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# RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

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## MISLED BY HIMSELF: What the Johnson Tapes Reveal about the Dominican Intervention of 1965

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*Abstract: The recent release of over four hundred telephone conversations recorded in the Lyndon Baines Johnson White House from April to December 1965 provide historians with exciting new evidence on the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic. The role of the president in that civil conflict has been up to now mysterious since Johnson rarely committed himself to paper. Critics and scholars since have somewhat exonerated him as simply another decision maker misled by a panicky country team spreading rumors of an imminent communist takeover. The tapes suggest, however, that Johnson was both aware that evidence of a takeover was insufficient and perhaps more concerned with domestic politics than with the situation in Santo Domingo. Repeatedly, close advisors attempted to dissuade him from overplaying an anti-communist rationale. But everywhere he looked in Washington Johnson saw enemies who would exploit any hesitation on his part. Soon after committing 23,000 troops, he admitted his lapses in judgment while he simultaneously sought scapegoats for them. The tapes place Johnson once and for all at the center of one of the most serious crises in the history of U.S.-Latin American relations and reveal the darker side of his foreign policy instincts.*

I have nothing in the world I want except to do what I believe to be right. 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 that misled me was Lyndon Johnson, nobody else! I did that! I can't

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blame a damn human. And I don't want any of them to take credit for it. . . . I'll ride it out.

Lyndon Johnson to Abe Fortas and Robert McNamara, 23 May 1965<sup>1</sup>

Lyndon Johnson's *mea culpa*—and many other White House exchanges—are now available to researchers thanks to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library's declassification of telephone conversations recorded from April through December 1965.<sup>2</sup> Reacting to a Dominican counter-coup of 24 April that turned into a generalized revolt within days, the U.S. government on 28 April sent a first contingent of what would eventually be 23,000 troops to occupy the capital, Santo Domingo. Dominicans agreed to a settlement by September 1965, but the fact and style of U.S. intervention stirred worldwide criticism. The release of the Johnson tapes, nearly forty years after one of the greatest crises in U.S.-Latin American relations, offers no striking revelations about the Dominican episode. But it does add much-needed texture to what scholars know of the White House staff's moods, personalities, and political priorities during the first and most important weeks of the crisis. Mostly, however, the tapes provide a sharper sense of the president's role than had previously been discernable.

More than thirty years ago, despite masterful research and interviews, scholar Abraham Lowenthal remained frustrated that "evidence about the president's own views and actions is still fragmentary and uncertain."<sup>3</sup> Paper documents on the intervention, at the Johnson Library and elsewhere, have been largely declassified for about a decade now (ex-

1. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson, Fortas, and McNamara, 23 May 1965, 5:10P.M., WH6505.29, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. All conversations are from the Johnson Library.

2. I thank the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation for a grant that allowed the research for this piece. In early 2001, the LBJ Library opened up about four hundred conversations from April 1965 to July 1965 mentioning the Dominican Republic and covering the great majority of Johnson's involvement in the crisis. In April 2002, the Library released the remaining tapes, fewer than twenty conversations, from August through December 1965. Most conversations were from the Oval Office; the Situation Room independently recorded many of those that were not. Roughly thirty hours of recordings concern the Dominican intervention. For those who cannot work at the Library, its Web site, [www.lbjlib.utexas.edu](http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu), provides a finding aid, and the Library can ship copies of audio tapes (\$6.00 each) or transcripts (\$0.25 per page, although the Library did not make those transcripts and warns—wisely—against their accuracy). Researchers can also find most of these conversations—but not all, and not complete ones—in Michael Beschloss, ed., *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964–1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). And the Department of State is preparing a volume in its *Foreign Relations of the United States* series that will cover the Dominican crisis and include phone conversations. As of December 2002 the volume was not published.

3. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention* (1972; reprint Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 150; see also Theodore Draper, *The Dominican Revolt: A Case Study in American Policy* (New York: Commentary, 1968), 3.

cept for many CIA and FBI memos). But the phone-bound Johnson, who logged 75 to 100 calls per day while in the White House, contributed little to them.<sup>4</sup> If the now-released conversations confirm anything, it is that the president was indeed engaged in the major decisions of the intervention. Scholars suspected as much. In the first nine days of the crisis, journalist Charles Roberts noted in 1965, Johnson met with major advisors to the Dominican situation 180 times.<sup>5</sup> Because the number of sources featuring Johnson is now roughly equal to those featuring his major advisors, scholars can better assess his contributions.

The tapes reveal that Johnson was more responsible than previously thought for the intelligence failures and hasty decision-making that marked the intervention. Without the tapes, critics and commentators concluded that it was Johnson's advisors on the ground, mostly the embassy and the CIA, who misled the president by convincing him that communists trained outside the Dominican Republic had taken over a leftist revolt against the right-wing Dominican military and planned to conduct a Castro-like revolution once in power. Senator J. William Fulbright, for instance, focused on "faulty advice given to the President by his representatives in the Dominican Republic." Theodore Draper also believed that the U.S. diplomatic staff in Santo Domingo "was chiefly or wholly to blame."<sup>6</sup> This accepted wisdom took the onus somewhat off the president.

The tapes reinforce two elements of the president's decision-making process that alter this conclusion: first, Johnson chose to commit troops despite what he knew to be a lack of solid evidence of communist danger; and second, Johnson was perhaps more concerned with the domestic political fallout from the fear of "another Cuba" in the Western Hemisphere than he was with the reality itself of a communist takeover. The tapes also suggest a remorseful president, who quickly realized his early errors and found himself caught between the impulse to take the blame and the need to foist it upon others. The statement that opens this article, for instance, is not simply an admission of Johnson's own culpa-

4. William Doyle, *Inside the Oval Office: The White House Tapes from FDR to Clinton* (New York: Kodansha International, 1999), 141; Johnson did give his side of the story in his memoirs, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Popular Library, 1971), 187–205.

