

June 16, 1972  
11:22 am – 12:26 pm

Conversation No. 737-4  
Cassette Nos. 2255-2257  
Oval Office

[The President met with Luis Echeverría Alvarez, Foreign Minister Emilio Rabasa Mishkin, Alexander M. Haig, Jr., and translator Donald F. Barnes]

[Greetings, introductions]

Nixon: Well, we'll get started on our meeting. You have this [National] Press Club thing, I believe.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Sí.*

Nixon: Oh, my! He's the busiest man in Washington. Far busiest than I am!

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: I think perhaps whatever subject the President would like to bring up, and then I'd like to hear some more of his views on our policies towards the hemisphere. And I could then perhaps before we conclude, I could – I think he might be interested to hear some of my brief news with regard to the Soviet leaders and their attitudes.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Dígale usted al Señor Presidente Nixon que hasta qué punto por mi visita, por mis palabras en el Congreso y por lo que él tan gentilmente dijo anoche en la cena, podríamos hablar en esta declaración de prensa, en lo que yo di en el club de prensa hoy, que se ha iniciado una nueva etapa en las relaciones diplomáticas de Estados Unidos y de América Latina... que estamos en la iniciación de una verdadera renovación con un nuevo estilo.*

Translator: Mr. President, I wonder to what degree – as a result of my visit here, of my presence in the Congress yesterday, and your very kind words spoken at the dinner at night – to what degree do you think we could say in our joint press statement and in my own statements to the National Press Club in a few minutes, in a sense that we have begun a new era, that a new era has begun in the diplomatic relations between the United States and Latin America – that we are beginning a true renewal, and a new style in our relationships.

Echeverría: *Que si no sólo en China, no sólo en la URSS, por qué no decir ahora: estamos iniciando una etapa, estamos hablando con una renovada franqueza de estos asuntos que a todos nos están...no sería útil, yo estaba pensando hoy en la mañana.*

Translator: Not only are you having, of course, a new relationship with China and with the Soviet Union, but why not say you are . . . entering into a new era also with us, that we are speaking with renewed frankness on all these matters that affect us. I was thinking this morning that perhaps this might be useful.

Nixon: Well, I think that what the President might say first was that – he should say very frankly to the National Press Club that he believes that at a time when the United States is developing a new approach in its relationships with the PRC, the Soviet Union and other nations in other areas of the world that it is important – that he believes, and that he told President Nixon this – that it is very important for the United States to develop a new approach to the problems here with our closest friends and our closest neighbors in the American hemisphere. Then he could go on to say what was my reaction – I mean obviously they'll ask, or he may want to volunteer it. He could say that I was very impressed by the President's analysis – by President Echeverría's analysis of the problems of Latin America. I was very impressed by the sense of urgency he expressed, and by the recommendations that he made . . . And that I consider it very valuable and important for me to see the problems of Latin America through the eyes of President Echeverría – a man who understands the United States to the north, but who also is very familiar with and shows great perception of the problems of Latin America. And I think he could say that President Echeverría and I agree that we need a new approach to the problems of Latin America. I would say, incidentally, I think it would be helpful if he would say that, however, the new approach is not limited to what the United States will do as a government and as private enterprise, but it is also a new approach of partnership on both sides, what other governments in this hemisphere will do; that there is a need for that and that he, President Echeverría, is confident that as a result of the talks that he and I have had, that there will be developed a new approach to this and a new era of his – without over-promising – I say, a new era in relations between the American states; all of the American states, is both needed and will be coming.

[Muffled conversation, Nixon talks to translator about how to incorporate these comments into President Echeverría's speech at the National Press Club.]

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: . . . *Dígale que es una muy buena síntesis la del señor presidente la que acaba de hacer, que qué tal que sea una especie de preámbulo del comunicado de prensa.*

Translator: That's an excellent summary, Mr. President, and I would just suggest perhaps it would make a very good preamble to the joint press statement.

