

ferred to Algeria as the economic model for implementing IMF policies. Could you comment on how cynical such a comment is, in light of the reality facing Algeria?

Brahimi: The economic situation is a catastrophe. All of the economic and social indicators have been in the red since 1993. Now, you have the impact of the privatization of the economy. You have two factors here. First, you have the privatization of the state farms, which have belonged to the state since the departure of the French in 1962. In 1987, there was a law passed which gave priority in the sale of the land to the farmers themselves. It wasn't bad, because only the workers could buy the land. But unfortunately, now it has been reported that the massacres have been very intense in the area near Algiers, in precisely the area where these privatizations are taking place. The plan is to clear the land by killing people, and after killing them, to give it to the military and the friends of generals. So the privatization is not benefitting the people, but only a narrow group of people in the regime.

Second, you have the privatization of state companies in the industrial and service sectors. This privatization will bring about 400,000 layoffs; the already high level of unemployment will be even higher. To give you an example, the unemployment figure rose from 1.3 million in 1992 to more than 2.5 million in 1996; there will be 3 million unemployed by the end of this year. Since opportunities for job creation are very poor, because of low rates of investment, unemployment will increase even more. Now, according to my calculations, there is an increase of 250,000 potential new workers coming into the labor force each year, which means that the unemployed workforce will increase to 4.5 million by the year 2002.

Also, because the IMF ordered the Algerian government to devalue its currency, the dinar, this devaluation increased the prices of all imported goods, and Algeria is importing 90% of its consumer goods, so you can imagine its impact on the Algerian population. Prices have gone up very steeply, especially in food products. This causes a drop in purchasing power of the population, leading to a growth in poverty, and I now have reliable information from Algeria that the average salary is unable to cover the basic needs of the average household, let alone the situation of the unemployed. So, the situation is very serious. You cannot have economic growth without investment, and, except in the hydrocarbon sector, the rate of investment is very, very low—I would say it is the lowest in the last 30 years, since our independence. All the economic and social indicators are very bad. Besides that, you have corruption, and the external debt jumped from \$26 billion in 1992 to \$40 billion in 1998, if the military debt is included. It is a very, very dramatic situation, and I don't see by what miracle the economic situation will improve in the next three or four years. I would say, to the contrary, that I expect that the Algerian economy will be bankrupt in the next few years.

What's at stake in jailing of Shubeilat

by Our Special Correspondent

Anyone desirous of understanding what the prospects are, for peace or war in the Middle East, should carefully follow the developments in the case of Laith Shubeilat, the independent Jordanian Islamist currently being held in prison, on charges of incitement to riot and *lèse-majesté*. If plans proceed, to put Shubeilat on trial before a military tribunal, ram through a conviction, and serve him a lengthy sentence, it means that



Laith Shubeilat

some time this summer, war will engulf the region. It may begin as a revival of the Palestinian Intifada against Israeli occupying forces, and/or as fratricidal strife fomented among the desperate Palestinian population; it will most likely lead to an Israeli military move to expel up to a million Palestinians from the West Bank, into Jordan, along the lines of the plan associated with Israeli Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon, known as the "Jordan Is Palestine" option. Some in the region are even mooted that the "surplus" Palestinian population would be driven into Iraq, perhaps under a different government. Regardless of the variations in the scenarios, one thing is clear: This would destroy Jordan as a nation, as well as Iraq, if it were thus besieged.

Shubeilat is being kept in jail because he is the only opposition figure with the political credibility and courage to speak out and denounce the process which is leading in the direction of catastrophe for the region. He has consistently denounced the "normalization" process of Jordan with Israel as a fraud, and detrimental to the economic interests of Palestinians and Jordanians. Most significantly, he has led the charge against the International Monetary Fund and its systematic destruction of the Jordanian economy since the IMF structural adjustment policy was imposed in 1992.

To keep Shubeilat quiet, and to terrorize anyone who might share his views, he was thrown in prison Feb. 20 on hoked-up charges. To keep the entire political class quiet, the press has been ordered not to print anything pertaining to his case. On March 19, following a request from State Security Court Prosecutor General Ma'amoun Khasawneh, the head

of the Press and Publications Department of the Interior Ministry, Bilal Tal, sent a circular to all press, telling them not to "run any news or information related to the case of Mr. Shubeilat." Although the move was rightly contested by Shubeilat's defense attorney, Hussein Mjalli, on grounds that it was unconstitutional, and a petition of leaders of 13 political parties was issued March 21, protesting the quasi-martial law situation in the Kingdom, the security authorities have not budged.

