

Omar Suleiman and the Rendition to Torture

# The Torture Career of Egypt's New Vice President

Thursday 3 February 2011, by [SOLDZ Stephen](#) (Date first published: 31 January 2011).

In response to the mass protests of recent days, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has appointed his first Vice President in his over 30 years rule, intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. When Suleiman was first announced, Aljazeera commentators were describing him as a “distinguished” and “respected” man. It turns out, however, that he is distinguished for, among other things, his central role in Egyptian torture and in the US rendition to torture program. Further, he is “respected” by US officials for his cooperation with their torture plans, among other initiatives.

Katherine Hawkins, an expert on the US's rendition to torture program, in an email, has sent some critical texts where Suleiman pops up. Thus, Jane Mayer, in *The Dark Side*, pointed to Suleiman's role in the rendition program:

*“Each rendition was authorized at the very top levels of both governments....The long-serving chief of the Egyptian central intelligence agency, Omar Suleiman, negotiated directly with top Agency officials. [Former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt] Walker described the Egyptian counterpart, Suleiman, as “very bright, very realistic,” adding that he was cognizant that there was a downside to “some of the negative things that the Egyptians engaged in, of torture and so on. But he was not squeamish, by the way” (pp. 113).*

Stephen Grey, in *Ghost Plane*, his investigative work on the rendition program also points to Suleiman as central in the rendition program: “To negotiate these assurances [that the Egyptians wouldn't “torture” the prisoner delivered for torture] the CIA dealt principally in Egypt through Omar Suleiman, the chief of the Egyptian general intelligence service (EGIS) since 1993. It was he who arranged the meetings with the Egyptian interior ministry.... Suleiman, who understood English well, was an urbane and sophisticated man. Others told me that for years Suleiman was America's chief interlocutor with the Egyptian regime — the main channel to President Hosni Mubarak himself, even on matters far removed from intelligence and security.

Suleiman's role, was also highlighted in a Wikileaks cable:

*“In the context of the close and sustained cooperation between the USG and GOE on counterterrorism, Post believes that the written GOE assurances regarding the return of three Egyptians detained at Guantanamo (reftel) represent the firm commitment of the GOE to adhere to the requested principles. These assurances were passed directly from Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) Chief Soliman through liaison channels — the most effective communication path on this issue. General Soliman's word is the GOE's guarantee, and the GOE's track record of cooperation on CT issues lends further support to this assessment. End summary.”*

However, Suleiman wasn't just the go-to bureaucrat for when the Americans wanted to arrange a little torture. This “urbane and sophisticated man” apparently enjoyed a little rough stuff himself.

Shortly after 9/11, Australian citizen Mamdouh Habib was captured by Pakistani security forces and, under US pressure, torture by Pakistanis. He was then rendered (with an Australian diplomats watching) by CIA operatives to Egypt, a not uncommon practice. In Egypt, Habib merited Suleiman's personal attention. As related by Richard Neville, based on Habib's memoir:

*"Habib was interrogated by the country's Intelligence Director, General Omar Suleiman.... Suleiman took a personal interest in anyone suspected of links with Al Qaeda. As Habib had visited Afghanistan shortly before 9/11, he was under suspicion. Habib was repeatedly zapped with high-voltage electricity, immersed in water up to his nostrils, beaten, his fingers were broken and he was hung from metal hooks."*

That treatment wasn't enough for Suleiman, so:

*"To loosen Habib's tongue, Suleiman ordered a guard to murder a gruesomely shackled Turkistan prisoner in front of Habib – and he did, with a vicious karate kick."*

After Suleiman's men extracted Habib's confession, he was transferred back to US custody, where he eventually was imprisoned at Guantanamo. His "confession" was then used as evidence in his Guantanamo trial.

The *Washington Post's* intelligence correspondent Jeff Stein reported some additional details regarding Suleiman and his important role in the old Egypt the demonstrators are trying to leave behind:

*"Suleiman is seen by some analysts as a possible successor to the president," the Voice of American said Friday. "He earned international respect for his role as a mediator in Middle East affairs and for curbing Islamic extremism."*

An editorialist at Pakistan's "International News" predicted Thursday that "Suleiman will probably scupper his boss's plans [to install his son], even if the aspiring intelligence guru himself is as young as 75."

Suleiman graduated from Egypt's prestigious Military Academy but also received training in the Soviet Union. Under his guidance, Egyptian intelligence has worked hand-in-glove with the CIA's counterterrorism programs, most notably in the 2003 rendition from Italy of an al-Qaeda suspect known as Abu Omar.

In 2009, *Foreign Policy* magazine ranked Suleiman as the Middle East's most powerful intelligence chief, ahead of Mossad chief Meir Dagan.

In an observation that may turn out to be ironic, the magazine wrote, "More than from any other single factor, Suleiman's influence stems from his unswerving loyalty to Mubarak."

If Suleiman succeeds Mubarak and retains power, we will likely be treated to plaudits for his distinguished credentials from government officials and US pundits. We should remember that what they really mean is his ability to brutalize and torture. As Stephen Grey puts it:

*"But in secret, men like Omar Suleiman, the country's most powerful spy and secret politician, did our work, the sort of work that Western countries have no appetite to do ourselves."*

If Suleiman receives praise in the US, it will be because our leaders know that he's the sort of leader who can be counted on to do what it takes to restore order and ensure that Egypt remains friendly to US interests.

We sure hope that the Egyptian demonstrators reject the farce of Suleiman's appointment and push on to a complete change of regime. Otherwise the Egyptian torture chamber will undoubtedly return, as a new regime reestablishes "stability" and serves US interests.

**By STEPHEN SOLDZ**

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\* From Counterpunch:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/soldz01312011.html>

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