

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 2: They don't think Bosch is [a communist]. They think he's just a stooge for the deal. But nobody thought Castro was either.

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[Footnotes added]

LBJ: Hello?

Abe Fortas: I'm sorry to bother you, sir, but I thought I'd better report this to you. At first, I . . . [former Governor of Puerto Rico Luis] Muñoz[-Marín] is still in New York. I reached [Roberto] Sánchez Vilella, who is the present Governor, and I told him that I was concerned about the developing situation in the Dominican Republic and that I thought that it would be a good idea if we got somebody out to sit with Juan Bosch and try to talk to him and persuade him to keep calm and not say anything.

We talked about who it ought to be. Sánchez, the Governor, suggested [Jorge] Font Saldaña, whom I know and who is Secretary of Treasury, but a very, very level-headed, a very completely pro-American guy. And thank God he got out there and talked with Bosch, and he's with him right now. And after the news was announced on the radio—

LBJ: Wait just one second—

In the background can be heard a TV broadcast of a segment of Johnson's remark of the swearing-in of Raborn and Helms earlier in the day. The section he listens to is:

"... and as an inspiration to his coworkers and as a dedicated patriotic man himself that gave America the great strength of the Polaris missile. His genius was proved in that task."¹

LBJ: Go ahead.

The news broadcast can still be heard in the background, wrapping up the story on the new CIA leadership and switching to the U.S. Marines in the Dominican Republic.

¹ "Remarks at the Swearing In of Admiral Raborn and Richard Helms as Director and Deputy Director, CIA," *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1966), doc. 209.

Fortas: Then after the news came over on radio here I called Jaime Benítez, chancellor of the University [of Puerto Rico], and got him to go into his house. Juan Bosch and Font Saldaña are in the chancellor's summer house, which is about 100 yards away.

And I talked with Benítez. He said ... I'll get, read my notes to you: in Bosch's judgment this move is dynamite but that Benítez thinks that it was inevitable. He thinks it would have been better if the United States had gotten OAS [Organization of American States] concurrence before doing it. He says that Bosch is surprisingly calm about it, that Font Saldaña is talking to him and doing a very good psychiatric job on him. On the other hand, Bosch is getting all sorts of crazy stories. This is Benítez talking. For example, Bosch has been told that there was complicity between the U.S. embassy and [General Elias] Wessin y Wessin, the general down there.² And that they have what it purports to be a message from our embassy down there that Wessin would have to bombard the city or all would be lost. Benítez says that he, Benítez, believes that this is false and has so told Bosch.

I asked him what Bosch was going to do and what position he was going to take. First, Benítez said that he thought that Bosch would ... he had planned to do what Benítez advised him to. That as of the moment Bosch takes the position as follows: that the constitutional forces, meaning the Bosch forces, have 17,000 men in the Dominican Republic. But that Bosch thinks that a truce should be produced. He says that if Wessin y Wessin could be prevailed on to cease fire, that Bosch would be willing to get his group to do likewise. That Bosch favors OAS intervention and a return to constitutionality—that is to say OAS coming in and then elections later on. Bosch says that he wants to go back to the Dominican Republic, but if it were necessary as part of a truce, that he would be willing to stay out until after the new elections were held. That he, Bosch, wants to exhaust every possible type of appeal for support of constitutionality. What he has done is what Benítez called an appeal to Latin American conscience. And that he has thus far received messages in support of him, Bosch, from Venezuela, Costa Rica, Peru, and Chile. He says that Bosch is willing to go to Washington to present his case to the Organization of American States or do whatever else is necessary. Benítez volunteered the statement that Bosch is totally and completely anti-Castro. Benítez asked me if I had any suggestions to make to him, Benítez, as to what Bosch ought to say or what attitude he ought to take. I said I did not, that I was really calling him just as a matter of my own information to find out what the situation was, and that if anything else occurred to me I would call him back.

LBJ: Wait just a minute—

Fortas: Yes, sir.

The news report has moved to Johnson's statement ordering the Marines into the Dominican Republic.

"I reported the decisions that this Government considers necessary in this situation in order to protect American lives.

² Air Force General Wessin y Wessin was Chief of the Armed Forces in the Dominican Republic and commander of the right-wing forces. Fortas pronounces his name as Westin.

“The members of the leadership expressed their support of these decisions. The United States Government has been informed by military authorities in the Dominican Republic that American lives are in danger. These authorities are no longer able to guarantee their safety and they have reported that the assistance of military personnel is now needed for that purpose.

“I have ordered the Secretary of Defense to put the necessary American troops ashore in order to give protection to hundreds of Americans who are still in the Dominican Republic and to escort them safely back to this country. This same assistance will be available to the nationals of other countries, some of whom have already asked for our help.

“Pursuant to my instructions 400 Marines have already landed. General Wheeler, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has just reported to me that there have been no incidents.”³

The news then turns to developments in Congress.

LBJ: Go ahead.

Fortas: Well, he just wanted to know what—whether I had any suggestions to make to him as to what Bosch ought to do or say. And Bosch is right there in the chancellor’s summer house.

So I ... we have got that means of communication if it’s useful. And I’ll just stand by and wait if anybody wants me to use it.

LBJ: Good. I’ll talk to [Secretary of State] Dean [Rusk] and [Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs] Tom Mann in the morning. We have about 2[00] or 300 of them out of there already. Well, they have about 900 more to go. They’ve had no problems; there are no incidents. And they’re moving them rather quickly, and there’s no firing. And both sides have quietened down. We don’t know—we haven’t had an answer from them to our appeal for a ceasefire in my statement, but the [*unintelligible*] it’s having the same effect. We ... our hope [is] they could get them out tomorrow pretty early.

We notified the OAS through the ambassador, and we didn’t think, though, and I didn’t think I could wait 20 seconds for the OAS to get all their group together to try to determine, when I had two wires from the ambassador [William Tapley Bennett Jr.] within the hour—[*unintelligible*] and he’s a very calm, sober, judicious career man—to just not act on it.

I had [U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations] Adlai [Stevenson] in and [Senator J. William] Fulbright [D-Arkansas] and all of them and we went over it and I took out ... I put in a strong statement on OAS and then put in ... cut out anything that might be interpreted as aligning them with the communists and stuff like that, which our people tell us they are. They don’t think

³ “Statement by the President Upon Ordering Troops Into the Dominican Republic,” *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), [doc. 212](#).

Bosch is. They think he's just a stooge for the deal. But nobody thought Castro was either. And so we'll just take a look at it, and I sure do appreciate your call.

Fortas: Yes, sir.

LBJ: Thank you.

Fortas: Thank you, sir.