

LEBANON

ALL DEMONSTRATIONS BANNED ISRAEL/PLO PEACE ACCORD OPPONENTS KILLED

PRESIDENT CLINTON CALLS FOR SILENCING OF CRITICS

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SUMMARY

On September 13, as Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed in Washington an interim self-rule accord for Gaza and Jericho, protestors against this agreement were killed and injured in Beirut and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

In one particularly bloody demonstration held on that day, Lebanese Army troops killed seven men and one woman as they peacefully protested against the accord. Dozens more were injured by gunfire when the demonstration of several hundred persons was forcibly dispersed by units of the Lebanese Army. Hizballa, a pro-Iranian Lebanese Shi'a group, and other political organizations had called for the protest. The demonstration was held in defiance of a decision taken by the Lebanese government in mid-August indefinitely banning "all assemblies and processions," whether or not they had obtained a license from the authorities.

Responding to public demands, on September 14 the Lebanese Parliament debated the incident and recommended that the Cabinet reconsider the ban. However, on September 18, the full Cabinet rejected the Parliament's recommendation and reiterated its categorical ban on public protest.

In a troublesome development, on September 15, President Bill Clinton telephoned President Hafez al-Asad of Syria requesting that he silence critics of the Israel-PLO agreement. According to consistent reports about the telephone conversation, President Clinton expressed concern that such criticism makes it difficult to achieve progress in the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, as well as between the PLO and Israel. Despite denials by Syrian officials, Middle East Watch information is that Syrian authorities have privately advised Lebanese political groups, including Hizballa, to tone down their public criticism.

In Lebanon's refugee camps, forces loyal to Yasser Arafat, the PLO Chairman, attempted to stop protests against the accord. At least six peaceful protesters were injured by gunfire at two of these protests. In Jordan, meanwhile, the government asked opponents of the agreement not to protest publicly. When Muslim Brotherhood supporters organized protests on September 13, the security forces arrested several suspected organizers. On September 18, King Hussein warned critics of the accords against continuing public protests.

Middle East Watch is deeply concerned that the coming transitional phase, which involves interim agreements between the parties to the Middle East conflict, could see an upsurge in human rights violations throughout the region. Bans on peaceful protests and the authorities' willingness to use violence to suppress peaceful opposition are causes for alarm. The Lebanese example demonstrates the immediate results of denial of the basic right of peaceful expression. The dire warnings issued by governments in the region against public protest are ominous signs of their determination to use force, if necessary, to suppress dissent.

It is especially dismaying that President Clinton should have called President Asad to request that he silence Palestinian critics of the peace accord between Israel and the PLO. The Syrian government has had a bloody history of suppressing political dissent. Peace will indeed be hollow if it is going to be built on cancelling civil and political rights, including the right to free expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Middle East Watch calls on the Lebanese government to rescind its ban on peaceful demonstrations. A full and independent investigation should be conducted to determine the responsibility for the deaths and injuries of peaceful demonstrators on September 13. Such an investigation is especially urgent in light of the credible allegations that top government officials were directly responsible for the decision to disperse that demonstration by force.

As Israel and the PLO begin detailed negotiations on the implementation of their limited self-rule agreement, dissent can be expected to emerge from many sides. Middle East Watch fears that the temptation to suppress peaceful opposition to the accord will be strong. In identical letters sent to Yasser Arafat, PLO Chairman, and Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister, on September 13, Middle East Watch called on the two leaders to affirm publicly their commitment to respect the fundamental rights of the

populations under their control.

Future progress in resolving the conflict may depend on initiatives taken now toward curbing violations of human rights. Israel can, in this manner, signal to Palestinians that they are gaining tangible and immediate benefits from the limited self-rule plan signed in Washington on September 13. And the Palestinian leadership can enhance the legitimacy of the accord by declaring its commitment to the rule of law, democratic participation in political life, tolerance of dissent, and acceptance of international human rights standards.

Middle East Watch calls on the Palestine Liberation Organization and the governments of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria to permit peaceful demonstrations for or against the peace accords. Towards that end, the PLO and the four governments should make it clear to their officials and supporters that peaceful dissent may not be silenced.

The United States plays a pivotal role in the Middle East negotiations. Middle East Watch calls on the Administration to take the lead by publicly and forcefully stating that peace in the Middle East should be built on respect for human rights, including the right of peaceful dissent. To undo the impression created in the region by President Clinton's widely reported request that President Asad silence critics of the Gaza-Jericho accord, Middle East Watch urges the U.S. government to clarify publicly the U.S. position on the treatment of critics of the peace accords.

