

After Annapolis: The Real Fight Has Begun

For months before the Nov. 27 Middle East peace conference in Annapolis, Md., Lyndon LaRouche had been promoting the idea that Syrian participation, opening the prospect of a near-term Israeli-Syrian peace agreement, would cause a significant shift in the political dynamic in the region, and should be strongly promoted. He cautioned against any grandiose expectations of a “big breakthrough” on any of the peace tracks at Annapolis, focusing instead on a needed tilt in direction, to bring some sense of optimism to a region otherwise beset by crisis. Build momentum by a series of small achievements, LaRouche urged. When LaRouche first started pushing for the Syrian participation, the prospects of Damascus being invited to the table were nil—despite some public statements by Israeli President Shimon Peres, suggesting that Syria and Israel could reach a meeting of the minds.

Early reports of the results of the Annapolis meeting offer some cause for cautious optimism, at the same time that the danger of war remains high. First of all, the Syrian government did participate in the meeting, and, according to a wide range of American, Arab, and Israeli sources, the Israeli government played a significant role, along with Arab League states, in encouraging Damascus to attend. Within the Israeli establishment, there is a growing support for a peace treaty with Syria, involving the return of Golan to Syria, a fair division of the waters beneath the Golan Heights, and other remaining issues.

As one senior U.S. intelligence source told *EIR*, a Syria-Israel peace deal is “99% worked out,” and if a treaty is signed in the near future, “40% of the problems in the region will have been solved.” Already, sources from the region are reporting that a consensus has been reached, as the result of coordinated Syrian, Egyptian, and Saudi diplomatic efforts, to break the stalemate over the selection of a new Lebanese President. If the agreement is finalized over the next days, this will significantly reduce the danger of a new Lebanese civil war—another break from the downward spiral towards permanent regional chaos.

Several senior Washington policy-makers emphasized, in talks with *EIR* following the summit, that

one of the most important accomplishments at Annapolis was that Vice President Dick Cheney, and other war-party fanatics inside the Bush Administration, were robbed of an opportunity to press for an immediate military attack on Iran. According to these former officials, Cheney had been banking on a breakdown of the Annapolis talks, and a discrediting of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who staked her personal reputation on some modicum of success in bringing together a wide array of regional and international players, to jump-start the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, after a seven-year shutdown. Now, as one source put it, “Annapolis did not fail, and Cheney is fuming.” Furthermore, Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister, in a widely publicized interview on the eve of the Annapolis talks, made it clear that the kingdom has no interest in another regional war, even against Iran.

According to LaRouche, another factor that cannot be underestimated, is that the Bush family, and most emphatically, former President George H.W. Bush and former First Lady Barbara Bush, are desperate to salvage some shred of family legacy, after seven disastrous years of the Bush-Cheney Presidency. Progress on a Middle East peace deal, involving a Syria-Israel agreement, and a long-overdue just solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, represents the last best hope that the Bush family name can be saved. And that is no small matter if your last name is Bush.

Do not be surprised to learn that Rice, who has her own “legacy issues,” received significant backing from leading “Bush 41” allies, such as former National Security Advisor Gen. Brent Scowcroft and former Secretary of State James Baker III. And do not be surprised to see the Russian government of President Vladimir Putin step forward, to play a key role in furthering the peace effort. At Annapolis, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced that Russia has been speaking with the Bush Administration about hosting a follow-up conference to Annapolis in Moscow, early in 2008. The focus: a Syria-Israel peace deal.

A small, but potentially important step has been taken, but now, the real fight has begun.