561, box 1612; US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1360, 8 pm, 25 April 1961, CDF 632.35/4-2561; both RG 59, NA.

likely irritating the US envoy, Argentina's president did in fact transmit to senior US officials his complaint about Rubottom. On April 10, Argentina's ambassador in Washington Emilio Donato del Carril, on instructions from Buenos Aires, called on Secretary of State Rusk to convey an "oral message" from Frondizi. It claimed that the "good offices" offer had actually "worked out very well," provoking Cuba's rejection and a sensible US reply that "had placed matters in their proper perspective." The message also related that Cuba had sent a new note to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Ecuador again raising the possibility of mediation--this time advocated by "the neutralist nations of Asia and Africa"--but Argentina was "replying negatively to this proposition."

However, the "primary purpose" of his call, del Carril told Rusk, was to relay, on Frondizi's instructions, that "President Frondizi is disturbed over the remarks which Ambassador Rubottom has made publicly and repeatedly" on the "good offices" matter. Rusk asked for examples, but del Carril said he only had "very general" instructions and could not be more explicit or specific. Rusk promised to investigate and instructed two senior State Department aides present--Acting Assistant Secretary of Inter-American Affairs (Mann was heading to Mexico City to become US ambassador) Wymberley Coerr and C.A. Boonstra, director of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs' Office of East Coast Affairs--to take responsibility for doing so. Rusk pledged to inform del Carril of the inquiry's results.<sup>39</sup>

Afterwards, Boonstra drafted a cable to Rubottom relating Frondizi's complaints via del Carril, adding that the Argentine ambassador had not cited examples, pleading only general instructions, "but [they] obviously derive from your official and social statements repeatedly critical of Argentine proffer good offices." Boonstra added an advisory comment, which Coerr approved: "Argentine Government evidently making all-out effort [to] counter widespread criticism [of] its action by contending it really is diplomatic triumph. Presumably this handicapped if your posture known to be critical."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, "President Frondizi Disturbed over remarks of Ambassador Rubottom," 10 April 1961, CDF 737.00/4-761, box 1611, RG 59, NA.

<sup>40</sup> Deptel 1435 to Amembassy Buenos Aires, 10 April 1961, CDF 611.37/4-1061, box 1224, RG 59, NA.

So Rubottom knew Frondizi had groused to his boss, Rusk, about his behavior. Simultaneously, his own view of Frondizi soured further when a classified telegram arrived from the US ambassador in Quito, reporting that Ecuador's foreign minister had disclosed that Argentina's envoy had just relayed a proposal for his country to join Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico to collectively "mediate US/Cuban problem."<sup>41</sup> Rubottom was "shocked" to learn of Argentina's "continuing [mediation] initiative," which clearly suggested that, despite myriad US attempts to edify him (including his own), Frondizi *still* did not share Washington's fervent belief that the confrontation with Cuba was not bilateral but hemispheric. In a frank analysis of Frondizi's handling of the Cuba issue, Rubottom was willing to credit his affirmations of solidarity with the "free world" and the United States and forgive "one-time aberration like March 4 offer good offices," but suspected he still hoped to convert his mediation offer into a diplomatic triumph, still reduced the entire Cuba issue to a bilateral US-Cuba spat, and that his actions reflected the now prevailing "Musich-Florit line" at the foreign office. Sensing Frondizi felt "emboldened" to proffer mediation since Montero's ouster, Rubottom even suspected that a letter from Taboada claiming sole authorship of the "good offices" offer, circulated to the military, was a fraud to camouflage Frondizi's personal involvement and approval of the act. Rubottom recommended that State stoutly tell del Carril that Washington remained opposed to any move that painted the Cuba issue "solely in terms [of] dispute with US."<sup>42</sup>

Frondizi pestered Washington for action on Rubottom--on April 12 del Carril checked with Coerr "to discuss this matter further and asked whether the Department had gathered together the facts enabling its response" or briefed Rusk on the matter<sup>43</sup>--but State took its time. On April 18 Boonstra wrote Rubottom to explain the delay

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<sup>41</sup> US Embassy, Quito (Bernbaum), tel. 537, 8 pm, 10 April 1961, 737.00/4-761, box 1611, RG 59, NA.

<sup>42</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1260, 8 pm, 12 April 1961, 737.00/4-12-61, box 1611, RG 59, NA.

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Coerr-del Carril, "Argentine Relations with the United States," 12 April 1961, CDF 611.35/4-1261, RG 59, NA; ARA - Coerr to Secretary, Subject: Suggested Reply to Amb del Carril, 24 April 1961, 737.00/4-2261, box 1612, RG 59, NA.



(distracted by factors ranging from the matter's elevation to Rusk, UN consultations, the Argentina desk officer's absence on sick leave, Mann's departure, and the Bay of Pigs debacle), but assured him they were "taking a line supporting your views although possibly going a little easy because of what has been happening subsequently."<sup>44</sup> On April 24, Coerr recommended, and Rusk okayed, a reply to del Carrill (and through him, Frondizi) affirming that Rubottom had "at all times reflected" the US position rejecting mediation or good offices since they failed to address "the real problem," Cuba's refusal to cut ties to "the Sino-Soviet bloc and to return to the Inter-American family." The reply would stress that Argentina's failure to consult in advance put Rubottom "in a very difficult position" since it would have been "difficult if not impossible" for him to "avoid making comments." Washington expressed "regret" his comments disturbed Frondizi but would not apologize for them.<sup>45</sup> On April 28, Coerr conveyed this message to del Carril, who "expressed understanding, saying that at the time that the remarks were made there was considerable tension which might have accounted for this incident."<sup>46</sup>

Better supported, in the supposed May 2 letter, were the statements attributed to Rubottom about Alvaro C. Alsogaray, the economics minister whom Frondizi had appointed, at military insistence in June 1959, who had abruptly resigned, at Frondizi's request, on April 25.<sup>47</sup> "We lost a good friend last week when he [i.e., Frondizi] fired Alsogaray," Rubottom supposedly wrote, and that seems wholly accurate. Shortly before, Rubottom had cabled Rusk, directly, that the US government "should, to degree possible, demonstrate confidence in Minister Economy Alsogaray who has consistently cooperated with US." Rubottom had then judged that despite opposition Alsogaray was

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<sup>44</sup> Boonstra to Rubottom, 18 April 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, "321.5 Cuba (Jan.-July 1961)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

<sup>45</sup> Coerr to Secretary, Subject: Suggested Reply to Amb. del Carrill, 24 April 1961, 737.00/4-2261, box 1612, RG 59, NA.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Coerr-Whitman-del Carril, "Discussion with Argentine Ambassador on Ambassador Rubottom's Remarks," 28 April 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1967, box 2, "113 ARGENTINA 1961 US Ambassador" folder, RG 59, NA; see also ARA - Coerr to ARA - Ortiz, 26 April 1961, 737.00/4-2261, box 1612, RG 59, NA.

<sup>47</sup> "Argentine Quits Economics Post: Alsogaray Leaves Cabinet at Request of President," *NYT*, 25 April 1961, p. 10. Alsogaray appointment: Sheinin, *Argentina and the United States*, p. 118; Potash, *Army & Politics in Argentina*, pp. 308-09, 331; Szusterman, *Frondizi*, p. 125.

"still firmly in saddle" (underlining in original).<sup>48</sup> Washington viewed Alsogaray as a capable pro-US figure, playing a crucial role in stabilizing Argentina's economy and promoting investment but whose politically unpopular "belt-tightening" measures had made assorted enemies, including in labor and in the government, led by none other than Frigerio and his circle. (Even after resigning, he remained in touch with Rubottom and Kennedy Administration officials, who considered him a "proven friend of the United States" still playing a "constructive" role in Argentina; he would become economics minister in May 1962 after the military overthrew Frondizi.<sup>49</sup>)

Likewise, Rubottom's statement that Frondizi, a "day or two" after accepting Alsogaray's resignation, had replaced Foreign Minister Taboada with Adolfo Mugica, was accurate. Moreover, the judgment that Mugica was "definitely not running the show," since Frondizi was "now practically his own Foreign Minister," seems not unreasonable for Rubottom to make, if not necessarily to state so bluntly, as was his conclusion that the deputy foreign minister, Oscar Camilión, and economic adviser Musich, "put on the blackmail act every time we ask for cooperation on Cuba, but Frondizi is actually pulling the strings."

As for Rubottom's purported statement that Frondizi was "playing a tricky game with us" (e.g., to trade off support on Cuba for maximal economic aid) and "definitely giving priority to building up popularity with the voters before the next congressional and gubernatorial elections" and hence "making dangerous concessions to leftist groups and pro-European business elements," that does not seem too far from his actual thinking. In a "careful analysis" of Frondizi--sent a week after his alleged letter to Bundy--Rubottom called Argentina's president a "masterful political tactician whose sights [are] now set on [March] 1962 [legislative] elections whose outcome will greatly influence 1964 presidential election..." While wanting to take at "face value" Frondizi's anti-Castro

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<sup>48</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), For The Secretary, tel. 1273, Noon, 14 April 1961, 737.00/4-12-61, box 1611, RG 59, NA.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 452, 5 pm, 8 September 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, National Security Files (NSF), JFKL.

statements on Cuba, he advised Washington to take a "'wait-and-see' attitude." However, contrary to the letter there is no sign that Rubottom felt he had had a "showdown" with Frondizi or viewed him, not Brazil's Quadros, as "our big headache," let alone that he was discreetly (not "discretely" as the letter misspells) conspiring with Montero and the military to "continue putting pressure" on Frondizi. Summing up his May 10 assessment, Rubottom vowed to "continue [to] stay as close to Frondizi as possible and endeavor [to] influence him constructively all possible ways. He is not as good as his admirers claim nor as bad as his detractors assert, and is above all a realist." Ambivalently, warily, Rubottom advised continuing to work with Frondizi "on a reciprocal basis and measured against proven performance. Whenever he strays from cooperative path, we should react promptly and not hide our feelings. Am confident he would understand that treatment."<sup>50</sup>

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Whether real or forged, Rubottom's 2 May 1961 letter to McGeorge Bundy may have significantly influenced Frondizi's perception of the US ambassador in Buenos Aires, contemporaneous Argentine documents suggest. For it was later in May, presumably shortly after the supposed letter was intercepted by Argentine intelligence, translated into Spanish, and passed to Frondizi (it did, after all, end up in his papers), that Frondizi launched his secret campaign to convince President Kennedy to remove his ambassador to Argentina and, concurrently, to also stop other US embassy officers in Buenos Aires, both military and intelligence agents, from collaborating with right-wing Argentines, primarily in the military, against the country's president.

The first opportunity in Frondizi's anti-Rubottom campaign, it appears, was a trip to Washington to see US officials, including President Kennedy, by his new economics minister (Alsogaray's replacement), Roberto T. Alemann. Alemann conversed with JFK for a half-hour on Wednesday afternoon, May 24, after a more detailed discussion with

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<sup>50</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1436, 7 pm, 10 May 1961, box 1614, 737.00/5-1061, RG 59, NA.

Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon at which he outlined Argentine needs.<sup>51</sup> Press reports suggested that Alemann, well-known in Washington as a former financial counselor at Argentina's embassy, sought nearly half a billion dollars in foreign aid, much of it from the United States.<sup>52</sup> According to a US record of the meeting<sup>53</sup>, Alemann used the Oval Office talk for two main purposes. First, to relay Frondizi's ardent hope that the upcoming OAS meeting in Uruguay at which the Alliance for Progress (which JFK had unveiled in March) was to be formally launched, could provide a chance to confer personally with Kennedy, either in Montevideo or Buenos Aires; Kennedy said he too would "most warmly welcome" such a meeting--which, Frondizi envisioned, might also include Brazil's President Jânio Quadros and Mexico's Adolfo López Mateos--but made no commitment. Second, to discuss Argentina's economic situation, both its "hard-won" successes and urgent needs, for which Frondizi's government desired US loans for projects such as railroad construction (JFK promised sympathetic study).<sup>54</sup>

However, one thing Alemann apparently did *not* mention was the desire to replace Rubottom--perhaps because, having returned to Washington, D.C. for a visit, the US ambassador to Argentina, along with Argentina's ambassador to the United States, was sitting right there, in the Oval Office, and it would hardly be polite to raise that request in his presence. (Argentina's UN Ambassador, Mario Amadeo, was also supposed to attend but could not make it.)

