

Reporter's Notebook: Like Nixon's Old Days

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By JOHN HERBERS JUN 19 1974

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AMMAN, Jordan, June 18 —For President Nixon and his staff the seven-day journey to the Middle East that ended today was like the good old days of 1972, before the Watergate disclosures.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's press secretary who has been helpless over the last year to get favorable news for Mr. Nixon, was jubilant. The network television shows, he pointed out, have given prominent attention to the trip, depicting a President very much in charge, on the move, winning acclaim from both Arabs and Israelis as he sought to strengthen the new approach of his Administration to the sensitive Middle East situation.

No small part of the picture was the sight of the American Presidency on the move. Last winter Mr. Nixon flew to California by commercial plane as a symbolic show of fuel-saving. But here no effort was spared to restore what some critics have termed the imperial trappings of the Presidency.

There was Air Force One, the blue and silver Presidential jet, and another almost like it as a back-up plane. Three big cargo jets carried among other things five limousines for the President and his senior staff. Helicopters were brought in from aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean. There were many truckloads of equipment.

Scores of advance men and Secret Service agents worked the cities days in advance. Secretaries, technicians and doctors from the White House staff formed much of the entourage. American embassy staffs were brought into service.

But throughout the trip there were small reminders of the troubles Mr. Nixon must return to at home. A question came up in regard to hotel bills in the Arab countries when the local political leaders would not permit the hotels to bill their American guests.

The White House staff did not seem to be concerned, but the 130 members of the press corps traveling with the President protested to Mr. Ziegler on their own behalf. The prosecution agreed to ask the countries involved to bill the reporters and photographers later, no matter how this might offend the sense of hospitality.

The crudely penned portrait of President Nixon that had been reproduced in various sites by the thousands and pasted on billboards and placards in Cairo, Alexandria and across the Egyptian countryside would hardly have been approved by a Presidential press agent. Heavy lines under unfocused eyes and around the mouth gave the appearance of an unflattering caricature of slyness, not unlike some of the political cartoons in American payers.

The unfavorable effect was, of course, unintentional and if the Egyptians found anything wrong they did not show it as they proudly displayed the portrait in their frenzied ovations for the American leader.

Yet to American observers, the portrait was one of a number of reminders of the special burden Mr. Nixon and his Administration continued to carry at home even as he was receiving popular acclaim abroad.

One of the more serious reminders involved Secretary of State Kissinger. In the past, it has been the custom for Mr. Kissinger to brief reporters on the contents of joint agreements with other countries. The agreement signed in Cairo on Friday by Mr. Nixon and President Anwar el-Sadat was released without explanation. One view was that Mr. Kissinger did not want to meet with reporters because he would be asked embarrassing questions about his Salzburg press conference, in which he threatened to resign unless cleared of allegations involving wire-taps.

Another view was that Mr. Kissinger was weary. In Cairo there were indications he was not as close to exhaustion as some had thought. One night he went out on a night club tour. At a state dinner, President Sadat had for the entertainment of his American guests the finest of Cairo's belly dancers. During the performances Mr. Kissinger and President Sadat were animated in laughter and conversation and appeared to be enjoying the show.

Before he left the group in Jerusalem, to attend a North Atlantic Treaty Organization ministers meeting in Ottawa, Mr. Kissinger did hold a press conference, mostly, he said, to let it be known he had not faded out. He still would not discuss his statement a week earlier other than to say "I stick by what I said."

Had his uncertainty over continuing in office harmed his standing with foreign officials with whom he had been meeting?

"I have not discussed the issue with any of the leaders with whom we have met and I have not had that impression," he said. "Of course, there is some hope in the State Department."

The credibility problems of the Nixon White House were not left back in Washington. When President Nixon was speaking from the balcony of the Kubbah Palace in Cairo, Mr. Ziegler was circulating among reporters saying that the Egyptian security forces, which he did not identify, had estimated that two million to three million people had cheered Mr. Nixon as he rode triumphantly into the city.

A moment later, Mr. Nixon said over the loudspeaker that "several hundred thousand" had been along the route, an estimate that seemed more accurate to veteran crowd-watchers in the press corps. But Mr. Ziegler was not subdued. The next day in Alexandria he again quoting unnamed Egyptian officials, said three-and-a-half million people had lined the President's route from Cairo through Alexandria. The two-day Ziegler estimate of up to six-and-a-half million was met with some skepticism.

Producing crowds for political purposes is a fine art in the United States. But the



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Mrs. Richard M. Nixon spent the last part of her tour of the Mideast yesterday visiting Roman ruins near Jerash, Jordan, in the mountains of Gilead, and a merry moment occurred when a little girl gave her a bouquet of irises. Apparently the child had been waiting a good while in the heat to present the flowers, for they were rather wilted. Mrs. Nixon walked nearly a mile among the ruins, visiting a temple to Artemis and a vast forum. She said the President's "journey for peace" was "very successful."

Egyptians may be better at it. In Alexandria on Thursday, some of the American press arrived two hours before Presidents Nixon and

Sadat in time to see people being brought in by the busload, apparently at the urging of the Egyptian Government. There were coaches

among the crowds who would instruct the people to shout "Nick-son, Nick-son," and the people would pick it up with enthusiasm.