

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 11: We've tried to save that country.

August 27, 1965 | 11:30AM | LBJ and Dwight Eisenhower | WH6508.12-8660 | LBJ Library

[Footnotes added]

LBJ: Yes, General.¹

Dwight Eisenhower: First of all, Mr. President, I want to wish you a very happy birthday.

LBJ: Well, you make—

Eisenhower: I hear you're going to get a chance to go to your home and enjoy it, and I hope you have a wonderful vacation.²

LBJ: I want to, but I'm afraid I've got problems on my steel strike, and my maritime strike, and my space boys. I don't whether we're going to stop them or let them go another day. And I wish you were here to make these decisions.

Eisenhower: *[laughing]*: Well ...

LBJ: I want to tell you something I heard that ought to please you.

Eisenhower: Yeah.

LBJ: On my birthday, one of the great men in this country—and I won't quote his name because you'd think he's sucking up to both of us—but one of the men I respect most and that you do, told me that he had just come back from the Middle West, and the best thing that happened to this country was that ... he picked up from a number of his business associates their comment and the confidence they had that the President would counsel with President Eisenhower and would try to get his advice. *[LBJ chuckles]*³

Eisenhower: Well, that was very nice.

¹ Eisenhower had resigned in his commission as a 5-star General of the Army in 1952 to run for president. After he left office, his successor, John F. Kennedy, reinstated Eisenhower's commission at his former rank, and Eisenhower had since indicated that he preferred the honorific "General" rather than "Mr. President."

² Later that afternoon, Johnson left for the LBJ Ranch in Texas.

³ This was probably a reference to Senator Clinton Anderson (D-New Mexico), who had just returned from New Mexico. Johnson spoke with Anderson by telephone at 10:54 AM, but Eisenhower was not mentioned in that brief call (which was recorded). But Anderson had submitted a memorandum to Johnson that provided more details on the trip and that may have made mention of the topic.

LBJ: So ...

Eisenhower: I wanted to tell you another thing, sir. [Director of Central Intelligence] Admiral [William “Red”] Raborn was just here.

LBJ: Yes.

Eisenhower: [*with LBJ acknowledging*] And of all the things he had to tell me, the one thing that I wanted to tell you that I applaud is your support of this programs [*sic*] they’ve developed out there in Southeast Asia for propaganda—you might say “indoctrination”— and protection of people in their rights and against these raiding troo—I think that [*unintelligible*]—he tells me that you’re—he’s allowed [\$]40 million, I think it was in Vietnam, something in Laos—all of that is—I think is a—that’s a ... that money is the finest money you that you’ve just allocated that I can think of. Just wonderful.

LBJ: [*with Eisenhower acknowledging*] Well, I’m so glad to hear it. I’ve also tried to pursue more, and if you ever have the time—I don’t want to bother you or pester you. You’ve given all you deserve to give. But I want the new group in there at USIA [United States Information Agency] that we have tried to reform by taking the Kennedy people out and putting in others. I’ve got one General [David] Sarnoff and different ones. I want you to see them, and I have repeated to them, as near as I could, what you said to me and [Robert] McNamara at the Cabinet Room that day. And they have gone up and they are putting in extra transmitters. They’re putting in—they’re actually going to put a television station on the air where the people out there can know of the work that their own soldiers are doing and can applaud it. So—

Eisenhower: Yeah, I think we’re going to need to have the instruments outside the—

LBJ: Well, they’re just going to put them up in the villages—put a big screen in them. And ... Japan, I think, is going to contribute the television sets.

Eisenhower: Oy!

LBJ: So it all comes out of your feeling that if we don’t get the morale of the people, we can’t ever win anything. And—

Eisenhower: That is correct. And I want to tell you, as I say, I just ... I tell you that I talked to him about his coordination, and he said they’ve set up a pretty good conferring group that worked on that pretty well. And he seemed pretty confident about the whole thing.

LBJ: The liberals have attacked me a little bit for putting Raborn in, but he was quite a success with the Polaris, and he was a stable fellow, and he had a good many of the qualities you and I like in people—good horse sense.⁴

Eisenhower: Oh, I was just—I was impressed deeply, Mr. President.

⁴ Raborn had been the first director of the U.S. Navy’s Fleet Ballistic Missile Program. Under his watch, that program developed the Polaris missile, the world’s first submarine-launched nuclear missile.

LBJ: Well, they have hammered at me for having a military man—the [*Washington*] *Post* and the [*New York*] *Times*. But—⁵

Eisenhower: Well, once in a while, you know, a man is fortunate in his enemies. [*both laugh*] Now, when you take a man who is so dedicated and capable as Raborn, or a number of these other service men you've used, who have no axe to grind, no chance of getting rich or any great acclaim—they just—they're doing ... just want to do some work for their friends, I'll tell you, you won't make many mistakes there.

LBJ: Yeah.

Eisenhower: And I would, as I say, I'd ... from my mind, I would like the criticism of such people as that.

LBJ: Well, I've observed one thing, Mr. President, about the military people.

Eisenhower: Yeah. Yeah.

LBJ: That is different from nearly every other group you see. If you tell them that their country needs them, that's all you need to say. They just come on and do it. That's true with ...

