

Jordanian parliamentarian arrested to silence opposition to the IMF

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

One clear lesson of the Gulf war was that anyone who bucked the authority of the Anglo-American establishment would be smashed with military might. The same lesson is being dealt out, with equal brutality, to those who dare challenge the authority of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to dictate policies of austerity. Whether it is farmers in Poland, or political activists in Jordan, who question policy emanating from London and Washington, the response is the same: thug tactics, slander, and harassment.

The case in point is that of Jordanian parliamentarian Laith Shubeilat, detained on Aug. 31 for questioning and charged formally one week later for alleged involvement with an illegal Islamic group. The charges, based on alleged confessions of two arrested youths, assert that the Islamic

parliamentarian's car had been used for the transport of arms and explosives for something called the Vanguard of Islamic Youth (Shabab Al Nafeer Al Islami). Days earlier, Deputy Yacoub Qarrash, who shares an office with Shubeilat, had been detained and charged with heading up the Vanguard group, which was accused of planning armed actions against the state. Shubeilat's home and office were searched, boxes of videotapes and documents were confiscated. Despite the official request of his lawyer Ibrahim Bakr, the parliamentarian was denied bail. He was neither allowed to confer with his defense committee, nor was he permitted a meeting with his lawyer except in the presence of a third party. Due to these restrictions, he and his lawyer agreed that the accused would answer no questions until brought to court.

'Everyone knows that my husband is nonviolent'

Mrs. Rima Laith Shubeilat made the following statement on her husband's arrest at a press conference on Sept. 6.

In the name of God.

The following is a press release on the detention of Laith Shubeilat, a member of the Jordanian parliament and the chairman of the parliamentary committee to investigate cases of corruption in the public sector.

Laith was twice the president of the engineers union, and a member of the National Council, and twice a member of parliament. Anyone who follows Laith's public work would have noticed the nonviolent nature of his activities and his beliefs, and his determination to set into motion institutions which can function properly.

Due to the fact of my close association with Laith as his wife and friend, I can remember so many incidents in which Laith rejected violence, regardless of the source and victim. He condemned the assassination of Faraj Fodah, although he disagreed with his thought.

Laith's stand during the uprising in the south proved

to be in the interest of restoring peace and addressing the main issues in a family fight.

I would like to address the events of yesterday. Laith's defense committee, which includes 10 parliament members, was denied the right to meet with him in privacy. Only Mr. Ibrahim Bakr, his lawyer, was allowed to meet with him, but only in the presence of a third party. Due to this unfair treatment, Laith refused to answer questions put forward by the prosecutor general and insisted on answering questions only in court. Although bail is normal in many similar cases, Laith was denied bail, despite his political, social, and public status in the country.

The smear campaign of some sectors of the local and foreign media was amazing and revealing. The fabrication of events and connections, shows the lack of journalistic integrity and honesty. I believe that when Jordanians judge the recent events objectively, they will be assured that Laith is loyal to his country, its protection, security, and welfare of all his fellow citizens. When this is over, Laith will be as he is always.

I like to remind you of what is revealed in the Holy Koran: "O true believers, if a wicked man comes unto you with a tale, inquire quickly in the truth thereof, lest ye hurt people through ignorance, and afterwards repent of what ye have done."

Nonetheless, the press proceeded post haste to find him guilty. The media not only took for gospel allegations that the "Vanguard" group was linked to the PFLP-GC of Ahmed Jibril, but engaged in blatant breaches of professional conduct by claiming, according to the Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, that the State Security Court prosecution was leaking information from the interrogations to them, on government orders! When, on Sept. 8, the news broke that large arms caches had been located near Amman, connections to the Shubeilat case were automatically drawn. The image was painted in the press of a militarized, Iranian-backed fundamentalist force which might be moved to launch an insurrection against the Jordanian state.

Nothing could contrast more starkly with the image Shubeilat has earned through years of public work. Elected to parliament in 1984, he was reelected in 1989 with the highest number of votes in his district. Not only Muslims but prominent Christians support him, lauding him for his integrity, honesty, and courage to speak out against injustice. Shubeilat is known internationally as an Islamist capable of dialoguing with all political and religious tendencies.

