

German Foreign Policy Leader Says Annapolis Opens Doors for Peace

by William Jones

The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundstag (parliament) on Dec. 11 underlined the new possibilities opened in the international strategic situation by the Nov. 27 Annapolis conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and by the publication of the latest U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program.

Speaking at a Washington meeting sponsored by the New America Foundation, Christian Democratic Union Parliamentarian Ruprecht Polenz said he considered it unlikely that the UN Security Council would opt for a third sanctions resolution against Iran, given the opposition from both China and Russia to such an escalation of the pressure on Iran. And sanctions without unanimous support from the Permanent Five, he deemed of little effect.

But Polenz called for maintaining the second UN sanctions resolution "as a lead," to pressure Iran to postpone uranium enrichment "at least for a while." At the same time, he called for negotiations with Iran. "I feel we should start negotiations without any preconditions," Polenz said. The publication of the NIE "gives us the possibility to consider such a position." The Bush Administration has stated that it would begin talks with Iran, but only after Iran freezes its uranium enrichment.

Polenz also urged that negotiations on the Iran nuclear program again be brought under the purview of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA negotiations, he noted, had succeeded earlier in getting Iran to accept more extensive inspections under the so-called "Additional Protocol." The agency was thereby enabled to get a better picture of the extent and nature of the Iranian program, and could more competently deal with any loose speculation with regard to the program. Polenz pointed to the elections in Iran in March. If new initiatives were to be forthcoming from the

West, he reasoned, this would serve to strengthen those in Iran who were calling for a rapprochement with the West.

'Iran Does Not Want To Be Isolated'

In response to a question from this reporter on the possibility of multilateral security talks among the countries of the region, including Iran, similar to the invitation extended to Iran at the Dec. 3-4 meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Riyadh and in line with what Lyndon LaRouche proposed in 2004 with his LaRouche Doctrine for Southwest Asia, Polenz expressed support for multilateral talks. "If you follow, as I do, the Iranian press, you see that every invitation that is extended to Iran from the international community is widely celebrated. Iran does not want to be isolated. We could try to use this as leverage," he said.

The role of the regional powers is key, Polenz said. "Iran likes to portray this as a conflict between the U.S. and Iran. We are better off if we can show that other countries in the region also have problems with the Iranian nuclear program, if we can show them that this may spark a rather dangerous arms race in the region." In such a forum, the Iranians could also raise their own legitimate security concerns, Polenz said, "and they do have legitimate security concerns."

Annapolis Was 'Crucial'

The Annapolis process was crucial to the whole situation, Polenz said. Polenz, who travels extensively in Southwest Asia, referred to comments made to him by Jordan's King Abdullah: "Iran is an octopus with tentacles everywhere, but you should go after the tentacles." If Annapolis succeeds in making progress on the Palestinian track, "it would open the possibility of a deal between Israel and Syria." Such a development would tend to bring down tensions in the region both with Hamas and Hezbollah, making it easier to deal with Iran, which otherwise tends to egg them on, Polenz said.

"And one should definitely not adopt the philosophy of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend,'" he said. "You don't want to play the Shias against the Sunnis. We need to ease tensions between these two groups, not exacerbate them." The talks between the United States and Iran which have been held in Iraq to discuss their involvement in that country might be broadened to include other issues, opening the door to a more substantive dialogue between the two nations.

Most definitely a window of opportunity has been opened up by Annapolis and the publication of the recent NIE. The fact of a German politician coming to Washington to convey the message that Polenz brings is a clear indication of the changed situation. But the Bush Administration and Congress must respond quickly and decisively to exploit that opening, for the opponents of peace will not be remiss in moving quickly to see that it is closed.

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