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<sup>51</sup> Alemann-Dillon memorandum of conversation, "U.S.-Argentine Economic and Financial Relations," 11 a.m., 24 May 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, box 2, "025 ARGENTINA 1961 Conversations of Ambassador with High-Ranking Argentines" folder, RG 59, NA. Other attendees included Rubottom and del Carril.

<sup>52</sup> Julius Duscha, "Argentina Puts Need at \$500 Million," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1961, p. 15; "Alemann Sees President Today To Discuss Aid for Argentina," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1961, p. C13.

<sup>53</sup> State Department to US Embassy in Argentina, deptel 1701, 24 May 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. XII: *American Republics* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996), doc. 172. This was a summary of the meeting prepared by a State Department official. The author searched for a more detailed memorandum of conversation both in NSF, JFKL and RG 59, NA but could not find one, and it's not clear whether one exists.

<sup>54</sup> Before seeing JFK, Alemann had attended a ceremony at the Export-Import Bank for the signing of a \$40 million loan to assist roadbuilding in Argentina. "President Spurs Latin Aid Moves: Confers on July Parley - Argentine Loan Signed," *NYT*, 25 May 1961, p. 8.

After the sessions with Alemann, the White House issued an anodyne statement hailing US-Argentine cooperation and "deep ties of friendship" and pledging to support the Frondizi government's "heroic effort to improve the welfare of its people." Vowing broadly to collaborate to promote Argentina's "long-range economic development," it asserted that "the United States and the cause of freedom have no stronger or more respected friend than the people of Argentina."<sup>55</sup> Back in Argentina, Alemann was equally positive on the negotiations, publicly saying he was "very satisfied" and proclaiming (in US embassy paraphrase) that his visit represented a "personal triumph" and "the opening of a new era in US-Argentine relations."<sup>56</sup>

However, within a day, an unidentified Argentine official (Alemann?) prepared a less effusive memo on the meeting that explicitly mentioned the Rubottom case. Discussing the results of the talk with Kennedy and alluding to a preparatory, pre-conference memorandum, the "strictly confidential" document stated that the three major follow-up items were, first, "the need to promote the summit meeting (Kennedy-Frondizi-Quadros-Lopez Mateo conference) by all possible means"; second, recently-announced plans for Kennedy's prestigious ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson, to soon visit South America (JFK saw Stevenson and approved his mission on May 24, the same day he met Alemann<sup>57</sup>); and third, the "Rubottom case." In the context both of the upcoming Kennedy-Khrushchev summit in Vienna in early June and the persistence of "hard" anti-Castro sectors in the US government despite the recent Bay of Pigs failure (and consequent fading of support for that hard line both in Latin America and US public opinion), the memo said it was "urgent to counteract at Kennedy's own level the position of the US embassy in Buenos Aires. It is necessary that R.R. does not return to Buenos Aires." The memo considered it "absolutely necessary" for Frondizi to speak about the matter to Stevenson, completely frankly ("crudely and without quibbling, in a plane of the closest friendship and by way of consultation").

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<sup>55</sup> Deptel to Buenos Aires 1699, 24 May 1961, CDF 611.35/5-2461, RG 59, NA.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Hoyt), Airgram 343, 1 June 1961, CDF 735.00/1-1661, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>57</sup> See record of the conversation, President Kennedy, Stevenson, Rusk, and Assistant Secretary of State Harland Cleveland, 24 May 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Subject files of Assistant Secretary, 1959-1962, "Visits to L.A. (Stevenson Trip) 1961. ARA files" folder, box 3, RG 59, NA.

Elaborating on why it was crucial "to extinguish the effects of the position of the US Ambassador in B.A.," the memo warned that if "R.R." and his embassy continued their actions, this would "strip away" the positive elements that could maintain and strengthen good US-Argentine relations.

"Who is the one who desires to deteriorate and worsen relations between A[rgentina]. and the US?" the memo asked. "Obviously not President F[rondizi]. So it is necessary to clarify what instructions Rubottom is responding to and why the traditional [Argentine] press attacks the government with the same arguments that said ambassador and his subordinates spread among enemy sectors." The memo then claimed that the "military tensions" in Argentina "originate mainly in the US embassy, which does not act as a representative of a friendly government but as an expression of the Pentagon." Depicting a dire situation, "especially if it is examined from the social point of view," the memo argued that if anti-government Argentine actors "continue to be supported by the US embassy, the government will face extremely serious problems, particularly in the military sector," which, combined with economic challenges for which Argentina needed "massive help," "may make the situation untenable." After itemizing economic woes, including labor strife in the Buenos Aires area and prospective layoffs of at least 175,000 workers (75,000 railroad workers and 100,000 bureaucrats) due to budget shortfalls, the memo stressed that "Argentines would not understand" if Kennedy, especially after offering substantial help to Brazil, did not promote "massive aid" to Argentine. Some would even suggest, it added, that the United States "must be 'blackmailed'"--it did not specify how, but another document, described below, did--"to obtain aid."<sup>58</sup>

Another memo, apparently prepared by a Frondizi emissary (possibly Frigerio or Musich; see below), suggests that there had been some disagreement among the Argentines about how strongly to press Washington for Rubottom's dismissal and for economic support. The document's unidentified author stated that "Operation

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<sup>58</sup> Memorandum re 24 May 1961 meeting between Argentine Economics Minister Roberto T. Alemann and US President John F. Kennedy, Washington, 25 May 1961, Código 03.4.7.4, Caja 1, AF, BNMM.

Kennedy" had not been carried out as originally planned in a May 16 memorandum (not found) in part due to the fact that he had only reached New York on Thursday, May 25, a day after the Kennedy-Alemann conversation had already taken place. When he then spoke with Argentina's ambassador to the United States, del Carril had said that "raising the Rubottom case" now, after Alemann's visit, would be "absolutely preposterous" or "absolutely unreasonable" [*absolutamente descabellado*], although later "it should be easier to do so." The main reason del Carril cited, according to the document, was Rubottom's "power" among Kennedy associates, especially his close relationship with Dillon; Rubottom had "worked very well," together with del Carril, to promote Alemann's dealings with the treasury secretary. The emissary, in explaining why "Operation K," had not gone as envisaged beforehand in Buenos Aires, described his conversations with del Carril, Alemann, and Argentine ambassador to the UN Amadeo. They, especially del Carril and Amadeo, had strongly opposed an aspect of the plan that apparently would have had Alemann propose to Kennedy the resuscitation of Argentine mediation between the United States and Cuba, along with expanded US economic aid. Both stressed the impossibility, and inadvisability, of making such a proposal (especially considering the unfavorable US reaction to Argentina's sponsorship of a comparable idea in March); del Carril called the memo's idea of trying to spur some form of Washington-Havana negotiations "insanity" and "nonsense"; Alemann called the linkage with economic aid "blackmail."<sup>59</sup>

Although Alemann evidently had not transmitted the anti-Rubottom message during his talks in Washington, the next high-level opportunity for Frondizi to get that request across came only a fortnight later, when Adlai Stevenson visited various South American countries in June, stopping in Buenos Aires on June 7-9. Before leaving, the US UN ambassador had multiple discussion with Argentina's UN ambassador Amadeo (and possibly a Frondizi emissary) to discuss the upcoming trip, but there's no sign from Amadeo's cables of their discussions that the Rubottom situation was raised. (After

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<sup>59</sup> Memorandum, "Operation Kennedy," n.d. [Spring 1961], Personalidades, "Kennedy", UC 1347, Fondo Centro de Estudios Nacionales, BNMM [hereafter CEN, BNMM].

seeing a June 24 letter from Frigerio to Stevenson alluding to a conversation with him and Amadeo in New York, a State Department official concluded the document "indicates that it was he who was the emissary who visited Amadeo in New York in connection with Amadeo's preparation of a memorandum to Ambassador Stevenson just before the latter began his South American trip." The official, Argentina desk officer James F. O'Connor, Jr., thought Frigerio might have carried a letter from Frondizi to Stevenson, "although Musich was also in the US at about that time."<sup>60</sup>)

A few days before Stevenson reached Buenos Aires, Frondizi asked, through US embassy officials, "that all meetings be between him and Ambassador Stevenson," specifically requesting a three-and-a-half hour meeting on the afternoon of June 7, and a three-hour talk the next morning, June 8, followed by a private lunch.<sup>61</sup> These one-on-one meetings would thereby exclude, not only the other members of Stevenson's traveling party (which notably included veteran diplomat Ellis O. Briggs; Harvard Business School Prof. Lincoln Gordon--whom Kennedy would soon name his ambassador to Brazil--and US UN Mission officer Charles D. Cook), but also the resident US ambassador, facilitating any frank comments Frondizi might want to make about him. Although Argentina's president had also used the tactic of securing exclusive meetings with other figures, e.g., foreign leaders from Brazil, Uruguay, and Bolivia, Frondizi's requirement raised US eyebrows--and suspicions. Acting US Ambassador Henry Hoyt (Rubottom was still out of town) speculated that his "request for all meetings alone with Stevenson, excluding Briggs [and] Rubottom, [was] designed [to] deliberately eliminate any State Department connection [with] his visit." Hoyt also suspected that leftist Frondizi advisors, such as Musich and Frigerio, sensing that JFK's UN man had been less hostile to Argentina's "good offices" offer than the State Department or local US

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<sup>60</sup> O'Connor to Rubottom, 21 July 1961, enc. Frigerio to Stevenson, 24 June 1961, Stevenson to Frigerio, 3 July 1961, and Stevenson to Rusk, 3 July 1961, in Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA. O'Connor's inference would make both Frigerio and Musich suspects as possible authors of the memoranda described above ("Operation Kennedy" and about Alemann's talk with JFK).

<sup>61</sup> Wellman to files, "Program for Ambassador Stevenson in Buenos Aires," 3 June 1961, CDF 120.1520/6-161, box 218, RG 59, NA.



Embassy and hence was a potential ally ("friend at court"), had moved Frondizi to seek tight, almost exclusive access to Stevenson in Buenos Aires, leaving his retinue little to do "except attend social functions."<sup>62</sup> The embassy recommended that Stevenson insist on a previously-approved program, and that Briggs, Rubottom, and Cook attend all but one meeting with Frondizi and resist their "deliberate exclusion" from others. Ultimately, Frondizi and Stevenson met alone (plus an Argentine interpreter, diplomat Alejandro Orfila<sup>63</sup>) on June 7 at the Casa Rosada, the pink governmental palace dominating the central Plaza de Mayo. Frondizi mainly used the tête-à-tête to urge that JFK come to meet him, together with leaders of Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, perhaps in Argentina, to agree on strategy before the upcoming Inter-American Economic and Social Council (IA-ECOSOC) conference in Uruguay to officially launch the Alliance for Progress; Stevenson was noncommittal, even doubtful, regarding Kennedy's possible attendance, arguing, *inter alia*, that other, smaller countries might resent the bigger countries lording over them.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, Briggs, Rubottom, and his deputy, Hoyt, covered much of the same ground with Argentine Foreign Minister Adolfo Mugica, Under Secretary Oscar Camilión, Frondizi aide Musich, and other foreign office officials.<sup>65</sup> The next day, Frondizi and Stevenson convened at 11 a.m. along with Briggs, Rubottom, and Cook on the US side and on Argentina's side Mugica, Musich, and Orfila again as translator, this time at the suburban presidential residence, the Quinta de Olivos (where, in August, Frondizi would secretly host Ernesto "Che" Guevara, before

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<sup>62</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Hoyt), tel. 1568, 4 pm, 3 June 1961, CDF 120.1520/6-161, box 218, RG 59, NA.

