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To Talk Peace

The Jordan Times (Editorial)

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Iran and Hamas most vociferously attacked the Annapolis peace conference, describing it as a futile effort to settle the Palestinian question, one that follows in the footsteps of previous similar moves, including the Madrid peace conference, which failed to deliver.

Before a clear idea about the outcome of the peace conference that was kicked off on a positive note yesterday crystallises, thus apportioning blame or praise, a few remarks about the two above-mentioned entities would be in order.

If Hamas were to be invited to any peace talks, the invitation should come from the Palestinian government of Mahmoud Abbas, and not from any host country.

Despite the divisions between Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority, they remain two sides of the same coin; they each represent big segments of the Palestinian people, even though they severed relations a few months ago.

Hamas has to be part of any agreement deciding the fate of the Palestinians. For having obtained legitimacy through elections, for withholding hostilities, showing that it is willing to respect its part of the bargain, and for being the representative of part of its people.

As for Iran, with Syrian participation assured, a window of opportunity was opened for Tehran to be included in the Annapolis talks as well.

The country holds sway over some in the region, and including it in talks deciding the destiny of the area would only be wise.

But all is not lost. Given the premise on the basis of which the Annapolis meeting was convened, the intention was never to make it a negotiating venue, but rather a platform on the basis of which to launch future peace talks.

The sting from not being invited to participate in this meeting could still be taken off Hamas and Iran by engaging the two parties in future international efforts to that end.

To be sure, it was not only Iran and Hamas that questioned the utility of the peace conference. Israeli extremists, including the former Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had also cast doubts about the usefulness of holding such a conference, deciding that it was a futile attempt. Surely Hamas and Iran do not wish to be seen on the same side of the barricade as Israeli radicals.

The door must, therefore, be kept open for their future involvement in international efforts to settle the Palestinian question and decide the course the region follows.

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