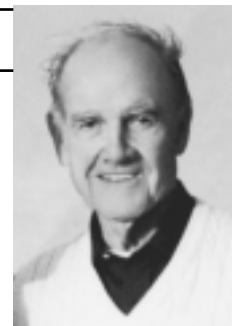


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## Interview: Sen. George McGovern

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# ‘Come Home America’ to What Is Noble and Just

*George McGovern served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1957 until 1961, when he became the first director of the U.S. Food for Peace Organization under President John F. Kennedy. He was the U.S. Senator for South Dakota from 1963-81. In 1972, he ran as the Democratic candidate for President, in opposition to incumbent President Richard Nixon. He served as U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, appointed by President Bill Clinton. During World War II, McGovern was a decorated fighter pilot. He also holds a PhD in history from Northwestern University. President Clinton awarded the Senator the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000.*

*In his Oct. 8 interview with Nina Ogden, Senator McGovern stressed that the real sources of national security are a wise and honest Federal government, and a strong physical economy.*

**EIR:** We spoke on the phone right after the first Presidential candidates’ debate, and we both had the same response to hearing George Bush say how hard a job it is being President, and you thought that Senator Kerry might have some advice for him on that.

**McGovern:** Well, I thought he very well might have said, “You know Mr. President, we know it’s hard to be President. We know that you’re telling us what you really think when you say how h-a-a-rd it is—you’ve said that repeatedly this evening and I think what that indicates is that it’s time for you to take a rest. I’m eager and ready to go and do a hard piece of work. Let’s see what I can do in that job that’s so hard.”

**EIR:** I think that most of the country feels that way, too. We didn’t talk after the Vice Presidential debate on Tuesday [Oct. 5]. What did you think about that?

**McGovern:** Well, you know, Cheney is obviously a shrewd and long-time public official, but I thought John Edwards came across very well. He was concise, he was direct. He took the President head-on in the opening statement of the debate, when he said, “Mr. Vice President you keep propounding a falsehood. You keep telling us that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government were behind the 9/11 tragedy. You ought to know that they had nothing to do with it.” And I thought that confronted the Vice President in a way that may have surprised him. But it is the absolute truth. The 9/11 Commis-

sion said that Iraq had nothing to do with that 9/11 attack. Saddam Hussein is bad enough without blaming him for something that he had nothing to do with.

**EIR:** Bush and Cheney just keep on propounding the Straussian big lie, and assume that the American people will keep on going along with it.

**McGovern:** Well, we’ve had two big falsehoods that have been revealed. Number one: We went into Iraq, according to the administration, because they had weapons of mass destruction that were targetted on the United States. We have since learned that there were no weapons of mass destruction. And just recently, we’ve learned that Saddam Hussein, during the time that he was trying to achieve some kind of weapons of mass destruction, had it aimed at Iran, not at us, which is of course, perfectly logical. Iran and Iraq had been bitter enemies for years—fought one of the bloodiest wars in modern history for eight years. So it’s perfectly logical, that if they were trying to devise some kind of chemical, biological or nuclear weapon, that the purpose was to keep them even with the attempt of Iran to build such weapons.

**EIR:** One of the things you say right in the beginning of your new book, *The Essential America*, is that Bill Clinton did an excellent job as campaign coordinator for Texas in your Presidential campaign in 1972, and then with remarkable skill defeated the senior President Bush with the campaign slogan: “It’s the economy, stupid.” You know that we are organizing for Senator Kerry with the pamphlet called, *It’s the Physical Economy, Stupid*. In your book, you pose the physical economy as a foundation stone for national security.

**McGovern:** An economy is no better or worse as an instrument of national policy than the wisdom of those who direct it. Hitler built up one of the most prosperous economies, the envy of the world during the great global depression throughout the 1930s, but he used that economy to build up an aggressive war machine that intended to smash its way all across Europe and eventually to the United States. So that’s not the test of a good economy, one that’s so intermingled with war, and with aggression, and attacks on other people. A sound economy is one that seeks the greatest good of the greatest number of people. It provides employment. It provides good jobs. It provides useful production. It tries to even out the



*President John F. Kennedy (left) appointed George McGovern to be the first director of the Food For Peace Program in 1960. In 1998 President Clinton appointed him U.S. Ambassador to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.*

great yawning gap between the few extremely wealthy at the top and the great mass of people in the middle and at the bottom of the economy. A strong economy, like strong national security, involves a good educational system, a good health-care system, a careful protection of the resources of the nation, a credible, honest government. Those are the things that make up both a strong physical economy, and a strong national security.

**EIR:** I'd like to ask you about two of those things. One is a credible government, because you have spoken about FDR's creation of the Good Neighbor program, and you said that we have now squandered the kind of credibility our nation had. What do we need to do to return to credible government?

