

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 9: Don't you let them take that public sentiment away from me. You be arousing them as much as [they] arouse you.

May 2, 1965 | 6:24 PM | LBJ, William Tapley Bennett, John Martin, and McGeorge Bundy | WH6505.02-7528 | LBJ Library

[Footnotes added]

LBJ: Hello? Hello?

William Tapley Bennett: Hello?

LBJ: Yes, Tap.

Bennett: Mr. President?

LBJ: Yes.

Bennett: Well, we've still got raging disorders downtown, congregations of mobs being incited to violent actions, the most violent anti-American Castro-type oratory being spouted at them.

These ... just a general ... we have some reports that churches are being attacked. It's a real *[unintelligible]*.¹

The OAS [Organization of American States] delegation came in in mid-afternoon and therefore hasn't got active yet. They're having some difficulties in that the, this rebel group, that they could only guarantee their safety if they travelled around the town in ambulances, and they say they won't do that. But that—if there's no patrol—if the rebels can't control the town enough for them to travel like the commission they are, why then that shows that they have no control over their own element.

[José Antonio] Mora[-Otero], the Secretary General [of the Organization of American States], has been here since yesterday. He has met with both sides, and we have—I have just come back from a meeting of the entire diplomatic corps with him. And I think he's very distressed with what he's found, and feels that—

LBJ: How does the diplomatic corps² feel?

¹ It sounds like Bennett says the word "holocaust" here, but it cannot be confirmed and that word does not seem to fit the scale of violence he was reporting on in Santo Domingo.

² They appear to understand "diplomatic corps" in different ways. Bennett is referring to foreign diplomats based in Santo Domingo. LBJ is apparently referring to foreign journalists.

Bennett: They are almost unanimous in sharing the views we have been expressing to you. They have had great trouble communicating with their home governments, and at this meeting I offered to send any messages, either in code or in plain, that any of them wished to give me. And I think that practically all of them will be using our facilities.

LBJ: I would see to that. I'd put a good reporter on that from my embassy to see that each one of them filed a story for their people.

Bennett: Right.

LBJ: You can't understand the real importance—

Bennett: That's exactly—

LBJ: —of the right kind of material coming out of there. And while I've got you, be sure that every time you load somebody on a ship [that] they get a picture of it. Because we want to show that this activity is going on every day.

Bennett: Right.

LBJ: And see that our reporters go down and interview some of them as they go out. And keep them—

Bennett: Yes, some of them have got some tales of horror to tell, too.

LBJ: Well, get the reporters down there [and] get your press officer. And we're not getting of that up here. We're just getting that we're making everybody in Latin America mad.

Bennett: Yes.

LBJ: That we're intervenars [*sic*]. That we're just going back to the gunboat policy.

Bennett: Right. I know.

LBJ: And the stuff coming out's awful bad.

Bennett: There's no doubt that there's a lot of popular fervor behind this. The people say they are fighting for constitutional government.

We are trying to work up a line. We're already getting out leaflets, and I think our position should be that "we are coming in to save you from lawless elements and to help you prepare for early elections."

LBJ: That's good.

Bennett: And, they're going to—

LBJ: That's good. Now, what else is happening?

Bennett: As to those who have ... we've taken out between 2,500 and 3,000 [evacuees]. Of those, about 1,500 [are] Americans. There are about 225 at the Hotel [Embajador] now waiting for evacuation, and more are coming in. They're running three and four to one foreigner rather than American, at this stage. And it's roughly estimated that about 5,000 foreigners are still in the country, of which some 1,500 are American.

On the military side—

LBJ: All right, I'd sure put that out. Because the afternoon broadcast ... our public relations are very poor down there. The afternoon broadcast from down there says that you've completed your mission of evacuation.

Bennett: Good gracious! I don't how that could [*unintelligible*].

LBJ: Well, because we don't give them a handout. Give them a handout. Call [Dan] Kurzman and all of them in there. Tell them you've got 5,000 foreigners, of which 1,500 are Americans.³

Bennett: Right. Right. John Martin and I have just finished having a press conference with Kurzman and the all of the whole crew. Oh, there must be sixty, seventy-five here by now. And we ... John took occasion to label this for what it is, and that is the Castro Communist elements have taken over the domination of this movement.

On the military side—and I have both General [Bruce] Palmer [Jr.] and John Martin here with me—our casualties, one of the wounded died, and so we are now up to five dead and—

LBJ: [*aside*] All right, good. Come in Mac [Bundy]. You can get on the phone there. [*to Bennett*] Five dead?

