

## **End Annapolis – Try a new approach**

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While on her twentieth flight to the Middle East in early November, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters that Israel and the Palestinians had never before come so close to resolving the conflict. Presumably, the parties to the conflict do not share this assessment. In the yearlong negotiations following the Annapolis summit on 27 November 2007 there has been no progress towards an agreement which would put the establishment of a Palestinian state within reach. To be sure, both the Palestinian President Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister declared their commitment to dividing the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. However, in negotiating thorny issues, which will have to be resolved in a peace treaty – establishing a border, distribution of water resources, the evacuation of settlements, the status of Jerusalem, the rights of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons – no progress deserving of this label has been made. Let's hope that the next U.S. government will face this reality and change course.

The failure of Annapolis should not come as a surprise. The built-in mistakes of the previous negotiation formats – Oslo (1993) and the Road Map (2003) – ought to have been warning enough. In order to make headway towards a settlement, both sides would have had to believe in the willingness of the adversary to make peace. Only then would they have been able to make the often cited “painful compromises”. However, neither negotiation framework provided for a mechanism to foil attempts of sabotage nor did they allow for mediation or arbitration. In Annapolis, these deficits recurred when the Israeli approach prevailed in implementing a future peace treaty according to the specifications of the Road Map. To make matters worse, one half of the Palestinians, whom Hamas represents, were excluded from the political process. In order to pave the way for a Palestinian state, the PA was obligated to bring the Palestinian paramilitary militias under its control so as to prevent attacks on Israel. On the other side, Israel would have had to freeze all settlement activity in the West Bank, dismantle settlement outposts and begin removing over 600 road blocks, which constrain life beyond all bearing and paralyze the economy. One year after Annapolis neither side has fulfilled these obligations, which were to facilitate the process of creating an independent Palestinian state.

Sure enough, the Israeli army tore down a few road blocks. Nonetheless, new ones emerged in other places, and the building of settlements continued and was even accelerated in and around Jerusalem. Given the continued land robbery, President Abbas could hardly dare to make concessions in the most sensitive issues, above all East-Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian state or the claim to the refugees' right of return, without running the risk of being perceived as a puppet of Israel and its almighty patron. On the other side, the Ramallah-based PA did indeed cooperate with Israel in hunting down activist and supporters of the opposing Hamas and closed down its charitable institutions. Yet the PA is far from establishing its monopoly of force in the West Bank.

However, the USA showed neither Israel nor the PA the red card. Since 9/11 a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite its high symbolic value which holds such destructive mobilization potential, seems to be of secondary importance. In its global war against terror, the U.S. government evidently prioritizes defeating the Islamist faction of the Palestinian liberation movements. Hamas, for that matter, ruling in the Gaza Strip, is treated by Israel as the de facto government of a quasi-enemy state and is coming to terms with the misery of the

blockade. A year ago, the leaders who gathered in Annapolis may still have believed in the feasibility of the two-state solution. Do they expect in earnest that three states – Israel, East-Palestine (Fatahland) and West-Palestine (Hamastan) will achieve a sustainable solution to the struggle over the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea? Washington's new champion of change should know better. The Europeans should see that he does by intensifying their contacts with the liberal establishment and bringing their own ideas into the Middle East Quartet, which has of late been eclipsed by Washington. The EU has the chance to make an impact on Obama's Mideast policy-in-progress only if it rises to the challenge and dares a new beginning, e.g. putting on the table a blueprint for a final settlement, which provides for a contiguous and viable Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and committing to oversee its implementation on the ground. There is not much time left for the EU. It should make use of it now.