

Close Liaison

Growing Role For Hoover as Johnson Adviser

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New light has been shed on relations between President Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover with disclosure that Mr. Johnson has assigned the FBI to probe Communist activity in the Dominican Republic.

More than had been generally realized, it seems, the President is listening to the FBI director's advice

not only on police and security matters but on broader questions such as the commitment of Marines to the Dominican Republic.

If appearances are a true indication, Mr. Johnson now is personally closer to Hoover than any other President has been.

REPORT

Though five months ago he was reported on high authority to have been considering replacing Hoover at the FBI, the President professes to set great store upon his counsel.

Evidently, he talks to Hoover often on the telephone, day and night. Frequently in private conversations with others he sprinkles lofty praise of Hoover, extolling his trustworthiness and recounting how ingeniously the FBI has infiltrated certain questionable organizations.

It has become characteristic of the President to refer to Hoover in superlative, so much so that at times listeners, conditioned perhaps by skepticism bred of experi-

on Page 1

ence in Washington, suspect he would not mind if a report on his words trickled back to the FBI chief.

SHREWD

Two of this capital's shrewdest students of power politics are Lyndon B. Johnson and J. Edgar Hoover. The importance of what each can contribute to the strength of the other is well known to both.

Hoover has become such a politically formidable figure over the years that his prestige has had to be taken into account by Presidents whether they liked it or not. Presidents have been keenly aware that, if retired to private life unwillingly, Hoover could, were he so disposed, become a political rallying point with awkward implications for the White House.

Thus the report in Newsweek last December that the President had decided he must find a new FBI chief and that "the search is on" proved highly embarrassing to the Administration.

DENIAL

The White House denied the report; Mr. Johnson displayed much anger over it. The Newsweek article had the effect of ending all speculation about Hoover's early departure from the Government.

When the President on

March 26 went on television to announce the arrest of Ku Klux Klan members accused of murdering Viola Gregg Liuzzo near Selma, Ala., during the civil rights march, he had Hoover at his right hand. He referred to him as "our honored public servant" and praised the work of the FBI and its director.

In sending a team of FBI agents to the Dominican Republic, as reported yesterday by The Washington Post and The Chronicle, the President took an unusual step.

SPOKESMAN

Commenting on it after the White House had tacitly confirmed the report, an FBI spokesman said there was no law forbidding assignment of FBI agents overseas. Some U.S. embassies abroad, he noted, have FBI agents attached.

Primarily, however, they perform rather routine functions, such as liaison with foreign police forces. Certainly it has been the custom since the establishment of the Agency after World War II to leave the gathering of intelligence overseas to this agency, which, at the same time, co-operates with the FBI in the United States on certain matters of intelligence and security.

REQUEST

Reportedly, the President got in touch with Hoover personally and asked him to undertake the investigation.

Because of the credence that Congress and the public give to Hoover and the FBI, it is widely supposed here that the President, under some criticism that he overreacted to the Dominican revolt, would like to bolster his case with FBI findings about the extent of the danger of a Communist takeover in Santo Domingo. What would happen if the FBI should find that, on the contrary, the Communist threat was exaggerated is a matter of conjecture.

Hoover's role in the future of the Johnson Administration will be watched with interest in Washington, for it appears that the FBI director's influence with the President is on the rise.