<sup>63</sup> Argentine foreign minister Mugica clarified this to Rubottom a day before Stevenson arrived. He identified the interpreter as Argentine ambassador to Japan Orfila (home for consultation), who knew Stevenson "and should be satisfactory to both parties." Rubottom-Mugica memcon, 6 June 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to Argentina, "025 ARGENTINA 1961 Conversations of Ambassador with High-Ranking Argentines" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

<sup>64</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; from Stevenson), tel. 1594, 11 pm, 7 June 1961, "Argentina: General, 1/61-7/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; see also U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; from Stevenson), tel. 1595, 11 p.m., 7 June 1961, *ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> Conversation record in CDF 737.00/6-661, box 1616, RG 59, NA; see also U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; From Stevenson), tel. 1600, 6 pm, 8 June 1961, CDF 737.00/6-661, box 1616, RG 59, NA.

the Cuban-Argentine revolutionary's visit became publicly known, igniting a massive controversy).<sup>66</sup>

Nowhere in the extensive declassified US sources on Stevenson's trip examined by the author is there any mention of Frondizi complaining about Rubottom or requesting his removal: not in Stevenson's cables to the State Department reporting his private June 7 talks with Frondizi<sup>67</sup>; nor the minutes of the more sociable June 8 Stevenson-Frondizi conversation in Stevenson's papers; nor in a memorandum stating Argentina's position Frondizi handed to Stevenson on June 7, or one containing summaries of Stevenson's talks with Frondizi and the Argentines that Musich gave him the next evening after dinner (though a US summary noted that Frondizi had partly absolved JFK for the Bay of Pigs since he inherited the plans and "implied that some officials, in the Department of State or otherwise, are not carrying out President Kennedy's policy")<sup>68</sup>; nor in his lengthy secret briefing to senior State Department officials on his return<sup>69</sup>; nor in his written report to President Kennedy.<sup>70</sup> As for Argentine records, no comments about Rubottom appear in a 19-page secret summary (not verbatim, but detailed) of the Frondizi-Stevenson June 7-8 conversations prepared

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<sup>66</sup> For a U.S. records of this conversation, see Subseries 5D: U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, folder 7 ("Latin America"), box 350, Adlai E. Stevenson papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, available on-line at [https://findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/MC124\\_c01864](https://findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/MC124_c01864)

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; from Stevenson), tel. 1594, 11 pm, 7 June 1961, "Argentina: General, 1/61-7/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>68</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; from Stevenson), tel. 1595, 11 p.m., 7 June 1961, "Argentina: General, 1/61-7/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Fitzgerald), desp. 1542, "Policy Statement Given by President Frondizi to Ambassador Stevenson," 8 June 1961, U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Fitzgerald), desp. 1549, "Argentine Viewpoint Revealed in Frondizi-Stevenson Talks," 9 June 1961, both CDF 120.1520/6-861, MDR release 2/28/23; and U.S. Embassy, Rio de Janeiro (Crimmins), desp. 1135, "Transmittal of Argentine Government's Resumé of Conversations and Documents Re Stevenson Visit," 14 June 1961, CDF 120.1520/6-14/61, MDR release 2/28/23.

<sup>69</sup> Briefing on the Subject of Ambassador Adlai Stevenson's Trip to South America," 23 June 1961, Bureau of Inter-America Affairs, Subject files of Assistant Secretary, 1959-1962, "Visits to L.A. (Stevenson Trip) 1961 ARA files" folder, box 3, RG 59, NA.

<sup>70</sup> Report to the President on South American Mission, June 4-22, 1961, "Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson's Trip: Latin America, 6/61, Report, 6/28/61" folder, box 250a, NSF, JFKL. A slightly sanitized version of the report (references to Argentina or Frondizi redacted) can be found in Walter Johnson, ed., *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson, Vol. VIII: Ambassador to the United Nations, 1961-1965* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), pp. 75-83.

by Argentina's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and signed by Mugica.<sup>71</sup> Nor did several other, shorter Argentine memoranda regarding those conversations mention Rubottom.

However, although apparently absent from the written record, apparently Frondizi did get across to Stevenson at some point his desire to see Rubottom replaced by a different US ambassador. Months later, after Rubottom's departure (i.e., compelled premature resignation) was a *fait accompli*, at least two US journalists for prominent publications would hear, evidently from Argentine sources, that Frondizi had conveyed his message to Stevenson during his Buenos Aires visit. In October 1961, shortly after the announcement of Rubottom's purportedly routine "retirement," *Time Magazine* reported that, during Stevenson's visit in June, "Frondizi hinted that an ambassadorial change might be a good idea."<sup>72</sup> And in December, *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist C.L. Sulzberger would write that Rubottom, "an able, economically sensible Ambassador," had been "eased out by President Frondizi's *eminence grise*, Señor Frigerio, who persuaded Frondizi to send a message to Mr. Kennedy through the embarrassed Adlai Stevenson, virtually declaring our envoy *persona non grata*."<sup>73</sup>

However, an Argentine document found in Frondizi's papers offers the strongest evidence. Dated June 30, 1961, after Stevenson had returned to the United States from his South American tour, and possibly based on information he conveyed through Argentina's UN ambassador, Mario Amadeo<sup>74</sup>, the "RESERVADO" memorandum, author unidentified but on foreign office letterhead, reports on follow-up to Stevenson's visit, including the following item:

2.- R.R. Matter. Stevenson discussed the matter at length with K. The American opinion is that R.R. is a loyal instrument at the service of friendship and cooperation with Argentina and its government. But given the existing

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<sup>71</sup> Mugica, "Conversaciones entre el Señor Presidente Dr. Frondizi y el Señor Embajador Adlai Stevenson (días 7 y 8 de junio de 1961)," 13 June 1961, Código 03.4.7.4, Caja 1, AF, BNMM.

<sup>72</sup> "Out Goes Rubottom," *Time Magazine*, 20 October 1961, in Rubottom as told to Williams, *Lifelong Diplomat*, pp. 178-79.

<sup>73</sup> C.L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: Problems of Progress -- III: Needed Reforms," *NYT*, 23 Dec 1961, p. 22

<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of the document is the handwritten notation "c/Amadeo" but it is not clear if this means the information came through Amadeo or merely that he should be copied on it. I thank Prof. Paula Alonso for help in interpreting in this document.

situation and the proposal made by the Argentine authorities, he will be withdrawn. This decision will only be finalized after the Uruguay conference. The information was provided in a strictly confidential nature, emphasizing it should not transcend for any reason until such opportunity arrives.<sup>75</sup>

Obviously, "K" is President Kennedy. After flying from South America to Washington on June 22, besides preparing his formal written report, Stevenson the next morning (before a lengthy briefing to State Department officials) personally reported on his trip to JFK, who was in bed recuperating from a "rather bad cold" but asked "penetrating" questions and subjected Stevenson and Gordon to a "very searching cross-examination."<sup>76</sup> Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles also attended the hour-and-forty-minute session.<sup>77</sup> Three days later, on June 26 at 5:20 pm, Stevenson saw Kennedy again at the White House, this time only with Rusk.<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, no record of either discussion was found, but the latter, smaller meeting seems more suitable to discuss a sensitive personnel matter. The outcome reported in "strictly confidential" terms to the Argentines was accurate: US officials defended Rubottom but agreed to replace him, deferring to Frondizi's wish, although only after the upcoming conference in Uruguay; acting before then, so hastily, could conceivably be embarrassing and disruptive at a vital juncture.

Around this time, a key member of Frondizi's inner circle--and a key figure in this story--also communicated to Stevenson the Argentine government's displeasure at US officials in Buenos Aires. In an English-language letter dated June 24, Rogelio Frigerio began by expressing regret that he and Stevenson had not met during the American's

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<sup>75</sup> Foreign Ministry memorandum, "ENTREVISTA STEVENSON, c/Amadeo," 30 June 1961, Código 03.4.7.4, Caja 1, AF, BNMM.

<sup>76</sup> Lincoln Gordon Oral History Interview - JFK #1, 5/30/64, pp. 19-20, JFKL.

<sup>77</sup> The meeting started at 10:30 am on Friday, June 23, 1961. Newspapers and the president's appointments record say Briggs also attended, but Gordon recalled that Briggs was ill so had gone to New England; the appointment record, but not Gordon or newspaper reports, also says that, besides Bowles, Rusk and White House aide Goodwin attended. President's appointments, June 1961, Box 3, Evelyn Lincoln Personal Papers, JFKL; "Stevenson Tells President of Americas' Discontent," *NYT*, 24 June 1961, p. 1; Carroll Kirkpatrick, "Adlai Says Red Peril Rises in Latin Areas," *Washington Post*, 24 June 1961, p. 1; Gordon OHI, - JFK #1. 5/30/64, pp. 19-20, JFKL.

<sup>78</sup> President's appointments, June 1961, Box 3, Evelyn Lincoln personal papers, JFKL

recent Buenos Aires visit despite "the wish expressed to you by President Frondizi" (more on that later), recalling their last meeting in New York together with Amadeo, and flattering Stevenson as a "sincere friend" of Latin America, a "worthy follower" of FDR, and the best possible transmitter of views to President Kennedy. He then launched into an analysis of Argentina-US relations, stressing Argentina's strategic economic and political re-orientation away from Europe and toward the United States; the importance of Argentina achieving, with US help, adequate economic progress and democratic success to avoid further Communist/Castroist advances in the hemisphere; the need to embrace Frondizi's initiative of holding a pre-Uruguay summit of "the four Presidents" (US, Argentine, Brazilian, Mexican) "to seek an integral solution to the problems of underdevelopment and, consequently, to outbursts of the Cuban type," and to support Frondizi and assure his success--he represented "the peaceful, democratic and bloodless" solution for Argentina and other countries, and would otherwise be pushed aside by a "reactionary" regime hastening widespread disillusionment, especially with the United States, rebellion, and ultimately extremism. In that context Frigerio raised, without explicitly referring to Rubottom, the problem of US officials conspiring to undermine Frondizi. Posing the challenges Frondizi faced, particularly unpopular economic measures to promote the "jump to development," he asked:

Who is going to help us take the jump? Who fight us and sabotage us waiting for our failure? Is the United States Government certain that a great part of its officers is not acting against the true allies of the United States, *interfering in Argentine politics and favouring the enemies of the Government?* (emphasis added)

Frigerio wrapped up the 8-page missive by again pleading for the US government, in this "very grave and overflowing with danger" moment, to back Argentina adequately and not be led astray by a "timid or belated response."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Rogelio Frigelio to "Ambassador and friend" (Stevenson), 24 June 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

On July 3, Stevenson passed the letter to Rusk, writing in a cover note<sup>80</sup> that Frigerio was Frondizi's "'closest friend'" and reputedly responsible "for delivering the Peronista vote" which elected him in 1958. Though no longer in an official post, and now living "in a sort of seclusion," Stevenson went on, Frigerio's "influence on the President [Frondizi] continues so great that the President asked me to go to see him at his home while I was there, an assignment which I managed to evade." (An Argentine source blames their failure to meet on the intelligence services' "vigilance," but Stevenson's remark to Rusk suggests he was hardly eager to see Frigerio..<sup>81</sup>) In his one page note, "Adlai" drew "Dean[']s" notice to only one passage in Frigerio's letter: the one block-quoted above: "You will, of course, understand the reference at the top of page 7," he wrote--implying that the two had already discussed the specific complaints behind Frigerio's question about US officials, perhaps when Stevenson and the secretary of state together met Kennedy a week earlier, on Monday afternoon, June 26. If so, that would fit a chronology that could have produced the June 30 Argentine memo quoted above stating that Stevenson had "discussed the matter at length with K."

