

WASHINGTON DATELINE

by Trude B. Feldman
ISRAELITE'S WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT

Interview With Eban

Abba Eban, Foreign Minister of Israel, said that the tension in the Middle East should neither be underestimated nor exaggerated. And, of the above two dangers, exaggeration is by far the greatest, he added.

"Although there is tension -- and will be -- until there is peace, there is no grounds for thinking either that the Mideast is on the verge of local war, and still less that it is a center of potential global confrontation," he said. "On the whole, the cease fire regime does hold up and if there is an incident which sends a few shells across the canal, when that dies down the situation is as it was before, the same cease - fire lines and the same relative security stability."

During an interview in Los Angeles' Bel Air Sands, Mr. Eban based his remarks on well - founded assumptions: There is no Arab state which can rationally believe that it could make any gain whatever by generalized warfare ----that is, there would not be a different result now than in June, 1967,

"The difference is that whereas they may not have known that in 1967, it is today generally understood. Therefore, he said that he does not anticipate an Arab initiative for generalizing the war, nor will there be any Israeli initiative to break the framework of the cease-fire.

"We want to maintain the cease - fire situation as a starting point for the search for peace, so that on the local level there is a balance of forces which is not congenial to generalized war," he said. "On the international level, I don't think there is any great power which is encouraging any mideastern state to generalize the conflict. Therefore, the prediction is that the situation, until there is peace -- will be very much as it is now, a general situation of normality in Israel's life -- only invaded by those occasional eruptions."

Mr. Eban emphasized that the cease-fire situation -- with all its difficulties -- is infinitely preferable for Israel, preferable to anything except peace, and that it will be maintained until there is

real, solid contractual peace.

The 54-year old Foreign Minister cited the two alternatives: The status quo, with all its difficulties, or the infinitely preferable vision of a negotiated and signed peace.

"We will try to get the latter," he added. "But, until we do, we will be very much as it is now, a general situation of normality in Israel's life -- only invaded by those occasional eruptions."

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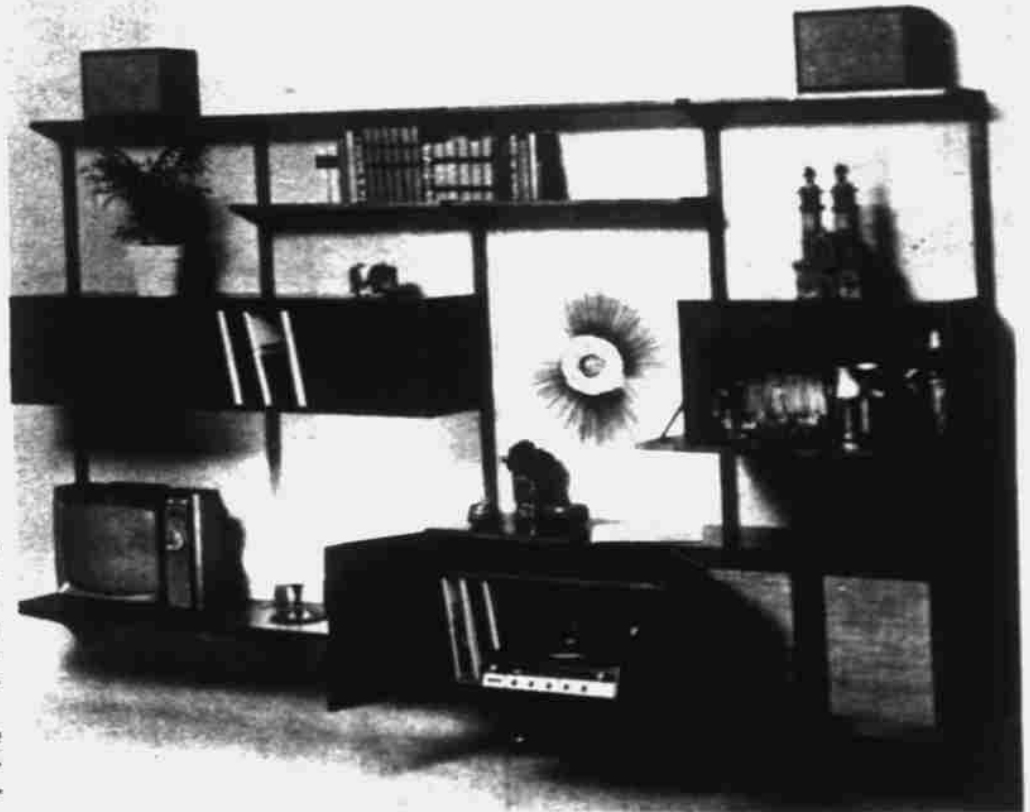
"We will try to get the latter," he added. "But, until we do, we will be satisfied with the former."

Mr. Eban went on to say that in his view there has been an extreme overplaying of the dangers of war, especially by the Arab states.

"The French and Soviets are trying to keep alive the concept of the Mideast as the main center of international tension," he said. "It's true that the Arab arms have been replenished, but Israel hasn't been sitting with its arms folded during the past one and one-half years. We've considerably strengthened our posture since June, 1967."

Eban maintained that the numerical balance is in the favor of the Arab states, but said that no Arab country - if given the chance -- could change the existing situation today by force or by war.

As to a substantive move toward peace in the Mideast, Mr. Eban said it's unlikely until the extraordinary complex of non-negotiation is overcome.



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USUAL DENIALS OF SECRET ISRAELI - ARAB MEETS

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- Israeli and Jordanian denials of reports that Israeli Deputy Premier Yigal Allon and Foreign Minister Abba Eban and King Hussein of Jordan have held separate secret meetings in recent months were expected by diplomatic observers who noted that the possible delicate political contact between the two warring nations required such public disclaimers.

Reports of a Hussein-Eban meeting in London have been circulating since the end of February when a German-language weekly in New York and an anglo-Jewish weekly in London carried such stories. The New York

Times last week, citing "reliable sources," reported that King Hussein and Mr. Eban had held at least two secret meetings. And a United Nations source said that King Hussein and Allon had met at night in a tent near the Israeli-Jordan border.

Observers in Jerusalem said the interesting aspect of such speculations were the reported terms discussed during these meetings. They involved granting Jordan access to the Israeli Mediterranean port and giving King Hussein custody of the Islamic Holy Places in Jerusalem while the city continued under Israeli control. In addition, Israel would keep military settlements along the Jordan River while most of the West Bank would be returned to Jordanian control. The earlier report also included Jordanian use of Kalandia airport in northern Jerusalem.

These terms, observers noted, were similar to the "Allon Plan" reportedly

proposed by Mr. Allon but never officially adopted as the basis for peace negotiations by the Israeli Government. But diplomats speculated that some version of such terms would eventually form the bases for official peace talks between Israel and Jordan.

The reports on the meeting stated that King Hussein was dissatisfied with the Israeli offer and also broke off further contact for the sake of Arab solidarity. He insisted that any tentative understanding would have to be made known through the United Nation's Mideast peace envoy, Dr. Gunnar V. Jarring, a request believed designed to stop possible attacks on Jordan from other Arab groups.

UN observers believe that the reports of peace talks between Israel and Jordan were behind Amman's request for a Security Council meeting to discuss Israel's air attacks against Jordan.



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