9

Strategic Points, Flexible Lines, Tense Surfaces, and Political Volumes: Ariel Sharon and the Geometry of Occupation

Eyal Weizman

The wording of the 2003 Middle East peace initiative, the "roadmap," managed — perhaps unwittingly but clearly all the same — to equate the transformation of the built environment with acts of organized violence. Israel is to stop planning, constructing, and populating, and then it is to dismantle settlements built by independent groups in breach of its own laws. The Palestinian authority is to prevent shooting, shelling, and suicide attacks carried out by armed organizations, dismantling their infrastructures and arresting their masterminds in the process. Although the document does not make it clear if it sees the activities of each side as comparable (or merely trapped in a cyclical sequence of causes and effects), never before was the work of architects and planners so clearly equated with those of terrorists.

Indeed, the human and political rights of Palestinians are violated not only by the frequent blows of the Israeli military, but also by a much slower and steadier process in which the totality of the environment in which they live is configured around them as an ever-tightening knot. In this process the transformation of the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 became a parallel conflict carried out with pencil lines on the drafting tables of military and civilian planners and architects. It developed as an "urban war" in which urbanity provided not only the arena of war but also its very weapons and ammunition. Just like a gun or a tank, mundane building matters have been used by the Israeli state to apply its strategic and political agenda.

The figure of Ariel Sharon is central to this process. The use of apparently "temporary" security architecture to create permanent "facts on the ground"; the rejection of borderlines as the limits of state territory; the preference for ever-flexible internal frontiers: above all, this is the spatial legacy of Ariel Sharon.

This chapter attempts to understand the way in which Ariel Sharon imagines territory and practices space. It is an attempt to look at his long-lasting physical oeuvre, the one in which both Israelis and Palestinians must struggle to live, as one architect tries to understand the work of another.

Surface

Israel's pre-1967 borders were seen by the military as indefensible. Israeli military strategy, conscious of the strategic inferiorities of Israel's borders, was based on an oxymoron coined in 1959 by Yigal Allon, a Labour politician and a retired military commander: "preemptive attack." This principle conceived an extensive use of Israel's superior air power as a volumetric compensation for its planar inferiority. The 1967 war implemented Yigal Allon's strategy to the letter. With complete control of the skies, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was free to progress across the surface, stopping and redeploying along clear, natural barriers.

In the process, the geopolitical balance of the Middle East was radically transformed. Israel tripled the territory under its control. The new lines, stretched now along the Jordan River and the Suez Canal, were seen as the "natural border" of a promised land. This fitted well with a newly developed pharcasmagorical attitude of the Israeli state. An unparalleled period of economic prosperity commenced, due, at least in part, to cheap labor drawn from the newly occupied Palestinian population of more than a million people. Gradually, however, the "Occupied Territories" grew too large within the national imagination. This creeping agoraphobia meant that the unfamiliar territories had to be studied, mapped, and domesticated from within. Their edges had to be fortified against the prospect of counter-aggression from the "outside."

Lines

Under the government of Golda Meir, two Labourites — Haim Bar-Lev and Yigal Allon — were put in charge of fortifying the edges of the Occupied Territories on two different fronts. Allon, then the minister of agriculture, devised and implemented the Allon Plan. This marked out the locations of a series of agricultural outposts along the western bank of the Jordan River. It created a security border with Jordan while consciously aiming to settle spaces only sparsely populated by Palestinians.
On October 6, 1973, the line that had stood up to two years of Egyptian attacks was breached by a surprise attack by the Egyptian army. The surprise attack was carried out by two armored divisions that broke through the Egyptian 10th Armored Division and penetrated as far as 40 kilometers into the Sinai. The enemy commander, General Abdel Nasser, had planned this attack well in advance, and the Egyptian forces were well prepared for it. The attack was a complete surprise, and the Israeli forces were caught off guard. The Israeli forces were forced to withdraw, and the Egyptian forces advanced into the Sinai Peninsula. The result of this attack was the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, also known as the October War.
Strategic Points

In May 1977, the Labour government came to power, with a commitment to a new settlement policy. The new policy was based on the principle of "statehood without conflict," which aimed to establish a just and democratic society for all.

1. The establishment of the Oslo Accords (1993) allowed for the partial implementation of the "land for peace" principle.

2. The establishment of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as separate autonomous territories.

3. The recognition of the PLO and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

4. The establishment of the "Road Map for Peace" (2002), which aimed to achieve a two-state solution.

5. The establishment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the legality of Israel's actions in the occupied territories.