The war party

The driving force toward confrontation within the region, is the current Israeli government. As Lyndon LaRouche characterized it in the radio broadcast "EIR Talks" on March 18, there is Sharon, "a well-known butcher," and Netanyahu, "who is a legitimate fascist." And, LaRouche continued, "the time has come where someone has to step on Netanyahu, almost as if he were a bug. Because . . . he's pushed Jordan to the point that Jordan could explode." LaRouche pointed to the fact that King Hussein, a "stability factor," is reportedly ill. "Then," he added, "you have a friend of mine, Laith Shubeilat, who is an Islamic figure, who is a leader of the Engineers' Society, one of the key stabilizing figures inside Jordan. And he is now being framed up for prosecution, for something in which he had no part, simply as rounding up the usual list of suspects, and possibly shooting them." LaRouche warned, "If the King were to die, and Laith were to be imprisoned or otherwise destabilized or killed, then you could see very easily, a scenario for the disappearance of Jordan as a nation-state from the face of the planet, which is something . . . which Ariel Sharon has long desired, is to break up Jordan."

Both Netanyahu and Sharon escalated their provocations toward the Palestinians and Jordan in the last ten days of March. Sharon, while on a visit to Jordan, was quoted on Israeli television, saying that Israel had informed Jordan that it was committed to "finish off the job" of assassinating Hamas leader Misha'al, whom the Mossad had tried but failed to kill in Amman. Sharon later said he "respected Jordan's sovereignty," which referred to his qualification that this time, the Mossad would not kill the man on Jordanian soil.

At the same time, Netanyahu, coming under increasing pressure, exerted by the United States and by UN General Secretary Kofi Annan (see *International Intelligence*, in this issue) responded by rejecting any outside attempt to "dictate" policy. The Israeli Prime Minister again spat in the face of President Clinton, who was reportedly preparing a new initiative to restart peace talks, and threatened to mobilize "Israel's congressmen," among the Zionist lobby and friends of televangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, to stonewall any administration move for an Israeli military withdrawal.

If that were not sufficient, Netanyahu's message was, that perhaps a terrorist incident could be arranged, to provide the pretext for a definitive end to the peace process. Thus, on March 24, the *Jerusalem Post* reported, Israel security had

gone on a terror alert, fearing new attacks by Islamic Jihad and Hamas. The "general and growing alert in anticipation of terrorist strikes" was reported by security sources. This came as a result of a strategy session, during which security agencies reviewed recent events they said constituted a pattern. The paper listed them, as if they were a sociological phenomenon, whereas in fact, they all document Israeli provocations. It wrote, "These included the incident at the Tarkumiya road-block, where three Palestinians were mistakenly shot dead by [Israeli] soldiers, growing unrest on the Palestinian street, the violent eviction of Palestinian squatter families by the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] from Israeli-controlled territory, and the deadlock in the peace process." The paper noted that the situation in the territories was "worse than ever," and that Hamas had reemerged to lead demonstrations. It concluded with an ominous statement attributed to the security source, "A terror attack [launched] from the Palestinian Authority now against Israel would cause the complete collapse of the [peace] process with the Palestinians."

Time is running out

In his interview, LaRouche pointed to the deterioration of the economic situation as a major factor in the crisis, and emphasized the emergence of an opposition to Netanyahu's policies in Israel. Yet, the United States, he said, continued to hesitate, "because of the factor of the Falwells and the Robertsons, who are the main constituency behind the Starr operation, and because of the influence on Hollywood money, and so forth, of certain Zionist operations, which are either part of the Netanyahu operation, or which do not want to oppose it, that is, do not want to be in a position of getting into a fight with them. They don't want to appear to the 'betraying Israel,' " he said, "even if the government is a virtual Hitler."

The tone and content of Kofi Annan's message in Israel, may well be the product of discussions the UN diplomat held with President Clinton in Washington prior to his trip, and may indicate a concerted effort to force the issue with Israel. "The United States," LaRouche said, "is going to have to step in forcefully, with other countries, and put a foot down on this operation. It affects us all. They can't do that. They cannot be allowed to go ahead with this Hitler-like lunacy that Netanyahu is pushing in the Middle East."

One critical move, in stopping the drive toward regional chaos, would be to set free the one political figure in Jordan, who has mobilized an effective opposition to the Sharon-Netanyahu lunacy, and that is Laith Shubeilat.

Calls for the release of Laith Shubeilat should be addressed to the Royal Court at fax number 00962-6-4627421. Copies of letters or petitions should be sent to the Jordanian Engineers' Association (JEA), at fax number 00962-6-5676933, and to the newspaper Al Arab Al Yawm, at fax number 00962-6-5602266.