'Ulterior motives'

Why this singular treatment of a prominent figure whose integrity has been recognized by every part of the political spectrum since his entry into parliament eight years ago? In the view of his wife, Rima Laith Shubeilat, who gave a press conference on Sept. 6, "ulterior motives" were behind the arrest. The aim was "to silence him." Referencing the unusual procedure being followed against her husband, including a vicious press campaign of smears and fabrications, Mrs. Shubeilat pointed to the timing of the detention, which occurred shortly after her husband had gained prominence in presenting a corruption case to parliament. The commission of inquiry headed up by Mr. Shubeilat had in fact gathered material on former Prime Minister Zaid Rifai, as well as several others, in an investigation unprecedented in Jordan.

The findings of Shubeilat's commission indicated that the former prime minister, who had served between 1985-89, had awarded a highway contract to a company for \$109 million, although other companies had made lower bids. The commission, made up of Islamists like Shubeilat as well as many liberals, held Rifai responsible for Jordan's hefty \$18 billion deficit. Most telling is the fact that Rifai was forced out of power in April 1989, due to mass actions protesting the increases in food and fuel prices which his government had introduced, on the orders of the IMF. Thus, the challenge mounted by Shubeilat's parliamentary commission was not merely directed against a powerful former prime minister, but against a policy identified with the IMF.

Shubeilat's anti-IMF stance has not been limited to his parliamentary commission work. As a devout Muslim, he has rejected the usurious practices of the IMF, and called for orderly debt moratoria, as part of a policy to implement a just, new world economic order. This approach has found

Turkey-Iran clash is dangerously close

For the first time ever on Aug. 30, Turkish troops backed by attack helicopters crossed the border into Iran in pursuit of PKK Kurdish separatist guerrillas. The action launched a confrontation between the two states, with incalculable longer-term consequences. Iran denounced the incursion as "an act of aggression."

Until that day, Turkey had regularly engaged in "hot pursuit" by ground forces, and heavy air and artillery attacks, against PKK sanctuaries in northern Iraq, but had never risked provoking Iran. The new Turkish doctrine, which was behind the deliberate incursion into Iranian territory, was drafted by an urgent session of the Turkish National Security Council, held Aug. 27 in the southeast Turkish city of Diyarbakir, presided over by President Turgut Özal. Formally, the National Security Council consists of the President, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and his cabinet, and the General Staff, headed by Gen. Dogan Gures. In reality, its decisions reflect policies of the General Staff and Özal, who together have been running the war against the Kurdish guerrillas, independent of the government. The General Staff document rubber-stamped at Diyarbakir announced that Turkey would send troops into "any country" from which Kurdish guerrillas operated.

The incursion followed a months-long pattern of PKK units using sanctuaries inside Iran to attack locations in eastern Turkey. The true cause of the Turkish-Iranian confrontation, however, is not the Kurdish issue per se; it is rather the lawful result, on two counts, of Turkish policy toward the war in the Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Struggle for influence in the Caucasus

First, Turkey, backed by the United States and Britain, has successfully isolated Iran from influencing the situation in the Caucasus region, a traditional historical sphere of Persian influence. This has been accomplished through the installation in power in Baku of the Azerbaijan

broad-based support in Jordan, the country in the region with the highest debt burden, calculated in per capita terms. Importantly, Shubeilat's economic policy proposals for a "third way" alternative to both neo-liberalism and Marxism, have been supported by Muslims and Christians alike.

He who defies the IMF will be targeted—that is the unwritten law imposed by the Anglo-American banking powers. Its application today in Jordan involves a further dimension.

Popular Front, an organization with a rabidly pan-Turkic ideology, and though the mechanism of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as the international agency involved in "mediation" in the Armenia-Azerbaijan war. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the CSCE was expanded to include the former Soviet republics. By this means, this formerly European body was transformed into a semi-Eurasian organization. Under this new arrangement, the CSCE includes, together with Turkey, all the Turkic central Asian republics, but does not include Iran.