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The SEPTEMBER 13 DEMONSTRATION IN BEIRUT Scores of Protestors Killed or Injured

Despite the mid-August ban on all demonstrations, Hizballa and other Lebanese and Palestinian groups in Lebanon called for protest demonstrations to be held on Monday, September 13, during the White House ceremony of signing the Israel-PLO interim self-rule agreement for Gaza and Jericho. On September 10 and again on September 12, the government publicly reiterated the ban and discouraged organizers from going ahead with their plans. Although a number of groups withdrew their support for the protest march, Hizballa insisted on carrying it out.

On the day before the demonstration, Sunday, September 12, Bishara Mirhij, Minister of the Interior, chaired a Central Security Council meeting of heads of Lebanese security forces. Colonel Rustum Ghazala represented the Syrian forces command in Lebanon in this meeting, which reconfirmed the government's ban.

Attempts to prevent the demonstration from taking place were made by Mirhij and commanders of Lebanese and Syrian forces. They contacted Hizballa leaders, including Hajj Hussein al-Khalil, head of the political bureau, and Deputy Muhammed Burjawi, a Hizballa Member of Parliament from Beirut, asking them to abide by the ban on demonstrations. They were told that since Lebanese officials had already criticized the peace agreement in very strong terms, there was no need for private citizens to demonstrate. Syrian

forces commanders in Lebanon and officials in Damascus informed Hizballa that they supported the Lebanese government's decision, but Hizballa insisted on holding the demonstration. Leaders of other political groups that had previously agreed to join the demonstration by then tried unsuccessfully to dissuade Hizballa from holding it. Deputy Zaher al-Khatib, from *Rabitat al-Shighila* (Workers League), and Tawfiq Muhanna, from the Syrian Social National Party--Supreme Council, were among the intermediaries.

According to government officials, because of these efforts they believed that a compromise had been struck. Hizballa's protest was to be restricted to a religious service to be held inside the Martyrs Cemetery, near Shatila Circle in Beirut, where prayers might be said, followed by speeches. While Hizballa appeared to accept the compromise, it nevertheless refused to issue a statement cancelling the demonstration.¹

Around dawn on the Monday of September 13, in an attempt to enforce the government's ban on demonstrations, mechanized units of the Lebanese Army as well as units from the Internal Security Forces were deployed throughout West Beirut and the Southern Suburb of Beirut (*al-Dhahiyyi al-Janoubiyyi*), a Hizballa stronghold. Troops were also deployed near the entrances of Palestinian refugee camps and in the towns of the Beqa', as well in southern and northern Lebanon.

Hours before the demonstration, Lebanese and Syrian forces were informed of the gathering of potential demonstrators. Discussions between President Hrawi, the ministers of defense and the interior and other security officials, as well as with Syrian officials, were apparently aimed at ensuring compliance with the ban while permitting assembly of some protesters inside the Martyrs Cemetery.

Meanwhile, Hizballa met with other political groups in its headquarters in Bir al-Abed in Beirut. According to a source in Hizballa, that meeting decided to call for the demonstration to assemble in front of al-Hadi Mosque following the noon prayers. Initially, Hizballa had called for the demonstration to be held in what is known as the "Cola Circle" in the center of Beirut. After it had been informed of the ban and other parties pulled out of the event, Hizballa changed the venue to the Ghubairi Circle in the Southern Suburb, where it has wide support among the residents.

After the noon prayers of Monday, September 13, several hundred demonstrators gathered. Tens of the protesters started marching from the mosque in the direction of the army's vehicles, raising their hands and chanting. Army officers asked them to halt their progress and, when they failed to comply, fired in the air. The demonstrators dispersed but regrouped several hundred meters away, under the Airport Circle's bridge (200 meters from al-Ghubairi Circle). They again started marching towards the army's tanks and armored vehicles, chanting anti-Israel and anti-US slogans. At 2:15, army officers again demanded that the demonstrators disperse and again fired shots into the air, including a loud B-7 percussion shell, which created tension among the demonstrators and panic among shopkeepers and others in the area of the demonstration. This was almost immediately followed by firing into the crowd. Seven men and one woman are known to have been killed: Abboud Abboud, Samir Wahhab, al-Hajj Ali al-Tawil, Nizar Qansou, Muhammed Abdel-Karim, Sabah Haidar and Sakna Shams al-Din. According to various reports, more than forty others were wounded (the names of thirty-two of the wounded are on file at Middle

¹According to government officials, Hizballa representatives also demanded that the government not issue a statement on the new deal.

East Watch). Most of the injured were released after being treated at area hospitals.