Nixon: I think another thing – if you can get time, I don't know whether you will have time to do this – but another thing that could be said which expresses my view is this: that the eyes of the world obviously are riveted on the journey to Peking and the journey to Moscow. And that I consider that the President's visit here is very important in directing the attention of the world and the President – our President, the President of the United States – of our Congress, of the American people to the equally important and vital problems of what is called the Third World. I don't like to divide the world up that way but that's the way people speak of it. I think that . . . President Echeverría's visit comes at a very good time in that it reminds the American people and the American Congress and the rest, that as important – and everybody realizes the importance of the journeys to Moscow and Peking were in building a structure of world peace [unintelligible] – that equally important and of the same priority are new approaches to the problems of – not only Latin America, but the rest of the Third World which the President has referred to.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Dígale que un amigo me preguntaba ayer si no había sido inconveniente que en lo que yo dije en el Congreso, mencionara que hay problemas no resueltos en lugar de referirme a los sí resueltos, que si no hay inconveniente en este periodo antes de las elecciones, si no habré empleado un lenguaje lleno de galas literarias.*

Translator: A friend asked me yesterday, wouldn't it have been better in your speech to the Congress that instead of mentioning the problems that are still to be resolved actually compared to those that have already been taken care of – and especially in this pre-election period in this country – wouldn't it have been a lot better if you had used other, literary phrases in your speech?

Echeverría: *Y yo le dije que al contrario. Que es una nueva etapa que abrimos, es una apertura, con ese tono de franqueza, que puede ser una norma para las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y nuestros países. Que va a ser muy saludable. Una apertura con franqueza a la que no le teme el presidente Nixon porque cuando hay amistad, es el punto de partida, se puede hablar de todos los problemas.*

Translator: And I replied, on the contrary, because we are really opening a new era and I think that we can speak with the frankness that will become a standard for the relation between the United States and our country and this will be a very healthy thing indeed. That we can speak with frankness – not because we are friends, although I'm sure that President Nixon is our friend . . . I believe that when you use friendship as a form of departure you should speak frankly on all these problems.

Echeverría: *Dígale que hoy hablo con el Club Nacional de Prensa, luego en la OEA, mañana con la Cámara de Comercio de Nueva York, luego con un grupo de intelectuales, en la noche en la casa del señor Rockefeller con industriales, y en las charlas que tenga en Chicago, en San Antonio y en Los Ángeles, que si no puede ser útil que lo comentemos, señores o sea siento que se ha abierto una nueva etapa en que estamos hablando con mucha franqueza con [unintelligible] de buenos amigos. Si el*

*presidente Nixon ha consolidado la amistad, nosotros la estamos consolidando. No nos ocultamos en barreras de palabras*

Translator: I will be talking, Mr. President, a little later in the day to the National Press Club and then addressing the Organization of American States. Tomorrow I'll talk to the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce in New York, subsequently to a group of intellectuals and then at Governor Rockefeller's home with a group of leading industrialists. And also later on I will be talking to people in Chicago, in San Antonio and in Los Angeles. And I really do believe it would be useful if we could say that we feel that we're entering into a new era in which we can speak on the basis of our friendship with frankness, and that President Nixon has consolidated this friendship and that we are also contributing to this positive relation and we don't want to hide anything behind a barrage of words.

Nixon: I think you might say too that our talks with the Chinese leaders and the Soviet leaders were extremely frank, and we owe no less and certainly even more to have frank talks with our friends. And it does no... it serves no purpose to cover up – paper over problems by so called literary elements. As a matter of fact there has perhaps been too much in the relations and in the American community ... for us to put too much emphasis on fine words and slogans rather than on programs and needs. And I think this new era to which we are referring should be one that is pragmatic – that has high ideals but that ... it should be a program of action. Action to deal with the problems – economic and others – that we face in this hemisphere.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: The President, by the way, is at liberty to, of course, to – if he feels it useful to do so – to quote me directly on that. That is my belief. That's what we need in our new approach to the problems of this hemisphere, and that's the reason I welcome the recommendations of the President and other leaders in the American hemisphere whom he suggests we ought to be talking to too. But their recommendations, their – so this will be a ... not a case of the United States trying to determine the future of this hemisphere, but a ... in which we together share our best interests and thereby come up with a true partnership program.

[Translation into Spanish]

*Echeverría: Sí. Dígale que él dijo la palabra slogans hace un ratito... usted me dijo lemas. Voy a decir, siento que nos estamos alejando de los slogans diplomáticos. El presidente Nixon lo hizo en China, lo hizo en Rusia, lo estamos haciendo en relaciones de Estados Unidos con Latinoamérica. Es un neorrealismo, un redescubrimiento de la realidad. Pero sólo es posible con amistad, es la conquista.*

Translator: You use the word "slogans" Mr. President, and I think we can feel that we are leaving behind the diplomatic slogans. I think that this was done in the PRC visit and the visit to the Soviet Union and I think that this also applies to American relations with Latin

America – that there is a new realism in this relationship and this can be based only on friendship and out of this will come our victory.

