

Both sides
talk about
war again

Chance of new war suddenly
perils Nixon-Kissinger effort

NIX AD

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By United Press

There was talk in both Cairo and Tel Aviv that the Middle East war might be renewed. Egypt reimposed its wartime blackout and carried out new negotiations with its Arab allies. Diplomatic positions on both sides hardened even in spite of optimistic talk under the influence of United States mediation.

Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, influential editor of the semiofficial Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram and a confidant of President Anwar Sadat, said "a return to the battlefield to continue the war is more likely than our going to a peace conference."

"Peace is still far, far away," he wrote. "Even the beginning of the road to peace is still far."

In Tel Aviv, Lt. Gen. Haim Bar-Lev, former chief of staff of the Israeli armed forces, said in an interview with the newspaper Ma'ariv that Egypt might try to renew the war but that Egypt had no chance because Israeli forces inside Egypt were sitting on that country's soft belly.

In Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir

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told a news conference after talks with President Nixon yesterday that the cease-fire line in Egypt should be negotiated by the two countries and that "Israel feels there will have to be a redistribution of forces on each side."

She said Israel had given first priority to an exchange of prisoners of war and would not unilaterally withdraw to the Oct. 22 lines. Egypt has said there would be no exchange or peace talks until Israel does so withdraw.

Egyptian officials today rejected her proposal for a troop redistribution and said Egypt was not prepared to give up any military positions it now held on its own mainland west of the Suez Canal. They reaffirmed that the first priority must be Israeli withdrawal, thus freeing the trapped 3rd Egyptian Army.

Despite the firm statements by leaders, dispatches from Suez city reported there was growing cooperation between Israeli and Egyptian soldiers manning the truce lines. But observers said this appeared to be more an escape from boredom than anything else — Israeli and Egyptian forces clashed on the east bank of the canal yesterday.

While war talk grew in Cairo, it was revealed that Sadat met secretly at Kuwait Airport yesterday with

President Hafez Assad of Syria, the other main combatant in the 18-day October conflict. Arab press commentators said Sadat appeared to be backing up his warnings about renewal of the war with careful groundwork for such an event.

To a certain extent this was borne out by Egyptian officials in Cairo. They said the Kuwait conference was to formulate a common strategy for either alternative — peaceful settlement or renewal of fighting.

Beirut press reports said that after their meeting in Kuwait, attended also by that Persian Gulf state's ruling sheikh plus defense ministers of the three countries, Sadat flew to Riyadh to meet King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, while the Syrian president went to Iraq.

A government order reimposed a blackout on Cairo and nine other governorates, including that of the Suez Canal. The blackout, imposed originally when the war broke out Oct. 6, had been relaxed during the past two days.

In Tel Aviv, the newspaper of Mrs. Meir's ruling Labor Party warned that her Washington talks did not mean an end to the war.

The Labor organ Davar wrote "We should not ignore the fact that the war has not yet ended or assume that matters have finally and irrevocably reverted to the political sphere."

Mrs. Meir told newsmen in Washington a new

cease-fire line should be negotiated by Israel and Egypt to straighten out untenable positions. "Israel feels there will have to be a redistribution of forces on each side," Mrs. Meir said.

Diplomatic sources in Washington interpreted this as a veiled offer to relieve Israeli pressure on the encircled 20,000-man Egyptian 3rd Army — a move that might prompt Egypt to release Israeli prisoners.

Mrs. Meir said the POW release was her top priority. "This is something Israel cannot live with," she said.

She did not specify how Nixon received her new truce line proposal but said the President "assured me that the security and well-being of Israel are a true and lasting concern of the U.S."

UPI reporter Thomas Ackerman reported from the cease-fire lines in Egypt that soldiers from the two sides had begun to mingle and chat despite occasional clashes.

An Israeli colonel told Ackerman "The companionship between the Israelis and the Egyptians is unbelievable. They exchange ideas, they speak with each other, they listen to the radio together and some of the Egyptian officers speak Hebrew."

A young Israeli infantryman told Ackerman the opposing troops "compare our dogtag inscriptions and the officers' ranks. Anything to pass the time of day."