More important, however, is the unconditional Turkish military and economic support given to an Azerbaijan leadership which has proclaimed a policy for the medium-term of creating a Greater Azerbaijan. The Greater Azerbaijan envisioned would be comprised of the former Soviet Azerbaijan plus Iranian Azerbaijan, and thus would be at the expense of a large piece of Iranian territory. The backing of such designs by Ankara has justifiably enraged Teheran. In response to this Turkish policy of promoting an eventual dismemberment of Iran, Teheran has countered by closing its eyes to PKK bases on its soil, sending a "message" to Ankara that dismemberment can be a two-way street. The result has been, in the past several months, the expansion of the geographical realm of PKK guerrilla operations from their traditional centers in southeast Turkey, near the borders with Iraq and Syria, to the eastern Turkish provinces bordering on Iran.

The Turkish operation against Iran has been accompanied by a qualitative escalation against Iraq, timed with the Anglo-American policy of dividing Iraq into "exclusion zones" as a transition to an eventual three-way partition of that country. "Hot pursuit" air and ground operations into northern Iraq against Kurdish guerrillas have been under way since Aug. 28, directly after the pivotal National Security Council meeting in Diyarbakir.

These operations, the most massive ever launched, including for the first time the use of 5,000 elite paratroopers, were but the prelude to the second dangerous Turkish escalation, which came on the heels of the incursion into Iran. On Sept. 6, clearly speaking not only for himself but for the General Staff, President Özal issued a statement accusing Iraq of "supporting the PKK," and trying "to

split up Turkey." Publicly, this marked an alarming 180° shift in the Turkish position concerning the nation of Iraq, as Turkey was now moving to abandon the cornerstone of its previous policy, which was friendship based on each country supporting the territorial integrity of the other. Özal's charge was as absurd as it was dangerous, as no Iraqi regime would ever support a Kurdish rebellion to split up Turkey, knowing full well that the minute that policy succeeded, and an independent Kurdistan were created, Iraq would be the next state to be dismembered.

The accusation was absurd, but was stated for a reason. Turkey has become convinced that the Allied "exclusion zone" policy toward Iraq will lead to Iraq's dismemberment, and Turkish doctrine holds that, should Iraq fall apart, Turkey must seize Iraqi Kurdistan to prevent it from becoming an independent entity. Thus, the accusation is to create the excuse whereby Turkey can invoke "national security" and lay claim to northern Iraq when the nation fragments under Anglo-American pressures.

There is another reason for such lies. While it is true that the PKK has sanctuaries beyond the Turkish border, and has gotten foreign backing, especially from Syria, the main sources for its huge and menacing growth over the past year are not foreign, but "made in Turkey." The Turkish policy of mass oppression and indiscriminate persecution of innocent Kurds, with mass arrests and killings, has been the greatest single contributor to the growth of the PKK guerrilla force, which, according to a late-August estimate by Prime Minister Demirel, now stands at 11,000 full-time guerrilla fighters. The brutality of the security forces was illustrated in but one example in the Army's August destruction of the southeastern Turkish city of Sirmak, forcing nearly all of the city's 25,000 Turkish Kurds to flee the city and their destroyed homes.

Such wanton actions, which have been occurring with increasing ferocity since March, will guarantee the continued escalation of PKK guerrilla activity, giving Ankara new occasions to blame "foreign" powers, and engage in new "hot pursuit" operations against both Iraq and Iran. Because of this, in the months ahead the threshold of potential conflict between Turkey and Iran will rise to the level of a dangerous pre-war situation.

—Konstantin George

Silencing the opposition

Regardless of ostensible differences over presidential preferences, the ruling circles of the Anglo-American establishment show little disagreement regarding their war policy in the Gulf and Middle East. As the implementation of the "no fly" zone in southern Iraq indicates, the policy involves a recarving of the region, which in turn will provoke new conflicts. Jordan's position within the whole is precarious;

debt-ridden and squeezed in the vise of IMF austerity, its economy, shattered by the Gulf war, is crumbling. Sentiment in defense of Iraqi sovereignty, which was high during the war, has, if anything, increased since the U.S.-led attacks against Saddam Hussein have been revealed as a pathological obsession on the part of the White House. As soon as the "no fly" zone was put into effect, in fact, demonstrations broke out in Jordan.