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## Interview: Abdelwahab El Messiri

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# We do not want to be assimilated into this so-called new international order

*Abdelwahab El Messiri is an Egyptian author of several books on the Middle East and is currently writing an encyclopedia on Zionism. He was interviewed by telephone on Feb. 8 by Joseph Brewda.*

**EIR:** The U.S. media and George Bush claim that the Egyptian population strongly supports the U.S. war against Iraq. What is your view?

**Messiri:** Actually, the U.S. and other Western media correspondents here in Cairo usually start off an interview by saying "Why does the Egyptian population support Saddam Hussein?" It's simply an assumption now. That's why the universities have not been opened. That's why the government is very jittery. The other day, there was a meeting of harmless poets and so on, with a heavy deployment of troops around that building. The attitude of the government and the security forces here shows that they feel that there is not exactly total support of the government. This is quite understandable.

Saddam Hussein, regardless of what you think of him, is a Third World leader who stood up to Western technology, and said "No." So even those who opposed him initially, are beginning to see possibilities. He is more or less suggesting possibilities for freedom, regardless of what will happen eventually.

So this is another big lie, perpetuated by the media in the U.S. and elsewhere. Look at the opposition papers. They disappear the moment they are published, whereas I understand for the first time in quite a few years, people do not buy the official newspapers.

**EIR:** It seems that Israel will sooner or later enter the war and attack Iraq. What would be the reaction in Egypt?

**Messiri:** Actually, I think it is this possible reaction that will stop Israel from entering the war. So I don't share your view on that. Israel would like very much to enter the war, to hit and hit very hard, and implement the Kissinger plan—namely to destroy Iraq completely, and help set up the new international order in the Middle East as well.

But, the American establishment and Western elites are too intelligent, I think, to let Israel have its way. Therefore,

they will ask Israel to—as they say—"restrain" itself.

After all, Israel is a mercenary state. It's not a state in the normal sense of the word. It does not have a separate dynamism or will. It is an annex of the Western world. It would be better to look at Israel as a garrison or a protectorate, and a garrison or protectorate does not have full sovereignty. It's just like the enclave of the *pieds-noirs* [European inhabitants] in Algeria, like the Crusader states. They survived as long as the colonial or imperial metropolis supported them. Once the imperial metropolis decided it was in their interest to let them disappear, they let them disappear.

The allied forces know that if Israel were to join the war that there then could be massive defections, even among their troops, among the Arab and Muslim forces there. Therefore, on balance, they feel it is better for Israel to stand still and keep quiet, and take in a few Scud missiles from Iraq.

**EIR:** There seems to be a policy to sponsor Israel to eliminate the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and solve the so-called Palestinian problem, including making Jordan into Palestine.

**Messiri:** I think that's what the West wants. But I think that they can achieve it without having Israel involved in the war. Once the Iraqi military power is destroyed, then they assume that there will be some kind of general pacification in the Middle East. And once the pacification takes place, then they can dictate, they can redraw the map as they say. So, I think the plan is very much there, but it can be achieved without the military involvement of the state of Israel.

**EIR:** What do you think are the possibilities of success of the new imperial plan to redraw the map of the Middle East?

**Messiri:** The Middle East has proven to be rather intractable, and this is really why the West is so much irritated with us. We do not want to be rationalized, domesticated, and assimilated into this so-called new international order. I expect that if they begin to redraw the map, they will find new types of resistance.

Actually, I sometimes think that the experts in the Pentagon and the White House enjoy a very high level of stupidity. Suppose you destroy Iraq, and redraw the map, and bring

Arab solidarity to an end. Fine. But, then there has to be some form of solidarity. Then we'll find ourselves faced with Islamic solidarity, with Iran pushed into the role of the leader of the region. Then the dream of pacification will come to an end. Then you will find the Islamic discourse taking over in a country like Saudi Arabia and so on. Then you will find the Islamic discourse acquiring an anti-imperialist content. And so the Middle East will prove even more intractable.

We are already witnessing something like that inside Palestine with the Intifada. The Hamas group—the Islamic group—is gradually winning over. Yes, there might be some redrawing of the map, but the unintended results of that will be far more important than the intended results.

**EIR:** What will be the likely effects of this war on the stability of Egypt?

**Messiri:** There will be a lot of reevaluation, both on the part of the government and the part of the opposition. It will all depend on the outcome of the war. Already, the factor of the metaphysics of the military superiority of the West has been punctured. Because here is the Western world afraid to en-

gage Saddam Hussein on land. The fact that Saddam Hussein has survived for four weeks, and there is no end in sight; the fact that someone stood up to this military might all by himself, will put some ideas in the minds of some people.

Since 1967, one ingredient of Arab military doctrine has been that you can not engage Israel through regular armies, and that this should be left for the Palestinians to do in the form of uprisings and so on. That's why some Arab regimes were glad about the Intifada, because after all, it's happening there and they could forget about it. Now, Saddam Hussein is once more suggesting the possibility that you can build up militarily, that you can liquidate this Zionist enclave in the Middle East.

This will generate some destabilization in the region because you will have officers thinking, ideologues reconsidering, and so on. On the level of the masses, they will begin to ask, "Is this the end of Arab nationalism, the end of an Arab political order? Should a new order emerge with the Arab discourse integrated in the Islamic discourse?" It will result in a radical reevaluation of basic premises, and that will also result in the restructuring of political life in the region.

## Red Cross appeals 'to all belligerents'

*A spokesman for the Red Cross in Geneva told EIR on Feb. 7 that the international agency has eight representatives in Baghdad at the present time. Asked what he knows about the situation there, he said that they are not allowed to make their knowledge public, lest they be unable to continue their work. This is common Red Cross policy all over the world, he said. But the fact that the Red Cross published an appeal on Feb. 1, shows how urgently we view the situation, he added. "Such an appeal is very uncommon for us."*

*Here is the full text of the statement released by the International Committee of the Red Cross on Feb. 1:*

The conflict now raging in the Middle East will inevitably bring widespread destruction, perhaps on a scale unprecedented in this part of the world. Millions of civilians have been caught up in the violence, without shelter or protection against occupation and bombardment. Growing numbers of combatants are falling into enemy hands. Hundreds of thousands of ground troops—most of them young men—are preparing to meet in a deadly confrontation.

The determination of the parties in conflict and the buildup of awesome means of destruction are a presage of irreversible devastation. When the veil of censorship is lifted, the full horror of the suffering inflicted on the peoples of the region, on the fighters and their families, will be revealed for all to see.

One of the most disquieting aspects of this conflict is the possibility that the law of war, which is the expression of the most basic and universal principles of humanity and of the dictates of the public conscience, might be swept aside by the political, military, or propaganda demands of the moment.

The right to choose methods or means of warfare is not unlimited. Weapons having indiscriminate effects and those likely to cause disproportionate suffering and damage to the environment are prohibited.

The wounded, whether civilian or military, and prisoners must receive special consideration and protection in compliance with specific rules which the entire international community has undertaken to respect.

The International Committee of the Red Cross therefore solemnly appeals today to all belligerents, in the name of all civilian and military victims, to have due regard for humanitarian considerations. To show respect for the victims and treat them humanely, in the spirit of the Geneva Conventions, is to recognize a heritage common to all mankind and thus pave the way to reconciliation. It is also the last chance of averting a tragedy even greater than the use of force.