

**B426. "A Fence to Make Good Neighbors" Christian Science Monitor (August 6, 2003) p. 9.**

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Instead of chiding Israel for building a fence between its territory and the land on which the Palestinian state is to be formed, the United States should welcome it. Indeed, it should offer to cover a good part of the cost involved in building the fence, about \$ 600 million, to rush it along. Historically, some fences can make good neighbors. While not a panacea, solid walls can at least offer temporary relief from situations of drastic conflict.

So far, few have noted the fact that the Sharon government's agreement to build the fence sends a clear signal - better yet, creates facts on the ground - that most Israeli settlers will have to leave the West Bank. These settlers are on the "wrong side" of the fence.

Theoretically, they could live under Palestinian rule, the way millions of Palestinian Arabs live in Israel, but the settlers are very unlikely to do so. They are hard-liners who view the West Bank as God-given Israeli territory. If Palestinian rule commenced, these hard-liners would surely leave for Israel proper.

There are those critics who argue that the fence amounts to an Israeli land grab. Actually, it follows fairly closely the Green Line, the one road map champions envision as the future border between Israel and Palestine. In other parts, one can argue it should be built a few miles to the West - without needing to oppose the whole thing.

But why should Israel or the US support the fence? First and foremost, it will serve as an effective barrier against terrorism. The fragile current cease-fire rests on the notion that Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas will be able to disarm Hamas and Islamic Jihad. These militant Palestinian groups openly declare that they will not settle for any "peace" that stops short of Israel's destruction. Hamas states in its charter:

"[Peace] initiatives, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problem, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic Resistance Movement. For renouncing any part of Palestine means renouncing part of the religion; the nationalism of the Islamic Resistance Movement is part of its faith...."

This is a line that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have consistently maintained - from their viewpoint - for good reasons. To assume that these groups would give up on their goals if only Israel would extend some gestures of good will, or because of some meetings in Washington, is a dangerous mistake.

There are those who argue that extremists merely mouth these statements to keep their base. This may be the case, but right now no one can tell for sure. The fence will help ensure that whatever is behind the hot statements will not lead to renewal of violence. The fence would slow down the operation of these groups, and it will maintain the conditions essential for nurturing the cease-fire, allowing time for tempers to cool off and for both sides to learn to enjoy the fruits of the current respite from violence.

The promise of the fence is far from a theoretical notion. When a fence was built in Cyprus, separating the Greeks and Turks in 1974 after years of bloody fighting, the hostilities subsided. Indeed, the two groups have since moved toward reconciliation. A fence helps to maintain an uneasy truce on the northern border between Israel and Lebanon, despite the fact that there are several thousand Hizbullah terrorists in the area. And the fence that surrounds Gaza is the main reason very few terrorists reach Israel from that region.

Critics say that the fence now being built does not follow the precise line of demarcation which this or that party favors as the border between Israel and Palestine. True. But it is no Great Wall of China. It can be quite readily relocated when a peace treaty is forged. Critics say that the fence inconveniences some Arabs because it falls between some of their villages. True. But this is a small price to pay for what I claim can be a major contribution to making peace. Critics say it will prevent Palestinians from working in Israel or tending to their land on the other side of the fence. Like the fence around Gaza, however, the new fence has plans for dozens of gates, allowing workers and farmers with permits to travel through. Indeed, one day - hopes spring eternal - it can be removed.

It is no cure-all. There is no agreement where it should or could be built in Jerusalem. Terrorists can attack by sea and air and Israel can respond in the same way. And fences can be breached, although this one will be secured by the Israeli army, using both troops and various sensors. Still, when all is said and done, the fence could do much to facilitate a cooling-off period for both sides, without which the cease-fire is unlikely to last.

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