

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 7: They're shooting at each other now. The Marines are in open fire with the Communists. They started shooting at our embassy, and the Marines are shooting back.

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LBJ: Sir?

Abe Fortas: I thought I'd better check to you the information that I have from my people in Puerto Rico. I think they've done an excellent job, particularly Jaime Benítez, the chancellor of the University [of Puerto Rico]. I have not seen the [news] tickers or the—

LBJ: They're shooting at each other now. The Marines are in open fire with the Communists. They started shooting at our embassy, and the Marines are shooting back.

Fortas: Oh, Lord.

LBJ: The ambassador [William Tapley Bennett] called twice and says that we just don't know how much to do. The snipers' bullets—we could hear the bullets and the firing by, right by the American embassy.

Fortas: Mm-hmm. Well, now, Benítez tells me that he wrote a statement from [Juan] Bosch, which Bosch used, saying that the United States had a right to protect its citizens and that the landing was legitimate for this purpose. I don't know whether that is accurate or whether it's come out that way.

Benítez says that the difficulty, a good deal of agony was caused by the *Herald Tribune* article this morning saying that we regard Bosch as a communist. Benítez says that Bosch made a statement to the press in which he criticized the Soviet Union and repudiated [Fidel] Castro. He said that Bosch is going to be a "Face the Nation" program, which will be taped in Puerto Rico on Saturday and will be telecast up here on Sunday. He says that Bosch is getting quite a lot of communications from Latin American liberals and leaders of similar liberal Latin American countries supporting him.

Benítez says that some of Bosch's people are telling him that this is all a cover, that the United States has decided to occupy the Dominican Republic. And [General] Wessin [y] Wessin is making statement that he is working in full cooperation with the United States. Benítez is, seems to me, to be very sensible about this thing. I asked him this afternoon what he thinks could be done and what he thinks a resolution of this thing would be, that would be least undesirable. He said that he thought that the only thing that could be done that might be acceptable all around, including Latin America, would be to do whatever has to be done through the OAS [Organization of American States]. He is very realistic about what has to be done. That is to say

a temporary military junta with some general OAS assessment of the situation and maybe the usual business about elections later on. He thinks that if this is done overtly as a U.S. operation which results in establishing the Wessin y Wessin group, that it will be regarded as the equivalent to the original establishment of Trujillo. The extent to which he's right and wrong I don't know.

He ... Mrs. Bosch bought a ticket to come up to Washington. She's a very articulate woman. I think that we have stopped her. We've stopped her a couple of times today and then got word she was coming. But my last report is from Benítez, says that she has been stopped down there by Benítez and Benítez's wife going to work on her. She's very, very articulate, and if she comes up here she'll do a lot of talking and raise a lot of hell. So that's the situation, and if there are any instructions toward—that anybody wants to give me to convey down there, I'll be glad to do it.

LBJ: Thank you so much, Abe.

Fortas: Yes, sir.

LBJ: All right.

Fortas: Thank you, sir. Bye.