

In June of 1971, Nixon decided to send Agnew to South Korea for the inauguration of President Chung Hee Park, and then on to Singapore, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Africa, and western Europe. At the time, Kissinger, without Agnew's knowledge, was continuing negotiations with China that would lead to Nixon's visit to Beijing. On June 4th, Agnew asked for a direct meeting with Nixon and proposed that on his visit to South Korea, he also visit China.

From Very Strange Bedfellows

Agnew: "I just wanted to see you because I had an idea. I don't know if it's worth anything or whether it's not, but I thought I'd ask you about it. You know, I'm going to go to this [clears throat] Korea trip, and there's some feeling, although I haven't discussed any itinerary with Henry, there's some feeling that we ought to stay away from Taiwan, because of the situation. I don't know what the decision is on that, but the thought came to me that it might be, I don't know how the mainland Chinese would think of this, but. . . looking back and recollecting your visit to the Soviet Union, it might not be a bad thing if we could do it, if I could go to the PRC [People's Republic of China]—and Taiwan."

There is a long pause before Nixon replies, stammering: "Well, the problem, the problem is the time. Er, the, er, I don't think they will be, I'm afraid I have to go through a [check] on that. I'm afraid we will not be, we will not move far enough to see in our own, uh, talks with them. I have in mind, I have very much in mind, the possibility of [meeting] with the Chinese. We don't want to be in the position of going too fast, because of the fact that if we do, if we pushed that way, and also that we're not scaring a hell of a lot of other people, get a lot of people disturbed, angry at us. I'm inclined to think, I'm inclined to think, some other spots would be useful, I think on the Taiwan—"

Agnew: "This may be a bad thing then."

Nixon: "You can't go to Taiwan at this point. . . . And you don't want to say anything right now. Something, something may come, I can tell you that something could come of the Chinese thing in terms of movement within two or three months. It will not be within two or three weeks, though. You see, we're gonna to make a statement on trade on June the tenth. We're trying to work grain in the damn thing so we can get some of our farmers a little happy. All soft goods, all soft goods, nothing, nothing heavy, nothing strategic. But in terms of the travel thing, they haven't accepted any of the Democratic candidates [who were seeking entry]. They've turned them all down, so far."

Agnew: "Well, that's what, that occurred to me, Mr. President."

Nixon: "As far as we're concerned, we want to be able to get a little further down after we make the trade thing, and see what happens on that."

Agnew [talking over Nixon]: "Well, it's unfortunate. I thought it would be advantageous for two reasons. First of all, in my other two trips I've stopped at Taiwan. The failure to stop at

Taiwan is a very tough thing for them, I would think, because [Nixon tries to break in: “I know, I know”] this would be a way to overcome it, if it could just be a formal stop at both places. . . . I had an appointment with Henry tomorrow to discuss this. But this just occurred to me, this idea, and I’m sorry it took—”

Nixon [cutting him off]: “On the other hand, I must say that the difficulty is the China thing is not ready yet, for a stop.”

Agnew [deferentially]: “I understand.”

Nixon: “We don’t want to be too anxious. You know how those people are. Let me ask you, what other places did you have in mind that you would like to go to?”

Agnew: “While we’re there, what I wanted to do, I told Henry that—”

Nixon: “Would you like to go to Japan?”

Agnew: “Frankly, what I read of Japan every day, it looks like it would be just a tremendous demonstration, and we don’t need that right now.”

Nixon: “We don’t need that. Go to friendly countries only.”

Agnew says he will be meeting with Kissinger for breakfast the next morning to discuss the rest of his itinerary, and Nixon suggests they both come to his office afterward.

Nixon: “. . . We’re gonna have a hell of a lot to handle. We will not, incidentally, have made any decision on the UN thing [recognition for Taiwan] by that time, so you have no problem with that. That will not be made until later. . . .”

Before leaving, Agnew makes one other pitch: “One thing I’d like to do, I’d like to just make this working trip and hit those countries I’ve hit. . . . On the way back, what I wanted to do, I wanted while my daughter is out of school, it’s a great chance for her, I want to send Judy and Kim [his wife and daughter] over to Europe, and then maybe do Spain and Portugal on the way back, or something of that sort, if that’s all right, or two European countries on the way back, pick them up and bring ’em home.”

Nixon, seeming to ignore the idea, says: “Well, the other possibility that I was thinking of, I was thinking of possibly Iran. On the other hand—”

Agnew: “Then I’d have to go to Israel.”

Nixon: “Oh, not at all. Iran is the one country [in the Middle East] you can go to without going to Israel, you see, it’s on the edge. . . . There’s something can be said about [going there].”

But Agnew balks. “I’m not particularly eager to go,” he says, as if dickering with a hard-sell travel agent.

Nixon: “Neither would I. It’s a hell of a damned place to go to. I’d rather go to Egypt, but nevertheless.” Agnew says so would he.

Still suggesting an alternative, Nixon says “the Greek thing” appeals to him, but there had been another problem there involving treatment of another administration member. “You can’t do Romania, I’ve done that, or Yugoslavia,” he says. What about elsewhere in the Balkans?

“You’re an absolute cinch for no demonstrations in any of those countries, that’s for damned

sure,” the president says. “And if we could really go to any of them, I think it would be good. Now, one we’ve never been to is Bulgaria. Nobody’s been to Bulgaria. They’ve always been enemies of Greece.” It is beginning to sound now as if Nixon is pulling Spiro Agnew’s leg.

Agnew laughs nervously. “That would get me into deep trouble, wouldn’t it?” he observes. “The trouble is, Mr. President, with the Greek situation with my antecedents there, and the Greek-American community here, I’d be catching hell for not going to Greece anyway. [Talking over Nixon’s pitch again] I just think myself, I think I ought to go to Greece. I think it’s abnormal not to go to Greece for me—”

Nixon: “You mean you would do it at the end of your trip.”

Agnew: “Yes, pick my family up there, send them over and let them spend a few days over there.”

Nixon: “Sure, by all means.”

Agnew: “But I couldn’t let them go unless I stopped.”

Nixon, not excited about the visit to Greece, suggests other countries in Europe—“Spain, Portugal” plus “one African stop.”

Agnew: “How about we’ve got to refuel somewhere on the way back. I wonder about Saudi Arabia, [but] then I’d have to go to Israel.”

Nixon: [shaken again, more obviously now]: “Hell, no! Hell, no! Saudi Arabia’s another country to go to. You only have to go to Israel if you go to UAR [Egypt, the United Arab Republic] or Jordan. No, sir. The Saudis would be great. Damn right . . .”

Agnew: “Well, that’s sort of on the way.”

Nixon [sounding even more like a travel agent]: “Saudi Arabia would be good. That would be interesting too. I’ve never been there, but I’m sure it would be.”