



The Progress of the Annapolis Peace Process

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My studies, family and career have taken me several times around the world. After more than 30 years in the Foreign Service, I'm retiring at the end of this assignment in a few weeks. Although I'm leaving the United States government, I will continue in public service as the Deputy Executive Director of the International Energy Agency.

But you want me to talk about the situation in Israel. Well, life and work in Israel is never boring and my last month on the job has been no exception. The Egyptian-mediated cease fire in Gaza is tenuously continuing and prisoner exchange deals involving both Hezbollah and Hamas are in the works. Secretary Rice recently undertook her sixth trip to the region this year to encourage progress in the process launched at Annapolis last fall. In fact, it was her 21st visit to Israel during my tenure—talk about an embarrassment of riches, to get your boss to visit you 21 times in less than three years. Israeli Prime Minister Olmert remains embroiled in a police investigation of alleged corruption while fending off political challenges and dispatching envoys to Istanbul for proximity talks with Syrian counterparts. On a more negative note, Iran continues to loom large in Israeli politics and media as a most serious threat to Israel's existence.

Although the majority of my talk will focus on the Annapolis process and the ongoing Israeli and Palestinian talks regarding the road map implementation and the creation of a Palestinian state, I'd like to begin by taking a few minutes to address the current Israeli situation vis-à-vis Syria and Iran. As many of you no doubt read in the media, Israel and Syria are continuing to conduct indirect peace talks under the auspices of Turkey with the intentions to proceed in good faith and with an open mind towards achieving a peace agreement. We have confidence in Turkish mediation and, great confidence, in Israel. Syria, however, is a different story. We have many issues with Syria these days, including the Syrian government's close cooperation with Iran in supporting terrorists groups, facilitating the passage of foreign fighters into Iraq and destabilizing Lebanon as well as its violation of human rights within Syria. It's hard to see how a peace agreement between Israel and Syria can succeed without dealing with such issues. On the other hand, settling them would be a true contribution to peace throughout the Middle East and the United States does not oppose these talks.

The Iranian threat has also become a hot topic in both Israel and the United States. Just last week I'm sure you all saw how Iran boasted somewhat disingenuously that it had successfully test fired several types of ballistic missiles simultaneously. We see this as part of their continued efforts to develop WMD capable delivery systems of increasingly greater ranges. This effort poses a significant threat to international peace and security. It was explicitly identified as such by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1737. This resolution prohibits states from providing assistance to Iran in the development of nuclear delivery systems which include, of course, ballistic missiles.

Secretary Rice said last week The Iranian missile threat is not “imaginary”. Iran’s ballistic missile programs are among the most active in the Middle East, and probably the world, and their continued development is a major reason the United States in cooperation with its allies and partners is developing a ballistic missile defense system for Europe.

Notwithstanding Iran’s continued violation of their Security Council obligations the U.S. remains committed to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. The international community, including Israel, is united in pursuing this dual track strategy to offer Iran a path to negotiations while simultaneously pressuring it to take that path using multilateral sanctions. Having said this, both President Bush and Prime Minister Olmert have been careful not to allow the use of force in current efforts to persuade Iran to abide by U.N. Security Council resolutions and cease its pursuit for dangerous nuclear technology fails. I was told at dinner that there was a breaking news announcement just this evening that the United States would be sending some envoys to Iran. I don’t have any details on that but perhaps it shows that Iran has begun to realize that it should take the path towards negotiations and I certainly hope so.

As for efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, significant progress has been made during my time as ambassador to Israel. I can’t claim credit for all of that progress by any means, but I’ve been fortunate enough to be there while it happened. It’s important to remember that getting direct talks restarted at all was a signaled achievement. The Annapolis Conference was preceded by seven bloody years of terrorism and violence following the failures of Camp David and Taba. In constructing the Annapolis process, the administration wanted not only to find a way to resume negotiations, but also to restore trust and confidence between the parties while learning from previous failures. The most critical lesson learned has been that the political negotiations on a final agreement cannot take place in a vacuum. This is why the Annapolis process was designed to encompass multiple reinforcing tracks in addition to the political talks. Those efforts include pushing for and verifying roadmap compliance, improving conditions on the ground, and promoting Palestinian institutional and economic development involving the international community, especially Arab states, in the process.

