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TALKS DUE TO GO ON EVEN WITH SYRIA'S DECISION NOT TO ATTEND

By Edwin Bytan, JTA European Bureau Chief

GENEVA, Dec. 18 (JTA)--Israeli official circles said here today that the Syrian decision not to attend the Geneva peace talks will not effect Israel's own presence. These circles said that Israel Foreign Minister Abba Eban will probably arrive in Geneva Thursday and will attend the talks Friday morning if the Egyptian delegation shows up. The Israelis said, however, that Israel had still not received this afternoon the official invitation to attend the talks though they expect UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim to hand it over later tonight to the Israeli delegation in New York. (See separate UN story.)

The Egyptian delegation here said that under current plans Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmi is expected here tomorrow. The Egyptians said that unless a last minute change occurs they expect to attend the talks Friday morning as planned. Waldheim and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko are also expected here tomorrow. U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger is due Thursday evening and that same night he is scheduled to dine with Gromyko to iron out last minute difficulties.

American sources say that should the conference take place, which some doubt now after Syria's refusal to attend the talks, Kissinger may meet Fahmi late Thursday night and have a working breakfast with Eban Friday morning before the official opening. Egyptian officials here privately express confidence that the conference will open as planned and that after its one day official session will be continued at the level of experts. The main issue they would like to discuss is the disengagement of forces on the Suez Canal. Some Egyptians say that Kissinger has given them assurances that an agreement on this issue will be reached before the end of the month enabling them to disengage their Third Army.

Dec. 21, the shortest day of the year, will reportedly be devoted to generalities. Immediately after this ceremonial opening, the conference will suspend its activities and resume them only mid-January after the Israeli elections and the formation of a new government. In the interim, non-official representatives of the four delegations will probably continue to meet to work on technical arrangements and reach agreement on the conference machinery. It is generally believed that three main sub-commissions will be set up to examine the "consistency" of peace: the implementation of Resolution 242 and the disengagement of Israeli and Egyptian forces in the Canal zone.

Even before starting, however, the conference has had positive effects. For the first time in the tormented history of the Middle East, Israelis and Arabs have met face to face and discussed and sometimes even professionally cooperated. The protagonists are not official delegates but the dozens of Israeli and Arab newsmen already in Geneva. For the first time, Arab and Israeli newsmen share the same tables in the press room cafeteria and exchange information and comments. An Egyptian reporter told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency correspondent "things have definitely changed. It is logical that if our official delegates will meet in a few days, reporters can do so also." Personal relations and even personal affinities have rapidly developed among the Israeli and Arab press corps and have helped to drastically alter the mutual fears and suspicions. But a big shadow still looms over the conference and officials fear that till the last moment a hitch could develop wrecking the first serious attempt yet made to bring a solution to the passions, hatreds and fears accumulated in the Middle East for 25 years.

CABINET ANNOUNCES GENEVA DELEGATION

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA)--The Cabinet met this afternoon--the third time this week--to finalize details for the Geneva conference and hear from Foreign Minister Abba Eban the outline of his speech to the opening session. After the meeting it was announced that Premier Golda Meir would deliver a political statement Thursday morning to the Knesset on Israel's decision to take part in the conference. The Premier is then expected to outline the talks with Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and explain how Israel's reservations over auspices and over the invitation were soothed away by the Secretary.

The Cabinet also approved Israel's official delegation to Geneva: it includes Eban himself; Deputy Director General Ephraim Evron; Israel's Ambassador to Italy, Moshe Sasson (an Arab affairs expert); legal advisor Dr. Meir Rosen; and three of the Foreign Ministry's senior advisors--Shmuel Divon (Arab affairs), Mordechai Kidron (UN affairs), and Eytan Bezur (political advisor).