Bennett: Five dead and forty-one wounded.

LBJ: Forty-one wounded. All right.

Bennett: General Palmer tells me that sporadic fire is continuing just north of the bridge on the west bank. And also—

LBJ: Sporadic fire north of bridge on west bank.

Bennett: And also on the east side as well.

LBJ: All right. What are we doing about it? Why don't we taken them out?

³ Dan Kurzman was a foreign correspondent for the *Washington Post*.

Bennett: Well, we've asked for authority for that link-up that we spoke of, and we all feel united here that this is crucial to our position.

LBJ: Some of the folks here think that maybe you out to do it in daytime instead of night. And I understand you-all want to do it at night?

Bennett: Well, I believe there was the problem: didn't want to go along when there was too many people. The feeling was that if you waited until the streets were more empty you wouldn't have to clear it of civilians.

LBJ: All right. What's the other problem, Mac?

Bundy: [*aside*] Political cover, Mr. President. [*Unintelligible.*]

LBJ: We want to get the OAS to say, "Let's go do it." Or approve it. Can't you—

Bennett: We have already got Mora's full approval and understanding.

LBJ: What about the committee, though?

Bennett: We have not been able to talk to them yet.

LBJ: Well, I'd get over and talk to them. Tell them you need to do it tonight. If you don't, you're going to have a lot more trouble.

Bennett: That's right.

LBJ: And get their approval?

Bennett: Do you feel we have to get the full commission? Because our—John Martin and I felt that we've got it from Mora, and it was up to him to tell his commission.

LBJ: Well, we ... it'd be better if you could get them all. We don't have to do anything. But we'd like to.

Bennett: All right. Well, we—

LBJ: We're in a much better position if we've got them behind us on everything.

Bennett: Well, we—

LBJ: And I would see that they are. I just ... I don't know what kind of a salesman you are, but I'd just see that they came back here—

Bennett: That's not hard to sell. [*chuckles*]

LBJ: I'd just see that they came back here with the right story.

Bennett: Well, we've ... I'm sorry they've *just* arrived because we'd like them to get the full flavor of this situation, which is ... I think you feel much more strongly on it from here than I gather from what you say outside where the press isn't accurate in their reporting.

LBJ: Well, I think that if you get Martin and tell him—the General tell him his problem, and say you ought to do it at night when the civilians are not out on the streets and the roads—

Bennett: Right.

LBJ: That they would say "OK," and—

Bennett: We've had—Mora understood it at once, and ...

LBJ: Did Mora give you approval?

Bennett: Yes, he did. So that that's it: we've got approval now. If we get into a wrangle and debate with some of these people, it might hold us back.

LBJ: All right. [*aside to Bundy*] Well, now, Mac, why do we have to take it up again with Mora [*unintelligible*]? [*LBJ and Bundy confer aside, but they're discussion can't be made out.*]

An operator cuts in on the line.

Operator: Is the line in use?

Bennett: No, it's in use, yes.

Operator: Right.

LBJ: [*to Bennett*] That's another—OK.

Bennett: Sir?

LBJ: You get Mora, and go in and let him tell them why, and get Martin to tell them why, and you tell them why, and the General tell them why. And then we'll get you instructions [as] quickly as we can meet.

Bennett: All right, sir.

LBJ: But you try to call us back and tell us what the committee says.

Bennett: So you'd like us to call back?

LBJ: If you can.

Bennett: All right.

LBJ: What else? What—now—

Bennett: Fine. Now, we're getting out food and medicine to both sides, and we have got loudspeakers announcing that. All the radio stations are knocked out but one, and so the communications of that kind are not as good as they might be.

LBJ: No way we can get a station on the air?

Bennett: We're trying to do that, and we've also asked for something that flies with a big loudspeaker so we can hover over. And we're also—

LBJ: Why don't you get a helicopter and put a big speaker?

Bennett: Well, General Palmer tells me that's coming in this afternoon.

LBJ: I'd just get a helicopter right quick and put a speaker right on the bottom of it and talk through it. I did that all over Texas in a campaign twenty years ago.

Bennett: [*chuckles*] We're going to be operating on that basis very, very shortly.

LBJ: Don't you let them take that public sentiment away from me. You be arousing them as much as [*they*] arouse you. You get you some folks locally and get them to say, "come here and get your food. Come here and get your medicine. Pretty soon we're going to have an election and going to have a government, and we're not going to have a dictator from anybody."