6. The establishment of the European Union's "barrier" (2005), which aimed to prevent the expansion of Israeli settlements.

7. The establishment of the "two-state solution" as the only realistic option to achieve peace.

8. The establishment of the "negotiations" (2008), which aimed to achieve a just and lasting peace.

9. The establishment of the "Palestinian state" (2011), which aimed to achieve self-determination for the Palestinian people.

10. The establishment of the "international community" (2015), which aimed to support the Palestinian people in their struggle for freedom.

The establishment of these points has been a significant step towards achieving peace and justice in the region.
"panoptic fortresses"—optical devices on an urban scale, laid out to generate observation, spatially and temporally, all round. (Weizman, 2002; Segal and Weizman, 2003).

The high ground, on which settlements were located, thus offers the strategic assets of self-provision and a wider view. But beyond being employed militarily, the urban layout of vision also serves an aesthetic agenda: it allows for contemplation over a pastoral landscape evocative of history, one in which biblical scenarios could be imagined and participated in, at least visually. All this feeds the national mythic imagination, giving settlers the sense of foundational authority based on long historical continuity.

In the early 1980s another of the construction frenzies that are indicative of Ariel Sharon's closeness to executive power had begun. The "biblical" heartland of the West Bank became overlaid by the two symbiotic and synergetic instruments of security: the settlement observation point and the serpentine road network. The latter was the prime device for serving the former; the former overlooked and protected the latter.

Sharon realized the dual potential of emerging messianic-religious impulses: to settle a mythological landscape, and to facilitate the desire of the middle classes to push outside of the congested centers of Israeli cities to populate his matrix of points with civilian communities. Unlike Labour's agricultural settlements of the Kibbutz and the Moshav, the new "community settlements" were, in effect, dormitory suburbs of closely-knit social groups composed mainly of national-religious-professional middle classes.

Architecture was thus conscripted to establish the state's control of its territories and help make uniform communities. Uniformity of architectural taste was imposed through the repetition of a small variety of single and double family house-and-garden structures. Beyond responding to middle-class suburban aesthetics, the adornment of settlement homes with red roofs served a further military agenda—identifying these sites from afar as Israeli.

The fact that the inhabitants had to seek work outside the settlements made them rely on the roads to connect them with the employment centers in the metropolitan areas around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, within Israel proper. This was similar to the way that the American suburbs developed as an offspring of postwar World War II construction technology, and especially around the system of interstate highways, developed to serve the integrated industry of the American war economy. Israeli suburbia made perfect use of the system laid out for mobile defense in depth. The massive system of fifty highways, together with a modern matrix of infrastructure, became effective instruments of development—merging the needs of a sprawling suburbia with national security and political ambitions to push ever more Israelis into the West Bank.
The way to contain these urban streams, from the perspective of Ariel Sharon's planners, was to use the weapons of counter-urbanism - or more precisely, to use the tools of urbanism: controlling the population, restricting their mobility, and denying them the means to exist as communities. This was done using economic sanctions and the destruction of infrastructure. The policy was to make life unbearable in the settlements - they were turned into open-air concentration camps - and to allow the rest of the state to exercise its power without interference.

Beyond their status as rearguard positions in the defense of the state from invasion and the settlement of the occupied territories, the settlements were therefore used to allow the state to exercise its power without interference. The settlements were thus made into a state within a state, a parallel society that was not subject to the laws of the state. This was done by creating a system of control and surveillance that was designed to prevent any form of social or economic activity that could challenge the state's authority.

The most striking example of this was the construction of the separation wall. The wall was built to prevent the movement of people and goods between the settlements and the rest of the state. It was designed to prevent any form of social or economic activity that could challenge the state's authority. The wall was a powerful symbol of the state's control over the settlements and the people who lived in them.

The wall was also a symbol of the state's inability to control the settlements. The wall was never fully completed and was often breached, allowing people to move freely between the settlements and the rest of the state. This was a constant source of frustration for the state and its planners, who were always trying to find ways to control the settlements and prevent any form of social or economic activity that could challenge the state's authority.

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directly present within Palestinian cities. The facing of the Palestinian population as relatively stationary, and its separation into isolated, limited urban nuclei, makes it much easier to manage and control.

