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## Netanyahu could learn from Sharon's realistic approach to Zionism

Under the Gush Emunim approach, the status of the land is more important than that of the state; Sharon saw territory as a means of reaching an end.

By Shaul Arieli | Feb. 4, 2014 | 6:00 AM |  4

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A great deal has been written about the cooperation between the late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and members of the Gush Emunim settlers movement in settling the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but not about the huge disparity between their politics and their values, and their differing perception of the goal of the settlement enterprise.

Sharon believed in the secular Zionist idea of keeping Israel secure as a democratic state of the Jewish people, whereas the members of Gush Emunim, according to Hanan Porat, one of the movement's most prominent leaders, wanted "the formation of 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,' the restoration of the divine presence to Zion, the establishment of the Davidic dynasty and the building of the Temple."

Sharon saw territory as a means of satisfying a set of defined needs originating in culture, society and politics. According to that approach, the link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel explains why the Jewish people demand ownership and sovereignty in the land; after that, the precise size of the territory is determined by a mix of values, interests, benefits and needs, each of which is constantly examined in light of the objective and can change in accordance with the circumstances.

Gush Emunim, on the other hand, considers territory to be an integral part of individual and shared identity, and therefore an integral part of national identity as well. Territory becomes a kind of collective memory, a common denominator of the internal ties among members of the nation. Under this approach, the status of the land is more important than the status of the state, because the link to the land is based on a divine promise, whereas the state is a transient creation of man, and any human challenge regarding the borders of the homeland is seen as sacrilege. Government institutions are therefore viewed as having no legitimacy or right to concede territory in exchange for peace, democracy or anything else.

Sharon believed that the military occupation was temporary, and that the borders of the country would ultimately be determined by demographics and by the plow. "I come from a segment of Israeli society that does not believe in agreements and contracts, but only in determining facts on the ground," he said. But when the settlement enterprise failed to determine facts on the ground in Gush Katif, that Jewish community of fewer than 10,000 people in the midst of more than 1.5 million Palestinians, Sharon initiated the disengagement. "We cannot hold onto Gaza forever," he said. "It's impossible over long periods of time to rule in densely populated areas without their having to receive rights in the end."

The second intifada forced Sharon to build the separation barrier. Although some suggested fencing in Area A, the territory under full civil and security control of the Palestinian Authority, Sharon explained the route of the barrier by stating his desire to maintain a Jewish majority in the State of Israel. "The demographic consideration played an important role in determining the route of the separation fence because of the fear of annexing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who would link up with the Israeli Arabs," he said.

Sharon was realistic. While the members of Gush Emunim are sending up plans such as the annexation of Area C (under full Israeli control) or the Jordan Valley, and are trying to strengthen the illegal outposts and the isolated settlements, Sharon envisioned a withdrawal from isolated settlements. "Sharon said that he saw in the near future a series of significant steps in Judea and Samaria, of withdrawal from isolated settlements," said Dov Weissglas, who used to serve as a senior adviser to Sharon.

At present, when Gush Emunim and the members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party want to torpedo U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's goal of reaching a final-status agreement, the prime minister must consider the very different ways in which the goals of Zionism can be achieved.