**McGovern:** After President Roosevelt's successful campaign for re-election in 1940, in which he defeated a very good man, Wendell Willkie of Indiana, he asked Mr. Willkie to take a trip around the world. He provided him with a B-24 bomber to take him and his party on that trip. (And, by the way, that's the kind of a plane I flew against Hitler's Nazi-land.)

**EIR:** For 35 combat missions, I understand.

**McGovern:** Yes, 35 combat missions.

Anyway, he asked Willkie to make that trip and report back on what he found to be important conditions around the world. Willkie came back and wrote a little book called *One World*, and the conclusion that he reached, which he told to President Roosevelt personally, and then repeated in his book, is this: He said, everywhere I went around the world, I found that the greatest source of American power and influence and

strength in the world rested on the reservoir of good will that people everywhere had towards the United States.

I think it's sad that that good will towards this great country of ours has diminished sorely during the last four years of the Bush Administration. We've lost standing everywhere on this aggressive invasion of Iraq, a country that bore no threat to us. We have lost standing by backing away from the Kyoto Treaty, to halt global warming. We've lost standing pushing ahead with the Star Wars missiles in outer space, instead of staying with the ABM Treaty of 1972. We have lost stature by opposing a ban on landmines that continue to blow off the arms and legs of children in the far reaches of the world. And we've lost stature by opposing the international war crimes court.

In all of those ways, we come across to the rest of the world as a kind of go-it-alone bullying nation, which I don't think we really are. The American people are a decent and honorable people, but these so-called neo-

conservatives, who dominate the foreign policy and national security thinking of this administration, are a dangerous lot, in my opinion. They're too careless about going to war. They're too careless about ignoring the thinking of other people. You know, Jefferson said, we should have a decent respect to the opinions of mankind. That's still true today. That doesn't mean we have to give other countries a veto over what we do. In the long run we have to do what we think is in the best interests of the nation, but we have to do that taking full account of the contrary opinions of some other countries may have, whose good will we need to be effective in the world.

**EIR:** In your book, you give a lot of examples of what we have to do, really of what John Kerry has to do, to gain that kind of national security. One example, in particular, I would like to ask you about, since President Kennedy appointed you in 1960 to be the first director of the U.S. Food for Peace program, and President Clinton appointed you in 1997 to be the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization—and that is the association between national security and food production.

**McGovern:** You know, when President Eisenhower invited Premier Nikita Khrushchov, the Soviet leader, to the United States, he asked him, after Mr. Khrushchov arrived here, what he would like to do. President Eisenhower said, "You can go any place you please in this country. If you want to visit our naval installations, or our strategic air power installations, anything that you want to see, you're welcome to take a look at it." Khrushchov said, "Look, we have planes and tanks and missiles. What I would like to see are two things—I'd like to

see Disneyland, and I'd like to see a corn farm out in Iowa. I've got a couple of friends out there I've been corresponding with, I'd like to visit their farms." It was Roswell and Jonathan Garst, two big corn and hog farmers in Coon Rapids, Iowa. And Khrushchov was fascinated by that farm—the agricultural practices, the livestock handling, the whole gamut. They wouldn't take him to Disneyland, because the Secret Service said they weren't sure they could provide protection in an open area like that.

**EIR:** He learned more from the farms, don't you think?

**McGovern:** Yes. Yes, there's no doubt in my mind that Khrushchov understood that the major advantage the U.S. had over the Soviet Union was our food producing power. We have the best farmers in the world. We have the most efficient producers in the world. Five percent of Americans

## The Real Sources of National Security

### The Essential America: Our Founders and the Liberal Tradition

by George McGovern

New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004

192 pages, hardcover, \$20

Quoting from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, "O, it is excellent/ To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous/ To use it like a giant," Sen. George McGovern dedicates a chapter of his new book to "the sources of security and national greatness." He reminds his readers that, "A political leader has the obligation to try to understand the public will, but not necessarily to be controlled by it. He must also identify as best he can the mistaken aspects of the public will and of government policy."

McGovern writes frankly about the present quagmire in Southwest Asia: "The Iraqi people know that our strategists backed Saddam Hussein as long as he was killing Iranians in the 1980s, just as we backed Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1980s as long as they were killing Russians."

Senator McGovern revisits President Eisenhower's warnings about the "military-industrial complex," and describes the "real sources of national security" as a strong physical economy, and a trustworthy federal government serving the common good.

—Nina Ogden

who work the farms feed the other 95%, plus half the world that we trade with or assist; and the Soviet Union, at that time, had half the entire population working on farms and they couldn't even feed their own people, let alone have food left over to assist the rest of the world.

