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**How Rice can improve her odds**

**By Daniel C. Kurtzer and Scott B. Lasensky**

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Condoleezza Rice is playing a high-stakes game of diplomacy. After cautious bets during her first three years as secretary of state, she is going all-in on a summit meeting at Annapolis to launch final status negotiations. Her odds of winning are low, and she knows it.

But those odds can start moving in her favor if she draws the right lessons from U.S. diplomatic experience in the Israeli-Arab peace process. Having led a study group on this for the past year, the results of which the United States Institute of Peace will soon publish, we can offer the following tips:

First, Rice's diplomacy must be clearly understood as being a top priority of the U.S. president. It is imperative to dispel the notion that President George W. Bush wants Annapolis to divert attention from Iraq or to create a smokescreen for possible military action against Iran.

The president should clearly declare that resolving the Arab-Israel conflict is a high priority in and of itself. And he must make sure that all his aides line up behind what he says. There simply isn't time left in this administration for any ambiguity on whether the "road to Jerusalem leads through Baghdad."

Second, the president's policy must be seen as having been formulated in Washington, not in some Middle Eastern countries or as a result of domestic pressures. President Bill Clinton's talking points for the 2000 Geneva summit meeting with Syria's President Hafez al-Assad were written in Jerusalem, and the Syrians knew it. What our friends say is important, but we own our policy.

Third, already now the United States must dispatch a monitoring team to set up shop on the ground and be ready to oversee fulfillment of the parties' commitments. If Rice can secure an Israeli settlements freeze and a Palestinian commitment to go after perpetrators of violence, she must be ready to verify what the parties do or fail to do.

The Bush administration failed to create such a monitoring mission in 2003, when implementation of the Road Map was to have been started. Without monitoring, accountability and some consequence for failing to implement commitments, a peace process is worthless.

Fourth, there will be more forces against success after Annapolis than for maintaining momentum. The administration will need to stay the course and keep the parties focused on end-game issues.

Domestic politics in Israel will turn nasty when Prime Minister Ehud Olmert starts talking seriously with the Palestinians and carrying out Israel's obligations. Palestinian domestic politics will turn nasty when President Mahmoud Abbas hints at compromise or lifts a finger against perpetrators of violence. Both leaders will turn to Rice and ask for a break.

The answer may have to be "no." There has never been an achievement in the peace process that was risk-free for the parties; every breakthrough has been accompanied by severe domestic repercussions for Arab and Israeli leaders.

What Rice can do is draw deeply from the diplomatic toolbox that has served U.S. policymakers in the past - assurances, guarantees, political support, economic and security assistance and the like. She can also make sure that American diplomats are given rein to bridge problems creatively and develop solutions to problems that appear intractable. Final peace documents always belong to the parties, but often benefit from anonymous American drafting.

Finally, the secretary ought to activate a back-room State Department operation to plan U.S. positions on the four core final status issues - territory, security, refugees and Jerusalem.

The United States did not do its homework before the 2000 Camp David summit, and the Israelis and Palestinians saw the result - what one U.S. participant has called "bumper car diplomacy." The time to do the homework is now.

American diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli peace process in the past has scored big (peace treaties involving Egypt, Jordan and Israel) and has been shut out (Camp David II and the Road Map). Secretary Rice's chances of winning her high-risk bet in Annapolis can be enhanced by learning from these successes and failures.

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