CLINTON TO ASAD: SILENCE CRITICS OF THE PEACE ACCORD

On September 15, two days after the confrontation in Beirut and similar protests in the region, President Clinton called President Asad of Syria to solicit his support for the Israel-PLO interim accord. According to a September 16 report in the *New York Times*, Clinton asked Asad to silence Palestinians in Damascus who were attacking the peace agreement. Administration officials reportedly said that Clinton had telephoned Asad, for the second time in six days, not only to assure him that Washington was committed to facilitating Syrian-Israeli negotiations over the Golan Heights, but also to ask him to rein in the Palestinian hardliners in Damascus, who are opposed to Yasser Arafat's deal with Israel.

U.S. officials told the *New York Times* that President Asad had replied that even though Palestinian radicals in Damascus were opposed to the deal, Syria was not opposing it, as was signified by the attendance of the Syrian ambassador in Washington at the signing ceremony. Clinton reportedly told Asad that the hardline factions could nevertheless undermine support for Arafat, and were sending the wrong signal to the Israeli public about Syria's intentions. Asad countered by saying that he too had to take public opinion, Syrian and Palestinian, into account.²

While White House officials have confirmed that Clinton, in a 40-minute conversation with Asad, expressed his commitment to Israeli-Syrian negotiations, they have not publicly confirmed the unusual gesture of asking Syria to restrain anti-Arafat Palestinians. U.S. officials contacted by Middle East Watch declined to confirm the reported content of the phone conversation. However, one official, reading from an internal State Department document, said that the President had meant to send a message that the enemies of peace should not be allowed to disrupt the negotiations.

Several other sources have corroborated the statement that President Clinton in effect had asked President Asad to mute critics.³ On September 18, *Al-Hayat*, the pro-Saudi Arabian leading daily in the Middle East, reported the phone conversation in its front page, under the headline "Clinton Asks al-Asad to Discipline Palestinian Opponents of the accord." It attributed to Syrian officials confirmation of the content of the conversation as reported in Western press.

Even before the presidential phone conversation was reported, those in favor of holding protest demonstrations over the Israel-PLO accord had accused the Lebanese government of carrying out orders from the U.S. and Israel. After the reports of Clinton's remarks began to circulate, critics became more vehement. In a press conference held in Damascus on September 17, Nayef Hawatmeh, Secretary General of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, one of ten Palestinian factions rejecting the accord, said, "Damascus is resisting American and Israeli pressures to stop the activities of Palestinian opposition

² Thomas L. Friedman, "U.S. and Israel Ask Syrians to Silence Arafat Opponents," *New York Times*, Sep. 16, 1993, page 1.

³ For example, in a September 17 National Public Radio (*All Things Considered*) interview with Zuhair Diyab, a Syrian academic, Diyab corroborated the allegation and added, "What Western press did not report was Asad's reply -- that Palestinians in Syria, just like Syrian citizens, were free to express their views on the accords."

in Syria. Vice President (Abdel-Halim) Khaddam has confirmed to us that the United States and Israel are pressuring Syria to stop those activities. Syria has held on to its firm position and to the right of the Palestinian people to express their views without outside interference. There is Israeli opposition so why hasn't Rabin been asked to repress that opposition?"

On September 19, during a memorial service for those killed in the demonstration, Sayyed Hasan Nasralla, Secretary General of Hizballa, blamed top Lebanese government leaders, then added, "The government's decision (was) taken for the benefit of others: America and Israel. It wanted to send a message to America and Israel that the authorities are capable of keeping a lid on things. Instead, we believe that they should legalize demonstrations and tell the world that Lebanon enjoys peace and freedom."

LEBANON BANS ALL DEMONSTRATION

The forcible dispersion of the September 13 demonstration was not an isolated incident. It was the consequence of an official plan to ban all demonstrations, taken just before it became known that Israel and the PLO had reached a secret accord in Oslo. On August 11, the Lebanese Cabinet adopted a decree banning all demonstrations, "with or without permit." During a September 10 extraordinary session of the Cabinet and in a September 12 meeting of the Central Security Council, the ban was reconfirmed.