5. Roberts, *LBJ's Inner Circle* (New York: Delacorte, 1965), 211. The Department of State's Deputy Historian David Patterson said that, based on the tapes, it was obvious Johnson "micro-managed" the crisis, "Expanding the Horizons of the *Foreign Relations Series*," *The SHAFR Newsletter* (June 1999), available at [www.ohiou.edu/shafr/NEWS/1999/jun/juneart99.htm](http://www.ohiou.edu/shafr/NEWS/1999/jun/juneart99.htm). Beschloss's *Reaching for Glory* also paints a president in charge of this crisis, and Doyle in *Inside the Oval Office* labels Johnson "the controlling executive."

6. Fulbright speech, "The Situation in the Dominican Republic," *Congressional Record*, 15 September 1965, 23855; Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 5. See also Dan Kurzman, *Santo Domingo: Revolt of the Damned* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 19–20; and Tad Szulc, *Dominican Diary* (New York: Dell, 1965), 3.

bility. The president speaks of substituting "other people's judgments" for his own and clearly feels that he is taking responsibility for the irresponsibility of others. The Johnson tapes reveal that much of that irresponsibility emanated from the Oval Office itself.

#### USING THE TAPES

Scholars should be cautiously optimistic about presidential telephone recordings. To be sure, they do have clear advantages. Tapes often confirm the documentary record, for instance, or suggest alternative paths not taken, or otherwise just provide good quotations. They also make for good classroom listening; students glimpse what it was like to be in policymakers' shoes. For those interested in the minutiae of the sequence of events, phone calls are also more accurately timed than cables, whose recorded time of reception could be hours after they were actually written and sent.

Phone calls mostly stand out as a candid record of White House "principals" living through an emotional crisis. On the phone, Johnson and his advisors made off-the-cuff suggestions, expressed doubts about policies, or vowed trust and affection to one another. The result for the researcher is that many people otherwise relegated to a paper existence come to life on the line. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, for instance, who traveled to the Dominican Republic in mid-May to finalize an agreement that he thought was a matter of details, grew troubled by what he perceived to be the duplicitous deal-breaking of Dominicans. As his mission ran aground, Bundy's normally measured Ivy League timbre grew shaky. He characterized the Dominican Republic as "a crooked, foggy, and irresponsible island."<sup>7</sup> The president could himself be a most unstable conversationalist. Johnson worked on this crisis into the wee hours of the morning and often sounded disheartened, frustrated, or panicked. Only the Johnson tapes have recorded the president's sighs and moans as he learned of mounting criticism against him.

The tapes also present disadvantages, however. First, scholars should appreciate the intimacy that limits the deliberate nature of phone calls as opposed to cables or memoranda. A spontaneous remark could be just that, not one's considered judgment and much less a statement of policy. Second, many of the hours recorded are Situation Room and White House calls chronicling the Bundy mission in May, which are not so compelling as other calls because the mission ultimately failed. Third, the conversations are sometimes difficult to follow because Johnson and his men improvised a dizzying array of code names and phrases in case

7. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Johnson, 18 May 1965, 12:50P.M., WH6505.23.

third parties were tapping their lines. Some of these were decipherable, to say the least: "J.B." was former Dominican president Juan Bosch; "Colonel C" was rebel leader Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Caamaño; and "I" was right-wing leader Antonio Imbert. What's more, speakers often slipped and used real names. In contrast, some pseudonyms are difficult to determine even now: "Columbo" was most likely Organization of American States (OAS) negotiator José Mora; and "the Bang-Bangs" were probably the right-wing military. White House negotiator Abe Fortas seemed to enjoy this game (he volunteered to help Johnson). He was first "Mr. Davidson" and then "Mr. Arnold." He also made up phrases of his own, for instance referring to the left-leaning rebels as "those fellows who play left field on the baseball team" and then simply to "the baseball players."<sup>8</sup> "Your cryptic language is too much for me," an exasperated Jaime Benítez once said to Fortas. Benítez, the chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico, was himself known as "our Young-Looking Friend" and then simply as "YLF."<sup>9</sup>

Mostly, the tapes leave many issues still clouded. There are not enough conversations, for example, to reconstruct former Ambassador John Bartlow Martin's return to the Dominican Republic in early May to form an anti-rebel "Loyalist" government behind Imbert.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, little allows scholars to know the exact level of U.S. involvement in the Dominican Air Force's bombing of Santo Domingo on 27 April.<sup>11</sup> There are also almost no conversations from June, July, and August, when the OAS ostensibly took over the negotiations. Finally, almost all calls concerning the role of the CIA and the FBI have been "sanitized" with beeps, which are often several minutes long.

#### DIVISIONS IN THE "JOHNSON TREATMENT"

The tapes do confirm a high level of internal differences, confusion about things Dominican, and Cold War paranoia among Johnson's

8. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas and Bundy, 20 May 1965, no time indicated, SR6505.05.

9. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas and Benítez, 18 May 1965, 1:32P.M., WH6505.23.

10. Mentions of the Martin mission include recordings of telephone conversations between Bundy and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 12:29P.M., WH6504.08; Johnson and McNamara, 1 May 1965, 11:30A.M., WH6505.01; Johnson and Martin, 2 May 1965, 3:42P.M., WH6505.02; Johnson and John Chancellor, 2 May 1965, 5:26P.M., WH6505.02; Bennett and Johnson, 2 May 1965, 6:24P.M., WH6505.02; Martin and Johnson, 3 May 1965, 3:15A.M., WH6505.03; Bennett and Johnson, 3 May 1965, 9:56P.M., WH6505.04; and Johnson and Situation Room, 4 May 1965, 8:16P.M., WH6505.04.

11. See Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 74–77; Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation: The United States and the Dominican Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 26; and Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention*, 90.

advisors. The policy implication is that these traits contributed to the failure of the first month's diplomacy, which led to the devolution of talks into the hands of the OAS. The political endgame of the landing of the Marines was to form an interim government agreeable to both Caamaño and Imbert's forces and dedicated to an election in the near future. The Johnson tapes tell the story of the conservative wing of the Johnson team prolonging this end result in favor of the Dominican military and against the advice of more liberal advisors.

