

Lyndon Johnson and the Dominican Intervention of 1965
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Transcript of Tape No. 10: I don't want to be an intervenor.

May 23, 1965 | 5:10 PM | LBJ, Abe Fortas, and Robert McNamara | WH6505.29–7812 to WH6505.29–7815¹ | LBJ Library

[Footnotes added]

LBJ: The basic thing with me, Abe, is this: I cannot ... I might sell it to [former Governor of Puerto Rico Luis] Muñoz[-Marin], but I can't sell it to [Senator Richard] Russell [D-Georgia] and to [Senator Everett] Dirksen [R-Illinois] and to [Representative Gerald] Ford [R-Michigan] and to the [Representative] George Mahons [D-Texas] and so forth for \$1 or ... I just can't, I can't stand the pressure, if we have a government [in the Dominican Republic] that is soft or sympathetic or even kind in dealing with the Communists.

Fortas: I understand.

LBJ: The only support I have now ... I'm not ever going to get [Arthur] Schlesinger's support or the liberals' support. I've got Muñoz made a statement for me that I ought to have gone in, but they all say "ought to go in, but." And that's always going to be their attitude. So I can't get in the posture if that is not the agreement. If the agreement is he's [Juan Bosch] going to let them stay around there and be in the back room and go underground when we have Sunday church meeting, but to come out and run it all the rest of the week, I don't think that we—it's at all advisable for us to seriously consider it.

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LBJ: And I think it's really got to be anti-communist and pro-liberal. That's what I want.

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LBJ: When we went in there, we went in there for one reason: that's to preserve life, to evacuate people, to save our own folks. And in so doing, we said "and, we are going to immediately notify the OAS [Organization of American States] and work closely with them." Now, that's what we have done. They're bringing in troops to replace them.

Every time that ... Any time that they can function, we're going to move out. We'll be a member of the OAS, individual, but it'd be a multilateral operation. Any time that they can have a

¹ For more context on this particularly revealing tape, see: Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), p.633; Alan McPherson, "Misled by Himself: What the Johnson Tapes Reveal About the Dominican Intervention of 1965," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 2003): 127-46.

meeting and take any action as an inter-American unit, we're going to be a part of it but not individually. We're not going to substitute any of our judgments for theirs. Soon as they can get the foreign ministers together, any time, the next day, the next week, or the next month, or the next year, we're willing to become absorbed in their operation instead of doing a unilateral basis.

We didn't say to the world we were going to establish a government, that we were going to plant our flag there, and that we were going to preserve the Constitution of the United States, and all the laws written thereunder. We said, "we're going in there to preserve life, and we're notifying the OAS [that] that's the reason we're going, and we're going to appeal to them to come on in and do something about it."

Now, we've been there a month. And during that month we've been trying every day to get them to come up with a formula, to get them to pick three wise men, to get them to set up a trusteeship, to get them to make recommendations about a government, to get them to furnish men, to get them to furnish money, to get them do anything they will collectively, which we'll be glad to put up our part in accordance with their direction. We'll serve under them. We'll let their general take charge. We'll just be one of many.

But to take the position that we have lost a lot of prestige and that we went in there for the purpose of setting up a satellite state of our own choosing, not only to me would be a tragic mistake, but God knows I don't want my brand on this satellite state. Because I don't know one of them. I never heard of one of them. I doubt all of them. The group that I saw down there when I was there at the [Juan Bosch 1963] inauguration makes me seriously—it's seriously questionable whether they would make it last.

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Fortas: Well, you've done everything in the world to get the OAS to take over this job, and they didn't do it. And they wouldn't—

LBJ: Well, no. No, they've been in and out. They don't have the facilities, the requirements. Nobody's really taken it over. We've just been kind of a holding operation until the Latin could in his own slow way finally move.

They've got a few troops on the way, and they'll have some more, and they've got a few countries there, and they'll some more supporting us in the OAS. But they agreed to an inter-American force. They agreed to send a commission. They have taken over; they haven't produced. But hell, we've taken over and we haven't produced! Every time we get close to an agreement that we could recommend or even stand on, why they issue an ultimatum where somebody gets killed or they say that we did something wrong, or something, as you know.

Nobody but a patient man as you are—and I think I'm patient—would have ever been able to withstand it for a month. But I don't think that we ought to have our brand on whatever comes out. It may be the most perfect union. I want it to be a hemispheric thing instead of an individual LBJ. I don't object to giving them my wife, my daughter, and my car, and my money. But I want them to say, "here's what we've collected from all this hemisphere."

Fortas: Yeah.

LBJ: And I think that if you don't, that they'll wreck us more than they have. Bosch's group has damn near destroyed us in Europe and abroad with the liberals and the *Manchester Guardians* and the articles out of here about how this is a unilateral operation. And the [British Prime Minister Harold] Wilson government is wobbly now because he's got a three-man majority. And they take the position that this man Johnson is another Führer. And that's the liberal thing about the North Americans. They've sold that.

