



Golda Meir Is Betting on Nixon

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"GOLDA'S BETTING everything on Nixon and Kissinger," a well-placed Israeli said here in Tel Aviv the other day. Though he is pro-American and supports the government of Prime Minister Golda Meir, he said it with something like alarm.

For just below the cabinet level hard feelings about President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger are beginning to mount here. There is a growing sense that the President wants detente to offset Watergate, and is prepared to sacrifice Israeli interests in order to give Americans the feeling there is harmony between himself and the Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev.

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THE SUSPICION first arose when Kissinger flew to Moscow a week ago last Saturday. The Israelis had just begun to take the offensive across the Suez Canal.

They didn't understand why Kissinger couldn't have dallied in Washington, thus assuring more time for the fighting.

Then came the cease-fire worked out in Moscow a day later. There was no consultation with the Israelis on the content of the agreement while it was being drawn up. Though satisfied with the terms, the Israelis were puzzled as to why they hadn't been given an advance text.

After that there was the affair of the Russian threat to send military force to police the cease-fire. The Israelis were pleased by the alert President Nixon ordered in response.

Most recently there has been the matter of the Egyptian Third Army Corps,

which the Israelis surrounded just after the cease-fire. The Russians used the encirclement of that force as the pretext for the threat to intervene.

In response to Soviet pressure, the United States prevailed on Israel to allow food and water through to the trapped Egyptian soldiers. Since no arrangements had been made for Israelis held prisoner by the Arabs, the passage of food and water to Egyptians still able to fight was felt to be particularly unfair here.

Throughout all this, Mrs. Meir has remained steadfastly faithful to Mr. Nixon. She has waved away officials who told her about the impact of Watergate. She has refrained from asking hard questions about the timing of the cease-fire. She has put down critics in her own government. She has cut off all but a tiny handful of trusted advisers from information as to what is going on.

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BUT MORE pressures are building up. The treatment of Israeli prisoners and the ending of the Egyptian blockade against Israel at the mouth of the Red Sea, not to mention the eventual territorial settlement, are all at issue here.

Moreover, there is an undertone of discontent in the country. Many people feel that the government was caught unprepared for the war, that Israel suffered unnecessary casualties as a result, and that the fighting was stopped on the eve of a great victory. Thus Mrs. Meir is vulnerable, and if her bet on the President and Kissinger doesn't pay off in peace negotiations, she will be in trouble.