Abe Fortas embodied much of the promise and peril of the conservative Johnson approach. In addition to using normal channels such as the State Department and the OAS, Johnson stayed true to his "Johnson treatment" preference for overbearing directness. He opened a back channel by sending his long-time friend Fortas as early as 25 April to contact Bosch, who was exiled in Puerto Rico.<sup>12</sup> (Rebels called themselves "Constitutionalists" because they demanded the return of Bosch, whose democratic rule was overthrown in September 1963, and of the Constitution he had crafted.) Johnson's choice of Fortas as negotiator showed that the president valued loyalty and toughness over proper channels or even expert knowledge. Fortas was a New Dealer, a well-known lawyer and Yale law professor whose judgment Johnson trusted so much he would appoint Fortas to the Supreme Court in July 1965. But while Fortas had experience in Puerto Rico, he had almost none in the Dominican Republic. He barely knew the issues or people involved (he called Elías Wessin y Wessin, the initial commander of the right-wing forces, "Westin y Westin"). Fortas also opposed intervention, according to his biographer.<sup>13</sup> But the tapes do not betray his opposition; rather, Fortas demonstrated a faith, consistent with Johnson's, that the United States, right or wrong, could be a force for reconciliation and democracy in the Dominican Republic.

Fortas quickly saw his ideals eroded. "OK, Boss, we've got a deal!" he reported to his president on 14 May, thinking he and Bosch had agreed on who should make up the interim government.<sup>14</sup> Two days later, however, Caamaño and Imbert both repudiated what came to be known as the "San Juan Agreement," a turnaround that indicated to Fortas that Bosch had little authority in Santo Domingo. As a lawyer, Fortas also

12. The first mention of Fortas is in recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Mann, 26 April 1965, 9:35A.M., WH6504.05. This is also the first White House recording that concerns the crisis. Johnson says he went to see Fortas on 25 April "just to visit with him on the general picture" and that Bosch asked the U.S. government whether he should return to the Dominican Republic.

13. Laura Kalman, *Abe Fortas: A Biography* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 233. According to Kalman, Johnson spoke to Fortas forty times and to Bundy eighty-six times during this period.

14. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Fortas, 14 May 1965, 7:29P.M., WH6505.12.

found negotiations with the notoriously inefficient Bosch “a hell of a process.” He complained to Johnson:

This fellow Bosch is a complete Latin poet-hero type and he’s completely devoted to this damn constitution. . . . The first day, you see, he insisted that Caamaño was the lawfully elected president and it had to be Caamaño or nothing. And that went on for six long brutal hours. And I told him that it just wouldn’t do. And finally, about way late in the afternoon, when I thought we’d had just about reached the end, I said, “Mr. Bosch, what you’re doing is offering us a choice between Caamaño or nothing and I tell you that it’s nothing. And I want to tell you that what you’re doing is presenting the alternative of the loss of thousands of lives, which will be on your hands, or some flexibility.” And I got up and walked out of the room and stayed out ten minutes. When I got back in, he had the damn constitution in his hands. He said, “Ah, I see a way.” He said “Caamaño was not elected with strict legitimacy. And I can tell him that and he will step aside.” Then he couldn’t find the provision in the constitution. He showed me something but it didn’t read the way he said it read. But we had broken through and he was able to rise above principle [laughs]. It’s incredible, just incredible.<sup>15</sup>

It turned out that Fortas, like Bosch, also had little authority to make deals. The real wielders of power among the president’s advisors were Bundy and Thomas Mann, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. The Johnson tapes confirm the rumored differences in outlook and strategy between the two, and strongly suggest a bitter confrontation in which Mann prevailed. While Bundy sought a compromise between Dominican factions, Mann operated to weaken the rebels. On 18 May, Bundy called Johnson to report that he had reached a workable agreement with both sides, redrafting in a sense the San Juan Agreement, and was confident that this was the best peaceful solution the U.S. government could hope for. Yet he warned that U.S. advisors in Santo Domingo, who at this point included himself and Mann, “differ[ed] on our enthusiasm.”<sup>16</sup>

Fortas warned Johnson that, in fact, “there is a direct conflict—there always has been—in terms of fundamental view point between Mann on the one hand and McBundy on the other hand. . . . And there isn’t going to be any way to reconcile those.” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara confirmed to the president that Mann, despite his publicly neutral stance, felt that U.S. forces should

step in and gradually squeeze the rebels down. How do we do that? We move the U.S. LOC [Line of Communication, a series of checkpoints hemming in the rebels in downtown Santo Domingo] line southward a block or two at a time. This would cause some fighting. We’d eventually hopefully get that line down to the very southern tip of that business section and squeeze the rebels in there,

15. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas and Johnson, 16 May 1965, 12:30P.M., WH6505.15.

16. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Johnson, 18 May 1965, 12:01A.M., WH6506.20.

at which point presumably they'd give up. If they didn't give up, we'd starve them out. Ultimately they'd be forced into negotiations with the Loyalists. The Loyalists would have more power than the rebels and would come out on top and assure control of the armed forces. That's basically the alternative.

"Mann's view," as Abe Fortas otherwise expressed it to the president, "is that what we ought to do is to turn Imbert loose completely." Johnson's response: "Honestly, I have more confidence in Mann's judgment than I do in Bundy's." Bundy is "quick and brilliant and fast and so forth but is absolutely screwball on a good many things."<sup>17</sup>

In the week following that conversation, two suspicious events promptly killed the Bundy mission. First, Imbert's troops stepped up their sweep of the northern neighborhoods of Santo Domingo with obvious support from U.S. troops. This betrayal of good faith by the United States made the Bundy plan unacceptable to Caamaño. Fighting by proxy had long been the plan, in fact. Days into the intervention, for instance, McNamara suggested that U.S. forces "gradually help Wessin build up his forces during the cease fire—get him a little equipment, a little food, a little medicine."<sup>18</sup> When journalists presented irrefutable evidence of such support, the White House was evasive, saying only that local U.S. military in Santo Domingo had denied such incidents. The response both implied that it was the U.S. generals "down there" who were lying—and not Johnson—and allowed for continued "isolated incidents" of support. The tapes reveal that several advisors became disgusted with the Mann approach at this point. George Reedy, the White House press secretary, told Fortas: "You know, I hate to say it Abe, but those stories have a certain ring of truth to me." Fortas himself considered quitting. And former Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín felt "ashamed of being an American citizen."<sup>19</sup>

17. Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 320–21, 328, explains that Bundy by May 1965 was falling out of favor with Johnson because he had agreed to participate in a teach-in on the Vietnam War. The Bundy mission to Santo Domingo may have been partly engineered to force Bundy to miss the event. Recordings of telephone conversations between Johnson and Fortas, 19 May 1965, 11:40A.M., WH6505.25; between Johnson and McNamara, 19 May 1965, 12:37P.M., WH6505.26.

