

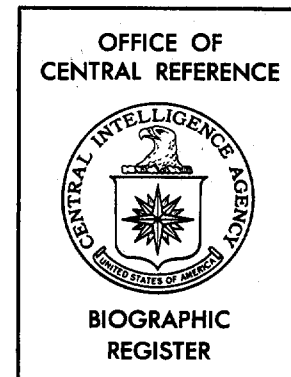
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BRAZIL

Vasco Tristão Leitão da CUNHA

Foreign Minister

Foreign Minister in the provisional Mazzilli cabinet, Vasco Tristão Leitão da Cunha agreed on 15 April 1964 to continue in the same portfolio in the cabinet of President Humberto Castelo Branco. A brilliant scion of an old and distinguished family who is believed to possess substantial political courage, the new Foreign Minister is an old-school, highly respected senior career diplomat of obvious pro-Western and democratic orientation. In one of his initial public pronouncements as Foreign Minister he reportedly stated that Brazil would continue relations with all countries of the world, but as a conscious member of the Western world, Brazil would naturally have more intimate relations with those nations which had the same moral heritage and the same concept of freedom and progress. Somewhat later he announced, "Brazil will not permit Communism in its territory and will not make deals with Communism in the Americas." Named Ambassador to Portugal in December 1963 (he was not due to arrive in Lisbon until April 1964), da Cunha has carved an illustrious career despite the fact that he suffers from acute nervous tension and reportedly has been afflicted with palsy for a number of years. Included in his long and checkered career are assignments at the United Nations as well as in Argentina, Peru, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Chile, Paraguay, Cuba and the USSR.



In the summer of 1963 da Cunha was nominated by Brazil as Ambassador to France. It was felt at the time that he was the man who could re-establish normal diplomatic relations between the two nations because of his supposed personal relationship with French President Charles de Gaulle. However, France refused to act on the Brazilian request for agrément, and in November (amid considerable bitter recrimination in the Brazilian press) da Cunha's nomination was withdrawn. The French refusal was presumably a part of the Franco-Brazilian "lobster war" over fishing rights off the Brazilian continental shelf. Subsequently, it was rumored in Foreign Office circles that da Cunha might be sent to Washington. Da Cunha's nomination to Lisbon was probably not a demotion, given the special relationship between Portugal and Brazil. The fact that da Cunha is an old-school, professional diplomat, with pro-US leanings caused the US Embassy in Rio to feel he might well have been passed over for the Washington job because of his lack of political influence, sympathies, and connections with the Goulart government.

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 GROUP 1
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Vasco Tristão Leitão da CUNHA (cont)

Vasco Tristão Leitão da Cunha was born 2 September 1903 in the then Federal District of Rio de Janeiro. After receiving a bachelor of social and juridical sciences degree from the University of Rio de Janeiro, he entered the diplomatic service in 1927, receiving his first assignment abroad two years later in Lima. In 1941 he was appointed Under Secretary of Justice, and he was acting Minister of Justice at the outbreak of World War II. He then showed himself to be staunchly pro-Ally and pro-United States, proving his courage and the sincerity of his sentiments by ordering the arrest of the allegedly Nazi-sympathizing chief of police of Rio, Felinto Muller, although this arrest was bound to, and did, precipitate an internal political crisis. After his return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs late in 1942, da Cunha was sent to Lisbon as First Secretary of the mission. He was at that time reported somewhat embittered against then Foreign Minister Oswaldo Aranha's failure to accord him a rank commensurate with his former cabinet position.

In addition to being a professional diplomat of great competence, da Cunha has unusual honesty and integrity. He convincingly demonstrated the latter qualities when, as secretary general of the Foreign Office in 1961, he publicly disavowed the trade negotiations of Jânio Quadros' emissary, João Dantas, with the East German regime on the ground that these negotiations were being carried on at a level and in a manner inconsistent with the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Quadros thereupon forced da Cunha's resignation as secretary general, and until his appointment to Moscow in April 1962 (which all sectors of Brazilian public opinion applauded) da Cunha served on the Foreign Office's Promotion Board. While secretary general, da Cunha was of unfailing assistance to the US Embassy in Rio, though his effectiveness as a contact was limited by overrulings from above.

Prior to his appointment as secretary general in February 1961, da Cunha served for four years as Ambassador to Havana and in early 1961 made a trip there, reportedly to convey a Brazilian offer of mediation between the United States and Cuba. He insisted he had gone merely to bid his good-byes. While Ambassador to Havana in the early stages of the Castro regime da Cunha was considered sympathetic to Fidel Castro.

[redacted] His views changed rapidly, however, so that after his return to Rio his home became a gathering place for exiled anti-Castroites. Da Cunha's wife (who has a reputation for being morally weak and who in March 1960 [redacted]

[redacted] and daughter, as well as the Foreign Minister himself, have been praised highly by Cuban refugees in Rio for help extended them both in Cuba and Brazil.

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Vasco Tristão Leitão da CUNHA
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Da Cunha and his wife, Virginia, are known to have two children. The Foreign Minister speaks French, Spanish and fluent English, in addition to his native Portuguese.

TRS:kvm

July 1964

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