

Jordan's Laith Shubeilat framed up as Anglo-Americans drive for war

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

If George Bush, White House Chief of Staff James Baker III, and CIA Director Robert Gates were to have their way, sometime in early October the head of Laith Shubeilat, esteemed Islamist member of the Jordanian Parliament, would be presented on a silver platter to the extravagant residence of the American ambassador in Amman, with greetings from the government. Following the exchange of courtesies, the assembled dignitaries would proceed to reorganize affairs in the troubled Middle East, assured, this time, that not a peep of protest would be heard.

Very little of this formulation is metaphorical: In reality, the charges which were formally presented on Sept. 22 to Shubeilat's lawyer, Mr. Ibrahim Bakr, include several counts which carry the death sentence, by hanging. Shubeilat, who has been held in detention at Swaqa prison in Amman, was charged with threatening the state by supporting an insurrectionary group. The accusation, that his automobile had been used one year earlier to transport weapons, had allegedly emerged during interrogations of detained youths who were reported to belong to a group called the Vanguard of Islamic Youth, which had never been heard of prior to the arrests.

Shubeilat was not allowed to confer with his lawyer alone, nor was he allowed to be visited by his wife until Sept. 23. A preliminary hearing is slated for Sept. 29, after which a trial date will be set.

The Shubeilat affair, which has assumed the dimensions of a test case for the viability of the Jordanian elite, has little or nothing to do with a couple of youths borrowing a car to transport weapons. It is political, at the highest level of international politics.

What peace, at what price?

The White House and its higher-ups in London, want a general reorganization of the Middle East, including the partition of Iraq (and its subsequent re-confederation under a puppet regime), and the emergence of Israel, Turkey, and Iran as regional powers. The ongoing "peace conference" is the framework within which a series of separate peace agreements are to be drawn up between Israel and Syria, Israel and Jordan, etc., on the model of the Camp David agreements of nearly 15 years ago.

To make it work, Jordan must play the game, vis-à-vis both Israel and Iraq. During the Gulf war, Jordan maintained

an uncomfortable position of neutrality, which earned it the rage of the United States. (Some hardened cynics believe Jordan's stance was itself part of the U.S. coalition's policy: If Jordan had joined the coalition overtly, they reason, it would have become a target of Iraq, which could have brought Israel into the conflict.) Now, Jordan is being persuaded to abandon its facade of neutrality and join the U.S.-Saudi camp. King Hussein, following surgery for cancer at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota in late August, met with Bush, then-Secretary of State Baker, and Gates on regional policy, and press reports applauded his change of heart. He also met twice with Saudi Ambassador to Washington Prince Bandar, the man known to Arab circles as the "master of payments" of funds which the CIA and the Congress are not equipped to authorize. Bandar is also the official Washington go-between with the Israelis, enjoying intimate relations with the Zionist lobby.

More worrisome is the fact that the king reportedly met with several figures prominent in the anti-Saddam Hussein opposition, including Kurdish leader Talabani and Shiite leader in London, on his way back to Jordan. What was discussed in these meetings was Amman's posture toward Baghdad. Not only does Washington demand that Jordan respect the anti-Iraq embargo, blocking the flow of goods across the border, but it would like to see the anti-Saddam opposition stationed in Jordan, perhaps with "Radio Free Iraq" transmitters beaming into Iraq. What the White House wants, in short, is for Jordan to sell out Iraq, lock, stock, and barrel.

The Jordanian people, most of whom are Palestinians, see things differently. The vast majority of the people support Iraq, despite differences some may have with its leadership, and have facilitated humanitarian aid efforts as well as the supply of food and medicines. In late August, thousands rallied to the call to demonstrate against the "no-fly zone."

As for the U.S.-led "peace conference," very few Jordanians give any credence to the myth that it will give the Palestinians their right to self-determination. Most vocal in their opposition to the Camp David II are the Islamists in Jordan and the Hamas within the Occupied Territories. The champion of the Islamist camp is none other than Laith Shubeilat. Shubeilat had expressed his "pessimism" regarding a peace-talk breakthrough. He has emphasized that, were an

agreement to be reached involving Jordan, it would have to be ratified by Parliament, a highly unlikely event. The Islamic parliamentarian's view has been that the only basis for peace was implementation of the juridical instruments so ceremoniously forged by the U.N.: resolutions demanding the total withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Territories and real self-determination for the Palestinian people, including their eventual decision to form a sovereign state.

