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Ariel Sharon, the Butcher of Lebanon, Revisited

For a long while now I have been an avid reader of Matthew Stevenson's myriad and outstanding travel journals detailing his many experiences across the world. He joins an august list of travel literature writers that include Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, V.S. Naipaul, Marco Polo, and Bill Bryson.

Whether by train, car, bus, or bicycle, I've accompanied Matthew through valleys, mountain ranges, desolate and verdant landscapes, large cities whose teeming and narrow streets come to life with the daily and commonplace affairs of locals in tableaux vibrant with quotidian color and activities.

Over the years Matthew invited me to partake in sparse and delectable meals. He invited me to join him on his many escapades in libraries, small and large museums, ticket counters, constricted hotel rooms, battlefield sites, and town squares. I survived bitterly cold and rainy days, enjoyed the balmy spring and fall moments, and dreaded the terribly hot, scorching summer days.

A salient image that glares through his many Counterpunch postings is his love affair with his trusted bicycle.

Because of his attention to detail and because his travel writing stands out in a class of its own, I've christened Matthew as the Ibn Battuta of modern times.

In the 14th century the North African scholar Ibn Battuta, born in Tangier to Berber parents, travelled extensively throughout Asia Minor, East and West Africa, the Maldives, India, and the Byzantine Empire, spending considerable time in Constantinople. His Opus Magnum, an encyclopedic work under the title *Rihla [Journey, Travels], The Gift of the Beholders on the Peculiarities of the Regions and Marvels of Journeys*, was recorded in 1353. An inquisitive observer, Ibn Battuta delved into the political, social, and cultural

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quodidian of the countries he visited. In short, it was the first recorded work of historiography that details social and cultural mores.

On January 27, 2023, Matthew Stevenson went off his travel-writing beaten path; Counterpunch posted an interview Matthew penned under the title *The Ambiguities of Political Command: The Case of Ukraine*. The article is a conversation with Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London. Freedman is the author of *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (2002) and *The Future of War: A History* (2017). His most recent book is *Command: The Politics of Military Operations from Korea to Ukraine* (2022).

In his interview, Freedman conveniently glosses over the US's role in the 2014 Ukraine elections and Ukraine's refusal to implement the 2014-2015 Minsk agreements. He is quite right about Putin's being "the worst sorts [sic.] of political leader in terms of orchestrating the war, ... he underestimated the opponent, believed the war would be easier than it would be." And insofar as Freedman's assessment of Zelensky is concerned, there is some undeserved embellishment. Freedman's assessment of the Kennedy/Khrushchev Cuba missile crisis is on target.

Further, Freedman is wrong when he states that "The US is a big power that tends to be called upon to deal with all sorts of things." The reality is that the US invites itself to be the world's policeman, supporting allies, and incinerating those who stand in its hegemonic path. And kudos to Sir Freedman for stating that "Iraq could have been avoided."

I so wish Sir Freedman had instead said: "The war in Iraq and other places SHOULD have been avoided.

In his *Command: The Politics of Military Operations from Korea to Ukraine*, Freedman states the following about Ariel Sharon one of the vilest Israeli commanders who built his military career on the corpses of thousands of Palestinians, Lebanese, and Egyptians. For his ruthless bulldozer behavior and for his butchery of innocent civilians in the 1982 Rape of Lebanon, Sharon added another title to his sordid military record: Sharon, The Butcher of Lebanon, a legacy writ large in the annals of modern Near Eastern history.

Of the thousands of accomplished generals in recorded history, Freedman's egregious choice and adulation of Ariel Sharon, The Butcher of Lebanon, stands out as a blemish on his judgement. Freedman states:

In terms of generals, I think what one finds is that often it is the meeting of the man with the moment. One of the generals I spent a lot of time on [in *Command*] is [the Israeli

general] Ariel Sharon, who was heroic. No doubt he was performative. He was a risk taker, he was brave, he was audacious tactically, he was very accomplished, but politically he was disastrous, and he was disruptive because he was very egotistical. But his men would follow him and take risks for him.

In the 1967 war and again in 1973, Sharon made a difference. When he was minister of defense in 1982, he was completely disastrous because he got Israel involved in a calamitous war in Lebanon.

Like most Israeli generals, Ariel Sharon adhered to the practice of habitually attacking Palestinians to “teach them a lesson” by killing a few of them in a now-and-then policy, a policy that began with the 1948 Deir Yasseen massacre and a policy that has gone unabated for the last 75 years.

Israel’s flagrant violation of international military norms is legend. When it comes to Geneva Convention laws, and especially the enshrined Geneva Convention War Crimes, Ariel Sharon’s habit of writing his own conventions is duly noted by credible historians. Using civilians, including women and children as human shields, is neither “heroic,” “Brave,” nor “performative.” Sharon employed this sordid tactic in the 1973 October war as troops, under his command, entered the Egyptian city of Ismailia. The same tactic was used in 1982 when Sharon’s troops invaded Lebanon, inflicting heavy human and materiel losses. With full US acquiescence, Sharon’s “heroic,” “brave,” and “performative” brutally criminal adventure in Lebanon left 17,825 dead, mostly civilians, and a whopping 30,203 wounded.

A general, backed by the fifth strongest nuclear-armed military power in the world taking on peasants, and defenseless urban civilians is a brutal coward.

Further, bombing Beirut and pulverizing its urban high-rise structures to rubble with the most advanced weaponry compliments of its American patrons is not an act of “bravery.” Rather, it is an act of cowardice like no other.

And for a finale to this orgy of cowardice and heinous crime against humanity, Sharon’s adventure culminated with a 24 hour genocidal killing spree on the Shatila and Sabra Palestinian refugee camps, a dastardly deed that resulted in the slaughter of 2,500 – 4,000 helpless Palestinian refugee victims, most of whom were women, the aged, and children. Because the decaying corpses (doused with lime) were hauled off in the buckets of frontend dozer buckets and buried under a soccer field close to Beirut’s International airport, we will never know the exact number of victims.

Even the beasts were not spared. Donkeys, dogs, and cats were summarily executed, Nazi style.

This was one of many Palestinian Babi Yars.

Not only did Sharon orchestrate and direct this heinous crime, but he also provided the flares to light access to the alleys and hovels in which God's beautiful and innocent victims were raped, mutilated, and slaughtered – in cold blood.

And the victims' ONLY crime was to have been Palestinian refugees pushed out of their ancestral lands in 1948.

And the US, with its naval power moored half a mile off in the Mediterranean, was eavesdropping on the communications between the Israeli Eichmanns and their paid Lebanese Phalange executioners.

And Reagan slept through the whole carnage.

In a just world General Ariel Sharon should have been arrested, tried, court marshalled, convicted, and sent to prison.

Sharon, like many of Israel's generals, went on to become an Israeli Prime Minister.

But then this is not, nor will it ever be, a just world.

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