

Barrier Under Assault

* Solon Solomon

Six years after two judicial decisions, the British Foreign Secretary William Hague's recent visit to Israel came to return the issue of the security barrier to the frontlines. In 2004 the International Court of Justice viewed the barrier as primarily a political project. The Israeli Supreme Court stressed the barrier's security aspect. Thus, it did not nullify the project but ordered the State to alter its route in many cases.

Such is the case of the villages of Bi'lin and Ni'ilin with whose activists Hague decided to meet. As such, Hague would have no reason to hold a meeting of solidarity for that particular reason.

Indeed, Hague's meeting was a gesture of displeasure towards the whole project of the barrier as an expression of the Israeli occupation.

Hague's opting to perceive openly the barrier only as a political project is overdue simplified. Every day reality clearly demonstrates that terrorist attacks have dwindled after its erection. It is not possible that Hague, an experienced statesman, is not aware of that. As such in Hague's move, there are some messages that the Israeli diplomacy must decipher.

First, Hague's perception returns on the table the gap of understanding between Israel and the international community in issues the first views as measures of self defense and the latter as cynical political moves. In that sense, the great loser is international law and the right of self defense. Even the International Court in its opinion on the barrier acknowledged the project's potential security element.

Yet, more importantly, the political character of the barrier and Hague's stirring of the issue is utterly connected with the plans for a future Palestinian state and its borders. It is not by accident that Hague's move comes just a few days after Netanyahu reportedly proposed a Palestinian state with Israel keeping control of 40% of the West Bank and the security fence serving as a border line.

As such, Hague might have wanted to send a message to Jerusalem that after Oslo, the international community will not accept anything less for a Palestinian state. Netanyahu's Oslo, which echoes proposals put by Yigal Allon in the decade of the '70s, can not expect to find open arms.

At the same time the message is directed also to Ramallah. The United Kingdom is taking the presidency of the U.N. Security Council and the Palestinians have recently made public their intentions to turn to the Council in the future in order to ask for State recognition. Moreover they have often spoken in favor of one bi-national state.

In these aspects Hague's gesture can be deemed as double; his suggestion to the activists to continue their activities carries the message that eventually- if Israel does not abide by the dictates of the world community- the latter will recognize a Palestinian state. And more alarmingly, once the barrier has only a political connotation and can not serve as a frontier, maybe the border should be ultimately

placed on the Jordan River. It is noteworthy that opposition leader and Kadima Chairwoman, Tzipi Livni, during her meeting with Hague, hailed to defend the barrier not only on a security basis but also on the basis that it has resulted to a separation of Israel from the Palestinian cities.

Yet, such a British message, if true, should not necessarily be perceived also as prudent. The Oslo Accords provide that neither Israel nor the Palestinians will resort to unilateralism regarding the final status of the territories. And this obligation pertains both to the Israeli and the Palestinian side alike.

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