
Interview: Mahmud El-Sherif

Western media always paint Saddam black

Mahmud El-Sherif is the editor of the Amman, Jordan daily Ad Dustour. The interview as conducted by telephone with Joseph Brewda on Oct. 18.

EIR: Mr. El-Sherif, I wonder if you could give your assessment of the American media's coverage of the Middle East in the current situation.

El-Sherif: One could safely say that the U.S. media is generally biased—even when they report facts—biased toward the Israeli side and against Saddam Hussein. For instance, when Saddam Hussein says something, they carry it, but they temper what they report with the usual stereotypes. They insert certain sentences which maintain the negative stereotypes of Iraq and Saddam Hussein, and tilt the coverage, as much as they can, toward the Israeli point of view.

For instance, when the U.S. media report on the recent events in Jerusalem, they use the word which has been coined by the Israelis: the "Temple Mount." This is a new word which has proliferated in the Western media, to emphasize that this particular place is actually where the temple used to be, although, scientifically speaking, no excavation has revealed that this mount was the site of the temple. When you emphasize "Temple Mount," "Temple Mount," the "Palestinians are demonstrating at the 'Temple Mount,' " . . . you actually stress the "fact" that this is the site where the temple used to be. So that one day when you destroy the Al-Aqsa Mosque, then: this "temple" was on the "Temple Mount." This is the kind of technique which the American media tend to use.

Generally, they tend to be sympathetic towards the Israeli version. You rarely find a story that is absolutely balanced, which tries to be fair, and which gives enough space to the people who have been oppressed for 40 years, hounded out of their country, and dehumanized. When you read the articles on the opinion page, you find people like William Safire [*New York Times*], or James Hoagland [*Washington Post*], or Mr. Abraham Rosenthal [*New York Times*] continuously harping on the theme that Saddam Hussein is the most dan-

gerous man in the world, that he's Hitler. They use the images of 1939, Chamberlain, and the policy of appeasement, continuously, in order to create a feeling in the hearts of Americans that unless Saddam Hussein is completely eliminated there will be no peace in the world: The whole world is now living in peace, and the only menace is Saddam Hussein.

I am not saying that Saddam Hussein is right, but I am trying to emphasize that they are intent on painting a black picture of the man, and his power and country and ambitions: to make the war attractive, and the sacrifices acceptable—through eliminating a "monster," and this word they are using. You rarely find people with cool minds who try to put things into proper perspective, like Mr. Anthony Lewis when he handled the Israeli-Palestinian issue, or Flora Lewis. As for the opinion-shapers in the United States in the national dailies, unfortunately they are strongly pro-Israel. They are trying hectically to use the build-up against Saddam Hussein in order to destroy Iraq for reasons that have nothing to do with Kuwait and nothing to do with peace but everything to do with Israel.

EIR: President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker insistently claim that all of the Arab masses, that the entire Arab world stands behind the U.S.

El-Sherif: Wherever there is freedom of expression, wherever there is an element of democracy, you find that the instinctive tendency of the masses is expressed in favor of Saddam Hussein and against the United States. Where the masses have no voice, Mr. Bush claims that the people are with him. When Mr. Bush says the Arab world is with him, he means some Arab heads of state are with him.

The people here do not condone whatever Iraq does. Many people do not accept the way he handled the crisis of Kuwait, though they understand the roots of the problem, and many of them might want to see all the boundaries of the Arab world removed and have one united nation. Many of them do not accept the way Saddam Hussein handled the Kuwaiti issue. If it were left to the Arab world, I can assure you that many Arabs would have objected to Saddam's handling of Kuwait, and would have pressed for a solution. But the problem is, when you have American troops installed on the Arab world, on the sacred territory of Saudi Arabia, the issue has not become Saddam versus Kuwait. It has become Saddam versus a new sort of colonialism.

They say people are with Saddam against Kuwait. This is not true. People are with Saddam when Saddam is opposing this buildup on Arabian territory. We tried very hard, for more than 70 years, to win our independence, and we don't want to see Arab territory being occupied by foreign troops. If the issue had been left to Kuwait, it could have been handled, but once the Americans decided to change the confrontation from Iraq versus Kuwait to Saddam Hussein versus the imperial West, then people sided automatically with Saddam.