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Column: On both sides of the wall

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At midnight a few days ago I received a call from my mom. She called to tell me that New York Times foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman's documentary on the Israeli "security fence" would be on. One hour after I convinced my roommate to shut off "Tiger Woods 2004" to watch the documentary, we were both left speechless, staring blankly in each other's direction. We saw a tale of desperation and suffering; not just of those Palestinians affected by the wall, but also of Israelis reeling from horrific suicide bombings. It is hard not to be depressed by how hopeless things seem over there.

Frequently, things appear equally hopeless on our side of the pond. Because of the emotional resonance this issue has on our campus - and others across the country - and my being a committed moderate, I often find myself painted by the left as reflexively pro-Israel and by the right as a left-wing fanatic. The Israeli wall has put me in an even more difficult position.

Last year, Haifa mayor and Labor Party prime ministerial candidate Amram Mitzna advocated building a wall along the 1967 border. While the wall also was proposed to have encircled East Jerusalem, he sought to dismantle all settlements on the Palestinian side of the wall and to remove all Israeli troops from the territories. He and other peaceniks believed that allowing Palestinians the ability to establish a state in the territories - coupled with the inability of suicide bombers to penetrate Israel - would allow for a significant enough thaw in relations to occur, allowing Israel and its new Palestinian neighbor to negotiate the remaining contested issues and sign a peace treaty.

Even then, I did not support such a maneuver. Images of Hezbollah and Lebanon kept dancing in and out of my head. It seemed that such a move would only further empower radicals in Hamas and Islamic Jihad - those whose primary goal is the destruction of Israel, not the creation of a Palestinian state, the dream of the vast majority of Palestinians - to continue their reign of terror. Enter Ariel Sharon.

Emboldened by a landslide victory at the polls in 2003, Sharon and his Likud Party saw a political gold mine awaiting them in Mitzna's classic liberal proposal. Sharon - who has been a primary proponent of the settlement venture - saw the opportunity both to weaken his liberal opposition and the potential to essentially annex settlement territory to Israeli control. Sharon began constructing a fence that weaved in and out of the Palestinian territories, including the encirclement of the Palestinian town of Qalqilya. This no doubt has caused incredible hardship for the Palestinian people, some of whom are cut off from their own farmland on the opposite side of the wall.

Despite wholeheartedly abhorring Sharon's policy and ideology behind the construction of the wall, when I talk to my best friend I get a terrible feeling in my gut. My best friend lives in Tel Aviv. She works at a bar where last year a suicide bomber blew himself up. A few months ago, as she rounded a corner, another suicide bomber struck. Every time I hear of a suicide bombing, all I can think about is where my best friend was when it went off. I cannot fathom how people can live their lives not knowing if they could potentially be killed eating lunch or riding a bus. In the back of my head I can't help but think that a wall might prevent suicide bombers from carrying out their attacks. But for each thought like this, I cannot keep the images of suffering Palestinians out of my head.

I guess when it comes down to it, I am just really angry. I am angry with the Israeli left for not

formulating a vision capable of inspiring moderate Israelis to reject the ideology of Ariel Sharon. I am angry with the Palestinian leadership for failing its people in its quest for a state. I am angry at the campus pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian communities that make it so hard for people to support all suffering people. And - to adapt Israeli journalist Baruch Kimmerling's resonant message - I am angry with myself for knowing all of this, and doing nothing to change it.

-The writer, a sophomore majoring in international affairs, is the Hatchet opinions editor.

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