Perhaps of most immediate importance is the effort to improve the quality of life for the average person. People need to believe that their lives and their children’s future will be better if they are to support the potentially painful political compromises necessary for an agreement. If we cannot give them this hope soon there is a risk that the post-Oslo generation support for peace will be lost and hope for successful negotiations will be dashed for years to come. This is one reason why the Bush administration and the Annapolis Conference set the goal of accomplishing and reaching an agreement on the formation of a Palestinian state by the end of this year. Of course, Secretary Rice has made it a priority during each of her visits to sit down with Defense Minister Barak from Israel, Prime Minister Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority—sometimes alone, sometimes together—to discuss improving conditions on the ground and aiding the Palestinian Authority in its effort to build functioning public institutions, particularly those related to strengthening the rule of law. The secretary has also made it clear that she expects both sides to live up to the roadmap commitments.

The recent deployment of Palestinian security forces to the West Bank cities of Nablus and Jenin after undergoing U.S.-funded training in Jordan is a prime example of this effort. Led by U.S. Army Lt. General Keith Dayton this important capacity building project is giving the Palestinians a greater role in providing for their own security. It is also part of a comprehensive international effort to reestablish the law and order structure, including jails and courts, in order to fight crime as well as to help the Palestinian Authority meet its roadmap obligation in dismantling the

terrorist's infrastructure. In fact, the Palestinian Authority's police forces are already improving and becoming more committed to providing security primarily, of course, for their own people. As the security capacity solidifies, we believe it will also hamper the terrorist's ability to operate, which will safely allow for improvements to West Bank movement and access, and facilitate the implementation of quick and effective economic projects that will give the local Palestinian economy a much needed shot in the arm. I very much believe in job creation as a necessary condition for peace.

In Jenin, where one of the first groups of newly trained Palestinian police forces was deployed, the U.S. agency for international development has already begun work on media projects worth about \$3 million. It includes renovating schools, the construction of the community center and upgrading several olive presses to meet international standards and allow exports of Palestinian olive oil to world markets. Again, job creation is the goal.

These sorts of projects will pave the way for larger longer-term structural projects of the kind that Quartet Representative Tony Blair, former U.K. prime minister, has been actively promoting. Success stories in Jenin or Nablus, which preceded Jenin, could one day serve as a template for other parts of the West Bank creating real changes on the ground and promoting increased optimism for a better future among Palestinians.

A few visits back, Secretary Rice and Defense Minister Barak and Prime Minister Fayyad agreed on the need to review, and where possible remove, West Bank road blocks consistent with Israeli security needs. They also discussed ways to improve the check points, increasing capacity, decreasing wait times and humanizing the process. At the time the secretary clearly stated that she is not looking at numbers, but rather at the effect of the removal, or lack of removal, of the road block on the quality of life in the West Bank. As part of his monitoring the roadmap implementation U.S. Air Force Lt. General Will Frasier is now evaluating West Bank movement and access and its corresponding economic impact. Of course, from the Israeli perspective the road blocks in the West Bank are necessary security features and Lt. General Frasier is very sensitive to that. Unfortunately, more needs to be accomplished on this issue. During her last two visits, Secretary Rice has met in a trilateral form with Barak and Fayyad in an effort to highlight the importance of increased access and movement for the Palestinians, while at the same time insuring Israel's security needs.