Silencing opposition

On Sept. 22, the formal charges were presented against Shubeilat, depicting him as involved in an Islamic network, armed to the gills, ready to move militarily to block the "peace process." On Sept. 23, BBC reported triumphantly that the U.S. and Jordan had mended their fences and were holding joint military exercises in eastern Jordan (near the Iraqi border). Acting Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was ebulliently praising Jordan the same day, on its implementing the blockade against Iraq. During those days, a motley crew of well-paid actors, variously sporting Kurdish dress, Shiite robes, and "Baath Party" uniforms, met in Kurdistan to lay the basis for an alternative government to Saddam Hussein. Simultaneously, operations were already afoot at the U.N. to confiscate frozen Iraqi funds, transfer them into an escrow account, and allocate them for the planned uprising against Baghdad's leadership.

No doubt there will be massive protest against all these machinations in Jordan. What better way to suppress such protest than to take the recognized spokesman for the dissenting view and sacrifice him?

Laith Shubeilat, it must be understood, is not merely an opposition figure who happens to have made it into Parliament. As an independent representative of the Islamic movement, he has enjoyed unprecedented popular support since his first election in 1984. In 1989, he was reelected with the highest number of votes, his supporters coming not only from Muslim but also Christian quarters. He has held positions of honor as president of the Engineers Union and member of the National Council. He is known in Jordan for his profound religious convictions, his personal integrity, and honesty. It is said that "the only thing Laith Shubeilat fears is God." In Parliament, he was leading the House Investigations Committee, which had assembled material implicating corruption on the part of six former ministers, among them former Prime Minister Zaid Rifai, former Finance Minister Hanna Odeh, and former Public Works Minister Mahmoud Hawamdeh. Rifai is also known as the International Monetary Fund's man in Jordan, largely responsible for the country's financial breakdown.

Thus, Shubeilat has become the symbol of the fight against corruption, against the IMF and its usurious policies, against the new world order's wars and imperialist designs for regional takeover. His endorsement of the ideas and program of Lyndon LaRouche have only made this political

position more incisive. To smash the opposition in Jordan—and the Arab and Muslim world—Washington thus made a careful choice in singling out Shubeilat.

Shubeilat must be freed

If such is the intention, such is not necessarily the course which events will take. If the U.S. and its allies proceed as planned in Iraq, the outcome will be war, like that which ravaged Lebanon for over a decade. Such a war is, indeed, the real content of the Anglo-American policy. Despite their historical political subservience to Washington, even the Saudis do not look with favor on a breakup of Iraq. Iran, in such a juncture, would gain relative status, emerging as a major power. Already, Iran has been flexing its muscles in the region, refusing the presence of Syria or Egypt in any regional security arrangement (as was planned at the end of the Gulf war) and occupying the island of Abu Musa in violation of a 1971 agreement with the United Arab Emirates (see *International Intelligence*). Some smaller emirates, as a result, are turning to Iraq for protection.

Similarly, if the U.S. rams through an Israeli-Syrian agreement and a sellout arrangement for the Palestinians under Jordanian sponsorship, all hell will break loose. Jordan, as a nation, will stand to lose as much as anyone else. In short, any further destabilization anywhere in the region will unleash uncontrollable war, along the lines of the Thirty Years' War of 1618-48. In such a situation, it is not governments who will be in control, but populations and popular movements.

Mass organizations have already begun to move in defense of Laith Shubeilat. An alliance of the Muslim Brotherhood, the United Organization for the Reconstruction of the Baath Party, the Socialist Arab Baath Party, the Arab Movement for Popular Liberation, the Jordanian Revolutionary People's Party, the Arab Pioneer Movement, the National Progressive Democrats, the Social Arab Nationalists in Jordan, and various individuals, signed a statement Sept. 10, denouncing the arrest and calling for his release. Similar statements followed in rapid succession, from the Graduates in Islamic Studies, the Democratic Popular Party, Mansour Morad (chairman of the Jordanian Youth Association), the Group of Islamic Parliamentarians, the Jordanian Journalists, the Islamic Movement Parliamentary Office, and a group of electors of Laith Shubeilat from his congressional district. Overseas, the Schiller Institute launched a call (see below). The Committee against Repression, headquartered in France, picked up the call, and joined the mobilization to channel telegrams and faxes of protest into Jordan, demanding his immediate release.

The most elegant way of averting catastrophe is for the highest authorities of the kingdom to find the means to liberate Shubeilat. If, on the contrary, his head is placed on the silver platter, it is sure to be the last banquet the assembled VIPs will attend.