

# WASHINGTON DATELINE

BY TRUDE B. FELDMAN

ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

In his first exclusive interview on the Middle East situation, Vice President Gerald R. Ford predicted that President Nixon's "maneuverings in that area will go down in the annals of great diplomacy...."

Mr. Ford noted that a new chapter in the search for peace was written, when, for the first time in the long and bitter history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, both sides had agreed to direct talks--the kind of talks that may eventually remove this "menace to world stability."

"Dr. Kissinger judged the moment when Egypt and Israel were ready to go from a state of permanent hostility to a state of possible accommodation," he said. "He converted that readiness into a formula that both countries could accept."

If you were President today, what course would you follow in the Mideast?

"The first thing I'd do," Vice President Ford told me, "is to support Dr. Kissinger one hundred per cent. In my judgment, no Secretary of State in my lifetime has had the public support in the United States to the extent that he has. If he makes a decision in the resolution of the Mideast problem, I believe the American people, by an overwhelming majority, will support him, because he's the one who put the negotiations together. And he's the one person in the history of that area who is able to talk to both Arabs and Israelis, and have the faith of both."

"The American people know that Dr. Kissinger is trying, unselfishly and objectively, to find an answer that will protect Israel on the one hand, and the Arabs on the other. So if they can reach an agreement and Dr. Kissinger assures us it's a fair compromise, I believe Americans will support him."

Mr. Ford continued: "I do know that both Israelis and Arabs consider him a brilliant man and trust him as the Secretary of State under President Nixon. It's almost a phenomenon how strongly he is trusted abroad. It's



VICE PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD CHATS WITH OUR WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT TRUDE B. FELDMAN DURING EXCLUSIVE

really amazing how Arab leaders meet him one day and don't object to his meetings with Israeli leaders the next day or vice versa. Has any other Secretary of State been as successful in this regard?"

Although he had not visited Israel (a scheduled trip was cancelled when his wife took ill), Ford has been a staunch supporter of the Jewish state throughout his Congressional tenure. "I did, and do now, support military help and weapons for Israel in order to keep a proper military balance," he said. "But now it would be helpful if we can get some agreement between both Israel and the Arab nations and between the Soviet Union and ourselves, to reduce the weapons build-up in the mideast."

Gerald Ford said American-Israeli friendship must be fostered because both this friendship and this policy serve the cause of peace.

"American-Israeli friendship is rooted in the traditions of both peoples who share a

INTERVIEW AT WASHINGTON'S MAYFLOWER HOTEL. (PHOTO BY W. OATES)

common bond based on the Judean-Christian heritage. The ardent support of our country for the cause of the national restoration of Zion can be traced back to the Colonial days when the Puritan fathers manifested their love for the Hebraic culture, continuing to the present time as we stand on the threshold of the bicentennial of our Independence."

Ford recalled that every American President of the 20th century has supported the Zionist dream of a Jewish national home. "Both of our major political parties are committed to Israel's survival," he said. "It is vital that this bipartisan backing of Israel continues. Our backing should continue through military credits, supporting assistance, and grants to resettle immigrants. Those who truly care about Israel's survival must express bipartisan support through actions, not only by words. We must retain our unity since unity strengthens the hand of our President in his efforts to promote peace."

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