

# Nusseibeh's detention stuns left, annoys U.S.

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Sari Nusseibeh's arrest and administrative detention for allegedly transferring security information to Iraqi intelligence has shocked diplomatic and liberal opinion here. He was considered one of the most straightforward Palestinian proponents of accommodation with Israel.

The U.S. insisted that its "opposition to the practice of administrative detention is longstanding," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said. "The charges against Dr. Nusseibeh, like those against other administrative detainees, ought to be made public and a chance given to him to defend himself in a court of law. We have informed the government of Israel of our views."

In the Knesset, some on the right called for Nusseibeh's expulsion, while from the center and left there were calls for his trial so that he could attempt to disprove the allegations.

Amnon Rubinstein (Shinui), a former dean of Tel Aviv University law school, said that if Nusseibeh passed information to Iraq, he had committed treason and should be tried. As a resident of Israel, Nusseibeh has the right to appeal his administrative detention to the District Court and the Supreme Court. In both courts, Rubinstein noted, the judges are entitled to inspect the classified evidence.

"If the Israeli authorities have evidence to support the accusations against him, he should be put on trial," the British Foreign Office spokesman said.

The charges against the Bir Zeit

University philosophy professor are far graver than those against other Palestinian spokesmen recently detained for instigating or promoting violence during the intifada.

Nusseibeh's six-month administrative detention, his first, follows several interrogations over the past two years concerning his role as paymaster of the intifada and his role in drafting leaflets of the PLO-affiliated Unified Command of the Uprising. He is suspected of having been a conduit for transferring security information to PLO officials in contact with Iraq by facsimile and telephone. Three other Palestinians have been arrested in connection with his activities, Israel TV said.

In a statement read by his lawyer at an East Jerusalem press conference, Nusseibeh said: "I categorically deny the government's statement and assert that I have never been, nor am now engaged in any intelligence gathering on behalf of any government or organization.

"I believe that my arrest is intended to silence the voices of moderation and, specifically, the Palestinian call for ending the Gulf war through peaceful negotiations, so we can move on to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian question."

Nusseibeh, 41, son of a former Jordanian defense minister and ambassador to Britain, was arrested at his home in Abu Dis just before midnight on Tuesday by five jeep loads of Border Police who showed him the order for his arrest and took him to the Russian Compound lock-up, his wife Lucy said. Although he lives just outside Jerusalem, he is registered as a resident of Jerusalem where he grew up.

A diplomatic source said he found the Oxford- and Harvard-educated specialist in Islamic philosophy distinguished among Palestinian spokesmen for his "insights into the concerns of Israelis and the Jewish people. In a conflict where both sides have had difficulties looking into the hearts of the adversary, he was able to do this."

At a time when other Palestinians justified their support for Iraq by saying the U.S. had betrayed them, Nusseibeh told *The Jerusalem Post* two months ago: "Our own road to statehood is through Israel, through Israeli public opinion, not through Iraq or the U.S. ... It is still our responsibility as Palestinians to emphasize to the Israelis that it is peace that we seek and coexistence, and not the destruction of Israel ... Not for Israel's sake but for our sake."

Defense sources were shocked by an article he published in the East Jerusalem daily *al-Fajr* last Wednesday in which he praised Iraq's military ability and accused the U.S. of being an aggressive state in search of a "satanic enemy" to replace the Soviet Union, as though UN resolutions in support of the U.S. action, the issue of Kuwait and the shelling of Israeli towns did not exist.

They said that it surprised and concerned them because if "westernized, rational, Sari Nusseibeh thinks like this, you can imagine what others are thinking."

While the article, approved by military censorship, enhanced existing suspicions about Nusseibeh, it was not part of the charges against him. The spying allegation was only the latest, but most important, element of a series of allegations against him, they said.

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