18. Recording of telephone conversation between McNamara, Fortas, and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 10:50A.M., WH6504.08.

19. Recordings of telephone conversations between Fortas and Reedy, 20 May 1965, no time indicated, SR6505.02, and between Fortas and Muñoz Marín, 20 May 1965, no time indicated, SR6505.02. U.S. embassy officials or military commanders on the ground did sometimes fail to let the president know that they were acquiescing in right-wing military aggression against the rebels. See, for example, recordings of telephone conversations between Bundy and Johnson, 13 May 1965, 7:45P.M., WH6506.10, for details of an Imbert attack on a rebel radio transmitter; Johnson and Fortas, 19 May 1965, 11:40A.M., WH6505.25, on allowing Imbert to fly troops out of San Isidro airfield; and Fortas and Reedy, 20 May 1965, no time indicated, SR6505.02, on giving Johnson assurances to the opposite of what major newspapers were reporting.



In the second event, newspapers “revealed” that Antonio Guzmán, Bundy’s proposed provisional president (and “Mr. G” on the tapes), was involved in suspicious dealings with an agricultural bank. Rumors of planted stories abounded. The State Department, neither confirming nor denying the Guzmán involvement, effectively torpedoed the Bundy plan. The Johnson tapes provide no direct evidence that U.S. advisors orchestrated any of these developments—only Bundy mentioned the possibility of, as he said, “some sort of something by somebody”—but they do indicate an increasingly open rightward bias in the White House.<sup>20</sup>

The light seemed to dawn on Bundy during a convoluted exchange with the Secretary of Defense on 23 May, after McNamara told Bundy that Johnson’s extreme anti-leftist proposals, in the unlikely event they were accepted, should not even bear the president’s “brand.” One can almost hear the feeling of betrayal in Bundy’s voice as he realizes Johnson has set him up for failure and that he will nevertheless have to go along with his president’s wishes:

BUNDY: We would be in the position of having been ready to back this [a Guzmán-led government] but not having fired.

MCNAMARA: That’s correct.

BUNDY: Well, I think I know how this will come out, then. I take it that’s what he [Johnson] wants.

MCNAMARA: That’s right.

BUNDY: Is that correct?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

BUNDY: OK. Well then let me make a slightly different point, which is that I believe that what we put forth should be very carefully tailored so that everybody thinks it’s right and we stand on it but it doesn’t happen.

MCNAMARA: Well I think I agree with you except that I wouldn’t make it so damn right that it made it impossible to happen.<sup>21</sup>

The tapes suggest here a missed opportunity not only for the United States but for Dominicans in revolt, one with perhaps tremendous consequences for Dominican history. If the rebels had accepted at this crucial juncture to purge themselves of communist sympathizers, the White House would have been sufficiently committed and it would have pressured Imbert

20. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Moyers, 25 May 1965, 9:25P.M., WH6505.30; see also Rusk and Johnson, 24 May 1965, 7:24P.M., WH6505.30; and Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 184.

21. Recording of telephone conversation between McNamara and Bundy, 23 May 1965, 8:05P.M., WH6505.30. The proposal they are discussing is Rusk telegram 1208 to Bundy and Cyrus Vance, 23 May 1965, folder Dominican Republic Davidson 5/65, box 51, Country File Latin America, National Security Files, Johnson Library.

to accept. The rebels failed to see that time was against them, strengthening Imbert's forces as they grew weaker and more isolated in downtown Santo Domingo. In the absence of an agreement, Mann sold Johnson on his alternative of a slow OAS diplomacy, which conveniently allowed the cordoning off of Santo Domingo to wear down the rebels through attrition.

The tapes, finally, further support the argument for the conservative victory in that they offer evidence that U.S. officials knew early on that they were safe in promoting an election in the Dominican Republic. Mann and Johnson believed that a free vote would likely elevate their favorite, Joaquín Balaguer, to the presidency. Balaguer had previously been president toward the end of the hated regime of dictator Rafael Trujillo, but he was still popular among impoverished peasants, as secret polls told the White House. Barely two days into the 1965 crisis, the following conversation took place:

JOHNSON: We're going to have to really set up that government down there and run it and stabilize it some way or other. This Bosch is no good. . . .

MANN: He's no good at all. . . . If we don't get a decent government in there, Mr. President, we get another Bosch. It's just going to be another sinkhole.

JOHNSON: Well that's what you ought to do. That's your problem. You better figure it out.

MANN: . . . The man to get back, I think, is Balaguer. He's the one that ran way ahead in the polls.

JOHNSON: Well, try to do it, try to do it.<sup>22</sup>

This exchange is the earliest instance on record in which Johnson sanctioned Balaguer.<sup>23</sup> It is also striking evidence of the U.S. sense of entitlement displayed throughout this first month. U.S. advisors were quite open on the phone about their right to promote military, diplomatic, and political victories on the right while pretending to be neutral on all these fronts.

#### JOHNSON AND THE POLITICS OF INTERVENTION

"It looks to me like I'm in a hell of a shape either way. If I take over, I can't live in the world. If I let them take over, I can't live here," Johnson

22. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Mann, 26 April 1965, 9:35A.M., WH6504.05. Beschloss erroneously dates this conversation 24 April 1965, 9:35A.M., the day the revolt began, in *Reaching for Glory*, 284–85.

23. Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, said that Balaguer was "given the Washington buildup" in June 1965. Former Deputy Director of the CIA Ray Cline related that Johnson reacted enthusiastically to the suggestion of Balaguer as a candidate, in his *Secrets, Spies and Scholars* (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1976), 213. Cline does not say when the conversation took place, but it was after Johnson asked, "How the hell can I get my troops out of this damn mess?" and therefore after 28 April. See also Peter Felten, "The 1965–1966 United

explained to Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield before sending Marines to the Dominican Republic.<sup>24</sup> This statement from the tapes along with many others bring out more clearly than ever that the fear of domestic dissent moved Johnson to knowingly exaggerate the communist danger on the Caribbean island. Right after his conversation with Mansfield, Johnson told Fortas, "I think that the worst domestic political disaster we could suffer would be for Castro to take over."<sup>25</sup> The Johnson tapes—especially those between 24 April, when the revolt began, and 2 May, when Johnson openly accused international communists of controlling the rebels—reinforce the view that Johnson's near obsession with domestic consensus ironically made that very consensus more difficult to achieve.

To be sure, the tapes reveal a president plagued by a real fear of a vaguely defined international conspiracy. To Johnson more than to any of his advisors (except perhaps FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover), all local insurgencies were part of a worldwide master plan. "I am seeing the pattern and I just cannot be silent," he told Bundy. "What they are doing in La Paz, Bolivia, what they are doing in Mexico City and what they are doing in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic is not totally unrelated."<sup>26</sup>

More often and with more anxiety in his voice, however, Johnson spoke about opponents at home—and these *were* very well defined. Of course, he was wary of Republicans such as Barry Goldwater and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen. After he ordered the first troops in, he told Dirksen and House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, "I have just taken an action that will prove that Democratic presidents can deal with Communists as strongly as Republicans." Yet the closer Johnson's perceived enemies were, the more dangerous they seemed to him. He feared fellow Democrats Mansfield, "this damn fool" Fulbright, and

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States Intervention in the Dominican Republic" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1995), 321–24, which says that Balaguer was involved actively as early as June.

24. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Mansfield, 30 April 1965, 11:51A.M., WH6504.08. As was his habit when building a consensus, Johnson used similar phrases with different audiences. Wall Street Journal reporter Philip Geyelin, in *Lyndon B. Johnson and the World* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 237, said that Johnson "told the National Security Council: 'It would be hard for me to live in this Hemisphere if I sent in the Marines, and I couldn't live in this country if I didn't.'" A similar quotation is, "If I send in the Marines, I can't live in the Hemisphere. If I don't, I can't live at home," from Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 265–66.

25. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 12:17P.M., WH6504.08.

26. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Johnson, 1 May 1965, 2:21A.M., WH6505.01; Geyelin in *Johnson and the World*, 254, wrote that Johnson "was strongly reinforced by Dean Rusk, who tended to see the Dominican Republic not in isolation, but as part of a global Communist conspiracy."

Robert Kennedy the most since they were potential competitors for the presidency.<sup>27</sup> He also complained often about “my liberals” and shouted that the State Department was a “bunch of damn sissies.”<sup>28</sup> Probably as treacherous in Johnson’s mind was what Fortas called “this damn lousy American press,” especially the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. The president’s fear of leaks and his efforts to suppress what he considered inaccurate media reports took up an inordinate amount of his energy.<sup>29</sup> Johnson conveyed his sense of persecution by speaking in the plural of individual enemies: the “Dirksens,” the “Morses” (Wayne Morse, D-OR, an important voice on Latin American affairs), the “Szulces” (Tad Szulc of the *Times*), and the “Kurzmanns” (Dan Kurzman of the *Post*), he liked to say, were out to get him. The president also complained to close friends and advisors about other close friends and advisors, thus contributing to an atmosphere of paranoia himself. “I’m really afraid to talk to anybody,” Johnson once confided to Mansfield.<sup>30</sup>

With domestic and international fears both stoked in April 1965, the tapes strongly suggest that the White House—and especially Johnson—disregarded the lack of hard evidence about communist control over the Dominican situation. Whether communist cadres did lead non-communist rebels in Santo Domingo is still debatable; whether they could have *maintained* leadership is entirely speculative.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have debated not only those conclusions but also how much the president knowingly distorted information leading to such conclusions. Draper, for instance, argued that, on 28 April, the day Johnson decided to send troops, evidence of a takeover “was virtually nonexistent.” Jerome Slater had been more cautious and had reproached Draper for implying that Washington “*knew* the threat to be nonexistent.” Others still defended the administration with the argument that “LBJ’s information was . . . from such well-placed sources that to reveal them would have resulted in the sudden death of the informants—and a cutoff of further intelli-

27. Quotation to Dirksen and Ford is in Michael Kryzaneck, “The Dominican Intervention Revisited: An Attitudinal and Operational Analysis,” in *United States Policy in Latin America: A Quarter Century of Crisis and Challenge, 1961–1986*, ed. John Martz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 140; on Fulbright, recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Harry Truman, 19 April 1965, 11:42A.M., WH6504.05.

28. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 6:00P.M., WH6504.09

29. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 12:17P.M., WH6504.08.

30. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Mansfield, 30 April 1965, 11:51A.M., WH6504.08.

31. Dominicans on the left have admitted a lack of preparation and of control in late April, if also a desire for it; see, for instance, J. I. Quello and Narciso Isa Conde, “Revolutionary Struggle in the Dominican Republic and Its Lessons,” *World Marxist Review* (Toronto) 8 (December 1965):98, 99; and Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 35–42.

gence."<sup>32</sup> Almost forty years later, those sources have still not been revealed (and this may explain the still-classified CIA and FBI documents and tapes). The Johnson tapes, in any case, lend ammunition to the more cynical Draper view.