A member of Hariri's cabinet has said privately that the government decided not to allow any demonstrations in order to prevent Lebanon from becoming a battleground for those opposed to the accords, and that the government was determined to carry out this ban.⁴

President Hrawi told reporters on September 20 that, "Lebanon has to keep its home front intact for the next three to four months, as we face an earthquake -- the earthquake of peace. I am not just reading the grounds in a coffee cup; I have been told by an American official that everything will be resolved by the end of this year. Because we take the statement of the American official seriously, we have decided to fortify ourselves and protect our home front from disunity....The country cannot withstand any tremor."⁵

In addition to the desire to suppress opposition to the Middle East peace process, the blanket ban on demonstrations comes as a very significant step in a series of measures recently taken by the Lebanese government to restrict its opponents' ability to express critical views. In recent months, the Lebanese government under President Elias el-Hrawi has repeatedly acted to restrict free speech, in the stated belief that unrestrained expression may plunge the country back into civil war. Officials have also expressed their impatience with what they describe as excessive freedom. Muhsin Dalloul, Minister of Defense, defended the recent action by his troops who fired on the crowd of demonstrators by invoking the 1975-90 civil war. He told the September 14 session of Parliament:

⁴ *Al-Hayat*, September 15, 1993, unsigned. Iran, Iraq, Libya and a number of Palestinian and Lebanese political groups have expressed their rejection of the Gaza-Jericho accord.

⁵ *Al-Hayat*, "Hrawi: An American Official Told Us Everything Will Be Resolved by Year's End," Sep. 21, 1993.

We have to make up our minds: do we support maintaining law and order and preserving reverence for the state or are we for returning to the chaos of the [Civil] War?

A few months ago, Dalloul betrayed the government's belief that the limited freedom the Lebanese enjoy was already excessive. On May 15, after the ICN television network and two dailies were shut down, Dalloul said in a radio interview:

There is no threat to freedom [from the closures]; freedom is alive and well. We have a glut of freedoms. The only threat is from those who cry over its loss, not from those who [allegedly] abuse it.

During 1993, having secured the election of a loyal parliament in the fall of 1992, the government intensified its campaign against free speech. For example, between April 29 and May 28, it ordered the closure of four news organizations which published or aired news and commentary critical of the government or its allies. It also filed criminal charges against four journalists for violating press regulations. The government has also renewed its attempts to close down all of Lebanon's forty-five private, and unlicensed, television stations.⁶

In August, 1993, Michel Samaha, the Minister of Information, instructed Lebanon TV, the only licensed television network in Lebanon, to submit its news bulletins to the Ministry before they are broadcast. He cited the Charter of the Ministry of Information and the license agreement as authority for his right to approve news broadcasts.

Senior Lebanese officials have expressed concern that the coming two months will witness more upheaval in Lebanon, since the next round of Middle East negotiations will not begin until November. The interim period of uncertainty may fuel dissatisfaction with the Gaza-Jericho accord among Palestinian refugees and Lebanese citizens. Many Lebanese fear that this accord and Israel's insistence so far on not negotiating the issue of pre-1967 refugees imply that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will have to be settled permanently there. Most of the 400,000 refugees resident in Lebanon came during or immediately after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.⁷

The government's fears may be only partly related to the Israel-PLO deal. It may be even more concerned about possible protests following the potential peace agreements between Israel and Lebanon, and between Israel and Syria, since any such deal could possibly result in restrictions on the activities of Hizballa.⁸ A senior official in the Hariri cabinet told *al-Hayat* that confrontations similar to the September 13 incident were likely to take place if and when Syria and Lebanon sign similar accords with Israel. The decision to act forcefully was therefore meant to send an early message to potential critics of the peace

⁶ For a detailed discussion of these measures, see Human Rights Watch's report *Lebanon's Lively Press Faces Worst Crackdown Since 1976*, New York, July 1993.

⁷ Middle East Watch interviews; Sep. 16 and 17, 1993.

⁸ Middle East Watch interview; Sep. 17, 1993.

accords.⁹

Since the September 13 events, Syrian authorities have made repeated contacts with leaders of various groups in Lebanon, including Hizballa, in a bid to limit their public protests. On September 14, Syria dispatched Gen. Ghazi Kan'an, head of Security and Intelligence for the Syrian command in Lebanon, to Beirut. While expressing concern about the number of casualties, which they believed could have been avoided, Syrian officials supported the Lebanese government's ban and privately criticized Mirhij's decision to boycott the Cabinet and the Parliament's session. On September 17, Abdel-Halim Khaddam, Syria's Vice President met with al-Hajj Hasan al-Khalil, head of the Political Bureau of Hizballa. While criticizing the manner in which the demonstration was handled, Khaddam had reportedly summoned him to Damascus to dissuade him from mounting further protests.