On the same day, July 3, Stevenson also wrote Frigerio, expressing disappointment that they had failed to meet in Buenos Aires, expressing no disagreements with his "interesting letter" but regretfully informing him that JFK could not attend Frondizi's proposed "four Presidents" meeting due to the press of Congressional business (though he did not exclude Kennedy coming to Uruguay for the conference's final days and perhaps seeing Frondizi and the other leaders then). Stevenson assured Frigerio that his views would be brought to the attention of Rusk and other US officials concerned with US-Argentina relations.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Stevenson to Rusk, 3 July 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

<sup>81</sup> Hebe Carmen Pelosi and Leonor M. de Devoto, *Las relaciones internacionales en la presidencia de Frondizi, 1958-1963: desarrollo, integración latinoamericana y paz mundial* (Buenos Aires, 2012; Editorial Académica Española, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2012), p. 164.

<sup>82</sup> Stevenson to Frigerio, 3 July 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA; also Johnson, ed., *Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson*, vol. 8, p. 87.

All of these documents--Frigerio's long letter, Stevenson's reply, and Stevenson's note to Rusk conveying the letter--were soon sent to Rubottom in Buenos Aires by the State Department's Argentina desk officer, James F. O'Connor, Jr. Discussing Frigerio's letter, O'Connor, like Stevenson, highlighted the passage in which the Argentine had questioned the activities of US officials. His statement seems rather cryptic. "It seems to me that we are more chargeable with intervention in Argentine affairs," O'Connor wrote, "when we agree to our own embroilment to some degree in Argentine internal political maneuverings through acceptance of the policy and operational duality and covertness symbolized by the Frigerio situation." He seemed to be referring to the Argentine leader's sometimes convoluted or conspiratorial use of assorted, sometimes unofficial intermediaries or emissaries to convey messages to and do business with US officials, observing at one point: "Frondizi is asking a great deal in expecting us to go along with less than open dealings less than openly handled -- in other words to conduct US-Argentine relations according to their own standards of political operation, rather than our own or the fair norms of diplomacy. There is a large factor of trust in Frondizi as an individual involved in all this, since he might at some point have to or want to jettison one or all of the members of his kitchen cabinet, and in such a case their dealings with US officials, and any understandings reached, would be unprovable and unenforceable, so to speak, except insofar as Frondizi chose to honor them, which the very circumstances of any departure of his intimates might make it difficult for him to do."<sup>83</sup>

Even before seeing the latest exchange with Frigerio, O'Connor had grown irritated with what he regarded as the Frondizi circle's shenanigans. In a letter to Rubottom, the Argentina desk officer derided a memorandum that Frondizi aide Musich had given Stevenson at a June 8 dinner at the presidential residence in Buenos Aires purporting to describe Argentina's stands as discussed earlier in the day. Besides deriding it as "no cause for joy" and "crude," O'Connor felt it diverged significantly from

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<sup>83</sup> O'Connor to Rubottom, 21 July 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.

the US record of the same conversation. In the Frondizi aide's apparent superseding of the foreign minister, Mugica, who was there (and described Musich as "the brains of the Foreign Office"<sup>84</sup>), O'Connor suspected "a deliberate tactic of Frondizi and/or the Frigerio clique to staff the Foreign Ministry with a respectable elderly figurehead who can be managed by the Musiches and the Orfilas who really call the tune and do the operating." Resignedly, wearily approaching the end of his term, O'Connor wrote that their "Argentine friends" love to blather about franqueza (frankness) in their bilateral dealings with Washington but were really devoted to maniobra (maneuver), often stemming from their own "intra-governmental problems with which we should not really be asked to concern ourselves."<sup>85</sup>

Licking their wounds after the Bay of Pigs, US officials had wanted to step up the pressure on Havana by rallying the OAS to impose stiffer sanctions against Cuba, both economic and political, including, if possible, a mandatory break in relations. (The Kennedy Administration also moved to intensify clandestine efforts against Castro, including ongoing assassination plotting.) However, not only Frondizi but every important Latin American leader strongly counseled Washington that, before trying to convene an OAS foreign ministers meeting empowered to collectively take harsh anti-Cuba measures, Washington needed to gain hemispheric support by demonstrating its commitment to significantly aid economic development (the better to stem the Cuban example's spread). Accordingly, pushing a Colombian proposal, Washington backed the IA-ECOSOC meeting, held in Punta del Este, Uruguay, an off-season resort, from 5-17 August 1961. From a US perspective the conference went fairly well: other than Cuba, the OAS unanimously voted to formally create the Alliance for Progress, and US delegation head treasury secretary Dillon gained rave reviews by pledging \$20 billion in US aid (over ten years).

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<sup>84</sup> Mugica-Musich-Camilion and Briggs-Rubottom-Hoyt memcon, 7 June 1961, cited above.

<sup>85</sup> O'Connor to Rubottom, 23 June 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, "350 ARGENTINA 1961 Internal Political Affairs (General)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA.



Yet, to a considerable extent, Cuba's Industry Minister, Che Guevara, stole the show--both during and immediately after the conference. His opening speech, Dillon grudgingly cabled JFK, was a "masterful presentation of Communist point of view."<sup>86</sup> The bearded revolutionary, dressed in olive fatigues, convivially hobnobbed with various delegations (especially Brazil's), journalists, admirers, and vacationers, both in the conference hotel and strolling the beach. He even seemed eager to meet a US delegation member, but Dillon mandated that the Americans, for obvious reasons, assiduously ignore him. Yet after the conference adjourned, a nocturnal encounter occurred in Montevideo, with Argentine and Brazilian conspiring, when White House aide Richard Goodwin went to a party in a Brazilian diplomat's apartment and ended up in a conversation with Guevara.<sup>87</sup> Word soon leaked, triggering a minor brouhaha in Washington (which falsely insisted it was just a "casual cocktail party meeting" and conversation lasting less than half an hour<sup>88</sup>), but Che provoked even bigger crises on August 18-19 when he then flew first to Buenos Aires (where he met Frondizi, who tried but failed to keep his visitor's presence secret) and then to Brasília, where he was publicly greeted and honored by Brazilian president Quadros, who resigned a week later amid the uproar.

Where did this fit into the Rubottom story? First, the controversy in Argentina only deepened Rubottom's suspicions about Argentina's president--who, as in his "good offices" proposal in March, had not given US officials any advance notice of Guevara's visit. After word of Guevara's presence seeped out, many anti-communist Argentines, especially in the military, expressed outrage and demanded Frondizi's ouster.<sup>89</sup> US officials were alarmed to learn, first from a confidential source, then from Mugica and

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<sup>86</sup> Dillon to JFK, in US Embassy, Montevideo, tel. 123, 9 August 1961, in *FRUS, 1961-63*, vol. 12, doc. 22. For his conference speeches, see Ernesto Che Guevara, *Our America and Theirs: Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress—The Debate at Punta del Este* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> There are numerous sources on the Guevara-Goodwin meeting. See, e.g., Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1988), chap. 10.

<sup>88</sup> See "White House Calls Guevara Bid Insignificant," *WP*, 24 August 1961, p. A12; "Guevara Talk Weighed," *NYT*, 24 August 1961, p. 15; and other sources cited in Goodwin, *Remembering America*.

<sup>89</sup> On this crisis, see, e.g., Potash, *Army & Politics in Argentina*, esp. pp. 338-41, and Szusterman, *Frondizi*, pp. 201-202.

Argentine press reports, that Frondizi, under intense pressure, had defended hosting Che to angry military brass by citing the Che-Goodwin meeting (which he said, accurately, lasted for several hours, contrary to the White House) and even claimed that he had seen Che "at [US Government] request because USG hoped Argentina might mediate its problem with Cuba."<sup>90</sup> Appalled, Rubottom believed Frondizi had lied to "'use' us" to defend himself (and, reprising the "good offices" imbroglio, the ambassador sought and received State Department approval to clarify privately to Argentine officials and "appropriate individuals" that the United States had no advance knowledge of the Frondizi-Che meeting).<sup>91</sup> To Rubottom, Frondizi's latest crisis was a "result of his own doing ... another example of Machiavellian tactics at which he is considered expert but which continue to embroil him in domestic difficulties as well as international embarrassment." The US government could be understanding, even sympathetic, "especially when Argentine military take exaggerated, golpista position," he wrote Woodward, "but Frondizi tactics exceed friendly bounds when he tries irresponsibly to blame US for his troubles."<sup>92</sup>

On Saturday night, August 18, after Guevara left Buenos Aires, Rubottom was "flabbergasted" to be accosted by Argentine press after what he thought was a confidential meeting at the foreign office, and be asked bluntly "whether it was true that I would be 'recalled'"--the next day an Argentine foreign office official told him the reporters "had cornered me primarily to inquire as to whether I was 'leaving' the country." Rubottom suspected that Frondizi had set him up.<sup>93</sup> When Mugica, right after seeing Frondizi, repeated publicly that the Goodwin-Guevara chat had reflected a US desire for an accommodation with Cuba, justifying Frondizi's welcome for Che as aimed

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<sup>90</sup> Rubottom to Robert F. Woodward (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs), 21 August 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Subject files of Assistant Secretary, 1959-1962, "ARGENTINA 1961 (ARA files)" folder, box 2, RG 59, NA; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 311, Noon, 22 August 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>91</sup> Department of State tel. 312 to Buenos Aires, 7:42 pm, 23 August 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; "'use' us": Rubottom to Woodward, 21 August 1961, cited above.

<sup>92</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), For Woodward Only, tel. 324, 8 pm, 22 August 1961, CDF 735.00/7-1161, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>93</sup> Rubottom to Woodward, 21 August 1961, cited above.

at reducing tension in line with Washington's wishes, military indignation forced the foreign minister to resign, on August 28, taking the blame for the Che-Frondizi encounter; obviously, it seemed, Frondizi had ditched him to save his own skin.<sup>94</sup>

By then, even as the Che visit kerfuffle engulfed and distracted Frondizi and Argentina, the Punta del Este conference success meant the Kennedy Administration could now move forward to redeem its pledge to Frondizi to replace Rubottom. Near the end of August, wire service articles reported, evidently based on State Department and/or White House leaks, that a reshuffling of US ambassadors in Latin America, including Argentina, was impending, part of a broad effort to put a "Kennedy-picked team" in place. The Associated Press, calling Buenos Aires an "expensive post," noted that Rubottom was "a career officer and the Argentine post is regarded normally as economically burdensome for a career man."<sup>95</sup> United Press International said Kennedy was "considering" John O. Bell, the State Department's deputy coordinator for foreign assistance, for the job. "The shift is one of several steps the Administration is considering to strengthen political and economic ties with Argentina," UPI's story stated.<sup>96</sup> From Buenos Aires, Rubottom cabled, without comment, local press coverage of these reports of his own replacement, quoting reports emphasizing that JFK sought a "highly qualified man [to] handle increasing economic aspects [of] Argentine-US relations" and desired his envoys in Latin America "be thoroughly acquainted with new ideals of social change as outlined in new frontier policy."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Mugica interview in *La Razon*, in U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 321, 22 August 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; also US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 336, 10 pm, 23 August 1961, in *ibid.* "Top Frondizi Aide Quits Under Fire: Foreign Minister Criticized in Uproar Over Guevara," *NYT*, 29 August 1961, p. 1. While dumping Mugica, a "figurehead Foreign Minister all along," Frondizi kept the "Frigerio clique" (Florit, Musich, Camilion) who exerted real power in the foreign ministry, the U.S. embassy observed. U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Fitzgerald), desp. 285, "Resignation of Foreign Minister Adolfo Mugica," 31 August 1961, CDF 735.00/7-1161, box1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>95</sup> "U.S. Eyes Shuffle In Our Latin Posts," *Miami Herald*, 30 Aug 1961, p. 14.

<sup>96</sup> "Envoy Shift Studied," *NYT*, 31 Aug 1961, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 380, 1 pm, 30 August 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 370, 11 am, 29 August 1961, CDF 735.00/7-1161, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

These initial articles stressed routine policy or personnel considerations behind Rubottom's reportedly incipient replacement and noted comparable Kennedy Administration intentions to name new ambassadors in various Latin American capitals to take over from Eisenhower holdovers, such as sending Lincoln Gordon to Brazil to replace John M. Cabot. However, within a day or two, more sinister reports began to appear in the Argentine press, reported to Washington by Rubottom himself.

