



Published on *The American Task Force on Palestine* (<http://www.americantaskforce.org>)

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Annapolis Summit Requires Commitment

Ziad Asali

Middle East Progress (Opinion)

October 22, 2007 - 12:14pm

<http://middleeastprogress.org/?p=1476> [1]

October 19, 2007

Article Author(s): Ziad Asali

Media Outlet: Middle East Progress

Article Type: Opinion

Date: October 22, 2007

Source Link(s): <http://middleeastprogress.org/?p=1476> [1]

Condoleezza Rice met with Middle East leaders this week to prepare the Annapolis meeting that has become ever more critical to illustrating the administration's renewed focus on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Measures of success for the Annapolis summit are important, not simply for "grading" the session, but for setting up a framework to analyze progress moving forward. The summit should be measured on a threefold basis: (1) the nature of the document that results, (2) progress made on the ground both in the days leading toward it and in the aftermath, and (3) the process for follow-through on the final status issues established.

First, the Palestinian and Israeli negotiators must produce a document that lays out the general outline, framework or principles for a final peace agreement. Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas met initially to discuss this document not long after President Bush first announced the coming conference. They started with general conversations but have now progressed to sessions with negotiating teams working to create more specific contours. Olmert and Abbas likely have differing visions for the document, however. Olmert wants the most general possible terms that will not fracture his political coalition at home but will still guarantee the presence of the Arab states such as Saudi Arabia at Annapolis; Abbas seeks maximalist details to reassure a skeptical population that he and his party can deliver. The United States will need to exercise deft and sustained diplomacy to reconcile the understandably disparate positions and help produce a workable document that can serve as the foundation for the follow-on process.

The relevance of the document and the follow-on will be only as good as the ability to show results on the ground. In other words, both sides must see on-the-ground changes in the near term, and those changes must be sustained for there to be confidence in the process. Significant majorities among Palestinians and Israelis alike want the conflict to end and

support the two-state solution. But Palestinians and Israelis alike also need to see that the daily challenges they face and fears they confront, which they relate to the conflict, are being addressed through this process.

Prime Minister Fayyad has been in office for over five months. Despite promises from the Government of Israel that Palestinians' movement and access for business transport, jobs, and the like would improve; conditions have barely changed. Similarly, the Israeli government is not acting to remove outposts or slow illegal growth in settlements. Moreover, any security system that will deliver law and order for the Palestinians and security for Israel requires the efforts of both sides and the engagement of the Quartet. Real concerns exist about the Palestinian Authority's degree of control over various militias and slow reform of the security sector, which they must tackle. But, they must also be given the space to take control. Linkage between these changes on the ground and the summit is critical for leaders to gain the support necessary to successfully complete and implement a final status agreement.

The last and most critical component of success will be the follow-on process to the summit. What process will be established for the parties to continue onwards to work out the details of final status while also implementing that on which they have agreed? What roles will be determined in this process for the United States, the other members of the Quartet, and the also important so-called Arab Quartet? For example, will time-lines for performance and follow-on meetings be established; even if missed, such schedules have an important role in keeping all parties focused.

While working toward the agreement, developing the follow-on process steps that will ensure that Palestinians and Israelis' needs are being met by one another, with the help of the international actors as and where necessary, will be as important as the initial framework document. This follow-on must include the commitment of both sides to meeting of identifiable benchmarks on both day-to-day and final status issues whose progress will be monitored by the international community.

The Annapolis meeting must not fail. A measure of success on all three variables is needed. For that to happen we need the commitment of all actors involved, including but not limited to the Israelis and Palestinians attending, to make it so. And the United States, as host, must be committed, creative, and relentless in pushing all involved to pursue our shared common interests and objectives: working toward a two-state solution that will increase regional security and stability, and establishing a straightforward path toward reaching that end

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