Since the incident, the Lebanese government has again reiterated its ban and has apparently gained the support of the Speaker of the Parliament for its decision. On September 18, the Cabinet reaffirmed the ban. After a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by Hariri, a near unanimous decision was taken to reconfirm the earlier ban on all demonstrations. Only Mirhij, who had resumed his duties as Minister of Interior at Syria's insistence, abstained. On the same day President el-Hrawi, Prime Minister Hariri and Speaker Berri – the "three presidents", as they referred to in Lebanon – met and jointly endorsed the Cabinet's decision banning further demonstrations. They agreed that the ban "is not intended to take away public freedoms, which will remain preserved. It is meant to take into consideration the critical circumstances through which the country is passing, to protect the home front and prevent any one from exploiting conditions in the country," according to an official statement issued after their joint meeting. Berri's endorsement is significant because it appears at odds with the Parliament's recommendation on September 14 that the government reconsider its ban on public protest.

THE BAN UNDER LEBANESE LAW

Lebanese law does not guarantee the right of peaceful demonstration. However, until the recent categorical ban on all demonstrations, demonstrations were permitted if they secured prior licenses. The recent ban discontinued the previous system altogether.

The Lebanese Constitution guarantees freedom of assembly "within the bounds of the law" (Article 13). This guarantee is rendered almost worthless by the Penal Code, which criminalizes peaceful demonstrations under almost any circumstances (Articles 345-349). Despite this nearly complete ban, it was the Lebanese governments' practice to grant permits, selectively, to hold demonstrations, albeit under

⁹ Walid Shuqair, "Confrontation with Hizballa Anticipates Progress on the Syrian and Lebanese Tracks," *Al-Hayat*, September 16, 1993. The article cited anonymous sources in the Lebanese Presidential Palace as saying that Syria, while concerned about shortcomings in the Gaza-Jericho plan, was determined to prevent Lebanon from becoming a battleground for regional powers opposed to the negotiations. Syria would seek to limit the influence of those Palestinian and regional critics who may want to whip up the "Lebanese street" in opposition to the accords. Such opposition, if sustained, may lead to opposition to any deals Lebanon and Syria themselves may sign. According to these sources, Syria does not want its 11th hour negotiations with Israel, expected to take place late this year, to be interrupted by opposition "in the street," i.e., through demonstrations or other forms of public dissent.

very strict conditions.

Conditions for permitting public demonstrations are set forth in the Memorandum to Regulate Freedom of Assembly issued by the Minister of Interior in 1970. The detailed Memorandum legalized the principle of permitting demonstrations to take place, but imposed onerous conditions. It acknowledges that "the right of free assembly to express opinions on social, political, cultural, professional and economic issues has become one of the attributes of political democracy in Lebanon and other countries." At the same time, it gave authorities nearly complete discretion on whether to grant permission to hold such events in public.

In practice, demonstrations considered potentially dangerous or harmful to Lebanon's security or foreign relations were routinely denied permission and in many cases forcibly dispersed.

In addition, written statements, fliers and posters may not be distributed or displayed during demonstrations without first securing permits from the General Directorate of Public Security, the main national police force. According to Legislative Decree No. 55 of August 1967,

No leaflets, statements, press releases or similar materials may be printed, published or issued in any method whatsoever without obtaining a prior license, regardless of their subject or the methods or media used or the language in which they are expressed.¹⁰

Requirements for obtaining licenses are so difficult to satisfy that in practice most groups wishing to distribute statements do not apply, risking fines and imprisonment for non-compliance.¹¹

The system of selective licensing continued until August 1993, when the Cabinet issued its August 9 decree banning "all assemblies and processions with or without permit," thus effectively ending the practice of selectively granting permits. The new rule was reaffirmed during a September 10 extraordinary session of the Cabinet and by the Central Security Council on September 12, a day before the demonstration.

REACTIONS TO THE INCIDENT AND BAN

Although the ban had elicited only scant negative commentary before the September 13 demonstration, the bloody attack on the peaceful demonstrators resulted in strong denunciations from members of Parliament and private citizens. Despite the negative publicity, the government has reiterated its ban on all demonstrations and its determination to stop all protests.

¹⁰ For more details see Human Rights Watch, *Lebanon's Lively Press Faces the Worst Crackdown Since 1976*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹ For example, if, within a week of submitting the application to the agency, the applicant does not receive a positive response, the permit is deemed denied. Once a permit is issued, the applicant has only one week from notification to issue the approved text. After that, a new application is required. A new application is also required if any changes are introduced in the text. A decision by the General Directorate of Public Security is final. *id.*

Predictably, senior government officials have tried to justify the army action. In doing so, they have also confirmed that the shooting was authorized and was not a result of a misunderstanding or misapplication of orders. On September 13, Defense Minister Dalloul, said about the incident: "Army units were very disciplined in carrying out their orders and implementing the Council of Minister's decision, meticulously and responsibly."