The Battle for the Hilltops

After Sharon, facing the reality of this spatial practice was essential to establish a precedent and gain momentum. He believed it was important "to secure a precedent that is morally good that can be followed by all the West Bank winners in the years to come." The West Bank winners' original plan called for a separation of the Palestinian population. (Sharon, 2002: see note 9.) Defining his political objectives, he stated: "I believe that in the West Bank the problem of the Arab people is not the establishment of a separate state, but rather the establishment of a separate community. The Arab people are a community, not a state. The state is the Jewish one. Therefore, the solution to the problem is the establishment of a separate community" (Sharon, 2002: see note 9.).

As the beginning of 1993, after the Kahan inquiry into the 1982 massacre in Sabra and Shatila, Sharon's government was responsible. He was found guilty of "crimes against humanity" by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1999. In the same year, Sharon was indicted for "crimes against humanity" by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for his role in the 1982 massacre in Sabra and Shatila.

Flexible Line

Points and lines that are spatially significant to the distribution of settlement patterns are often treated as a series of linear components. The purpose of the settlement pattern is to connect them (roads) and protect them (borders). The flexibility of the road network is an important factor in the establishment of new settlements. Most new settlements have an agenda for urban development, and they often mean relocation, sometimes even to a more strategic position.
settlements and their supportive infrastructure from the Palestinian population (plate 9.3).

The main component of the barrier is a touch-sensitive, “smart,” 3-meter high electronic fence, placed on 150 centimeter-deep concrete foundations (to prevent digging under it), topped with barbed wire (to prevent climbing over it), day and night video cameras, and even small radars. Stretched along the east side of the fence (facing the bulk of the West Bank) are a patrol road, a 3-meter deep trench, and two barbed-wire fences. West of it (towards Israel proper) are a trace road — where footprints of intruders are registered — a patrol road suitable for armored vehicles, and some more barbed-wire fences. At some places, where the barrier passes a Palestinian town, the tactically required see-through/shoot-through fence solidifies into an 8-meter high bullet-proof wall. Watchtowers with firing posts are placed at intervals of a few hundred meters along the barrier.

Seven control gates for Israelis and nine for Palestinians are planned in the barrier in order to allow people in and out of the enclosed area. Some twenty-six “agricultural gates” will serve Palestinian farmers whose lands are on the other side.

The project was born on November 2000, in the wake of the collapse of Labour’s political project at Camp David, and a little more than a month after the second intifada began. Prime minister Ehud Barak decided that, if the political borders between Israel and a Palestinian state could not be agreed upon, he would set them out unilaterally. Barak approved a plan to establish a linear barrier, roughly corresponding with the Green Line.


Ariel Sharon and the Geometry of Occupation

composed of a series of ditches and dykes designed to prevent the passage of motor vehicles into Israel. Labour, propagating this idea of unilateral separation along a fortified line, has since lost two elections.

Ariel Sharon insisted — up until the day he appeared to have changed his mind — that “the idea [to build the barrier] is populist.” However, on April 14, 2002, two days before the battle for Jenin was concluded and with all other major Palestinian cities firmly in his hands (Gasham, this volume), Sharon “surrendered” to the demands of the Labour ministers in his unity government, as well as to growing public pressures. Amid fear of suicide attacks carried out by infiltrators from the West Bank, and awareness that not a single attack had been carried out from fenced-off Gaza, Sharon demanded a “security fence” and announced the coalition government’s decision to establish the barrier.

If the direction and path of a line is the sum total of the force field of pressures that is applied to it, the barrier can offer the clearest diagram of the principle of political and social pressure molded into form. The path taken by the barrier line reflects a contingent balance of all the vectors of influences on it. As the path of the barrier “snakes” southwards, it goes through a process in which political pressures on either side of the proposed structure start echoing each other. In a principle of “positive feedback” these pressures generate ever more radical twists and turns, pushing the barrier ever deeper east of the Green Line into the occupied West Bank.

As the barrier neared their region, settlement councils started applying political pressure for the path to “loop around” and absorb them into the western (Israel) “inside.” The settlers initially resisted the idea of a barrier that would cut off parts of the West Bank from Israel proper. But once they realized they could not stop its construction, they opted, instead, to try to influence its route. A particularly loud outcry came from the settlement of Atlit-Menashe — a relatively wealthy suburban community. In the first design for the northern path for the barrier, authorized in June 2002, this settlement was left “outside.” The local panic about being “abandoned,” mediated through right-wing ministers, managed to force a revision of the plan and the stretching out of a long loop to incorporate the settlement back “inside.” As a result, the Palestinian towns of Qalqilya and Haba‘a, a few hundred meters apart as the crow flies, found themselves surrounded on all sides by the barrier’s extension, and the connection between them now stretched into a corridor 20 kilometers long.

