

# WASHINGTON DATELINE

By TRUDE B. FELDMAN

ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

Planes--but, not those elusive Phantom jets --were the subject of a chat between Richard Nixon and Golda Meir at the White House last week.

"Did you fly here on your own plane?" the President asked the Israeli Prime Minister as they posed for photographs in his Oval office.

When Mrs. Meir replied in the affirmative, the President added: "You can be proud of your Israeli pilots...they're about the best in the world. It takes a certain kind of a man to be a pilot...don't you think?"

Although Mrs. Meir came here to discuss a different kind of aircraft with the President, she politely exchanged small talk about planes and pilots and agreed that El Al Airlines indeed had safe planes and excellent pilots. Mr. Nixon marvelled at the training given the pilots and asked Mrs. Meir why they are retired at a young age.

Mrs. Meir, dressed in a two-piece black outfit, clutched her black gloves and continued the banter with the President while a score of photographers snapped away, and while only about six correspondents observed the session.

Despite the considerable tension between the U.S. and Israel since October, 1970, (when the 73-year old Premier and Mr. Nixon last talked with each other in Washington), both leaders appeared to be in an unusually relaxed frame of mind.

Mrs. Meir and Mr. Nixon conferred alone --without aides--for two hours, after which Presidential spokesman Ron Ziegler read a prepared statement in which he characterized their meeting. He said they spent some time reviewing the world situation, particularly the various diplomatic moves in which Mr. Nixon will soon be engaged.

He also said they discussed the need for further diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement in the Mideast. "In particular, they explored specific ways in which Israel and the U.S. could contribute to such efforts."

"On bilateral matters," he said "a useful and satisfactory discussion was held on the ways in which Israel's long-term needs for modernizing and maintaining the capacity of its defense forces in the context of our on-going policy of maintaining a military balance could be accomplished..."

Ziegler declined to say whether one of the ways in which Israel's long-term needs could be accomplished would be to sell her more Phantom jets now.

He also declined to comment on whether Mr. Nixon and Mrs. Meir were in agreement by the end of their meeting on whether or not the military balance had been disrupted in recent weeks.

He merely stated that Mr. Nixon again described the elements necessary in an overall effort to achieve peace in the Mideast--that the U.S. would not permit the military balance to shift against Israel, and confirmed that the U.S. continues to maintain with Israel an on-going relationship of financial assistance and military supply.



GOLDA MEIR CONFERS WITH PRESIDENT NIXON IN HIS OVAL OFFICE AT WHITE HOUSE. (PHOTO BY ROTTIER)

"In the context of this policy, it is recognized that Israeli forces must maintain a long-term program of modernization, and the U.S. will continue to discuss how it can help in that process."

Ziegler added that in the course of their discussion, Mr. Nixon repeated that simply maintaining a military balance is not a policy that by itself can bring peace--and that negotiations are also needed.

When Ziegler was asked if a decision is made on whether or not to sell Israel the Phantoms, would it be made public, he said:

"We've never--from here-- discussed the details of our efforts with the Israelis, and I won't now..."

As to whether his statement describing their conference was read and reviewed by Golda Meir before release, Ziegler said he was reading his own comments based on a conversation with Mr. Nixon following the Nixon-Meir meeting...and that he only spoke for the White House.

Asked if Mr. Nixon gave any assurance to Mrs. Meir that there will be no agreement reaction with any other big power for a full settlement in the Mideast, Ziegler emphasized that the President and Prime Minister had agreed that specific nature of their discussion would remain confidential...

Since Mr. Nixon talked with Mrs. Meir about his forthcoming travels and the discussion he will have with other world leaders, would he--in turn--discuss Israel's problems with those leaders?

"I can't give you an agenda as to what he'll discuss with other world leaders," Ziegler concluded, "but it should be assumed that when Mr. Nixon sits down with Mrs. Meir, he would discuss the various meetings he intends to have with other heads of government, and I'm sure Mrs. Meir is interested in the U.S. policy in that area..."

During a 3-hour working luncheon with Secretary of State William Rogers, he clarified for Mrs. Meir the U.S. position vis a vis his much-publicized United Nations address. His speech was publicly criticized--and objected to--by Mrs. Meir.

Mrs. Meir later reported they were in agreement that the new debates before the United Nations must now run their course before any new diplomatic efforts can be made in the Mideast situation.

After meeting with Mr. Rogers, Golda Meir --with a shy smile--related: "It was a very pleasant discussion--it's always that..."

What are the prospects of your getting the Phantoms?

"I'm always optimistic," she firmly responded. "I'm never discouraged."

Asked about the possibility of negotiations, she said: "We've been, and are always ready to negotiate under the proper conditions. We prefer direct negotiations. We are willing for indirect negotiations also...but we will never accept any pre-conditions for negotiations. Even the biggest Big Power has no right or capability to impose a settlement."

On the plight of Soviet Jewry, Mrs. Meir observed that she is well aware of, and appreciative of, President Nixon's interest and sensitivity with the problem.

"I'm convinced that whatever will be possible to do, he will..."

When this writer asked Mrs. Meir if she was satisfied with her talks with Mr. Nixon and Mr. Rogers, she explained that communication between countries is vital, particularly such talks on the highest level.

"These face to face talks are very useful and most important--even between friends like the U.S. and Israel," she said, "because they give one the chance to try to discover exactly where one differs on any given issue."

She added that she deemed it a privilege to have the chance to talk freely and frankly with Mr. Nixon and Mr. Rogers on a friendly basis.

"I went away with the feeling there is an understanding of the problems in our area," she added, "and this is the most one can ask of a friendly country."

"...And, with all the problems on Mr. Nixon's mind and his preoccupation with his trips and talks with heads of States, I did appreciate the fact that he took so much time to listen to me and discuss Israel's problems with me. I only hope these conversations will be helpful to our countries."

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