

ARAB STATES - ISRAEL: Only scattered incidents occurred on the Syrian and Egyptian fronts yesterday.

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The press and officials in Cairo and Tel Aviv have been conducting a war of nerves with conflicting reports on the inevitability of war and the likelihood of peace. The reports--fed to the Western press, carried in local newspapers, and issued in oblique official statements--are probably designed partly to put pressure on the enemy and the superpowers and partly to mask intentions, but they may also reflect genuine uncertainty about future policy.

The Egyptians, in particular, appear to hope that some progress toward breaking the diplomatic impasse will result from Israeli Defense Minister Dayan's current visit to Washington and from Secretary Kissinger's visit to Cairo and other Middle East capitals next week. Despite press reports that the Egyptians have informed both the UN and the US that they will not reopen the Kilometer 101 disengagement talks, public comments from official government spokesmen continue to be somewhat less categorical. They leave open the possibility that the talks may be resumed and that, in any case, the Geneva peace conference might be convened without prior progress toward disengagement.

Signals on whether or not hostilities will resume are mixed. Chief of Staff Shazli revised and strengthened his statement of a few days ago which suggested that military action is unlikely in the near future unless the Israelis start it. The new version indicates that Cairo would wait and see how things go in the peace conference and in the Israeli elections on 31 December before making any changes in the current situation, unless the Israelis launch

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Can offensive. Publication of the Shazli interview has been stopped by "higher authorities," probably because it would be inconsistent with the high level of tension Cairo has been trying to project and because it would take some of the heat off the issue of the unfulfilled disengagement commitment. The gist of Shazli's statement appears to be corroborated by a statement on 4 December attributed to the Soviet military attaché in Cairo to the effect that the military situation will not deteriorate further. The Cairo press, nevertheless, continues to talk stridently of the "inevitability" of renewed fighting if Israel does not take steps "which exonerate it from the suspicion of working intentionally to obstruct a solution."

A similar contradiction appears in Israel. The press continues to note the high state of alert on all borders and stresses the need to maintain the alert, but notes that there is only a slim possibility that an all-out confrontation will flare up. According to press reports in Tel Aviv, plans for a possible resumption of military negotiations with Egypt have been put off until Defense Minister Dayan finishes his talks with Secretary Kissinger. Radio Israel, meanwhile, has carried a statement by Deputy Premier Allon warning the Arab states that, if the war resumed, Israeli reaction would be beyond anything the Arabs expected. The US defense attaché in Tel Aviv reports that, despite hawkish public and private statements by Israeli military leaders, it is evident that they and the Israeli people really do not want a return to war. They reportedly would fight if necessary, but do not need or want any more casualties.

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