Bennett: Right. And we're going to get rid of the lawless elements, because—

LBJ: Right. Now, what else you got?

Bennett: That's about the pick of it as of this moment. I think John Martin would like to speak to you, sir. He's right here.

LBJ: All right. Any casualties today?

Bennett: [*aside*] Any casualties today, General Palmer? [*to LBJ*] Just this one who died; he'd already been wounded. And there's some wounds from the sporadic fire.

LBJ: Do you have all your people that you've been expecting? Have they all got in?

Bennett: [*aside to Palmer*] Have all your people got in? [*to LBJ*] Yes, sir.

LBJ: Good.

Bennett: No, it's been very impressive.

LBJ: Now, you know that every day you're going to have to get some people out of there?

Bennett: I'm sorry, I didn't get that, sir.

LBJ: Every day you're going to be having to move some people out of there. I know it's going to take you a long time because of the great number you've got: 5,000.

Bennett: That's right.

Bundy: How many have you got out so far, Tap?

LBJ: I've already got that. He's got—

Bennett: 2,500–3,000.

LBJ: I've got that stuff, Mac.

Bundy: Right, sir.

LBJ: Anything else?

Bennett: John Martin wanted to speak to you.

LBJ: All right.

Martin: Mr. President?

LBJ: Yes.

Martin: I told the press that in my opinion the U.S. Marines had originally come in to protect American lives and property, but in my opinion their purpose now should be to save the Dominican Republic from Castro Communist takeover. Because what began as a PRD [*Partido Revolucionario Dominicano* / Dominican Revolutionary Party] revolt has become dominated by Castro Communists and other violent extremists.

LBJ: Fine, John.

Martin: I gave it for attribution.

LBJ: Fine. Anything else?

Martin: I feel, Mr. President, that it's now, in view of that, I seriously doubt that I can be of any further use in contacting the rebels now having made this statement. I think you can understand that.

LBJ: Yeah. Maybe you ought to have one fine swansong with your Puerto Rico friend [Juan Bosch] by telling him that this is what's happening and what you're seeing.

Martin: That's what I was going to do, sir.

LBJ: They oughtn't to—

Martin: I thought I would do that now.

LBJ: I would sure warn him and tell him you've got names, numbers, and addresses. We've got 58 of them.⁴

Martin: Yup. I will do that and then wait a day or two and, subject to your views, I'll—

LBJ: You stay there till we tell you to leave. It'll be a day or so.

Martin: Of course. Of course. I'll stay as long as I can do anything—you know that.

LBJ: Yeah. OK.

Martin: OK, sir.

LBJ: Bye.

Martin: Just a minute: Ambassador Bennett.

Bennett: So you want us to go after the commission, do you? I hope it won't hold us up too much.

LBJ: Well—

Bennett: Since we've already got Mora with us.

LBJ: I would try them. Just ... I don't think I'd put it where if they rejected it you didn't do it.

Bennett: Well, that's just it.

LBJ: I'd have Mora and Martin go with you.

Bennett: No, well, I will.

LBJ: And have Martin say that he just thinks this is going to save a lot of lives, and this in the interest of the hemisphere. And then I'd have Mora say he agrees with him. And then I'd say that

⁴ LBJ was referring to a list the CIA compiled of suspected Communists or Communist-sympathizers believed to be playing a role in the uprising.

“we’re going to go ahead and do it, and we hope that you all agree,” and then see what their blood pressure is.

Bennett: I just wouldn’t want any three of them to decide otherwise, and then we’d have a big press donnybrook and it’d be difficult.

Someone else cuts in on the line.

Unidentified: Hello?

LBJ: Yes?

Unidentified: Hello?

LBJ: Who’s on here?

Unidentified: Hello?

LBJ: Get off! Who’s on here?

Unidentified: Hello?

Bundy: Hello?

Unidentified: Hello.

LBJ: Who are you?

Bennett: Now it’s clear again?

Unidentified: Hello?

LBJ: Who is that on? Somebody on your phone?

Bennett: No, I don’t believe so.

LBJ: Somebody down there, yeah.

Bennett: Fine. Well, we’re all clear now, sir.

LBJ: All right.

Bennett: All right, we’ll try—

LBJ: We’ll get you word on that right away.

Bennett: All right, sir. We'll try to get out and find these people.

LBJ: All right.

Bennett: Thank you, sir.