

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 3: In my opinion this is a real struggle mounted by Mr. [Fidel] Castro.

April 29, 1965 | 8:47 AM | LBJ and William Raborn | WH6504.06-7375¹ | LBJ Library

[Footnotes added]

William “Red” Raborn: Good morning, sir.

LBJ: What’s the news this morning?

Raborn: Well, the news is about the same as it was last night. We have about 500 Marines ashore. The rebels have heavy weapons and are holed up and barricaded themselves in the center of the city. The police forces are relatively ineffective against these people because they can’t deal with these heavier weapons. They sent out a tank, which was promptly knocked out by a bazooka. There was no report of any contact or any fighting by our Marines. That’s in Santo Domingo.

The situation in [South] Vietnam is we have no report yet from the contacts which the Marines made on their patrol. Our recon [reconnaissance] flights were not too effective on account of bad weather. There is some indication that the regular units of the North Vietnamese Army have moved their headquarters a little closer to where the Marines are located at the airport there. There is some conflicting intelligence on our communications, but we’re still getting on top of this.

Is there any point in particular that you have in mind, sir?

LBJ: No.

Back to the Dominican Republic thing: Can we have any evaluation of the relative strengths and what really happened yesterday that turned this thing around?

Raborn: Well, sir, yes, we do. The ... in the first place, we’ve identified eight hardcore Castro-trained guerrillas that are ... and when they came in, they pushed aside the [Juan] Bosch people and took command of the forces. The Bosch people were—well, they might be slightly pink, but were not the kind of terrorists that the Castroites were.

¹ An earlier transcript of this conversation appeared as “Telephone Conversation Between Director of Central Intelligence Raborn and President Johnson,” 29 April 1965, in *FRUS 1964–1968*, 32: doc. 39 fn. 3 (<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v32/d39>).

They rapidly took over the situation. They raided police stations, took their arms, took their uniforms, and are ... was sort of in command of the city in spots. The regular army, the tanks units and so forth ... General [unintelligible] has just sat on his ditty-box over there and hasn't done a darn thing about moving in.² I think he's afraid of the gasoline bombs and the bazookas in the hands of the rebels. The police—the army officers are holed up inside the city in one or two places and seem to have lost their nerve against the hardcore and hard-nosed Castro-led guerrillas. I think they lined up a bunch of people and shot them, and this has kind of terrorized the other folks. In my opinion this is a real struggle mounted by Mr. [Fidel] Castro.

LBJ: What do you think we ought to do about it?

Well, sir, I think, sir, that we've got to take more positive action to clean these people out, and ... otherwise it's liable to drag on and on, and eventually these other folks will get—the Castro-led types—will get the top hand, and we'll have a mess on our hands. [Unintelligible] restore order and try to turn it back over to the junta. You know we had a member of the junta that requested, that begged us, to do this.

LBJ: Well, that will put us in pretty much trouble internationally with all the international organizations, the OAS [Organization of American States] and the United Nations, won't it?

Raborn: It could, sir. And I noticed that the OAS is meeting this morning. And ... but there's no question in my mind that this is the start of expansion of Castro's—

LBJ: How many Castro terrorists are there?

Raborn: Well, we have positively identified eight of them. And I sent a list over to the White House, well, about 6:00 [A.M.]—a brochure on them. It's on the ... it should be over there in your office, Situation Room, on who they are, what they are, and what their training has been.

LBJ: Have we—what has been our problem with intelligence down there? Have we known this thing was in this shape?

Raborn: I—from my review of it, sir, I think we've been pretty much on top of this, yes, sir. And, of course, the forces being pre-positioned and all that and readiness to move in was part of the deal.

I think that there are some deficiencies in our ability to get—[clears throat] excuse me—regular broadcast radio get aboard ships. We probably should have had some of those aboard the ships there, so that we could reassure the populants [*sic*: populace] and all that sort of thing. The local radio station in Santo Domingo, of course, went off the air, and the only thing they heard was from Puerto Rico. And looking at this thing last night after I got back from your nice dinner, it looked to me like that we ought to equip ourselves with regular household radio transmitters, so that the house radio could ... we could broadcast information direct to the people if we so wished.

² Johnson was referring to a regular, unsecure line that might be intercepted.

LBJ: Did we get our walkie-talkies in there yesterday?

Raborn: Yes, sir. They were distributed. One of the difficulties, as you know, is that the army units in the city, and the General who had tanks on the other side of the river, didn't have any way to talk to each other. So we distributed 70 sets, as I understand it, yesterday, and now they're in communication with each other.

LBJ: OK, we'll probably get together a little later. I'll probably call you a little later.

Raborn: All right, sir. Thank you.