

Washington: Nixon on the Diplomatic-Campaign Trail

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Sept. 15—President Nixon is now going into the most active diplomatic and political phase of his Administration. After meeting with Premier Golda Meir of Israel in Washington this week, he will go to Europe on Sept. 27 for eight days, and then meet with visiting heads of government here and at the United Nations through most of October.

This will carry him up to the November elections. It will enable him to dominate the headlines abroad while Vice President Spiro Agnew is scolding the Democrats in campaign rallies at home. With visits to Britain, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, the Pope, the Sixth Fleet and talks with the U.S. Paris peace negotiators on the side, this schedule should give him plenty of time to do his official business and still prove his theory that "no politics is the best politics" for a President.

The first meeting, with the Israeli Premier, is likely to be the toughest on his agenda. The President is pleased that his initiative led to a cease-fire in the Middle East, and no doubt he will be arguing that the maintenance of this cease-fire is the most important short-range objective of the entire Middle Eastern tangle.

For example, Mr. Nixon's aides are emphasizing that the blackmail and dynamite diplomacy of the Arab skyjackers

and terrorists is designed primarily to break up the Israeli-Arab peace talks, and that therefore this is the main thing the guerrillas must not be allowed to achieve.

Mrs. Meir, however, sees all this from a somewhat different perspective. The last time she was in Washington a year ago, there were no Soviet pilots or missiles engaged in the Middle Eastern war. From her point of view, this has been a bad year in which the United States has allowed the Soviets to penetrate deep into the Suez area, and has even had to admit that since the cease-fire, the Soviets and Egyptians have improved the Arab military position and put mobile SAM-3 ground-to-air missiles into position to deal with low-flying Israeli aircraft.

Element of Trust

More than that, the Israelis feel that the Nixon Administration was so surprised and pleased when Moscow and Cairo agreed to the cease-fire that it overlooked clear violations of the agreement, and did not stand behind the promises Mrs. Meir thought President Nixon had given to get Israel's approval of the cease-fire.

That is only part of the list of topics on Mrs. Meir's agenda. The more the Soviets back the Egyptians with modern arms, the more arms Israel has to get to hold the balance, and the more arms Israel buys, the more she gets into deep eco-

nomjc trouble.

Accordingly, Mrs. Meir not only wants more arms but more credit from the United States, and beyond that, some assurance that if Israel stands aside and watches Egypt built up in defiance of the cease-fire agreement, the United States will not let her down in an emergency.

Political Diplomacy

It is not quite clear what the Israelis mean by being let down. In addition to more planes and air-to-ground missiles to deal, if necessary, with the SAM-3's, what "assurances" does Mrs. Meir want? Is she interested in Senator Fulbright's proposal of a treaty guarantee by the United States of Israel's pre-1967-war boundaries? Is President Nixon willing to consider such a thing just when he is trying to reduce commitments abroad?

One thing is fairly clear. Mrs. Meir would like to be assured that the Nixon Administration's diplomatic techniques would be a little more considerate of Israel's strategic and political problems. The State Department has been showing its Middle East proposals first to Egypt, and following up later with "assurances" to Israel which Mrs. Meir feels were unreliable and embarrassing to her in her domestic political troubles.

In short, while Mr. Nixon's Middle East diplomacy was

good politics for him at home, it was much more dangerous strategically and politically for Mrs. Meir at home, and there is nothing in the President's projected trip to Europe that is likely to encourage the Israelis, particularly his trip to Yugoslavia to see Marshall Tito, who is Nasser's most influential friend in Europe.

Nevertheless, if the Middle East can be kept fairly quiet, whatever Israel's anxieties for the next six weeks, the President's trip should be useful both diplomatically and politically. It will give him a chance to reappraise the European situation for the first time since the West German-Soviet nonaggression treaty. It will enable him to meet for the first time with the leaders of the new British Government, and give him a chance to get Tito's estimate of Soviet policy in the Middle East, which is now the most puzzling problem on the horizon.

But mainly the trip should help his party in the November elections. It is part of the Republican campaign argument that Mr. Nixon is working for peace under the handicap of a lot of carping Democrats, and with the President in Europe talking peace, it will be hard for the Democrats to criticize him without sounding like what the Vice President calls a lot of "nattering nabobs of negativism."