Nixon: That's very good. I think the President will say it much better than I could say it. I think it will be good for him to carry this message to New York, to Chicago, to San Antonio, to Los Angeles and of course back to his own country and, to the extent that it is covered, to the rest of Latin America.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: I would not...I think it's only fair to say we have not found any instant solutions for problems that are already nagging and have been with us for generations, but on the other hand we have put out on the table what the problems really are and now [. . .] our approach is to – in a very pragmatic and realistic way – grapple with those problems and do something about them rather than just talk about them with fine words.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Muy bien, me parece bien, muy preciso.*

Nixon: We have...I wondered if our colleagues here worked out any more language on the salinity act here.

[“Yes, sir,” etc. Many different people speaking at once. Breaks, skips in recording, static.]

[Another participant reads the text of salinity agreement in Spanish, then English]

Nixon: Sure, sure, that's fine...put it so that it translates... [static, breaks in recording].

[More discussion in English and Spanish of the language of the agreement, timing of its public release.]

Nixon: Let me suggest what we do then, when it is briefed – when we brief the press, we authorize our press spokesman to say to yours that, uh, “What do you mean by improving the quality of water?” And we'll say, “at least 100 salinity.” But in a communiqué, it's getting be a little to complicated.

[Translation into Spanish]

Rabasa: *Considera señor Presidente en general que se quede: “de llevar a cabo esta transmisión para mejorar inmediatamente la calidad a todos los que van a México...” pero que—*

Echeverría: *¿Así esta la expresión que usa?*

Rabasa: *Sí señor, para llevar a cabo acciones inmediatamente para mejorar la calidad de las aguas para México... que no lo pongan así en partes... por ejemplo podría confundir...*

Echeverría: *De acuerdo, de acuerdo entra la parte: “mejorable inmediatamente”*

Rabasa: *Inmediatamente... [unintelligible] Pues consideramos así en partes como mínimo... tiene toda la razón...*

Echeverría: *Va a ser en México una magnífica impresión.*

Nixon: The very important thing to cover is not the immediate impression because we had a good impression after we met with Díaz Ordaz and then, you know, a disappointment and I guess they've been having good impressions about salinity for 27 – ever since 1944. But the thing that I want to tell the President now is that he has my personal commitment. We have stated here, but I'm going to say it again to him – that I personally will see to it that we settle this on a just basis between President Echeverría and myself before the end of the year. Now we – the sooner the better. We'll put January 1<sup>st</sup> as our goal. This is the way – just to give him an example - that we got the SALT Agreement: personal communication with [Leonid I.] Brezhnev, which we issued on May 20<sup>th</sup> of last year and said we would try to reach an agreement in August on defensive weapons before the end of the year. Well, as a matter of fact we didn't reach it until a little after the summer. But the fact we made that – set that goal meant that we'd both do it. And we're doing now the same thing with President Echeverría – he has personal [assurances?] at the highest level. Because I think we've kept it at bureaucratic level long enough, and now we've got to settle it once and for all.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *¿Cuáles son los puntos concretos que el Sr. Presidente Nixon informó al pueblo norteamericano de su viaje a Rusia? Muy brevemente . . .*

Translator: It would be so good, Mr. President, if you could summarize for me what would the main points that you brought to the America people when you returned from Moscow.

Nixon: Well, the most important agreement we made with the Soviet leaders was one on arms control, which is a beginning – I emphasize, a beginning, a very important beginning, in which both powers agreed to limit defensive weapons, nuclear weapons, by treaty, and have an interim agreement on offensive weapons. In October, the Soviet Union Congress approves these two agreements, which I am confident they will. We will then start a second round of talks in which we hope to develop a permanent agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union limiting offensive nuclear weapons. I have decided this applies only to nuclear weapons. No additions were – have yet been agreed upon or are expected in the field of conventional weapons. In other words, both sides will continue to remain [unintelligible] the conventional forces [unintelligible].

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: And then in addition to that we have there, Mr. President, a number of agreements. We're setting up a trade connection, which will mean more trade; joint cooperation in space, environment, health . . .

