

Conversation No. 462-005

Date: March 5, 1971

Time: 8:30 - 10:15 a.m.

Location: Oval Office

Participants: Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Alexander Haig, and Richard Helms

Over the course of a wide-ranging discussion of political affairs in Europe and Latin America, DCI Richard Helms warned the President of the “wave” of radicalism throughout Latin America following, among other things, the election of Allende, and he advised the President against taking a softer line against Cuba. Nixon heartily concurred, lamenting the fact that the Catholic Church, both in Latin America and in the United States, was no longer serving as a bulwark of conservatism and stability in the region. Nixon also gave vent to his oft-expressed belief that “Latins” (be they European or American) required “strong leadership” in order to function effectively.

[...]

[462-005_Clip 1](#) (1.8m, 1:54)

Nixon: Now, looking at Cuba, let's turn there a moment: Do you agree—Do you still—You know, my conviction is very strong that we cannot give up in our policy toward Cuba. I think, as you know, there are arguments to the effect that, well, the Chileans recognize them, and all that sort of thing. [Unclear] The problems with Cuba are enormous. They are still, of course, bent on revolution. So, if we, we throw in the towel with the Cubans, the effect on the rest of Latin America could be massive. Encouraging that—Encouraging Communists, Marxists, Allende, or, call it what you will, will try for revolutions. Now, I have begged the question already, but I want to know what your honest opinion is to do, from the intelligence and everything else. Do you think we should hold the course on Cuba, or [should] we start being nice to Castro?

Helms: Sir, I sat at your desk about a year ago on this question, and I gave you the answer then that I was opposed to the idea of relenting on Cuba.

Nixon: Um-hmm.

Helms: I'm just as opposed today. In fact, even more so. I think what's happened in Chile makes it even more advisable to keep a tough line on Cuba. I think that if you, uh, give the impression that we're now soft on Cuba, and can live with any of these things, I think what, I'm afraid, is the

wave of Latin America anyway is going to crash on the beach a lot faster. But, it's a lot easier for this country to handle Cuba the way we handle her now, than to start these little pacifying moves

—
Nixon: So, we're right about it?

Helms: —which are really cosmetic, and which just makes it—make it difficult to face the problem. Neither—

Nixon: [Unclear]. No, no—I don't want any of those. Don't let any of those pacifying things get in here now. Well, they get in, but we're going to be sure [unclear], because I've been—I've put "No" on a hell of a lot of sheets coming through this office on that, I want you to know.

Helms: I'm sure you have.

Nixon: Do this, or that, or the other thing with the damn Cubans? And to hell with them.

BEGIN WITHDRAWN ITEM NO. 10

[National Security]

[Duration: 2m 36s]

CUBA, ITALY, SPAIN

END WITHDRAWN ITEM NO. 10

[462-005_Clip2](#) (1.4m, 1:27)

Nixon: Here's the thing we have to realize, and it—The most single—The most [important] single event in terms of ideological and philosophically [unclear] that has occurred in the last ten years, in my opinion, has been the deterioration of the attitude of the Catholic Church. I am probably pro—the strongest pro-Catholic who is not a Catholic; the greatest admirer of Catholic traditions, what they've done through the years. I'll say this—I'm not going to say it to anybody else—the Catholics, at the present time, as some people have said to me, they're—in Latin America, they're about one-third Marxists, and the other third are in the center, and the other third are Catholics, now—now about that—at the present time. In the old days, you could count on the Catholic Church for many things to play an effective role on a serious question. What we see here is very cathartic. And, it—What has happened is that the American Catholic Church, finally, has condemned, I mean, an awful lot of Catholics in Latin America and everywhere else.
 [...]

[462-005_Clip3](#) (877k, 0:54)

Nixon: I believe we support whoever are our friends anyplace in the world. And I believe that in most Latin countries [*you kind of need*]*—not dictators; that’s a horrible word, and a reprehensible word to most Americans—but, that strong leadership is essential. De Gaulle proved that. I mean, France is a Latin country. It couldn’t—If even France, with all of its sophistication, couldn’t handle a democracy, you can’t. The Italians? That’s their problem. They can’t afford the luxury of democracy. Neither can Spain, and no country in Latin America can that I know of. They say, “[Look at] Colombia.” Well, heck, would we like that here? Well, the party in power wouldn’t like it worth a damn, and the party out of power would say, “Great, let’s change every four years.”*

[...]