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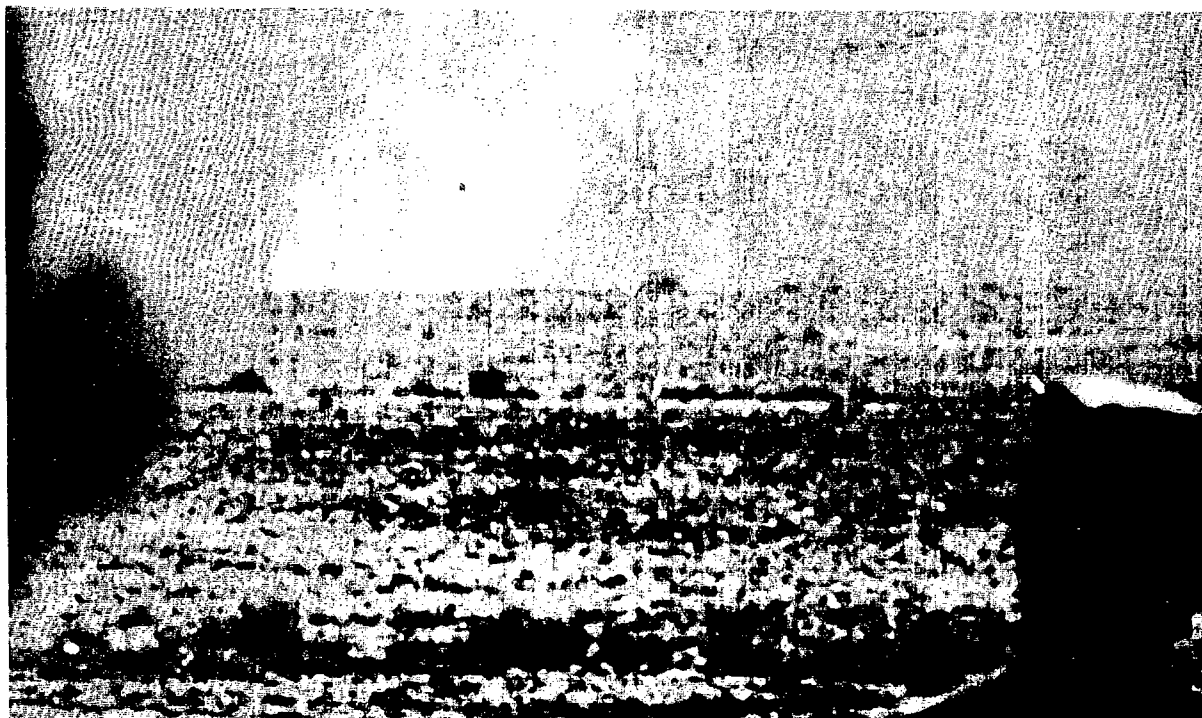
## THE MIDDLE EAST

Arab and Israeli military forces were on high alert this week, and cease-fire violations increased as Cairo and Tel Aviv engaged in fruitless indirect negotiations for a resumption of their stalled disengagement talks at Kilometer 101. A round of diplomatic activity early in the week gave rise to some optimism, but this later dissipated as Cairo and Tel Aviv held to their bargaining positions, presumably in hopes of realizing gains from Secretary Kissinger's impending visit to the area. Meanwhile, Israel and the Arab states are preparing for the peace conference, expected to convene later

this month in Geneva. Syria now appears willing to attend, but Jordan is still reluctant.

### Military Moves

Israeli and Egyptian military forces were, if anything, even more on edge this week, each guarding against precipitate action by the other. There were no firm indications that either side intends to resume hostilities immediately, although the Cairo press continues to stress Egypt's ability and will to fight.



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The Suez near Ismailia

The Egyptians are building an earthen causeway to supplement the three ponton bridges that they constructed earlier this month across the Suez Canal north of Ismailia.

Despite these increased preparations and the touchiness of both sides, cease-fire violations on the Egyptian front this week were few and generally minor. Neither this limited military action nor the stalled negotiations were sufficient to disrupt the continued flow of supplies to Suez city and the encircled Egyptian Third Army.

More serious cease-fire violations were reported on the Syrian front. On 2 December, Damascus claimed to have destroyed an Israeli engineering unit, three tanks, a bulldozer, and an ammunition dump during a three- to four-hour battle. Syrian forces reportedly used small arms, artillery, and tanks, as well as anti-tank missiles, in their attempt to disrupt efforts by the Israelis to solidify their positions in captured Syrian territory. A similar attack was made the next day.

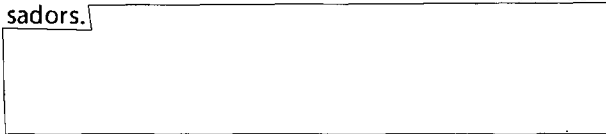
Terrorist activity increased in Israel this week. On 4 December a hand grenade exploded in the Arab section of Jerusalem, injuring about 20 persons. It was the most serious incident in the Arab quarter in more than a year. The following day, 15 people were injured in an explosion on a bus northeast of Tel Aviv. Guerrilla activity in the occupied West Bank area has also increased recently. In mid-November, there were six violent incidents in as many days, up from 17 for all of 1972.

