

ARAB STATES - ISRAEL: A last-minute round of inter-Arab consultations seems to be under way in the wake of Secretary Kissinger's Middle East tour and in anticipation of Friday's expected opening session of the Geneva peace conference.

Damascus appears to be one of the focal points for these conversations, possibly because of Syria's reported announcement that it is delaying until today a final decision on whether to attend the peace talks.

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According to press accounts, Fahmi then flew to Damascus yesterday where he conferred for three hours with President Asad and Khaddam before returning to Cairo. Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat also met with Asad late yesterday evening.

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Libyan Prime Minister Jalud returned to Cairo from Tripoli yesterday, less than 24 hours after having left the Egyptian capital. Jalud spent five days in Egypt last week and reportedly had two meetings with President Sadat.

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The postponement of the Geneva peace conference is being taken in stride by Egyptian media, reflecting an attitude of resignation that such a delay is inevitable. As might be expected, a Cairo radio commentator blamed the postponement on Israeli maneuvering, supported by the US, but he took a fairly relaxed approach. The Egyptians should have expected this, he said, and in any case "it will not be long" before Tel Aviv's and Washington's true intentions toward a settlement become clear. In an interview presented on French television yesterday, Foreign

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Minister Fahmi said that Egypt does not expect Israel to follow a constructive line at Geneva, but that Cairo will nevertheless go there to prove to the world once again that Israel is the peace obstructionist.

Arab military pressure on Israel will probably continue to play a significant role in the Arab strategy for obtaining concessions from Tel Aviv at the peace talks. An article in yesterday's edition of Cairo's semiofficial newspaper, Al-Ahram, stressed the need for increasing such pressure to force Israel to bear the high cost of maximum preparedness for as long as possible.

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Israeli Deputy Premier Yigal Allon's expectations of the Geneva conference proceedings were spelled out in a recorded election campaign interview broadcast by Jerusalem radio on December 17. Allon said that:

--"considerable time" would be spent negotiating a separation of forces;

--the only joint session would be the opening ceremony, and then only if Syria had provided a POW list;

--Israel would hold separate subcommittee sessions with each of its neighboring states "because there are different problems with each state";

--a "long list of conditions" on which a settlement would rest must be negotiated before final boundaries can be discussed; these conditions include the nature of demilitarized zones, the status of peace-keeping forces, Israel's navigation rights, and the nature of relations among the neighboring states following a settlement.

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