Now, McNamara said he just had hell getting Andrew Goodpaster a third star. And I said, well, that's the finest thing [that] happens. And I want to look forward to the day—I want to see Goodpaster chief of staff. I just think he's one of the competent men, and that's the first thing you told me.⁶

Now, I brought in Mr. [William] McKee over at the Air Force to try to help us get straightened out on this waste of some of these idealistic visionaries on the supersonic thing.⁷

⁵ When the White House announced Raborn as Johnson's choice to replace John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence, the *New York Times* editorial board had commended Raborn on his prior service and virtues but pointed to his lack of experience and his age. They wrote: "The liabilities are, however, important. Admiral Raborn has had little intelligence experience; and the job of running the most complex intelligence operation in the world, and of coordinating other intelligence organizations jealous of their prerogatives, is one that requires professional expertise as well as tact, charm and strength. Another liability is Admiral Raborn's age; he is 59. The C.I.A. post should be a nonpartisan, long-term appointment; it is absolutely essential for continuity and effectiveness that intelligence be kept out of politics and that it be headed by men who will give to it major portions of their lives." Editorial, "Master Spy," *New York Times*, 13 April 1965.

⁶ Goodpaster had been a senior aide to Eisenhower while he was president. Johnson had called on Goodpaster to act as a conduit to the former president. Johnson was probably referring to the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Goodpaster did not end up serving in that role but did serve as the Director of the Joint Staff, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1966–67) and, later, as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO Forces (1969–74).

⁷ General William F. McKee had been vice chief of staff of the Air Force. In May, Johnson had appointed him to head the Federal Aviation Authority. The appointment drew criticism the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, and others, for putting a military veteran at the top of the civilian organization. "Pilots Criticize Appointment," *New York Times*, 6 May 1965.

And he's been letting contracts for 25 years, and he's just a competent man. He retired. I said, "The country needs you." And he just clicks his heels and said, "When the country needs you, the commander in chief says so, he does it." The rest of them want to argue about how much they're making, and why they can't leave their wife, and so forth.

Eisenhower: Oh, sure, sure.

LBJ: A military man doesn't do that. He wants—if his country needs him, he's ready to go. You take—

Eisenhower: No-one will ever know how badly I hated to go to NATO in [*unintelligible*], I'll tell you that.⁸

LBJ: I'll tell you one thing I've got a problem with. I sure wished I could get some, a little help. And I guess I oughtn't to—I don't want to shove it. But I mentioned it once before.

You remember you talked to me about a certain young man? And he's giving me lots of problems. You told me about what he's doing to your foundation and ... in the other administration, he was kind of running it.⁹

Now, he's getting ready to make a tour of, over the country. And he's shown a little unhappiness, and he says that I listen to [Senator Everett] Dirksen [R-Illinois] too much, and I listen to the other groups too much. And—

Eisenhower: Now, who is this fellow? Just remind me—

LBJ: Bobby. Bobby Kennedy.

Eisenhower: Oh, yeah!

LBJ: You remember, you told me the first week you were in some of the problems that you'd thought I'd have with him and created—

Eisenhower: Told you the first day I saw you.

LBJ: That's right. And—so that's an accurate prediction. Now, he's getting ready to go off on a big tour to Latin America. And he's going to tell them that what we've done in the Dominican Republic and other things are not right. He's already criticized us.¹⁰

Now, the polls show that about 85 [percent] to 10 [percent] approve what we've done. And we've tried to save that country.¹¹

⁸ Eisenhower served as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) of NATO from April 1951 to May 1952.

⁹ Referring to the JFK administration.

¹⁰ On 7 May, Kennedy described the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic as having been done "without regard to our friends and allies in the Organization of American States." "The Nation," *New York Times*, 27 June 1965.

I just wish there's some way that we could blow it up and puff it up, and take a nice jet airplane, and take whoever he wanted, and get Milton [Eisenhower] to visit five or six capitals in a week as my special representative before this other thing occurs.¹²

So I could have ... I either have to do that or I have to get [Secretary of State] Dean Rusk. And Rusk is not as well known and not as well recognized, and really not as well liked among them. And if I can't get him, I'll have to get the vice president [Hubert Humphrey], and I have problems there. I don't know what he'd commit him to.¹³ Now, Milton understands them and he's gone over the whole Dominican Republic—

The recording ends abruptly. LBJ's next call is to Milton Eisenhower.

¹¹ It is not clear what polls Johnson was referring to. Major published public opinion polls of the period were generally favorable to Johnson's handling of the Dominican crisis but were much more closely divided than suggested by the numbers Johnson uses. An August 1965 poll by the Opinion Research Corporation that asked respondents on Johnson's handling of the situation in the Dominican Republic found that 16 percent rated it as "very good," 31 percent as "fairly good," 24 percent as "not so good/fair," and 29 percent as "no opinion." (Opinion Research Corporation, August 2 - September 3, 1965.) Other polls on the issue found a similar divide.

¹² Milton Eisenhower was the younger brother of Dwight Eisenhower and was President of Johns Hopkins University. During his brother's administration he had often traveled to Latin America as the president's personal emissary, and he had written a book of his experiences as *The Wine is Bitter* (Doubleday, 1963).

¹³ Humphrey had a reputation inside the White House for speaking too freely and going off-message.