

Palestine: A Peace Process That Makes Peace Impossible

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Global Research, December 02, 2008
2 December 2008

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Palestinian - Israeli peace-making can only deliver if Palestinians are united, but the current Annapolis "peace process" was launched first of all as a blueprint for perpetuating the inter-Palestinian divide.

Commitment or non-commitment to what the Quartet of the US, EU, UN and Russian mediators in Middle East peace - making described as the "Annapolis Process" in a statement they released after their meeting in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on November 8 has become the terms of reference to make or break the Palestinian unity of ranks, which has so far failed the Egyptian mediation efforts, the latest in a series of national, Arab and non-Arab similar reconciliation endeavors.

The Annapolis conference, which was hosted by the United States in Maryland on November 27, 2007 and attended by all members of the League of Arab States, convened with much fanfare and re-launched the Palestinian - Israeli negotiations after a seven - year interruption since the collapse of the trilateral Camp David summit with the U.S. in 2000.

In Annapolis, Arab leaders and the Palestinian presidency were lured by a promise of a Palestinian state by the end of 2008 and a wider Arab - Israeli peace process, mainly on the Syrian track thereafter, to coexist with the inter-Palestinian divide between the PLO - led West Bank and the Hamas - led Gaza Strip and to grudgingly hide their bitter resentment of the U.S. - Israeli threat of siege, which had aborted Qatari, UAE, Saudi, Egyptian, Yemeni and other Arab and non - Arab mediation efforts to unify Palestinian ranks.

The Annapolis plan to implement the first stage of the 2003 Road Map for a Palestinian - Israeli political settlement has built on two pillars, the first a Palestinian - Israeli security coordination that is solely and directly monitored by three senior U.S. generals, namely James Jones, William Fraser and Keith Dayton, and the second pillar is inter - Palestinian divide between the PLO in Ramallah and Hamas in Gaza.

However, the failure of the "Annapolis process" could be better proved by the unmet deadline of 2008 and the un-honored promise of a Palestinian state, but the two pillars nonetheless survived the failure of Annapolis so far to perpetuate and exacerbate the Palestinian rift, with the security coordination raising accusations by Hamas of PLO collaboration with Israel and the divide developing into what threatens to become a permanent separation between the West Bank and Gaza.

There remain too at the core of the Annapolis process and at the heart of the Palestinian divide the three Israeli - U.S. "good conduct" preconditions that qualify Palestinians to be

partners to peace negotiations as well as to evade military siege, economic blockade and diplomatic isolation, namely to unilaterally renounce violence without any guarantees of Israeli reciprocity, recognize the existence of the state of Israel without any Israeli reciprocal recognition of the state of Palestine, and commitment to the accords signed by the PLO with Israel regardless of Israeli reciprocal respect thereto.

Israel's lack of reciprocity has come recently under spotlight by the refusal of the U.S. State Department to publish a report by its Middle East security envoy General James Jones on Palestinian - Israeli security, which the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, quoted by AFP on November 26, described in August as "an extremely critical report of Israel's policies" in the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

It is now public knowledge that the Palestinian partner to the Annapolis process, represented by the President Mahmoud Abbas - led Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the autonomous Palestinian Authority (PA), are wholeheartedly committed thereto irrespective of any Israeli reciprocity. The emergency meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on November 26 concluded similarly committal, encouraged beforehand to let go the undelivered promises of the Annapolis conference by indications floated by both the Israeli President Shimon Peres and the U.S. President - elect Barak Obama's team of their willingness to deal with the collective Arab peace initiative.

Hamas is consequently left in the cold to fend off a Palestinian and Arab diplomatic isolation as much as to survive the Israeli ongoing economic blockade and military siege, "hopefully" to gradually be finished off or alternatively to surrender to those same three preconditions to which its Palestinian rival had subscribed to as early as the Oslo accord was signed with Israel in Washington D.C. in 1993.

More out of presuming the weakness of Hamas than out of feeling a strength in his own position, but stiffening his back with the U.S. and Israeli determination to push hard with their three pre-qualifications, President Abbas feels safe enough to persistently reiterate his commitment to Annapolis and to corner the besieged Islamic movement to either dismantle voluntarily or otherwise being swept away in a way or another, and he is on record as saying that the end of the "black coup d'etat" in Gaza in June 2007 is only a matter of time.

However the end game of the Annapolis process is still far away from being the only game in the town as it is held hostage to Hamas' fate as much as it has cornered Hamas, but meanwhile this process remains the detrimental factor that makes or breaks the unity of Palestinian ranks, as long as both Palestinian protagonists continue to risk it out in their brinkmanship policies.

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