So, yes, I've always stressed the importance of the family farm, the efficiency of the family farm, the way farmers care for the land, and look to future generations. Those are all things that are very important to our overall national security. If you think that food isn't the front line of defense, just go with nothing more than a little bowl of porridge or gruel, with no milk to go with it, and have that as your daily fare for 30 days and see what you think is the most important concern that you have.

**EIR:** You've seen this all around the world.

**McGovern:** Yes, I've seen it. I've probably walked through 10,000 dusty villages in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East; and always the number-one concern of people is to get enough food on the table to take care of their children and their families. Sanitary water, of course, is another indispensable ingredient. We have thousands of people dying every day from unsanitary water, and from malnutrition, inadequate food. Those are the things I think we have to be concentrating on, in international affairs.

**EIR:** Can I ask you about the things you have written about FDR's Vice President, Henry Wallace, and his policies of the "Ever-Normal Granary" and parity pricing?

**McGovern:** The Ever-Normal Granary policy that Henry Wallace propounded when he was Secretary of Agriculture served America well. I have no doubt that he was the greatest Secretary of Agriculture in American history—and very popular here in South Dakota. What he proposed, is that we develop an arrangement under which, at harvest time, when all the farmers bring their grain into harvest, that they don't have to sell it all at the same time, which would break the price and give every farmer an inadequate return on their labor and investment. He said that if you want to hold off some of this from the market, you can get a loan from the Department of Agriculture, and then pay it off when you sell your grain later. And that provided for a more orderly method of marketing grain, so that it didn't crush the price at the time farmers harvested the crop.

The other aspect of that was that he provided that a certain amount of grain could be stored indefinitely, against the time when you might have a famine, or you might have a shortage of crops. Suppose you go into an extended drought. It's very handy to have granaries filled with corn, and wheat, and barley, and rye, oats, and these other things that we need to sustain our food production. And the Ever-Normal Granary of the Wallace years was designed to do that. The farmers could put their grain under storage and the government would hold it in storage for them until such time as the market would absorb it.



*George McGovern, shown under the propeller hub, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross after flying 35 combat missions over Nazi Germany. He recognizes John Kerry's courage: "I can tell you that it took just as much courage for him to stand up and say that the war was wrong as it took courage to participate in the war."*

**EIR:** And the parity policy question, which we would like to see restored?

**McGovern:** Well you know, the parity formula recognized that farmers don't have a labor union. You had 2 or 3 million family-sized farms competing against each other. And in the absence of some mechanism, that means you drive the price to the bottom. And so what parity said, is that we will guarantee farmers 90% of parity. That means 90% of what other prices are. They had an index of 200 commodities, and when those commodities went up in value, farm prices should go up. When the farm index of other commodities went down, farm prices would go down, but they would stay in a parity relationship.

Parity is just another word for equality. It means that farm prices should recognize the changing price structure in all other commodities, and that's only a fair guarantee, so I always thought that the parity price was a fair thing. It's not a subsidy to farmers, it's simply a mechanism for making sure that farm prices stay in some reasonable relationship to other prices.

**EIR:** I'm going to ask you, as an elder statesman, two things, to give advice to the next administration, because what we hope to do is build a landslide for Kerry and Edwards, and create a situation where the lower 80% of the population is

really involved in something like a New Deal. I know you are a strong supporter of Senator Kerry, but there were two things which I think made both of us uncomfortable. One was, as sort of a macho sound bite, that we are going to "kill" our enemies; and both Kerry and Edwards repeating that phrase, and the campaign urging its use in campaign statements and e-mails and so forth. Now you were a combat veteran, as is John Kerry, and you knew that people did not discount your war record, and you didn't have to use that kind of language. Why does that bother you?

**McGovern:** Well you know, Benjamin Franklin said that there was never such a thing as a good war or a bad peace. I think that we need to think about those words. Now, I'm proud of my service in World War II. We had to stop Hitler. We had to stop the Imperial Japanese force. We had to take on Mussolini in Italy. These were cutthroat dictators that were out to destroy western civilization. But, I never particularly enjoyed thinking about the fact that the bombs I dropped probably killed a lot of innocent people. We were trying to

hit oil refineries in Hitler's land. We were trying to knock out tank factories, fighter airplane factories, railroad marshalling areas and so on. But I knew, in the back of my mind, that there were also innocent people, that had no control over Hitler, no control over Tojo, who also died under those bombs, and I never enjoyed talking about killing Germans, or killing Japanese, or killing Italians.

I find that phrase repellent, to talk about killing people. I know that war is a brutal affair, and no one can make it seem otherwise, but I don't like to see great national figures talking about, we're going to "kill," we're going to "hunt down these terrorists and kill them." You know some of those terrorists are teenagers. Some of them are young men and women who think they are serving a righteous cause. We know they're misguided, but they're still human beings, and I'd just like to see a little bit less in the use of blood-thirsty language.

