

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Nixon Defies Danger in Mideast Trip

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon's stubborn determination to visit the Middle East, in the opinion of experts, has placed him in the greatest physical danger of his White House experience.

He ignored secret intelligence warnings that the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, an Arab terrorist ring, might attempt to assassinate him. They are believed to be equipped with shoulder-fired, heat-seeking Soviet missiles, which could knock down the presidential plane or blow up his ground transportation.

The greatest security precautions in history have been taken, therefore, to protect the President as he tours the world's most volatile hotspot.

Most of the Secret Service protective force had been airlifted to the Middle East to provide bodyguards for Mr. Nixon and to coordinate the security preparations of the host nations.

Intelligence teams departed a week ahead of the President and fanned out to every city on his itinerary. Secret Service chief Stuart Knight himself flew to the Middle East to direct the operations.

In case of an attack upon the President, a special medical team has been rushed to the Mediterranean and is now standing by on an aircraft carrier.

The five-man team is led by Capt. William J. Fouty, chief of surgery at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, and Dr. Myer Rosenthal, head of the hospital's Intensive Care Unit. Ready to assist them are three crack Navy corpsmen. The carrier was chosen because of its excellent hospital facilities.

The Secret Service considered the President's train trip from Cairo to Alexandria as the most dangerous time. The vulnerability of the train threw the security experts into a near panic. The Egyptians, therefore, stationed security police at every bend in the track along the entire route.

However, intelligence reports suggest that the terrorists, because of their good relations with Egypt and Syria, wouldn't want to embarrass them with an incident. They are more likely to attempt an assassination in Israel or Jordan, the two countries most hated by the Palestinians.

The intelligence reports warn, indeed, that the terrorists will hardly be able to resist attempting a spectacular stunt while the President is in Israel.

White House sources say the President insisted on making the trip, despite the risk, because he is determined to carry out his diplomatic objectives in the Middle East. He told visitors that the danger wouldn't deter him, recalling his experience with a mob that besieged his

vice presidential limousine in Venezuela in 1958.

Perhaps he also remembered that he received a hero's welcome after his return from Venezuela. Some insiders wonder whether he deliberately might now be courting danger in the Middle East to win public sympathy on the eve of the impeachment hearings.

WASHINGTON WHIRL—There is tentative talk inside the White House of extending President Nixon's travels to the Pacific. Congress would look bad trying to impeach the President, advisers feel, while he is traveling around the world in pursuit of peace ... The President has told friends he sometimes remembered, sometimes forgot that recorders were taping everything said in his offices. Those who have listened to the tapes agree he talked sometimes as if he didn't realize he was being bugged, other times as if he were making statements for the hidden microphones ... Former Vice President Spiro Agnew has told friends he'll hold his tongue until President Nixon is out of the White House. But then, said Agnew, he'll have a story to tell ... The Federal Aviation Administration, which licenses pilots and carefully regulates the number of hours they can work, lets the airlines overwork flight attendants on international trips. Some have told us of work-

ing 25 hours without a break until they couldn't respond properly to a hijacking or ditching. An FAA spokesman told us there's "no justification" for licensing flight attendants of regulation their working hours ...

In our June 9 analysis of the American foreign aid program, we listed seven European countries which owe money to the U.S. In this "deadbeat" class we listed, unfortunately, the nation of Finland. It is true that Finland has an outstanding debt of about \$8.8 million. But Finnish Ambassador Leo Tuominen has assured us that it is being paid off, with interest, in accordance with the loan agreements. "Finland is known around the world," he told us, "as a country which always pays her debts."

... In two columns last month, we revealed a secret White House master plan to use government agencies to generate votes for President Nixon in 1972. Not long afterwards, we appeared with White House aide Fred Malek, who authored the plan, on columnist Irv Kupcinet's television show. Unlike many other White House aides, Malek was able to disagree with us without malice. The transcript shows he finally turned to us and said generously: "The White House may not like you, but we find you are accurate, which is more than we can say for many of your colleagues."