U.S. REACTION TO SYRIA'S BOYCOTT OF TALKS

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 (JTA)--Syria's refusal to join the peace conference in Geneva was seen here as based on its fear that world attention would be focused on its refusal to abide by the Geneva Convention on POWs. A Syrian government spokesman in Damascus said today that "behind the scenes maneuvering" meant the talks would be diverted into "secondary matters" to serve Israel's interests. This was interpreted here as meaning it would not permit Israel to demand directly of Syria at the conference that it provide names of Israeli POWs nor allow an International Red Cross representative to visit the POW camp.

WALDHEIM STILL WAITING FOR LETTER INVITING HIM TO ATTEND PEACE TALKS

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 18 (JTA)--With only three days remaining before the Middle East peace conference is due to open in Geneva, Secretary General Kurt Waldheim still has not received the letter from the United States and the Soviet Union inviting him to attend and asking him to invite the other participants--Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria--

it was learned here today. A UN spokesman said that the Secretary General's plans to leave for Geneva are "very tentative." The absence of formal invitations until now led some observers to speculate that another postponement might be made.

Israeli sources here, however, expressed confidence that the Geneva conference would open Friday as scheduled. They apparently based their view on Israel's agreement, after assurances from Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger in Jerusalem Sunday and Monday, to the conference ground rules. The main stumbling block for Israel had been the nature of the United Nations' role at the conference which they prefer to be symbolic rather than active.

Assembly to Suspend, Not Adjourn

In another development here, General Assembly President Leopoldo Benites of Ecuador was expected to announce late this afternoon that the Assembly's 28th session would not be adjourning today as originally scheduled but would suspend, meaning that it could be reconvened again on short notice. Some sources here said the change of plans was not related to the Geneva conference. Others observed that the Assembly was standing by to intervene should snags develop at Geneva. It was recalled that the Assembly had suspended rather than adjourned on two previous occasions in 1967 and 1968. (Yitzhak Rabi)

LOD AIRPORT ON ALERT AS HIJACKED PLANE MOVES ACROSS MIDEAST COUNTRIES

TEL AVIV, Dec. 18 (JTA)--Lod Airport experienced on-again off-again alerts last night and this morning as authorities followed the movements of a Lufthansa jet hijacked by Palestinian terrorists yesterday in a bloody rampage at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport which took at least 36 lives. The plane landed at Athens Airport last night where the terrorists murdered four hostages after Greek authorities refused their demand for the release of two terrorists imprisoned in Greece. It took off again and was reported this afternoon to have landed in Kuwait with 12 hostages still aboard. (See P. 3 for reactions to carnage.)

The first alert was sounded at Lod yesterday when the hijacked plane entered Middle East airspace and approached Beirut. Lebanese authorities refused the plane permission to land and the aircraft went to Athens. The alert was relaxed at that point but reinstated this morning when the terrorist-held plane circled over Beirut again. It was relaxed when the jet landed at Damascus only to be reinstated a second time when the plane took off after refueling.

Syrian authorities refused the terrorists political asylum and the terrorists rejected Syrian government appeals to release the hostages. For the first time in the long and bloody annals of terrorist hijacking, Arab governments, the Palestinian Liberation Organization and even more militant Palestinian groups condemned the terrorist action in Rome and are demanding that the perpetrators be brought to justice. This development was linked to the Geneva peace conference, Arab governments, and Palestinian leaders for the most part fear that the latest terrorist outrage might have adverse effects on the peace parley.

(In New York today, Egypt's Ambassador to the U.S., Dr. Ashraf Ghobral, took a different view. Interviewed on the CBS Morning News television program, he said chances for success at Geneva may have been improved because the terrorist carnage has dramatized the urgency of a speedy peace settlement in the Middle East. Re-

ports from Cairo said, however, that Egyptian political circles were concerned that the Geneva conference may be cancelled because Geneva is too dangerous a site and Swiss authorities could not provide adequate protection against possible terrorist assaults on the various delegations.)

