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Fences Don't Always Make Good Neighbors

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Henry Kissinger still wants to be a player in U.S. foreign policy, but he is off base on a crucial issue in the Middle East.

I'm convinced that Kissinger would give up all his riches -- accumulated by parlaying his government expertise into lucrative business connections -- if he could be secretary of state-in-perpetuity. Power has always meant more to him than money.

When he was guiding our nation's foreign affairs in 1969 and the early 1970s as President Nixon's national security adviser and secretary of state, the world was his chessboard.

He invented "shuttle diplomacy" with his travels back and forth between Israel and its Arab neighbors, always in search of a cease-fire. Despite those efforts, there has been no end to the regional strife.

Now Kissinger has taken sides in another emotional chapter in the continuing Middle East crisis by supporting Israel's drive to build a fence between Palestine and Israel.

In an essay in *The Washington Post* last month, Kissinger wrote that such a fence -- which U.S. policy makers oppose -- could "become a solution rather than an obstacle to peace."

"If it sharply reduced terrorism, it could provide an incentive to negotiations," he argued. "In the event of negotiations, the fence could provide a safety net for security, a defining line beyond which settlements should be abandoned and a provisional border for the Palestinian state."

He also wrote, "A physical barrier difficult to penetrate would facilitate Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian cities and the abandonment of checkpoints that deprive so much of Palestinian life of dignity.

"It would provide a line on the other side of which settlements would have to live under Palestinian rule or be abandoned," he added.

All of this might make sense, except that Kissinger was diplomatically vague on where the barricade should be built.

If President Bush contemplated a new fence for his ranch in Crawford, Texas, would he build it on his neighbor's land? Of course not.

That's the rub when it comes to Israel's fencing plans.

In a Dec. 5 letter to The Post, Nino Kader, communications director for the American Task Force on Palestine -- a non-profit group made up of Americans of Palestinian heritage, said the planned Israeli fence would confiscate "600,000 acres of prime Palestinian land."

Kader also takes issue with Kissinger on another point. The former secretary of state -- who should know better -- contended, "No Palestinian has fully recognized Israel."

Not so, notes Kader, who points out that the Palestinian Liberation Organization headed by Yasser Arafat sent a letter on Sept. 9, 1993, to the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin, telling him, "The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security." Kader also asked how Arafat could have signed the 1993 Oslo peace treaty if he did not recognize Israel.

The Bush administration opposes Israel's plans for a fence. "We don't think a fence enhances Israel's security," says Deputy White House press secretary Sean McCormack, who also observed that such a fence "impinges on the life of the Palestinian people."

In another letter to the Post, Debra DeLee, president and CEO of Americans for Peace Now -- a pro-Israeli peace group -- rejected Kissinger's statement that acceptance of Israel is "beyond Palestinian emotional and psychological capacities."

She pointed to a poll last October that showed 64 percent of Palestinians support a two-state solution.

The two-state concept is the only plausible solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. If only to satisfy Kissinger and his cohorts, perhaps Palestinian leaders should publicly reaffirm their recognition of the state of Israel -- but not the occupation or annexation of their land in violation of international law.

Israel should move toward negotiating the final borders and proceed with the removal of some of the 150 settlements it has established in the West

Bank and Gaza. An international military force along the border also would be in order.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon indicates he is ready to buck his own Likud party to unilaterally dismantle some of the settlements. Nonetheless, he plans to proceed with his barricade, despite U.S. and Palestinian opposition.

In his poem "Mending Wall," Robert Frost wrote: "Good fences make good neighbors."

But he also said: "Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know: What was I walling in or walling out."

I believe that the Palestinians and the Israelis will walk side by side some day with neither being walled in or walled out.

It's possible.

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