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Diplomatic Correspondent

The account of newsman John Scali's middleman role in the Cuban missile crisis does Mr. Scali credit and instructs the rest of us in the odd ways of diplomacy. On the key Friday in October, 1962, apparently for reasons connected entirely with his repute as a reporter, he was approached by a Soviet diplomat and put in the position of passing between the American and Soviet governments the outlines of a possible settlement. The crisis thus hinged in part on the diplomatic reporting of Mr. Scali, who is, appropriately, ABC's State Department correspondent.

It must be stressed that Mr. Scali instantly and scrupulously shed his role as newsman—thus losing a scoop to make a reporter weep—and took up his responsibilities as a citizen whom chance had thrust into a critical and unforeseen part in the great Cuban drama. The Soviets, and other observers, would be wrong to conclude from this once-in-a-million performance that the American press is, as the Russians often seem to believe, merely another branch of government. This is simply not so. Relations between press and government are not free of ambiguity but the fact that Mr. Scali acted as courier not journalist proves anew the rule of formal separation.