On September 1, he cabled, the newspaper *Correo de la Tarde* had published a column, the fifth in a series of "exposés on Frigerio 'shadow government,'" on both the Guevara visit and "rumors my replacement as Ambassador." It asserted, he wrote, that "'these machiavellians' (Frigerio et al.) have 'condemned (me) to death' for many reasons, principal one being my not having fallen in with them. Says one of 'shadow government' representatives went to Washington and urged desirability replacing me. Says that subsequently other 'special representatives' operated in same way to extent that Del Carril, real Ambassador to the US, resisted suggestion that he cooperate in my removal. (Columnist challenges anyone to deny this without lying.)" The column had said Frigerio was "getting more accustomed every day to having things done his way" and Frondizi, who was expected to soon travel to New York for the UN General Assembly, had to crush this "fifth column" power grab. The writer had denied his aim was to defend Rubottom "although I have acted correctly locally" but rather to defend Argentina's good name which was being conflated with the goals of "the Frigerio clique," which purportedly included Musich and Camilión.<sup>98</sup>

Once again Rubottom had no direct personal comment in that cable, but in another telegram, sent the same day (and which Rubottom excerpted in his memoirs four decades later), he related frankly his belief that "Rigerio forces, long identified with neutralist moves and effort deflect US from current Cuban policy, have made little effort [to] disguise their attempts [to] cause my recall since last March. Following Punta del Este Conference," he added, "various newspapermen informed Embassy officers that

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<sup>98</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 406, 1 Sept 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

Argentine delegation openly spoke of my imminent transfer and implied they had arranged it." Quoting private conversations with friendly Argentine newsmen, Rubottom reported that sympathetic press had been pressured not to publish statements supportive of him, and that it was "an open secret among informed Argentine sources that Frigerio and associates have been irritated by my failure to play their game and support or remain silent in face of their fabrications with respect US policy." Frigerio was also reportedly "enraged" by Rubottom's denial that Washington had been consulted about Argentina's March "good offices" offer regarding Argentine mediation between the United States and Cuba and the embassy's refusal to confirm the claim by Mugica (a "gullible mouthpiece for Frigerio group") that Washington had "encouraged" the Frondizi-Guevara meeting.<sup>99</sup>

Some other Buenos Aires press items chiding Rubottom caught the eye of a key US media figure: Jerry Hannifin, a senior writer and Latin America specialist at Henry Luce's powerful *Time Magazine*. On September 11, in an internal memo to an editor proposing an article on "The Unpopular Ambassador," Hannifin wrote that Rubottom was "fighting for his ambassadorial life in Argentina" and the outcome remained "in doubt." Noting critical editorials in the venerable (and conservative) *La Prensa* and other Buenos Aires newspapers, Hannifin gathered that large Argentine landowners resented Rubottom's dutiful promotion of accelerated land reform in line with JFK's *Alianza para el Progreso*, and suggested that their bid to "botto Rubottom suggests similar problems for US diplomacy elsewhere in Latin America." Sizing up the government's feelings-- while not mentioning rifts over Cuba, alleged contacts with the military, or foreign policy (let alone the supposed letter to Bundy)--Hannifin judged that the "Mugica-Musich set" in Argentina's foreign ministry "want Rubottom out of the way," but that "Frondizi and others in his camp want Rubottom to remain." Hannifin suggested *Time's* veteran local correspondent, Piero Saporiti, "get an exact reading" in Buenos Aires.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rubottom telegram to Washington, 1 September 1961, in Rubottom as told to Williams, *Lifelong Diplomat*, pp. 182-84.

<sup>100</sup> Hannifin (Washington) to Parker, "Hemisphere Suggestions," 11 September 1961, *Time* dispatches, second series: Box 27, bMS Am 2090.1 (510), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Unfortunately, any reports Saporiti sent were not found.

The sudden burst of public commentary on Rubottom (pro and con) in early September also intrigued diplomatic observers. Believing the Che affair had inspired the "local rumors that [Rubottom] would be replaced to satisfy the Argentines" and "corresponding rumors from Washington," Britain's Buenos Aires embassy felt the reasons the Argentines wanted Rubottom out "appear to do him credit"--they preferred "a businessman with little knowledge of diplomacy" who would "featherbed" US investment in Argentine, as Frigerio envisioned. Hence, the local Chamber of Commerce and press had "sprung to Mr. Rubottom's defence." Yet the U.K. envoy, like Hannifin, seemed oblivious to Frondizi's secret motive for prodding JFK to remove Rubottom: his suspicion that the US embassy in Buenos Aires, led by the ambassador, was plotting with Argentine military hardliners to pressure or overthrow him.<sup>101</sup>

No further word came immediately from Washington about Rubottom's prospective early recall, but the Argentines continued to inquire. On September 9, an Argentine diplomat (likely Amb. del Carril) lunched in Washington with JFK White House aide Dick Goodwin at the home of Bolivia's "*very Argentinista*" ambassador. The Argentine diplomat, his subsequent secret memo to Frondizi indicates, suggested, to enhance mutual understanding between JFK and Frondizi, naming as the new US ambassador in Buenos Aires "someone who directly represents and interprets President Kennedy." Perhaps, he added, "someone from the Kennedy team," such as Lincoln Gordon, who was on JFK's Latin America transition team and about to head to Brazil as his new ambassador.

Goodwin "replied by nodding, and adding that they were currently considering two or three names of people with those characteristics."<sup>102</sup>

Attention then turned to preparing for Frondizi's impending trip later that month to New York City, where he would not only address the UNGA but, more importantly for

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<sup>101</sup> British Embassy, Buenos Aires (Chancery) to American Department, FO, 4 September 1961, FO 371/155824, TNA.

<sup>102</sup> Memo, author unidentified (del Carill?) to Frondizi, 12 September 1961, Código 03.4.7.5, Caja 34, AF, BNMM.

this story, see JFK and other senior US leaders such as Stevenson and Rusk. Accompanying him was Argentina's new foreign minister (Mugica's replacement), Miguel Ángel Cárcano, a senior figure who twenty years earlier--when, like Joseph P. Kennedy, he had been his country's ambassador to Great Britain at the start of World War II--had met JFK when he visited Argentina and stayed at the Cárcano estate in 1941.<sup>103</sup> Before the visit, Rubottom cabled Rusk a mixed assessment of Argentina's president: he hailed Frondizi's "unquestioned intelligence, dynamism, and leadership" but thought he was "strongly influenced by Frigerio group" (including Musich who would accompany him) and domestic politics; he perceived the visit as a chance to influence him, and Argentina, toward an "even stronger and more forthright position in defense [of] free world principles."<sup>104</sup>

During their talks with US leaders, both Frondizi and Cárcano gave the strongest, and highest-level evidence of their belief that the US embassy in Buenos Aires (and its leader, Rubottom) had been plotting against Argentina's government. On Sunday, September 24, after flying to New York via Brazil and Venezuela, Frondizi met at his hotel, the Waldorf Astoria, with Stevenson. Rusk joined them for conversation over dinner, and according to the Argentine record (but not the American), the following exchange occurred:

- When President Frondizi raised the problem of interference by the United States Embassy in Argentina and the intelligence services in our country, Mr. Rusk told him that he could answer him on this matter now, saying that there was nothing he could do in this regard and that he would like to find the formula to free the Kennedy Government and himself personally from the interference of the American Intelligence service.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 1032, 11 am, 8 March 1961, CDF 737.00/3-161, box 1610, RG 59, NA; U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), unnumbered tel., 19 Sept 1961, CDF 735.00/7-1161, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>104</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), tel. 522, 8 pm, 21 Sept 1961, "Argentina: General, 8/61-12/61" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL; also U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom), Airgram A-72, "Subject: Recommendations for U.S. position to be taken during talks with President Frondizi and party," 15 September 1961, CDF 611.35/9-1561, RG 59, NA.

<sup>105</sup> Record of Frondizi-Stevenson (and Rusk) Conversations, New York, 24 September 1961, Código 03.4.7.5, Caja 35, AF, BNMM.

Two days later, on Tuesday morning September 26 at the Carlyle Hotel, Frondizi finally met President Kennedy and had a chance to directly tell the US leader about his displeasure with the US Embassy and Ambassador in Buenos Aires. Again according to Argentine (and to a lesser extent US) records of their two-hour-long one-on-one breakfast conversation before a larger two-hour plenary talk including aides on both sides, that's what he did. Emphasizing his and Argentina's needs for understanding and support, both political and economic, Frondizi introduced his predicament by stating that despite "his desire to work with the United States--and especially with President Kennedy's Administration, since he was an admirer of his ideas since the days of Franklin Roosevelt, and despite his admiration for President Kennedy and his philosophy, and in spite of his admiration for his effective work for world peace and democracy--he was sometimes hampered by American interests." To remedy this situation, to improve Argentine-US relations and Argentines' impressions of US policy, Frondizi underlined the importance of stationing US representatives in Argentina who "knew how to interpret President Kennedy's ideas and philosophy"--otherwise, "they create problems for the government."<sup>106</sup>

In reply, "President Kennedy said that the question of sending a new ambassador to Argentina, who would be selected with great care, was currently being studied."<sup>107</sup>

Naturally, Frondizi responded, "the US government would decide who would be the ambassador, but that he wanted to speak frankly on this matter. He said that the US needed a representative in Argentina had a feeling for President Kennedy's Latin American policy, especially with reference to Argentina."<sup>108</sup> Another Argentine version

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<sup>106</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, JFK-Frondizi (Donald F. Barnes, translator), Hotel Carlyle, New York City, 9 am, 26 Sept 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, CO, JFKL (also State Dept. Central Files, 711.11-KE/9-2761, RG 59, NA); Record of Frondizi-JFK Meeting, Carlyle Hotel, New York City, 26 September 1961, Personalidades, "Kennedy", UC 1347, CEN, BNMM.

<sup>107</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, JFK-Frondizi (Donald F. Barnes, translator), Hotel Carlyle, New York City, 9 am, 26 Sept 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, CO, JFKL; Record of Frondizi-JFK Meeting, Carlyle Hotel, New York City, 26 September 1961, Personalidades, "Kennedy", UC 1347, CEN, BNMM.

<sup>108</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, JFK-Frondizi (Donald F. Barnes, translator), Hotel Carlyle, New York City, 9 am, 26 Sept 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, CO, JFKL; Record of Frondizi-JFK



of the same intimate conversation, containing an exchange absent from the US record, says Frondizi remarked that "not all North American representatives in Argentina participate in Kennedy's approach to international matters," alluded to CIA and military embassy personnel attached, and explicitly referred to Ambassador Rubottom, "who had made a curious visit to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army during the crisis led by Commander-in-Chief Toranza Montero." That last charge, of course, echoed the statement made in the supposed May 2 Rubottom letter to McGeorge Bundy that Frondizi had "bawled me out for attending a meeting of senior army officers" and effectively "accus[ed] me of complicity in the plot by General Toranzo Montero to overthrow his Government." In reply, the record indicated, Kennedy said nothing about Frondizi's specific claims "but stated that he was going to change the ambassador and that he was looking for the man." The document asserted that, after the talk with Frondizi, President Kennedy (echoing Rusk) told Argentine Foreign Minister Minister Cárcano: "Frondizi cannot expect me to eliminate the intelligence men from Buenos Aires; I cannot do it; if I could, I would start by removing those from Washington. In exchange for [this inability] I am willing to give you all kinds of personal political support. Anything you ask for. If you need money, I can finance you a newspaper or a campaign."<sup>109</sup>

Neither Kennedy nor Frondizi had mentioned the search for a new ambassador at the plenary session, nor was that subject, or Frondizi's complaints about the US embassy in Argentina, mentioned in a summary of the conversations cabled to Rubottom in Buenos Aires.<sup>110</sup>

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Meeting, Carlyle Hotel, New York City, 26 September 1961, Personalidades, "Kennedy", UC 1347, CEN, BNMM.

