

PolicyWatch #1749

Mohamed ElBaradei: On the Record

February 2, 2011

A crucial player in Egypt's evolving political crisis, Mohammed El-Baradei is a lawyer by profession and the former head of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, from which he retired last year. He was awarded -- along with the IAEA -- the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize for his diplomatic role in the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The following is a sampling of his comments on Egypt, the United States, Israel, and Iran.

On the Muslim Brotherhood:

"For years, the West has bought Mr. Mubarak's demonization of the Muslim Brotherhood lock, stock and barrel, the idea that the only alternative here are these demons called the Muslim Brotherhood who are the equivalent of Al Qaeda's... I am pretty sure that any freely and fairly elected government in Egypt will be a moderate one, but America is really pushing Egypt and pushing the whole Arab world into radicalization with this inept policy of supporting repression."

-- [New York Times](#), January 26, 2011

They have been portrayed as allies of bin Laden, which is complete nonsense. One doesn't have to agree with their conservative-religious ideas, but they are part of our society. They have every right to participate in the development of this society if they pursue their path in a democratic manner, free of violence."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), July 12, 2010

On Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt:

"It's symptomatic of a society that's decaying. It's an expression of frustration and it's manifesting itself into a religious clash... What do you see now? We are fighting over the right of Christians to build a church. How low can you get? To fight over anybody's right to build a house of God, it's very symptomatic. As I said they've tried to paint me as a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. But I would like one day to see Egypt governed by a Christian woman."

-- [Al-Masry Al-Youm](#), December 23, 2010

On political populism and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad:

"The so-called moderate regimes in the Middle East have not fulfilled their promises. The people were betrayed by their rulers. And the Arab League, once cofounded by Egypt, with its headquarters in Cairo, long ago became irrelevant through its wavering. What is left of it is a joke. That is why Ahmadinezhad, with his radical positions, is so celebrated by the masses..."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), July 12, 2010

On a Palestinian state coexisting with Israel:

"That is the only solution. But for that to happen, a government must come to power in Israel that respects the 1967 borders."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), July 12, 2010

On the situation in Gaza:

"The Gaza Strip is the world's largest prison. And it is one with two prison guards -- on the one side, Israel

seals the area off, and on the other side we have closed our border. Egypt's government has invoked security reasons for doing so -- they fear the Hamas, whose radical positions I do not share, but who came to power in a legitimate election... We must do all that we can to relieve the suffering of the people there. Open the borders, end the blockade!"

-- [Der Spiegel](#), July 12, 2010

On Iran's views of Israel:

"There have been a lot of offensive statements, frankly, on the part of Iran; although from what I understand, Iran wants a one-state solution...not, as reported in the media, that Israel should be wiped off the map."

-- [JTA](#), February 1, 2009

On Israel's status as a Jewish state:

"I'm not taking sides on that."

-- [JTA](#), February 1, 2009

On U.S. relations with Israel:

"We have to stop applying different standards in the Middle East. It is this duplicity that is constantly criticized in the Arab world. The goal should be to turn the Middle East into a nuclear-weapons-free zone."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), May 18, 2009

On negotiating with Iran:

"It's important to understand the difference between what the Iranians demand publicly and how they act pragmatically. You are sitting across from the experience of thousands of years of bazaars: They know how to bargain for the best price, but they also know when to give in... They want to be treated as equals, and they want security guarantees for their country. For them, complete control over nuclear technology is a means to achieve these goals. But I am not certain what that really says about their willingness to compromise."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), May 18, 2009

On Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei:

"I was surprised by how much he knew about the smallest technical details and the progress of negotiations. But during our discussion, it became clear to me just how deeply he mistrusts the West, especially the United States."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), May 18, 2009.

On nuclear weapons in the Middle East:

"I am very much in favor of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons, without Iranian, but also without Israeli, atomic weapons. But in general, the danger of a nuclear-armed Iran is overestimated... I do not believe that the Iranians are actually producing nuclear weapons."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), July 12, 2010

On the possibility of a military strike against Iran:

"That would be absolutely the worst thing that could happen. There is no military solution... If a country is bombed, you give them every reason -- with the support of everybody in the country and outside the country -- to go for nuclear weapons, and nobody can even blame them."

-- [Washington Post](#), December 6, 2009

On the Bush administration authorizing the monitoring of his telephone calls:

"What can you expect from an administration that -- in a mixture of ignorance and arrogance -- passed over countless diplomatic opportunities to conduct a dialogue with Tehran? The entire Middle East was turned into a complete mess."

-- [Der Spiegel](#), May 18, 2009.

On Israel bombing a suspected Syrian nuclear reactor in September 2007:

"I have been very harsh on Israel because they violated the rules of international law on the use of unilateral force, and they did not provide us with the information before the bombing, which we could then easily have established whether Syria was building a nuclear reactor. To that extent, the blame is also shared with the U.S., who sat on the information for a year and six months after the bombing."

-- [JTA](#), February 1, 2009

On identity and shared human values:

"I am an Egyptian Muslim, educated in Cairo and New York, and now living in Vienna. My wife and I have spent half of our lives in the North, half in the South. And we have experienced first hand the unique nature of the human family and the common values we all share. Shakespeare speaks of every single member of that family in *The Merchant of Venice*, when he asks: 'If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?'"

-- [Nobel Lecture](#), Oslo, December 10, 2005

** Compiled by Allison LeBlanc and Andrew Engel, research assistants at the Washington Institute.*

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