On September 14, Dalloul told the Parliament, "The deployment of the Army was at the request of the Central Security Council to support Internal Security Forces...We are against demonstrations outside (Palestinian refugee) camps...There was no need for demonstrations because Lebanon's leaders were clearly critical of the accord...We have to make up our minds: do we support maintaining law and order and preserving reverence for the state or are we for returning to the chaos of the (Civil) War?"

During a September 14 ministerial meeting, President Elias el-Hrawi expressed his view, too, that protesters should not have demonstrated, especially not near the Presidential Palace. He told the meeting, "There was no need for demonstrations. According to our information, the demonstrators were planning to march to the Presidential Palace. Why should they demonstrate in front of the Palace when all the leaders of the country have already denounced the Gaza-Jericho accord? Is the Palace responsible for Arafat's signing?...Wasn't Elias el-Hrawi the first to denounce that accord?"¹²

In a meeting with journalists on September 20, President Hrawi provided a more defensive justification of the ban,

Article 13 of the Constitution protects public liberties, so there is no need to fear. As for demonstrations, they all need to be licensed before taking place, regardless of their subjects. It is up to the state's discretion whether to allow them or not, according to its evaluation of the security situation. It also has to guarantee that no one would exploit the demonstration to jeopardize security...As for saying that the President wants to ban demonstrations, I must stress that we are not in a presidential system. It was the Council of Ministers which took the decision to ban demonstration and it is up to it alone to revise that decision...I am not a dictator. I could not break the Cabinet's decision. We are in a democratic system.¹³

Privately, government officials have also pointed out that states opposed to the peace process may use Lebanon as a battleground to mount opposition to the accords. Iran, Iraq and Libya have all denounced the Gaza-Jericho accord. In addition, the government of Iran arms, finances and gives political support to Hizballa, a party whose members have used violence to achieve their goals. By banning all protests, for or against the peace accords, these officials feel that they can keep Lebanon out of the struggle over the agreements.¹⁴

¹² *Al-Hayat* September 15, 1993.

¹³ *Al-Hayat* September 21, 1993.

¹⁴ Middle East Watch interviews, September 16, 1993.

These explanations notwithstanding, there has been strong criticism of the manner in which the demonstration was handled and of the blanket ban on demonstrations. Critics have pointed out that banning peaceful demonstrations is very likely to backfire. Denied a peaceful way to express their dissent, opponents of the government and critics of the Middle East peace process may resort to violent means to express their views. It is only by permitting the peaceful expression of dissent, including through demonstrations, that the government may be able to identify and bring to justice those employing violence to express their political opinions.

An unlikely critic of the government has been Bishara Mirhij, Minister of the Interior, who disagreed with the army's action. As a member of the Cabinet he had voted for the ban.¹⁶ As Minister of the Interior and Chairman of the Central Security Council -- i.e., the primary security authority -- Mirhij undertook to implement the ban but favored a compromise with the demonstrators over a bloody confrontation. He was apparently overruled and the army was ordered to stop the demonstration by force.

To express his profound disagreement over the incident, Mirhij took unprecedented action. He announced that he was suspending his membership in the Cabinet and the performance of his duties as Minister of the Interior, pending an investigation into the incident. In a statement he issued on September 13, immediately following the incident, Mirhij said,

Regarding the painful developments in which innocent citizens were killed when they attempted to express their views on a serious event affecting the fate of their country and nation, I declare that as Minister of Interior I attempted this time -- as I did times before -- to spare the country this painful outcome, intervening with all concerned parties to achieve that goal. This time, although I did receive positive responses from responsible leaders, my attempt failed. Therefore, until a complete investigation is undertaken, I have suspended my activities as Minister of Interior, but will continue my conciliatory role in the service of the nation.

He called for "respect for the rule of law, governmental authority and the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms." Privately, Mirhij blamed the army and accused Hrawi of contributing to the disastrous outcome by rejecting a compromise the Minister had worked out with Hizballa to avert bloodshed.¹⁶

Independent politicians and lawyers in Lebanon believe that by refusing to carry out his responsibilities while remaining a member of the government, Mirhij may have violated the spirit if not the letter of constitutional rules and the charter of the Council of Ministers, especially since he appears to have supported the Cabinet's ban on all demonstrations. He also chaired the Central Security Council, which was charged with implementing that decision.¹⁷ Mirhij's unusual protest is an indication of the

¹⁶ On September 20, President Hrawi told journalists, "I am not disclosing Mirhij's secret if I stated that the decision to ban demonstrations was unanimous. If he did not agree with it, why didn't he leave?"

¹⁶ *Al-Hayat*, Sep. 15, 1993.