<sup>109</sup> Record of JFK-Frondizi interview, New York City, 26 September 1961, Código 03.4.7.3, Caja 18, AF, BNMM.

<sup>110</sup> For US records, see State Dept. deptel. 575 to U.S. Embassy, Argentina, 27 September 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. 12, doc. 173, and Memorandum of Conversation, JFK/Rusk/Woodward/Martin/Duke/Goodwin-Frondizi/Carcano/del Carril/Alemann/Musich/Morales/Ortiz de Rosas, Hotel Carlyle, 10:15 am, 26 Sept 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, CO, JFKL and CDF 611.35/9-2661, RG 59, NA.

A few days later, after Frondizi left New York and returned to Argentina, the Kennedy administration moved concretely to remove the US ambassador in Buenos Aires from his post. In a September 30 "eyes only" cable, Acting Secretary Bowles informed Rubottom that within a week the White House planned to announce that President Kennedy would accept his resignation as ambassador to Argentina, and the State Department would disclose that he was to be relocated to become a State Department counselor at the Naval War College in Providence, Rhode Island. While acknowledging the hasty reassignment might cause "personal inconvenience," the telegram instructed Rubottom to wrap up his business quickly and return to the United States in time to take up his new duties by October 23.<sup>111</sup> The announcements duly came on October 9, with no replacement immediately announced (DCM Hoyt would become interim acting ambassador).<sup>112</sup> Hinting at intrigue behind the move, the AP reported "rumors that, in addition to Rubottom's having been appointed by Eisenhower, the Kennedy administration wished to make a change in Argentina for other reasons. For one thing, a clique in the Argentine foreign ministry reportedly was sharp-shooting at Rubottom. Then there is a feeling too that at least some Argentine officials have not been given a proper understanding of Washington's attitude toward Fidel Castro's Cuba."<sup>113</sup>

Far deeper discoveries pertaining to Rubottom's compelled resignation were being made by the US embassy in Buenos Aires, as a secret, priority telegram from Hoyt to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Robert F. Woodward dated October 18 soon revealed. In the cable, over Rubottom's signature since he hadn't left Argentina's capital yet, Hoyt informed Woodward of two important revelations concerning the Rubottom case. The first involved Frigerio, Rubottom's and the embassy's long-time nemesis. Earlier in October, the embassy's political counselor had

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<sup>111</sup> Deptel 598 (Bowles) to Buenos Aires, 30 Sept 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>112</sup> "Envoy's Resignation Accepted," *NYT*, 10 October 1961, p. 85.

<sup>113</sup> "Rubottom Successor Undecided," *Miami Herald*, 11 October 1961, p. 4.

summarized (in a document declassified only 61 years later) how US officials viewed the almost mystical 56-year-old figure:

Rogelio Frigerio, of course, has been the subject of many reports from this Embassy. Economic Advisor to President Frondizi during the early part of the latter's term in office, he has since then been well known as the chief unofficial advisor to the President. He is generally credited with being the biggest single influence on Frondizi and some of his protegés occupy important positions in key government ministries, particularly in the Foreign Ministry. Frigerio and his followers are known as advocates of a policy of extracting maximum economic and other concessions from the United States in return for political support. Frigerio has long been the chief target of military and political sectors opposed to Frondizi and to the recent ambiguous policy of the Administration on Cuba and other foreign policy matters. Frigerio also has the general reputation of being a "fixer" and of being the channel through which Frondizi does his "dirty work" in financial and political senses. It is rare to find anyone outside Frigerio's own coterie who does not regard this eminence grise of the Frondizi Administration as a "shady" character.<sup>114</sup>

Now, Hoyt informed Woodward that the State Department and White House should know that Frigerio had admitted to a *Time Magazine* reporter (probably Piero Saporiti) that he was "responsible for maneuvering to oust Ambassador Rubottom." Not only that, Frigerio had given *Time's* reporter a "memo setting forth his complaints against Ambassador," an "egotistical document" enumerating Rubottom's sins: he had failed to consult with Frigerio; had failed to see him in Washington before coming to Argentina<sup>115</sup>; and most damningly, was "involved in machinations with Toranzo

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<sup>114</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (John A. Fitzgerald, political counselor), desp. no. 425, "Rogelio Frigerio and Corruption," 4 October 1961, CDF 735.00/10-461, RG 59, NA, released 13 Oct 2022 author's MDR. "Frigerio has the reputation of being an intriguer and a 'wangler' who reputedly receives a cut from business firms seeking favor from the government," Fitzgerald had written. "He has long been known as an advocate of the theory of extracting maximum concessions from the United States as the price of international political support." U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Fitzgerald), desp. 285, 31 August 1961, CDF 735.00/7-1161, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>115</sup> On Rubottom declining to see Frigerio in Washington because he was "quite busy in connection with his departure" (as a State Department official told an Argentine Embassy aide who tried to set up a meeting), see memorandum of conversation, James F. O'Connor-Alejandro Orfila, "Call on Ambassador Rubottom by Rogelio Frigerio," 13 September 1960, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Office of East Coast Affairs, Records Relating to ARGENTINA 1956-1964, box 1, "351.8 Frigerio and his party 1960" folder, RG 59, NA.

Montero to force Frondizi out"--an allegation Hoyt called "absolutely false; no basis whatsoever."

Additionally, Hoyt wrote, the embassy had obtained, apparently through espionage, the "translation of purported letter from Rubottom to McGeorge Bundy dated May 2, 1960"--sic; 1961--containing statements attributed to Rubottom "highly critical" of Frondizi and "advocating pressure on Frondizi through Toranzo Montero and other dissident groups." Crucially, Hoyt then asserted, having consulted him: "Rubottom has never written to Bundy nor does he know him." Hoyt warned that the supposed Rubottom to Bundy missive was in the military's possession "and might someday come to light." Undoubtedly, the "completely spurious document" was "another attempt by Frigerio group (although this can not be proved) to place Ambassador in bad light with White House."<sup>116</sup>

Recalling that a local newspaper had already reported that Frigerio had boasted of causing Rubottom's ouster, Hoyt worried that such crowing might spur a public scandal, causing definite "embarrassment to administration"--especially if Frigerio's memo and/or the "falsified letter to Bundy" became public, and US friends in Argentina blasted Washington for caving to pressure from the "Frigerio clique."

Sure enough, *Time* published a piece on the affair in its October 20 issue: "Out Goes Rubottom." By far the most intent on challenging White House claims that the envoy's removal was "nothing more than the natural replacement of Eisenhower appointees with New Frontiersmen," the article postulated that Rubottom, exploiting his fluent Spanish to zealously spread the US story to a wide array of Argentines, had, "apparently unconsciously," alienated one side in a "palace faction fight" around Frondizi--those led by Frigerio, "the political grey eminence who kept in touch with the Peronists for President Arturo Frondizi and dreamed up such international attention getters as Argentina's offer of 'good offices' as a mediator to settle the differences between Castro's Cuba and the US" Rubottom, *Time* stated, had favored Frigerio's rivals,

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<sup>116</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (Rubottom; Hoyt for Woodward), tel. 668, 18 October 1961, Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL (sanitized 2003).

led by Alsogaray, "the conservative, army-supported economic planner forced upon Frondizi by the anti-Person military brass." Without referring explicitly to Frigerio's memo or to him as a source, *Time* said Rubottom had irked Frigerio when he warned Argentine officials that sacking Alsogaray (forced to resign in April 1961) might endanger US investment, and that Frigerio also blamed Rubottom for torpedoing the "good offices" idea. Without mentioning the Rubottom to Bundy letter that may have helped spark the anti-Rubottom Argentine campaign, the article said Frondizi had pushed for his ouster during Stevenson's visit in June and again "got the message across" in his talks with JFK in late September.<sup>117</sup>

On October 25, Hoyt sent a follow-up personal ("official-informal-confidential-eyes only") letter--not a telegram, which would receive wider circulation--to Woodward to explain a bit of the background behind his earlier telegram.<sup>118</sup> He "really didn't have my heart in it" because the decision to remove Rubottom was already made and the main goal was to continue the job, he said, but several embassy officers sensed a danger that a public scandal might erupt, embarrassing the administration, so Washington ought to be alerted. "Dick, of course, was here when the telegram was sent but tried to keep out of the issue, although he was, of course, hopping mad at this falsified document," Hoyt added.

Terming the atmosphere surrounding Rubottom's compelled departure "pretty tense," Hoyt said his many friends who thought he was doing a "wonderful job," both American expats and Argentines, felt it was wrong and were "bitter," but talk was already turning to speculation about his replacement. That came a little more than a month later, in mid-December, when Kennedy notified Frondizi of his intent to send

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<sup>117</sup> "Out Goes Rubottom," *Time Magazine*, 20 October 1961, in Rubottom as told to Williams, *Lifelong Diplomat*, pp. 178-79. Notably, the article, thanks to the additional reporting (presumably by Saporiti in Buenos Aires), did not repeat Hannifin's belief (in his September 11 memo) that Frondizi wished Rubottom to stay in his post. Also, despite Hoyt's October 18 cable, there was no claim in the article that Rubottom had plotted with Montero (or other military figures) to oust Frondizi. Unfortunately, neither Saporiti's reporting on the matter or Frigerio's memorandum was found in the *Time* dispatches collection at Houghton Library.

<sup>118</sup> Hank (Henry A. Hoyt, Chargé d'Affairs a.i., U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires) to Bob (Robert F. Woodward, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs), 25 October 1961, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Subject Files of the Assistant Secretary, 1959-1962, box 2, ARGENTINA (ARA files) 1961, RG 59, NA.

diplomat Robert M. McClintock, most recently ambassador in Lebanon but fluent in Spanish; Frondizi, in Tokyo on an Asian jaunt, sent his warm approval.<sup>119</sup> (In early December, Rusk had considered sending Assistant Secretary Woodward to Argentina as ambassador to replace Rubottom but chose McClintock after Woodward, who was willing in principle, decided to stay in his current job until after the upcoming Punta del Este OAS foreign ministers' conference in late January 1962.<sup>120</sup>)

Nevertheless, as Kennedy soon learned when Frondizi stopped to see him in Florida on his way home from Asia, even with Rubottom gone, Argentina's president still suspected American meddling. Kennedy had agreed to see Frondizi on December 24 at his father's beachfront Palm Beach residence to press for Argentine support at the upcoming OAS foreign ministers meeting on Cuba to take place a month later in Punta del Este. During their discussion, an Argentine record shows, Frondizi complained that certain Argentine military sectors, "due to the continuous interference of the Pentagon," were "an endless source of problems and difficulties" for his government.

At this, "Kennedy smiled and with an understanding look added that 'he also suffered from the same interference.'"

"With the difference," Frondizi retorted, "that in his [Kennedy's] country they do not endanger the stability of the government."<sup>121</sup>

A summary of the discussion cabled to Hoyt in Buenos Aires described Frondizi's complaint a bit differently, suggesting that the CIA rather than the Pentagon was the target: "President Frondizi expressed concern regarding pressures from Argentine armed forces on GOA for more emphatic action against Cuba which he said he suspects is accentuated by stimulation US intelligence sources."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Deptel to Amembassy Tokyo, deptel. 1544, cleared by JFK on 13 December 1961; US Embassy, Tokyo (Reischauer), tel. 1717, 11 am, 15 December 1961; both in Argentina 8/61-12/61 folder, box 6, NSF, JFIKL.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Robert F. Woodward by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 5 May 1987, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, pp. 44-45.

<sup>121</sup> Record of Frondizi-JFK conversation, Palm Beach, FL, 24 December 1961, Código 03.4.7.3, Caja 18, AF, BNMM; also memoirs of Frondizi's interpreter: Carlos Ortiz de Rozas, *Confidencias diplomáticas* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 2011), pp. 114-125 (quotation p. 121).

<sup>122</sup> State Department to Embassy in Argentina, deptel 1151, 26 December 1961, *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. XII, doc. 127.

