



Suleiman: Change you can't believe in

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Published: February 9th, 2011



A couple of days after the start of the uprising in Egypt, *Omar Suleiman*, head of the Intelligence Services realized that a golden opportunity had presented itself. He could marginalize the Egyptian president, kill the aspiration of the president's wife *Suzanne* to see her son *Gamal* succeed his father, and get rid of all the new guard in the Egyptian government represented by *Gamal Mubarak's* opportunistic business and corrupt clique. The internal fight between the old guard, represented by Mubarak the father with his aging army officers, and the new guard, represented by the younger business people and Mubarak the son, was no longer a well-kept secret in Egypt. *Suleiman* recognized that he could also deal a fatal blow to one of his most formidable foes. The continuously expanding power of the interior minister *Habib El Adly* supported by his one million-plus unpopular internal security apparatus and police was in *Suleiman's* way. He also correctly reasoned that a population fed up with the tyranny of the Internal Security apparatus would welcome the army as a liberator rather than an oppressor.

Suleiman's Machiavellian orchestration of events was brilliant. He had to compel President *Mubarak* to appoint him as vice-president and to promise not to seek reelection, as well as to remove *Mubarak's* son *Gamal* and his cronies from the government. The pressure exercised on the father to turn against his son must have been enormous. That, *Suleiman* knew, could only be accomplished with the weight of the army and the prodding and the blessing of the United States. President *Mubarak* had to go too, but in due time. Removing the president now would make *Suleiman* the primary target of the ire of the people in the street, something he wanted to avoid. For *Suleiman*, *Mubarak* will serve as an insurance policy to absorb the blame for anything wrong the government may still inflict on the people.

To accomplish his goal, *Suleiman* thought it advisable to seek the help of Lieutenant General *Sami Enan*, who was visiting the U.S. in late January and having high-level meetings with Pentagon officials during the uprising. The general is second in command to Field Marshal *Tantawi*, the minister of defense and considered to be honest and competent. *Enan*, born in 1948, is younger than *Suleiman* and is also respected enough to have been mentioned ironically by the Muslim Brotherhood this week, in a slap to *Suleiman*, as an acceptable president for Egypt. Explaining the situation to *Enan*, *Suleiman* probably prodded him to press the case with his counterparts in Washington for disposing of *Mubarak* and the cabinet and the appointing of *Suleiman* as a caretaker VP. His Intelligence apparatus that he heads also went into action, feeding the CIA information about the precarious condition Mubarak is in. The CIA had long depended on *Suleiman's* Intelligence service in Egypt to combat terrorism and their independent assessment of the situation was most probably lacking. The White House and *Enan* performed as planned without a hitch and *Mubarak*, taken off guard by the speed of events and presented with a fait accompli, felt obliged to comply with *Suleiman's* wishes by announcing on public TV that he will no longer run for re-election and neither will his son.



Having disposed of all his adversaries within the government within seventy two-hours, *Suleiman* still had to confront the turmoil in the street and the Western reaction to these events. To that end, he adopted what he considered to be his most effective tactics to date: raising the threat of the Islamists and external forces as the main instigators although it was obvious that the uprising was by in large secular in nature and driven only by Egyptians. The Brotherhood members were latecomers to the demonstrations and for *Suleiman*, paradoxically; they were easier to combat than the unknown secular and nationalistic elements confronting the regime. In the firm paternalistic but dismissive tone that Egyptians are accustomed to hear from their rulers, he also continued to vilify the actions of the security forces while trying to appeal to the sentimental traits of Egyptians. Finally, he knew that he could depend on Israel and the Jewish lobby to shift the discourse in the U.S. in his favor.

In the aftermath of *Mubarak's* speech conceding all that *Suleiman* had demanded, *Hosni Mubarak* probably became a prisoner in his own palace. It seems that the German Chancellor, aware of the situation, offered to have *Mubarak* flown to Germany for health reasons. *Suleiman* will have none of it. He emphatically told journalists that *Mubarak* would stay in Egypt, basically under his thumb. *Mubarak* may be still useful for making declarations and appearing in some photo opportunities but the president had no longer any power. If the demonstrations persist, he will use *Mubarak's* stepping down as his last card to appease the population.