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: But the point that I would particularly emphasize to the President, because he is a pragmatic man as I am, these agreements were made without any compromise on either side of our philosophies. Mr. Brezhnev and [Aleksei N.] Kosygin are very dedicated communists. And I, like the President, am a dedicated believer in the system of free government.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: The same is true in our new relation with the People's Republic of China. Chou En-Lai and Mao Tse-Tung and their colleagues are totally dedicated communists, and we have no illusions about that.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: What brings the two countries – what brings the United States and the People's Republic of China together in certain areas and what brought about the Soviet Union and the United States reaching agreement in certain areas is not any change in philosophy but it's really a matter of necessity and mutual self-interest.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: Now I expect for example, Mr. President, that both the Chinese and the Russians will continue their actions of subversion, support of communist causes in your country and in all countries in the world. I have no reason to think they're going to change that.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: What we have to do, though, is to recognize the facts of international life. There will be a billion Chinese – about a third of all the people in the world – by the end of the century. And the Soviet Union has enormous military nuclear power and is therefore a potential threat to its neighbors if they decided to use that power aggressively.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: Now I would never say this publicly, but one of the reasons that the Chinese certainly wanted to have an understanding with us was because of their fear of the Russians. And one of the reasons that the Russians wanted to have – develop some better

relations with the United States – one, there were others – was because of their concern of the future possibility of China developing similar strength [?]. It was very pragmatic.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: Tell him – Mr. President, my own philosophy – he knows my long reputation as an anti-communist. My views on the dangers of communism, on the repugnance of the system, have not changed. But the United States for the present time, by the accident of history, is the only nation with the power to restrain the Soviet Union at this time. And due to – with the potential power to restrain the People's Republic of China in the event they decided to engage in adventurist policies any place in the world, it was my belief that we have a better chance, we – the United States – to exercise the restraining influence on these two great communist powers by negotiating with them, by – in communication with them. Even recognizing that Brezhnev and I are totally different in our philosophies, Chou En-Lai and I are different in our philosophies, but by talking with them we have a better chance to – by negotiating with them directly on a very cold basis – than having virtually no communication. And then have confrontation develop in a place like the Mid-East or maybe in another place in Latin America which brings us together and the world becomes involved. This was a risk I decided we had to take – to talk directly.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: A very significant part of each communiqué, the one that came from Peking and the one from Moscow, was that both Peking and Moscow agreed with us that we would avoid and refrain from engaging in activities that might bring along confrontation between the two powers. Now this is not a treaty but it is an understanding. We have no illusions about the eventual goal of all communists. They want to have communism all over the world. But we do believe having this kind of understanding put down on paper between the government of the United States and the PRC on the one hand and the government of the Soviet Union and the United States on the other hand is constructive because it could mean in the future that the – that this will be a restraining influence on leaders of the two great communist superpowers as they move... I think speaking very privately and candidly to the Mr. President, I think we can expect them to continue to move with their subversion. But in so far as overt moves, I believe that these two hearings that we've had this week, this month...this year, probably reduces very significantly the chance for overt moves on the part of China or Russia because it would be a violation of understandings that we reached at the summit.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: For example, no doubt is left in the minds of the Soviet Union leaders that we would resist Soviet adventurism in the Western Hemisphere.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: And also, I think that the President in his journey, some of these people may ask about Vietnam. I only say that...we...that I can give you my assurance that we have – our goal is to bring the war to an end in an honorable way just as soon as we can, and that in a way that will respect the independence of both North Vietnam and South Vietnam and I believe we are making progress in that direction.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: Let me just say one word on that. I know that there are – I don't believe and I don't ask – it would be very unwise for the President to get into that issue because of the concerns...because of Mexico's traditional policy of non-alignment on some of these matters. But I would only say that it is my view that if the massive invasion of South Vietnam, which started right after Easter of this year, supported by a superpower, the Soviet Union and its tanks and its guns – if it succeeds not just in-country [?] in South Vietnam but inflicting a defeat and forcing the withdrawal of the United States, then this would have a very damaging effect on the credibility of the United States among its other friends in Asia, in Europe, in Latin America. But even more significant, if that kind of action, in other words the support of an invasion in arms, in tanks, guns, and so forth, provided by one of the communist superpowers, if it succeeds in a place like Vietnam, they will – and, and the United States does not react and see it through – then they will be encouraged to try it elsewhere. And it...it's the rule of international relations, if the crime pays, they'll try again; if it doesn't pay, then they don't try. So I think bringing this terribly difficult war to an end in an honorable way is, in the long run, in the interest of a lasting peace. On the other hand just caving into communist aggression would encourage more aggression and war in the future.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Quería preguntarle que – ¿A que se debió después de su visita a Rusia esa aggression? ¿cual es la explicación que ha dado el gobierno de Estados Unidos? porque en todo el mundo llamó mucho la atención.*

