

WASHINGTON DATELINE

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Ford: 'War Danger'

President Gerald Ford said last Thursday that if the United States doesn't seize upon the present opportunity for a successful attempt in our step by step negotiation process in the Mideast that we might lose a "unique opportunity."

He also reiterated his earlier statement that there is a "serious danger of war in the Middle East."

Ford pointed out that during his numerous conferences with officials in the Mideast and in Europe, as well as with American experts on Mideast affairs, he found they all agree that it's a "very potentially volatile situation."

Ford gave his latest views on the Middle East -- among other subjects -- in an hour-long televised interview with National Broadcasting Co.'s John Chancellor and Tom Brokaw, in the living quarters of the White House.

When asked about Dr. Henry Kissinger's now-famous statement -- and his own endorsement of it -- that the U. S. would use military intervention if it faced "strangulation" as a result of a new oil embargo -- Ford responded: "This country, in case of economic strangulation -- and the key word is 'strangulation' -- has to be prepared without specifying what we might do, to take the necessary action for our self preservation. When you're being strangled,

it's a question of either dying or living and when you use the word 'strangulation' in relationship to the existence of the U.S. or its non-existence, we're not going to permit America to be strangled to death."

He was also asked about the "moral implications" of such action -- since "it's their oil, not ours."

Ford agreed with his questioner that it's a "troublesome" question. Nonetheless he remarked: "It may not be right. But wars have been fought over natural resources from time immemorial."

Ford also said there's a possibility that the Mideast negotiations -- if not successful with the step-by-step process -- may yet be conducted in Geneva. "We prefer the process that has been successful so far, but if there is no progress, we undoubtedly would be forced to go to Geneva," he said. "I wouldn't be any more optimistic; in fact, I'd be less optimistic, if the matter was thrown on the doorstep of Geneva." He added that the U.S. isn't trying to shut out the Soviet Union in the process of trying to find an answer in the Mideast. "They're playing, and have played, a constructive role, even under the current circumstances. Perhaps we're taking a course of action where it's more visible that we're doing something, but the Soviet Union is now playing a part as well." (The last time the Russians played a role in the Mideast was at the Geneva Conference in December 1973).

Ford stated that the U.S. -- over the years -- has been very generous in economic and military aid for Israel. "On the other hand, we've been generous to a number of Arab nations. Israel

doesn't need adequate military capability to protect its boundaries or its territorial integrity," he said. "I think because of the commonality of interest we have with Israel in the Mideast that it's in our interest as well as theirs to be helpful to them, both militarily and economically."

Ford was also asked: "On a long-range basis, do you think it's possible for Israel to be truly secure in the Mideast without a U.S. guarantee of some kind?"

"Israel has never asked for any U.S. manpower or any guarantee from us for their security or their territorial integrity. If the Israelis are given adequate arms and sufficient economic help, they can handle the situation in the Mideast," he replied. "Unfortunately, the last war was much more severe from their point of view than the three previous ones, and I suspect that with the Arabs having more sophisticated weapons and probably a better military capability, another war might even be worse. That's one reason why we wish to accelerate the efforts to find some answers there. But the Israelis, with adequate equipment and their determination and sufficient economic aid won't have to have U. S. guarantees of any kind."

And Jordan's King Hussein predicted in an interview in Cairo that the next Arab-Israeli war would have unprecedented blood shed and the backing of the super powers.

"Unlike the last war, the next one will be total," Hussein said. "I don't know what kinds of weapons will be used in it, but I know the two sides have horrible weapons...."



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