

Former IAEA chief: Iraq war killed “a million innocent civilians”

Patrick Martin
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NOTICE TO READERS: An earlier draft of this article said that, in addition to the censorship of ElBaradei's comments in the American media, the Guardian itself removed the reference to one million dead in Iraq and the violation of international law in the war in later versions of the article on its site. We have been informed by the freelance writer for the Guardian, Jack Shenker, that there was no such editorial change. The two articles we cited ran side-by-side, along with a third piece on ElBaradei's work at the IAEA, in the print edition of the Guardian April 1, 2010. The WSWS regrets the error.

The former head of the UN's chief nuclear agency, Mohammed ElBaradei, said in an interview with the British newspaper *Guardian* Wednesday that those who launched the war in Iraq were responsible for killing a million innocent people and could be held accountable under international law. He was clearly referring to US President George Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and their top military and security aides.

It was his first interview with an international publication since ElBaradei returned to his native Egypt, after a decade heading the International Atomic Energy Agency, where he won the Nobel Peace Prize, in large measure because of his opposition to the efforts by the Bush administration to use concocted charges about “weapons of mass destruction” as an all-purpose pretext for military intervention throughout the Middle East.

“I would hope that the lessons of Iraq, both in London and in the US have started to sink in,” he told the *Guardian*. “Sure, there are dictators, but are you ready every time you want to get rid of a dictator to sacrifice a million innocent civilians? All the indications coming out of [the Chilcot inquiry in

Britain] are that Iraq was not really about weapons of mass destruction but rather about regime change, and I keep asking the same question—where do you find this regime change in international law? And if it is a violation of international law, who is accountable for that?”

This suggestion that Bush and Blair were guilty of war crimes, coming from a high-ranking former UN official, would ordinarily be considered major news. The *Guardian* interview was reported by the main British and French news agencies, Reuters and AFP, but the entire American corporate media gave it zero coverage. Not a single major American newspaper or television network mentioned it.

The discussion of the violation of international law in launching the Iraq war came in the course of a longer discussion of the bankruptcy of US-British foreign policy in the Muslim world. ElBaradei criticized the longstanding support of Washington for dictators like Mubarak. “The idea that the only alternative to authoritarian regimes is Bin Laden and Co. is a fake one, yet continuation of current policies will make that prophecy come true.”

He warned of “increasing radicalization” in the Arab world: “People feel repressed by their own governments, they feel unfairly treated by the outside world, they wake up in the morning and who do they see—they see people being shot and killed, all Muslims from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Darfur.”

“Western policy towards this part of the world has been a total failure, in my view,” he said. “It has not been based on dialogue, understanding, supporting civil society and empowering people, but rather it's been based on supporting authoritarian systems as long as the oil keeps pumping.”

ElBaradei warned of the hypocrisy and double

standard of Western policy. “The West talks a lot about elections in Iran, for example, but at least there were elections,” he said. “Yet where are the elections in the Arab world? If the West doesn’t talk about that, then how can it have any credibility?”

ElBaradei is now reportedly considering a presidential bid against 81-year-old President Hosni Mubarak, whose fifth six-year term expires next year. He clearly hopes that Western pressure will compel Mubarak to permit a more robust opposition campaign than during the last presidential election, when the largest opposition party, the Muslim Brotherhood, was barred from standing a candidate, and Ayman Nour, the bourgeois liberal candidate who finished second, was jailed for alleged petition fraud.

Speaking to a British newspaper, ElBaradei was in essence warning his old patrons, the major European powers, of the counterproductive character of Western policy, particularly that of the United States. “When you see that the most popular people in the Middle East are Ahmadinejad and Hassan Nasrallah [leader of Hezbollah], that should send you a message: that your policy is not reaching out to the people,” he said.

He also took note of the extreme social tension in Egypt, where the vast majority of the population lives in crushing poverty. The *Guardian* account reads: “In Egypt the rich live in ghettos,” he said, waving his hand at the beautifully manicured garden, complete with pool. “The gap in social justice here is simply indescribable.”



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