

FACTSHEET: THE ANNAPOLIS NEGOTIATIONS PROCESS



What is “Annapolis”?

“Annapolis” was the kick-off of a new set of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. On November 27, 2007, in Annapolis, Maryland, US President George W. Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas presented a well publicized joint statement committing to recommence negotiations, with a view to having some final agreement by the end of 2008. The parties promised to resolve “all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception.”¹ Olmert and Abbas also agreed to implement their respective obligations to the 2003 “Road Map Peace Plan,” adding that the envisioned future treaty will be “subject to the implementation of the Road Map.”² The US is slated to be the judge of adherence to the Road Map. Real negotiations started on December 12, 2007.

What is the political and financial support for Annapolis?

The Annapolis kick-off was part of a highly orchestrated process to precipitate some negotiated result between Israel and the Palestinians. Some of the elements of this promotional campaign included:

- Representation by Arab states. There was great pressure on other Arab states to be visibly present at the Annapolis ceremony, and ultimately 16 of them showed. This strong visible Arab support was the result of many factors that go far beyond the scope of this factsheet.
- Release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Early in December, 2007, Israel released 429 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails in a “good will” gesture meant to bolster support of Abbas and the Annapolis process.
- Paris Conference to solicit aid for Palestinians. The PA under Abbas issued a Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) which provided a framework to garner international promises of aid to the PA through 2010. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also provided supporting analyses for this plan, and projections of how the plan could – under various scenarios – improve the living conditions and economy of the Palestinians.
- Paris Conference to solicit aid for the Palestinians. On December 17th, 2007, a “Pledging Conference” in Paris resulted in international promises of almost \$7.5 billion in aid to the PA over three years (including about \$300 million from Canada.)

How successful have early negotiations been?

Early negotiations, which began as scheduled on December 12, 2007, got off to an inauspicious start. On December 12th itself, and again later in December, Israel announced new plans to expand two of its Jewish-only colonies – in strict violation of the provisions of the Road Map Peace Plan. Sessions slated for negotiations were subsequently eclipsed by heated arguments on how to proceed given Israel’s pugnacious announcements. The US administration has expressed great concern over these Israeli plans, as have the Quartet³, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon⁴, among others.

What are some of the obstacles to just outcomes through Annapolis?

While most would welcome a positive outcome from the negotiations process begun through Annapolis, there are a number of reasons to question whether the negotiated outcomes may promote a just resolution to the standoff between Israel and the Palestinians. They include:

- Weak credibility of both Abbas and Olmert. Olmert leads a shaky coalition government in Israel, and will have difficulty making substantive offers to the Palestinians without triggering the fall of his government. Abbas, for his part, negotiates on behalf of the Palestinians as “Chairman of the PLO,” (a right established under Oslo) and not as the *elected* leader of the Palestinian Authority. Hamas, which won the last election and which took control of Gaza in a forcible coup in June

2007 opposes the negotiations. Finally, the US Administration sponsoring the talks is due to leave office in January, 2009, thus forcing “results” from Annapolis by the end of 2008.

- Hamas and Gaza are largely outside the Annapolis process. With Hamas excluded from the Annapolis process, it is difficult to see how Gaza’s population will benefit and/or consequently support the process. In addition, Hamas’ opposition to the negotiations will likely fuel an ongoing deterrent to progress as Israel and Hamas continue to strike violently at one another.
- The Annapolis Process will involve only the Israelis and Palestinians. Success in previous negotiations is largely attributed to the direct involvement of US presidents, e.g. Carter in the Camp David Accords of 1978, and Clinton in the Camp David Accords of 2000. It is hard to see how pro-justice concessions can be wrested from the Israelis without an influential third party.
- Israel threatens to expand colonies as talks start. While there may be some political reasons behind the announcements, it is difficult to reconcile the Israeli plans for colony expansion (discussed above) with the spirit of good-faith negotiations which is supposed to characterize the Annapolis process.
- Olmert’s historic concerns with the Jewishness of Israel. Long before he became Israeli Prime Minister, Olmert proposed that Israel disengage from the Palestinians to ensure a *Jewish* character for Israel – a position reinforced by his speech at Annapolis. Israel’s negotiating position may likely be driven by this concern, rather than a desire to address “core issues.”
- Israel’s 14 reservations to the Road Map Peace Plan are unaddressed. While the Annapolis Process takes the Road Map Peace Plan as a starting point, it ignores the fact that Israel gutted the Plan with 14 “reservations” in 2003 (while the Palestinians accepted the plan “as is.”) Israel’s 14 reservations undermine the Plan’s most important protections and promises to the Palestinians.
- The fact that the US is the sole arbiter of the Annapolis Process. While Abbas claimed in an interview that the US has been “sympathetic toward the Palestinian issue,”⁵ US foreign policy has unwaveringly favoured Israel in the last 60 years. As Annapolis supersedes the Road Map Peace Plan, so the US clearly brushes aside the “Quartet” in future negotiations.

What promise may there be for just solutions through Annapolis?

A resumption of negotiations after seven violent years must be viewed positively. As Jimmy Carter and others have pointed out, the status quo and ongoing Israeli practices “on the ground” are unacceptable. Also promising is the fact that Olmert and Abbas have a certain rapport (absent in the past between, e.g. Arafat and Barak in 2000), borne through ongoing discussions since June, 2007. Finally, through the Paris conference of December 17th, the World Bank and IMF have given the international community a clear message that recovery in Palestine depends on a change in Israeli occupation practices in Palestine.

How do Palestinians and Israelis feel about the Annapolis Process?

According to a survey of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in mid-November, only 35.3 percent of Palestinians expect the Annapolis process to be a success.⁶ Another survey in mid-December indicated that 65 percent of these Palestinians believe that the chances for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the next five years are slim or non-existent.⁷ Among Israelis, at the end of December, 89 percent think the chances of a deal between Israel and the Palestinians by the end of 2008 are low.⁸

¹ *Joint Understanding read by President Bush at Annapolis Conference*, US State Department, Nov. 27, 2007, retrieved Dec. 15 from <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rt/c2829.htm>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Statement by Middle East Quartet*, UN Office of the Secretary General, Department of Public Information, Dec. 18, 2007

⁴ *“Ban Ki-moon to discuss planned Israeli settlements with Quartet partners,”* UN Office of the Secretary General, Department of Public Information, Dec. 6, 2007

⁵ *“Report: Abbas reiterates refusal to recognize Israel as ‘Jewish State’,”* Associated Press, Dec. 2, 2007, retrieved Dec. 15 from <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/929978.html>

⁶ *“Annapolis Summit Set for Failure, Say Palestinians,”* Angus Reid Global Monitor : Polls & Research, Nov. 15, 2007

⁷ *“A Total Lack of Confidence in the Annapolis Process Keeps Hamas’s Popularity Stable despite Worsening Conditions in the Gaza,”* Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Dec. 17, 2007

⁸ *“Israelis hopeless on deal with Palestinians,”* Angus Reid Global Monitor : Polls & Research, Dec. 30, 2007