

The importance of a failed summit

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Do not belittle the Annapolis summit. Despite all the prophecies of failure, justified as they are, this summit could still make an important contribution to the history of Israeli-Arab negotiations: For the first time, it will become crystal-clear who aspires toward peace and, more important, who flees from it as if from fire.

Israel is going to Annapolis as if by force. The prime minister's hands are tied. If he were to dare to raise the core issues, which are the only thing to be discussed there, then his political fate would be sealed. Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu have already announced that in such an event, they will bring down his government. One can assume that Ehud Olmert, the survivor, is aware of this danger. Despite the lofty agreements that he will achieve - or not, it will seem as if his biweekly talks with Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas never took place. Eli Yishai won't permit it, Avigdor Lieberman is making threats and even Ehud Barak is making sour faces. An Israel that refuses to discuss the core issues is an Israel that does not want peace. There's no other way to put it.

All this is made even more serious by the context in which the summit is being held: Israel never had as few excuses for evading progress toward peace, the ambient climate was never more conducive to progress. The terror card cannot be played again, because the terror has abated. Qassams landing on Sderot and a childish assassination attempt are not a reason to evade the peace process. This low level of terror will, unfortunately, continue to accompany Israeli-Palestinian relations for years to come. We must learn to live with it, and above all recognize that it will not stop in the absence of an agreement that will put an end to the occupation.

There is more. The security issue is much greater today on the Palestinian side. Israel can no longer continue to mouth slogans about security, after seven years in which it killed 4,267 Palestinians, 861 of them children and teens, in comparison to 467 Israelis who were killed, according to data from *B'Tselem*.

Another excuse that no longer washes is the "no partner" one. Israel has never had an easier peace partner than Mahmoud Abbas. True, he represents barely half the Palestinian people - Olmert represents an even smaller proportion - and true, it would be preferable if the Palestinian team going to Annapolis were to include Hamas, but that is no reason not to try. We destroyed Yasser Arafat as a partner - and the time has come to regret it - but we can no longer use the weakness of his successor as an excuse: Israel did all it could to create that situation. The Arab world, too, is more open to Israel and to peace than ever. Israel is methodically destroying the Arab League's resolution and the Saudi peace plan, but they are still on the table and sending out an unprecedented message of hope to Israel.

The real role of the United States will also be exposed at the summit: No other agent is as capable of making as great a contribution to advancing peace in the region as is Washington, but in the absence of any pressure on Israel, the sad impression is that even the Americans will not go out of their way to achieve peace. Annapolis is shaping up as no more than a perfunctory gesture from America. We tried, the Americans will say. But, of course, it is not a genuine

attempt.

All the cards will be shown at Annapolis, and that is no small thing. The world will see and judge, Israelis will see and decide: Do we genuinely want peace?

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