A few days into the revolt, on the evening of 27–28 April, Caamaño's troops miraculously prevented the Loyalists from entering downtown Santo Domingo through Duarte Bridge, and by the morning the Wessin military was demoralized and headed for defeat. Johnson had not been that keen on finding communist evidence up to then, but suddenly his need for such intelligence intensified. The *Times'* Szulc wrote that on 28 April, CIA Director Admiral William Raborn told the president that intelligence had identified three communists in rebel leadership, but he gave no names. That very night Johnson ordered the first troops in.<sup>33</sup> Also that night, however, minutes before his television speech announcing the mission, Johnson was convinced to omit from the speech a sentence suggesting that Marines were protecting Dominican freedoms, which would have implied an anti-communist rationale.<sup>34</sup>

To make the anti-communist case publicly, Johnson had to make two qualitative leaps in his logic. The first was that leftist rebels were trained in Cuba, and the second was that those trained in Cuba were led by Castro. There was apparently scant evidence for the first and none for the second, but Johnson made both leaps with ease. In so doing, he could justify the intervention on the grounds that the United States prevented an international communist aggression. On 29 April, the day after the first contingent of troops landed, Johnson called Raborn to find out "what really happened yesterday that turned this thing around" in Caamaño's favor. Raborn made the president's two leaps for him. He assured the president that the CIA now had "identified eight hard-core, Castro-trained guerrillas." These eight, Raborn asserted, "rapidly took over the situation, they raided police stations, took their arms, took their uniforms and took command of the city in spots." Then, making the second leap, Raborn called these eight supermen "hard-nosed Castro-led guerrillas. . .

32. Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 120; Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation*, 50; Roberts, *LBJ's Inner Circle*, 199. Johnson himself said "we cannot tell everything we know from the FBI," in transcript of telephone conversation between Johnson and Senator Talmadge, 23 August 1965, 3:11P.M., WH6508.09; Mann said "the kind of proof the public demands involves breaking up your intelligence sources," cited in Kurzman, *Santo Domingo*, 18. Dallek wrote most recently that Johnson "knew that the evidence of Communist subversion was less clear and the dangers to foreign nationals less pronounced than he said. But he believed domestic pressures compelled him to act as he did," in *Flawed Giant*, 265.

33. Szulc, *Dominican Diary*, 46.

34. The most direct evidence of this is from Eric Sevareid, "The Final Troubled Hours of Adlai Stevenson," *Look*, 30 November 1965, 84.

In my opinion this is a real struggle *mounted by Mr. Castro.*" This was Johnson's chance to demand hard evidence of Cuban training, of Cuban orders, or at least of how eight people could have achieved all these feats. He did none of these things. When Raborn recommended "more positive action to clean these people out" lest "the Castro-led types . . . get the top hand," Johnson missed Raborn's hint that Communists did not have "the top hand" at the time.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Johnson increased the readiness of U.S. troops.<sup>36</sup>

Barely one hour later, Bundy denied at least Raborn's second leap to a nervous Johnson. "Oh, this is all inside as I understand it so far, Mr. President. . . . I will be very surprised if the Cubans try anything in the way of an invasion." Johnson, however, had domestic critics on his mind. "I sure don't want to wake up a few hours later and say, 'Well, we were awaiting developments,' and find out Castro's in charge. . . . That's what they're already saying, 'I told you so.'"<sup>37</sup>

A day later, 30 April, Johnson argued more strongly in private that Communists were "in charge" and that Castro fed them orders. Two new events rushed him to judgment. First, Caamaño's rebels had taken over Santo Domingo's Fort Ozama and its twenty-one tanks. To Johnson, such a bold, effective military move in itself appeared to be evidence of Communist leadership. As he told Fortas and McNamara,

They've already captured tanks now and they've taken over the police and they're marching them down the streets and they've got a hundred of them as hostages and they're saying they're going to shoot them if they don't take over. Now our CIA says that this is a completely led, operated, dominated—they [the Cubans? the CIA?] have got men on the inside of it—Castro operation.<sup>38</sup>

Second, the CIA now had a list of forty-five Communists among the rebels. This was the first appearance of the infamous McCarthyite list, whose total kept changing, and which journalists on the ground easily deflated.<sup>39</sup> The tapes show that not only did Johnson not question the list, but that he may have inflated it. He first stated that the total of

35. Emphases added; recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Raborn, 29 April 1965, 8:47A.M., WH6504.06.

36. Lowenthal, *The Dominican Intervention*, 110. After 2P.M., Johnson urged all remaining Marines (about 500 men) off the *Boxer*, and by 3P.M., the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary unit (1,580 men) to land. Although Lowenthal says that the Raborn-Johnson exchange took place at noon, the tape is marked 8:47A.M., so Johnson had several hours to consider his military moves.

37. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Bundy, 29 April 1965, 9:48A.M., WH6504.06.

38. Recording of telephone conversation between Fortas, Johnson, and McNamara, 30 April 1965, 10:50A.M., WH6504.08.

39. Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 140–41; Geyelin, *Johnson and the World*, 238–39; Szulc, *Dominican Diary*, 33.

"Castro-trained, Castro-operated" Dominicans was forty-five, but one hour later told Mansfield that there were now fifty-three. He may have added the previous eight to the forty-five rather than include them. Johnson's frequent use of slang further conveniently blurred things. He said the "Castro people" had "knocked the Bosch people out, kicked them overboard, and . . . are now the leaders in full swing." In reality, the president had little sense of what a "Castro person" was or what leadership in this conflict meant in practical terms. Rather, Johnson acted on faith: "There ain't no doubt about this being Castro now," he told Fortas and McNamara. "If Bosch doesn't know it, *we* know it's Communist."<sup>40</sup>

That afternoon, three close advisors cautioned the president not to go public with his conviction for lack of evidence. First, Bundy told Johnson that an early draft of a statement for that evening was "full of the menace of Communism." "The question is precisely when you want to be publicly in that position," Bundy warned. "And I hadn't thought you wanted to be there right now." A few hours later, Bundy explained:

See, one of the troubles is they've named forty-five people; they've spotted eight of them. Nobody has yet said that any one of these Communists is actually in command of a column or has in fact any—. The representatives that are going and speaking to people are these military that are with Bosch that nobody says are Communists. They're neither better nor worse than our military. They're just Dominican colonels trained under Trujillo, every one of them. . . . [You might] get pinned to civil war against Communists that *aren't* in charge. Nobody's—I don't know that we're *that* clear that these guys are *that* much in control of this messy movement.<sup>41</sup>

