

Ford Vague On Israel

Guarantee of Security Tied To Progress

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President Ford said yesterday that the United States would not be willing to give Israel a formal guarantee of its security until there has been more progress toward a peace settlement in the Middle East.

This statement in an interview in the current issue of Time magazine appeared to be an attempt to apply some careful diplomatic pressure on Israel to be more conciliatory in any forthcoming peace moves with the Arabs.

In an unusually indefinite-sounding statement for an American President speaking of Israel, Mr. Ford said of such a guarantee: "In the final analysis, we have to judge what is in our national interest above any and all other considerations."

Mr. Ford has been heavily criticized by the Arabs for what they consider his heavily pro-Israeli statements while he served as House minority leader.

Mr. Ford noted in the Time interview that Washington has already given Israel "everything except" a security guarantee.

"We have often made commitments that we consider Israel a necessary state in the Middle East, both as to integrity of territory and its existence.

"I wouldn't rule out a guarantee under some circumstances, but there has to be, in my judgment, some real progress there before that step would be taken.

"It so happens that there is a substantial relationship at

the present time between our national security interests and those of Israel.

"But in the final analysis, we have to judge what is in our national interest above any and all circumstances."

There is some question, however, whether the Israeli government is interested in the kind of guarantee that President Ford seemed to be referring to. In the past, suggestions of such a guarantee have been rejected by Israel as being both meaningless and risky in view of the history of formal assurances that were not honored when tested.

The official Israeli position for some years has been that the best guarantee is Israel's own military strength. Suggestions that there should be a great power pledge to Israel have been viewed by Israeli officials as a standard part of attempts to persuade them give up land.

The President's carefully phrased suggestion that there could come a time when Israeli and American interests could diverge was seen as a hint that a disagreement could be in the offing over how far Israel should go in making concessions to Egypt and perhaps other Arab states in forthcoming negotiations, di-

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rect or indirect, if the Israelis do not become more flexible.

But the President also reaffirmed his backing for the recent statement by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger that has raised a storm of protest in the Arab world. Kissinger recently said in an interview with Business Week magazine that the United States could not rule out the use of force if it were confronted with "some actual strangulation" over oil supplies for the industrialized nations.

"Strangulation is the key word," Mr. Ford said. "He didn't say force would be used to bring a price change" of the oil.

In addition to applying some diplomatic pressure on Israel, the President's words raised the possibility that he is trying to balance off the Kissinger statement, viewed as hostile by the Arabs, with one that could be expected to

stir some anxiety in Israel.

When the Nixon administration said in its early days that it sought to take a more "evenhanded" approach in the Middle East, there was an outpouring of expressions of concern from Israelis and their American friends.

President Ford told Time that he considers the prospects of war in the Middle East "very, very serious."

He said that the gravity of

the situation increases "every day that we don't get some action for further progress in the settlement of some of those disputes."

News agencies reported these other developments in the Middle East yesterday:

- In Kuwait, the foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates said his country might blow up its oil wells if the United States carried out its "threats" to take military action against oil-producing countries.

"We belong to the Arab world and we would carry out immediately any decision taken by the Arabs, even if it meant blowing up the oil wells," said Foreign Minister Ahmad Suweidi.

- In Cairo, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran obliquely answered the Kissinger statement by saying that "the way to get out of the world economic crises depends mainly on understanding and cooperation away from threats and violence."

A communique issued at the end of the shah's five-day visit to Egypt also said that ending international economic problems depends "on finding a balance between the prices of raw materials and manufactured goods."

The two expressed "satisfaction" in joint Egyptian-Iranian projects, which amount to more than \$1 billion. These include the establishment of

the Iran-Egypt Development Bank, reconstruction in the Suez Canal area, possible canal improvement and the building of a Suez-Port Sad pipeline.

The shah left Egypt for a private visit and medical check-up in Vienna.

- In Brussels, NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns said in an interview with UPI that any nation is likely to use force if it is "faced with strangulation."

"I would say any nation, faced with strangulation, is likely to consider the use of force. That applies to the European countries as well as to the Arabs or to the Soviets," Luns said.

Some Europeans have responded to Kissinger's views by calling the possibility of the use of force unthinkable.

- South Korea was reported by newspapers in Seoul as considering recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization in a bid to improve relations with the Arab world.

- Israeli forces crossed into southern Lebanon and blew up three bridges and two water conduits and killed one Palestinian guerrilla near the village of Kfar Chouba, the Israeli military said.

The Lebanese Defense Ministry acknowledged the raid and said one child was injured and paralyzed in the company-strength raid.