And either one of two things: they [pro-Bosch factions] have to clean themselves up, as I see it, where we can live with them. Put enough perfume on them to kill the odor of killing 20 Americans and wounding 100. And that's what they have done. It hasn't been [Antonio] Imbert's group that has been killing our people; they've been killing them. They've got to put enough perfume on to permit us to live with them by cleaning themselves up.

Or, we've got to stay on the side and let nature take its course and see if Imbert can clean them up. Now, if he can't, then maybe, ultimately, some other agency, Adlai's [Stevenson] agency [the United Nations] or OAS or somebody else come in. Maybe Brazil will get in the middle and some of their soldiers will get killed. Maybe they'll take more responsibility.

But my purpose there, number one, is to evacuate my people [and] number two is try to stop the fighting, bring a cease-fire. It seems that two of those, both of those things have been done. Number three is to have an OAS solution to it. That being one that they adopt in their name.

And I read a lot of speeches I didn't write. And they may be reading one we do write over there themselves. I don't mind writing a speech and letting some of my technicians work on it.

But I don't want it to come out in the LBJ brand with the LBJ name saying this is what the Führer put to them. Because I think Bobby Kennedy will be pointing this out. And Arthur Schlesinger will be pointing this out. And while I'm taking them on on the left, which I'll have to do with investigations of all kinds. The ADA [Americans for Democratic Action] has done ordered one; Mr. Richard, whatever-his-name-is from Los Angeles—Edwards [Representative Don Edwards]. Then the right, the Russells and the [House Armed Services Chairman Mendel] Rivers that control the committee will say, "You sent them in there. And you marched them up the hill and then marched them down again." And I just can't afford to accept or approve or recognize anything that hasn't got a flag on its arm and that's got any Communist tinge.

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LBJ: Well, I don't know. I don't really go all the way, as you know, with [McGeorge] Bundy. As I ... this wasn't my idea [to have] Bundy go down there. But I'm ... as you remember, he grabbed the phone every time you called me, and you always started off by saying "we want Bundy." [Fortas chuckles] And we wound up with Bundy [*unintelligible interjection by Fortas*]. And if we get him back without wrecking him, and me too, I'll be—I'll say a good third of "My dear Lord."

Because I think that ... I think he's a brilliant man, and I'm attached to him, and he's indispensable to me. But I think he's pretty positive and pretty precise, and pretty inflexible, and ...

Fortas: [*Unintelligible*] in these negotiations [*unintelligible*].

LBJ: I tried to talk to him two days after the Bay of Pigs. And President Kennedy said, "Please stay away from him. Don't mention anything to him. He's awfully upset. He's just so nervous that he can't do it." So he gets pretty nervous on these things.

We're going to have to live with them a long time, and I'm prepared to do it. I have nothing in the world I want except to do what I believe to be right. Now, I don't always know what's right. Sometimes I take other people's judgments, and I get misled. Like sending troops in there to Santo Domingo. But the man who misled me was Lyndon Johnson, nobody else. I did that. I can't blame a damn human, and I don't want any of them to take credit for it. [*Fortas laughs*] And I'll ride it out. I think it's a ... I'd do the same thing right this second if I got a wire from Ambassador Sanchez, by God.

And I know how it looks. And it looks just the opposite from the way I want [it] to look. I don't want to be an intervenor. But I think that ... I think Mr. [Fidel] Castro done intervened pretty good when he kicked old [Donald] Reid [Cabral] out.

And, honestly, of all the people I saw, I thought Reid was the least dictatorial and the most genuine and honest of any of that crowd I met.

Fortas: Yeah, well this didn't have anything to do with Reid. [*Unintelligible*].

LBJ: I think it did. I think Reid was trying to clean up these goddamn generals and trying to get a government that would work and an economy that could sustain itself.

Fortas: [*Unintelligible*].

LBJ: And I think these crackpots overthrew him while he was doing it.

Fortas: This wasn't—

LBJ: I think that's what happening to me, incidentally. [*chuckling*] Incidentally, I think that's what's happening to me. I may be the Reid of North America, because I've got my ... I've tried to get my system going that can support this thing with jobs and money and the economy and so forth, and while I'm doing it I've got the experts in the London *Times* and the [*Washington Post* reporter Dan] Kurzmans and the [*New York Times* reporter Tad] Szulcs and the Schlesingers all giving me the works. So I may be in the same place as Reid, just [*unintelligible*] move over next week.

Fortas: Well, he was thrown out by these generals.

LBJ: He was thrown out by these crackpots because he was functioning on the generals. But the generals can't do the job themselves. We know—we all know who is behind this one
[*approximately 10 seconds excised by NARA*].

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