McNamara also tried to cool down the statement. Johnson wanted to say that "outside powers" had taken over. McNamara was frank:

Well, I think you've got a pretty tough job to prove that, Mr. President. As president. The rest of us can say things like that and we don't have to prove it. But you've got a handful of people there [identified Communists in Santo Domingo]. You don't know that Castro is trying to do anything. You'd have a hard time proving to any group that Castro has done more than train these people. *We've* trained a lot of people. *He's* trained a lot of people. I think this puts your own status and prestige too much on the line. . . . [The CIA has not] shown any evidence that I've seen that Castro has been directing this or has had any control over those people once they got back there.<sup>42</sup>

40. Recordings of telephone conversations between Johnson and Mansfield, 30 April 1965, 11:51A.M., WH6504.08; and Fortas and Johnson (with McNamara on the line), 30 April 1965, 10:50A.M., WH6504.08

41. Recordings of telephone conversations between Bundy and Johnson, 1:45P.M. and 6:35P.M., both 30 April 1965, WH6504.09.

42. Recording of telephone conversation between McNamara and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 5:05P.M., WH6504.09.

Minutes later, aide Bill Moyers was on the line with McNamara and the president, who now feared that “if we don’t take over that island within the next twenty-four hours or before the last man folds, we never will.” Moyers assured him that “the CIA Cuban man tells me Havana is still taken off balance by this” and warned that to suggest Cuban involvement might in fact provoke that very involvement or at the very least boost Castro’s prestige by giving him credit for a revolution that was not his.<sup>43</sup>

As Bundy noted that evening, the decision to go public came down to a “gut” judgment by the president and the president only. Johnson’s comments to Bundy and McNamara that day revealed a mix of instinct and conscious thought. In one agonizing afternoon, the president repeatedly confronted all three of his major concerns—domestic opposition, international Communism, and evidence of ties to Cuba—and came to the conclusion that his fear of the first two outweighed his lack of the third. He expressed his reasoning to McNamara:

Bob, what worries me—I don’t think I’m being quite honest with ‘em [the U.S. public?]. I think we do know, and I think every one of the citizens in this country knows that there are disturbing signs there and that there are people trained outside in there. And I think that if I don’t say so, that it looks like I’m concealing it and trying to cover up.

Johnson, in short, did not feel that he misled voters by accusing rebel leaders of being international Communists. On the contrary, he misled them if he did *not* make that accusation. It was a testament to Cold War thinking that the president argued that this was a matter of telling the “truth.”<sup>44</sup> That evening, appearing on television for the second time in three days, despite his best judgment Johnson limited himself to referring to “signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control.”

On 2 May, Johnson made a third television appearance on the Dominican crisis, and this time he did not hold back. With some advisors still reluctant, the president nevertheless asserted that “what began as a popular democratic revolution, committed to democracy and social justice, very shortly moved and was taken over and really seized and placed into the hands of a band of Communist conspirators.”<sup>45</sup> It seems that

43. Recording of telephone conversation between McNamara, Moyers, and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 5:40P.M., WH6504.09.

44. Recording of telephone conversation between McNamara and Johnson, 30 April 1965, 6:25P.M., WH6504.09.

45. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon Johnson, 1965—I*, (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1966), 30 April speech is on 461–62; 2 May speech is on 469–74. On advisors, see Roberts, *LBJ’s Inner Circle*, 210. There have been rumors that Johnson improvised about Communists after his Teleprompter malfunctioned, but Roberts writes that “after a four-hour long discussion of language to be used, Johnson decided to go all



Johnson made the statement not because he had new evidence, but because a key liberal, John Bartlow Martin, had returned from Santo Domingo that afternoon and had made the same assertion in a press conference: "What began as a PRD [Bosch's party] revolt," said Martin using similar words, "had in the last few days fallen under the domination of Castro/Communists and other violent extremists."<sup>46</sup> Johnson was delighted. "I'm very, very proud of you and what you have done," he told Martin later that day on the phone. Johnson seemed relieved that he could now answer liberal critics with one of their own. Wanting to keep Martin publicly engaged, he played to his Good Neighbor instincts.

There's no gunboat stuff about this. . . . I think you ought to tell about your sympathies and your feelings and how you are opposed to dictatorship. . . . Maybe you, as a man that's not responsible for this operation, could talk better than somebody else.<sup>47</sup>

Once the Marines took over with relatively little opposition, no new evidence of communist leadership surfaced. (In a conversation with Raborn, after Johnson asks "what kind of proof do we have" against Castro-trained Dominicans, more than thirty seconds are sanitized.) The president now seemed to realize his mistake. His efforts to retrace his steps, for one, suggest that he felt he had asserted far more communist danger than there had been.<sup>48</sup> As early as 3 May, Johnson began asking advisors to make lists of everyone with whom the White House and the State Department had talked from the outset of the crisis: Who said what to him? Who was in the room? Who withheld information? On 12 May, when Johnson again suggested that Caamaño was secretly "controlled by the Castroites," McNamara again was frank:

I don't think they are. How the hell can fifty-eight people control them when they've got several hundred? I just don't believe the story that Bosch and Caamaño are controlled by the Castroites. I don't mean to say they aren't influ-

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the way." Rowland Evans and Robert Novak in Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The New American Library, 1966), 523, explain that the Teleprompter did malfunction but that it only made Johnson repeat two paragraphs, not ad-lib. See also Lady Bird Johnson's diary entry in Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory*, 308–09.

46. Martin cited in Piero Gleijeses, *The Dominican Crisis: The 1965 Constitutionalist Revolt and American Intervention* trans. Lawrence Lipson (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 258. For more on the Martin trip and the press conference, see Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 134–35. According to Szulc, "[Martin's] assessment that the revolution had gone over to the Communists was the final element in convincing the Administration that this was the case," in *Dominican Diary*, 106.

47. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Martin, 2 May 1965, 3:42P.M., WH6505.02. On Johnson's handling of liberals during the crisis, see Evans and Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson*, 518.

