

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.washingtontimes.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Article published Dec 9, 2007

Piecemeal peace talks

December 9, 2007

By Mike Pence - The Annapolis Conference was not the opening scene in a movie that ends with the creation of a Palestinian state. Instead, it was the early stages of pre-production to see if such a movie is even feasible or desirable.

Central casting was called and the major players showed up at the Naval Academy, but the script for how this movie even begins has yet to be written.

Let me be clear: After decades of violence against Israel and military conflicts in the region, I welcome a return of formal peace talks. I commend President Bush, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas for agreeing to begin negotiations.

Hamas-sponsored terrorism, enabled by Iran, Syria and others is still pervasive in the Palestinian territories and Israel. Rockets fired from Palestinian territories still hit Israeli targets regularly.

Weapons are still smuggled through Egypt to the Palestinian territories, many produced by Iran. Democratic institutions are nowhere close to taking hold in Palestinian civil society. And, anti-Israel rhetoric and writings still pervade Palestinian life, inciting violence against Jewish people, the State of Israel and the United States.

Therefore, the United States must proceed with caution.

While all Americans hope for a lasting peace in the region, any treaty must begin with the recognition of a secure and stable Jewish State of Israel.

Likewise, creation of a Palestinian state is not inevitable. There is no Palestine now and there should not be in the near future, since the Palestinian Authority has not met many of its obligations under the Roadmap to Peace.

In fact, there should be no Palestine until the secretary of state can certify to Congress that the Palestinian Authority, at a minimum:

- Is advancing democratic ideals by actively promoting human rights and individual freedoms.
- Consistently and strongly condemns terrorism — and swiftly and decisively brings justice to those who plan, promote, fund or carry out acts of terror.

- Has taken, and plans to continue to take, tangible steps to disavow terrorism, dismantle terrorist infrastructures, confiscate unauthorized weapons, consolidate and control the Palestinian security organizations.
- Ends the incitement to violence and hatred in Palestinian publications, schools and other public institutions, while discouraging such incitement in mosques, Palestinian media and private institutions.
- Is working to end government corruption through increased efficiency and transparency in all government agencies and initiatives.
- Has stopped participating in any economic, educational, cultural or other boycott of Israel, its citizens, its products or its services.
- Does not manipulate or inappropriately influence in any way the outcome of presidential or legislative elections in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority.
- Has worked and plans to continue to work actively with the government of Israel to implement the steps and adhere to the principles set out in the Roadmap to Peace (or any successor to such) to bring security, peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians.
- Recognizes Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and conducts diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in the same manner and to the same extent as it conducts diplomatic relations with any other country.

These issues, combined with key matters regarding refugees, Jerusalem and state borders, were not resolved at, and will not be resolved soon after, the Annapolis meeting. These are complex, long-term issues, of which no one should expect quick resolution.

The Annapolis meeting should not be used as an impetus for pressuring Israel to make concessions beyond those it has already made. The Annapolis meeting was an important step in the peace process, but it should by no means be regarded as a significant leap toward an independent Palestinian state.

Significant progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process cannot be made at bayside press briefings in American cities. The real progress has to come on the ground in Israel, in the Palestinian territories, and in the hearts and minds of Israelis and Palestinians.

Real progress will not come from additional acts that exchange the tangible security of Israel for intangible promises of future Palestinian action. Only genuine, thorough and recurring antiterror, pro-democratic actions should yield peace and eventual Palestinian statehood.

Mike Pence of Indiana is the ranking Republican member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Middle East Subcommittee.