**EIR:** I think Senator Kerry doesn't have to be defensive, and use that kind of language.

**McGovern:** He doesn't have to, because he had a distinguished war record in Vietnam, and it took a great deal of courage to do what he did, as a young man in that period. He went into battle and led his men fearlessly and effectively. But he also showed great courage when he came back to the

United States at the end of the war and started to read about it, and look into the history of that conflict, and study something about the record of the Vietnamese people. And he came to the view that we had made a great mistake in intervening in Vietnam. And I can tell you, that that took just as much courage for him to stand up and say that war was wrong as it did courage to participate in the war.

**EIR:** And it must seem to you like *déjà vu*, since you ran against President Nixon, to hear these kinds of crazy things being thrown at people, when they do try to tell the truth—from Bush and from Cheney.

**McGovern:** Well, as the prophet wrote many years ago, there's nothing new under the Sun. We've always had these efforts to discredit one's political opponent. I certainly was on the receiving end of a lot of that in 1972. I'm not bitter about it. It was a glorious opportunity to run for the Presidential nomination of my party and win it; I lost to Richard Nixon in the general election, but I've never had any desire to trade places with that landslide winner.

**EIR:** I knew that the slogan of your campaign at that time was "Come home, America." But I didn't know that your wife had seen that in a sermon of Dr. King's.

**McGovern:** Well, that's right. She had picked up a little paperback which was a collection of some of his more outstanding sermons, and she came across this phrase, "Come home America, come home to a land of equality. Come home to a land of liberty, come home to a land that respects the dignity of human beings everywhere." And she said, "You know George, that phrase haunts me: 'Come home America.'" And it did me, so I adopted it as my campaign rallying cry.

Basically that's what my new book is all about. It's a reminder of the enduring values that Tom Paine, the great author of *Common Sense*, Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln, the author of the great Gettysburg Address. . . .

**EIR:** And it's interesting, in the interest of bipartisanship, that in this book, two of the people you look to, in terms of national security, are Dwight Eisenhower and General MacArthur.

**McGovern:** Well that's right. You know that General MacArthur said, before we went into Vietnam, that any American Commander-in-Chief who ever again takes us to war on the Asian mainland, ought to have his head examined.

**EIR:** And now we're in war in Southwest Asia, and they should have had their heads examined, too.

**McGovern:** Yeah. They should have listened to that warning before we put the American Army into Vietnam. And then, of course, General Eisenhower, five-star general who made that great farewell address, warning against the

mounting power of the "military-industrial complex." Nobody ever supposed for one minute that Dwight Eisenhower was weak on national defense, but thoughtful people knew, he was giving us a sound warning, that it's possible to spend too much on the military. And when you do that, you weaken the country, by depriving us of resources we need for other factors of national defense such as education and health care.

**EIR:** Can I ask you one last question? And this would be a piece of advice for John Kerry based on your experience in the Middle East: In the Vice Presidential debate, Senator Edwards was talking about the need for Israeli security, but he didn't talk about the need for Palestinian security. I think you would have some advice, because you have done a lot of work to bring about peace in the Middle East.

**McGovern:** Well I've always thought of myself as a friend of Israel. I admire their political system, I admire their economic development, I admire their rich culture and their religious heritage. I've always supported them, but we also need to recognize that the Palestinians and the Arab peoples have a great tradition too, and that just as the Israelis want an independent state for themselves, so do the Palestinians. You know, we don't have a right and a wrong in this Palestinian-Israeli dispute. We have two rights: the right of Israel to live at peace in freedom and in their own country, and the right of Palestinians to enjoy the same opportunities.

So, I make the case in my book, that we don't serve the interest of either the Israelis or the Palestinians, when we either back off from playing an active role in trying to bring about a settlement there, or when we side with one side or the other, against the other competing side. That diminishes our influence both ways. We ought to follow an even-handed approach to both sides, to both the Palestinians and the Israelis, and then be strong about it, to be persistent about it, and to insist that the price of our support for either side is going to be their willingness to compromise and to bring about a just and lasting peace in that part of the world. If we could lead the way, in resolving this Arab-Israeli dispute, it would do more to quiet the ferment and anger, and militancy in the Arab world than anything else we could do.

**EIR:** I think you've also done a lot of work on making sure that those kinds of political agreements involve economic agreements, especially the question of water. This is, again, the physical economy question that you talk about for our country, which also has to be put forward for the Arab-Israeli conflict and other nations as well.

**McGovern:** That's correct.

**EIR:** All right, well, we thank you. Your book, which ends with a quotation from Abraham Lincoln to appeal "to the better angels of our nature," is a breath of fresh air.

**McGovern:** Thank you, very much.