

Annapolis talks: A cover for fomenting Palestinian civil war and preparing assault on Iran

26 November 2007

The Annapolis summit in Maryland on the Israel Palestine conflict on November 27 has nothing to do with seeking a peace settlement through the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Not even a preliminary statement of goals and/or principles could be agreed between the two parties for this one-day affair. Israel has refused to discuss any of the key issues that must be resolved for any settlement: the borders of any putative state, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the status of East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

Israel goes to the talks confident that it is hosted by its key ally. An article in the *Washington Post* last week quoted senior White House staffers admitting that the US has no intention of pressurising Israel into making concessions it does not wish to make. “The president remains skeptical as to the Palestinians’ ability to make the necessary concession for achieving peace,” said one source. “The Israelis trust Bush...if they’re going to take any chances, they’d rather do it with him, not his successor,” said the officials.

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, the talks are a crude attempt to stitch up a deal between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President and Fatah leader, Mahmoud Abbas so that he can posture as having moved the “peace process” forward and continue to suppress all resistance to the Israeli occupation.

For Washington, the talks have a broader political purpose. By enabling President George Bush to be seen attempting some kind of resolution of the conflict, they will aid the Arab regimes in justifying their acquiescence in Washington’s occupation of Iraq and its planned assault on Iran.

On Friday, the Arab League agreed to go along with the charade, including Saudi Arabia which does not recognise Israel and is a financial backer of Hamas in Gaza. Syria will attend after the US indicated that the future of the Golan Heights would be on the agenda. The US is also reported to have given its tacit approval to separate talks between Syria

and Israel on the Golan Heights immediately following Annapolis.

This is by no means the main reason for the participation of Damascus. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem went so far as to state that the return of the Golan Heights was *not* a precondition to peace talks. Attendance at Annapolis is a desperate effort by the regime of Bashir Assad to reach an accommodation with Washington and prevent the US from targeting it alongside Iran.

Lebanon will also attend, despite the strenuous opposition of Hezbollah.

Israeli Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer of the Labour Party noted the political significance of the Arab regime’s decision to participate, telling Army Radio, “The meeting is taking place at a time when radicals and moderates in the Arab-Muslim world are on a collision course. There is no doubt that this meeting is also aimed at contributing to reinforcing the moderate Arab camp.”

In the Occupied Territories, Annapolis has been preceded by frantic efforts by Abbas to get a minimal state that Olmert would agree to. To this end, he dropped his previous demands for a freeze on the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and a definite time when a Palestinian state would come into being.

Secondly, he has stepped up efforts to depose the Islamist group Hamas and retake control of the Gaza strip, which is the precondition placed on him by both Washington and Israel for recognising Fatah as a “negotiating partner.”

Hamas came to power in January 2006, as a result of widespread disaffection with Fatah because of its readiness to agree a rotten deal with Bush and its endemic corruption. The Western powers and Israel responded by imposing an economic blockade, closing Gaza off to the outside world. When the possibility of a National Unity government of Fatah and Hamas emerged in the summer of 2006, Israel mounted a savage war on Gaza.

After fomenting a civil war between the rival factions in Gaza that ended with Fatah’s military defeat, Israel, the US

and the European powers encouraged Abbas to dissolve the Hamas government and form a new government, splitting Palestine into two. Bush gave US\$190 million to support Abbas's regime and with Israel has provided arms and training for Abbas to root out Hamas.

Olmert has publicly insisted that any future deal depends upon the Palestinian Authority retaking control of Gaza. "There will be no implementation of the treaty before the Road Map commitments are all implemented," he told journalists after talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh.

"The commitments also apply to the Gaza Strip, [for the Palestinians] Gaza must be part of the Palestinian state and then naturally, the Palestinians must fight terrorism, and that includes the Gaza Strip," he continued. Last week, the Israeli Defence Ministry's plan to begin reducing the flow of electricity to the Gaza Strip as of December 2 was approved by Attorney-General Menahem Mazuz.

Abbas has responded to the demands placed on him by mobilising his forces in a direct conflict with Hamas. When 100,000 Fatah supporters gathered at a November 12 rally in Gaza to mark the third anniversary of the death of Yasser Arafat, Hamas security forces opened fire, killing 7 demonstrators and injuring more than 90. More than 400 Fatah supporters were arrested and dozens held for questioning.

Two days later, Abbas publicly called for the overthrow of the Hamas government in Gaza. "We have to bring down this gang that forcibly took over the Gaza Strip and is abusing the sufferings and pains of our people," he said on television.

Hamas does not represent a progressive alternative to Fatah and articulates the interests of sections of the Arab bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Beholden to Saudi Arabia as well as Iran and Hezbollah in Syria for its finances and armaments, it was clearly shaken by their decision to endorse Annapolis. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri called the announcement "a great shock for Palestinians because it opened the door for direct normalisation with the occupation amid continued escalation and aggression."

"We were expecting an Arab consensus to break the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and to save the lives of many Palestinians who are stranded on the borders," he said. "We didn't expect to see agreement among the Arabs on meeting with Israel."

Deposed Palestinian President Ismael Haniyeh said that "Israel is seeking normalisation, especially with key countries like Saudi Arabia. We must avoid giving legitimacy to free normalisation with the Israeli occupation."

Such expressions of surprise ignore the bitter experience of decades during which the Arab regimes, most infamously

Egypt, Jordan and Syria, have carried out monstrous betrayals of the Palestinians that have left them in their present dire straits. Now the Arab states are participating in a yet greater crime—preparations for war against Iran

Hamas has been left with little option other than to rally opposition to Abbas internally, uniting with Islamic Jihad and smaller militant groups in convening an "Anti-Annapolis" conference in the Gaza Strip.

Khaled Abu Hilal, of the breakaway Fatah al-Yasser, will be in attendance, and it is supported by various Palestinian political and civic groups. Abu Mujahed, spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees in Gaza, warned that any concessions made by Abbas would trigger a third intifada that would be "fiercer than the previous ones."

Abbas also faces a challenge on the right, from Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad, who has his own small party called Third Way and is said to be working with PA negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo to establish a new party to contest the next Palestinian elections. The infighting has left the Palestinian negotiating team divided into two camps.

Fayyad epitomises the wealthy social layer that is now collaborating with Washington even more clearly than Abbas. He has no connection whatsoever with Fatah's earlier struggle against Israel.

Described by *Haaretz* as "Everyone's favorite Palestinian" and "the ideal partner," he was seated next to Ariel Sharon at a wedding ceremony and has lectured "Israel's economic and political elite" about his own political and economic philosophy.

He received a doctorate in economics at the University of Texas in 1987, then worked at the World Bank and the Federal Reserve in Washington. When the PA was established, he served as a representative of the International Monetary Fund and then the West Bank's manager of the Arab Bank, the largest bank in the Middle East. He was adopted as a favourite by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who ensured that he became PA finance minister. Following the split between Gaza and the West Bank, he was unconstitutionally made prime minister, as well as retaining his position as finance minister.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact