

Lebanese Paper on Hashemi, McFarlane Issues

NC051205 Beirut AL-SHIRA' in Arabic

3 Nov 86 pp 24, 26

[Text] What has happened in Tehran in the past 2 months? Was it part of a power struggle such as takes place in most regimes in the world? Has the issue been resolved by the removal of one of the parties to the struggle, and has the former participant in government and decisionmaking turned overnight into a traitor deserving execution, as usually happens in such cases?

Al-Shira' considers itself well-informed on past and present events within Iran. It has taken an interest in everything that has happened there since the victory of the revolution in February 1979. It is familiar with all the details. It knows about the home of the successor of the imam [Ayatollah Khomeyni] Shaykh Hoseyn 'Ali Montazeri; it knows how the big house in Qom was opened to all citizens after its patron left the shah's prisons; and it knows how the son of the house Shaykh Mohammad Montazeri (Abu Ahmad) used the small room overlooking the courtyard as a headquarters for exporting the revolution to the world. The latter began his activities by waging an open battle against all those who considered themselves as dominating the revolution, even if they held the highest posts in the state, after the victory of Imam Khomeyni.

Al-Shira', which throws light on events in Tehran, urges everyone, particularly in Iran, to provide a full and fearless explanation of what has happened, without making futile accusations and without taking stands which are bound to prevent the reaching of a solution, regardless of the strength of those who are still in power. They should learn from revolutions in other countries which devour their sons and then themselves become exposed to loss as a result of the blows of others.

The Iranian news agency reported the arrest of Mehdi Hashemi on a charge of possessing weapons and fake passports a month after the incident actually took place. The incident was kept secret. What has been revealed so far, and what might be revealed in the future, does not and may not go beyond helping to corroborate the charge against the man who until recently was the means of liaison between most world liberation movements and Tehran.

Mehdi Hashemi was born in the town of Najafabad in 1946. This is also the home town of Shaykh Hoseyn 'Ali Montazeri and his son Shaykh Mohammad. The relationship between Hashemi and Montazeri is not confined to their shared birthplace; it extends to a closeness of ideas and views on the continuation of the revolution and the course it should take.

Hashemi is one of the staunchest supporters of the call of Shaykh Mohammad Montazeri (God bless his soul) for the revolution to be exploited. He (Montazeri) was nicknamed "the Trotsky of the Iranian revolution" during the revolution's early days. Others described him as the "red shaykh". At any rate, he was known to all those who knew and supported him as the revolution's mind that never slept.

Hashemi is much influenced by the political and revolutionary movement of Montazeri junior. He did not worry about the

revolution after its victory, as some do these days. He had been living the revolution ever since the shah's power was at its peak. He was arrested several times during the shah's reign and on three occasions faced charges that could have led to his execution. However, due to lack of evidence the authorities were compelled to release him in the end. When the revolution triumphed, he and Shaykh Mohammad were the first to criticize the way Ayatollah Beheshti was dealing with the revolutionaries in the Islamic Republican Party. He was also critical of President Abolhasan Bani-Sadr. In both instances, Beheshti and Bani-Sadr were at the peak of their power. However, Montazeri and Hashemi did not hesitate to level charges against them. They submitted their written views and reports about them to Imam Khomeyni himself. In one of these reports Hashemi described the Islamic Republican Party, which Beheshti and Rafsanjani had formed, as the Rastakhiz Iranian Ba'th party, which the shah had formed several years before his downfall.

Mohammad Montazeri was a great supporter of this party, which was formed in March 1979; that is, 1 month after the victory of the Iranian revolution. He even called on members of Islamic movements outside Tehran to join it. However, he soon had a violent confrontation with Ayatollah Beheshti, who was the second strongest man in Iran after Ayatollah Khomeyni until his death in 1981. Montazeri issued vehement statements which greatly embarrassed his father, Shaykh Husayn. This prompted the father to issue a statement of his own to the press in 1979 in which he objected to the stands of his son, explaining that they were fantasies and illusions resulting from the torture and beating he had received during the shah's regime.

When Shaykh Mohammed Montazeri formed the "Satja" organization in 1979 to campaign for support for Islamic liberation movements throughout the world, Hashemi was his right-hand man. Through this organization, Hashemi was able to make close contact with these movements and to establish strong relations with them.

The organization was later disbanded because it conflicted with the concept of a state in Iran, a state which had begun to take root after a difficult start. Following the disbandment, Montazeri joined the Revolutionary Guard, which had turned from the mission of overthrowing the shah to a mission of protecting the revolution. Montazeri had many supporters within this group, including "Abu Sharif," who was the commander of the guard's military operations, and Hashemi, who was responsible for the guard's relationship with various liberation movements in the world.

Although Montazeri was martyred at the same table with Ayatollah Beheshti in the bombing of the "Hezb-e Jomhuri-ye Eslami" [Islamic Republican Party] headquarters by the "Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization," Hashemi continued to play a role in the Revolutionary Guards in his capacity as member of the Central Committee and the official in charge of the Liberation Movements Office. His role became more prominent in all walks of life in Tehran following the September 1980 escalation in the war with Iraq.

It was natural that Hashemi would play his role within the guard as he himself understood it and as he wanted it; in other words,

within the context that the revolution must continue. This caused him to clash with advocates of another concept several times, advocates who were becoming stronger every day. Their concept could be described as the notion of a stable state. The most prominent advocates of this concept were Rafiqdust and Mohsen Reza'i, members of the Guard's Central Committee. Rafiqdust later became commander of the Revolutionary Guard while Reza'i became minister of the Revolutionary Guard.

The struggle between these two concepts was settled by Ayatollah Khomeyni in 1984. He split the Liberation Movements Office into two organizations which were no longer under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Guard: the Foreign Ministry under 'Ali Akbar Velayati, and the Ministry of Intelligence under Shaykh Mohammad Reyshahri, a strong and intrepid man.

These changes meant a reduction in Hashemi's tasks and his transfer from a revolutionary organization in which he believed, to government and security organizations — namely, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Intelligence. In view of the fact that his ideas did not fit the concepts of these two organizations, he voluntarily left the Revolutionary Guard and settled in Qom to play another role commensurate with his aspirations and methods.

In Qom he acted in accordance with religious teachings; namely, through the six schools which had been established by Shaykh Hoseyn 'Ali Montazeri and which included over 1,000 students, most of them Iranians, in addition to a few Lebanese, Iraqi, Pakistani, Afghan, and various other Arab students.

Hashemi also acted within the political sphere through his indoctrination of fighters on the battlefronts.

In terms of field activity abroad, Shaykh Hoseyn 'Ali Montazeri did not hesitate to support Mehdi Hashemi in his endeavors to again set up an office to aid liberation movements throughout the world. Hashemi benefited from Shaykh Montazeri's personal, political, and material support and from donations and Islamic taxes, which used to be paid to the office by Montazeri's supporters and merchants from Tehran and other Iranian cities, particularly Esfahan.

The office's links with the Islamic liberation movements around the world stopped again. [as published] Many of these movements' leaders had opted to deal with this office because they imagined it was supported by Shaykh Montazeri, the man not overly concerned with the method of political and diplomatic relations which the Iranian Foreign Ministry strives to maintain. The maintenance of such relations was often at the expense of these liberation movements, the latter believed.

The office's links were extended to movements with which Iran as a state was not happy to have dealings, particularly in Afghanistan, where movements emerged which rejected cooperation with Pakistan, at the same time, without receiving any aid from Iran. These movements were, however, taken under the office's wing.

Gradually, contradictions surfaced between this office and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Intelligence. It was natural that such contradictions should lead to offenses, which in turn led to confrontation.

Before matters could grow much worse, the authorities, represented by Foreign Minister 'Ali Akbar Velayati and Intelligence Minister Shaykh Mohammad Mohammadi-Reyshahri, intervened several times with Shaykh Montazeri, at the instigation of Tehran's strongman, Majlis Speaker 'Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, to stop the office's activities under Montazeri's chairmanship. Montazeri, however, always used to say: This office is under my patronage. Its philosophy is different from yours. You are a state with relations that you must preserve. The office is a revolution, and it has relations it must preserve.

Majlis Speaker Shaykh Hashemi-Rafsanjani often attempted to persuade Mehdi Hashemi to give up his post and choose an ambassadorship in any international capital. These efforts were in vain; the man neither wanted to be nor could be an ambassador.

As the contradictions between the two concepts grew, they had to be settled decisively. How was this done?

Al-Shira' is concerned with presenting the political view which both parties offer as justification. *Al-Shira'* is adopting neither of these views. What is the state's view, if one may put it that way?

The state, or those who defend the decision to arrest Hashemi, say the detained man's actions threaten the state's relations with others, which is not in agreement with the state's interests. The state relates the following two incidents as proof of its view:

1. The first incident was when arms were transported to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in a civilian aircraft carrying pilgrims during last year's Hajj season, an action which created tension between Iran and the Kingdom. The state provides as proof the fact that the plane took off from Esfahan, Hashemi's stronghold and formerly the stronghold of Montazeri's son. It is the city from which numerous pilgrims who support Hashemi's stands have emerged.

2. The second incident was the kidnapping of Syrian Charge d'Affaires in Tehran Iyad al-Mahmud. The state says Hashemi and his group kidnapped him on behalf of Syria's foes in the region, led by Yasir 'Arafat.

Since this accusation goes beyond theoretical differences to actual involvement in affairs harmful to relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the large Muslim neighboring country, and with Syria, the principal Arab ally, the issue is graver still, accusing Hashemi of having close ties to Iranian and Palestinian groups linked to Yasir 'Arafat, who is hostile to the state and the revolution.

What does Hashemi reply?

His circles defend him, and from their own viewpoint, trying to explain the two incidents from a different perspective, they say:

The ones who shipped the weapons on the plane from Esfahan had no connection with Hashemi. Hashemi replies to the accusation by saying: The Revolutionary Guards group arrested on this charge has admitted that the shipment was made in direct preparation for the Revolution Guards and their command, and there is no use in levelling this accusation against him.

Regarding the kidnapping of the Syrian charge d'affaires, Hashemi says: This was planned by Iranian intelligence, supervised by Shaykh Reyshahri, because the diplomat was fomenting national and Ba'thist ideas within Tehran. His detention was a message from Tehran to Damascus which Syria understood very well, but which it has not yet answered.

The danger point is reached when Hashemi's supporters reply to the accusations levelled against their official by saying:

The elimination of the Liberation Movements Office led by Hashemi was a clear Western demand to Tehran in return for delivering the military assistance it needs.

They then relate an incident which *Al-Shira'* publishes only to present the other side objectively.

They relate the following incident: A secret U.S. envoy, Robert McFarlane, visited Tehran secretly at the beginning of last month (September) and stayed at the Independence Hotel (formerly the Hilton Hotel). He held extremely important talks with envoys from the Foreign Ministry, the Consultative Assembly, and the Army. Among these envoys were Dr Mohammad Lavasani, head of the Political Department for Asia and Africa, who had worked for 10 years for Aramco in Saudi Arabia; Dr Mohammad 'Ali Hadi, deputy chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Consultative Assembly; and a senior Army officer.

The talks between McFarlane, who served for a time as an assistant to National Security Council Chief Brzezinski, and the Iranian delegation centered on the Gulf war and what is termed international terrorism.

The tale as told by Hashemi's supporters goes on: Iran asked two things of Washington, which its envoys proposed very clearly: one was a halt to military, material, and political support for the Iraqi regime; and the other was the sale of spare parts to Iran for its U.S.-made aircraft, tanks, radar, and other weapons. In return, the United States, through McFarlane, asked Tehran to stop supporting liberation movements in the world on the pretext that they are terrorist movements and to guarantee the security of Arab Gulf states.

The tale ends with the conclusion of the deal. Hashemi's supporters say: Washington responded quickly to Iran's demands, sending four C-300 planes from a base in the Philippines carrying some of the needed spare parts for Iran. These contributed to a large extent to improving the Iranian air defense system, which last week downed three Iraqi planes, one a Sokhoi and two MiG-23's. The shipment also strengthened the defense of Tehran and improved Iranian radar operations.

Tehran's response came with the arrest of Hashemi and the accusations that he had deviated from the logic of the state and had tried to involve it in disputes with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Syria, as indicated by the two incidents.

This is what Hashemi's group and the official Iranian statements are saying. While it is not our place to direct or accept accusations of this party or that, we can still relate available information on this question.

Hashemi's supporters believe that this entire incident unfolded without the knowledge of Imam Khomeyni, who was bed-ridden after suffering a heart attack that required a long rest. With regard to his call to let justice take its course, they do not doubt this at all, because they, too, want justice to take its course.

In addition, they still consider Shaykh Hoseyn 'Ali Montazeri their patron. Montazeri had sought to explain the affair to Imam Khomeyni, but the imam's condition did not allow this. So the apparent successor himself stayed at home and refused to receive envoys from senior personalities. Nor did he receive Shaykh Rafsanjani or Khamene'i when they came to him in Qom to explain the situation. Hashemi's supporters add other reports about statements issued in Tehran and other Iranian cities, some of which were published in the press, which defended Hashemi. They also reported that a number of Revolutionary Guards cadres had returned from the front to protest the arrest of their patron.

In addition, his supporters believe that the coming stage will see an escalation in the confrontation with the liberal trends in Iran, particularly the factions of former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazar-gan, in an attempt to cover up the real struggle raging between these two positions. Accusing Mehdi Hashemi of killing a clergyman will be useless, because this is the same charge levelled against him during the shah's regime.

Whatever the outcome, there are now two opposing logics in Tehran: The logic of the state and the logic of the revolution. Each has its supporting views and practical justifications. If it is difficult for either of them to back away from their ideas, it is still more difficult for either of them to stop levelling the worst accusations against the other to make their logic prevail. We know this all too well in Third World countries. 'Ali Nasir Muhammad was yesterday the undisputed leader of Aden and a nationalist, progressive, and internationalist. Those listening to Aden radio talking about him today will not be surprised by whatever is waiting tomorrow for Abu Bakr al-'Attas or for others in Tehran, Baghdad, etc.