Translator: If I may Mr. President, I have a question. To what does the U.S. government attribute the fact that this aggression with the support of the Soviet Union took place after your visit there? This is something that puzzles the whole world.

Nixon: Well, let me tell you what they say, just in confidence to the President. Very briefly: they...the Russians said they were surprised. That it was not their plan that it should take place, and they tend to blame it on the Chinese. On the other hand, the Chinese, we believe – we have reason to believe did not encourage it. What we – my guess is that the North Vietnamese, after seeing that we had gone to China, one of their great allies, and we're going to Russia, recognized that they had better move now or that their two allies would put pressure on them to settle and they thought this was their last chance to knock out South Vietnam militarily, particularly since I had withdrawn a half a million men, and there were very few Americans. But they made, we think, a great mistake, because they didn't expect me to react and risk the summit, which I did do, as

strongly as I did. So – and their big gamble has failed, that’s my confidential opinion. That’s why I think that we can see in the future – I’m not saying next month, I don’t know when – but we can see the end of this long war coming because they failed militarily and now they have no choice but to negotiate. Because neither the Russians in my opinion, nor the Chinese now want this war to go ahead.

[Translation into Spanish]

Nixon: I think the important thing I would like to leave the President with is this thought: that we realize our policy has been subject to much criticism, but... I’m sure he understands that I would not have gone to China with all the political risks involved here, I would not have gone to the Soviet Union, unless I felt and unless this nation felt and believed in the need to build a more peaceful world. The United States was involved in Korea and then in Vietnam not by its choice, but in order to try, in our awkward way, to save people from having a communist government, imposed upon them against their will. But we ... I think our Russia and China initiatives should lay to rest the charge that we do not seek peace in the world. We do seek peace, but we do not seek surrender. And I think the way to... the wrong way to peace is to be weak and to cave in to aggression any place in the world. The right way to peace is to be strong – fair, but strong – and resist aggression when it comes.

[Translation into Spanish]

Echeverría: *Sí. Dígale que sin duda alguna – fuera de opositores electorales o intelectuales, o grupos comunistas aislados en el mundo – en la opinión americana y fuera de los Estados Unidos hay constancia objetiva de esa lucha por la paz. Que son evidentemente riesgos, totalmente novedosos en la historia diplomática del mundo.*

Translator: There is no doubt, Mr. President – if you leave aside the people who are opposing you for electoral purposes this year, if you leave aside the intellectuals and certain isolated groups of communists in the world – that both within and without the United States in public opinion there is a true awareness of the fact that you are waging a struggle for peace and that you have undertaken these journeys with all the risks that they involve in this new and unique diplomatic way of doing things, new in the history of the world.

Echeverría: *Y que... si China o Rusia se sintieran muy fuertes no hubieran aceptado el viaje.*

Translator: And, I believe that if China and the Soviet Union had felt very strongly, they would not have accepted your journeys.

Echeverría: *Claro.*

Nixon: We must get to the Press Club.

[Many people speaking at once.]

Rabasa: Mr. President, as you know we have this problem of immigrant [unintelligible].

Nixon: Yeah, yeah.

Rabasa: We don't want them, we don't throw them out of the country, you don't want them, I mean at a government level, but they come back and we have to deal with it. [Unintelligible] have talked but there is no agreement what to pay the commission for two or three Americans, two or three Mexicans that in six months or eight months [unintelligible] and advise each [unintelligible] a way out of this problem.

[Whispered comment]: Why don't we discuss this . . . [unintelligible].

Nixon: He thinks we can work out some language . . . [unintelligible].

[Speaking in Spanish between two people]

Nixon: Well, they're good people. I feel sorry for them. I grew up in California. We had lots of them, some of my best friends were immigrants. They became citizens, eventually. It's sad, really.

[The meeting concludes with an exchange of gifts and discussion about press conference on the White House lawn.]