

Omar Suleiman—Longtime Collaborator With Israel and US

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Egyptian vice president Omar Suleiman, the former head of security services and chief torturer, was the official identified by Israel more than two years ago as its favored candidate to succeed President Hosni Mubarak, according to cables released by WikiLeaks this week.

The Israeli backing for Suleiman was made public by the Daily Telegraph, a right-wing British newspaper, which obtained US diplomatic cables that were later posted on the web site of the Internet whistleblower organization.

Suleiman has been heading the negotiations with opposition groups on behalf of the Mubarak regime, and has the backing of the Obama administration to lead a “transition” regime that would maintain the pro-US military dictatorship if Mubarak steps down or flees the country.

Cables from the American embassies in Tel Aviv and Cairo show Suleiman to be the point man for collaboration with Israel in repression of the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, where Egypt controls part of the border. He was also the key ally for US officials in secret operations, including rendition and torture, conducted as part of the “war on terror.”

Reporting on a visit by Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak to Egypt, a senior Israeli adviser, David Hacham, told his interlocutor at the US embassy in Tel Aviv that Mubarak’s “aged appearance and slurred speech” had “shocked” Barak and others in the Israeli delegation.

By contrast, the August 23, 2008 cable notes, spelling the Egyptian official’s name incorrectly, “Hacham was full of praise for Soliman, however, and noted that a hot line set up between the MOD [the Israeli Ministry of Defense] and Egyptian General Intelligence Service is now in daily use.”

“Hacham noted that the Israelis believe Soliman is likely to serve as at least an interim President if Mubarak dies or is incapacitated,” the cable continues, adding, “We defer to Embassy Cairo for analysis of Egyptian succession scenarios, but there is no question that Israel is most comfortable with the prospect of Omar Soliman.”

Additional cables from the US Embassy in Cairo explain why Suleiman was the favorite official of both the Israelis and the Americans.

January 26, 2006—a memo to visiting FBI Director Robert Mueller noted, “The CIA has a

strong and growing relationship with the Egyptian Intelligence Service (EGIS). We believe your visit can help the FBI to establish a similarly robust and productive partnership with the State Security Investigative Service. Although they see the national interest in improving law enforcement cooperation, leaders like Omar Soliman, Interior Minister Adly, SSIS Director Abdel Rahman and especially President Mubarak...”

The Interior Minister has since been sacked, and now faces charges of authorizing torture of prisoners. He is the scapegoat for crimes in which all of the above-named officials, particularly Suleiman, are directly implicated. The “strong and growing relationship” with the CIA included transfer of prisoners to be tortured by Egyptian interrogators at the direction of Suleiman.

The cable pointed to a series of anti-democratic measures, including the jailing of opposition leader Ayman Nour, who ran second to Mubarak in the 2005 presidential election, and noting that these actions “have undermined Mubarak’s credibility as a leader of democratic reforms,” while concluding, “The bedrock of our strategic interests with Egypt, however, remains as important as ever.”

October 30, 2007—a cable advised visiting FBI official John Pistole of “the opportunity to review and reinforce our law enforcement cooperation with the State Security Investigative Service (SSIS), which is under the auspices of Minister of Interior Habib Al Adly,” the aforementioned chief torturer, with whom the FBI is to share fingerprint records and other information on “suspected terrorists.”

December 12, 2007—a cable from US Ambassador to Egypt Francis Riccardione relayed complaints from the Egyptians about the difficulties of managing the problem of Gaza, which involved “the need to ‘squeeze’ Hamas, while avoiding being seen as complicit in Israel’s ‘siege’ of Gaza.” Egypt played a vital role in the blockade, since its forces controlled the only Arab territory adjacent to the enclave.

According to the US ambassador, “Egyptian General Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman told us Egypt wants Gaza to go ‘hungry’ but not ‘starve.’” Suleiman and Minister of Defense and Field Marshal Tantawi “each have claimed that the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] would be ‘welcome’ to re-invade Philadelphi—if the IDF thought that would stop the smuggling.”

In other words, the two top Egyptian military/intelligence officials suggested that a foreign power should seize control of Egyptian territory—the Philadelphi border crossing—an action that in many countries would be categorized as treason.

January 2, 2008—a cable recounted Suleiman’s comments to a visiting US delegation of Republican senators and congressmen. He called Iran “a significant threat to Egypt,” declared Egypt to be “America’s partner,” and expressed concern over a recent US National Intelligence Estimate that conceded that Iran had no active nuclear weapons program.

Suleiman told his US visitors that the time was right to push ahead with a settlement between the Israeli regime and the Palestinian Authority, declaring, in what must rank as the understatement of the decade, that “Arab states are ready to see an end to ‘the struggle’” — i.e., to any further resistance by the Palestinian people to their dispossession by the Zionist state.

It is no wonder that Omar Suleiman—now Egyptian vice president and putative successor to

Mubarak—was described by the US Embassy as “the most successful element of the relationship” between the US and Egyptian intelligence agencies.

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