#### Stalled Negotiations

Egypt and Israel this week talked all around the question of resuming their disengagement talks at Kilometer 101. The meetings were suspended late last week by the Egyptians, who decried Tel Aviv's stalling on the withdrawal of Israeli troops from positions along the critically important Cairo-Suez road. Cairo insisted at the time the talks were broken off that it would not agree to their resumption until Tel Aviv indicated a willingness to change its "intransigent" position on troop pullbacks.

Early this week, the Egyptians were exhibiting cautious optimism. A Foreign Ministry spokesman indicated that indirect diplomatic contacts were under way between Egypt and Israel. He added that results—presumably a reopening of the talks at Kilometer 101—could be expected "perhaps in the immediate future." The spokesman did not claim, however, that Egypt had secured a promise from Israel to implement a troop withdrawal.

A new round of diplomatic activity over the weekend was responsible for at least part of the Egyptian optimism. President Sadat on 1 December consulted with the US and Soviet ambassadors.



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#### Posturing for the Peace Conference

Official Egyptian spokesmen as well as the Cairo press repeated this week that the question of Egypt's attendance at the coming peace conference "was complicated" by the lack of progress at Kilometer 101. They have refrained from directly tying the Egyptian presence to progress on the disengagement issue, suggesting that their implied threats to boycott the conference may be part of a rhetorical war of nerves. As the week ended, it appeared increasingly likely that Cairo would delay any decision on either the talks at Kilometer 101 or the peace conference in the hope of reaping diplomatic benefits from Secretary Kissinger's visit.

According to press accounts, Syria's President Asad bowed this week to pressure from his Arab allies and agreed to attend the Geneva talks. Damascus had threatened last weekend not to attend, perhaps as a show of solidarity with Egypt over the impasse at Kilometer 101. Syrian political and military leaders apparently have serious doubts about Israel's interest in peace, however, and are pessimistic about the possibility of reaching a settlement without further fighting.

In a speech last weekend, King Husayn left open the question of Jordan's attendance at the peace conference, but in private he is saying that he sees no reason to participate. The King is especially bitter about the failure of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza to protest the Arab summit's recent decision to designate the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Despite the urging of other Arab leaders, Husayn continues to turn aside feelers from high-level fedayeen leaders for possible cooperation between the PLO and Jordan.

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Libyan President Qadhafi's opposition to the cease-fire accord and to Arab participation in a peace conference has triggered a bitter controversy and a diplomatic rift between Libya and Egypt. The press feud that has been going on between Tripoli and Cairo since the signing of the cease-fire agreement escalated last week to the point where a leading Egyptian commentator issued a scathing and direct denunciation of Qadhafi. In retaliation, Libya closed its "relations office" in Cairo and recalled all but three of its diplomatic personnel. This falls well short of a formal break in relations—and both sides seem anxious to avoid an open rupture—but it marks a low ebb in the special relationship between the two states.

#### Preparations in Israel

This week, as expected, the central committee of the ruling Labor Party gave a strong vote of confidence to Mrs. Meir. It endorsed the modifications in the party's platform that were worked out last week by party leaders in preparation for the parliamentary elections set for 31 December. The platform, which Mrs. Meir hopes will help give her a mandate to try for a peace settlement, is clearly a compromise. It reflects pressures from party doves for new flexibility toward the Arabs, but holds fast to Israel's long-standing demands for defensible borders and a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The platform also reiterates Israeli opposition to any independent Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan River.

Otherwise, government leaders are absorbed in hammering out their negotiating position and tactics for the peace conference, although they do not intend to get into substantive issues until after the elections. In efforts to clarify the extent to which Israel can count on support from the US, Prime Minister Meir and Foreign Minister Eban held long talks with US Undersecretary Rush when he was in Israel for the funeral of its first prime minister, David Ben Gurion. In advance of Secretary Kissinger's visit, Defense Minister Dayan and Finance Minister Sapir headed for the US for bond rallies and talks with US officials.

Press reports indicate that Israel's initial tactic at the conference will be to press the Arabs for some show of "good faith"—for example, an indication of their willingness to recognize Israel and sign a binding peace treaty. Israeli officials are saying that the "nature of the peace" the Arabs are willing to undertake will affect the flexibility of Israel's response to the key Arab demand—Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

#### Soviet Activity

The Soviets are continuing to stress the need for an Israeli pullback to the positions held on 22 October. Top Soviet leaders told visiting British Foreign Secretary Home this week that Israeli intransigence on this issue might prevent convocation of the peace conference. *Pravda* on 30 November played on this theme, accusing Tel Aviv of placing every possible obstacle in the way of a peace settlement.

The Soviets are backing Cairo's position, but it seems unlikely that Moscow will in fact demand an Israeli pullback as a pre-condition to a conference. A peace conference would again place the USSR in the center of Middle East diplomacy, and the Soviets indicated to Home that they definitely see themselves as permanent guarantors of any peace settlement.

The visit of candidate politburo member Ponomarev to Baghdad late last week appears to have stemmed in part from Iraq's opposition to a Middle East settlement. The joint Soviet-Iraqi communique, however, made no mention of the peace conference, suggesting that any Soviet attempt to move the Iraqis to a more conciliatory policy was not successful.

Moscow also sent a middle-level party delegation to Cairo in late November with the evident purpose of putting a positive face on Soviet-Egyptian ties. The visit also gave the Egyptians the opportunity to show their appreciation for Soviet support and to soothe Moscow's nerves about Egypt's improved relations with Washington. ( )

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