

Conversation No 751-014

Date: July 24, 1972

Time: 4:14 – 5:48 p.m.

Location Oval Office

Participants: Nixon, Raymond K. Price, Jr., Rev. John J. McLaughlin, John K. Andrews, Jr., David R. Gergen, Lee W. Huebner, Rodney C. Campbell, Harold J. Lezar, Jr. Vera Hirschberg, Aram Bakshian, Jr. and John B. McDonald. Stephen B. Bull and the White House photographer were present at the beginning of the meeting.

Whatever else one might say about the 1972 presidential election, the choice could not have been starker in Nixon's mind. In a private conversation with Republican aides and backers, Nixon accentuated the fundamental and irreconcilable ideological differences between himself and George McGovern in terms of foreign policy and the role of the United States in the international system.¹ According to Nixon, besides the fact that McGovern was "a man who very honestly and sincerely believes that American should withdraw from its world role," McGovern, and the political Left more broadly, were guilty of maintaining double standards, which was obvious if one studied "what he [McGovern] said about Chile, and about Allende and Castro, as compared to what he said about Greece."²

Nixon argued that McGovern's condemnation of the Greek junta "enormously appeals to his constituency, because they are against dictators if they're on the Right, but not if they're on the Left." Besides being incredibly irresponsible, since it would deal a "body blow" NATO and "deny us the only base from which we have to have a viable policy in the Mediterranean, and in the Mideast" (especially its oil), there was the matter of "consistency": "He [McGovern] says that what we ought to do is to improve our relations with Allende, and improve our relations with Castro, despite the fact that they are engaged in activities that are very detrimental to us. So you see the double standard there."

[...]

[751-014_Clip1](#) (2.9m; 2:58)

¹ Senator (D-SD), 1963-1981.

² On April 21, 1967, a group of Greek military officers staged a *coup d'état* (the so-called "Colonels Revolt") to prevent national elections that would have probably produced a center-left government (possibly including members of the Communist Party, which was banned at the time). The *junta* initially ruled Greece in concert with King Constantine II, until the King fled in December after leading an abortive counter-coup against the military.

Nixon: What it is you have here is a man [McGovern] who very honestly and sincerely believes that America should withdraw from its world role. Now, that isn't said in any—in the sense of trying to level a charge that can't be backed up, but he does believe it. His votes over the years have been that way, totally backed up by his votes; totally backed up by—Like his support of Mansfield's resolution with regard to Europe [unclear]. But, just as another very clear indication of the difference between the two [Nixon and McGovern], is what he said about Chile, and about Allende and Castro, as compared to what he said about Greece. Now, the Greek Government thing is hardly getting any play. It doesn't need to pull out, because any intelligent person knows that withdrawing—first, that saying, "Forget about the Greeks," enormously appeals to his constituency, because they are against dictators if they're on the Right, but not if they're on the Left. But saying, "Forget about the Greeks," is—first, it would give, give a body blow [unclear] NATO, from which it couldn't recover. The Greeks have 19 divisions. It's the southern half. It'd split off the Turks. Second, from the standpoint of the United States and its future, it would deny us the only base from which we have to have a viable policy in the Mediterranean, and in the Mideast. And that means not just Israel, but the oil-states: Iran, Saudi Arabia, et cetera, upon which the future of the U.S. and the future of Europe all depends. The—And then, on the other, the other side of the coin, if you want to take the consistency line, you have—he says that what we ought to do is to improve our relations with Allende, and improve our relations with Castro, despite the fact that they are engaged in activities that are very detrimental to us. So you see the double standard there. But the point—And the point is that here, here you have a very—as Connally pointed out and this is the distinction; this is why the choice is so much gravely greater—a great difference between any campaign since World War Two. Whatever the differences between Adlai Stevenson and Eisenhower, they were both internationalists; whatever the differences between Kennedy and I were concerned, we were both internationalists. We were arguing that you could do it, you know, really the most effective policy. And whatever the difference with Johnson and Goldwater are concerned, they were both, basically, for a strong United States and for a foreign policy recognizing that we had some responsibility in the world, and if the United States didn't carry—hadn't carried responsibility in the world, that you'd have

a vacuum which only the great superpower, the Soviet Union, or the future superpower, Communist China, was certain to fill.

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