¹⁷ Muhammed Shuqair, "Official Lebanese Sources: Attempts to Put the Responsibility for the Suburb's Incident on El-Hrawi," *al-Hayat*, Sep. 16, 1993.

extent of displeasure many Lebanese, including those opposed to Hizballa, have felt about the manner in which the demonstration was handled.

On September 14, the day after the demonstration, the Chamber of Deputies, Lebanon's Parliament, devoted most of a nine-hour session to a discussion of the demonstration and repercussions of the Gaza-Jericho deal. Although the Parliament is composed mostly of loyalists, since the opposition boycotted the parliamentary elections held in August and September 1992, many deputies condemned the attack on the demonstrators. The strong censure was probably in part due to lobbying by Hizballa, which holds one of the largest voting blocs in the Chamber.

Hizballa representatives in the Parliament were joined by secular deputies, many of whom denounced the use of lethal force and demanded an investigation. Najah Wakim, a Greek Orthodox deputy from Beirut, asked: "By what constitutional or legal authority did the government outlaw demonstrations? Are we under martial law?" Zaher al-Khatib, from the Workers League, and Wakim both described the event as a massacre and called on the government to resign.

Deputy Wakim laid the blame not on the army but on the civilian leadership. He said that there was no need for "an investigation to determine criminal culpability," of individual officers. Instead, the responsibility was that of the politicians who gave the order. Deputy Ibrahim al-Sayyed echoed this view, "Since the government had issued an order to forcibly prevent the demonstration from taking place, there is no need to investigate. It is political responsibility and the government should resign. Only if the use of lethal force was unauthorized is there a point in investigation to determine individual responsibility."

Despite these and other strong views expressed during the session, the Parliament failed to take decisive action. At the end of its meeting it issued, without a vote, a non-binding recommendation calling for an investigation of the incident. It also requested that the government reconsider its ban on demonstrations.

However, on September 18, Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Parliament, joined President el-Hrawi and Prime Minister Hariri in endorsing the Cabinet's decision banning further demonstrations, according to an official statement issued after their meeting. They stressed that the ban "is meant to take into consideration the critical circumstances through which the country is passing, to protect the home front and prevent any one from exploiting conditions."

Outside the parliament and government circles, a number of prominent leaders condemned the killing of demonstrators. In addition to religious leaders with links to Hizballa, others joined in the criticism. Shaikh Bahjat Ghaith, spiritual leader of the Druze community criticized the "unjustified clashes." The Socialist Progressive Party, led by Walid Jumblat, Minister for the Internally Displaced, called for the "preservation of democratic and political freedoms...The exercise of the right to peaceful expression contributes to the respect of law and the constitution." It denounced the forcible dispersion of the demonstration and called for an immediate investigation.

Similarly, Hussein al-Mosawi, head of Amal -- a secular Shi`a party controlled by Speaker Berri -- criticized "those who gave orders to the army to use force." Hussein al-Husaini, former speaker of the parliament and recently a vocal opposition spokesman, joined in criticizing the government action. Omar Karami, former Prime Minister and an MP from Tripoli, criticized the decision to ban demonstrations and called for an investigation to determine responsibility.

On September 16, the Supreme Shi`a Council, the highest Shi`a religious body, issued a strongly worded two-page statement on the events. It condemned the "horrifying crime perpetrated against a peaceful demonstration" and demanded that the government "repeal its ban on demonstrations, enhance the exercise of democracy, support freedoms,....determine responsibility [for the incident] and establish accountability."

Sayyed Hasan Nasralla, Hizballa's Secretary General, vowed to continue the protest, "We will not remain silent when we are getting killed in the streets and when freedoms are repressed," he said in a statement issued on September 13 announcing that there would be a funeral procession the following day.

On September 14, a funeral procession to mourn the dead -- estimated at tens-of-thousands-strong -- went off peacefully. Probably because the military and security forces had redeployed away from the route of the demonstration, there were no incidents, despite the heightened tension caused by the previous day's events.

On September 19, a memorial service was held in Huraik Lane (in the Southern Suburb) for the demonstrators killed in the protest. Several thousand supporters listened to speeches denouncing the action and asking for the resignation of Prime Minister Hariri's government. Among those present was Homayoun Alizadeh, Iran's representative in Lebanon.

Hasan Nasralla, Secretary General of Hizballa who spoke at the memorial service, laid the blame on the top leaders of the government. He told the mourners:

This ban means that the authorities are willing and prepared to commit another massacre, other massacres...The government's decision [reiterating the ban] is a political rationalization of the crime, taken for the benefit of others: America and Israel. The government wanted to send a message to America and Israel that it is capable of keeping a lid on things. Instead, we believe that they should legalize demonstrations and tell the world that Lebanon enjoys peace and freedom.

