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## The whitewashing of Ariel Sharon

■ The 'man of courage and peace' story ignores his bloody and ruthless past.

By Saree Makdisi, SAREE MAKDISI is a professor of English and comparative literature at UCLA.

AS ARIEL SHARON'S career comes to an end, the whitewashing is already underway. Literally overnight he was being hailed as "a man of courage and peace" who had generated "hopes for a far-reaching accord" with an electoral campaign promising "to end conflict with the Palestinians."

But even if end-of-career assessments often stretch the truth, and even if far too many people fall for the old saw about the gruff old warrior miraculously turning into a man of peace, the reality is that miracles don't happen, and only rarely have words and realities been separated by such a yawning abyss.

### ADVERTISEMENT



From the beginning to the end of his career, Sharon was a man of ruthless and often gratuitous violence. The waypoints of his career are all drenched in blood, from the massacre he directed at the village of Qibya in 1953, in which his men destroyed whole houses with their occupants — men, women and children — still inside, to the ruinous invasion of Lebanon in 1982, in which his army laid siege to Beirut, cut off water, electricity and food supplies and subjected the city's hapless residents to weeks of indiscriminate bombardment by land, sea and air.

As a purely gratuitous bonus, Sharon and his army later facilitated the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians at the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, and in all about 20,000 people — almost all innocent civilians — were killed during his Lebanon adventure.

Sharon's approach to peacemaking in recent years wasn't very different from his approach to war. Extrajudicial assassinations, mass home demolitions, the construction of hideous barriers and walls, population transfers and illegal annexations — these were his stock in trade as "a man of

courage and peace."

Some may take comfort in the myth that Sharon was transformed into a peacemaker, but in fact he never deviated from his own 1998 call to "run and grab as many hilltops" in the occupied territories as possible. His plan for peace with the Palestinians involved grabbing large portions of the West Bank, ultimately annexing them to Israel, and turning over the shattered, encircled, isolated, disconnected and barren fragments of territory left behind to what only a fool would call a Palestinian state.

SHARON'S "painful sacrifices" for peace may have involved Israel keeping less, rather than more, of the territory that it captured violently and has clung to illegally for four decades, but few seem to have noticed that it's not really a sacrifice to return something that wasn't yours to begin with.

His much-ballyhooed withdrawal from Gaza left 1.4 million Palestinians in what is essentially the world's largest prison, cut off from the rest of the world and as subject to Israeli power as before. It also terminated the possibility of a two-state solution to the conflict by condemning Palestinians to whiling away their lives in a series of disconnected Bantustans, ghettos, reservations and strategic hamlets, entirely at the mercy of Israel.

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That's not peace. As Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull would have recognized at a glance, it's an attempt to pacify an entire people by bludgeoning them into a subhuman irrelevance. Nothing short of actual genocide — for which Sharon's formula was merely a kind of substitute — would persuade the Palestinian people to quietly accept such an arrangement, or negate themselves in some other way. And no matter which Israeli politician now assumes Sharon's bloody mantle, such an approach to peace will always fail.

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