Suleiman was, however, taken by surprise two days later when the American president, who was too anxious for democratic change while following the events in *Tahrir*, stated that change must start "NOW." For *Suleiman*, all the changes he had aspired to had already taken place. He knew, however, that Israel and the Jewish lobby would start mobilizing soon enough against democratic change in Egypt. The dangers were too great, they would explain to Obama, he surmised, and Egypt was not Gaza; they could not risk the outcome. Soon enough, we saw the U.S. talk shows and the media shift from the subject of democracy and sympathy with the Egyptian man in the street to the subject of Israeli security and the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Israelis were also clear that *Al Baradei* was not an acceptable replacement. They had never forgiven the Nobel prize winner who probably single-handedly, with poise and accurate reporting while heading the International Atomic Energy Commission, stopped the Bush administration three years ago from getting the U.S. into another war with Iran at the urging of Israel. *Al Baradei* knew that Iran was a threat, but not an imminent one as it was hysterically being portrayed then. The Nobel Prize committee, by their action, obviously agreed with *Al Baradei's* assessment and time proved him right. *Suleiman* also knew that *Al Baradei* did not have the support of the military; he was simply not one of them. Although popular with the secular masses in Egypt, the U.S. administration ignored his presence.

Having being convinced that it was in the best interests of the U.S. Obama was by now ready to fully embrace *Suleiman* as the new leader of Egypt. Replacing "democracy", words like "stability," "caution" and "orderly transition" were becoming the U.S. administration's words of the day. Dictators, however, are not used to being held accountable for their words and *Suleiman* proved soon enough that he was no exception. When asked, "Do you believe in democracy?" he replied, "For sure. But you will do that . . . when the people here will have the culture of democracy." As his words echoed in Egypt and around the globe, the American public, like everybody else in the world was coming to the slow realization that *Suleiman* had no interest in having a democratically elected government at the helm. They realized that if he is to rule Egypt as all others, have ruled before him, he will be the new Pharaoh with all the inequalities and despotism of the old regime and that the U.S. government, in spite of all the rhetoric about democracy, will still support another dictator at the expense of the aspirations of

the people. When *Suleiman* and the foreign minister *Abu El Gheit* threatened the demonstrators and warned the West yesterday that unless the opposition participate in a dialogue with him on his own terms and end the demonstrations, there will be a coup in the country, he was ironically referring to the coup he had already masterminded. The army and the Intelligence apparatus, with him at the head, were already in control. His remarks were simply a veiled threat for martial law and the opportunity to legitimize the coup.

What the West does not realize is that “democracy” for the Egyptians is a democracy à la *de Tocqueville*. In the words of *de Tocqueville*, democracy meant “equality of conditions” rather than the simple political elections with one person-one vote. It means to redress the accumulated injustices which have occurred during the last thirty years, to get rid of corruption and despotism in the public and private spheres and to level the fields in employment and business opportunities.

I, for one, continue to believe that the Islamists constitute a real threat in Egypt and that the Muslim Brotherhood’s influence among a population that is more than thirty percent illiterate cannot be underestimated, particularly in local elections. Their weight however could be tampered if the government and other secular institutions can also provide some of the safety net the Brotherhood presently offers the population in health and social issues. Education is also the key to counteract backwardness, be it religious or not. If the Brotherhood youth members are allowed economic opportunities, I believe that they may also be open to a peaceful functioning of society and democratic compromises without necessarily abandoning their religious beliefs. It should also be noted that while they have every reason to fear the most from the Brotherhood, thousands of Christians are participating in the uprising. They are willing to take the chance for a more just and progressive Egypt.

Our military aid to Egypt for the past thirty years has been nothing short of a moral scandal and a geo-strategic blunder of huge proportions. Some of the funds we provide Egypt should be redirected or increased to staff health clinics build schools and develop secular social networks. When the clasped hand symbol of the U.S. AID appears on products and services all over Egypt as well as our military equipments in the street, Egyptians will understand that the American people and their government wish them well.



The Egyptian youth have the right and the opportunity to prove Mr. *Suleiman* wrong in his assessment that Egypt is not ready for democracy. We all may live to regret it, but if we truly believe in democracy and human rights, we have the responsibility to help the Egyptians chart their own destiny and support their aspirations for a better life. If we do not support all those secular forces at work and marginalize people like *Al Baradei* and many other respected personalities who are calling for change and are needed in the transition period, we only have ourselves to blame if the Brotherhood remains the major opposition force in Egypt.

Rather than turning against the people as *Suleiman* is suggesting may happen, we should prod some respected general like *Enan*, who is also trusted by the Pentagon, to play an important role in bringing the army to continue to oversee a peaceful transition while participating as a member in a transition government. That participation should alleviate at least some of our fears that the transition will not be secular in nature and the solution would be an acceptable one to the secular forces led by *El Baradei*, to the Brotherhood and most probably to the youths in *Tahrir Square*. It will be a travesty on the other hand to allow *Suleiman*’s coup to succeed.

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