After receiving the December 26 telegram, Hoyt two days later saw a close Frondizi aide, Eduardo S. Gonzalez, to respond to the charge he had made to Kennedy in Palm Beach that "that the intelligence service of the American Embassy in Buenos Aires was putting pressure on the Argentine military on the Argentine position in the Cuba case." Hoyt told Gonzalez, who promptly reported the conversation in a secret memo to Frondizi, that he had interviewed both intelligence officers and military attachés at the embassy and they had all completely denied the accusation. Hoyt emphasized that all embassy staff were expressly instructed "not to press or issue statements" on the subject, even when Argentine military officers ask their opinion.<sup>123</sup>

At Punta del Este in January, Argentina was among a minority of OAS countries (consisting of Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and Ecuador) that, resisting strenuous US pressure, refused to endorse the hardline sanctions against Cuba that Washington espoused; even while joining a condemnation of Cuba's "incompatibility" with inter-American standards, Frondizi's delegation abstained on the sterner sanctions, depriving the US delegation led by Rusk of the two-thirds majority it needed. Argentina's military, furious at what it viewed as Frondizi's undue sympathy for communism and refusal to follow Washington's lead, demanded an immediate break in Argentine diplomatic relations with Cuba, pressed Foreign Minister Carcano to resign, and squeezed Frondizi to leave as well.<sup>124</sup>

Desperately trying to stay afloat, the Argentine president grasped for Washington's support--and still worried that US Embassy officials were conspiring against him, despite again receiving Hoyt's personal reassurance that he had given "categoric" orders to all US embassy personnel not to interfere "in any way" in Argentina's "internal" business. To Frondizi on February 2, Hoyt "[r]ecalled my previous conversation with President concerning his allegations our intelligence officers might be exerting influence on military and assured President I had redoubled instructions for us

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<sup>123</sup> Eduardo S. Gonzalez, memo to President Frondizi, Subject: Interview of the United States Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Hoyt, with Eduardo S. González," 28 December 1961, "(Relaciones Exteriores) Cuba" folder, Código 03.4.7 International Politics, AF, BNMM.

<sup>124</sup> See, e.g., "Argentina's. Break With Cuba Demanded by Military Heads," *NYT*, 1 February 1962; "Frondizi Bows to Military; Accepts O.A.S. Cuba Stand," *NYT*, 3 February 1962, p. 1.

[to] keep out [of] such matters."<sup>125</sup> Within a week, despite tenacious resistance, Frondizi grudgingly severed Argentina's relations with Cuba under threat that otherwise the military would topple him.<sup>126</sup> US officials did not really mind that outcome, having favored building pressures on Frondizi to take a harder anti-Castro stand, "as part of normal operation of democratic process in a free society," though they would "deplore" a military coup.<sup>127</sup>

On February 12, writing Kennedy at what he called a "grave" moment for Argentine democracy and US-Argentina relations, Frondizi decried the "violent campaign" against his government that had erupted after Punta del Este, carried out mainly by "press and subversive politicians" who falsely claimed Frondizi was anti-American and pro-Communist. "However," he continued,

the greatest danger in this crisis lies in the fact that there are indications that it is receiving support and encouragement from certain groups in the United States that, for economic reasons or because of a mistaken ideological or political position, are irreconcilable enemies of the firm, clear, and determined position established by Your Excellency when you presented the Alliance for Progress.

The minion delivering his letter--Cecilio Morales, an economic advisor, who actually gave it to a State Department aide rather than personally to JFK--could provide "further details regarding these observations," Frondizi wrote. Should the military overthrow him, Frondizi warned, that could hasten an eventual extremist, communist, or Castroist revolt in Argentina that could then spread to Brazil. If that happened, he observed, Cuba would be a "secondary" concern, for in the Hemisphere's southern half communism in the Americas would have "a tremendous beachhead and an open field" for advancement and "total penetration".

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<sup>125</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (Hoyt), tel. 1307, 8 pm, 2 February 1962, CDF 735.00/1-962, box 1592, RG 59, NA.

<sup>126</sup> Edward C. Burks, "Argentina Cuts Ties With Cuba," *NYT*, 9 February 1962, p. 1.

<sup>127</sup> Deptel 1391 to Buenos Aires, 2 February 1962, CDF 735.00/1-962, box 1592, RG 59, NA.



Near the end of his lengthy letter, Frondizi stressed he was not asking Kennedy to intervene in Argentine domestic political affairs on his behalf--quite the contrary, he was asking him to *stop* US officials in Buenos Aires from what he suggested was ongoing interference: "I wish to ask you to consider the adoption of measures that can put an end to the activities of persons in any way connected with the United States who, by the most varied, profuse means, are engaged in the agitation I have described."<sup>128</sup>

As State Department officials mulled a draft presidential reply for Kennedy, they cabled a copy of Frondizi's February 12 letter to the US embassy in Buenos Aires for McClintock, who had just arrived in Buenos Aires to take over Rubottom's former post from interim acting ambassador Hoyt, to review and comment upon. But before he had a chance to do so, McClintock had a long talk with Frondizi at the Olivos residence on the night of February 21.<sup>129</sup> Afterwards, the new US ambassador, who had obviously reviewed considerable classified cable traffic, reported that Frondizi had begun with his "usual rehearsal of his feeling of need to have an American Ambassador in Buenos Aires who had implicit confidence of President Kennedy"--echoing his repeated past complaint about Rubottom--and his desire to open a new era in relations with Washington with McClintock reporting personally to JFK. Complaining about military plotting, McClintock reported, Frondizi had in voicing fears of a "golpe del estado -- a coup d'etat" displayed "almost feminine hyper-sensitivity to attitude of his own armed forces." Frondizi also delivered "a long jeremiad" on the case of what he called "the Cuban forgeries," documents allegedly purloined from Cuba's embassy in Buenos Aires by a diplomatic defector and which, on their face, seemed to show that Havana was backing leftist subversives in Argentina. Revealed and publicized by anti-Castro Cuban exiles in late September/early October 1961--in other words, coinciding with Frondizi's

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<sup>128</sup> Frondizi to JFK, 12 February 1962, enc. to L.D. Battle (Executive Secretary, State Dept.), to McGeorge Bundy, 17 February 1962, "Argentina: General, 3/1/62-3/15/62" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL. Battle said Morales had delivered Frondizi's letter "to the Department" on February 15 but did not say to whom specifically; no record (US. or Argentine) of any conversation on that occasion between Morales and any U.S. official was found.

<sup>129</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (McClintock), tel. 1456 (3 pts), 1 pm, 22 February 1962, "Argentina: General, 1/62-2/62" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

New York City summit with JFK, which he suspected was no accident but a deliberate attempt to embarrass him--the alleged records had ignited a major scandal in Argentina. Calls for an immediate diplomatic rupture with Cuba, especially from the military, surged but subsided after a Frondizi-appointed inquiry judged that, due to handwriting discrepancies, it could not confirm the documents' authenticity. Frondizi's comments now to McClintock implied he believed the Cuban exiles behind the affair had acted with clandestine US support.<sup>130</sup> McClintock pleaded ignorance but expressed confidence that "no agency of US government was currently involved in fomenting political pressure or exerting undue influence on any element in Argentina, including the military." He then added--pointedly, in view of the insinuations of Frondizi's as-yet-unanswered February 12 letter to Kennedy--that "one of my first items of business on arrival in Buenos Aires was to ascertain personally that no member of our three military missions, none of our service Attaches, and no element of our information gathering apparatus was interfering in any way whatsoever with the internal affairs of Argentina."

At this, Frondizi asked McClintock if he knew why his predecessor had been recalled "and then answered his own question" by saying that Rubottom, when the United States and Argentina had had "some differences of opinion as to tactics which should be followed re Cuban problem" (obviously alluding to the March 1961 "good offices" episode), had "informed a high Argentine military officer of his disagreement with [Frondizi's] course of action" and this had "undoubtedly excited the military element."\* McClintock again pleaded ignorance but vowed to take any complaints he might have directly to Frondizi and "not consult his soldiers," provoking a presidential

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<sup>130</sup> The present author discusses this controversial Cuban documents episode in greater length in his forthcoming book on Cuba, Brazil, and the Cold War. Though the documents remain disputed, the author located evidence that, although some U.S. officials believed they were authentic, the CIA eventually came to believe that anti-Castro Cubans had forged or altered them to make them more incriminating.

\* Based on the record of this conversation with McClintock, one scholar writes: "Frondizi had complained that former Ambassador Willard Beaulac had criticized government policy in his discussions with military officers and thus undermined the government's authority." Dustin A. Walcher, "Missionaries of Modernization: The United States, Argentina, and the Liberal International Order, 1958-1963" (Ohio State University dissertation, 2007), p. 161. Actually, Frondizi was complaining about Rubottom, who had replaced Beaulac as U.S. ambassador to Argentina in August 1960.

smile (for the only time during the meeting) when he quoted Clemenceau's French dictum that "war is too important to be left to the generals."

Fronzizi here, of course, repeated the charges Frigerio had been allegedly making while bragging that he had successfully gotten rid of Rubottom--and also a claim mentioned in the purported Rubottom to Bundy letter (which Fronzizi did not mention to McClintock; it's uncertain either knew that US embassy officials had learned of its existence). In any case, Fronzizi's explanation for Rubottom's exit made clear that he did not believe any of the more mundane motives (inserting a real New Frontier believer, an economics specialist, or someone able to handle high Buenos Aires expenses better than a career diplomat) but instead connected it to his own griping and requests to senior US officials (i.e., Stevenson and Kennedy).

Commenting on this part of the talk, McClintock said he regretted to describe it but felt it "necessary to place in historical perspective this overbearing, morbid fear of Fronzizi of his own military and his deep seated suspicion that we have been egging them on against him."

Noting that Fronzizi's blaming of "outside influences" in internal Argentine affairs resembled the insinuations in his February 12 letter to Kennedy, McClintock asked the Argentine president to define them--to which "Fronzizi squirmed and let his voice trail off with a vague reference to 'people like the John Birch Society'." McClintock discerned Frigerio's whispers in the president's ear behind this "sort of generalized accusation" but felt it was a fact of life that could not be ignored: "Fronzizi's projection against screen of his imagination of sinister US forces both in and out of our government exercising undue pressure borders on fantasy, but it is, nevertheless, a political fact in the president's brain."

As for JFK's reply to Fronzizi's "extraordinary" February 12 letter, McClintock recommended to State that it be "courteous, concise and chill." McClintock doubted a detailed substantive rebuttal would be of much use, but suggested Kennedy "at least note that so far as we are aware, the charges made by Fronzizi lack any basis in fact and inquire just what are the details regarding Fronzizi's observations" (which Morales was

supposed to have furnished). Kennedy might ask Frondizi to "submit proof of his assertions" through the US ambassador in Buenos Aires, McClintock, who pointed out that his own "rejoinders" to Frondizi at his last meeting might have already had some effect. However, McClintock suspected that in the heat of the upcoming electoral campaign Frondizi might evince further "aberrations" so Kennedy's "brief answer should come quickly."<sup>131</sup>

On March 2, the State Department forwarded to the White House a suggested Kennedy reply to Frondizi's February 12 letter.<sup>132</sup> As McClintock recommended it was brief. Pledging "close friendship" with Argentina and continued support for Frondizi's promotion of democracy and economic progress, it would have Kennedy assert that he had "looked thoroughly into the possibility that persons associated with the United States Government may have undertaken to work against the national interests of Argentina and counter to the political and economic aspirations of your Government. I can assure you, Mr. President, that I have been unable to find any evidence which would tend to substantiate this impression of interference." Kennedy would note that his "concern in this matter" had been "frankly discussed" with Morales, who could inform Frondizi of the seriousness of JFK's concern. The short letter would end with Kennedy expressing hope that its publication would raise public confidence in US support for Argentina's economic development within the framework of representative democracy as a goal of the Alliance for Progress.

