



“The Architect of Surrender”

Date: 1966-02-01
Conversation: WH6602-01-9601-9602
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson
Participant: Eugene J. McCarthy
Start Time: 09:20
Duration: 01:26
Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson discussed the conflict in Vietnam with his old friend, Sen. Eugene J. “Gene” McCarthy [DFL–Minnesota]. Johnson explained why he could not be “the architect of surrender” and recalled the circumstances surrounding the 1963 assassination of former South Vietnamese president Ngô Đình Diệm.

President Johnson: And we’ve had it looked up and down. But what it all gets back to, Gene, in the last word, is the Walter Lippmann-[J. William “Bill”] Fulbright [D–Arkansas] argument, [which] is: we oughtn’t to be there, and we ought to get out.

Eugene M. “Gene” McCarthy: Well, I guess that’s about what it—as I say, the bombing really doesn’t disturb me very [*unclear*]

President Johnson: These other things are just offshoots. What they really think is: we oughtn’t to be there, and we ought to get out. Well, I know we oughtn’t to be there. But I can’t get out. I just can’t be the architect of surrender. And don’t see—I’m trying every way in the world I can to find a way to . . . thing. But they don’t have the pressure that will bring them to [the] table as of yet. We don’t know whether they ever will. I’m willing to do damn near anything. If I told you what I was willing to do, I wouldn’t have any program. [Everett M.] Dirksen [R–Illinois] wouldn’t give me a dollar to operate the war. [*McCarthy acknowledges.*] I just can’t operate in a glass bowl with all these things. But I’m willing to do nearly anything a human can do if I can do it with any honor at all.

But they started with me on [Ngô Đình] Diệm, you remember.

McCarthy: Yeah.

President Johnson: He was corrupt, and he ought to be killed, so we killed him. We all got together and got a goddamn bunch of thugs, and we went in and assassinated him. Now, we’ve really had no political stability since then.

End of excerpt.

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Full information about this conversation: ["The Architect of Surrender"](#)