The identity of the terrorists who firebombed a Pan American jet and machinegunned bystanders in Rome yesterday, killing at least 36 persons (earlier reports put the death toll at 42), has not yet been established. According to various sources they were tentatively identified either as members of the Black September or of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

\$775,000 GEO GRANT TO AID JEWISH POOR

NEW YORK, Dec. 18 (JTA)--A two-year \$775,000 grant from the federal Office of Economic Opportunity to the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty, was announced today by Jerome Becker, coordinating council president. Terming the grant "a major milestone in the enhancement of programs of service to our fellow Jews in need," Becker said that the grant would enable the council to augment the programs of its local affiliates and to launch meaningful activities in areas not previously served.

Mayor John V. Lindsay initially provided New York City resources to aid the city's estimated 272,000 Jewish poor with allocation of an initial grant of \$250,000 to the coordinating council from the city's Human Resources Administration for the period of Dec. 1, 1972 through Nov. 30, 1973. Last month, the HRA, the city's superagency for welfare and poverty programs, refunded the coordinating council with an \$185,362 grant for its programs from Dec. 1, 1973 to next June 30. With the new GEO grant, a total of \$1,190,362 has been allocated to the coordinating council by the Lindsay Administration, Becker said.

He said that he had received commitments from Mayor-elect Abraham Beame which he hoped would "assure the impoverished Jews of New York a more equitable share of the governmental funding available to poverty groups throughout the community."

\$2.2 B AID MEASURE RUSHED FOR COMPLETION

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18 (JTA)--Congress is rushing the \$2.2 billion emergency military aid bill for Israel toward completion and for President Nixon's signature, hopefully before the Middle East peace conference opens in Geneva. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee today approved by a lopsided 15-2 majority an authorization bill identical to one approved last week by the House of Representatives. Committee chairman J. William Fulbright (D.Ark.) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D.Mont.) cast the only negative votes.

The full Senate is expected to vote on the authorization measure and both Houses on the final appropriations measure Thursday. Since the authorization measures in both the House and Senate are identical, that part of the two-step process has been completed.

The question of how much of the \$2.2 billion will go to Israel in the form of loans and how much as outright grants remains to be resolved by a House-Senate conference committee which meets tomorrow. The motion to provide up to \$1.5 billion in grants was introduced by Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D.Minn.) who pointed out that the Yom Kippur War had "cost Israel about \$6 billion, more than her entire national budget." Israel, he said, repays her loans, but is unable to pay any more loans.

MOOD IN ISRAEL IS ONE OF DEEP SKEPTICISM ABOUT ULTIMATE ARABAIMS

By David Landau (Jerusalem) and Yitzhak Shargil (Tel Aviv)

Dec. 18 (JTA)--The mood in Israel on the eve of the Geneva peace conference is one of deep skepticism about ultimate Arab aims, resignation to long, protracted negotiations fraught with dangers and pitfalls and determination to hold fast to positions of strength while bargaining for an acceptable settlement. This mood was reflected in statements by political and military leaders, platform positions taken by various political parties and the latest public opinion poll results released today. The skepticism in Israel derives from, and to some extent was responsible for, the last minute problems that forced postponement of the Geneva conference until Friday.

But Israel needed assurances on a variety of matters--particularly the United Nations role--and she apparently got satisfactory answers from U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger during his whirlwind visit Sunday and Monday. Another obstacle was removed, at least temporarily today, when Damascus announced that it would boycott the Geneva talks. Israel has stated firmly that it would have no contacts with the Syrians until they complied with the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war.

Public opinion, by a slight majority, favors Israel's retention of the administered Arab territories as part of any peace settlement that might be reached in Geneva. A weekly poll conducted by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Sciences, attributed that view to 73 percent of the respondents. But 68 percent favored return of the territories to the Arabs on condition that they are demilitarized. According to the poll, 81 percent of Israelis believe their government should insist that a peace agreement with the Arabs includes formal diplomatic relations. Prof. Eliyahu Gutman, director of the Institute, said this reflected Israelis' belief that the ultimate goal of the Arab countries is the destruction of Israel and that only by agreeing to diplomatic relations can they prove they have abandoned that goal. The poll reported that 78 percent of the respondents ranked commercial relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors second in importance. Fifty percent want United Nations guarantees to Israel and 35 percent called for Soviet guarantees.

Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said yesterday that he thought Israel should attend the Geneva peace conference "but not as if the devil was pushing us. We shouldn't swoon at the sight of newspaper headlines reading 'peace conference,'" he said. Addressing a closed meeting of the Labor Party's Rafi faction, Dayan warned that the Geneva talks would pose a severe test of Israel's courage and tenacity. "We have to go there armed with a correct view of things," he said. Dayan said that Israel faced a different world and a different Arab world compared to what it was before the Yom Kippur War. But if the Arabs are stronger, it does not mean Israel is weaker. "They will find us strong," he said, adding, "We may have to sit for some time yet on the other side of the Bitter Lake," meaning the west bank of the Suez Canal.

A similar observation was made earlier in the week by the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. David Elazar. Speaking to military correspondents in Tel Aviv, he said the Israeli army will have to remain in "full strength and in a high state of alert" along the cease-fire lines for some time in the future. "We have to take into account an attempt on the part of the enemy to change the situation by force while the Geneva conference is in session," he said.

POLITICAL LEADERS CONDEMN TERRORIST CARNAGE--Combined JTA Dispatches

Dec. 18 (JTA)--The Parliamentary leader of West Germany's opposition party demanded today that Arab terrorists who hijacked a Lufthansa jet in Rome yesterday after a murderous rampage be brought before the United Nations. Carl Karstens, who heads the Christian Democratic Union-Christian Socialist Union in the Bundestag, urged the Bonn government to take such action in concert with other European Common Market members. He expressed "profound disgust" at the hijacking and mass murders and said he hoped this feeling would be shared by those Arab states which might give the terrorists asylum. U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, in Madrid today for talks with Generalissimo Francisco Franco, said he was "morally outraged" by the slaughter.

In Jerusalem, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban said, "The people of Israel are deeply moved by the loss of life, injury and anguish suffered by Americans, Italians and Germans in the attack by enemies of peace at Rome Airport. Our nation, whose citizens have often been the targets of these murderous assaults by Arab terrorists feel a deep sympathy for and solidarity with all their innocent victims everywhere." United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim expressed "deep shock" at the "senseless and brutal killing of innocent people" in Rome and Athens. A statement issued on his behalf at UN headquarters in New York said the Secretary General "strongly condemns all acts of this nature wherever they may occur." A UN spokesman said Waldheim has offered the good offices of the UN to the ambassadors of Italy, Greece and West Germany.

Israeli Ambassador Yaacov Doron said in the General Assembly today that "this latest and most dreadful example of most cruel and unbridled terrorism throws a harsh light on the refusal of the General Assembly this year to consider the agenda item concerning measures against terrorists." Doron said his government dissociated itself from that refusal. Norway's Foreign Minister Knut Frydenlund said in Oslo, "We are shocked by these tragic occurrences which have cost so many innocent people their lives. No political motivation can justify such acts. It is our hope that the terror attacks will not have a negative effect on the planned peace conference in Geneva." In Bonn, Erik Blumenfeld, a CDU foreign policy expert, called on European states to act in unison to fight against air piracy. He described the Rome attack as "brutal murder." The West German Foreign Office has established a "crisis unit" to determine what can be done to secure the release of the remaining hostages.

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SPECIAL LATE BULLETIN: UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 18 (JTA)--Secretary General Kurt Waldheim was handed this afternoon a letter from the United States and the Soviet Union inviting him to convene the Middle East peace conference and preside in the opening phase. Waldheim then handed the Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Israeli envoys identical letters telling them he is convening the conference at 10:30 a.m. (Geneva time) at the Palais des Nations.