48. Draper noted that, in mid-May, "a strange thing happened" when U.S. officials began to backtrack, saying that communists had never taken over and that the U.S.

enced, Mr. President, not at all. But I don't believe that fifty-eight people or two hundred people for that matter can militarily control, physically control this other bunch.<sup>49</sup>

After he reviewed the chronologies and interviewed his subordinates, Johnson privately settled on a comforting narrative in which he did the wrong thing for the right reason. Like others, he used the analogy of Castro having begun a guerrilla struggle with twelve men—a difficult analogy to sustain—as a rationale for having panicked before tiny groups of hard-line Dominicans.<sup>50</sup> The president, moreover, was more than happy to spread the political fallout. On one hand, he told Raborn, “I don't want to blame anybody. I want to take the blame. I'm big enough and broad enough and man enough to take anything.”<sup>51</sup> On the other, Johnson grilled Bundy over his own alarmist 2 May speech: “Who is responsible for the Sunday night draft of my speech? You and Dick [Goodwin]?” Bundy, a bit defensively, answered yes, but so were Moyers, Mann, and some members of Congress. Bundy was, as always, cagily analytical: “There may be one phrase in that speech that says they [Communists] took control that we couldn't prove, but nobody could prove the opposite.”<sup>52</sup>

The president reappears on the White House tapes in a flurry of phone calls in reaction to a critical speech by Fulbright on the Senate floor on 15 September 1965. (As stated above, the tapes are relatively silent from June to August.) As Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Fulbright had held hearings in mid-July, but he was bound by a promise to keep the testimony locked, and dissent within the Committee blocked the issuance of a report. So Fulbright resorted to a speech.<sup>53</sup> For it, Johnson considered the Democrat a traitor—“You know Fulbright. His country comes last”—and instructed several senators to “hit” him verbally. The tapes suggest that Johnson also orchestrated the blocking of the Com-

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intervention had prevented them from doing so, *Dominican Revolt*, 138; see also Roberts, *LBJ's Inner Circle*, 211.

49. Quotations from recordings of telephone conversations between Johnson and Raborn, 12 May 1965, 4:05P.M., WH6505.08; and Johnson and McNamara, 12 May 1965, 11:20A.M., WH6505.08; see also Johnson and Jack Vaughn, 3 May 1965, 11:10A.M., WH6505.03.

50. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Senator George Smathers, 15 September 1965, 12:35P.M., WH6509.05; see similar analogies by Rusk, Mann, and Bennett in Draper, *Dominican Revolt*, 161.

51. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Raborn, 12 May 1965, 4:05P.M., WH6505.08.

52. Recording of telephone conversation between Bundy and Johnson, 31 May 1965, 10:42A.M., WH6505.33.

53. The speech is “The Situation in the Dominican Republic,” *Congressional Record*, 15 September 1965, 23855; Max Frankel, “Secret U.S. Report Details Policy Shift in Dominican Crisis,” *New York Times*, 14 November 1965, 1; George Pope Atkins and Larman

mittee report. And here again, Johnson vacillated between defending subordinates targeted by the speech and sacrificing them. Fulbright, perhaps calculating that a direct attack on Johnson was politically risky, focused on the U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, William Tapley Bennett, for providing misleading information to the president. Johnson felt that his "boy [Bennett] is entitled to some protection."<sup>54</sup> Yet he reiterated that he acted on the unambiguous, unanimous counsel of Bennett and the country team, in effect leaving room for doubt as to the soundness of that counsel: "Do you know of any bad advice I received from anybody on this matter?" he asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk for instance.<sup>55</sup> The Fulbright epilogue was a fitting illustration of Johnson's concern with the safety of his administration and of himself as much as with that of U.S. citizens or Dominicans.

Johnson's behavior during the Dominican crisis brought out some of his worst instincts as a foreign policymaker. Throughout that spring and summer, he was overly concerned with domestic opposition but seemed to create it himself: he wanted accurate, immediate information but also struck fear in the hearts of those who might bring him bad news; he often assigned too many advisors to one problem, causing them to divide into factions; finally, he was often paranoid, petty, and pessimistic.<sup>56</sup> In all fairness, Johnson took some of the blame for failures in the Dominican Republic and got his forces out without much incident, and most of his advisors also feared a possible communist takeover. Nevertheless, the Johnson tapes reveal to a greater extent than previously

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Wilson, *The Dominican Republic and the United States: From Imperialism to Transnationalism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 137; see also Peter Felten, "The Path to Dissent: Johnson, Fulbright, and the 1965 Intervention in the Dominican Republic," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (fall 1996): 1009–18.

54. Quotations from transcript of telephone conversation between Johnson and Senator Herman Talmadge, 23 August 1965, 3:11P.M., WH6508.09; see also transcript of Johnson and Senator Richard Russell, 14 September 1965, 6:35P.M., WH6509.04.

55. Recording of telephone conversation between Johnson and Rusk, 17 September 1965, 2:26P.M., WH6509.05; see also, on the same recording, Johnson and Senator George Smathers, 15 September 1965, 12:35P.M.; Johnson and Senator Russell Long, 15 September 1965, 6:40P.M., and Johnson and Rusk, 15 September 1965, 7:20P.M.

56. Months after the crisis, Geyelin came to similar conclusions in *Johnson and the World*, 237: The Dominican intervention "produced . . . what was probably the lowest ebb in Lyndon Johnson's standing as a world statesman in all of the first two years or more of his Presidency." "[Johnson's] flailing around in search of [a consensus], his irrelevant rationalizations and often inaccurate reconstruction of events, conspired to turn an essentially unmanageable and, in some ways, unavoidable crisis in a fundamentally unstable and crisis-prone Caribbean nation into a crisis of confidence in the President himself. It turned an effort, born, curiously enough, of caution, and largely designed to fill what seemed to be an ominous vacuum, into an unreasoned, reckless, impulsive piece of jingoism."

thought that the rationale for the intervention was his to begin with and they reposition him at the center of the Dominican crisis. Scholars may even use the tapes as a starting point for a reassessment of Johnson's overall approach to Latin America, a topic that is still crying out for a good monograph.