The path of the barrier was complicated by another series of external influences. Following pressure by government ministers from religious parties, the path of the barrier was stretched a few hundred meters southwards to include an old archeological site believed to be the biblical-era tomb of Rachel. Ten other archeological sites, including one complete Egyptian city, were discovered during the digging works along another
**Islands**

"The more forces there are in the vicinity of a line, the more complex is its shape. The less complex the line is, the more people there will be in the area. The more complex the line is, the more people there will be in the area. The more complex the line is, the more people there will be in the area. The more complex the line is, the more people there will be in the area."

**Temporary Sovereignty**

The Israeli government maintains that the principle that guides the path of the barrier is based on the political needs of the permanent order. Both borders are indeed different to borders in that they do not have a permanent order. But, they are not intended to be borders that will accommodate the movement of arms, personnel, and people across a territory. Throughout the implementation, through the way the government plans to construct the barrier, is most likely to accommodate the movement of arms, personnel, and people across a territory.
Endures/Endures

Within both Israeli and Palestinian parts of the West Bank, there will be a series of barriers and boundaries delineating them. The number of Israeli settlements, military installations, and the Palestinian area, will mean that the Palestinian will be in the same heterogeneous community in the West Bank as well. A few hundred thousands of settlers from the West Bank will remain in the Jericho region, where the Palestinian state will be established. The West Bank will be divided into areas inaccessible to Palestinians, due to security measures. The Palestinian will be in areas remote from their homes, and will be divided into areas that are inaccessible to them. The Palestinian will be in areas remote from their homes, and will be divided into areas that are inaccessible to them.

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A Political Volume

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valley that the road spans and the city it dives under are, according to the Oslo agreement, areas under limited Palestinian sovereignty. Thus the physical separation of traffic arrangements is mirrored by a political one – the city above is under Palestinian limited sovereignty while the road below is under full Israeli sovereignty. By introducing the vertical dimension, in similar schemes of over- and under-passes, linkage could be achieved between the different territorial islands.

The last territorial paradox of the frontier could thus be resolved. Israeli/Palestinian roads and infrastructure would connect settlements/Palestinian towns while they span over or under Palestinian/Israeli lands. Consequently, and hand-in-hand with the planned completion of the barrier, plans are under way to transform Route 60 – the main north–south traffic artery connecting all major Palestinian cities – into an elevated construction placed on slits allowing for Israeli east–west routes (those making the H plan) to pass undisturbed underneath it. At the point where these roads cross, sovereignty will be divided along the up/down axis of the vertical dimension.

In the West Bank, bridges are no longer merely devices engineered to overcome natural boundaries or connect impossible points. Rather, they become the boundary itself. Indeed, a new way of imagining territory has been developed for the West Bank. The region is no longer seen as a two-dimensional surface of a single territory, but as a large “hollow” three-dimensional surface, within which the West Bank can be physically partitioned into two separate but overlapping national geographies. Within this volume, separate security corridors, infrastructure, over-ground bridges and underground tunnels are woven into an Escher-like space.

With the technologies and infrastructure required for the physical segregation of Israelis from Palestinians along complex volumetric borders, it seems as if this most complex geopolitical problem of the Middle East has gone through a scale-shift and taken on architectural dimensions. The West Bank appears to have been reassembled in the shape of a complex building with its closed-off enclaves as walled spaces and its bypasses as exclusive security corridors. The barrier is but the surface component in an occupation that will continue underneath and above the surface – in the effective Israeli control of the water aquifers under Palestinian areas and in Israeli sovereignty over the airways and electromagnetic fields that will allow constant Israeli air force control above the territory. The volumetric technologies of separation might well be geometrically creative and “interesting” in planning terms. But, in essence, they are the very familiar and traditional, absolute and hermetic borders, here disguised within the Trojan horse of spatial radicalism.

The attempt to imagine a spatial–technical design solution to the conflict – one based on different paths of partition achieved by barriers, tunnels, and bridges – has thus reached its most extreme and dystopian logical conclusion and end result. This conclusion is too complex to offer security (unless the entire resources of the state are constantly drafted to maintain and service its length). It is too intrusive and aggressive to offer the appearance of a just solution. And it is too expensive to be economically viable in the long run.

Could the politics of borders and partition be replaced by a more viable alternative – based on inclusion, democracy, and human rights?