Yet the letter was never sent. On the evening of March 6, before the White House had acted, McClintock had another meeting with Frondizi, and found him in a "relaxed and affable mood," "more buoyant" compared to the previous, February 21 meeting. Moreover, since then, his "fears and suspicions ... had largely disappeared, although he did speak darkly of need for constant vigilance over military who were

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<sup>131</sup> U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires (McClintock), tel. 1459, Noon, 23 February 1962, "Argentina: General, 1/62-2/62" folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>132</sup> JFK to Frondizi (suggested reply), enc. to L.D. Battle (Melvin L. Manfull) to McGeorge Bundy, 2 March 1962, Argentina: General, 3/1/62-3/15/62 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

subject to manipulation by unspecified sinister forces."<sup>133</sup> In light of the "welcome change in psychological climate now prevailing in Frondizi's mind," McClintock now believed, he cabled, that it would be wiser to simply ignore, not reply to, Frondizi's "odd" February 12 letter to Kennedy. With Frondizi "so obviously in a cordial and relaxed mood," he felt, "even the lightest rejoinder to his foolish communication would set up a new guilt complex in his Florentine mind. Our own silence is in itself an implied rebuke." Were the subject ever to arise between them--or, as McClintock put it, if "these figments of [Frondizi's] imagination begin to stir"--he could simply tell Argentina's president Kennedy "had found no reason to answer his letter of February 12 because the charges made therein were so obviously without foundation."<sup>134</sup> Handwritten on McClintock's cable was a notation that Rusk was informed and agreed with not replying; two days later State officially told McClintock his advice was "discussed with White House which agreed."<sup>135</sup>

Though McClintock had dismissed, minimized, or even ridiculed Frondizi's "overbearing, morbid" fear of a military *coup d'etat*, less than three weeks later, on March 28, the Argentine military indeed ousted him, ushering in more than two decades of repressive, sometimes brutal dictatorship. McClintock had repeated US support for civilian government and opposition to a military coup, including to potential plotters, though at least one prominent scholar suggests he did so half-heartedly, given US resentment at Frondizi's "maneuverings on Cuba" and residual worry about Peronism.<sup>136</sup> As for Rubottom, after Frondizi's overthrow he wrote a friendly reporter that the events left him "very sad." *Time's* Jerry Hannifin had written to thank Rubottom for "guidance and backgrounding" for the magazine's new cover story ("Democracy's Failure in Argentina") on which he had worked. Hannifin, well aware of Rubottom's antipathy for his nemesis, told Rubottom that in it "we give Frigerio a working over" but

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<sup>133</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (McClintock), tel. 1549, 10 am, 7 March 1962, Argentina: General, 3/1/62-3/15/62 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL

<sup>134</sup> US Embassy, Buenos Aires (McClintock), tel. 1550, 10 am, 7 March 1962, Argentina: General, 3/1/62-3/15/62 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>135</sup> Deptel 1605 (Ball) to BA, 9 March 1962, Argentina: General, 3/1/62-3/15/62 folder, box 6, NSF, JFKL.

<sup>136</sup> Rabe, *Most Dangerous Area in the World*, p. 61.

added, "I'd like to have seen an even tougher job done on him, but we pegged him between Communism and Peronism. We should have pegged him all the way to the left, I think." Rubottom, perhaps newly alert to the perils of putting sensitive thoughts in writing, replied that there was "too much to say it here" and deferred comment until they spoke in person.<sup>137</sup>

For his part, Frigerio had fled into exile in Uruguay shortly before the military took over and charged him with "economic crimes." Excluded from power, yet still close to Peron, he embarked on a career of political and economic commentary, writing many books. Whether he ever wrote or spoke about his aversion to Rubottom is unknown, but at least some of his complaints against the US Embassy in Buenos Aires were recorded shortly after Frondizi's fall. Visiting Washington with Musich, Rogerio spoke on April 20—three weeks after the military seized power—with JFK aide and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (who went to his hotel rather than allowing him to "claim that he had been received at the White House"). Analyzing the events that had led to Frondizi's ouster, Frigerio apparently did not mention the alleged Rubottom-Bundy letter or, for that matter, complain directly about either Rubottom or his successor, but did charge that the "reactionary coalition" that deposed Frondizi had "encouragement" from "certain foreign diplomats." In this category he named Britain's envoys ("for obvious economic reasons to get the old crowd back into power") and "men in the middle levels of the American Embassy." Frigerio, reported Schlesinger, did not complain about Amb. McClintock, "who had been, he said, fine and had tried to help Frondizi till the last moment." The White House aide added, though, that

Frigerio obviously did not know that McClintock had suggested that the military abduct him (Frigerio) in the middle of the crisis. However, Frigerio went on, by the time McClintock had arrived in Buenos Aires, the groundwork had already been laid by other members of the Embassy staff, notably the Economic Counsellor, the labor attaches and the naval attache.

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<sup>137</sup> Hannifin to Rubottom, 27 March 1962; Rubottom to Hannifin, 3 April 1962; both in Hannifin file, folder 78, box 3, R. Richard Rubottom papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX. "Democracy's Failure in Argentina," *Time Magazine*, 30 March 1962.

These men, Frigerio said, had given people, especially in the armed forces, to understand that the United States wanted to get rid of Frondizi.

Schlesinger sent the memo to JFK describing both the conversation with Frigerio and a 51-page mimeographed statement on recent events he handed over ("I hesitate to inflict this document on you except that it gives some sense of the background of the current Argentine crisis"), but the president's reaction, if any, is not known.<sup>138</sup>

In 1964, Rubottom took "early retirement" from the foreign service, entering academia, but still had some bitter memories of his prematurely aborted tenure as ambassador to Argentina, and toward Frigerio in particular. In an interview almost three decades later, briefly recalling his "relatively short" term in Buenos Aires, Rubottom said he "found the Argentines to be difficult to work with. Individually they are among the most charming people in the world but as a country they're difficult." While not delving into the reasons for his early exit--let alone mentioning the mysterious allegedly "falsified" letter to Bundy--Rubottom alluded to the "great hope" Frondizi had inspired in Argentina but added ruefully that the president

had a problem though, and that was 'Gris Eminente,' the Grey Eminence, a man named Frigerio. Frigerio was not admired by most Argentines, particularly not trusted by the military because it was always thought that he had gone to Venezuela where Peron was living at the time of the election prior to May of 1958 and made a deal to deliver the Peronist vote to Frondizi. This undermined Frondizi's position in the minds of many of the knowledgeable people and it made Frigerio, who was seen as the instrument of this deal, even more suspect. So, I did not have any dealings with Frigerio and this hurt my relations with Frondizi. I think he expected the American Ambassador to deal with him as sort of an alter ego. I didn't do it.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Memorandum for Edward [sic; Edwin] Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, "Subject: Conversation with Rogelio Frigerio, April 20," 24 April 1962, enc. to Schlesinger to President, 25 April 1962, "Schlesinger, Arthur M., April 1962" folder, box 65a, President's Office Files (POF), JFKL; the reference to McClintock suggesting the Argentine military abduct Frigerio during the crisis is redacted in the version of this memo (sanitized in 2007) found in Staff Memoranda: Schlesinger, Arthur M., 1962: April-June, box 327, NSF, JFKL. Frigerio after Frondizi ouster: "Argentine Fears Reds," *NYT*, 19 April 1962, p. 15; Newton, "Frigerio"; Mario Morando, *Frigerio, el ideólogo de Frondizi* (Buenos Aires: A-Z editora, 2013).

<sup>139</sup> Rubottom interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 13 February 1990, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, p. 36.

In his as-told-to memoirs, published in 2011, Rubottom and his amanuensis also alluded to getting involuntarily enmeshed in the battle between factions squabbling around Frondizi, particularly Frigerio's side. "After Frondizi made clear to President Kennedy that he'd like to see a new US Ambassador to Argentina"--the book quotes the Kennedy-Frondizi exchange cited above from their private September 26, 1961 Hotel Carlyle meeting--he was replaced even though State Department colleagues felt he was being "treated unfairly."<sup>140</sup> Again, however, despite quoting contemporaneous Rubottom cables critical of Frigerio, there was no mention of his mysterious alleged letter to "George" Bundy.

So, was the May 2 Rubottom to Bundy letter real? Although Rubottom himself furiously denied authoring it, if he *had* written it, he had every reason to deny doing so, since it implicated him in, to put it mildly, grossly "undiplomatic" behavior. As noted, also, the purported letter's contents are a mixed bag, after comparison with declassified US documents: some statements appear reasonable, and supported, but other, important ones lack corroboration. If a forgery, who was behind it? Was it one of the "dirty tricks" of Frigerio or his gang, as Hoyt suspected? Or devised by someone (the Soviets?) out to damage US-Argentine relations? Was the letter (or its translation) passed to Frondizi, and if so, was he (or did he become) aware of its questionable provenance? In any case, both US and, especially, Argentine documents suggest it may have influenced Frondizi, deepening his documented worry that US embassy officials in Buenos Aires were conspiring with plotters against him, especially in the military. Were they? Or was Frondizi led astray? (Stephen Rabe, citing Frondizi's complaint to JFK at Palm Beach in December 1961 that Argentine military pressure for sterner anti-Cuba action "is accentuated by stimulation US intelligence sources," concludes: "US agents apparently urged the military to pressure Frondizi."<sup>141</sup>) While some of this story may seem like diplomatic inside baseball, deciphering it requires probing, and uncovering

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<sup>140</sup> Rubottom as told to Williams, *Lifelong Diplomat*, chap. 11.

<sup>141</sup> Rabe, *Most Dangerous Area in the World*, p. 59.



new information and insights, on larger issues concerning US-Argentina and Kennedy-Frondizi relations, domestic Argentine politics, and reverberations of the Cuban issue in Latin America at a key juncture of the Cold War. I welcome further investigation into this odd episode (which is not mentioned in standard works on US-Argentina relations<sup>142</sup>) by authentic specialists on Argentine history, who have deeper knowledge of the Frondizi period and Argentine archives and sources.

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<sup>142</sup> For example, there is no discussion of Rubottom's replacement at Frondizi's request, or the alleged Rubottom-Bundy letter, in Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America*; Rabe, *Most Dangerous Area in the World*; or Sheinin, *Argentina and the United States*. One scholar writes merely that Rubottom, a relative "moderate" on Cuba, was pushed aside, replaced as assistant secretary by a "tougher" Mann, and "served in Buenos Aires for a year before being forced into retirement when the new Kennedy administration did not offer him another post"--wrongly implying that the impetus to replace him came from Washington, not Buenos Aires. Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 132. In published Argentine sources, I found one allusion, in a book by an ex-Frondizi aide who admired Frigerio: Albino Gómez. In a purported diary, Gómez wrote that Frondizi, apparently in late August 1961, told him that he had summoned Rubottom, knowing of his contact with "General Toranzo and other conspirators," and after the U.S. ambassador had defended his conduct, had "kicked him out of the office" ("*Entonces Frondizi lo echó del despacho*"). Then, obviously alluding to the disputed 2 May 1961 missive to Bundy, Gómez says Rubottom "wrote a letter to a man close to President Kennedy" but received a "cool" ("*sosegate*") response from Washington and now behaved like a "well-bred child" and no longer objected to Argentine foreign policy. Albino Gómez, *Arturo Frondizi: El último estadista de la Argentina (1958-1962). La vigencia de un proyecto de desarrollo [Arturo Frondizi: The last statesman of Argentina (1958-1962). The validity of a development project]* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Turmalina, 2017), p. 173. Gómez cited no additional sources, making it harder to judge the account's credibility. He evidently had access to the alleged Rubottom to Bundy letter, so it's impossible to know whether the claim that Frondizi evicted Rubottom from his office came from Frondizi or from the alleged letter. An Argentine diplomat who translated Frondizi's 24 December 1961 conversation with JFK recalled that Rubottom "intervened without ceasing in Argentine internal affairs." Ortiz de Rozas, *Confidencias diplomáticas*, p. 123.