While the memorial service went off peacefully, army officers briefly detained some of the organizers who were using loudspeakers to announce the service and call on people to participate.

PROTESTS IN PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS IN LEBANON AND JORDAN

Lebanese officials have reaffirmed a longstanding practice of tolerating protests to take place within Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Muhsin Dalloul, Minister of Defense, has recently informed the Parliament that the recent ban did not apply to demonstrations taking place inside the perimeters of these camps, inhabited mostly by Palestinians who were displaced by the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Security within the camps is usually handled by Palestinian factions, mainly from among the groups represented in the Palestine Liberation Organization.

On September 13, the day the accord was signed in Washington, several anti-accord

demonstrations were held inside refugee camps. While most of these protests went peacefully, in at least two cases there were casualties when forces expressing allegiance to Yasser Arafat, the PLO chairman, attempted to stop the protests. In the Burj al-Barajni Camp, in the Southern Suburb of Beirut, demonstrators raised black flags and burned tires in protest. They were met by security officers from Fatah, Chairman Arafat's faction, who tried to disperse them and prevent them from blocking the roads. Four of the protestors were injured by gunfire and batons. Similarly, in the al-Rashidiyyi Camp, south of Tyre, protestors tore up or defaced pictures of Arafat and wrote graffiti on the walls describing the agreement as treasonous. When they attempted to do so near the home of Sultan Abu-al-`Ainin, Fatah's representative at the camp, Fatah security forces opened fire to stop the protestors, injuring at least two, Nafisa Hawwat, a 60-year old woman, and Mahmoud Jabr (Abu-Aiman).

By contrast, when camp authorities permitted protests to take place, no casualties were reported, partly because camps were run by groups opposed to the accord. In the `Ain al-Hilwi Camp near Sidon, demonstrators burned tires, blocked roads inside the camp and hoisted black flags in protest. Another demonstration assembled in front of the UNRWA school in the camp and marched through the streets of the camp. It was led by representatives of Palestinian anti-accord factions as well as youth and women groups. Among the speakers against the agreement was Shaikh Maher Hammoud, from a group called the Muslim Scholars Coalition, and Saleh Zaidan, a member of the Political Bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine representing the "Ten Factions" that had previously denounced the Gaza-Jericho accord. No incidents were reported, even one speaker, Shaikh Sayyed Baraka, called for "getting rid of Arafat as we got rid of Sadat," who was assassinated in 1981 by members of an Islamist group opposed to his peace accord with Israel. In the al-Rashidiyyi Camp, opponents were permitted to hold a press conference inside the camp during which Abu-Bashar, an official from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, called for "national unity to defeat the agreement," declaring that that Monday was a "dark day for the Palestinian people." Demonstrations in the Galilee Camp in Ba`albek, and sit-ins in the Barid and Baddawi camps in the north, took place without incidents.

In Jordan, authorities arrested a number of Islamist activists after demonstrations and sit-ins were organized within refugee camps to protest the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement. The Jordanian government had reportedly persuaded leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom it maintains cordial relations, not to demonstrate against the Gaza-Jericho accord. Despite this understanding, a number of demonstrations took place within the perimeters of the Wahdat and Baq`a refugee camps during the ceremonial Monday, September 13. Several Islamist activists living in these two camps were subsequently arrested on suspicion of organizing the protests.

Several other activists were arrested following a similar protest sit-in organized in the Omar ibn al-Khattab mosque in al-Zarqa. Shaikh Dhib Anis, a former member of Parliament and an Islamist activist, called for a sit-in to be held in the Mosque after the sunset prayers. Thousands of protesters gathered to listen to speeches denouncing the accord. Suddenly, electricity and telephone lines went dead in the area, an event for which the protesters blamed the government, but the protest continued anyway.

King Hussein has since warned against "manifestations of disunity." In a meeting he held with reporters on September 18, King Hussein warned that he would deal forcefully with threats to national unity, "Any one who postures or uses cutting words or insults while talking about his brothers...I will be his adversary until the day of judgment...Until the situation evolves to the goal we aspire to -- honorable and just peace -- there is no other way to deal with these things. We should not disintegrate before our

adversary and enemy."

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Middle East Watch was created in 1989 to monitor human rights practices in the Middle East and North Africa and to promote respect for internationally recognized standards. The chair of Middle East Watch is Gary Sick, the vice chairs are Lisa Anderson and Bruce Rabb. Andrew Whitley is the executive director; Eric Goldstein is the research director; Virginia N. Sherry and Aziz Abu-Hamad are associate directors; Suzanne Howard is the associate.

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