It's important to remember when discussing the roadmap that it did not even exist at the time of Camp David, and that prior to Annapolis its implementation was not evaluated in any systematic way. However, the Annapolis process was premised on the understanding that before any agreement can be implemented both sides must fulfill their roadmap obligations. So as negotiations proceeded and intensify, which they are doing behind the scenes, there's a growing sense of the urgency to meet these commitments. Looking at it another way, as each side makes progress on meeting its roadmap obligations it will instill confidence in its partner that it is committed to the negotiations.

Lt. General Frasier has been very meticulous and fair in his assessments and recommendations for improvement. He's made it clear that this is not an exercise to place blame—he's called himself a coach rather than a referee—the process is to help the two sides devise strategies to meet obligations which they both freely accepted.

On the Palestinian side the issue of Israeli settlements is very troublesome. The secretary made it clear during her visit last month that settlement activity needs to stop. Continued announcements

regarding Israeli construction in disputed areas undermine Palestinian and international confidence in the negotiations. On the Israeli side, terrorism remains the principal concern. Israelis insist that the Palestinian Authority must do more, much more, to fight terrorism. After the past seven years nobody questions Israel's right to do so. As the political negotiations progress, it may be hoped that some of these issues will become less contentious. For example, once borders are known, the issues of Israeli construction areas that will be part of Israel should fade.

Another major difference between the Annapolis process and previous efforts is the level of international support, especially from Arab states. We've had a number of successful international conferences since Annapolis. A primary example is the Paris Donors Conference last December which brought in \$7.7 billion in pledges for Palestinian economic and social development. May's Bethlehem Conference on private investment registered another \$1.4 billion in pledges and this from private sector participants at the conference.

I've not really touched upon long term security concerns but I want to assure all of you present that they are also a significant part of current planning. Retired Marine Corps General Jim Jones, actually he's more than a general, he's the commandant of the Marine Corps, was named by the president to develop ideas for a future regional security framework. In addition to examining how a future Palestinian state might relate to Israel and Israel security, General Jones is now studying the issues that impact broader security relations within the region.

As for the political talks it's important that Israelis and Palestinians discuss all of the issues comprehensively and in depth and they are doing so. We haven't heard a lot about their work because this can only be done productively outside of the public limelight. Both sides must be free to negotiate without providing a daily score card to their constituents. Depending on one's point of view some days will be good and others will be bad but that's the nature of negotiations. It's for good reasons that the parties decided that nothing is agreed until everything's agreed. When the secretary was asked, following her latest trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Livni and Ahmed Qurei of the Palestinian Authority, the two primary negotiators, if progress has been made she simply said "yes." In my view, providing more details than that in the midst of protracted complicated negotiations would be pointless and potentially damaging. By the way, these negotiations are now proceeding on three distinct levels with the talks being conducted by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to find a broad political framework for the Livni-Qurei negotiations, which are in turn supported by almost daily meetings of a number of bilateral expert working groups. So, there's quite a cottage industry of negotiations and we believe progress is being registered, although we're not seeing a lot in the press.

At this point, I'd like to recall how much convergence has taken place in the two parties' positions. The idea of two states living side by side in peace and security is now recognized and supported by substantial majorities—this according to opinion polls—on both sides. Most Israelis today believe that the only sure way to safeguard the Jewish and democratic nature of their state is through the creation of a Palestinian state. Palestinians now realize that the only way to gain the international support necessary to achieve their national desire for a Palestinian homeland, and to insure a better future for their children, is through the creation of a state that is at peace with its neighbor, Israel.

The challenge ahead for both sides during the remainder of 2008 will be to maintain the political will and courage necessary to move forward despite their respective internal political storms. Of course, this is an issue that's bigger than the political fortunes of any individual leader. I'm



convinced that if presented with a well-balanced plan for creating a peaceful Palestinian state while protecting Israeli security both the Israeli and Palestinian people will support it overwhelmingly. The president, Secretary Rice, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have all expressed their strong desire to achieve agreement by the end of the year. I'm still optimistic and we have the ability to do so.

Thank you. That's my update and I look forward to your questions.

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